“If You Love Me”
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After reading 84 verses to you last Sunday, it will be a pleasure to cover just 2 ½ verses today.

John 14:15-17a  NIV
15 “If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth.

To love Christ means to obey Christ.

John 14:15
15 “If you love me, keep my commands.”

Our first challenge is the first word: “if.” The Greek word (ean) can be translated into at least five conjunctions. The word is used many times in the New Testament. In his commentary on John’s Gospel, Dale Bruner suggests it would be better to use the word “when.” Jesus is not questioning his disciples’ love for him, he is assuming it.

My wife and I debate about the use of “when” and “if.” Sometimes she will use the word “if,” and I think she should use the word “when.” I think the two words have two different meanings. For example, I could say: “When I finish this sermon, you can go home,” and it has a different meaning than: “If I finish this sermon,” as though there’s a chance I will never finish this sermon.

Hence, I agree with Bruner. The verse should read: “When you love me, keep my commands.” Love is the central teaching for all of the Lenten sermons so let’s concentrate on the various words for love in the Bible.

When Jesus says, “If you love me...” what kind of love is this? Most of you already know about the four Greek words for love, but let’s review.

Philos refers to brotherly love, as in the city of Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. It describes love among friends. The New Testament writers use it often.

Storge refers to family affection - love in the family between parents and children. It describes the bond children can have and the care of grandparents.
**Eros** refers to sexual love and romantic relationships. It describes feelings, emotions, and a deep commitment to another person.

**Agape** refers to unfailing love, to the love of God, and to our love for people without boundaries, without conditions, and without restrictions.

The word agape was first used by the 70 Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew scripture into Greek (Septuagint also called LXX). They completed the first five books of the Bible 200 years before the birth of Jesus. When they came to the first Hebrew words for love in Genesis, the scholars had to decide about what Greek word to use. Eros was not appropriate. Storge seemed weak. Philos only referred to human relationships. None of them worked, so they took an obscure Greek word in Greek literature. Homer (850 BC - 800 BC) used agape to mean affection. The Jewish scholars took agape and defined it by their use of the word. The love Abraham had for his son, Isaac, was agape love. The unfailing love described by David in the Psalm read earlier is agape love.

Then the New Testament writers, starting with Paul in 1 Thessalonians, agreed with the decisions by the Jewish scholars and used the word agape.

**1 Thessalonians 1:3**

3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the first time the word “agape” was written by a New Testament author. The Gospels were written after Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, and they decided to do the same.

There’s one more Greek word that refers to love. When Jesus saw the crowd of 5,000, he had compassion on them. Two blind men approach Jesus, and our Lord had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Jesus told the parable of the lost son where the father sees him coming back home. Jesus says the father had compassion for his lost son. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:32 to be kind and compassionate to one another. Compassion! The Greek word means your heart goes out for the person.

When I declared my intentions to enter Princeton Seminary and go into the ministry, Dean and Martha Blackwelder came forward to sponsor me. “We will pray for you during your three years at seminary. When you are home, we want to take you out to lunch and hear all about your studies.” They were retired missionaries in their 80s. They loved me during seminary and I felt their love. They sent letters and reported to the session about my progress. I can authentically say Dean and Martha had compassion for me. Their hearts went out for me.
When I was ordained in 1972, Dean was asked to say, “Mr. Moderator, I present Robert Bardeen to be ordained as a Presbyterian pastor.” Instead, he had some things to say about me, including stories and songs. Half way through, the Presbytery moderator got out of his seat and stood next to Dean. With his sweet Southern accent, Dean said to him, “Mr. Moderator, you might as well sit down because I won’t be through until I properly introduce our first young man to enter the ministry from our church.” Everyone laughed, and the moderator took his seat. Dean and Martha loved me, and in return, I loved them.

However, think about this: Dean and Martha never asked me to obey them.

Our relationship with Jesus is different. Jesus says, “When you love me, then you will obey me.” Love and obedience go hand in hand. You can’t separate them. When we give our heart to Jesus Christ, we will want to know all that he has for us and obey his way of life.

The difficulty of loving Christ is the love we propose to use. Certainly, we can’t use eros, philos, or storge love. All three are inappropriate and imperfect. It has to be agape love. Agape love is perfect love, unconditional love, and unmerited love.

However, I think we have a problem when we consider loving with agape love. Since we are imperfect people who often put conditions on love and think people have to merit our love, how can we love Christ with agape love?

Consider the three ways Jesus uses the word love.

First, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:2-11). He expressed love to them. Of course, the disciples had a hard time accepting that love from Jesus. Peter objected to having Jesus wash his feet. Nevertheless, the truth is this: Jesus loved them.

