



**Temple Baptist Church**  
**Wilmington, North Carolina**  
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**Loving Our Risen Lord**  
**John 14:15-21**

In her collection of poems *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed the depth of her love for her husband, the poet Robert Browning, in her poem "How Do I Love Thee?" (Sonnet 43).<sup>1</sup>

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of being and ideal grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.  
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

That's certainly a beautiful and powerful poetic expression of love for one's husband or wife.

But when it comes to how we love our risen Lord, Jesus made it clear how we will best express it: **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"** (14:15).<sup>2</sup> And just to be sure we get it, he repeats it in verse 21: **"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."**

***What kind of love?***

Now we may need to clarify what we mean when we're talking about love. After all, in the Greek language there were four words that could be translated by our English word "love." One word expressed what we would call romantic love, another familial love, and another affection. Then there was a fourth word that was more general, and was often interchangeable with the words for familial love or affection.

Our English language isn't nearly so specific about love. After all, we use the same word to talk about how we feel about hot dogs, automobiles, sports teams, and our spouses and children!

That more general word the Greeks used was *agapāō* in its verb form and *agapē* in its noun form. In the New Testament, this is the main word that is used for "love." The word with the

connotation of affection is also used, but far less. The other two words are not used at all in the New Testament. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament authors took the more general word and used it as the primary expression for the love they were talking about. And what kind of love is that?

*Agápē* is the kind of love that God has for us, that we are to have for him, and that we are to have for others as well. What kind of love is it? It is *faithful, active, and self-sacrificial* love.<sup>3</sup> It's love that always seeks what's best for the other person, that's always willing to give. It's a love that's more about action than feeling.

And in the case of loving our Lord Jesus, the primary action that characterizes this love is *obedience* to his commandments.

### ***What are his commandments?***

So what are Jesus' commandments?

Well, elsewhere in the Gospel accounts, when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which says:

***"Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."***

He then quickly added that the second greatest commandment, from Leviticus 19:18, was like it: ***"you shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** He went on to declare that the Law and the Prophets all hung on these two commandments (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). He bound the two commandments together.

In John's account of the Gospel, he binds love for God and love for others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, together even tighter, even more inextricably. He says that if we love him, we will obey what he commands. So what does he command?

In John 13, earlier in the conversation in our text, after Jesus had washed his disciples' feet at the supper that he shared with them the night before his death, and after Judas had gone out to betray him, Jesus told his disciples (13:34-35):

***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."***

Then in 14:12, later in this conversation, he told them:

***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."***

Do you see it? To love Jesus is to keep his commandments, which are summed up in his command to love one another as he has loved us, laying down his life for us. That may be a little *too clear*, huh?

### ***What does this love lead to?***

So genuinely loving Jesus leads to and is demonstrated by obedience to his commandments

(14:15), the essence of which is loving one another as he has loved us, laying down his life for us. In other words, if we love him we will love our fellow disciples. We may not *like* them, but we will *act in loving ways* toward them. John reiterates this teaching in 1 John 4:7-21. In 4:20-21, John writes:

***“ . . . for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”***

Love leads to and is demonstrated by obedience to Christ’s commandment to love one another!

But loving Christ this way leads to much more. Jesus goes on to promise his disciples, and by extension us, that after he leaves (that is, dies, rises again, and returns to the Father), he will ask the Father and the Father will give us another Helper (the Paraclete, Advocate, Counselor, Comforter) to be with us. He will be like Jesus, because he is the Holy Spirit who was already with them, and would be dwelling in them. And as the Spirit would dwell in them (and in us!), Jesus would be present (14:16-18)!

Think about that—Christ, our risen Lord, is with us and dwells in us through the promised Holy Spirit whom the Father gave to us after Jesus rose and returned to heaven! He has not left us as orphans; through the Spirit he has come to us and is with us!

Jesus had told his disciples that he would die, yet he would rise. He reminded them of that here. After he rose, the world would not see him, but his disciples would. And because he lives, they also would live and would be raised at the last day (14:19). And so will we!

Jesus went on to show his disciples how this obedient love for him would lead to deeper knowledge of him and of the Father, and of how he is in the Father. But the amazing thing is that he told them that they would be in him and he in them. They would be *united to Christ*, just as he is united with the Father (14:20). In fact, as Jesus prayed in chapter 17, he prayed for this very thing for *all* who would believe on him (that includes us!):

***“ . . . that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”***

So loving our risen Lord leads to and demonstrates obedience, and leads to being loved by the Father and the Son, with the Son manifesting himself to the one who loves him (14:21).

God has already loved the world in such a way that he sent his only begotten Son so that whoever puts their faith in him should not perish but have eternal life. When we put our faith in Jesus, God’s Son, and love him, the action this love leads to is loving our fellow believers. We are all in union with Christ and thus with the Father through him, so the Father continues in this love relationship. So does the Son, and he continually makes himself known to us more and more.

It’s really almost too much to take in, isn’t it? The great Baptist New Testament and Greek scholar of the early twentieth century, A. T. Robertson, got at the heart of this passage well when he wrote: “The Unseen and Risen Christ will be a real and spiritual Presence to the obedient and

loving believer.”<sup>4</sup> He has loved us, we love him and demonstrate that love through our obedience. And he is always *with us*, until he takes us to be *with him*.

In his book *Soul Salsa*,<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet tells about a unique practice one tribe of Native Americans had for training their young braves. On a boy's thirteenth birthday, he would be taken blindfolded into a dense forest miles from his village and left to spend the entire night alone, away from the security that his family and tribe had always provided for him up to this point. When he took off the blindfold, he would find himself in the middle of thick woods, by himself, all night long.

You can imagine how every time he heard a twig snap, he thought a wild animal was ready to pounce. Whenever he heard an animal howl, he probably thought a wolf was about to leap out of the darkness. When the wind blew, he probably wondered if it was masking a more sinister sound. It was no doubt a terrifying night for many a boy.

But then after what must have seemed like an eternity, the dawn would break and the first rays of sunlight would enter the forest. The boy would look around, seeing flowers and trees, and the outline of a path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he would see something else—a man standing just a few feet away from him, armed with a bow and arrow.

That man would be the boy's father. And he would have been there *all night long*.

Isn't that just like God? No matter what we're facing, he is *always* with us. Even though his presence is unseen, it's more real than life itself.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has been through it all—every test, trial, and temptation Satan could possibly throw at him, especially the temptation to take the easy way rather than to obey the Father and his will. That cost Jesus his life. But he rose in victory! And because he did, we can find life in him. He is our risen Lord, and through the Holy Spirit, he is always with us, making us one with him.

How could we *not* love him?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/elizabeth-barrett-browning> (accessed 05/19/2017).

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and abridged, Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 5-10.

<sup>4</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. V (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1932), 254.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Soul Salsa* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 23-24