

John 15: Jesus' "Viability" Theology

The "Love-Obedience" Paradigm

John 15.9-14

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love,
just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that
he lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command.

- ❖ These verses (9-10) raise a number of questions for us, such as:
 - ▶ How does the Father love Jesus?
 - ▶ What does it mean to “remain in his love”?
 - ▶ Since “if” is a conditional word, is obedience the basis for being loved by Jesus? Furthermore, was it the basis for the Father loving Jesus and Jesus himself remaining in the Father’s love?
 - ▶ Is my salvation and spiritual security dependent on my obedience?
 - ▶ Am I in a position of “*he loves me, he loves me not*” according to the state of impeccability (or loss thereof) of my obedience?
 - ▶ In presenting himself as the *True Shepherd-Who-Lays-Down-His-Life*, Jesus said: “The reason the Father loves me is that I lay down my life.” Would Jesus have no longer been loved by the Father if, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he had been unable to continue with the divine plan of his sacrificial death?

Unconditional or Probationary?

“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love. . . . You are my friends if you do what I command.”

“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life . . .” (10.17)

- ❖ Are we loved because we are obedient and “un-loved” if we do not obey? Does Jesus “unfriend” us if we do not do what he commands?
- ❖ Before creation, before obeying the Father by laying down his life (10.17), Jesus said he was loved by the Father (17.24). At his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus declared that if he asked, the Father would honor his request for twelve legions of angels to prevent his arrest. The love of the Father for Jesus is *eternal, relational, unconditional*. Amazingly, Jesus also said that the Father has loved us even as the Father loved him (17.23). And with that same love, Jesus loves his followers.

❖ Even while saying, “You are my friends if you do what I command,” Jesus also declared: “*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*” The reality is that he is going to the cross to lay down his life for them because they are sinners and disobedient (Romans 5.8); because he loves them and they are under God’s disfavor, he is giving his life for them (1 John 4.10). The very reason for Jesus’ presence on earth is their absolute lack of merit, their failure to meet God’s conditions. The Apostle Paul starkly emphasized this when he wrote:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 TIMOTHY 1.15-16)

❖ As the Father has loved Jesus—eternally, relationally, and unconditionally—so Jesus has loved his disciples. The issue is not *if* they will be loved, but *how* that love will be realized in their lives: “Now remain in my love.”

How did Jesus keep his Father's commands?

“. . . just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.”

- ❖ Remembering that the love which exists between the Father and Jesus is eternal, relational, and unconditional, it is unthinkable that Jesus was motivated to obey the Father by condition or obligation. The writer to the Hebrews wrote:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

*“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
but a body You prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
You were not pleased.*

*Then I said, ‘Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll —
I have come to do Your will, my God.’” (HEBREWS 10.5-7)*

- ❖ What motivated Jesus to obey the Father? Did he need to prove his love by his obedience? The words of Hebrews 10 are quoted from this messianic prophecy, inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by David, in Psalm 40:

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire —

but my ears you have opened —

burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not require.

Then I said, “Here I am, I have come —

it is written about me in the scroll.

I desire to do Your will, my God;

Your law is within my heart.” (40.6-8)

- ❖ The word “desire” (Heb. *hapes*; KJV, ESV: *delight*) means: “to desire, delight in, be pleased with, have pleasure.” For Jesus, immersed as he was in the Father’s love, obedience was the joy of doing the Father’s will, fulfilling the Father’s heart, accomplishing the Father’s purposes.

The Desire of Jesus for Us

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

- ❖ When obedience is conditional and performance-based, it does not result in joy—perhaps fear, pride, self-condemnation, or self-satisfaction—but never the joy of Christ. The “if” conditions of Jesus’s obedience statements are meant to take us back to the dynamic of abiding in him—that deep, spiritual, relational connection, apart from which we can do nothing, but because of which we can experience all of the life, vitality, and sufficiency that he possesses as the True Vine.
- ❖ Jesus does not want obedience based on duty, obligation, or self-effort; such was the obedience of the Pharisees. Jesus wants us to experience the joy—his joy!—the result of deeply abiding in his unconditional, relational love (through divine revelation: Ephesians 3.17-19), and finding our delight in fulfilling his will.