

1 John 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

Analysis

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. John presents the positive contrast to verse 4's warning. "Whoso keepeth his word" (hos d' an tērē autou ton logon) elevates from "commandments" (specific instructions) to "word" (logos)—God's comprehensive revelation. "Keepeth" (tēreō) again emphasizes careful guarding and observing, implying devoted attention to God's revealed will.

The result is remarkable: "in him verily is the love of God perfected" (alēthōs en toutō hē agapē tou theou teteleiōtai). "The love of God" can mean God's love for us, our love for God, or both—likely the latter. God's love in us reaches its intended completion (teteleiōtai, perfect passive) when we keep His word. Our responsive love for God is demonstrated and matured through obedience (John 14:15, 21). This isn't achieving perfection in the sense of sinlessness but reaching love's true expression and purpose—wholehearted devotion expressed in glad obedience.

"Hereby know we that we are in him" (en toutō ginōskomen hoti en autō esmen) provides assurance of union with Christ. Being "in him" denotes intimate spiritual union—the believer's position in Christ, encompassing justification, sanctification, and security. The evidence is keeping His word. This circular relationship characterizes Christian experience: we keep His word because we're in Him (enabled by grace), and we know we're in Him because we keep His word (evidence of transformation).

Historical Context

The concept of love being "perfected" or "completed" through obedience was countercultural. Greek eros (passionate love) was emotional and self-serving. Roman pietas (duty) was dutiful but cold. Gnostic spirituality emphasized mystical union apart from ethics. John presents something revolutionary: love for God expressed through delighted obedience to His revealed will.

Jewish readers would recognize echoes of Deuteronomy's Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), immediately followed by commands to keep God's words. Love and obedience were inseparable in covenant relationship. The new covenant internalizes this (Jeremiah 31:33)—God writes His law on hearts, making obedience natural expression of transformed affections.

Medieval mysticism sometimes pursued union with God through contemplation apart from obedience. Quietism taught passivity rather than active holiness. The Reformation recovered the biblical connection between faith, love, and obedience. Calvin taught that true faith works through love (Galatians 5:6), producing fruit of righteousness. John's test provided clarity: genuine love for God and union with Christ necessarily manifest in keeping His word.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does understanding obedience as love's perfection (not burden) transform your attitude toward God's commandments?

2. In what specific ways is God's love being perfected (or hindered) in your life through your obedience (or disobedience)?
3. How can you cultivate joyful obedience that flows from love rather than duty-bound rule-keeping that breeds resentment?

Interlinear Text

ὅς	δ'	ἂν	τηρῇ	αὐτῷ	τὸν	λόγον	ἀληθῶς	ἐν
whoso	But	keepeth	G5083	him	G3588	word	verily	hereby
G3739	G1161	G302		G846		G3056	G230	G1722
τούτῳ	ἡ	ἀγάπη	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	τετελείωται	ἐν	τούτῳ	
him	G3588	the love	G3588	of God	is	hereby	him	
G5129		G26		G2316	G5048	G1722	G5129	
γινώσκουμεν	ὅτι	ἐν	αὐτῷ	ἐσμεν				
know we	that	hereby	him	we are				
G1097	G3754	G1722	G846	G2070				

Additional Cross-References

John 14:23 (Love): Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

John 14:21 (Love): He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Luke 11:28 (Word): But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

1 John 3:24 (Word): And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Psalms 119:2 (Parallel theme): Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Revelation 14:12 (Word): Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

1 John 5:2 (Love): By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

John 15:5 (Parallel theme): I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Ezekiel 36:27 (Parallel theme): And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Psalms 119:146 (Parallel theme): I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

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