

**John 14:15-21***John 14:1-14, 22-31 are included for context*

<sup>1</sup> “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. <sup>4</sup> Where (I) am going you know the way.” <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can 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 except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” <sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever 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 speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”

<sup>22</sup> Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, “Master, (then) what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup> “I have told you this while I am with you. <sup>26</sup> The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. <sup>28</sup> You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. <sup>30</sup> I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over me, <sup>31</sup> but the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me. Get up, let us go.

**Context**

The gospel text is part of a larger section which includes the Last Supper and all that takes place after Jesus had washed the disciples feet, after Judas has left the table (“*he took the morsel and left at once. And it was night*” (13:30)), and after Peter’s protestations he would never betray Jesus. The section comes before the disciples see their master led away for trial; then be condemned to death on a cross. Their faith will be sorely tested. It was to fortify them in these circumstances that Jesus’ teaching, beginning in 14:1, was given. O’Day suggests a broad outline of the context for our reading:

- The Farewell Meal (13:1-38)
- The Farewell Discourse (14:1-16:33)
- The Farewell Prayer (17:1-26)

John 14:1-10 is the gospel reading for the preceding week (5<sup>th</sup> Easter, Year A) in which the disciples are reminded to “*believe into Jesus*” (v.1) because Jesus is the “*way and the truth and the life*” (v.8). And it is in that belief that the apostles will do “*greater*” works (v.12) - by doing what Jesus does, the

disciples of every age continue the glorification of God through Jesus that was the purpose of Jesus own works (v.13; cf 5:44; 11:4; 17:4).

---

## Commentary

Jesus' discourse (at this point) begins to move in a new direction by focusing on the ways in which belief in Jesus empowers the believing community (v.12 ff). Jesus has emphasized that the works he does are not his own but are the Father's; now Jesus begins to emphasize the link between his works that of the believing community. Our gospel text describes two dimensions of the believer's relationship with Jesus: (1) the inseparability of one's love of Jesus and the keeping of his commandments (vv.15, 21, 23-24) and (2) the abiding and indwelling of the presence of God, even after Jesus' death and departure with those who love him (vv.16-20, 22-23).

### *Love and Keeping Commandments*

Love for Jesus is not sentimental, but is expressed by keeping his commands, i.e. by responding to all he taught, with faith and obedience – even when Jesus has gone. Brian Stoffregen asks this interesting question: What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus in his absence? That was a question for John's first readers and for us today. One answer is that while Jesus may be absent, God is not. In the whole of our text, there are three different promises present in 14:15-24

- The promise of the Paraclete (vv. 16-17)
- The promise of Jesus' return (vv. 18-20)
- The coming of the Father and Jesus (v. 23)

Our text includes the first two promises, which forms an outline of our lesson:

- a. The coming of the Paraclete (vv. 15-17)
- b. The coming (back) of Jesus (vv. 18-21 – possibly referring to the resurrection)

However, the entire lesson is bracketed by common thoughts (but in reverse order)

A1 If you love me,  
     B1 you will keep my commandments (v. 15)  
     B2 The one having my commandments and keeping them,  
 A2 that is the one who loves me. (v. 21)

Brown [644] suggests even more parallels between the two subsections:

	v.	v.
Necessary conditions: love Jesus; keep his commands	15	21
Giving of Paraclete // Coming back of Jesus	16	18
World will not see Paraclete or Jesus	16	19
Disciples will recognize Paraclete and see Jesus	17	19
Paraclete and Jesus will dwell in the disciples	17	20

Neither the giving of the Paraclete or coming back of Jesus seem to be describing the Last Day. Here the coming(s) are limited to the disciples who know the Paraclete (Spirit of Truth) and see Jesus – something the world is not able to do.

What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus in his absence? Part of the answer to our question is to love. The verb used in our verses for “love” (*agapate*) is a present subjunctive, implying a continuing act of loving Jesus – keep on loving Jesus or continue to love Jesus. The word *agapao* also implies more than having “warm feelings” towards someone or something. It emphasizes “showing one's love” or “demonstrating one's love” – sometimes even without the inner “feeling”. For example.,

“loving” one’s enemies doesn’t mean to develop warm feelings for them, but to do “beneficial deeds for” them.

How do we show our love for Jesus? By keeping his commandments. That’s another answer to the question: “What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus in his absence?”

What are Jesus commandments (note the plural, also in 14:21; 15:10)? And John 15:10b leads us to ask, “What are the Father’s commandments that Jesus kept?” Four times John has Jesus talking about commandments (*entole*) or commands (*entellomai*) that come from God.

