Love and Obedience

John 21:15-17

When Jesus gathered with His disciples in the upper room, the air was thick with wonder and sorrow. The Passover table was set, but the world was about to change. The Teacher who had washed their feet now spoke words that would shape the heart of faith for all time: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” It was not a command shouted from a mountaintop, but a whisper from a heart that had stooped to serve.

These words hold the tension between affection and action, between devotion and discipline. Love, in its truest form, always gives birth to obedience. And obedience, when rooted in love, ceases to be a burden and becomes joy. Yet for many, obedience sounds like restriction. It feels like the loss of freedom, the narrowing of possibilities. But in God’s kingdom, obedience is not a chain; it is the rhythm of belonging.

Love without obedience is sentiment without substance. Obedience without love is labor without life. The two must breathe together, like inhale and exhale, forming the heartbeat of covenant relationship. The one who truly loves cannot remain unmoved by the will of the beloved. Love longs to align, to reflect, to become one with the one it adores.

Consider Abraham, standing on the mountain with his son Isaac. His obedience was not mechanical, nor the blind following of orders. It was the trembling trust of love. He did not know how God would provide, but he knew whom he trusted. Obedience, for Abraham, was not about sacrifice but surrender. Love led him up that mountain; love held the knife from falling. In that moment, obedience became revelation—the unveiling of a God who provides.

When we read the Gospels, we see the same truth embodied in Jesus Himself. He said, “I do nothing of my own accord but only what I see the Father doing.” The Son’s obedience was not born of fear but intimacy. He loved the Father and delighted to do His will, even when that will led to the cross. Jesus’ obedience was not coerced; it was chosen. Through that obedience, the fullness of love was revealed.

Love is not proven by words but by willingness. Jesus told a story about two sons—one who said he would obey and did not, and one who said he would not but later went and did. The Father was pleased with the one whose actions matched the love that later grew in his heart. The story reminds us that obedience is not about perfection but direction. It is not about never failing but always returning/coming back.

There is a reason Scripture calls God's commandments "life." They are not arbitrary rules but expressions of His character. Each command reflects something of His heart, His wisdom, His holiness. To obey them is to walk in the pattern of divine love, to live as we were created to live. When we love God, obedience becomes the natural expression of that love. It becomes the way we participate in His life.

But there is another side to this story. Many obey out of fear. They obey because they dread punishment or seek reward. That kind of obedience can produce outward conformity but not inward transformation. It may restrain behavior but cannot heal the heart. Love alone has the power to transform obedience from duty into delight. Fear says, "I must do this, or I will suffer." Love says, "I will do this because it pleases the One I love."

In John's Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that those who love Him will keep His word, and that the Father will come and make His dwelling with them. Obedience becomes the doorway to divine presence. It is not a condition we meet to earn God's love but a path we walk to remain in its fullness. To love God is to create a space within ourselves where His word can live.

The early disciples learned that love and obedience could not be separated. When told to stop preaching in Jesus' name, they answered, "We must obey God rather than men." Their obedience was not rebellion for rebellion's sake. It was the fruit of love so deep that no power could silence it. They loved the truth more than their own safety. Obedience gave their love a voice that echoed through the centuries.

In the story of Peter, we see how love restores obedience. After his denial, Peter sat by a fire of forgiveness and heard the risen Christ ask, "Do you love me?" Three times the question pierced him. Each time he answered yes, and each time Jesus responded, "Feed my sheep." Love rekindled obedience. The fisherman who had once fled would now follow again, not because he feared judgment, but because he had been forgiven. Love became his calling, and obedience became his offering.

In our lives, love and obedience still wrestle for space. We often say we love God yet resist the surrender His word requires. We prefer affection without alignment, admiration without transformation. But love cannot remain distant. It must draw near; it must take shape in life. To obey is to let love become visible.

Blessings,

Pastor Gool