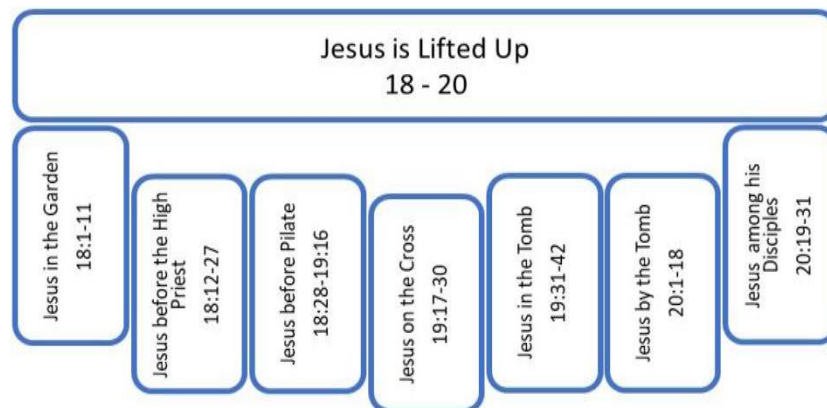


## Lesson 23: John 14 Jesus Comforts His Disciples

### Introduction



In John 14 we pick up perhaps right at the end of the Passover feast. In the last words of the chapter Jesus says, “Let us go from here.” So, they’d been in a room and they’d had a meal, and maybe this is the end, and Jesus is speaking. The context is emotionally charged. Jesus will address that. He is also going to move us along in our understanding of discipleship. Jesus repeats the central message to which his followers are to give as a witness. He also calls his disciples to a submission modeled after his own. Between these two ideas of message and submission, Jesus makes several enigmatic statements. We are going to consider all of this.

As an introduction to set up the tone for the chapter, let’s first pay attention to the emotional context and how Jesus speaks to that emotion.

“Let not your heart be troubled.” That’s how John chapter 14 begins. “Let not your heart be troubled.” Why are the hearts of the disciples troubled? Jesus has just said, “I am going away and where I go you cannot come.” Jesus is leaving. For good. Have you had a friend leave for good? A parent or teacher or mentor leave? For good? You can empathize with the emotion gripping their hearts. Jesus is leaving. And that’s not the only stressful factor. Jesus has just announced that one of the men is a traitor. And in addition to that Jesus added that Peter, the leader, will deny the Lord before the sun comes up. “Let not your heart be troubled.”

John told us that earlier in the meal Jesus “became troubled in spirit” thinking of the one who would betray him. Jesus understands the unsettledness of soul, the heaviness of spirit they are feeling. He is not discounting that. He speaks to comfort.

That’s how we should approach these next verses. If your heart right now is troubled, then listen to these verses with your own burden in mind. If your heart is not troubled, imagine how these men felt after hearing these things from Jesus. Let’s read the first four verses of John 14.

<sup>1</sup> “Let not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup> In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way where I am going.”

Does that comfort you? It may, it may not. Words, even words of truth, do not always touch the soul in the right way to ease the current pain. Would these words have comforted the disciples? Maybe. Maybe not right away. Being told that things will be better in the future does not easily remove the worry of present trials. The betrayal, the denial and the death of Jesus are the present reality just now pressing in on to the minds and hearts of the disciples.

This has all come up at this meal. The comfort that Jesus is giving them might be more for the days to come. After these hard things happen, during the ongoing process of grief or regret or loss, the disciples will be able to bring back these words, and as they reflect on the words, they’re going to hear Jesus. Jesus is not just saying just that things are going to be better in the future. The comfort is

not “you’re going to get a big house, you’re going to get to live in a mansion.” The comfort is not “life goes on after death.”

The comfort’s more specific than that. The comfort Jesus offers is relational. The comfort is “where I am you may be also. Believe in me. Believe in my Father. If I didn’t have a place for you, if I didn’t want you, I would have told you that. I would not have led you along.” And he has said, “where I’m going you cannot come.” And as words of comfort Jesus promises a reunion. “I am going there, and I’m going to come back again and receive you.” Jesus is telling them that this is not the end of relationship. Think of Peter and his love for Jesus. Peter wants to be with Jesus. Peter is losing Jesus. What would comfort Peter? “I’m going, Peter. But I have a place for you. I am not going to forget you, Peter. I could never forget you, Peter. I will come back, and I will receive you and bring you to me.”

