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Sermon Summary #11

So, You Say You Love Jesus? John 14:15-24

We live in a rather odd season in the history of the church of Jesus Christ. What isn't odd or strange is the spread of new and unbiblical doctrines. That, sadly, is something of a commonplace in church history. There always have been and always will be people who profess to know Christ and claim to believe in the authority of the Bible who promote false teachings, some of which are undeniably heretical.

What I have in mind, however, is something different, something that first emerged in the late 60's and early 70's in conjunction with what has come to be known as the Jesus People movement. Men and women who identified with the Jesus People movement happily and loudly declared their love for Jesus Christ and their devotion to his glory and fame. *But they were suspicious of local churches.* More specifically, they would often speak in the same breath of their love for Jesus but their disdain for what they called the "institutional" church. They would read their Bibles and share the gospel with non-Christians but typically avoided anything that smacked of what they felt was traditional or "religious".

The spirit of the early Jesus People movement has never entirely disappeared from the professing evangelical Christian world. But it reemerged with a vengeance in the past 15 to 20 years, especially here in America. One would often find it in what came to be known as the Emerging Church movement. But even people who had no part in the Emerging Church would still be found declaring their love for Jesus and their commitment to Jesus at the same time they openly and knowingly disobeyed what the NT teaches.

I had a conversation not too long ago with a young man here in OKC who believed that he had been called to be something of a "spiritual revolutionary." He had nothing but disdain for the structures and systems of the local church, in spite of the fact that these practices were based directly and explicitly on the teaching of the NT. When I pressed him on how he could say he loved Jesus and yet persisted in disobeying the explicit instruction of the NT, he didn't seem overly bothered by the inconsistency.

One sees this problem in yet another area of life: our sexual behavior. In spite of the fact that Jesus called for sexual abstinence prior to marriage and for sexual fidelity within marriage, numerous young adults think nothing of sleeping with their girlfriend or boyfriend. They obviously find no problem in saying they are Christians who love, honor, and trust Jesus, all the while they conduct themselves sexually in a way that Jesus openly and explicitly prohibited.

I could go on giving you other examples, but the same reality is present in them all. ***It is this profoundly unbiblical and indefensible idea that one can truly love Jesus Christ and be his disciple at the same time one consciously and openly and repeatedly and unrepentantly lives in opposition to what Jesus commanded us to do or not to do.***

In effect, what these people are saying is: "Jesus is great! Being a follower of Jesus is the 'in' thing to do! Declaring your love for Jesus and your admiration for his message is awesome! Living a simple and generous lifestyle like Jesus is cool! Standing defiantly in the face of religious hypocrisy is important! But the ethical commandments of Jesus are outdated and impractical. And our Lord's plan to build and to grow his Church is boring and restricting and ineffective."

So what would Jesus have to say to such people? One doesn't have to look any farther than what we've just read here in John 14. ***Four times within the span of ten verses***, Jesus says it as clearly and explicitly and undeniably as he possibly could:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (v. 15).

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (v. 21a).

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (v. 23a).

“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (v. 24a).

Jesus said much the same thing back in John 8:31. There he spoke to the religious leaders who said they “believed” in him:

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples” (John 8:31).

To “abide” in the words of Jesus is the same thing as “keeping” them. We see this again in John 15:10 and again in John 15:14, where Jesus declared:

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10).

“You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

I suppose that if someone were present to critique this message of Jesus, they might point out that it isn’t the most effective strategy in communication to repeat something over and over again in such a short span of space and time. If you do, you run the risk of boring people and losing their attention. But the fact that Jesus says this same thing repeatedly is not an indication that he was a poor preacher. It is an indication that he was deadly serious about this truth and that we need to pay close attention to what he says.

Among other things, this means that if you and I come into this auditorium on Sunday mornings and sing loudly and passionately about Jesus and our love for him and then walk out the door and live in explicit defiance of what he has commanded us to do, our so-called worship is of no value. It is hypocritical. It is disingenuous.

