

Belonging means Obedience
John 14:15-24, Hebrews 13:17

Friends, there was a game that we used to play when I was younger at my youth group, or at summer camp, and especially for Valentine's Day parties at school.

We called it "Honey if you love me, won't you please please smile!" Did you ever play it?

It's a pretty simple game really – you pick someone in the group to go sit on a chair in the middle of the room. Then someone of the opposite sex has to get them smile by sitting on their lap and asking them, in their most silly voice or in an extremely 'romantic' manner - "Honey if you love me won't you please please smile!"

And the person sitting on the chair has to keep a straight face and show no emotion whatsoever.

If the person sitting on their lap can't make them smile after three or four attempts then another person takes a turn to try and make them smile.

Whoever succeeds gets to sit in the chair and it's their turn to see how long they can resist the advances of the next person...

This game was always a big hit and everyone loved to play it – so kids if you ever wondered how people survived without smartphones and Flappy Birds – well... this is what we did – we played "honey if you love me won't you please please smile"

Now it was just a game- but if you ever played it you may remember that it could cause some serious relationship problems – especially for guys...

Because if you were playing this game with a group of people that happened to include your crush or high-school sweetheart, and you were sitting on the chair and another

pretty girl – other than your sweetheart - sat on your lap and coaxed a smile out of you – well... you can figure out the rest!

At some point later on there would be a conversation along the lines of:

“Why did you smile for her? Do you like her? I thought you liked me!”

“No... I mean I do... I mean I don’t like her, I like you – you’re my girlfriend!”

“Well, why did you smile for her and not for me?”

“Because I thought she looked funny ok – it doesn’t mean anything!”

“Honest?!”

“Yes – you’re my girlfriend. I like you – that’s why I gave you my jacket and we always sit together at lunch, right? Just because I smiled at her doesn’t mean anything.”

“Ok – sorry I got mad – just don’t do it again ok?”

“Ok, I won’t... I love you” “I love you to!”

And this dramatic little exchange is concluded with a couple of smooches and a hug. Oh to be young and in love.

But it’s not just young love that needs this kind of reassurance... Friends, every relationship has its indicators of loyalty and authenticity.

Every relationship is characterized by those things that we will or won’t do, that we should or shouldn’t do, which prove that we really are a true friend, a good parent, or a faithful spouse - even our relationship with Jesus.

That’s why Jesus says in John 14:15 *“If you love me – keep my commands.”*

Just as true friends show up to help you move – for the 3rd time in a year... just as a good parent sacrifices buying designer brands to afford sports programs for their kid... just

as a faithful spouse will only play “honey if you love me won’t you please please smile” with their husband or wife...

So to friends - anyone who claims to love Jesus... will obey his commands.

Now - I don’t think that this ground-breaking news for us – we know this. We know that if we call ourselves Christians we need to walk the talk, our actions have to show who we are – otherwise we are hypocrites.

But I wonder – have we ever considered what this might mean in terms of our relationship with Christ’s Body – the church... and specifically with our relationship to Valleyview?

Because as we’ve been emphasizing over the past couple weeks – the truth is that Christ and his body are intimately connected, so much so that you can’t have one without the other... and if you truly desire to grow closer to Christ, at some point you have to face that fact that it means growing closer to His Body – the church, which is us here at Valleyview

And so as we explore what it means to Belong to Christ AND to His Body, we come across this passage of scripture in John 14 which seems to suggest that belonging means obedience.

And to be honest this is a difficult aspect of our relationship with Christ’s Body – I mean it can be hard enough to obey Christ – but to obey the Church as well?

That feels too much like a throwback to the days when the Church controlled much of society – exerting its influence on matters of what could or couldn’t be done on a Sunday, what should or shouldn’t be performed in the theatre, what was or wasn’t proper and modest behavior for decent church going folk... and so on.

And to be honest friends – I can’t say that I’d want to go back to the way things were...

And certainly if you’ve ever experienced the Body of Christ acting in a legalistic, repressive manner exerting its influence over every part of society – well... you can understand why

Pauline Marois's PQ government is pushing their Charter of Quebec Values.

