

Heart of Discipleship



7. A Passion for Doing God's Will (John 15:9-17; Ps 119:97-106)

This is the seventh sermon in our series *Heart of Discipleship* and in it we have seen that we are all called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not an optional extra. Baptism is a mark of that discipleship because it is a statement that we have repented: I am not going to go my way but I am going to walk God's way. *I have decided to follow Jesus - no turning back!* We then saw that the cost of going God's way, of following Jesus is very costly because He wants our whole allegiance. We saw that God equips us but also calls us to holiness.

This begs a question. If Jesus wants us to follow Him, then where - and how? It's one thing to have a passion for following Jesus, but this naturally follows that we should seek His will for our lives. And last week we saw how God is ready and waiting to reveal His will to us and to lead us through life. But we also saw that our own unbelief and unwillingness are the main factors in our finding the will of God for our lives to be a mysterious and a seemingly impossible thing to discern. God is waiting to reveal His mind to you - be ready to spend time with Him and let Him reveal it to you.

So we have searched for God's will and found that searching involved meditating on God's word and spending time with Him. When we hear His voice and perceive His will and are prompted by the Spirit - what do we do? We walk in it.

What we need to understand that God's will invariably requires a response from us. We have a faith of being and doing. I think we have already found that the clear teaching of scripture is that being a disciple of Jesus Christ demands *change* in our lives. It's a transforming thing. Jesus said "take up your cross and follow me!". We are people that dance to the beat of a different drum, we swim against the tide, we stand out from the crowd - we are different - holy; morally exemplary - like Christ. There's no prize for guessing that this is the will of God for our lives. It's clearly stated in scripture. We are called to be different - God's children - so live who you are. Jesus says in verse 16: *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

Psychologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees? Brian Stoffregen

And what does God see? What do people see? Do they see Christ - or someone else?

And so often we're not different but if we are disciples we should be - but how? By discerning God's will and walking in it. By allowing ourselves to be followers rather than trying to lead God up our path.

As we come to our passage this morning we see how radically different to the world God's will in our lives is. It is simply summed up in this astounding statement:

Love one another as I have loved you

People look at our relationships and our lives and what do they see? Someone has called this phrase Jesus' Prime Directive. If you watch Star Trek you'll know all about Prime Directives. Their Prime Directive as they meet new life and civilizations is not to destroy them but to not interfere. It is the highest law in Starfleet.

But that's all fiction and we have here something that isn't fiction. Here is Jesus giving what is effectively the Prime Directive for the Church. Let's put it as Jesus first expressed it back in John 13:

John 13:34 " A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

It's a new command, but in one sense it is an extension of the old one which we looked at last week. Jesus fully endorses it as summing up the law and prophets - the whole OT in fact!

Matt 22: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "' Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ' Love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

And to this Jesus adds a new commandment *Love one another as I have loved you* Why more commandments? Aren't ten enough? Yes in terms of summarizing God's moral, civil and ceremonial law relating to Israel. But the radical difference between the New Covenant and the Old is that in the new we enter into a completely different relationship with God. It's a relationship that is equally open to Jew and Gentile and unlike the old one puts people into an intimate relationship with the living God in the way that the Old never would or could.

To the Jew the visible symbol of the Temple was that God was dwelling amongst His people, but to those of us who are in Christ, God dwells IN His people by His Spirit. The writer to the Hebrews describes how the Jewish people made sacrifices year by year which could never take away sin but as he says in Hebrews 10:12 *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.* We entered into the New Covenant by faith on the ground of the finished work of Christ. That's why as we have explored in the evening services in Galatians that Paul despaired as he saw Gentile Christians feeling that they had to become Jewish proselytes and observe the law.

The law couldn't save them. Their salvation was complete in Christ. That's why Paul could confidently say in Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

So as Jesus makes this new command, He isn't adding to the body of the Old Testament law, but setting out the family relationship that the Father and Son expect of the adopted family. In fact, all families have house rules. "When you are under my roof you keep my rules". We have come into the Father's house and there are house rules. We are sometimes like teenagers about this, but put yourself in the role of parent. How do you protect your children and guide them in the right paths? By setting standards and boundaries.