What are the “Commandments” of Jesus?

So what are the “commands” of Jesus? What is the “word” that he says we must be diligent to keep? Surely it is the entirety of his exhortations and instructions. It would include everything he says in the Farewell Discourse here in John 13-17: such things as loving one another, and praying in his name. It would include everything else he says in John’s gospel and anything recorded for us Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Things such as: loving our enemies, forgiving one another as God has forgiven us, taking the gospel to the nations of the earth, and living by the golden rule, as stated by Jesus in Matthew 7:12 – “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”

But it doesn’t stop there. May I remind you that Jesus said he will build his church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The church Jesus is determined to build began at Pentecost and is built up on the foundation of the many exhortations and principles and ethical guidelines contained in the epistles of Paul and Peter and John and the rest of the NT documents. In other words, ***the “commands” of Jesus that he has in mind here in John 14 include all the “commands” found throughout the NT.*** The apostle Paul himself, while declaring that he was free from the Law of Moses, said that he was “under the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). Thus whatever Paul told the church in the first century was simply the “law of Christ” or the commandments of Christ himself. This would include things like:

“Abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3).

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (Rom. 12:14).

“Be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1).

Give of your finances to the work of the local church and do so “bountifully” and “joyfully” (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

There is another reason why I believe it is legitimate, indeed essential, that we look to the rest of the NT to find out what is included in the “commands” of Jesus. In other words, the commands of Jesus include far more than simply what he himself said during the course of his earthly life. Here is why.

Look at John 14:25-26 –

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:25-26).

Here Jesus tells them that whatever he may have said while with them that they later forget will be brought back to their minds by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus we can rest assured that the “commands” of Jesus are recorded for us in the epistles of the NT that were written by those present with him in the Upper Room.

Also consider what John himself said in this regard. John was present with Jesus in the upper room when he spoke these words. And John himself later would write this in his first epistle:

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4).

“For this is the love of God [or love “for” God], that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

What does it mean to “Keep” his Commandments?

A lot of people who have no particular commitment to Christ and do not, in fact, love him and have no desire to be known as his followers, will often speak of what a wonderful moral example Jesus is. They will extol him for his philosophical wisdom. They like to point to him as someone who was unafraid to take on the religious establishment and to call them out for their hypocrisy.

But these same people have no intention of actually “keeping” his commandments. They don’t feel bound to honor his statements on sexual morality or what it means to truly worship God. The idea that we should love and pray for our enemies is distasteful to them. They had rather get even with their enemies!

So, what this means is that “keeping” Christ’s commandments is something far more than simply acknowledging that they are good and ethically upright and practically beneficial. One must actually be devoted to doing what Christ said, not merely memorizing it or telling others about it or even writing books on what Christ taught.

Of course, we will never in this life perfectly “keep” all that he commanded. But the Christian life is always one of progressive growth and improvement in obeying the words of Jesus. On those occasions when we don’t keep them we will experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit. So the issue is one of the *pursuit* of all he commanded, *not* the *perfect* fulfillment of it.

Is Jesus saying that Love IS Commandment-Keeping?

Some have mistakenly interpreted Jesus to be saying that love is commandment keeping, or that love equals the keeping of his commandments, or that love and the keeping of his commandments are interchangeable ideas. They are, in effect, the same thing. Or they say that we should define love as commandment keeping.

I don’t think this is correct. I think Jesus is saying that loving him *leads* to obedience. Truly to love Jesus is the *root*, of which obeying Jesus is the *fruit*. The person who genuinely loves Jesus will, as a *result* or in *consequence* of that love, obey all that Jesus has commanded.

That is what John is trying to say in the passage I quoted earlier.

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4).

To “know” Jesus, according to John, is to “love” Jesus. Thus, keeping the commandments of Jesus is the test or evidence or proof that we have come to know him and love him.

What does it mean to “Love” Jesus?

This is perhaps the most challenging and important thing for us to understand. Did you notice how many times Jesus repeats this point?

