

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Friends of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

The friendship that Christians have with Jesus is absolutely amazing, especially when we realize that we can have a personal, intimate relationship with the Son of God, who is responsible for creating and upholding the universe. It's overwhelming to grasp the truth of what it means is to be a friend of Jesus Christ.

James made the statement that "friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (4:4; NASB). A man chooses during his life whether he will be the friend of Jesus Christ or the friend of the world. Being a friend of Christ involves fellowship with the Trinity and "inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Pet. 1:8; NIV).

A. The Comfort of Friendship with Jesus

In John 15, Jesus talks to his eleven beloved disciples after Judas left to betray Him (John 13:21-30). The eleven remaining disciples are represented by the abiding branches in the analogy Jesus has shared in the preceding verses of chapter 15. Aware of the impending departure of Jesus, their hearts are filled with sorrow. But Jesus comforts them by telling them they are his personal, intimate, and beloved friends.

B. The Characteristics of Friendship with Jesus

In John 15:15, Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends." Friendship is the theme of the next several verses. Jesus identifies his true disciples--the abiding, fruit-bearing believers--as friends in the fullest sense of all that the word implies. That sense of intimacy is conveyed by several other terms. In the New Testament, believers are called "sons of God" (Rom. 8:19) and "children of God" (1 John 3:1). We are considered as important as the brothers, sisters, and mother of Jesus (Mark 3:35) and are called His brethren (Heb. 2:11). Believers are also called disciples (Gk. *mathetes* = 'learners'; John 8:31) and sheep (John 10:27). All those terms picture varying degrees of intimacy that a believer has with Christ. The dimensions of that loving relationship will be limited by your understanding of Jesus Christ Himself.

The special meaning implied in being "friends" in verse 15 is seen in comparison to being "servants" (Gk. *douloi* = "slaves"). No longer considering them servants, Jesus elevates them to the position of friends. A servant was not a position of shame; the term servant was often used to refer to people

who served God. For example, Moses, Joshua, and David were referred to as servants of God. In the New Testament, both Paul and James counted it an honor to be "a servant of God" (Titus 1:1; James 1:1). But Jesus said, "I have something greater for you yet: an intimate relationship with Me as friends." In the Old Testament, only Abraham was called the friend of God (Isa. 41:8). He had a unique relationship to God as the father of Israel. But Jesus bestows a unique intimacy on New Testament believers--friendship.

C. The Condition of Friendship with Jesus

In John 15:14, Jesus gives a clear-cut condition for being His friend: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you." The key to being a friend of Jesus is obedience. In fact, obedience is the standard for every relationship with Him.

1. John 15:10

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." The abiding believer is obedient.

2. 1 John 3:9-10

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." Obeying God's righteous standards and loving our brothers are two of the commands of Jesus. You do not, however, become a child of God by obedience; your obedience gives evidence that you are God's child. Obedience is the proof that you are intimately connected to Jesus Christ.

3. John 10:27

Jesus said of the believers who followed Him, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Obedience is the standard of a relationship to Jesus Christ.

4. John 8:31

"Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." In every case where the New Testament talks about a relationship to Jesus Christ, that relationship is made visible by obedience. A true disciple will obey Christ. Obedience is also the mark of a friend of Jesus. The world can tell who we are because we obey Him.

Be a Name-Dropper

Friendship with Jesus is a fantastic privilege. Next time you're in a group where someone is dropping the names of people they know, drop the name of Jesus. Tell them you're a personal friend of the Son of God, who always seeks the good of the one He loves.

In John 15:12-16, Jesus gives us five characteristics of his friends. They are not things you must do to become a friend of Jesus; they are the visible evidence that you are his friend. The friends of Jesus love each other, know divine truth, are chosen out of this world, bear fruit that remains, and have their prayers answered. The idea of all those things belonging to the believer is almost beyond imagination!

I. FRIENDS OF JESUS LOVE EACH OTHER (vv. 12-13)

A. The Command About Love (vv. 12, 14)

"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.... Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you."

1. Stated

The obedient believer is a friend of Jesus who has a sincere love for other believers. Granted there are some exceptions, but John is not concerned about them. Jesus commands us to keep on loving each other. A Christian's love for others is the greatest thing to have in a world that is starving for love. Our hearts should be full of love.