When I focus in on my love for Jesus, the words written here make my heart smile. Going to heaven is not about living in a big house and it’s not about feasting. Going to heaven is about living in a big house with Jesus, feasting with Jesus, you know, or living wherever with Jesus. Eternal life is about knowing God and being in relationship with God so that you enjoy that knowledge. I know I do not love God with much of my being. I certainly don’t love God with my whole mind, and my whole heart, and my whole strength. But I have this kernel of love in my heart. I have this seed. I have enough in my soul that I can imagine this, and this comforts me, the joy of relationship with Jesus.

One other thing comforts me here. It is not only the idea of relationship with Jesus, but the invitation to relationship with Jesus. Jesus has a place prepared. Jesus has gone ahead to make things ready to receive you in. He’s not going to be surprised or put out when you arrive. He’s not going to have to make a place for you on the couch. You do not have to wonder if you are expected or wanted. Jesus knows you. He makes a place for you ahead of time. He anticipates your coming with joy because he loves you. You are wanted. Jesus desires relationship with you and he invites you home with him. He’s going to come and get you.

This is the emotional context for the chapter. And we’ll keep that in mind. These are words of comfort. And we’ll keep that in mind, too. At the end, Jesus is going to say, “My peace I leave with you.” And they may not experience that during the cross, but they will later. Jesus also here is continuing to prepare his disciples for the life and ministry that is to come. He began this preparation in the beginning of the evening in chapter 13. And through the symbol of foot washing, he impressed on his disciples his expectation that they represent him with an attitude of humility, motivated by a heart of love. You want to be my disciples. You want to represent me. And the attitude of the disciple is humility, the motive of the disciple is love. Here in chapter 14 we are going to add to our understanding of discipleship with the message and submission of the disciple. And we start with the message.

### **The Message of the Disciple**

Jesus’ words of comfort seem to miss the disciples, or all of the disciples. They are confused by his assertion, “You know the way where I am going.” No. They do not believe they do. Jesus’ words raise questions from Thomas and from Philip. Jesus’ clarification points them to the central truth of their message. This is John 14:5-11.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. <sup>7</sup> If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” <sup>8</sup> Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. <sup>11</sup> “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

Thomas is the first to ask, trying to get his head around what Jesus is saying, “How do we know the way?” They know the way. They have just not put it all together, yet. Jesus’ sixth “I am” statement

with an object summarizes all other “I am statements” with objects. Let’s think about way and truth and life separately.

*I am the Way*

Jesus says, “I am the way.” How do you get to the Father? Jesus declared, “I am the door.” You get to the Father by going through me. How does Jesus provide a way? “I am the good shepherd.” The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus’ love and care for the sheep goes to the extreme of giving up his life as a substitute to pay the penalty of death. By laying down his life, Jesus made a way. He is the way.

That’s why Jesus can say, “No one can come to the Father except through me.” There are many, many religions in the world. Are there many, many ways to God? Not according to Jesus. Jesus is very exclusive. “No one can come to the Father except through me.” How can Jesus say that? How can Jesus be so exclusive? Notice that Jesus is not exclusive regarding who can come, only about how to get there. Jesus is very inclusive about who can come. He is universally inclusive. Consider the Samaritan woman. Is anyone excluded based because of race? Because of gender? Because of social status? Because of financial status? Because of gender? Because of moral ability? Because of intellectual ability? Because of any dividing factor at all? No. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will receive the gift of eternal life. But there is only one way. There is only one cure. There is only one solution, because there is only one God and there is only one payment for sin. Mohamed is not God and he did not die for your sins. Moses is not God and he did not die for your sins. Buddha is not God and he did not die for your sins. Your inner self is not God and your inner self cannot pay for your sins. Jesus, who is God and who came as man, died in your place. Jesus rose again. Jesus is the solution. There is only one way. These are the words of Jesus, “No one can come to the Father except through me.”

Jesus is the way.