Second, Jesus commanded the disciples to love each other (John 13:12-17, 34-35). Love for each other will be the way other people know they are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus calls the disciples to love him (John 14:15). The same Greek word is used for all three loves - agape love. Jesus thinks we have the ability to accomplish all three. We are able to receive his love, give his love to others, and give his love back to him.

How do we do that? How do we love Jesus?

The answer is simple. We love Jesus by obeying Jesus. Here’s some scriptural evidence. Notice the connection between love and obedience.
Deuteronomy 11:1
1 Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.

John 14:23-24
23 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

1 John 2:5
5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

Thus, the evidence of your love for Christ is shown in your willingness to obey him.

Jesus challenged the disciples to love and obey, but he knows he will have to leave them, so he promised to ask God the Father to send God the Holy Spirit to be an advocate, a helper, a constant presence, and a truth teller.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth.

Notice how the Trinity is stated in this sentence. The word “I” refers God the Son who is speaking to the disciples. God the Son will ask God the Father to send the disciples God the Spirit. All three is one sentence.

How will the Spirit of God do for them? There are many other passages in John’s Gospel where the role of the Holy Spirit is outlined (John 14:25-26, 15:26, 16:7-15), but in our passage today, four promises are given.

The Spirit of God will be our advocate.

Many have tried to translate the word “advocate” in other ways. KJV has “comforter.” The Message has “another friend.” Dale Bruner in his John commentary starts with “encourager,” but then moves to the name “true friend.”

The Greek word comes from the courts of law where an attorney represents you and speaks for you. The advocate pleads your case before the judge and jury. The attorney is advocating for you. Bruner’s change to “true friend” is because he thinks God’s Spirit stands with you no
matter what happens. It means to support someone or some cause without fail. Through thick and thin!

The expression “through thick and thin” comes from England when the countryside was mostly wooded with few roads. Originally, it was worded “through thick and thin wood” referring to thick forests and thin meadows. It appeared for the first time in 1662 by Richard Baxter: “Men do fancy a necessity where there is none, yet that will carry them through thick and thin.” Chaucer picked up the phrase, and today it means staying by another person no matter the harm. Through thick and think means being a true friend. The Spirit of God is a true friend, and will never leave you alone to face the good and the bad by yourself.

The Spirit of God will be our helper.

The word “help” is a special word in the New Testament. There are different Greek words for help, but I think the best one is from Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:18b-19 NRSV

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul is in a Roman prison. This is probably his last letter, yet he is rejoicing because of the opportunities he has to serve Christ while in prison. He is thankful for the prayers of the Philippians and for the help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ - another way to say the Spirit of God. What is this help? Paul uses a Greek word used no any other place in the New Testament, but frequently in Greek literature. It refers to the help from a choir director who works to have all of the voices work together. The Spirit of God helps us by coordinating harmony in our lives.

The Spirit of God will be a constant presence.

This statement restates the role of advocate who never leaves our side. The Spirit of God will be with us forever. It’s the promise of Jesus during the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19-20

19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

God’s presence will never end. Jesus says the same thing in this passage.

John 14:23
“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

**The Spirit of God will guide us about truth.**

Jesus says the advocate will be also called the Spirit of truth. How do we know what truth is? Do you remember Pilate’s question to Jesus during the trial? He asked: “What is truth?”

In Philosophy, there are seven main topics. Is there good and evil? How do we know what we know? What is right and wrong? Is there a God? What is real? What is beauty? What is truth?

All are difficult to answer. All have been debated for centuries.

Within Christianity, all of these topics are also debated - especially the issue of truth. I think there is less agreement today than in the past. Some are adamant about knowing the truth, while others feel that truth is relative. To the question about truth, those who affirm relative truth would say, “It all depends.” In fact, those who affirm a relativity position would say all of ethics is relative. All of reality is relative. It all depends upon your personal perspective.

It is troubling to me that Christians have not settled about the truth. There are so many denominations and theologies that all claim to have the truth. A month ago, a fellow called the church and asked me what Bible we use. I told him, and he asked why we don’t use the KJV. Then he asked if we had women pastors. I asked him why he called me. He answered, “Because God told me to call and correct you.”

Jesus says the Spirit of God will guide us about truth. I believe it, and I want to offer two areas where you can totally depend upon this guidance.

**The Spirit of God will guide you about the truth of creation and redemption.** The reason for both is love. God created us because God loves us. God redeemed us through Christ because God loves us. The truth of creation and redemption is all about love.

**The Spirit of God will guide you about the truth of your actions and thoughts.** No one else can. There’s no other source for guidance. No friend or family member can do it. Not even yourself. All of us need to know the truth about our lives. Only the Spirit of God can do reveal that truth to us.