

## **John 14.12-24: Love And Law – Do They Really Go Together?<sup>1</sup>**

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”<sup>2</sup>*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Over the past weeks, we have been looking at John 13-17, Jesus’ sermon to his disciples just prior to the crucifixion.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for the tumultuous, confusing, frightening, and disheartening days to come. The events they’ll experience are truly cosmic. The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension will happen to them in something of a daze.

But Jesus doesn’t want them to forget key truths. Until the gracious and public outpouring of God’s power on the day of Pentecost, Jesus is telling his disciples: “No matter what happens, hang on to these basic things! Don’t forget them! Hold them tight and you’ll get through.” These are truly among Jesus’ most famous last words.

It would take far too long to permit a detailed study of this section of John’s gospel, so we’ve only been hitting some of the highlights. Among the themes we’ve seen:

- How does Jesus lead us to the Father?
- What is the work of the Spirit of God?
- What does it mean to serve?

Today we’re going to look at vs 15 of chapter 14, a text that is among the most familiar: *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

Now just stop for a moment and think about that sentence. How do love and law go together in the same sentence? Don’t they seem contradictory? If we think about our relationship with God or our relationships with each other, how can we define “love” as “obedience to commandments”? That’s what I want us to look at over the next two weeks.

As we dive into vs 15 and what it has to say, be aware that we’re considering a vast topic. Anyone who thinks that they have a full grasp on the meaning of love in Scripture – particularly God’s love – would be like the one, who dips their foot into the Atlantic Ocean and then proclaims: “now I know everything there is to know about the oceans of the world!”

We won’t even be getting our feet wet – perhaps a big toe!

### **ASSUMPTIONS:**

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<sup>1</sup> #1: 100704, SJEAC.

<sup>2</sup> Joh 14.15

In order to get to the meat of this text, you need to know that I'm making two assumptions.

*Moral Law Still In Force:*

The first assumption is that the moral law still applies today. By the moral law, I mean the 10 commandments.

Many of you may respond by saying: "Well, that's no big deal! Of course it applies!" But there are those who will say that there is no law in the New Testament. They will quote from Rom: *you are not under law but under grace*<sup>3</sup> and wrongly interpret this to mean that the law of the Old Testament no longer applies today.

And I imagine we've all heard at least one person say that the OT is the book of law and judgment, while the NT is the book of love and grace. Nonsense!

Jesus himself summarizes the 10 commandments in the 2 tables of the law. His words are something we say nearly every Lord's Day.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*<sup>4</sup>

Jesus is quoting here from Numbers and Deuteronomy! And he's saying that all the rest of Scripture is suspended from and supported by the foundation of the 10 commandments.

This is a topic for itself and I won't go any further. But you should know that I'm asserting that the moral law is still fully in force.

*Two Axes Of Love And Law:*

The second assumption is that the pairing of law and love applies equally in two ways or on two axes. One axis is horizontal, expressed in the phrase: *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*.<sup>5</sup> Everything that has to do with our conduct concerning each other, our families, and the world around us – all of these are included under this heading.

The other is vertical, expressed in the phrase: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*.<sup>6</sup> This includes everything that has to do with a right relationship with God Himself, including worship, idolatry, and every other aspect of true piety.

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<sup>3</sup> Rom 6.14

<sup>4</sup> Mat 22.37-40

<sup>5</sup> Lev 19.18

<sup>6</sup> Deu 6.5

Though much of what we see in Scripture today and next will be applicable to the horizontal relationship of love, it's the vertical aspect will be the chief point of our examination of Joh 14.15.

### **LOVE DEFINED:**

This last week I asked someone a question that I've asked many times before. "What is love?" And as has happened so many times before, I also got the same far-away look and the mumbled reply: "yeah, really, what IS love?"

We can love puppy dogs, pleasant days, a certain flavor of ice cream, our own lives, our spouses and children, our country, and the smell of wood smoke on a winter day – and it's all the same word! We say that God is love. Some might say that love is our god. We can fall in love, fall out of love, find love, lose love, and love is what makes a Subaru a Subaru. "Love" has so many meanings that it means nothing.

I've spoken with some who say "love is desiring the best for someone else, no matter what". That sounds nice, doesn't it? Most recently the people who told me that this was a great meaning for love were divorced within 6 months!

Do you remember that line from the movie Jerry Maguire, where he says "You complete me." Wasn't that a tender moment? Probably most of us missed that fact that Jerry's love for Dorothy is based on what Dorothy can give him, can supply for him. She completes him, he says. And what about when he decides that she no longer completes him? What about when she needs HIM to complete her? Where will they be then?

It's the "you make the air smell sweet and life worth living" sort of love that expects you to fulfill all of my needs, wants, and desires. This is a taking kind of love and it's not Biblical.

It's also a kind of love we find quite often in the church. I have decided to follow Jesus: for now, until it starts being difficult, unless I don't like what he tells me to do. It's a relationship with God that says it IS all about my wants, needs, and feelings. Believers often end up essentially telling God that he had better deliver on our schedules and according to our specifications. We see it in the microcosm of congregations with complaining, gossip, and backbiting. We see it in the larger scope of the church with worship services that aren't even intended for believers any more.

When Jesus says, "If you love me, you'll obey me," he is saying that love is definable. This is a giving kind of love, based on our commitment to him. In vss 12-24, he says essentially the same thing 5 times:

- *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do (12). That is, we'll emulate Jesus, we'll follow his path to the Father.*

- *If you love me, you will keep my commandments (15).*
- *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me (21).*
- *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word ... (23)*
- *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 (24).*

It will help us to remember that Jesus is steeped in the books of the OT and they frame his thinking. In his humanity, he has been trained, brought up in, memorized, preached at, and he has lived by the words of the Old Testament. He himself has said that he has fulfilled the law, meaning that he has kept it and obeyed it.