- 10:18 in reference to Jesus’ power to lay down his life and his power to take it up again.
- 12:41 what Jesus does comes from the Father’s command (verb)
- 12:49 what Jesus says comes from the Father’s commandment (singular).
- 12:50 the Father’s commandment (singular) is eternal life – related to Jesus speaking just as the Father has told him.
- In addition, Jesus tells the disciples that he gives them a new commandment: “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another*” (John 13:34; 15:12).

Commandments (*entolai*, vv.15,21), “word” (*logos*, v.23), and “words” (*logoi*, vv. 24) are all synonyms. They point to the totality of what Jesus says and reveals about God. In order to interpret Jesus’ words about keeping his commandments/word in these verses, they need to be placed alongside Jesus’ earlier teachings about faithfulness to his word. Jesus regularly cites faithfulness to his word as the mark of belonging to him (e.g., 5:38; 8:31, 37, 51; 12:47-48; cf. 6:67-69).

The Johannine meaning of “commandment” is far broader than the Mosaic laws, rather encompasses the whole of Jesus’ life: words, deeds and the ultimate measure – love.

### ***Keeping His Commandments***

If we now have some hint at what we mean by “commandments,” what does it mean to “keep” (*tereo*) them? The basic meanings of this word [TDNT 1:21 *ff*] are:

1. keep watch over, guard
2. keep, hold, reserve, preserve someone or something
3. keep = not lose
4. keep = protect
5. keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to

NOTE: that “obey” is not one of the meanings (although perhaps implied by “observe”).

Brian Stoffregen’s paraphrase of *tereo* as “hold dear” or perhaps, “consider important” seems to capture the sense of the passage. This interpretation goes beyond mere obedience. One may detest the words that one is hearing and obeying. One may detest the one giving the orders, but to avoid punishment, one obeys them. In contrast to this, phrasing it, “Holding Jesus’ word dear,” implies having a positive attitude towards that Word and the Word-giver. That is, *wanting* to hear and obey it out of love for the speaker.

Loving Jesus and “holding dear” what Jesus said and did are inseparable. In chapters 14-15, twice “love” comes before “keep” (14:15; 23) and twice “keep” comes before “love” (14:21; 15:10). In addition, “keeping” is used with “commandments” (*entole*) (14:15, 21; 15:10) and with “word” (*logos*) (14:23, 24; 15:20). Loving Jesus and “holding dear” his word and commandments are inseparable.

The connection between love and keeping (i.e., holding dear) the commandments is illustrated by Jesus himself in v. 31. He is doing what the Father has commanded him, *so that* the world might know that he is loving the Father. The purpose of Jesus’ obedience is witnessing. The results of that witnessing are given in v.23:

1. The Father will love that one
2. The Father and Son will come to that one
3. The Father and Son will make a dwelling with that one

The promise we have from Jesus is that he (and his Father) will be present to those who, out of their love for Jesus, keep (i.e., hold dear) his word. These are those to whom Jesus will reveal himself.

In contrast to these who love Jesus and keep his word, Jesus next talks about “*Whoever does not love me does not keep (hold dear) my words*” (v. 24). Presumably these non-lovers and non-keepers do not receive the Father’s love or the abiding presence of the Father and the Son. This is understandable if the love and presence comes through the Word that one “holds dear” or “considers valuable,” those who do not have this relationship with the Word will not have the presence of the divine in their lives.

### ***The Advocate***

This is the first occurrence of the noun *parakletos* in the Fourth Gospel. This word occurs five times in the NT. It is used in 1 John 2:1 to refer to Jesus; and four times in John’s Farewell Discourse (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

Perhaps it best not to translate the Greek word *paraclete* because there are too many possibilities. While the literal meaning of the related verb (*parakaleo*) means “to call to one’s side,” usually asking the other for help, the noun took on a legal meaning as “helper in court”. Thus we have translations like “counselor,” “advocate,” or “one who speaks for another” as well as the too general translation of “helper”.

If the Paraclete is a “helper in court,” whose helper is it? Clearly the Paraclete has a role as helper to the disciples (and, now, our helper); but there are also indications that it is Jesus’ helper. The Paraclete comes to speak to us for Jesus. In 14:26, it will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus has said to us. In 15:26, it will testify on Jesus’ behalf. The Paraclete comes to speak to us on behalf of Jesus. In our text, the Paraclete will teach us “everything” and remind us of “all” that Jesus has said to us. (In 16:8; its topics are more specific: the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment.) It is not too much of a stretch to say that the Paraclete “helps” us to hear Jesus’ word, which, as noted above, brings the continuing presence of Jesus and his Father to us. The Paraclete reveals Jesus to us, but those without the help of the Paraclete will not properly hear or remember the word of Jesus’ presence.

