

John 14:15-21 If, then...

At our WNS supper just this past Wednesday
I was telling the Shumates and Jack and Leila
how I negotiated the clean-up
of our den with the girls.

“No one will get to go on the big yellow slide
if you don’t pick up all these toys in the den.”

That was met with blank stares,
so I restated my offer.

“**If** you want to go on the big yellow slide at church,
then you two need to pick up these toys.”

That got things moving,
at least for 30 seconds.

Parenting is all about the negotiating, right?



If, then.

If you eat your dinner,
then you can have ice cream.

If you finish your homework,
then you can play games on your tablet.

If you are this tall,
then you can ride the ride.

Actually life, not just parenting
is all about negotiating;

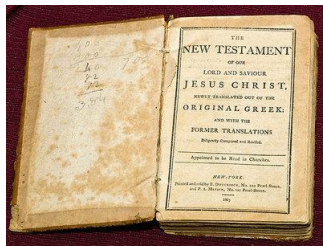
if I do this for you,
then will you do that for me?

I can remember playing Uno
with my little sister who wasn’t
quite up to speed on the rules.

She would get stuck
and have to draw card after card from the pile.

Of course, as an older sister
I sought to lessen her losing plight
and would offer her a card from my very own hand.
If you want to stop drawing
so many cards from the pile,
then you can have one of my cards.
So sweet.

This sort of backhanded negotiating
is what we have somewhat come to expect
from the business world.
If you sign up for our credit card,
then you won't have any interest for a year!
yeah, but where's the catch, right?



But what Jesus is saying here in John to his disciples,
is not negotiating.
It is more than the simpler, *if, then*.
In fact here the statement isn't a conditional
—Jesus says, **IF** you love me
you **WILL** keep my commands.

So at first glance, it seems like
he's combining the conditional
with the imperative.
If you love me, you **will**...
you don't usually combine those.

Jesus's statement feels a lot heavier
than Uno negotiating.
But Mark Davis, the author of the *Left Behind and Loving It* blog,
says we shouldn't read it as in imperative tense,
because in the Greek
it is the future tense.¹

¹ D. Mark Davis, <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/05/attending-love.html>

Which means that Davis translates

what Christ says to sound more like,

*If you love me, you will **attend** to my commands,*²

which he says we should hear

as a looking toward the new age;

If you love me, you will find yourself doing these things.

And instead of hearing, you **will keep**,

Davis uses **attend** which gets to

the meaning Jesus is trying to get across.

This *you will keep my commands*

has less to do with toeing-the-line and burdens,

and more to do with putting your

attention and energy towards.³

That softens the,

if you love me, you will keep my commands

not because it sounds easier,

it sounds more human.

It sounds more like something we can actually do.

It is almost like Jesus is saying,

you aren't perfect and never will be;

I get that.

What I want is for what you do

to be an outpouring

of your life and love

not a coercive system of rules and laws.

So if you love me like I know

that you say and do,

I want you to put all of yourself, all your energy,

all your attention toward

making my commands a reality.

Which begs the question?

what exactly are Jesus's commands?

What is it that the disciples will keep?

In John, the only time

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Jesus says something about a command,
it's in John 13:34-35—a passage right before this one,

*“I give you a new commandment:
Love each other.
Just as I have loved you,
so also you must love each other.
This is how everyone will know
that you are my disciples,
that you love each other.”*

After Jesus has taken off his robe
and washed the disciples' feet,
after Judas has betrayed him,
this is the command that Christ gives
his soon-to-be apostles.

After he'd just seen Judas
get up from the table to betray him,
this is what Jesus says,
*if you love me,
you will do what I've commanded,
which is love each other.*



Put all your energy
and your attention to this command;
love each other.

But love isn't a new thing.

Loving your neighbor was an essential commandment
in the Jewish faith

—hospitality and loving God
were paramount in the functioning
of the Jewish community.

So why is the command to love one another new?

Why is it special?

Why is Jesus saying,

*If you love me you will do what I command
which is love one another
as I have loved you?*

Wasn't that going on before?

Maybe this is the catch—it is new
because of what Jesus also promises in this passage
—the catch of the '*if, then*'—
but a catch that we never saw coming.

The promise of the Advocate,
the Spirit of Truth,
the one who will be with them forever,
be with them into the new age.

You will keep my commands,
in essence ***you will love in a new way***
and I will send someone to guide you
as you do this into the new age—the future.

The future the disciples face
of course is without Jesus.

Our text lands in the midst of what is called
the farewell speech
stretching from chapter 13 to 17.

The beginning of chapter 13 tells us,
“Now before the festival of Passover,
Jesus knew that his hour had come
to depart from this world
and go to the Father.

Having loved his own who were in the world,
he loved them to the end.” (13:1)

Jesus knows this is the end of this age.

He knew that this was the end of what had been
so that the new could be born
and manifest with God's world.