Remember - up until the 1960's everyday life and society in Quebec was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, and had been for centuries.

In fact when the city of Montreal was first established by French colonists in the 17th century it was considered be "The New Jerusalem" on the St. Lawrence River – heavily controlled and overseen by the Roman Catholic Church.

Anyways; the point is that Quebec has only recently been freed from the control of the Catholic Church and they are not interested in having history repeat itself with different religion, such as Islam, in control of their society.

And certainly as we consider what it means to "obey the Body of Christ" I want to make it clear that this is not the direction we are going in, and in fact if Jesus says "*my burden is easy and my yoke is light for I am gentle and humble of heart*"

(Matt 11:30) then that also ought to characterize how His Body deals with its members and whatever society they are part of as well.

And yet as this verse suggests there is something that Jesus requires us to carry, there is a yoke that we pull along with him – and that brings us back to considering Jesus' words in John 14:15 in the context of our relationship with His Body and considering that belonging to Christ and obeying Him also means obedience to His Body.

So let's look at John 14:15-24 with this in mind – and I'm going to take us through section by section because it's really cool to see how this passage opens up to us with this perspective.

So John 14:15 - *If you love me, keep my commands.* Friends the basis for our relationship with Christ **and His Body** is "love" shown through obedience.

Now we understand that we ought to love Christ; because of who He is and what He's done for us. We talk a lot about loving God, loving Christ - and even loving each other...

But what about loving the Church? We don't tend to think of it in this way do we? Friends the importance of "loving" Jesus must also extend to developing a "love" for His Body.

And that also puts a new perspective on what it means to love each other. 1 John 4: 21 says God *"has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."*

And while this might seem to be referring to our fellow humans – the use of "brother and sister" in this command means it is actually speaking about those who are part of the Body of Christ, so God is actually commanding us to "love the Church"

Friends – do we love the Church like we love Christ?

I know Christ is easy to love – and even those who don't love Him can admire Him as a great teacher...

But commanded to Love the Church? And showing that Love through obedience?

The Church seems too human, too much like a man-made organization, there's too much politics, power struggles, mistakes... and so on.

But consider what Jesus says next *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.*

Friends remember that while the church often seems to be too "man-made" it was born on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

Jesus is anticipating the creation of His Body when as He promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit.

Just as the body of Adam was brought to life when God breathed his Spirit into the clay - so to the Body of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, is brought to life when God poured out his Spirit on the tiny gathering of disciples and the Church was born.

So here we start to have more reason to love the church – it is born of God like nothing else.

Now we move on to vs. 18-19...

The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. – Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me.

This is how the Church **is** the Body of Christ. Jesus himself is with us... as the Holy Spirit is with us... and in us... and this sets us apart from the world – from other organizations and institutions and especially other world religions...

The world doesn't know the Holy Spirit... the world can't see Jesus - but those who are part of the Church can.

Jesus is with us - and so as Christ is the mediator between God and humanity – Christ's Body – the church is the mediator between the world and Christ.

Bill Hybels – the founding Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago – always says that “the local church is the hope of the world.”

Now I used to be critical about that statement. I thought it was far better to say that Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and that if we are relying on the local church to be the hope of the world - given the state of many churches - then this world is in big trouble!

But as I've been studying about the relationship between Christ and His Church – His Body, I now realize that until Christ returns to make all things new – Christ's presence in His Body through the Holy Spirit is all that this world has.

As Christ and His Body are so intimately connected then it is true that if Christ is the hope of this world - then local expressions of His Body are also the hope of this world.

So - we are adding on to the reasons for loving the Church. Now if you're not convinced yet – what Jesus says next in vs. 20 ought to do it...

Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Friends this is the amazing implication of what it means to belong to the Body of Christ because Christ is God.

In the Church we don't just worship God... we're not just in the presence of God... but as we belong to the Church we are actually in God and God is in us... because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus was fully human and fully divine, His Body is also fully human but through the Holy Spirit it is also fully divine.

