

# He Commands!

a sermon by Pastor D. Thomas Ford, Jr.  
Salem Lutheran Church  
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## John 14:15-21

{15} "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. {16} And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. {17} This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. {18} I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. {19} In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. {20} On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. {21} **They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me;** and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus The Risen Christ!

Once a reporter was interviewing an old man, a grandfather, who was obviously still in intense grief over the shooting death of his teenaged grandson. The grandson had been shot in a robbery of the family's little neighborhood grocery store.

"Do you want revenge on those who did this?" asked the reporter. "Would you like to shoot the person who shot your grandson?"

The old man looked astonished at the question. "No, that's not possible," said the grandfather.

"I guess you don't even know for sure who did this," said the reporter.

"No," said the grandfather. "It's not that. It's that we are Christians. We are not permitted revenge."<sup>1</sup>

He remembered Jesus' command: "But I say to you that hear, Love your

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<sup>1</sup> Story told by Bishop William Willimon  
<http://clergyresources.net/Willimon/willCommanded%20to%20Love.htm>

enemies, do good to those who hate you ....”<sup>2</sup>

Go to the scriptures and count all the direct commands Jesus is recorded as giving to us his disciples. I came up with 49. They range all the way from “Count the cost” to “Forgive 70 times 7.” From “take the log out of your own eye” to “love your enemies.”

In today’s Gospel Jesus speaks about all his direct orders to us this way: “**They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me ....**”

"Erich Honecker was deposed as East Germany's chief of state while the country was undergoing tremendous change. The turmoil in East Germany received a great deal of attention, but an unpopular act of Christian reconciliation went mostly ignored.

“Honecker was widely hated by others. After being ousted from his position, he was not allowed to live in his luxury villa. A Lutheran pastor offered to let the homeless Honecker live in the pastor's guest room. The pastor even paid Honecker's expenses. This was especially surprising since Honecker had once persecuted the church.

"This move was widely resented. Many people threatened to quit the church (and some did). The pastor received vile phone calls. When asked why he did it, the pastor cited a passage of Scripture: ‘All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has give us the ministry of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God’ (2 Cor. 5:18,20).”<sup>3</sup> It's a command. Be reconciled.

In today’s Gospel the Risen Lord Jesus is giving a farewell address to the troops before He leaves the earth to return to His Father. He reminds the troops of their direct orders. He reassures the troops. He tells them He will send them the help they will need to follow and carry out his very difficult direct orders. The Spirit of truth will be with them to help them obey their direct orders – to keep all his commandments. And as they obey all their direct orders, they will show their love for Him. And He will, in turn, love them and reveal himself to them.

Jesus The Lord makes the same promises to us. Here are your direct orders. Obey all of them. I will give you the Holy Spirit to help you. As you keep all my

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 6:27

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Paul Boers, Lord, Teach Us to Pray, Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1992.

commandments, you show your love for me. I will continue to love you always and reveal myself to you.

Now, in case anyone feels it is an impossible task to obey all of Jesus' direct orders, it is worth noting that all the commandments Jesus gave us are kept, He said, as we love God and as we love one another and all those for whom Christ died, which includes everyone. The Holy Spirit is always present to help us achieve this seemingly impossible task.

And impossible it often seems to be!

A woman once entered her pastor's office full of rage toward her husband. "I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me."

The pastor suggested she go home and act as if she really loved her husband. "Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him. Go out of your way to be kind. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love, then drop the bomb."

Buying into the pastor's plan, the woman enthusiastically left the office. Two months passed and the pastor called to see if she was ready to go through with the divorce. "Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him."

Her actions had changed her feelings. The ability to love is affected by repeated deeds.<sup>4</sup>

C. S. Lewis said, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."<sup>5</sup>

In the world you and I find ourselves living in today, people do not get turned on by being ordered to do things. In fact, most of the time people will try their best to get out of having to follow someone else's orders. Some scholars tell us that is why so many people don't want to have anything to do with the Church. They know that Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Dan Flanagan, "The Identifying Mark" – John 13:31-35 – May 10, 1998

<sup>5</sup> Mere Christianity, p. 116.

often gives direct orders and they find that too intimidating. They want to paddle their own canoe.

The former Chaplain of Duke University confessed, "On my way out of the church late one afternoon, I was chagrined to see, coming towards the church down the walkway, a rather forlorn looking man with a small bag, obviously a wanderer, a vagabond, a drifter, obviously coming toward the church seeking a handout.

"This is what you get for having a church situated near a busy highway. These drifters drift through about twice a week, seeking a tank of gas for their trip, a meal, a gift -- preferably in cash -- for their journey to who knows where. They always have some sad story of woe to tell but the end is always the same -- can you spare about \$25.00 in cash.

"I sighed as I watched the man approach. It had been a long day. I had a meeting to return for that night and I was anxious to get home. I would meet him at the door, head him off, give him the only cash I had -- a mere \$15.00 as I recall -- and then send him, and me, on our way.

"What can I do for you?' I asked with some annoyance in my voice.

"I wondered if you might be able to help a fella' on the way South,'" he said. 'I was headed down to....'

"Yes, yes,' I said. 'Well, I'm in a bit of a rush. So here is all I have. A five and a ten. That's all I've got.'

"The man took the money as I offered it. Looked at it. And without a word, he turned, and headed out toward the street.

"Then he stopped, and turned toward me as I locked the church door. 'I guess you think I'm supposed to thank you, to be grateful,' he said with a surprising tone of defiance.

"Well,' I said, 'now that you mention it, a little gratitude wouldn't hurt.'

"Well, I'm not going to thank you. You want to know why?' he sneered.

"Why?' I asked.

"Because you are a Christian. You don't help me because you want to. You have to help me because he [now thrusting his finger up into the air] told you to help me!' And then he left.

"I stood there, stunned, angry. The nerve of these people!

"On my drive home it finally hit me. He was right."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus commands! We obey.

In a few moments, He will issue a very familiar direct order. Take this and eat it. Take this and drink it. And we will obey. Because we know the One who is giving the direct order. It is none other than the One who became obedient unto death and who was raised for our justification, even Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Even so, there may be some present who do not know Him. Who may even question how one solitary figure from 2,000 years ago can issue direct orders then and expect people today to obey them. For those people, I close with a quote from Dr. Albert Schweitzer:

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."<sup>7</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Willimon, Op. Cit.

<sup>7</sup> From page 403 of The Quest of The Historical Jesus – A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede by Albert Schweitzer, D. THEOL., D. PHIL., D. MED. Translated by W. Montgomery. From the First German Edition "Von Reimarus zu Wrede," 1906. With a Preface by F. C. Burkitt, D.D. First English Edition, 1910. Published in Great Britain by A. & C. Black, Ltd.