What the Paraclete does is not new, but is a continuation of the work of Jesus. This can be seen clearly in the description of the Paraclete as the Spirit of truth in v. 17. To call the Paraclete the “Spirit of truth” is to identify the Paraclete as more than a true—i.e., truthful—Spirit. As the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete shares in the work of Jesus, because Jesus is the truth (14:6). The work of the Paraclete is thus to keep the truth of Jesus present to the world after Jesus’ departure (cf. 16:7-11). As with the unity of the Father and Jesus in their work, the relationship between Jesus and the Paraclete is also defined by the unity of their work.

The response of the world to the Paraclete’s presence echoes the response of the world to Jesus, a division between those who receive and those who do not (cf. 1:10-13). Yet the focus of vv. 16-17 is not ultimately on this division, but on the assurance that the presence of the Paraclete gives to Jesus’ “own.” Knowledge of the Paraclete is defined as the Paraclete’s abiding with the believing community (v. 17b). The Paraclete is repeatedly described in ways that emphasize its presence in and relationship with the faith community: “will be with you forever”; “abides with you”; and “will be in you.” The Paraclete ensures that the revelation of God in the incarnation does not end with Jesus’ death and return to God.

***I will not leave you...I will come to you***

The second promise of continuing presence is Jesus' promise of his own return (vv. 18-20). "Orphan" (*orphanos*) was a common metaphor to describe disciples left without their master but the use of the metaphor here has a special poignancy in the light of the familial and domestic imagery that runs throughout Jesus' words to his own (e.g., 13:33; 14:2-3, 10-14; 15:9-11; 16:21-24, 27). Jesus' promise that he will not leave the disciples orphaned recalls his use of the address "little children" in 13:33 and is an assurance that the intimacy of that familial relationship is not undercut by Jesus' departure. His promise to return (v. 18b) thus immediately counters any possible perception of Jesus' death as his abandonment of his own.

The primary meaning of this promise is fulfilled in the post-resurrection appearances. As in the promise of the Paraclete (v.17), Jesus' promise of his Easter return also makes a distinction between the world and the believing community (see also 15:18-25; 16:8-11; 17:6-25). Jesus' resurrection life gives life to the believers (v. 19b), because it is the ultimate demonstration that Jesus is indeed "the resurrection and the life" (11:25-26). Brown [646] notes that the profound insight of the Johannine community is that "union with Jesus was not permanently dependent on bodily presence." This is not to say there is no difference between the post-Easter appearance of Jesus and indwelling, but it does say that the appearances "were not an end in themselves; they initiate and point to a deeper type of presence" (cf. "*I am with you always, until the end of the age*" Mt 28:20)

But the promise is also more. The promise of Jesus' return needs to be read in concert with the preceding promise of the Paraclete (vv. 16-17). The advent of the Paraclete does not render Jesus himself superfluous, nor does it supersede him. Rather, the Paraclete's presence will make the events of the resurrection available beyond their limited moment in time.

***On that day***

The expression "on that day" is a standard Johannine expression pointing to the "hour" when Jesus is glorified in the events surrounding the passion, death and resurrection [Brown, 640]. Jesus promises that the events of Easter will be the catalyst for them to realize two things. First, they would understand what they had not previously been able to comprehend (7-11), that Jesus and the Father are one and to see Jesus is to see the Father. Second, they would understand something new: with the coming of the Spirit they would be 'in' Jesus, and Jesus 'in' them.

This concept of (mutual) indwelling is found in several places in the Fourth Gospel (6:56; 14:17, 20; 15:4-6, 7). What it means for Christ to dwell in believers has already been made clear: their love for Jesus is evident by their "holding dear" his commandments. However, what it means for believers to dwell 'in' Christ is more difficult to grasp. Perhaps a key text is John 15:4-10, where, describing the disciples' relationship to him in terms of branches in the vine, Jesus says the disciples (branches) 'remaining' in him (the vine) is associated with allowing his words to 'remain' in them (15:7). While some commentators attempt to make a distinction, perhaps it is best to think of vine/branches somewhat literally. Externally one might be able to point to "this place" is vine while "that part" is branch. However, internally, the distinction is less clear as the biological reality becomes "metaphor" for the love relationship between Christ and the believer.

***It always comes back to Love***

The final verse in this passage (15-21), where the first promise of the Paraclete is found, returns to the theme of love and obedience with which the passage begins: Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. Love for Christ does involve heartfelt appreciation of him (cf. 21:15-17; Luke 7:36-50) and should express itself in concern for his pleasure, but what Jesus himself stressed was that those who love him are those who obey his commands. This means responding to his teaching with obedience and faith.

