

FRIENDS AND LOVERS

ARE WE GOOD FRIENDS?



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"He was called the friend of God," James 2:23.

When and by whom was he so called?

There are two passages in the Old Testament in which an analogous designation is applied to the Patriarch, but probably the name was one in current use amongst the people, and expressed in a summary fashion the impression that had been made by the history of Abraham's life.

That is a sweet fate, to have this as the brief record of a character, and to be known throughout the ages by such an epitaph. The term "the friend" has displaced the proper name "Abraham" on the lips of all Mohammedian people to this very day. And the city of Hebron, where his corpse lies, is commonly known simply as "The Friend."

Our study is a very simple one. We just want to bring out two or three of the salient elements and characteristics of friendship as exercised on the human level, and to use these as a standard and a test of our Christianity and relationship to God.

How gracious and beautiful are the thoughts which underlie this and similar representations of Scripture, that **the bond which unites God to us is the very same as that which most sweetly and strongly ties men to one another**, and that, after all, Christianity is nothing more or less than the transference to the Lord of our emotions which make all the sweetness of human life and society.

Now we will look at two or three principles which are included in that name, "the friend of God," and ask ourselves privately and personally if they apply to our relationship to the Lord.

1. FRIENDS TRUST AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Mutual confidence is the mortar which binds the stones in society together into a building. It makes the difference between the herding together of beasts and the association of men. No community could keep together for an hour without mutual confidence, even in regard of the least intimate relationships of life. But it is the very life blood of friendship.

Therefore he was called "the friend of God" by James, because James deduced that he "believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness."

You cannot make a friend of a man that you do not know where to have to be a friend. There may be some vague reverence of, or abject reluctant submission, to "the unknown God," the something outside of ourselves that perhaps makes for righteousness. **But for any vivid, warm throb of friendship there must be first a clear knowledge and then a living grappling of that knowledge to our very hearts by our faith.**

Unless I trust God I cannot be a friend of God's. If you and I are His friends we trust Him, and He will trust us. For this friendship is not one-sided, and the name, through it may be ambiguous as to whether it means one whom I love or one who loves me, really includes both persons to the compact, and there are analogous, if not identical, emotions in each. So that, **if I trust God, I may be sure that God trusts me, and, in His confidence, leaves a great deal to me, and so ennobles and glorifies me by His reliance upon me.**

But while we know that this belief in God was the very nerve and center of Abraham's whole character, and was the reason why he was called "the friend of God," we must also remember, that, as James insists upon here, it was no mere idle assent, no mere intellectual conviction that God could not tell lies,

which was dignified by the name of belief, but that it was, as James insists upon in the context, a trust upon which proved itself to be valid, because it was continually operative in the life. “Faith without works is dead. And Abraham our father, was he not justified by works?”

So the epistle to the Hebrews, if you will remember, traces up to his faith all the chief points in his life. “By faith he went out from the land where he dwelt,” “By faith he dwelt in tabernacles, in the promised land, believing that it should be his and his seed’s,” “By faith he offered up his son on the altar.”

Thus we come to this, that the heavenly and the earthly friends, like friends on the low levels of humanity, **love each other because they trust each other.** We have said that the words “my friend” may either mean one whom I love or one who loves me, but that the two things are in the present connection inseparable. Only let us remember where the sweet reciprocation and interchange of love begins. “We love Him because He first loved us.”

“When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” And so we have to turn to that heavenly friend, and feel that as life itself, **so the love which is the life of life, has its beginning in Him,** and that never would our hearts have turned themselves from their alienation, unless there had poured down upon them the attractive outflow of His great love.

It was an old fancy that, whenever a tree was struck by lightning, all its tremulous foliage turned in the direction from which the bolt had come. **When the merciful flash of God’s great love strikes a heart, then all its tendrils turn to the source of life giving light, and we love back again,** in sweet reverberation to the primal and original love. So friends trust and love each other.

DO WE TRUST AND LOVE THE LORD?

2. FRIENDS HAVE FRANK, FAMILIAR INTERCOURSE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Let us turn to the illuminative example in our text, and remember God’s frankness with

Abraham. “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?” Let us cap that, as we can, marvelous and great as the utterance is, by another one, “I CALL YOU NOT SERVANTS. BUT FRIENDS. FOR ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE HEARD OF MY FATHER I DECLARE UNTO YOU.” So much for God’s frankness.

