

Exegesis

Vs. 14-15 – “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

The term “friend” **φίλος** (*philos*) was used by the Baptizer to distinguish himself from the “bridegroom” (3:29); it was used by Jesus when he spoke about Lazarus (11:11); and now, the Lord uses the word to describe his relationship with the Eleven. In the OT, only *two* people were considered to be God's friends. And though they were far from perfect, they're paragons of *obedience*: Abraham (cf. 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8) and Moses (Ex. 33:11). This is why Jesus makes it abundantly clear that *conformity to his word* is the basis for their friendship. Only those who “do whatsoever” Jesus has *commanded* can be considered his friends. All true disciples share a common characteristic: “*doers* of the word, and not hearers *only*” (Ja. 1:22).

But as we think of it, obedience rarely (if ever) factors into a friendship, right? What sort of friend demands subservience from their friend? It seems like Jesus is describing slavery rather than camaraderie. But Jesus explains that his servants “knoweth not what [their] lord doeth,” whereas his friends *do* know what their Lord is doing.¹ After all, God the Son has “made known” to his disciples “all [the] things” that God the Father has said. And, because, unlike the world, the eleven *believed* those words, Jesus calls them his “friends.” “Jesus’ absolute right to command is in no way diminished, but he takes pains to inform his friends of his motives, plans, and purposes.”² Thus, the friendship Jesus describes here is *not* one shared between equals. Jesus is not expected to obey the disciples like the disciples are expected to obey Jesus. The kind of friendship being referred to is the one that exists between a “lord” and his closest confidant(s).³

A king’s servant was *rarely* granted an explanation for what he was told to do; they were expected to obey without delay. It would’ve been considered insubordination for “the help” to question an order. In contrast, a king's friend was allotted privileges; they were privy to information the servant was not. *Blind* obedience was for minions; *informed* obedience was reserved for mates. A servant could only tell you *what* the king has commanded, whereas the

¹ Klink (2016), p. 657, “It is knowledge that distinguishes a friend from a slave, and this knowledge is reflective of relationship.”

² Carson (1991), p. 523.

³ Morris (1995), p. 599, “Once again obedience is the test of discipleship. The friends of Jesus are those who habitually obey him.”

king's friend could tell you *why* the ruler has commanded it.⁴ This is likely why obedience to Jesus is more of a *joy* than a burden (cf. 15:11).⁵

The disciples, *more than anyone else*, had a much better grasp of the rationale underpinning Jesus' commands. And because of that, their *station* in God's kingdom had changed. By *hearing* his instructions and *obeying* his word, the follower of Jesus is granted the rank of Jesus' friend. And remarkably, their station will improve even more once the Holy Spirit comes (cf. 16:12-15). At that point, the apostles will become the most well-informed followers of God who've ever walked the face of the earth (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). In comparison, Abraham and Moses will look like mere acquaintances.

Vs. 16 – In the first century, it was customary for disciples to choose their master.⁶ But the Lord reminds the eleven that *he* was the one who first took the initiative. He says, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...” These words check the pride that might arise from being the friend of Jesus.⁷ The apostles did not make themselves apostles. They did not get a degree and then applied to follow Jesus. The Lord was the initiator; he called, and they followed (cf. 1:39, 43, 51; Lu. 5:10-11). Whatever privileged position they now hold was not earned but *given*. Who knows where they'd be if not for the Son of God.

But not only did Jesus choose the apostles, he said, “[I have] ordained you...” The Greek term translated as “ordained” is **τίθημι** (*títhēmi*), and when it is used literally, it refers to laying something down (cf. 10:11, 15, 17-18; 13:4 Lu. 5:18; 9:44). But the word also refers to *something* or *someone* that's been appointed for a specific task (cf. Mat. 5:15; 24:51; Ac. 13:47; 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Thess. 5:9; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:8). The term is like those which describe the *appointment* of Abraham as the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5), the *ordination* of the Levites (Num. 8:10), and the *commissioning* of Joshua by Moses (Num. 27:18).⁸ Thus, in an administrative sense, “ordain” means determining the parameters—i.e., set apart for a specific task—a person, place, or thing.

But what, exactly, has been “ordained”? To answer that, we must look to the term “that.” The Greek term **ἵνα** (*hína*), here translated as “that,” denotes intention, end, purpose, or aim (e.g., A father gave his child some money *so that* they might buy some candy.) And while the word “that” appears three times in verse 16, so we might assume there are *three* goals of the

⁴ A similar comparison is made elsewhere but between servants and sons (cf. Gal. 4:1-7; Heb. 3:5-6).

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 459.

⁶ Morris (1995), p. 600, “Students the world over delight to seek out the teacher of their choice and attach themselves to him or her.”

⁷ Carson (1991), p. 523.

⁸ Köstenberger (2008), p. 459-460.

disciple's ordination, in Greek, *hína* is only used *twice*. As is indicated by italics, the second "that" has been supplied by the KJV translators.