2. Supported

a. Romans 5:5

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." Christians experience the love of God. What a tremendous privilege! The true believer will share that love with others. You can't be a true believer in Christ and not have a love for others.

b. 1 John 2:9-11

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not where he goeth, because darkness hath blinded his eyes." The true believer doesn't hate his brother.

c. 1 John 5:1

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ s born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him." A man is saved and becomes a friend of Jesus when he believes that Jesus is the Christ. His love for the Father will also be expressed in his love for Christ and others who have been born again spiritually. There's no such thing as loving God without loving Christ and other believers. It is characteristic of a true friend of Jesus that he loves the other friends of Jesus.

d. 1 Thessalonians 4:9

"As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Part of being a believer is loving other believers. In fact, a friend of Jesus would violate his nature in Christ if he didn't love others. It's natural for a believer to love the other friends of Jesus; only sin prevents such love.

The world doesn't know much about the quality of love that Christians experience because "the love of Christ ... surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19; NASB). Although the friends of Jesus fellowship in His love, there are occasionally some flaws in how they express it. Nevertheless, the general pattern of Christians is that they love one other. As we abide in Christ, we experience the fruit of the Spirit, part of which is love. If you don't love others, the problem is not resolved by conjuring up love yourself. It is resolved only by getting close to Jesus so that love becomes a fruit produced by Him through you, the abiding branch.

B. The Comparison Regarding Love (v. 13)

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

1. Explained

Jesus said in verse 12, "Love one another, as I loved you." Now, you can't love to the point of redeeming the whole world, but you can love with a sacrificial kind of love that gives. God isn't expecting you to love with a dimension of love equal to Christ's. He is expecting your love to have a sacrificial nature like Christ did. His disciples are not merely to be devoted and helpful to each other. They are to love like Jesus loved, who gave of Himself. Don't look at your brother in Christ as someone who's only an acquaintance; rather see him like Jesus would--primarily in terms of his soul's eternal needs. That requires the kind of love that is involved in comforting, instructing, and bearing one another's burdens. Sometimes, we substitute a superficial relationship for one that is deep. We need to intimately care about the needs of another.

2. Exercised

Sacrificial love is important to our testimony. Jesus told His disciples, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). We show the world who we are by reaching into the heart and soul of someone and giving of our time, wealth, encouragement, and empathy--whatever the needs may be. The fullest kind of love is described in verse 13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Our love for others is to be so intense, that if need be, it would lead us to die for someone else. The world over has acknowledged that as the supreme evidence of love.

3. Exemplified

In the case of Jesus, He loved so sacrificially that He laid down His life. If He hadn't died, everyone who has ever lived would spend forever in hell because there would be no sacrifice for sin. He knew He was not dying for Himself, but for mankind by bearing our sins in his own body on the cross. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that God has made Christ, "who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Christ died a substitutionary death, and we are the beneficiaries. We're not just witnesses of Calvary. We're the recipients of what was accomplished there; we reap the benefit of His life and willing surrender in death.

It's difficult to imagine the kind of love that would die for another, but even the world knows of it to some extent. Charles Dickens, in the classic tale, *A Tale of Two Cities*, tells us about the character of Charles Darnay, who was caught up in the swirl of the French Revolution. Although personally blameless, he was unjustly found guilty. While in prison to await the guillotine, a friend resembling him by the name Sidney Carton secretly drugged him, exchanged clothes, and took his place at the guillotine the next morning, while friends removed the drugged body of Darnay. His life was spared because his friend died for him.

That kind of love--the willingness to totally sacrifice oneself--should be common among believers. Certainly it has been seen among missionaries who have died to take the gospel to others. However, some of us don't even love others enough to give our time to someone, let alone our lives. Sometimes we neglect to share our love with our neighbors who need to know the truth of Jesus Christ, or minister our gifts to other believers who aren't growing, or give to needs around the world where money is needed for ministries to be carried on. Some of us haven't even learned to live for others, let alone die for them. Yet Jesus died for us when we hated him. Paul said, "Perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die, but God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7-8). That is the greatest example of sacrificial love for unlovable people. When we begin to love like that, the world is going to be in a state of shock and will listen to our message.

4. Exhorted

Have you ever given of yourself in a spirit of sacrifice to meet someone else's need? First John 3:16-18 forces us to examine the depth of our love: "By this perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (v. 16) We know God loves us because He laid down the life of His Son for our benefit. If you could ask God how much He loves you, I believe He'd point to a rocky hillside outside Jerusalem and say, "On that hill two thousand years ago My beloved Son died. That's how much I love you!" At the end of verse 16, John exhorts us to demonstrate that same kind of love: "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Are you ready to do that? Do you really care about others that deeply? Have you looked around to see who has spiritual and physical needs and then ministered to them in love? If not, then verses 17-18 are for you: "But whosoever hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassions from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." If you see a fellow believer with a need you can meet, but don't, you are failing to express God's love. We talk about His love so freely, but we are often afraid of going a step further and giving it away. We need to be reminded that the friends of Jesus love each other sacrificially, like He loved them.

