

Subject: *The Friends of Christ*

Scripture: *John 15:12-17*

On this day that we call “Friend Day,” it’s good to think about our friends and the great blessing of having friends and being a friend to others. The Bible has a lot to say about friends and friendship.

Proverbs 17:17 *A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

Proverbs 18:24 *A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

The Bible says that Abraham was “the friend of God.” It is even more remarkable that Christ was called “the friend of sinners.” Who else could He have for friends because all people have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). In our text Christ speaks to His disciples and calls them “friends.”

The Bible has many names and titles for people who know and love Christ: believers, beloved brethren, children of God, children of promise, children of light, sons of the resurrection, disciples, the elect, the godly, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, heirs of salvation, the righteous, lights in the world, living stones in God’s temple, members of Christ’s body, the people of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s possession, the salt of the earth, slaves of Christ, slaves of righteousness, vessels of honor, vessels of mercy, and saints. But the term “friends” is a special word that describes our closeness and special bond of love with the Lord. Christ said four things are true of His friends.

1. The friends of Christ love each other

In verse 12 Christ gives them a command to love one another. This is the second time He gave them this command (see John 13:34-35). In John 13, Jesus made it clear that people would know we are His disciples because we love one another. If Christ is your friend and He is my friend, then that makes us all friends. But that’s not all. Christ calls on us to have the same kind of love for each other as He has for us (Jn. 15:12), and then He reminds us of the love He has for us all (vs. 13).

This is so basic and so important to the Christian life. Believers have a special love for each other. This is a love that is given to us in salvation and is the fruit of the Spirit working in us.

Romans 5:5 *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*

1 John 4:7-8 ⁷ *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* ⁸ *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

Ephesians 5:2 *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.*

This love for one another is not just an emotional attachment or mere words. It is a love for each other shown by an unselfish devotion to meet one another's needs.

2. The friends of Christ obey Him

Sin is basically rebellion against God and His Word. Samuel rebuked King Saul because he failed to do what God commanded him.

1 Samuel 15:22 *And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*

Salvation means turning away from sin and obeying God. Repentance, faith, and obedience are always linked together in the Bible. Paul described unbelievers as “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8). Peter also defined unbelievers as “those who do not obey the gospel of God” (1 Pet. 4:17). Paul also said that the goal of gospel ministry was to bring about “obedience to the faith among all the nations” (Rom. 1:5).

Jesus taught the disciples to obey Him. This would be the proof (evidence) of their faith. True believers obey Him.

John 8:31 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.*

John 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

John 14:15 *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

We are not saved by works, but we are saved by grace through faith. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. The Bible tells us that true faith always produces obedience.

James 2:26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

Titus 1:16 *They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

3. The friends of Christ know spiritual truth

In verse 15 Jesus says he will no longer call them “servants” (*doulos*, slaves), but friends. A slave was bought, owned, and under the authority of a master. He lived in total submission to the will of his master, and the master provided for him and protected him. Slaves did not normally have a close relationship with their earthly masters. Slaves would not know what their master was doing or what he planned to do. They just followed orders and instructions. While followers of Christ are still called servants, we are also called friends, a higher honor than even a disciple.

William Barclay, a New Testament scholar, writes about the courts of Roman emperors and kings in the Middle East. In these royal courts there was very select group called the friends of the king or friends of the emperor. They always had access to the king and always had a very close connection with him. That's what is described here in John 15. Christ calls them friends because He has taught them divine truth from the Father. They understood things that other people did not know because they were “friends” of Christ. And the truth Christ taught them they wrote down and we have it in the New Testament (“the apostles' doctrine”).

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ¹³ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

The friends of Christ have the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth so we can know what He wants us to know.

4. The friends of Christ are chosen to bear spiritual fruit

The customary practice in Jewish life was for men who wanted to follow a certain teacher or rabbi to approach him and ask to learn from him. But with Jesus it was just the opposite. He chose the disciples; they did not choose Him. He chose them not because of any merit or worth in them, but just because He wanted to choose them. They were not the best and brightest, but just ordinary men. Not only did Christ choose them for salvation, He also chose them for service. The word “ordained” (vs. 16) means set apart for special service. He chose them to go into the world and bear fruit.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport. He doesn't choose us to stand by and watch while the world goes on its way to hell. He commands us: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:19-20). When people repent and believe the Gospel they become fruit that will remain forever.

We should be thankful for our blessings as the true friends of Christ, and we must realize that with great privilege comes great responsibility.

- It is our nature as Christ's friends to love each other, but the Bible commands us to “love one another fervently from a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22).
- It is our nature as Christ's friends to obey Him, but we can't pick and choose the commands we like and those we don't like. We are called to obey whatever He says and wherever He leads.
- It is our nature as Christ's friends to know divine truth, but we must study it faithfully.
- We have been chosen by Him to serve Him and be separate from the world, so we must be careful not to love the world and be entangled by it.
- We can sum it up like this...if we are Christ's friends we must “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called” (Eph. 4:1).