

February 16, 2014  
©Rick Myatt

## ENCHILADAS, NOT QUINOA John 14:15-26

Former football coach Jimmy Johnson said that the only thing worse than a leader who doesn't care about his people is a leader who pretends to care. People can see through a phony every time. We hold great disdain for people who are phony. That's why our world has such disgust for religious leaders who are revealed to be immoral or politicians who stand for family values while committing adultery. It's not just leaders. We laugh at the person who wants to dress and talk like a surfer but who can't surf. I run into phoniness when I am in a store and someone trying to sell me something finds out I am a pastor and suddenly becomes religious. None of us wants to be phony as a follower of Jesus. No one wants to be a hypocrite. We long to be the real thing, the genuine article. Today we will look at a passage of Scripture that can help us be real as followers of Jesus. The passage is part of Jesus' final briefing for his followers and is found in John 14:15-26.

### JESUS ASKED FOR OBEDIENCE

Jesus had just told the disciples they would continue his work and that he would answer their prayers. In this section of his Final Briefing he says a number of things that can be a little difficult to sort out, but there is one thing that stands out clearly. Those who truly love Jesus will do what he says. You see this in verse 15. "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Jesus repeats that several times. In verse 21 he says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." Again in verse 23 he says, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching." Then he puts it in a negative way in verse 24, "he who does not love me will not obey my teaching." When Jesus says almost the exact same thing four times that tells us this is the main theme in this part of the briefing.

In 1 John 2:3-6 John said a similar thing when he wrote, "We know that we have come to know him (God) if we obey his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in them. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

It makes sense that if you love someone you will do what they want. Maybe you seen that commercial where the guy is tailgating and finds that his wife once again has packed a patty made of quinoa. He thinks, "Why does she pack these things? I

ate one last time by accident. It tastes like a dirty old tree branch. What the heck is a quinoa?" But he remembers that the last time he ate one and his team won, so he throws it on the grill. A friend says, "What is that, a loufa?" He says, "It's a quinoa." Next month I will have a birthday. Often for my birthday Laurie will make a meal with her terrific enchiladas and maybe even an apple pie. She won't make a quinoa and cilantro salad for me. She would make her enchiladas and her supernaturally delicious apple pie because she knows I like that and loving me she wants to do what will please me. She knows a quinoa and cilantro salad, in addition to tasting like a dirty old tree branch to me, would not be something I want. If she totally ignores what I want, does what I ask her not to do, she doesn't really love me. But because she loves me she does what I want her to do.

This is a simple principle that we all understand. If you love Jesus, you will keep his commands, beginning with believing in him, then going on to loving one another as he has loved us.

### JESUS PROMISED A STRENGTHENER

In his commands Jesus set the standard awfully high. Love as he has loved us, which means unconditionally and infinitely. That means loving our enemies, loving those who persecute us or treat us badly. He also commanded that we forgive each other, that we serve each other, that we humble ourselves and deny ourselves in order to follow him. How are we supposed to do that? That is not natural to us.

In verse 16 Jesus said he would give us some help. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." The term translated "counselor" was the Greek word *parakletos*. Theologians turn that into the noun *paraclete*, a term you will hear almost nowhere outside of a school of theology. The first part of the word, *para*, means "by," or "alongside." The second part is from the verb *kaleo*, which means to call. So a *paraclete* is called alongside.

The term was often used of an attorney because he comes alongside in court and serves as an advocate, arguing your case for you. Wait, you mean when Jesus issued this daunting challenge of obeying his commands he promised as a way to help us that he would give us another *lawyer*? Insert your favorite lawyer joke here. Question: Why does California have the most lawyers and New Jersey the most toxic waste dumps? Answer: New Jersey had the first pick. Yeah, that's just what I need, more lawyers in my life. That will really give me the ability to do God's will because every encounter I've ever had with lawyers was so helpful and encouraging. Not to mention how spiritual the experience was. Hold on. The word

didn't have to mean "lawyer." It could also mean an encourager or strengthener. He is one who comes alongside you to support you, be with you and give you the strength to do whatever needs to be done. That's what Jesus meant.

