

Exegesis

Vs. 9-10 – Where the first eight verses were *loaded* with symbolism and figurative language (e.g., "fruit"), the following nine verses are far more direct and plain. This is seen in how the Lord moves from speaking about the connection between a "husbandman," a "true vine," and its "branches" to the bond between "the Father," the Son, and the disciples.¹ This is familiar ground for John's readers. Throughout his account, the relationship between God the Father and God the Son has been the *archetype* for the relationship between Jesus and his followers (cf. 5:21, 26; 10:14-15; 12:49-50; 14:2, 6-7, 12, 16, 20; etc.). Time and again, our faithful narrator wants us to understand that if we are to interact with Jesus, we must emulate how Jesus interacted with God.

The first thing the Lord wants us to emulate is the kind of love that he and God have for one another: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."² Obeying Christ's commands has already been hinted at in vs. 7, and now this principle is brought to the foreground. Just as a branch is fruitful when it abides in the vine, the disciple's relationship with Jesus thrives when they obey his instructions.³ But, as we discussed, this obedience is not mere compliance but wholehearted devotion. It is not the kind of obedience that an employer might receive from an employee but that a father might receive from a son; it is driven by enjoyment, not employment; it is moved by compassion, not compulsion; it is guided by loyalty, not liability. In short, it is lovingly submitting to Jesus rather than grudgingly subjecting ourselves to him. When we obey like this, we can rest assured that in the same way God loved Jesus, Jesus will love us.

We might be tempted to think that the Lord demands perfection, so much so that any mistake indicates apostasy—i.e., abandonment of faith and loss of salvation. But, if so, then *all* believers would lose their salvation because no Christian has ever lived a perfect life. Even the *best* followers of Jesus failed, sometimes multiple times (cf. 20:24-29; Rom. 7:15-20; Gal. 2:11-14). Hebrews 11 is often called the 'Hall of Faith' because it is a collection of our spiritual heroes. But look up their stories in the OT. Many of the 'Hall of Faith' inductees were deeply

¹ Though, to be clear, God, Jesus, and the disciples was the basis all along (cf. 15:1, 5).

² Later, in 17:24, Jesus says that his Father loved him "before the foundation of the world." So, if Jesus has loved his followers with the same kind of love that his father has loved him, this means that he's loved them in eternity past (cf. Eph. 1:4).

³ Morris (1995), p. 597, "This is not some mystical experience. It is simple obedience. It is when we keep Christ's commandments that we abide in his love."

flawed (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David, Samson, etc.). So, either Jesus' words in this passage are entirely out of sync with the rest of the NT, or, assuming the Bible never contradicts itself (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17), we must interpret them another way.

Just as it would be unwise to press the allegory of the husbandman, vine, and branches too far,⁴ so it would be unwise to press the comparison of God's love for Jesus with Jesus' love for his disciples too far. And two principles will keep us from going too far.

Firstly, we must recognize that Jesus' love for the disciples is not the same as God's love for Jesus. Kruse explains,

“The Father’s love for the Son predates creation and is the reason why he gave glory to the Son (17:24). The Father’s love for the Son expressed itself in placing everything in the Son’s hands (3:35) and was drawn out further by the Son’s willingness to lay down his life, only to take it up again (10:17). In none of these ways can it be said that Jesus’ love for his disciples is just the same as the Father’s love for him.”⁵

In other words, do not expect the same treatment from Jesus that he got from God.

Why? Secondly, we must not conflate ourselves with God's Son. We are not Jesus; he is the only person to ever love his Father *perfectly* without fail (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5). Sadly, even after we're saved, we'll still make mistakes, we'll still disobey.

So, no. The Lord is not demanding perfection, a.k.a. "Christian perfectionism."⁶ But if not, then what was he trying to say? Jesus was laying out a *pattern* for us to follow. And this interpretation is more in line with the rest of Scripture and what theologians call "progressive sanctification." After salvation, the believer *steadily* becomes more Christ-like (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6; 3:12; Col. 3:10) but only attains perfection in eternity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2-3). Getting saved is a one-time decision that reverberates throughout a person's lifetime.

So, when Jesus says, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love," it does *not* mean that he will fall out of love with us should we fail to obey, and neither does it mean that God's love is owed to us when we obey.⁷ Not only does God love us when we are disobedient (cf. 3:16), but even when we're obedient, his love is freely given and not earned (cf. Rom. 5:8).

⁴ Unlike Christians, branches have no control over their own fruitfulness.

⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 370.

⁶ For more on this topic, I highly recommend this: Carson, D.A., "Perfectionism," *Themelios*, Volume 35, Issue 1, April 2010, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/35.1/themelios-35-1.pdf>, [accessed December 13, 2023].

⁷ Klink (2016), p. 655.

The issue at hand here is a *pattern of behavior* (e.g., “continue,” “abide,” and “remain”).⁸ The comparison between God’s love for his son and Jesus’ love for his disciples is meant to give his followers something like an *example* to mimic, a *blueprint* to learn, or an *ideal* to pursue.⁹ A *momentary* lapse in judgment does not negate a *pattern* of faithfulness. Those who make unrighteousness a *habit* need to worry (vs. 6; cf. Rom. 6:2; 1 Jn. 3:1-10). Those who practice righteousness, even if they should stumble from time to time, are still considered righteous (cf. Pro. 24:16; 1 Jn. 1:9).

⁸ Köstenberger (2008), p. 456, “By his obedience, Jesus becomes a model for his disciples to emulate.”

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 520, “These two verses do not impose on the believer an absolute alternative, perfect obedience or utter apostasy; rather, they set up the only ultimate standard, the standard of Jesus himself.”

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 57 | John 15:9-10

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Where the first eight verses were *loaded* with symbolism and figurative language (e.g., "fruit"), the following nine verses are far more direct and plain. This is seen in how the Lord moves from speaking about the connection between a "husbandman," a "true vine," and its "branches" to the bond between "the Father," the Son, and the disciples. Though, to be clear, that was the basis all along (cf. 15:1, 5).

This is familiar ground for John's readers. Throughout his account, the relationship between God the Father and God the Son has been the *archetype* for the relationship between Jesus and his followers (cf. 5:21, 26; 10:14-15; 12:49-50; 14:2, 6-7, 12, 16, 20; etc.). Time and again, our faithful narrator wants us to understand that if we are to interact with Jesus, we must emulate how Jesus interacted with God. Namely, Jesus obeyed God like a son obeys his father; likewise, our obedience to Jesus is based on familial love. We do not obey because we have to. We obey because we want to. Compassion drives us rather than compulsion.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/ajrRvXw>

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>

Podcast Details:

Season 1 | 57