

FRIENDS OF CHRIST

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14.

One of the most inspiring words in the human language is "friend". In most of us, it awakens tender and inspiring thoughts. One is rich if he has worthy and true friends, and conversely, one is poor if he be without worthy and true friends. An asset in life, measureless in moment, is this matter of one's friends.

Human friendship is beautiful to perceive and precious to enjoy. If affection and sympathy were thrust out of life, and if interest alone bound men together, how dismal would this world of humanity become! Every instance of friendship has its charm. Who has not found friendship a charm, a stimulus, a power in life? Friendship, of some quality or other, is to all men a necessity; but there are many different kinds and degrees of it. Aristotle said, "Without friends none would choose to live, although he possessed all other good things."

Friendship involves reciprocal relations. In the light of the old saying, "It takes two to have a quarrel," it is to be remembered that it also takes two to make a friendship. Reciprocal relations are involved, so it is not a one-sided affair. There are two parties involved in this matter of friendship. Real friends are rare. In this connection I want to emphasize the fact that so few friends are real to us. Our friendship with someone is often imaginary. The so-called friendship that some have with Christ is of the imaginary type. We have some friends who are very real to us. When someone mentions their names, certain definite experiences and relations immediately arise in our minds. But when the name of Christ is mentioned some think of a person who lived here on earth over 1900 years ago. They seem not to realize that today He is a living Christ, capable of association with us. Men seldom speak of Him in conversation with their friends. His name is rarely mentioned. His presence seems not to be realized. Sometimes when we try to worship Him we do not get the joy of fellowship, because somehow He is not real to us. If He is not real to us, that is not His fault but our own. If Christianity is to mean anything to us, our Saviour must be a living reality to us. The friendship of Christ can be made as real to us as any other friendship.

Our need of friends is very great. The greater a man's good fortune the more it needs to be buttressed by the good will of others. The young need friends as a protection against their inexperience of life's evils. Those in the prime of life need friends to encourage them in every honorable pursuit. The old need friends to minister to their helplessness. Friendship will give support in weakness, understanding amid evil reports, help in the bearing of burdens, and consolation in sorrow. That is no friendship which breaks down under such demands. There are friends who act like swallows in that they stop with us in the summer time, but when winter sets in they take off. There are friends who can laugh with us as much as we like, but who cannot shed tears with us; they are butterflies that are very gay while the sun shines, but have to get in out of the rain. A sturdy friend is like a good coat which can be worn out in all kinds of weather. The value of a friend is discovered when you are in great need. A true friend is one with whom we may be absolutely sincere.

To read the final words of Christ to His disciples makes us feel like eavesdroppers. It was one of the most sacred moments in that wonderful fellowship of three years. They were a company of the friends of Christ, gathered to hear His last message

before He went to the cross. Yet the words He spoke are meant for us. To us He says, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

These words are challenging. They give us something to live up to. There was a moment when His disciples could not resist to it. "Are not you one of His friends?" That question, flung at Peter in a critical moment, was too much for him. He denied it, with oaths and curses. But, before we judge him too harshly, let us look into our own past history. Have we never let Christ down? That question makes most of us hang our heads. Yet, even if we have, it makes no difference to His friendship. That is the unending miracle. Whatever our own feelings may be or our own conduct has been, He does not change. He knew quite well that these disciples were going to let Him down. Perhaps it was in view of that, and the desolating remorse that He knew would follow, that He gathered them around Him and said, "Ye are my friends."

Christ applies this word "friend" to His own people, to His own true followers. Abraham was called "The Friend of God." Oh, what an appellation! The highest possible honor on earth is to be called truly the friend of Jesus. The important question for us to face is, "Are we the friends of Christ?" Let us impress that question upon our minds, upon our hearts, and upon our deepest consciences, "Am I really and truly a friend of Christ?" He is the friend of every soul. His death was for all. Am I His friend? Christ is beyond all comparison the best of friends, a friend in need and a friend indeed. In the heart of our Lord Jesus there burns such friendship toward us that all other forms of it are as dim candles in contrast to the sun.

In this text our Lord does not speak to us about His being our friend, but about our being His friends. How much it means to be His friend! It means forgiveness, freedom from the burden of past sin that clogs the wheels of new endeavor. It means guidance, the secret of how we, in the ordinary matters of daily life, may do the will of God. It means comfort, those blessed consolations that come like the dew when the withering wind of sorrow has blown upon our world. It means being tuned in to those secrets which God whispers in the ear of His friends. But this friendship begins in obedience.