John hints that Jesus knows something
about this ending that the disciples don't.
Jesus knows that his death

will leave them reeling,
“strike the shepherd,
that the sheep may be scattered,” (Zech. 13:7)
but Jesus also knows that when he leaves the disciples,
when he leaves the world,
that everything changes;
and Jesus does not leave his followers
as sheep without a shepherd,
he does not leave them reeling,
he does not leave them as orphans.



This Advocate and comforter will be with them
The Spirit of truth will be alive in the disciples
as though Christ were with them.
This Holy Spirit will come and dwell
in those who are followers of the movement
Christ has started when the disciples show,
*“they who have my commandments and keep them
are those who love me
and those who love me will be loved by my Father,
and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” (14:21)*

Which means that the Spirit
is somehow Christ alive and with us
in this new age, in this new community,
in the promise of forever.

And in case you need as much help as I do
when it comes to looking closely
at a shift of grammatical persons
—this passage goes from second person to third.
There are all these *you will know*
and *you will see* statements
in the farewell speech that takes
place at the last supper.

We read our scripture

as though we are there with them,
observing Jesus break bread, wash feet,
give new commands;
all of this is done to and for his disciples
who are right there with him.

But then the text shifts from *you's* to *them's*
they who have my commands and keep them;
I will love them and reveal myself to them...

This subtle change is a clue to **us**
that we've left the intimacy of the last supper
—where Jesus was talking to his disciples,
we've left that moment in the past
and now Jesus's words are meant for us,
in the future;
the followers of Jesus today,
in the new age and in every age.

The focus shifts with the voice,
saying to us
you - out there in the future
if you will put all of yourself,
all of your energy, all of your attention
to living out my new commandment
then it is as if I am right there with you.

“Blessed are those who have not seen,
yet have come to believe.” (Jn. 20:29)

If you will love each other
with a love that is willing
to lay down your life for those around you,
then you are living out my love
and therefore the love of the Father
and therefore divine, triune love itself.

Larry Bouchard puts it,
“if the command is to love God
and if God is love,
then to love God implicitly means
loving Love lovingly and practically,

leaving no one orphaned.”⁴

This means this command
wraps up on itself.

The Spirit of Truth alive in us
is the real presence of Christ manifested
in this very moment
and when that happens, no one is left out.



This week as I talked with my friend,
Justin Wright as he learned he had cancer,
he admitted to me that he didn't think
he was very religious.
I told him it was okay,
he didn't have to be.
Because I don't think God cares
if you are religious or not
and probably in some cases
Would prefer not.
God still loves and cares for all
of us regardless.

And I can say all of that in full confidence
because if the Advocate does not leave us orphaned,
then whenever we are expressing
the love of God with one other
—it makes no difference
whether only one of feels religious;
the love of Christ and Spirit of Truth are alive!

Even in tense hospital rooms.
Even in wake tragic news and death

⁴ Larry D. Bouchard, Feasting on the Word Year A, Vol. 2 edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY 2010 pg. 494

and then more tragic news.

How are the Wright's making it day to day
—I'll tell you how, the Spirit, the Advocate;
Christ's love a reality in their midst
in our prayers and our visits and our kind words.
If you love me, you will keep my commands to love each other.

I have another friend who lives at the beach
and she and her husband are foster parents.
Their first stint at foster parenting a little girl
ended up in their adopting her—
this resonates with some us, right?

Well my friend and her husband
and their now 3 girls,
fostered another little girl.
For over a year.

And just last week that little girl
went back home to live with her parents.
I can't imagine, can you?

But my friend, she has trusted the Spirit
through the whole process.
She invited the little girl's parents
to come over to her house and have dinner
and pack up Little Sunshine-
that's the name she goes by online.

And so Little Sunshine walked her parents
through my friend's house
pointing out where her room was,
where she put her dirty jams in the morning,
where her tooth brush stayed in the bathroom...

And then after dinner
and a little bit of front porch time,
Little Sunshine went home with her parents.
My friend and her family
gave her the biggest hug,
and then she was gone.

Now a week later,
there is a hole in there hearts,

but they are making it.
One day at a time,
knowing they did the right thing.

If that isn't the Advocate
never leaving us orphaned,
whether we are a child in foster care
or a mom who is willing to open her heart and home
I don't know what is.

This is what my friend wrote:

"Perhaps this experience
is one God needed for me to walk through
to understand another's journey.

I may never know,
but I know that God is growing me
... growing us...
in all of this heartache too.

And so, a week later... even now
as we are still trying to piece ourselves back together...
YES!! It was all worth it."⁵



So maybe if we do love Christ
the way we say we do,
then we will do what he commands
and love each other
with everything we have and are.

And if we do this,
then the Spirit will be the reality
of God's love in a world that needs it
in this new age.

This new age where we struggle

⁵ <http://babyblevins08.blogspot.com/2017/05/were-okay.html>

with whether we are religious enough for God
or making the right decisions
with someone else's child.
But I have a feeling that whatever the outcome
we will be there for each other
because the Spirit is at work in us.

If, you love one another as I have loved you,
then the world will know you are my disciples.

Loving Love,
lovingly and practically
means no one is left orphaned.

That's a pretty good catch.