- “If you *love* me, you will keep my commandments” (v. 15).
- “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who *loves* me” (v. 21a).
- “And he who *loves* me will be *loved* by my Father” (v. 21b).
- “And I will *love* him” (v. 21c).
- “If anyone *loves* me, he will keep my word” (v. 23a).
- “And my Father will *love* him” (v. 23b).
- “Whoever does not *love* me does not keep my words” (v. 23a).

He uses the word “love” 8 times in this short paragraph! So what does it mean? Certainly not what the world means by the word “love”!

Well, first of all, we know that the “love” we are to have for Jesus is not identical to the love he has for us. ***Jesus Christ loves us in spite of our moral flaws and sinful ways. But Jesus has no flaws and committed no sin. Therefore, we can’t “love” him in precisely the same way that he “loves” us.*** We rejoice in knowing that the love of God for us in Christ overcomes the obstacles that we create: our sin, our selfishness, our unbelief, our greed, our idolatry, our moral ugliness. In other words, God loves us in Christ in spite of the fact that we are unlovely and deserve damnation and judgment. But we don’t love Jesus in spite of anything. We love him precisely ***because*** he is without sin, ***because*** he is glorious and beautiful and altogether lovely. Jesus deserves the love we show him. But we don’t deserve the love he shows us.

So, our love for Jesus must be a response of our hearts and minds and affections to his beauty and holiness and greatness and glory. We don’t love him because he needs it. We don’t love him in response to some defect or deficiency in him. We love him precisely because he is free from all defects and deficiencies. We love him because he is morally and spiritually and in every other relevant way perfect and whole.

As John Piper put it: To love Jesus is to desire him because he is infinitely desirable. “It’s admiring him because he is infinitely admirable. It’s treasuring him because he is infinitely valuable. It’s enjoying him because he is infinitely enjoyable. It’s being satisfied with all that he is, because he is infinitely satisfying. It’s the reflex of the awakened and new-born human soul to all that is true and good and beautiful, embodied in Jesus.”

You and I first take deep and heartfelt delight in the excellency of Jesus Christ and then, as a result, we love doing excellent things, that is, the things he has commanded us to do.

To “love” someone or something is to desire them/it, to crave it, to long for it, to want it, to prefer it. Can you say today: “I desire Jesus and crave for more of Jesus and long to see him and know him and enjoy him above all else”? Back in John 12:43 we are told that the crowds refused to trust and believe in Jesus because “they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” That is to say, they preferred man’s praise to God’s praise.

To “love” Jesus is to be pleased with him, satisfied with him, content with him, in awe of him, happy with him. It is above all else a yearning to be with him forever. To “love” Jesus is to feel an irrepressible inner desire to pursue the fame of his name. It is to prize him above all that this world offers. It is to live for his glory, even if that would mean the loss of all earthly or human glory. It is to admire him and treasure him as infinitely more precious than anything or anyone anywhere in the universe!

Clearly, then, to “love” Jesus is more than to obey Jesus. Indeed, you will “obey” Jesus only if you first “love” him. ***Love is a deep-seated, heart-felt, passion for Jesus that engages our affections.*** It is to know him more intimately and to experience his presence more fully. Listen again to what Peter said:

- “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

I would argue that when Peter speaks of our “loving” Jesus he means precisely that we experience an inexpressible and ineffable “joy” in Jesus; a glorified joy in Jesus.

Is God’s Love for Us Dependent on Our Love for Him?

Our final question to answer strikes us as quite the problem. For *it appears as if Jesus is saying that God will love us only if we first love him*. In other words, when you look closely at these texts it almost seems as if he is saying that we “earn” or “merit” God’s love by loving him. Look at vv. 21 and 23:

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “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” (John 14:21-23).

Does it not appear as if Jesus is saying that only if we first love him will his Father love us? The answer is both Yes and No.