*I am the Truth*

Jesus also says, “I am the truth.” There are so many questions that we can ask and even answer ourselves about the creation through our own observation and experimentation. God has made us really, exceptionally good at discovering truth about the material universe. It’s amazing what people can do, what we can learn and what we can understand. But there are so many other questions that cannot be answered by us who live inside the created world as part of the created world. Questions like: what is the nature of our Creator? Is there a spiritual realm? What is the nature of the spirit? What is the spiritual nature of human beings? What is the purpose of our existence? Is there life after death? What is the problem of humanity that leads us to constant war and strife and poverty? What’s the real problem? Can that problem be overcome? What is the source of our universal feeling of guilt? Why does everybody feel that? Can that that guilt be paid for? What is the source of the beauty and love and goodness we see and sense that goes beyond the physical?

Human beings have been driven for always to speculate upon these questions. But these questions are beyond our ability to answer decisively. We can speculate, theorize, rationalize. But we cannot know the answers to these questions without help from the outside. Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world.” Jesus reveals truth because he is the Word, “And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Because of his own nature, because of his own participation in the creation of this universe, because of his intimate relationship to the Father, Jesus is able to answer with true knowledge all of the unanswerable questions.

Even more than that. Jesus not only explains the truth. Jesus is the truth. Jesus is at the very center of reality. If you begin your understanding of all things with Jesus at the center, you are standing on the most solid ground possible because he is at the very center. Jesus is the truth.

*I am the Life.*

Jesus also said, "I am the life." Your existence finds full expression in relationship to Jesus. Vitality is in Jesus. Meaning is in Jesus. Human nature is only fully alive in relationship with the Creator. You cannot be fully alive as a man or as a woman and be separated from Jesus. Apart from relationship with Jesus, you are a shadow, a husk of what you are created to be. To be good and beautiful and true, as a human being ought, perfected as a human being, you must be spiritually connected with God. Because that's who you are created to be. Humans are created to be spiritually connected with God. That is what human life is. You are meant to display love and compassion and rationality and leadership and servanthood over the created order. God made man and woman in his own image to rule over his creation. You are meant to reflect his nature and in so doing participate in the display of his glory. That is life. There is no life apart from Jesus. And so, he declared, "I am the Bread of Life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the true vine." I am where your vitality comes from.

The true disciple who believes that Jesus is who Jesus claims to be embraces him as the way, the truth and the life and that disciple proclaims that message to others. Just like Jesus, we proclaim that there is only one way to the Father. And everyone is invited to come. The gift is free to all who will receive Jesus by faith.

Jesus is our message.

Does this detract from the Father? Does putting Jesus in the center remove God from the center? Not when we rightly understand the nature of the Son and the Father.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Jesus tells them that they have seen the Father. They do not understand.

Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Philip's confusion makes sense. As much as they believe in Jesus, the disciples still struggle to grasp the implication of who he has revealed himself to be. Remember, they are not starting with any developed understanding of God as three in one. They don't know about the Trinity. There are hints and foreshadowings and suggestions in the Old Testament, but no developed teaching of God as three in one.

Even if the disciples can claim by this point to believe in the divine nature of Jesus and the unity of Jesus with the Father, they still are just beginning to work out in their minds what that means. John will have it worked out before he writes this Gospel. But not there, not at the Last Supper yet, and that's why Philip says, "Show us the Father."

Jesus' next words strongly affirm his claims throughout the Gospel to equality with God. Jesus says,

"Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. <sup>11</sup> Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

The union of the Father and the Son is so complete that to see Jesus is to see the Father. When we present Jesus according to the way he has revealed himself, we are presenting the Father. When we model our own human lives according to the humility and love and wisdom of Jesus, we are modeling ourselves according to the nature of the Father.

Making Jesus central and presenting him as our message, does not detract from the Father when we do so, according to the teaching of Jesus. Jesus reveals the Father. Jesus came to glorify the Father. When we place the Son at the center and teach what he taught, and see who he is, then we also placing the Father at the center. As we point to the glory of the Son, we point to the glory of the Father.

You who are a disciple of Jesus, what way do you proclaim? Jesus. What truth do you assert? Jesus. What life do you offer? Jesus. What is the message of the disciple? Jesus.

Having established this message, we can now move on to the submission of discipleship. But before we do that, we need to recognize three enigmatic statements clustered together in the middle of the chapter 14.

### Three Enigmatic Statements

Here are the three statements. Verses 12-15.