II. FRIENDS OF JESUS KNOW DIVINE TRUTH (v. 15)

A. Stated

The friends of Jesus know divine truth. When I stop to realize that, I am amazed because I am aware of my own intellectual limitations. A Christian can actually know the truths of the universe! Verse 15 says, "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 slave could never be a friend because the ancient Greco-Roman culture had reduced the slave to a living tool. His master never told him his goals and desires; he just told him what to do. Slaves serve because they are required to do so to earn their keep. They rarely are concerned about their master's wishes, but serve out of duty and fear.

But we who are Jesus' friends are not blindly obeying; we share His heart and purposes. Our greatest desire is are to accomplish God's will. We're not working to earn anything; we're working because it's our heart's desire to be a part of His plan, which He's revealed to us--past, present, and future.

B. Supported

1. John 8:31-32

"Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth." Christians have an inside scoop on divine truth!

2. John 17:6-8

Jesus said to the Father, "I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things, whatever thou hast givest me, are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." Jesus said in effect, "Father, everything you told me, I passed on to them."

3. Matthew 13:10-11

"The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." The Lord discloses the nature of God's Kingdom to His friends.

4. Luke 10:23-24

Christ "turned unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear; and have not heard them." For those who are the friends of Jesus, there is an intimacy of knowledge that came from the Father through the Son to us.

5. Acts 20:27

Divine truth first came to the apostles and their companions and was passed on to us through the Word of God. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." God's will has been revealed to us in the Bible.

6. Ephesians 3:3-4

Paul said, "By revelation [God] made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote before in few words, by which, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)."

7. Romans 16:25-26

"[The] gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery ... was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." God's truth has been revealed to us through the Bible.

8. 1 Corinthians 2:14

Not everyone who reads the Bible can discover its truths, however. Paul tells us that "the natural man receiveth not [does not understand] the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The friends of Jesus can know divine truth by the indwelling Spirit and the Word of God. We know things that unbelievers are incapable of understanding. Unbelieving philosophers and scientists are like babes in the woods compared to the simplest Christian who is exposed to the revelation of God through the Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we take our privilege of knowing divine truth for granted. I don't think we fully grasp what it is to know the truths of God.

Jesus never expected his disciples to blindly obey Him. We are friends who are intimately acquainted with His heart's desires and the goals of His ministry. What a privilege that is for us who are His disciples today!

III. FRIENDS OF JESUS ARE SPECIALLY CHOSEN (v. 16a-b)

Friends usually choose each other, but Jesus initiates His friendships. Verse 16 says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go."

A. Chosen to Salvation (v. 16a)

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

Jesus is talking about salvation here. In verse 19, He said, "I have chosen you out of the world." The Bible teaches that God has sovereignly chosen those who become saved:

1. Ephesians 1:4

"[God] hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world."

2. Mark 13:20

Speaking of the Tribulation, Jesus explained, "Except the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days."

B. Ordained to Service (v. 16b)

"[I have] ordained you, that ye should go."

1. The Explanation

The Greek word translated "ordained" (tithemi) is different from the word translated "chosen." It means "to appoint for special service" or "to send for a special reason." In several places in the New Testament, Scriptures talk about certain individuals being appointed or ordained.

a. Luke 6:13-14

"When it was day, [Jesus] called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve." We know that Jesus chose eleven of them to salvation. Beyond that, He chose them to serve as His particular disciples.

b. 1 Corinthians 12:28

Paul delineates those ordained to lead the church: "God hath set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers."

c. 2 Timothy 1:11

Paul said, "I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." Paul was chosen for certain purposes. Ordination implies service.

2. The Exhortation

a. Stated

There's a difference between being chosen to salvation and being ordained to special service. Verse 16 says that Jesus' friends are ordained to go. No Christian was ever chosen to stand around and watch. We were chosen to go and tell the world about Christ. The world isn't about to come to Christ by itself; we have to go to it. The Bible doesn't say, "Hey, all you in the world, come to church!"

b. Supported

1) Luke 14:23

"The lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in."

2) Mark 16:15

Jesus said to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

3) Acts 1:8

After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers, "Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Christians have been chosen to go out and reach the world. Christ selected a group of men out of the world of darkness, trained them, loved them as friends, and ordained them to go right back in the world where He found them. What a high calling! Every believer has been chosen for salvation and ordained to special service to be fired right back into the world again to communicate Jesus Christ.