Who is this strengthener? Jesus says, "The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him." The world can't see him because he is a Spirit, not a physical, visible being. But neither does the world know him. The world could know him, but it doesn't. However, Jesus went on to say, "But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." The disciples knew him. He was Jesus. This strengthener is the Spirit of Jesus. The world didn't know who Jesus really was, but the disciples knew. Because they had believed in him and knew him, Jesus promised he would send his Spirit to live in them once he was gone. Jesus says in verse 18, "I will not leave you as orphans." He will never abandon those who believe in him. Later he would say, "I will be with you always."

Jesus is going to return to the subject of his Spirit being in us later in the Final Briefing, so I will save extensive discussion of our life with him for that time. But for now, think about what Jesus is promising here. It would have been a profound encouragement and empowerment to walk around with Jesus all the time. Sometimes we stress about the future. Maybe our finances are bad, our job disappears and we worry about how we're going to get by. Would you do that if you were following Jesus around through life? In those days people worried about things like that, only in their case their concerns were a lot more basic. Most of them were concerned with having enough food to eat. Do you think the disciples ever worried about that after they had twice seen Jesus feed thousands of people when he started with only enough food for one person's lunch? I imagine that was one they never stressed about when they were with Jesus. If they could scrape up enough shekels to buy a piece of bread and some beef jerky they knew Jesus could turn that into a feast for all of them.

We worry about what might happen to us in the future. Brad Colbert cracked me up yesterday. After our men's breakfast he was moaning about getting older and falling apart. He jokingly said his hip had been hurting and he figured it was bone cancer. We joke about that, but we all have had that, "what if this weird symptom is cancer?" Do you think the disciples were less concerned about that after they watched Jesus stop a storm in its tracks just at the time they thought their boat was going to sink and they were going to die? Do you think they worried about their health? Hey, what if they got some awful disease like cancer? No worries, Jesus would heal it. What if they got polio and lost the use of their limbs? No problem. Jesus would heal it.

Jesus makes the point here that they are not going to lose all that help, all that encouragement. In fact, Jesus was going to do something even more amazing than he had yet done. As long as he was physically on the planet all he could do was help those he was physically with. But now he was going to leave and put his Spirit in all of his followers no matter where they were in the world. He could give even more strength and support to every single person who believes in him. That's the promise he made.

In John 7:37-38 Jesus spoke of those who believe in him having a river of living water flowing from within them. Then in verse 39 John said, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." Those who believe in Jesus have received his Spirit. They actually have the Spirit of Jesus inside them. That means we have a source of profound support, encouragement, strength and direction living in us. It is part of the new covenant promised by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 36:27 when he quoted God saying, "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

### JESUS PROMISED TO SHOW HIMSELF AGAIN

Jesus said that before long the world would not see him. He was alluding to his death and the fact that once he was placed in the tomb the world would not see him anymore. But the disciples would see him because he would appear to them after the resurrection. On that day they would realize who he really was. Because of the fact that he lived after death, so would they and all who believed in him.

Most of us forget that there were two disciples named Judas. Matthew and Mark give his name as Thaddeus. Most likely Luke and John gave us the real name of the guy, which was Judas. But after the notorious Judas was revealed to be a traitor this Judas was known by a nickname, Thaddeus, which might have meant "heart." Anyway, Thaddeus Judas asked the obvious question in verse 22. "Why aren't you going to show yourself to the world?" He and the other disciples wanted Jesus to set up his kingdom with a spectacular show of divine glory and power. When Jesus said the world wouldn't see him and that he would only show himself to the disciples, they were disappointed. I'm like Thad. Why didn't Jesus rise from the dead and then walk right through the streets of Jerusalem to the temple and say, "Now do you get who I am?" I wish he would do something like that today.

If you want to do an interesting study in the life of Jesus, look at how he responded to questions. He would ask another question in response, tell a story or sometimes, like here, say something that at first glance appears to have nothing to do with the

question that was asked. Jesus' answer to Thad seems like it fits in that category. He simply repeats that those who love him will obey him and adds that the Father and the Son will make their home with the person who loves Jesus. How does that answer Judas' question?

Judas and the other disciples wanted Jesus to do something dramatic and powerful. They wanted Jesus to take over in this world. Jesus' response essentially says, "It's not going to happen that way guys." He's telling them that the way he is going to work is in the hearts of those who believe in him. Those people are going to do a great work, empowered by his Spirit. God is going to work in their hearts and use them to change the world. It will be a very different plan from the one the disciples had in mind, but Jesus was quite insistent on it.