<sup>12</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. <sup>13</sup> Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*. <sup>15</sup> If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

I am only going to give my answer for one of these enigmas in this lesson. I am not sure enigma is even the best word. I think Jesus made these statements with the intention of driving us towards a deeper understanding of relationship with him. We might come up with a surface answer for each one right now. But without some mental wrestling, without considering the fuller context of what Jesus is saying about discipleship, about the Christian life, I do not believe we will get to the place Jesus is leading us to. He intends for us to reflect more deeply on these statements. We don't want an easy answer.

#### *Greater Works*

First Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father.” This is our first enigma. What can Jesus possibly mean in telling us that the one who believes will do greater works? Jesus has raised the dead. A few have followed him in that - Peter and Paul. But that is a very, very few. This sounds like a promise given to whoever believes, not just to an elite few. Is the problem our lack of faith? Is Jesus saying that if we truly believed we could raise the dead on command? “Lazarus come out!” And he comes out.

That seems the wrong way to go with this, especially since raising Lazarus is not even the greatest work of Jesus. Jesus is going to lay down his own life and raise it up again. No human being has ever done that. Even on top of that, Jesus' death is not merely death. He is taking on himself the punishment for all human sin. That's an unmatched work. We cannot seriously believe that Jesus is saying we're going to do something greater than the atonement on the cross.

Jesus must be saying something else. We have to ask, “What are the nature of the great works we will do?” We will be able to address that question better after we continue on through the next couple of chapters with the nature of discipleship. The next chapters will add to our idea of the works disciples are called to perform. So, I leave the question with you for now. What works is Jesus talking about? And what does he mean that we will do greater works than he?

#### *Answered Prayer*

What Jesus says next is just as enigmatic.

Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.

That just does not seem to be true. I have made a long list of requests through my life that Jesus has not answered. Ask me anything, I've done it. I will do it. No, he hasn't. Most of them are selfish, but some of them might have been selfless and some were concerned with the eternal well-being of other people. So why didn't Jesus do what I requested? Just at literal face value, I could test this promise right now in the most mundane way. Here, I'll do it. “Lord, please give me one million dollars this month. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.”

Will Jesus really give us anything we ask if only we truly believe when we ask? I know I did not really believe right now when I asked for a million dollars. I can't make myself believe he's promising to do that. But if I did, if I could make myself believe, if I can ask in faith, “Jesus, give me a million dollars,”

is he promising to give me a million dollars? No. That is not the point here. Something else is going on. Something to do with the nature of prayer and the nature of our relationship with Jesus.

This promise is going to be made by Jesus two more times, once in chapter 15 at the very center of our chiasmic structure, and again at the end of chapter 16, which is our chiasmic parallel to this section. What Jesus is saying is important enough for him to repeat three times. So, it must really have something to do with discipleship. Prayer is fundamental. We will come back to the question in chapter 16 after we see what else Jesus adds that might help us in understanding this promise and how it relates to living for Jesus.

With both of these enigmas, Jesus makes us stop and think because of the way he has phrased them. At the same time, the topic of both promises is clear to us. You will do great works. That's one. And ask me, and I will answer you. And that's two. Both promises fit Jesus' desire to comfort his disciples in the present emotional circumstances.

At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus comforted the disciples by telling them they will see him again, he will welcome them home. Adding to that comforting hope for the future, Jesus now also tells them, "Though I am gone, you are going to do great things. Your remaining here without me is not to no purpose. You have something wonderful ahead of you to do. Your life is significant."

And in addition to this, "I will not be fully gone. You can speak to the Father in my name. That is a guarantee of relationship. You are my disciple. As you go about my business and your life, ask me for whatever you need. There are no limits. I am listening. I am acting on your behalf. You are not alone."

This is the comfort of Jesus, hope for the future, significant work in the present, and the promise that you are not alone. He is listening and acting on your behalf.

The third and final enigma is also the second idea about discipleship I wanted to address in this chapter. We considered the disciples' message - Jesus. Now we consider the disciples' submission. I am holding off on the third area of discipleship, the promise of the Holy Spirit. That's a major idea here at the second half of chapter 14 but the promise is too big for this lesson. We will come back to the Holy Spirit in our next lesson.

The third enigma is this, verse 15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Maybe that sounds straight forward, but there are two very different ways to take this. Jesus states it as a conditional, an if/then statement. If you love me, then you will keep my commandments. What exactly is the relationship between the "if" part and the "then" part? If we get that wrong, it's going to lead us to a distorted view of submission, a distorted view of the Christian life.

