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John 14:15-21

Do you love Jesus? More than you realize!

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. **16**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— **17**the Spirit of truth. 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. **18**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **19**Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. **20**On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. **21**Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Do you love Jesus? Jesus loves you. Do you love Jesus? In many ways this is a tricky question because love can mean many things. Most of us think of love and correlate it with emotions. We have passion for Jesus. We have gratitude for Jesus. We experience joy in Jesus. Therefore we must love Jesus.

Are emotions the same as love?

A little girl was invited for dinner at the home of her first grade friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli and the mother asked if she liked it. "Oh, yes," the child replied politely, "I *love* it!" But when the bowl of broccoli was passed, she declined to take any. The hostess said, "I thought you said you loved broccoli." The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes ma'am, I do, but not enough to *eat* it!"

Emotions are not the same as love.

In our reading from John 14, Jesus tells us what it means to love him. Verse 21 says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." In other words, love is not simply an emotion, it is an action.

This is easy enough to understand. When you love someone you act. Imagine you are on a romantic walk along the beach. The sun is setting the wind is gently blowing and your beloved looks at you and asks, "Do you love me?" And you respond, "You know, I really can't say. But, it's so wonderful to know that you love me." That's the wrong answer. You will be enjoying the beach by yourself.

Love is not simply receptive. Love is not silent. Love speaks. Love acts. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (14:21).

Now it is at this point where we often get tripped up in one of two ways.

The first trap is to turn these words into a ruler to measure ourselves and others. That is what the Pharisees did. They followed the law and measured themselves by how well they kept it. Never mind they were paid to keep the law. Never mind that this caused a self-righteous attitude within them.

Jesus exposes their self-righteous attitudes in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector. If you remember, the Pharisee stands before God and says, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, could not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" (Luke 18:11-13).

Who left justified? The tax collector! This is important because many of us hear the command to be obedient and we begin comparing ourselves against each other. But Jesus is not saying these words in order to have us compete against each other for his love. Jesus is not a parent who plays his children against each other.

The second trap is to hear these words as threat and coercion: "Do this, or else! Obey my commands or else you do not love me." The problem with coercion is that it does not fit in the language of love. I am amazed at how often spouses use ultimatums on each other in order to produce love. Ultimatums might stop destructive behavior. However, ultimatums do not produce love. True love is not coerced. True love is free. It responds like the apostle Paul who said, "Rejoice, in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!" Love is freely given.

You see, Jesus is not speaking these words as a parent who wants you to earn his affection nor is he speaking as a boss who tries to manipulate your performance. Rather, Jesus is speaking as the good shepherd and as the one who washed his disciples' feet and as the one who called his disciples', "Friends." These words are not meant to coerce you. Rather, they are meant to help.

In his treatise on Good Works, Luther explains how commands are meant to help Christians. He says, "Imagine a young lover to whom we must whisper, 'Pssst! Daniel! Send Pamela flowers! She loves chocolate, so give her some!' Such words, though commands, are far from threatening and come as relief to the lover ignorant of the beloved's desires" (Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*. p. 97).

That is what Jesus is doing in this passage. Jesus is saying, "Pssst, whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (14:21). You have to remember that the disciples have Jesus' commands. That very evening Jesus gave them the new command. After washing their feet, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). To make sure they got it, later that evening Jesus said, "My command is this: love one another as I have loved you" (15:12).

Jesus is telling his disciples to love him by loving each other. With these words, Jesus is setting up the direction of the Christian community. Love! It is so wonderful that this Jesus does not give them too many rules. Jesus is the ultimate libertarian. He does not tell them 47 different ways to love. He simply shows them what love is. It is sacrificial. It is washing each other's feet. It is dying on the cross. Love in this manner. Love each other. Love your children. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Love!

“Pssst, Whoever has my commandments (and you do) and whoever obeys them, loves me.” That is why Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit. Loving each other in the way that Christ has loved us is impossible without the Holy Spirit. Love hopes all things and expects nothing. Love gives away all things away. If we are going to keep this command to love, the Holy Spirit needs to come alongside us and comfort and help us. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot love in the manner that God desires.

Have you ever heard the saying, “Nobody is indispensable”? It is not true. Say that to a man who had just lost his wife of fifty years. Say that to a mother who has just attended the funeral of her child. Richard Mann, the producer of Miami Vice was asked if Don Johnson was indispensable to the show Miami Vice. He answered, ‘Yes! Don Johnson is indispensable. There would be no Miami Vice without Don Johnson’ (Paul Zahl, *Grace in Practice*. p. 129).

The Holy Spirit is indispensable to the theology of grace. When Jesus says, “Love one another” we cannot love in the manner that Christ calls us to love without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit must do the heavy lifting. The Holy Spirit alone can change our hearts so that we do not hear Jesus’ commands as coercion but instead respond in a free and merry spirit.

Breathe, oh, breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast;
Let us all in Thee inherit,
Let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

It is fitting that we would need the Holy Spirit to produce the work in us. The reason is because the Holy Spirit is often the silent worker. We speak much of God the Father and God the Son. We speak very little of the Holy Spirit. However, like the Holy Spirit, much of our work is done silently. Even without our knowledge.

Remember the parable of the sheep and goats. The punch line of the parable is that the sheep think they are goats and the goats think they are sheep. The goats say, “When did we see you and not clothe you?” The sheep say, “When did we see you and clothe you?” The goats could pile up their good works whereas the sheep did not even know they had done good works. How is this possible? Because the Holy Spirit, that silent worker, was doing many good works without the sheep even knowing they were doing it.

That is the same with us. There are many good works that you do in your jobs that touch others. Many times you do not even think twice about them. But God knows you do them. The reason is because God is doing the work through you. You are the branch. Christ is the vine. The Holy Spirit is the source.

Could you love more? Of course. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. As for the question of do you love Jesus. Of course you do. Much more than you realize.

**In Jesus’ Name,
Amen**