Let’s start with the “No” response to this question. Throughout the NT, and especially here in John’s gospel and in his first epistle, *God’s love for us in Christ always comes first*. His love for us is always the cause of which our love for him is the effect. Consider just a couple of familiar texts that say this:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Clearly God’s love for the fallen world of sinful men and women precedes any love they might have for him. His love for us led to his giving to us his Son as the way for our obtaining eternal life.

Earlier in the Last Words of Jesus we encountered this text:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

Our love for others is obviously the fruit or result or response to a love that Christ has *already* shown to us by giving himself for us. Christ’s love for us comes first and our keeping of his commandment to love others follows. Indeed, Christ’s love for us is both the pattern and the power for our loving others.

Then there is 1 John 4:19 that ought to settle the question once and for all:

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

I should also mention what Paul says in Romans 5:8,

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Notice that God’s love is not for those who love him but for those who hate him: sinners. It was “while” we were “still” sinners, not after we became saints or after and because we loved God.

So, if all that is true, what does Jesus mean when he says in v. 21 that whoever loves me “will be loved by my Father and I will love him”? What does he mean in v. 23 when he says that “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”?

Does Jesus mean that God will love us *more* because of our obedience? That’s possible. This wouldn’t be any different from James 4:6. There we read that God “gives *more* grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” God gives grace at the beginning. God’s grace to us is the reason we are saved and are now his

children. But as we humble ourselves he gives even “more grace”! Perhaps that is the sense in which Jesus is here saying that God gives even more love.

But I think the answer to our question lies elsewhere. I don’t believe it is the case that God increases in how much he loves us, but rather that *he increases our capacity to know and enjoy and experience* his love for us. In other words, *he’s saying that our love for God, revealed and seen in our obedience, leads to an expansion to even greater depths of the ability and sensitivity of our hearts to sense and see God’s love for us.*

God poured out his love for us in Jesus that serves as the ground and cause of our now being in a relationship with him. In turn, our love for him leads to our obedience to his commands. And as we obey his commands he promises to work in us in such a way that our spiritual and emotional capacity to enjoy being enjoyed by him slowly but surely grows and deepens and intensifies.

In other words, here in John 14 Jesus is talking about God energizing and expanding our ability to *feel and enjoy and delight ever more deeply* in the love that he already has for us.

Thus, it all begins with God’s love for otherwise hell-deserving sinners like you and me. That love for us awakens in our hearts a corresponding love for him. And as we live in obedience to what Christ has commanded he graciously gives us the sensible experience and rock-solid knowledge of the immeasurable and incalculable expanse of his glorious affection. Thus our love for him is always the reflex or response to his love for us. And as we continue to love him and demonstrate it by our obedience he promises that he will pour into our lives even more love and the ability to see it and enjoy it to a degree greater than we had known before. God responds to our obedience with an extraordinary and extremely personal and deeply intimate affection that goes beyond what we experienced when we first came to faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

Why do you obey the commands of Jesus? Is it out of fear? Is it primarily from a sense of moral duty? Is it because you feel obligated? Or is it because you love him so much that you can’t bear the thought of doing something that might bring sadness to his soul? Is it because you are so keenly aware of how great his love is for you that you want nothing more than to be pleasing in his sight?

When you see the commandments of Jesus in Scripture, does your heart crater under a heavy burden? Do you sink in despair? Do you run away in shame? Or do you see a wonderful opportunity to put your love for Jesus on display? Do you feel instinctively drawn to do his will because you love him so truly and sincerely and passionately?

I long for a heart and mind and affections that rejoice at the invitation to obey Jesus. If you don’t, might it be that you don’t fully grasp his love for you?

One more comment is needed, especially in light of the promise in v. 23. God’s love for us that produces in us our love for Jesus, a love that results in obedience to his commands, leads to the assurance that the Father and the Son, together with the Spirit, “will come” to us and make their “home” with us. Just as Jesus will depart in order to make a future “home” (John 14:2) for his followers, the Father and Son (and Spirit) will come to the obedient disciple and dwell in him/her as God’s very home! Talk about heaven on earth! But not merely “on earth.” Rather, it is “heaven in our hearts”!