

May 6, 2018
Sixth Sunday of Easter

“All For You”

John 15:9-17

Back when Bridgette and I were getting married we took the Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University course together and ever since then I’ve kept a monthly budget for our household. I highly recommend doing so. Knowing where money is coming in and going out takes away lots of stress. A monthly budget is definitely worth the effort.

But in the budget I split everything into categories, and it kind of messes me up when Bridgette hands me a receipt with stuff all mixed together—groceries with medications and cosmetics and gifts and some sundries. I’m so particular about this that Bridgette sometimes will check out everything separately so they’re on different receipts! It messes up my system otherwise.

Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel today kind of do that to us. He is speaking to the disciples the evening before His arrest and crucifixion for the forgiveness of our sins—the Father’s loving will in action for us, His creation. Jesus says, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”*

I think a lot of Christians find Christ’s words here troubling because He is messing with our categories. He’s taking the “love” stuff and mixing it all together with the “commandment” stuff. We don’t like that!

How many Christians do you know that love Jesus? All of them, right? People are enthusiastically quick to speak of their love for Jesus. We certainly glory in how wonderful it is to be loved by Jesus. This “love” category is kind of an unsullied constant that we don’t really worry about ever faltering.

Not so much the obedience to the commandments category. We’re sinners. We don’t do all that well here. The only consistency here is our failure under the law. Christians will sometimes even give voice to the division we make between love and commandments; “I love the Lord, but you can’t really expect someone not to have sex before marriage.” “I love Jesus, but I just can’t forgive what that person did.” “I believe in God, but I’m not going to let it control my life.” Maybe folks don’t say that, but they think it; they live it.

Your God doesn’t work that way. Jesus says, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* We often go straight to the cross, but we need to remember that one of the ways Jesus loved us is by becoming one with us in the flesh and living a life of perfect obedience to God. Part of Jesus’ loving everyone in His human life was keeping the commandment of God which embody love of God and love of neighbor. This is how He says we are to love one another.

Of course, He ultimately lived this love out by His cross. *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”* Jesus lays down His life for the whole world, and that work of His is all love and obedience mixed together. There is no thought to loving the Father on the one hand but declining to obey the Father’s will on the other hand. Love and obedience are one in the same.

I know we don’t like it, but Jesus says what He says. *“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”* And He goes on to sum up all the commandments in love, *“These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”*

We try to get around this by setting categories. Here Jesus is kind of commissioning His apostles, so we might try and say it's for them and not for us. Early in this whole conversation Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give you; that you love one another,*" so we might say love is in the "new" category and all those other Commandments are in the "old" category. We try to say some things of God are in the "timeless" category but others are in the "changeable for modern life" category. But really, all of that is sinful parsing of God's Word because we want to enjoy all the love without minding the commands. It is all God's Word. It is all good. And it is all for you.

It's all one. Love and commandment, Law and Gospel, faith and obedience, all of it is the good design of God for His creation, for His friends who love Him and heed His Word.

Of course the Gospel predominates. Christ received the entirety of the Father's wrath and punishment in His suffering and death on the cross. Those who are baptized and believe stand saved by the blood of Christ. You are saved by God's grace through faith.

But that wonderful truth goes straight to my point today. Can you divide God's Word, go big time with His love while not so much heeding His commands, without doing damage to your faith? Can you trust in the power of one while doubting the consequences of the other? Can you split the counsel of God into those you accept and those where you kind of take a pass without weakening belief in the whole?

Jesus is pretty clear, "*Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.*" There is connection between the love of Christ and the command of Christ—It's all a big wonderful bundle of being baptized into the crucified and risen Christ who lives now and forever and gives you this perfect life as a gift of love.

So my exhortation today is simply to graciously receive this wonderful gift as He gives it. Don't try to split it into the good love parts you gladly receive and the bummer command parts you'd rather not have to deal with. All of this gift is of divine holiness and for your eternal good. It's the sinful parts of you that resist it that are the problem! Repent of those, be forgiven and seek to dwell more fully in the love and commands of God, for all of it is indeed good.

The Father loves you so much He sent Himself into the flesh to reconcile your disobedience to Himself through the obedience of the Son. Christ did that and it is good. He then poured out your punishment onto Christ in all its fullness out of love for you that you would be forgiven, and it is good. His love, His command, His Lordship. It's all good.

Don't try to split Him up. All of Him is for you.