So, considering that the word "that" shows up twice, we can see that there are *two* things that have been ordained:

First, the disciples have been *set apart* to be delegates who produce lasting fruit. Jesus says, "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit and *that* your fruit should remain...." As they interact with the world, the apostles are *not* representatives of themselves but of God. They were not permitted to hide from the world but to "go" out and bear witness about Jesus (cf. 15:27). And, as they were going, they would "bring forth fruit." This "fruit" is not produced through their own power but because they are "abiding in the vine" (15:5). We know this because Jesus says the "fruit should remain." Like the words "abide" in vs. 4 and "continue" in vs. 9, "remain" is translating the Greek term μένω (*menō*). Thus, the disciple's fruit has been appointed to *endure*.

But what is Jesus referring to when he uses the term "fruit"? As was previously mentioned (cf. 15:4-5), the term "fruit" is used in a variety of ways in the NT and, broadly speaking, it refers to *any* Christian virtue—i.e., love, joy, peace, patience, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23). However, considering that "fruit" comes so close to the term "go" in this context, it is hard not to think of the Great Commission (Mat. 28:19-20). So, it is likely that new converts are the *primary* fruit that is being referred to here (cf. Rom. 1:13). The purpose of Jesus calling the disciples was so that they would *go* and *make more disciples*. And this fruit of evangelism—i.e., new believers—*never* goes away and *never* spoils; it *remains*. Those souls we win to Christ will be our friends for all eternity.

Second, the disciples' prayers have been determined to be answered in the affirmative. Jesus says, "And that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Undoubtedly, the prayers of those who *abide* in Christ, *continue* in his words and *obey* his commandments will be answered. Such a disciple will pray as Jesus prayed before Lazarus' tomb: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always..." (11:41-42). They are not like "a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (Ja. 1:6). Instead, a praying disciple is like a battleship, slicing through open water, never wondering if it'll reach its destination. The Christian who lives on mission has God at the ready, willing, and able to answer his requests. The Father is quick to aid those who make it their habit to evangelize.

Vs. 17 – Ever the teacher, Jesus reiterates (cf. 15:12) the most important commandment: “These things I command you, [so] that ye love one another.” As the disciples were designed to make disciples, and their prayers were destined for approval, the commandments had but one directive: *to inspire brotherly affection*.⁹ It is no surprise that, before moving on to another topic, Jesus ends with love, a theme that has permeated the Vine and Branches section (cf. 15:9 (3xs), 10 (2xs), 12 (2xs), and 13).¹⁰

Additional Notes

Vs. 13 – Is not a love for an enemy greater than a love for a friend? Jesus himself seems to make that very point in Lu. 6:27-36. So, are not his words in Jn. 15 a contradiction? I do not think so, and here's why.

We must be mindful of the timeline. As he spoke in Jn. 15, the Lord was in the upper room. The cross did not lay *behind* but *before*. And as such, the disciples' sin debt had not yet been paid. Even in the upper room, the Eleven were still *sinners* in dire need of a Savior. At that moment, they were still *enemies* of God who needed reconciliation.

So, when Jesus spoke about the love for a friend in Jn. 15 and a love for an enemy in Lu. 6, he had to be talking about the *same* type of love and the *same* kind of person. In fact, could we not say that *every time* God has loved a human being, he has loved a *foe*, not a *friend*? Before we were ever God's allies, we were first his adversaries. Thus, the true marvel of Jn. 15:13 is that Jesus said those words to a room full of his *enemies*, and yet, despite that, he still calls them his “friends” in the very next verse!¹¹

No, I do not believe there is a contradiction. When Jesus admonished us to love our enemies, he encouraged us to do the same thing he was already doing for his friends. After all, did not the Father send his only Son to save an *already* condemned people (cf. Jn. 3:17)? Did not Jesus die for those who were *already* sinners (cf. Rom. 5:8)? And if he has lavished such love on us, who are we to deny loving others as Christ loved us? Who are we to love the lovely but hate the unlovely?

⁹ Morris (1995), p. 601, “...all the commandments in the discourse are for a single purpose, that the disciples may engage in mutual love.”

¹⁰ Klink (2016), p. 658, “For this pericope presents the church with the essential criterion for its belonging to and participating in the Vine.”

¹¹ But even more remarkable than the fact that a believer is an adversary turned ally, it is that Jesus' friends are also considered to be God's *children* (cf. 1:12). This is why John will later say, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 Jn. 3:1).

Love your *enemy*, dear Christian. By God's grace, they may become your dearest friend. At the very least, you will do something that even Jesus considers *great*.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 59 | John 15:14-17

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

We'll officially close out the Vine and Branches section of the Farwell Discourse tonight. And, as we'll see, Jesus ends by talking about love. This is appropriate as love has been a significant theme of this section. It is what inspires obedience and makes us the friends of God. Should we love one another, we need not doubt whether God loves us.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

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