### **The Submission of the Disciple**

The submission of the Disciple. This is John 14:16-31. I will read the whole, but then we'll just focus in only on a few verses that deal with commandment, that deal with submission.

<sup>16</sup> "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. <sup>20</sup> In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

<sup>22</sup> Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to 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 abode with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who

sent Me. <sup>25</sup> These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. <sup>26</sup> 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 said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. <sup>28</sup> You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. <sup>30</sup> I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; <sup>31</sup> but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

So, before I get into this idea of submission, did you hear the language of comfort again? He says, "I'm not leaving you as orphans. I'm going to come back for you. I'm going to prepare a place and I'm coming back for you. You have something important to do. He also said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled." And he repeats that, "Don't let it be fearful." He's comforting them. But he's also teaching them about discipleship, and we have this important mission of submission, of obedience to commandment. And the language comes in verse 21, 23 and 24. I'll read those again just so that we can have our minds on it.

<sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to 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 abode with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

Earlier in verse 15, we simply had this, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Now we have added to that in verse 23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

We can simplify these two conditional commands this way, "If you love God, then you will keep his commandments" and "If you keep his commandments, he will love you."

There is a legalistic way to take those words and a non-legalistic way to take those words. The human heart is naturally legalistic. Something in us naturally believes that we must perform in order to be loved. So, it is quite easy for us to hear or believe something that is not really being communicated here. We have to be careful.

The legalistic idea is that you prove your love by being obedient. If you love God, you prove it, you show it through your obedience. And when you do, you become worthy for God to love you back. He withholds his love until you obey. Then, conditioned on your obedience, he extends love to you.

If you love me, then you will do blank. And if you do blank, I will love you. What does that sound like to you, "If you love me, then you will do blank. And if you do blank, I will love you"? It sounds like manipulation to me. Imagine a young man saying that to a young woman. If you love me, you will do blank. And if you do blank, then I will love you. Fill in the blanks with whatever comes to your mind. If you love me, you will do blank. And if you do blank, then I will love you.

Is Jesus saying God is like that?

No. That's manipulation. That's not the love of God. It will help us to not take this in a legalistic way by returning to the idea I have mentioned before regarding the two questions of covenant. With every biblical covenant, there are two essential questions to ask. And it is critical that we learn to separate out the answers to these two questions in order to understand the difference between grace-based obedience and legalistic obedience.

Question number one is this, "What makes me acceptable to be in relationship with God?" There is only one biblical answer to this question. It was true for the Abrahamic covenant. It was true for the

Mosaic covenant. It is true for the New Covenant. What makes you acceptable to be in relationship with holy God? The grace of God received by faith. Nothing you do makes you acceptable enough, righteous enough, loveable enough. If it were dependent on you, then you would be in huge trouble. Fortunately for us all, our acceptability is based 100% on the grace of God which we receive by faith.

“God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).”

A second question then follows the first, “Having been made acceptable, how then shall I live?” That’s the question of the true believer. If you have come to believe in God, then something in you desires to know how to live for God. You have been born again. Something has happened to you. And it’s mixed up with your fleshly motives, it’s not pure in you, but it’s there. A seed has been planted in your heart. When you ask this question, “How then shall I live?”, when you’re asking it from that new heart the Spirit has put in you, then you know the answer. The Spirit speaks to your spirit that you should live according to the will of God. You love God and desire to live in obedience to his commands.

That is how love manifests itself in a relationship that contains rightful authority. And our relationship with God is one in which God bears rightful authority. You are not in a relationship with an equal. You’re in a relationship with someone who deserves your obedience. He is Lord. He is King. He is Father. You worship your Lord. You serve your King. You love your Father. Worship, service, love, they all reflect the same heart for God, and they manifest in obedience to his commandments.

Trying to express this right response to God makes me think of Deuteronomy 10:12-13, where Moses uses a lot of words to exhort the people to the same idea,

<sup>12</sup> “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> *and* to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Jesus’ words are not manipulation. Jesus’ words are a statement of fact about your new nature. If indeed you truly do love God, if that is a true statement about you, then you will be moved to keep his commandments.

