

Excursus 27

Diligence, Obedience, and Friendship

IN contrast to Satan’s plan for compulsion and domination, the Father’s whole “work and glory”⁷⁰² is to draw us to Him voluntarily through His love. As Lewis wrote:

God turns tools into servants, and servants into sons, so that they might at last be reunited to Him in the perfect freedom of love offered from the height of the utter individualities which He has liberated them to be.⁷⁰³

The scriptures teach that God is “more intelligent than they all”⁷⁰⁴ because of His “diligence and obedience.”⁷⁰⁵ The coupling of the term “diligence” with “obedience” is significant, suggesting that eternal progression is not a matter of mechanically “following orders,” but rather is an active process that requires us to maximize the wise exercise of agency within the bounds prescribed by revelation.

The word “diligence” denotes “careful and persistent work or effort,” its meaning closely allied with the Latin *assiduus*, from *assidere* “be engaged in doing.”⁷⁰⁶ Thus, the implication of the instruction to be diligent is that we are not simply to wait to be explicitly told what to do in a given situation, but rather that we must be “anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of [our] own free will,” positively and prayerfully exercising our minds and wills to gain both the increase in sincere desire and the necessary growth in understanding needed to act aright.⁷⁰⁷ Thus each person who is given a stewardship in the Church is required both to “learn his duty” as generally outlined in the revelations⁷⁰⁸ and also “to act in the office in which he is appointed, *in all diligence*.”⁷⁰⁹

To be exalted, men and women must not only be perfectly obedient to the Father in imitation of Jesus, but they must also, like the Christ, and through their firm reliance on Him, progress through their experience to the point that their will conforms to that of the Father because both their desires and their understanding perfectly match His own.⁷¹⁰ To those for whom that day comes, He will be able to say: “Ye are my friends, [since] ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I [call] you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”⁷¹¹

Two different Greek words for “love” are used in John’s report of Jesus’ words.⁷¹² The first word (*agape*) is the one Jesus characteristically used to teach his disciples to value, serve, and esteem all men; the other (*philo*) is the commonest Greek word describing a relationship

more on the historical context, see H. J. Cannon, *David O. McKay*, p. 108.

702 Moses 1:39.

703 C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape*, 1961 Preface, p. 9; cf. ch. 8, p. 41. See D&C 121:34-46; *Commentary* 4:28-s, p. 276 and 4:28-b, p. 276.

704 Abraham 3:19.

705 D&C 130:19. See *Endnote E-118*, p. 731.

706 *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

707 D&C 58:26-28; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:15, *Commentary* 2:10-b, p. 105.

708 E.g., D&C 107:38-39, 58, 73, 85-87, 89, 91.

709 D&C 107:99.

710 Matthew 6:10, 26:39; John 5:30, 6:38-39, 7:17; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2-3; D&C 19:18-19. See *Endnote E-119*, p. 731.

711 John 15:14-15. Of course, Jesus’ apostles had only reached a stage of relative perfection at this point.

712 John 15:13-15.

of affection between devoted friends, conveying “the thought of cherishing the Object above all else, of manifesting an affection characterized by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration.”⁷¹³ Thus, paralleling the way He earlier called out His special use of the term *shalom*,⁷¹⁴ Jesus is not merely describing the esteem He has for His disciples in a general way, He is rather affirming a special tender relationship of this highest kind that now existed between them.

After His resurrection, when Jesus appears to the twelve at the Sea of Galilee, He takes Peter aside and teaches him something of what it means to be His friend. An alternate reading of John 21:15-17 given by the translators of the *New English Bible* preserves in English the distinction between the two kinds of love in the original Greek text:⁷¹⁵

So when they had dined,
 Jesus saith to Simon Peter
 Simon, son of Jonas,⁷¹⁶ lovest thou me more than these?⁷¹⁷
 He saith unto him,
 Yea, Lord; thou knowest that [I am thy friend].⁷¹⁸
 He saith unto him,
 Feed my lambs.⁷¹⁹
 He saith to him again the second time,
 Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?
 He saith unto him,
 Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I [am thy friend].
 He saith unto him,
 Feed my sheep.
 He saith unto him the third time,
 Simon, son of Jonas, [art thou my friend?]
 Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time,
 [Art thou my friend?]
 And he said unto him,
 Lord, thou knowest all things;
 thou knowest that I [am thy friend].
 Jesus saith unto him,
 Feed my sheep.

In this passage, Peter meets Jesus' question about whether his love for the Lord surpassed the love of the other disciples with a passionate affirmation of his special relationship as a friend of the Lord. When Jesus fails to confirm Peter's assertion of a special status of intimacy and throws doubt the nature of his love a second time, Peter reiterates his claim

713 W. E. Vine, *Dictionary*, p. 694. For more on OT, Greco-Roman, and Johannine concepts of friendship, see G. K. Beale, *et al.*, *NT Use of the OT*, p. 493; C. S. Keener, *John*, 2:1006-1015; C. R. Koester, *Symbolism*, pp. 267-268, 274-275.

714 John 14:27. See H. N. Ridderbos, *John*, p. 511; A. E. Harvey, *Companion 2004*, p. 359.

715 S. Sandmel, *et al.*, *New English Bible*, p. 137 nn. r, s, t. See *Endnote E-120*, p. 731.

716 See *Endnote E-121*, p. 731.

717 Meaning, “more than the other disciples (H. N. Ridderbos, *John*, p. 665); cf. C. R. Koester, *Symbolism*, pp. 136-137. See *Endnote E-122*, p. 732.

718 See *Endnote E-123*, p. 732.

719 See *Endnote E-124*, p. 732.