## IMPLICATIONS

### LOVING JESUS IS KEY

The key step is for us to love Jesus. It is love for him that will motivate the obedience that Jesus called for. If you love him you will keep his commands. It starts with loving him. If you don't love him you're not going to care much about obeying him. It all starts with being amazed at God's love and his grace that he has given us and responding to that with love.

If we love Jesus we will do what he tells us. The more passionate our love for him the more passionate will be our desire to obey his commands. Let's envision a young man who has fallen desperately in love with a young woman. He can think of little besides her. He pursues her with all his might. She, however, is not sure about him. She goes out with him, but she has lots of options and is not at all sure that this particular specimen of the male gender is the one she should choose to spend the rest of her life with. Of course for this lovesick young man the thought of losing her is nearly unbearable. One day they are talking and the subject of favorite television shows comes up. She mentions that she is absolutely addicted to *Downton Abbey*. He has only heard a little about it and could not be less interested in watching what amounts to a glorified British soap opera. But the young lady, after waxing eloquent about the show says, "you should come over to my house and watch it with me." What does he do? Are you kidding? He is there in a heartbeat. Is it because he is so intrigued by the show? Not a chance. It is because he loves her. He goes and watches with her eagerly.

I can testify that such a motivation is quite real. I personally have been watching *Downton Abbey*. Let me make clear that nothing gets blown up in the show. No one gets shot. There are no airplanes. There are no spies. There is no adventure.

There are no sports to speak of. This is not my kind of show. Why do you do it, Rick? I do it because it is a way to express love to my wife. It makes her happy, because she enjoys the show. I live every day humbled, amazed and profoundly grateful for the fact that Laurie loves me. I still can't believe that she has chosen me to be her husband and keeps loving me day after day. I can't understand it, but I am indescribably happy because of it, and I want her to know how happy I am. So if I can express that to her by watching the maneuverings of Lord and Lady Grantham, Lady Mary, Lady Edith, The Dowager, Tom, Carson, Mrs. Hughes, Anna and Mr. Bates, and all the rest, then so be it. I don't do it as an onerous duty. I do it gladly because it makes Laurie happy. That is how the Christian life is to be lived. That is why we care about obeying the commands of Jesus.

### OBEDIENCE IS A RESULT NOT A REQUIREMENT

It would be very easy to read this passage and come to the conclusion that we have to obey Jesus in order to get God to love us. In verse 23 Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." There it is right there. If you obey his teaching the Father will love you. The obvious implication is if you don't the Father won't love you.

This fits with everything we've ever known and experienced in life. You have to perform. You have to do well to get approval, you have to be nice to people to get them to be nice to you, you have to be attractive in some way to gain people's attention. It makes sense to us that you have to obey Jesus if you want God to accept you and love you.

That is exactly how religion works. Do you keep the rules? Do you perform the five pillars? Do you live by the laws? These are the things you must do to be in God's kingdom. If that's the case then why did Jesus have to die on the cross? Paul wrote the book of Galatians to refute this very thinking that the way we get God to love us is by keeping the rules!

We need to interpret this passage in light of the rest of Scripture. In John 6:28 Jesus spoke of the person on whom God places his seal of approval. The audience responds in verse 29, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" In other words, how do we earn that approval? In verse 30 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." Here is the work, trust in Jesus. And that's the exact message of the book of Galatians. In Galatians 3:2 Paul asked people who thought they had to obey the commands to earn God's acceptance after they had put their faith in Jesus, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law,

or by believing what you heard?” Receiving the Spirit is God’s seal of approval. How did they get that? Was it that Paul explained all the rules to them and they said, “Oh, all right. We’ll try really hard to keep those rules” and then gave it their best effort? No, he told them about how Jesus died for them and rose from the dead and they put their faith in him. And God said, “Good enough.”

One of the most powerful messages in the Bible are found in Ephesians 2:8-9. “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.” Not by works means not be keeping the rules. It is a gift of God’s kindness.