Friends – while we may have an individual, “personal” relationship with Jesus – it is as we are drawn closer in, as part of the Body of Christ... that we get to experience what it means to participate in the Trinity.

Jesus in the Father, and Jesus in us and we in Him through the Holy Spirit! Amazing!

And friends, once you experience what that is like – you can never go back to a private, personal, individualistic type of faith relationship with Jesus where the Church is just a casual afterthought.

So friends, I have to ask... are you starting to love the church now? If so then listen to what Jesus has to say about how we show that love in vs. 21

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

So we're back to what it really means to love Jesus, to love His Body and we're given a promise that through obedience we will also discover what it means to be loved by the Father and Jesus.

So as we love the church, as we show that love through obeying the church – even when we might not feel like it... The promise is that the love of the Father and Christ will flow back to us through that obedience.

It's sort of like making yourself go to the gym and work out even when you don't feel like it because exercise makes you feel better.

So this is all good – but you can still ask the question “why?” And one of the disciples does that.

vs 22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

In other words – Jesus... wouldn't it be easier just to reveal yourself as the Messiah to the world? Why go away and have us become your Body and be the mediator between yourself and the world? Why do this whole Church - Body of Christ thing anyways....?

And Jesus answers back in vs. 23-24 “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

Friends, as I said at the beginning of this message, every relationship has its indicators of loyalty and authenticity and Jesus is looking for true followers. He's not looking for fame and popularity, he wants to be more than your miracle man, and so the Church is part of how Jesus determines who truly loves Him.

As the Church passes on the teachings of Jesus – those who truly love Jesus obey the teachings of His Body and become a part of the Body.

And so we're back to the truth that if you are serious about growing closer to Jesus Christ – at some point you are going to have to grow closer to His Body. And belonging to Jesus Christ means belonging to His Church and obeying His Church.

Now practically – what might this mean for us here at Valleyview?

Well let me offer Hebrews 13:17 as the means by which Christ might have something to say to us about what our next steps with Valleyview might be in relationship to obeying the Church.

It says *“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority...”*

Now friends – please know there are no issues or situations going on among us that I am trying to address in focusing on this particular verse.

I raise it because when people become official members at Valleyview – something I would suggest that many of you should consider doing by the way...

When people become members at Valleyview I try to make it clear that this is a commitment to allow the leadership of our church – myself and the elders and other ministry leaders - to give you guidance and instruction to help you grow in your relationship with Christ, and how to live that out in your day to day life.

So one of the ways we can obey the church is by submitting to the authority of those Christ has called to be leaders in his Church.

So friends as your minister, your pastor – as the one who is accountable to God for you as a member of the Body... my counsel, my advice, what I speak about in the sermons this isn't just friendly advice or some suggestions you might consider... It's something that you need to have confidence in and submit to.

Now the big question mark here is that can you have confidence in what I am saying or suggesting to you? What sort of confidence are we talking about?

Well – let’s go back to the last verse of our John 14 passage where Jesus qualifies all that He had been speaking about by saying *“These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”*

Friends as Jesus speaks for God the Father, the leaders of Christ’s body must speak for Jesus.

This means we must speak in Jesus name, we must speak in line with Jesus’ teachings, with His commands and powered by His Spirit – and it also means we speak in line with Jesus as the Word of God by which all things were made – we speak in line with creational truth...

And so friends if that is the case with what I say in a message, with what counsel I might give to you... then we are called to

show our love for Christ and for His church by obeying Christ’s teaching. Even when we don’t feel like it...

But isn’t God good in that He will bless us and allow us to experience His love - even we obey out of duty or obligation... when we don’t feel like it!

That’s the grace and mercy of God friends.

And that’s the message which Christ has entrusted us with to share with the world around us - that if anyone loves Jesus and they obey His commands then the Father and the Son will love them, and they will come to them and make their home with them through the Holy Spirit.

What a wonderful description of what it’s like to belong to Christ’s body.

So friends... if you love Jesus, if you love His Church – won’t you please please obey? Amen.