My wife and I have a running disagreement about the word, “duty”. I like the word. She does not like the word. She doesn’t like when I do things and then say, “Well, it’s my duty.” For her the word “duty” implies grudging obedience. It is enforced submission, like with Cinderella and her step-mother. And I can see that. I can also see another meaning for the word “duty” that probably comes from reading King Arthur and Lord of the Rings as a teenager. I see myself as a knight with knee bowed before my Lord. I hold my sword up stretched across both palms. And I exclaim, “Command me, my King.” That is my image for the word “duty.” It’s this love for my Lord, and he sends me out, my image as knight on errands and I’m living for him and I’m doing his will. So, you can see, Brenda and I have two very different images in mind. The idea of Christianity as grudging obedience, you know, Cinderella Christianity, is a sad idea. Living life doing something you don’t really want to do to convince God to love you, so that you can get a reward that doesn’t have anything to do with God in the end.

That’s not the Christianity of Scripture. The Christian life that Jesus talks about is a process of growing love for God from a heart that is motivated to obey. And God himself is the reward.

You can take the word “duty” or toss it out, either way. The idea is what’s key. There is a right obedience toward God that comes from a heart of love. Obedience to commandment is not an answer to the first question of covenant. We don’t earn acceptability; we don’t earn love. We do not obey to get him to accept us. We obey because he has accepted us and has put love for him into our heart.

We cannot do away with the word “submission.” That word appears too much in the Bible. We do need to place the word in a right and positive context. God is not calling us to grudging submission. He is calling us to willing submission. He calls us to humbly submit to the truth of who we are and the truth of who he is.



If that is where your heart is, then you will obey his commandments. And if you do obey his commandments, if you willingly submit to them, then you will be able to experience his love for you as his child. That's what it means that he will then love you. He has loved you as a sinner, but you will experience his love and him coming to you when you submit in relationship to him. The true disciple submits. And even in this we model ourselves after Jesus. Jesus waits on the voice of the Father. He does not act or speak on his own accord. As the incarnate Son, he willingly submitted to the will of the Father. He says at the close of this chapter, "but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me."

Having been declared righteous by grace through faith, how then shall we live? Moses understood loving obedience. He saw it as the key to life. "Choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days...(Deuteronomy 30:19-20)."

Moses understood loving obedience, but he also understood that was a lot to ask of sinful human beings. God allowed Moses to see ahead to the New Covenant. In Deuteronomy 30, Moses explains what he has seen; the failure of Israel, that leads to the exile of Israel, that leads to the restoration of Israel that leads to a new thing that God must do. Moses saw God must do something. "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."

Jesus echoes the words of Moses. Abundant life comes from choosing to live out of a heart of love for God in obedience to his commandments as an act of worship. That is the way of the disciple. As a result of walking in right relationship with God, we experience the fruit of relationship. We experience life. What Moses saw from far off, Jesus is now promising his disciples. I said in our last lesson we have a problem. We are called to an attitude of humility and a motive of love. This lesson has not solved that problem. If anything, we have added to the problem by declaring the way of the disciple as one of submissive obedience. Humility, love, obedience, all out of a right heart. That is beyond human capability. Israel taught us that. You can tell us how to love, how to serve God. We just can't do it. We need heart surgery. Something has to change inside.

### Reflection questions

1. Read John 14:1-15 and 27-31. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. What words or phrases indicate to you the emotional atmosphere Jesus is speaking into?
3. Jesus tells his disciples that the trouble of their hearts will be eased if they believe. What is the main cause of their troubled hearts? What does he ask them to believe? How do the promises of Jesus offer comfort?
4. How do Jesus' words to Thomas and Philip further the themes of the Gospel of John?
5. What is odd about verse 12? How do you understand what Jesus is saying?
6. What is odd about verses 13-14? How do you understand what Jesus is saying? Are there any clues in the text?
7. What is odd about verse 15? How do you understand what Jesus is saying?
8. Read John 14:16-31 noticing what stands out to you in connection to Jesus' statement, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." (We will focus on observations about the Helper/Holy Spirit in our next lesson.)
9. Agree or disagree with this statement, obedience should be understood as the fulfillment of one's duty towards God?
10. Describe two or three situations where you either obeyed out of a heart of love or you obeyed out of some other motive? How would you describe the difference?