Well how are we to understand Jesus’ statement in John 14:23 that if we obey his teaching the Father will love us? We note the grammar in the original language. The actual grammar is unfortunately masked in our English translation. Verse 23 is an “if, then” statement. The “if” part is “if anyone loves me.” Following that are three results, three parallel “then” statements. We will keep his teaching, the Father will love us and the Son and Father will make their home with us. But why would we love Jesus? Because we believe in what he has done for us. We love him as a response to what he has done for us. It is not the requirement to get God to love us, it is a result of the fact that we have learned how much God loves us and what he has done for us.

Are you certain that’s what Jesus meant? Yes, I am, because John, who heard these words and recorded them, in some other of his writings explained this. In 1 John 4:9-10 he wrote, “This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Down in verse 19 he made it explicit. “We love because he first loved us.” We love God as a response to his kindness and grace.

One night a couple of weeks ago it was really cold and threatening to rain. Our trash cans were out on the sidewalk because the next day was trash pickup day. I needed to take out some trash. I had a bag of trash, a bag of recyclable items and some newspapers. I also figured I would pick up our mail while I was venturing out into the cold. Our mailbox is across the street and down a couple of houses and we have a key we have to use to open it. So I went out to the trash with my hands overloaded with trash, recyclables, newspapers and keys. I opened the lid on the trash bin and somehow, and I still don’t know how this happened, while juggling all that stuff and trying to get the correct bag to drop into the trash I accidentally dropped the keys into the bin. That wouldn’t have been too bad if they’d just

dropped onto the top of the trash in the bin, but no, somehow the keys managed to filter down through the layers of trash deep into the bin where I couldn't see them. There I was, in the dark and cold, arms still full of trash and recycle items, trying to hold the bin open, with no idea where the keys were. This could easily have been the kind of thing where Laurie appropriately took me to task for being a total idiot. She could have berated me for what I had just done. Why not put the keys in your pocket until you needed them? Why not set some of that stuff down and do it one at a time? And how in the stinking world did you manage to drop the keys anyway? That's exactly what I deserved. She could have shown frustration and impatience with me. But she didn't. She just laughed about it. She said she could see herself doing something like that. She made light of it and with good humor helped me dig through the trash until we found it. Then she has never said another thing about it. In fact, until today she has probably forgotten it altogether.

You would think I had learned a lesson there about trying to do too much. You would think that, but you'd be wrong. Friday night we were getting ready for the men's breakfast the next morning. I was getting some cups to put out on the table that we use for the guys to put fruit in. I wanted to do it quickly so I grabbed a stack of them. I lost my hold on one and it fell on the floor and shattered. It was one of our wedding presents, now ruined forever because I had not learned the lesson of not trying to do too much at one time. Once again, Laurie just took with good humor and helped clean up the shattered pieces.

What if I feared I had to handle things like that without being a mistake prone idiot? What if I feared that if I failed I would face disgust, frustration, even ridicule and rejection? How would that impact my relationship with Laurie? It would be awful. Instead, what I get from her is grace, acceptance, love, affirmation, even when I have earned just the opposite. And that creates a huge desire in me to love her all the more and with even more passion do whatever will please her.

We love Jesus as a response to his love for us. As a result of loving him we will naturally want to do what pleases him, and that completes a virtuous cycle of love as we continue to live in the Father's love. This is why it is so utterly crucial that we understand how much God first loves us and that we grasp his grace. If we are to love God it must be a response of having being loved first. No set of doctrines, no set of rules, no amount of commands will ever produce love for God in our hearts. Only God's love overwhelming us will produce love for him in us.

**OBEDIENCE CAN BE A BLIND SPOT**



In the back of our eye there is a place where the optic nerve comes through from the brain. In that spot there are no photoreceptor cells, thus creating a hole in our vision. We have a blind spot right in the middle of our field of vision. We don't see it because our brain extrapolates details from the surrounding area and information from the other eye. But what if our brain didn't fill in that hole? We'd see just a black hole right in the middle of our eyesight. Oddly in terms of our ability to see ourselves our brain fails to fill in at times. Somehow we humans have a remarkable ability to live with blind spots the size of Australia. Marilee Jones was the dean of admission at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, one of the top schools in the nation. She was considered a master in her field and wrote several books. In one of them titled *Less Stress, More Success*, at one point she urged ethical behavior and honesty on her readers. She wrote, "Holding integrity is sometimes hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that what goes around comes around, meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out." Yes, it does. Ms. Jones resigned from her position a few years back when it was discovered that while she had put on her resume that she had graduated from Albany Medical College, Union College and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in fact she had never attended two of those schools and she had only been at RPI for one year. How can you preach integrity to people when you are a cheater? It is a common problem for humans.