In Deu 19 we read: *... you be careful to keep all this commandment, which I command you today, **by loving the LORD your God and by walking ever in his ways.***<sup>7</sup> How does one keep God's commands? By loving him! Love for God is obedience to God's law. Obedience to God's law is love for God. These are inseparable ideas.

Now some might respond by saying: "Love and law together!?! That sounds so dull, so dry, and so 'legalistic'." First, that's a wrong use of the word legalistic anyway. But perhaps it does to our untrained ear and sin-scarred souls, that is how these words sound. But that's not how the Biblical writers thought about God's law and word.

Consider the winsome ways in which God's people speak of God's law.

- *The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!*<sup>8</sup> The Psalmist desires to know God and his love, so he asks God to teach him his statutes, that is, his laws. This whole 119<sup>th</sup> chapter is a song in praise of God's law!
- Here's another: *I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.*<sup>9</sup>
- Jesus himself says *... because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.*<sup>10</sup>

Let me give you an analogy. Let's say that you see your neighbor looking under the hood of his 5 year old car, out of which smoke is pouring. You go over to see if you can offer him some help. You quickly see that the engine is ruined and one of the first questions you ask him is: "When was the last time you changed the oil?" He replies with something like: "Huh?"

Thinking that he didn't hear you, you ask in a different way: "Did you ever look at the user's manual in the glove box? It has a routine maintenance plan all laid out for

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<sup>7</sup> Deu 19.9

<sup>8</sup> Psa 119.64

<sup>9</sup> Psa 119.48

<sup>10</sup> Mat 24.12

you.” And he replies: “Ah, who needs manuals?” What do you do at this point? You smile politely and go back home, shaking your head.

God’s word is our user’s manual. In it he *has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him.*<sup>11</sup> In his word and statutes are a continuation of the conversation he started with Adam and Eve in the garden. He built us. He knows us. He tells us what’s best for us.

Love defined is, in short, obedience to the user’s manual, God’s law and word. Obedience to God’s law and word is our act of love for God. It’s that simple.

If I told you that I love my wife, but know her favorite kind of ice cream or her eye color – you might wonder! Knowing and loving God means knowing him particularly as he has revealed himself in his Son, who is revealed in Scripture.

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*<sup>12</sup>

This is the water of life. This is the food for our souls. This is the bread we should be eating – even every word that comes from the mouth of God.

## **APPLICATIONS:**

I’m going to close this first section of our look at Joh 14.15 with a final thought.

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we need to take a step back and look at our nation. The Constitution of the United States, as brilliant a document as it is, is not the word of God. And yet even Christians in this country have understood the establishment clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”) as meaning the separation of religion from all state affairs.

I don’t care what your political affiliation is. I don’t care for whom you voted in the last election. I don’t care what your perspective is on health care or stimulus packages. In a sense, I don’t even care what your perspective is on abortion. If you don’t love God first above all other people, parties, or institutions, these questions become nothing more than academic exercises.

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<sup>11</sup> 2Pe 1.3

<sup>12</sup> Psa 19.7-11

All the currency printed with the words “In God we trust” will do us little good if we don’t love him. And we can say the pledge of allegiance with the words “one nation under God” daily for the rest of our lives and we will still not be a blessed nation if we don’t obey Him. So I close with this old prayer from the BCP.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite; Have mercy upon this whole land; and so rule the hearts of your servants, Barack Obama, the President of the United States; Ed Rendell, the Governor of this Commonwealth, and all others in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things seek your honor and glory; and that we and all the People, duly considering whose authority they bear, may faithfully and obediently honor them, according to your blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

**John 14.12-24: How Do ‘Love’ And ‘Law’ Go Together?**

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

1. Assumptions

1.1. The moral law (10 commandments: Exodus 20.1-17, Deuteronomy 5.1-21) is still fully in force. See also Romans 6.14-18, James 1.25.

1.2. The “law of love” applies on two axes:

1.2.1. Horizontally, i.e., our neighbor: Leviticus 19.18

1.2.2. Vertically, i.e. God: Deuteronomy 6.5

2. Love Defined

2.1. Love overused, too many meanings, and thus nearly no meaning at all. Is love definable?

2.2. Jesus defines love the same way 5 times: John 14.12, 15, 21, 23, 24.

2.3. The keeping of the commandments is loving God ↔ loving God is the keeping of His commandments, see Deu 19.9.

2.4. The commandments are lovingly spoken of: Psa 119.48, 64. Jesus himself equates lawlessness with a cold heart: Mat 24.12.

2.5. The commandments of God (including all the “law and the prophets and the writings”) are the user manual for all that pertains to life and godliness, 2Pe 1.3.

3. Love Performed

4. Love Ignited



Continued next week ...

### **For The Fourth Of July**

**ALMIGHTY God: whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite: Have mercy upon this whole land: and so rule the hearts of your servants: Barack Obama: the President of the United States: Ed Rendell: the Governor of this Commonwealth: and all others in authority: that they: knowing whose ministers they are: may above all things seek your honor and glory: and that we and all the People: duly considering whose authority they bear: may faithfully and obediently honor them: according to your blessed Word and ordinance: through Jesus Christ our Lord: who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns ever: one God: world without end. Amen.**