While it is usually wishful thinking, in a perfect world, the parental "command" to children to keep their rooms clean, would evoke children' s free and joyful response to do what they know is their parent' s desire about their rooms. In fact, they shouldn' t even be told what they should do in order to please their parents.

Alas, though, it isn't a perfect world. Sometimes children and the congregation need to be told what they should do -- over and over and over again.

By giving guidance to God's children, Jesus gives us heaven's house rules in His teaching. They are there so that we grow in God's will. They are there to protect us. They are there to make us into mature people spiritually.

The statement *Love one another as I have loved you* sums up the body of Jesus' teaching in the gospels which is far more morally stringent than anything you'll find in the OT. Look at great passages like the Sermon on the Mount. They are not primarily intended for the masses, but for the disciples and they only make any sense in that context.

Why? Because Jesus Himself defines the Christian meaning of love. Look at John 15: *12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

Brennan Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.' "

This reflects Romans 5: 6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

And in the family of God, our love for one another should be such that we will willingly be prepared to lay down our lives for one another. Yes really! "You mean her? Do you know what she has been saying about me behind my back?" Yes. Or what about the person you just can't forgive? Yes. Not only must you forgive but you should be prepared to die for them too! "Oh!!" Think of the Christian you most dislike. We should love him or her so much that we would die for them. Why? it is the example of Christ. *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* If we do anything less then we are outside the will of God. Challenging isn't it?

God has demonstrated His love for us and Jesus is that living proof. And we are called to follow and obey the one who has loved us all the way to the cross of Calvary. If this question is not too facetious: why should we follow Jesus' commands. Why should we obey Him? Jesus happily tells us.

To Abide in Him

Let's look back at John 15: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love*

There seems to be a rule here - obey and remain. Jesus obeyed His Father and he remained (abided) in His love. What does this word remain or abide mean. It's the Greek *meno*. It has quite a wide meaning but the sense in terms of place is to rest in a place that is safe and you are not in a hurry to depart from. There is no more exciting place than being in the presence of God. I'm sure that many of us have been in that position of being in God's presence and not wanting to leave - rather like Peter as he witnessed the Transfiguration. Jesus abided in His Father's presence because he did His will. What about us? Are we in that place of safety? Are we in that fellowship with God? Or are we doing our will?

Obedience is a dirty word these days. It's all about express yourself. Find your own way. Yet the place to be safe as one of God's people is through trusting and obeying. We find ourselves abiding in His love and we will be secure in that however much the stresses and strains pour at us because we are doing His will. Obedience is in the end not a duty but a love transaction - "if you love me you will keep my commands". Our obedience to Christ tells the world how much we love Him.

We found it immensely empowering when we discerned the will of God as to my call to the ministry. As His will became clear, we began to take bigger steps of faith. It felt a bit hairy at times, but there was a peace - an abiding in Him about it.

I believe that many of us have a problem with obeying Christ. We don't have a problem with the 10 Commandments. We don't have a problem with basic moral principles. But we do have a problem when it comes to our behaviour as believers. Churches are some of the most hurtful places around and Christians poor role models of Christ-likeness. Why? Because we don't think that discerning God's will applies to us. Somehow *love one another as I have loved you* seems to apply to someone else. If we love Christ, we will obey His command *love one another as I have loved you*. How we behave will tell the world what we think about Christ. Considering how so many churches struggle today, that tells you something doesn't it? What do people think about Jesus when they see our Church? Not the building - us?

Individually we have a problem with obeying His command to be witnesses. Some have problems with His command to be baptised. Some have problems with His command to forgive. Some have a problem with the command not to be a gossip. Some have a problem with that command to sexual purity. Some have a problem with the command not to be judgemental. Some have the problem with the command not to put money before God. Some - no, many - have a problem discerning what God's will is in their lives. They know the Bible bit but they regard their life outside Church as theirs and not under God's authority in some way. Or worse, some people just have a problem with that word love. We are called to obey Christ. If we love Him we will obey Him because by His Spirit He has equipped us to do that.