Petra Reski is an investigative journalist who has become one of the leading experts on the Italian mafia. Her book, *The Honored Society: A Portrait of Italy's Most Powerful Mafia*, reveals a strange fact. Faith in God is quite common among Italian mobsters. Mafioso Marcello Fava, who later left the Mafia, told one journalist, "Before I had to kill someone, I would cross myself. I would say, 'Dear God, stand by me. Make sure nothing happens.'" He said pretty much all of his colleagues did. When mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano was arrested the police found him with 5 Bibles, filled with his comments written in the margins and passages underlined. He had 73 statues of Christ in his home, each of them bearing the inscription, "Jesus, I put my trust in you."

How is it possible that people who run a criminal enterprise that includes murder in its activities, fail to notice the fairly obvious violations of Jesus' commands? Somehow the human mind and heart are capable of having galactic proportioned blind spots. It's a problem with a long history.

I have seen Christian spouses treat one another terribly and somehow not notice that they are not loving each other as Christ commanded. Recently I have been talking with a good friend in ministry who has been treated terribly by a fellow

staff member who gets in the pulpit and preaches about humility and loving each other. Somehow he cannot see his obvious violations of his own teaching. What commands are we supposed to keep? We could create a checklist. Love others as Christ loves you. Forgive those who hurt you. Give to those in need. Keep your promises. Don't gossip. Don't be proud. The list could get pretty long and intimidating. The problem is we have a tendency to do some strange things with lists like that. We have a way of turning them into something external and kind of trivial and we treat the list like a bunch of duties.

Did you see the story in the news this week that some football players from Oklahoma University were found to have violated NCAA rules last year. It seems that at a graduation banquet on May 10 last year 3 players were guilty of eating too much pasta. That's right, the NCAA has a rule about how much food a player is allowed to eat at a banquet. The players were informed if they wished to reinstate their eligibility for next year each of them would have to pay back \$3.83. How would you like it if obeying God was like that? Uh oh, that's too much pasta. Obviously you aren't obeying God, so he won't love you. Fortunately this is not what God wants from us. He wants his life to flow through us.

Our obedience to Jesus' teaching is not a "paint by the numbers" kind of thing. It is not a matter of Jesus saying, "Here are all the rules and all the duties, make sure you keep them to the letter." It is a matter of us loving Jesus and wanting to do everything we can to please him.

When our daughter, Carissa, was a toddler at one point she decided she needed to stand right next to the television and put her hands on the screen. This was not a good thing for several reasons. It was not a healthy thing to stand right next to the old cathode ray tube television sets. But she was also in front of the screen so other people couldn't see what was on the TV and she left her messy handprints all over the screen. So we told her not to stand next to the television and most definitely not to put her hands on it. But she was just too fascinated by it and soon she was back at it. This time I got down on my knees and told her, "Carissa, you may not stand right next to the TV and you may not put your hands on it. If you do there is going to be a consequence." She knew what that meant. She knew that her mom and dad did not issue idle threats and that if she did what she badly wanted to do there was going to be a price to be paid.

She stood there hesitating and I could almost hear the deliberations going through her head. She was trying to decide whether to risk the consequence. But she wanted to touch the TV so badly. Apparently being unable to do what she wanted

felt nearly unbearable to her. Finally she walked over to the TV, stood right next to it and while looking directly at me put her hand not on the screen but on the side of the set. She kept looking at me to see what I was going to do about it. She was calculating to see how far she could push this thing and find out what she could get away with. I almost laughed because it was pretty funny to watch, but I knew I had to keep a straight face and carry through. Carissa got her consequence and learned to leave the TV alone. It was the last time we had a problem with it.

Let's not "love" God like that. If we love him we won't be calculating what we can get away with. So let's love him with all our hearts. Let's listen to his instruction with open ears and then with passion live how he tells us. We must always be humble, knowing that we have blind spots like everyone else. We must be more anxious to do what Jesus wants than to defend ourselves or prove that we are right.