It is the highest honor in the world to be called the friend of Christ. Jesus values His friends, not by what they have, or what they wear, but by what they do. You must yield obedience to your Lord and Master, and be eager to do it, or you are not His bosom friends.

What are some of the tests of friendship with Christ?

I. Trust In Him As Your Saviour.

You are the friend of Christ if you are trusting in Him as your personal Saviour. It is not enough to say, "I believe that Christ was crucified, buried, and arose again." Do I accept Him as my Saviour? Do I commit myself to Him with definite, unreserved commitment, yielding to Him completely in order that He may be my Saviour? Have you put your trust in Him as your personal Saviour? Can you say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day?" All you need to have done for you, the adequate, atoning, divine Saviour will do for you, if you will trust Him. Are you trusting Him as your Saviour?

"Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, Ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me!

All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

Are you trusting alone in Christ as your Saviour? Can you truly say

"On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

II. Love For Him As Your Master.

If you are really the friend of Christ, then you will love Him. Oh, how great is this matter of loving Christ! You will love Him with your heart, with your inner-self. If you are really His friend, you will love Him to the point that you will yield yourself to Him, without reserve, bowing before Him in your heart. Friendship can only exist in connection with sincere affection. If Christ is your friend, He will appear most valuable and desirable. His commands will all appear attractive to you. His service will be your highest privilege.

Do you love Christ? As you think of what He has done for you and for all humanity, does your heart stir with a strange outgoing of love toward Him and for Him? If you do not love Him, you are not His friend. Regardless of what your pretension or profession may be, you are not really the friend of Christ unless you love Him.

III. Obedience To Him As Your Lord.

"Ye are my friend, if ye do whatsoever I command you." A loved one dwells in the heart, in the memory, in the imagination, and in the anticipations. My reasons for thinking of Christ and valuing Him are many. He has done everything for me. He stands connected with every joy of my life. With every affection of my heart, my Saviour should be united. Gratitude and reverence should combine to form my remembrance of Him. How can I be His friend, if I never think of Him? How can I be truly His friend, if I am ashamed or unwilling to speak of Him?

Constancy is another attribute of a friend of Christ. A true friend loveth at all times. I ought never to speak of what I must bear or suffer for Christ, as if I felt to as a burden. I can never suffer anything for Him, in comparison with His acts of mercy for me. Let me love Him to the end, and count it a joy and a privilege if I am permitted to suffer anything in His service and for His glory.

Fidelity is an important attribute of a friend, also. The Saviour's interest and honor should be very dear and ever dear to me. Here is a great climaxing test that keeps on saying to us: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. A Christian wants to obey Christ.

Our Lord tells us what obedience He requests from those who call themselves His friends. True friends are eager to know what they can do to please the objects of their love. This also applies to the friends of Christ. There cannot be any friendship with Christ unless we are willing to yield hearty, loyal service to Him. If you are enrolled among the friends of Christ, you must be careful about your own personal obedience to His blessed will.

Obedience to Christ must be active. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Some think it is quite sufficient if they avoid what He forbids. Abstinence from evil is not enough for friendship. And then, the obedience which Christ expects from us is continuous. He does not say, "If you sometimes do what I command you - if you do it on Sundays, for instance - if you do what I command you in your place of worship, that will suffice. Rather we are to abide in Him and keep His statutes even unto the end. Furthermore, this obedience must be universal. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." A true friend of Christ does not pick and choose which precept he will keep and which he will neglect, for this is self-will and not obedience. Here is the proof of your love. Will you do the smaller thing for Jesus as well as the more weighty matter? Those who refuse to obey Christ are not His friends. The most friendly action a man can do for Jesus is to obey Him.

Now what is it that Christ wants from us? He wants our friendship. May He have yours? Are you a friend of Christ? Do you trust Him as your Saviour? And do you, in your heart, love Him because of Who He is, and what He is, and what He has done and is doing and proposes to do for you and for our needy world? Do you love Christ? And does your heart want to do whatever He bids you do? Is there a going out of your heart in obedience to His command to go and to say and to do His bidding, as laid down in the Word of God? Do you strive to know what Christ would have you do and then strive to carry that out the best you can? Your answer is "Yes", if you are a Christian. He wants your friendship; your friendship expressed in trust in Him, love for Him, and obedience to Him. Do you have that friendship? Do you bow to Christ gladly as your Lord and Master? A willing, cheerful, cordial service is what He asks of you, and without which no worthless words and formal acts can satisfy Him.