4) 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Paul said, "We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you." Christians have been called and ordained to glorify the name of Jesus Christ in the world by letting God work His perfect will through them. We're not called to sit; we're called to go.

IV. FRIENDS OF JESUS BEAR FRUIT (v. 16c)

"Bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

One of the fantastic things about the Christian life is that it's so meaningful. When you go out and communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone who ends up receiving Christ, you have brought about an eternal transaction. The life of an unbeliever has only a limited effect on others. It cannot compare with the life of a believer, who bears fruit that is eternal. Like the ripples in a pond when a rock is thrown in, your life will ripple throughout all eternity with fruit born in time to the glory of God. That's exciting!

We have seen that fruit is being Christlike, praising God, contributing to those in need, communicating spiritual truth, doing good works, and leading others to Christ. Those kinds of fruit have eternal consequences in the lives of others. You may say, "But I don't have any eternal fruit--I've never led anyone to Jesus." Maybe you never experienced the final result of reaping the harvest, but the Spirit-produced love and joy in your life can be part of the process of planting the truth of God in

others. Even believers you helped lead to Christ in some small way can partly be considered your fruit. Or, when you've taught someone else the Word of God and enriched their life, enabling them to better glorify God, you have produced eternal fruit.

It's wonderful to have a life that has such lasting effects. I hope you recognize the significance of your life in Christ--you affect eternity. A true branch doesn't produce temporary fruit, but abiding fruit. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul explained the transformation that sharing the gospel can bring about: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Paul was in the ministry because he had such a tremendous joy in seeing the finished product and knowing it was eternal. The things you do for God never pass away. Only what's done for Christ will last. The fruit you bear through Him lasts forever. The book of Revelation tells us that believers who have died and gone to heaven will be followed by their works (14:13).

V. FRIENDS OF JESUS HAVE THEIR PRAYERS ANSWERED (v. 16d)

"That whatever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

A true friend of Jesus has his prayers answered. To pray in Christ's name simply means to ask for what Jesus would want accomplished. The intent of such praying is not to ask for something so you can "consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). When your prayers are aligned with the desires of Jesus Christ, God will answer them.

CONCLUSION

Those who are the friends of Jesus love each other, know divine truth, have a special calling to go back into the world they've been called out of, bear fruit that is eternal, and have their prayers answered as they pray in the name of Christ. Those are characteristics of all who know Christ. They are yours because of your position in Christ, yet the New Testament still encourages you to operate on those principles. The true friends of Jesus love each other, and yet the Bible says that we must love each other fervently (1 Pet. 4:8). The true friends of Jesus know divine truth, yet the Bible says you should study the Word of God to show yourself "approved unto God ... rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The friends of Jesus have been chosen by Him, and yet we are exhorted to "walk worthy" of such a high calling (Eph. 4:1). The friends of Jesus bear eternal fruit, and yet the Bible tells us that we bear "more fruit" as a result of the purging process of the Father (John 15:2). The friends of Jesus pray and God answers, and yet the Bible yet says we are to pray effectively (James 5:16), constantly (1 Thess. 5:17). In every one of those general patterns for a Christian, there is also the call for practical implementation to reach for the ideal. The resources are yours, if you are a friend of Jesus.

What about those who are not His friends? Jesus said this: "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). Are you searching for love and truth? Are you longing for a meaningful, productive life? Are you searching for supernatural resources for all your needs? Be a friend of Jesus and you'll have them all. Jesus chooses His friends and if He is calling you to Himself, you need to respond.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How did Jesus comfort the sorrowful disciples before His departure (see p. 1)?
2. What are some of the terms that Scripture uses to identify the believer? In general, what do those terms picture (see p. 1)?
3. What unique intimacy did Jesus bestow on New Testament believers (see p. 2)?
4. What is the condition of friendship with Jesus that is given in John 15:14 (see p. 2)?
5. Can you become a child of God by obedience? Explain.
6. Cite some Scriptures to show that Christians will love other believers.
7. How can the problem of a Christian not loving others be resolved?
8. What kind of love does Jesus ask us to express?
9. What do we show the world by exercising sacrificial love (John 13:35)?
10. Cite a verse that identifies believers as beneficiaries of Christ's substitutionary death.
11. Compare the love of God with the love of man (Rom. 5:7-8).
12. How is a Christian's knowledge of his Master's will different from a slave's knowledge of his master's will?
13. How has divine truth been given to believers? Can an unbeliever understand divine truth? Explain your answer (1 Cor. 2:14).
14. What has God sovereignly chosen some individuals for? What has He ordained those believers to do? Support your answer with Scripture.

15. What type of transaction takes place when we lead someone to Christ?

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