And if we have areas of our lives where we are not obeying Christ; where we are not under His Lordship? We won't be abiding in Him and you'll find your faith a struggle. You've moved away and are not abiding in Him. Do you feel distant from God? Which one of you moved? You did.

If you find your faith a struggle, maybe this is an area you should explore before God. Let's come before God and ask that by His Spirit He'll show us those areas in our lives that need to come under His will so that we may abide more fully in His love.

Because obedience brings Joy

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

The way of obedience isn't just important because God is the only source of real joy and happiness. Jesus does not call us to blind obedience like some military leader who barks orders. He's our loving Saviour who tells us His will and commands us to follow because it is the only means of ultimate human contentment and happiness. We see contentment as having the easy life. "I'm retired now, so I'll rest back and enjoy myself and wait for glory". Is that right? It's that real joy, particularly when the effects of *anno domini* set in. Where is real joy? As we abide in Christ because His joy is in us. There are many comfortable Christians who are joyless, or at least the joy is a bit stretched. We need to discern His will, obey Him and follow Him. One commentator put the joy Jesus brings like this.

It is not the hollow joy of luxurious surroundings and sated appetites—joy that dissipates as soon as things change. It is, instead, the joy of the disciplined life, like that of the athlete who rejoices after conquering a difficult challenge to win a highly desired prize. That athlete might have blistered feet or strained muscles, but feels only the joy of victory.

Let's know His joy as we seek and follow His will, as we obey Him.

We become His friends

13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

The nature of Christian discipleship is not servant-hood but friendship. Disciples of Jewish rabbis were no better than servants but here Jesus offers friendship. There is an intimacy in this friendship because Jesus reveals to His people everything He knows about the Father. A number of human relationships are used in the NT to describe our relationship with God. There's a good reason for this because the nature of our relationship with God so transcends the human that there are insufficient human words to describe it so we use many - son, friend, brother. How can God be more intimate with us than the Spirit within us who is a fundamental part of us. This is the staggering truth about God that Satan would prefer we did not know. God walks with us because He's part of us. You can't get closer than that. It should bring us up short. As we sin - as we disobey His will and His commands, He's right there inside us. What is He thinking about that?

We become fruitful

In a previous sermon in this series we found that God wants to equip us to become productive. Here we have the same idea *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.*

God has called us to bear fruit. The early bit of chapter 15 of John makes that clear. What we produce in our lives will have a lasting effect. Do you want to be productive for God? Then obey the commands of Christ. Seek His will, do His will and bear fruit.

We get what we ask for

Finally, obedience to Christ means we get what we ask for. This promise comes at the end of all this. It's only those who are obedient and abiding in Christ that benefit from this promise. If we are obeying and remaining, then we are people who have sought this intimacy with God and we know His will. We can ask in that will and we will get it.



So where have we come to over the last two Sundays. God's will for our lives is not a mystery - it can be sought and found easily and it is a question of our will. But we have found that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us this prime directive as His people *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

It's the most straightforward expression of God's will in our lives. Whether it is this or anything else about God's will that we have discerned in our lives, we are called to obey Christ.

**Are we abiding in Christ this morning, or does He feel distant?
Are we walking in His will? Do we even know what it is?
Is there an area in our lives in which we are walking in disobedience?
Are there relationships we need to mend? Compulsions that need to be dealt with?
Do we have a judgmental or critical spirit? Do we think the worst of people? Do we care about others? Has the church or other things come before Jesus?
Do we love Christ so much that we desire to seek His will and obey Him?
Do people really see Jesus in us and our love for Him? Or do they see something else.**

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Let's come before Him this morning and ask Him to search our hearts and bring us to repentance.



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