

Keep My Word **John 14:23-31**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus says, at the beginning of our text, *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.”*

Someone comes in to see the pastor and says, “Pastor, I think I know what you’re going to say, but just hear me out, OK?” They proceed to go on to explain a specific situation to their pastor. And then ask, “So, what do you think?”

The pastor is leaning back in his chair, reflective and silent. Finally, he leans forward and asks, “So, do you want what I think? Or what God thinks? Before you answer, I have one quote from the Bible for you, *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.”* I believe that you know what the Bible says about the particular situation you are bringing to my attention, so, what exactly are you coming to me for?

“Well, Pastor, I want to know if it is acceptable or not?”

The pastor says, “So what you want, is my approval? I have a question for you. Do you love Christ, and will you keep His word? What does it say in the Bible about this?”

To this response, the person proceeds to get up and says, “See Pastor, I knew you wouldn’t understand. I don’t even know why I bothered coming in to talk to you.”

Calmly, the pastor encourages the person to sit down so that they can talk a bit more.

It has been a problem of humanity since the beginning of recorded history, people want to do their own thing and make their own rules. What were the first words in the temptation that Satan laid on Eve, do you remember? He began his temptation of her with these words, “did God really say?” “Did God really say, ‘you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Eve responds that God said they were not to eat of only one tree in middle the garden. It is then that Satan lies and tells her that if they eat, they will be like God.

No, times haven’t changed much in all the time since then. Even Christians, trying to justify their sinfulness, raise that same age old question in many and various forms. Did God really say? Is that really in God’s Word? How can we know that is really what God wants us to believe, there could be other ideas that are just as valid, or there wouldn’t be all those other religions out there. Or, every pastor’s all time favorite, “Pastor, that’s just your interpretation?”

Unfortunately, such comments are usually an attempt to get around what is clearly taught in God’s Word. More to the point, such things are said to excuse the fact that we are not keeping Jesus’ word.

What is most amazing is that instead of keeping God’s Word, people try to change it, dance around it, or whatever, just so they can excuse their behavior. People would rather excuse and continue in their sins, than repent of them and listen to Jesus’ Word.

That is truly the scariest thing about this whole problem. God’s Word has the very best response to sinfulness, it is called the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

All the challenges to God's Word are really attempts by people to justify themselves before God by their own works – works righteousness. There is in all people a certain amount of fear of God's wrath. We want to make ourselves acceptable to God by what we do and what we do not do.

This approach denies a very real truth, the truth that from Adam and Eve, we have all been corrupted by sin – that we are sinful by our very nature.

Too many people believe that sinfulness is simply the things we do or do not do which are against God's Law. So, they try to find a way around their behavior, and the two best methods are to either excuse it or deny the validity of any authority which states a particular behavior is wrong.

Unfortunately when someone thinks of sin only as what one does or doesn't do, they miss the whole truth – that we are by nature, sinful and unclean. There is a reason that we rebel and sin against God's Law, and that is because we are sinners – we are bred and born into sin – it is part and parcel of who and what we are.

Did you hear the middle of our Gospel lesson? Jesus tells them – and you – *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* If we are left with only our obedience to God's Word as to how we please God or make him angry, we would have no peace. Instead, knowing God's wrath against sin, we'd be terrified and anxious. There would be no comfort and our hearts would be troubled, for we'd never know whether we had done enough or not.

One of Satan's biggest temptations is his first one, it has worked for countless generations just as it did in the garden, “Did God really say?” Doubt of Scripture, and therefore of God creeps in, next thing you know, sin happens. That is when Satan creeps in with his second attack, telling you how bad you are – you're guilty and nothing can be done for you. And then, rather than repentance, many try even harder to come up with the right excuse to mollify and tone down their guilt.

Satan is the ruler of this world, and has no claim on Jesus. He also has no claim on you. Sin has no claim on you. Sinfulness has no claim on you.

All this law talk for us is kind of scary. Who can do all that God commands? Who can love God as God desires us to love Him – perfectly? Who can love all their neighbors as they love themselves? Who can even love himself?

That is why the Father sends Jesus. Conceived of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is conceived without sin. He isn't like the rest of us, for He is conceived *and* born in sinlessness. Jesus loves the Father, for He keeps the Father's Word. Jesus loves every neighbor, even those who betray Him, lie about Him, shame Him, and who crucify Him. His sinlessness is manifest in all His life, in His perfect keeping of the Father's Word.

In our text, Jesus tells His disciples that He is going away. He went away to be crucified for your sins and mine. He died upon the cross, and the old evil foe thought that he had won the victory. But Satan has no claim on Jesus, for there is no sin in Him. Three days later Christ rose from the dead.

Dearly beloved of God, there is your answer in regard to keeping the word of Christ. You and I are sinners! Admit it! Shout it to the mountaintops! Proclaim it for all to hear, for it is the absolute truth!

I am a sinner! I am redeemed of all sin! I am total and completely forgiven! You, dear friends, are cleansed of all sin – in in Christ Jesus your Lord!

It is true that we are to keep God's Word. We have failed and therefore deserve God's wrath and punishment. That is where Satan would like you to stop, and believe nothing more. He wants you to make excuses. He wants

you to try and talk God's Word out of the equation. He wants you to do whatever you can do to fix the problem yourself. It is an attractive thought.

But it does not depend on you. Christ has carried your sins and fulfilled the law to grant you His sinlessness. He has called you by name and made you His own, forgiving you in the very blood which He has shed for you.

As the pastor asked the person in his office who could only see God's Law, and indeed we all need to see it and repent, "Do you keep Jesus' word?" No, I am not talking about the Law. I am talking about the word of forgiveness which Christ would dispense to you in Word and Sacrament. In the blessed Means of Grace, Christ sinless death is delivered to you as payment for your sinfulness unto the forgiveness of sin. Do you keep Jesus' Word – in other words, do you trust that in Christ you are forgiven?

By the water of baptism, sin and death have no claim on you – for you have already died in Christ's death, and been cleansed of all sin.

By the absolution, guilt and Satan have no claim on you.

By Christ's precious body and His holy blood which you eat and drink, God's wrath is appeased and eternal damnation has no claim on you.

Today, our confirmands will confess that they believe that Christ has done all this for them. Katelyn and Katie, Collin, Dylan, and Erin will promise that they will continue in these precious gifts so that the Holy Spirit can continue the work of faith in them, so that they trust in Christ alone until He returns.

That is what Pentecost is all about. It is the Spirit who comes to each of you and convinces your heart and mind to trust not the Law, but the Word of Christ – that you are the redeemed, forgiven, children of God. It is the Spirit who fills you with faith to believe that you have already won the victory over sin and death, removing the terror of the Law. It is the Spirit who moves you to boldly proclaim, "Satan, sin, death, and guilt have no claim on me – I am Christ's and He is mine, now and forevermore." Amen.