Jesus promised that He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. Our love for Jesus, imperfect though it is, is rewarded in two related ways. First, we become the objects of the Father's own love, and second, we become the objects of Jesus' love and self-revelation. Love for Jesus does not end in stoic obedience to his will. Obedience is involved, but it leads to an experience of the love of the Father and the Son, and the revelation of the Son to the believer—surely the greatest incentive to express our love for Christ by obedience to his will.

---

## Notes

**John 14:15 *If you love me, you will keep my commandments*:** This verse is a conditional statement makes a definite and unqualified statement about some future event. How it is translated depends on which variant reading one chooses (i.e., the Greek in ancient manuscripts is not exact for this verse). Fr. Raymond Brown, using the subjunctive variant reading for *tereseite* (“keep”), suggests: “If you love me and keep my commandments, then I will ask the Father ....” However, the more widely accepted reading, and the one used in NAB and most translations is the future: “If you love me, then you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father ....” Another variant uses the imperative: “If you love me, keep my commandments and I will ask...” Note that the verb for “love” (*agapate*) is a present subjunctive, implying a continuing act of loving Jesus – keep on loving Jesus or continue to love Jesus.

**John 14:16 *another Advocate*:** Jesus is the first advocate (*paraclete*); see 1 John 2:1, where Jesus is an advocate in the sense of intercessor in heaven. The Greek term derives from legal terminology for an advocate or defense attorney, and can mean spokesman, mediator, intercessor, comforter, consoler, although no one of these terms encompasses the meaning in John. The Paraclete in John is a teacher, a witness to Jesus, and a prosecutor of the world, who represents the continued presence on earth of the Jesus who has returned to the Father. ***another*:** There are two Greek words meaning “another”, *allos* and *heteros*. It is sometimes argued that the first means another of a similar kind, the second another of a different kind, and because *allos* is used in v.16 the other Advocate is of the same kind as Jesus himself. However, the way *allos* and *heteros* are used in the Fourth Gospel and the NT as a whole does not support this distinction.

**John 14:17 *the Spirit of truth*:** The Advocate is described as “the Spirit of truth” here and in two other places in this Gospel (15:26; 16:13). In this respect, the Advocate is like Jesus, who revealed the truth (8:31–36, 40, 45–46; 16:7; 18:37) and embodied the truth of God (1:14, 17; 14:6). This expression was also used at Qumran community (Jewish), where it is a moral force put into a person by God, as opposed to the spirit of perversity. The Spirit of truth is more personal in John; it will teach the realities of the new order (14:26), and testify to the truth (14:6). While it has been customary to use masculine personal pronouns in English for the Advocate, the Greek word for “spirit” is neuter, and the Greek text and manuscript variants fluctuate between masculine and neuter pronouns. ***it remains with you, and will be in you*:** the manuscripts are not consistent on the tenses of the two verbs in this verse, while *remains* is always present tense, *is/will be* varies from present to future tense (differing only by an accent mark) in otherwise consistent manuscripts. Without repeating the myriad of explanations, perhaps it is no more complicated that the “former” Paraclete (Jesus) is now with them while “another Advocate” (v.16) will be in them – always realizing that “another Advocate” takes place after and because of the departure of Jesus. ***In you*:** The expression *en hymin* is also validly translated as “among you” and is perhaps indicated given that “you” is plural. But it should also be noted that the promise will become individualized in vv.21-23.

**John 14:18 *I will come to you*:** The vast majority of scholars hold that this coming refers primarily to the post-resurrection appearances (and secondarily to the promised indwelling) and not the second coming (parousia)

**John 14:21 *commandments and observes them is the one who loves me*:** The OT wisdom background

is clearly echoed here, e.g., Wisdom 6:12 describes Lady Wisdom in terms of love itself is the keeping of her laws and it is the keeping of the commandments that reveals the one who loves her. Wisdom 1:2 says that the Lord will reveal Himself to those who trust Him and obey his commandments.

---

## Sources

- G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007) 488-90
- Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 29b in *The Anchor Bible*, eds. William Albright and David Freeman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 637-48
- Neal M. Flanagan, "John" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, eds. Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1989) 1005
- Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 299-306
- Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4 in *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 400-408
- John J. McPolin, *John*, vol. 6 of the *New Testament Message*, eds. Wilfred Harrington and Donald Senior (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989) 199-204
- Gail R. O'Day, *John in the New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 9, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996) 745-50

## Dictionaries

- Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995)
- Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990)
- David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996)

## Scripture

Scripture quotes from *New American Bible* by Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. © 1991, 1986, 1970