

The Lord's Message: The Awkward Commandment

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Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: John 15:9-17

The Bible is filled with commandments from God, especially in the Old Testament. There are 613 commandments. We can probably only remember 10. Jesus knew that we would have a problem remembering the Ten Commandments, so He narrowed it down to two. Those two commandments are found in **Matthew 22:35-40**. That makes it easy for us. Simply love God and love everyone.

That word, "Love," is a difficult word for us to understand. I could say that I love my son and daughter. I could say that I love my wife. I could say that I love you. I could say that I love myself. I could say that I love Jesus. We just used the same word, "Love," for many different meanings. The love that I have for my son and daughter is different from the love that I have for my wife. The love that I have for my wife is different from the love that I have for you. The love that I have for you is different from the love that I have for myself. The love that I have for myself is different from the love that I have for Jesus. So, we have a problem. How do we define love?

The Greeks realized this early on. So, the Greeks came up with different words to describe "Love." The love for children is "Storge" or unconditional love that a parent would have for their children. The love for spouse is "Eros" or romantic love. The love for a friend is "Philia" or friendly love. The love for oneself is "Philautia." We should love ourselves. We are made in the image of God and God does not make "junk." The love that Jesus has for us and we have for Jesus is "Agape." Agape is unconditional love.

Do you see how confusing the meaning of "Love" is, even with the Greek words for love? Jesus knew that this was going to happen, so Jesus set about to explain to the disciples and to us how to obey this awkward commandment.

Let us pray.

In verse 9, Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." The examples that we have of God loving His Son are found at Jesus' baptism and at Jesus' Transfiguration. In **Luke 3:22**, God says that Jesus is His Son and He loves him. God makes a similar statement at the Transfiguration in **Mark 9:7**. Jesus knows that, without a doubt, that God loves Him. Do you have any doubts that God loves you? Jesus knows how much God loves Him. Jesus loves us in the same way.

At the end of this verse, Jesus says “Now remain in my love.” If we did not know how to remain in Jesus’ love, He tells us in verse 10. In verse 12, He tells us what He commands us to do. The Greek word for this love that Jesus is referring to is “agape.” Agape is the highest form of love. This love embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists, regardless of the circumstances. In other words, God chose us. We did not choose God. We have the choice whether to choose God or not. This is called freewill. God does not force His will on us, but rather let us choose to accept the relationship that God offers us through His only Son, Jesus.

If we choose to be in relationship with God, then we enter into covenant with Him. In a covenant relationship, God provides us with opportunities for God to display His love through us. The outcome of this covenant relationship we show forth in what the Bible calls “fruit.” Fruit is the increase that God’s love has on the lives of others. In **1 John 4:7-12**, John says that God is love and God’s love lives in us and we are to show that love to others.

The deeper the covenant relationship with God develops, the more that God changes us. This change only becomes complete when we surrender our will, or our life, to God. This is the greatest form of agape love. Jesus says in **John 15:13**. Jesus displayed this love in His compassion to heal those that were ill of physical or spiritual sickness. Jesus displayed this love when He taught about God and the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus displayed this love when He forgave those that hated Him. Jesus fully manifested this love when He gave His life on the cross for our sins, past, present and future.

This is the full extent of this covenant relationship of agape love with God. We are called to show compassion to those that are sick, **James 5:14-16** We are called to tell others about God and His love for them, **Acts 1:8** We are called to forgive, even our enemies, **Romans 12:17-21**.

This brings us to an awkward situation how do we love the prickly or unlovable people? The business partner that stole money from the company that you had founded together. The spouse who after 30 years of marriage wants a divorce. The person that is always ridiculing you for your faith. The grown son or daughter that does not want to have anything to do with you. It is not easy to love them. That is where we need God.

This is not easy for us to do. As a matter of fact, this act of love goes against everything in this world. The world tells us to do all we can to get ahead. Do not think of others. Do not show compassion to them. The world tells us that God does not exist. The world tells us to wipe out our enemies or cause pain and heartache to them. That is because we live in a fallen world.

God calls us to a higher standard. The standard of loving people regardless of how they love us. That is agape love. That is why this commandment is so awkward for all those that are in covenant relationship with God.

If we surrender our will to God, we gain so much more than the world can offer. We gain joy, **John 15:11**. People often ask me how can I have so much joy. I tell them it is because of God. If I know without a doubt that God loves me, why should I not be joyful. Yes, I am going to have problems and struggles, but God is with me. What can stand against me?

Verse 16 sums all of this up. If we choose the covenant relationship that God offers us, then we will bear much fruit. We will be used by God to bring others to Him. This will fill us with joy. Yes, this is an awkward commandment. This goes against our fallen nature. This goes against the world. God calls us to a higher standard, agape love.

Let us go as Easter people that have been resurrected from our sinful nature to a covenant relationship with God, let us love others as we have been loved by God. Amen.