What about Abraham’s frankness with God? Remember how he demonstrated with Him, how he complained to Him of His dealings, how he persisted with importunity, which would have been presumptuous but for the friendship which underlay it, and warranted the bold words.

So we take the simple lesson that if we are friends and lovers of God, we shall delight in intercourse with Him. **It is a strange kind of Christianity that does not care to be with God, that would rather think about anything else than about the Lord,** that is all unused to quiet, solitary conversation and communion with Him. **But it is the Christianity of, I wonder, how many of us today.**

He would be a strange friend that never crossed your threshold if you could help it, that was evidently uncomfortable in your presence, and ill at ease till he got away from you, and that when he came was struck dumb, and had not a word to say for himself, and did not know or feel that He and you had any interests or subjects in common.

Is that not a good deal like the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians? “He was called the friend of God, and he never, all his days, if he could help it, thought about Him or went near Him.”

If we are friends of God, we shall have no secrets from Him. There are very few of those who are dearest to us to whom we should venture to lay bare all the depths of our souls. There are black things down in the cellars that we do not like to show to any of our friends. We receive them upstairs, in the rooms for company.

But you should take God all through your house. And if there is the trust and the love that we have been speaking about, we

shall not be afraid to spread out all our foulness, and our weakness, and our unworthy thoughts of, and acts towards, Him, before His "pure eyes and perfect judgment," and say, "Nobody but my best friend could look at such a dungheap, but I spread it before Thee. Look at it, and Thou wilt cleanse it. Look at it, and it will melt away. Look at it, and in the knowledge that Thou knowest, my knowledge of it will be less of a torment, and my bosom will be cleansed of its perilous stuff."

Tell God all, if you mean to be a friend of His. And do not be afraid to tell Him your harsh thoughts of Him, and your complaints of Him. HE NEVER RESENTS ANYTHING THAT A MAN WHO LOVES HIM SAYS ABOUT HIM, IF HE SAYS IT TO HIM. What He resents, if we can use that word, is our huddling up grudges and murmurings and questionings in our own hearts, and saying never a word to the friend against whom they offend. **Out with it... complaints, regrets, questionings, petitions, hot wishes. Take them to the Lord, and be sure that instead of their breaking, they will, if spoken, cement the friendship which is disturbed by secrecy on our parts.**

If we are God's lovers, He will have no secrets from us. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."

There is a strange wisdom and insight, sometimes mounting even to prophetic anticipation, which creeps into a simple heart that is knit closely to God. But whether the result of our friendship with Him be such communication of such kinds of insight or not, we may be sure of this, that, **if we trust Him, and love Him, and we are frank with Him, that He will in so far be frank with us, that he will impart unto us Himself, and in the knowledge of His love we shall find all the knowledge that we need.**

3. FRIENDS DELIGHT TO MEET EACH OTHERS' WISHES.

Let us go back to our story again. The humble earthly friend of God did as God bade him, substantially all his life, from the

day when he made the great refusal, and left behind him home and kindred and all, until the day when he went up the side of Moriah to offer there his son. Abraham met God's wishes because Abraham trusted and loved God.

What about the Divine Friend? Did He not meet Abraham's wishes? You remember that wonderful scene, which presents in such vivid and dramatic form, **the everlasting Truth that the man who bows his will to God, bows God's will to his**, when he pleaded for Sodom, and won his case by persistence and importunity of lowly prayer.

These historical notices of both sides are for us the vehicles of the permanent Truth that **if we are God's lovers and friends, we shall find nothing sweeter than bowing to His will and executing His commandments.** The very mark and signature of love is that it delights to the Divine and fulfills the desires of the Beloved, and that it molds the will of each of the parties into conformity with the will of the other.

What a commentary Christianity is upon such thoughts! **To how many of us is the very notion of Christianity that of a prohibition of things that we would much like to do, and of commands to do things that we had much rather not do? All the slavery of abject submission, of reluctant service, is clean swept away, when we understand that friendship and love find their supreme delight in discovering and in executing the will of the Beloved.**

And sure if you and I are the friends of God, the cold words "duty," "must," "should," will be struck out of our vocabulary and will be replaced by "delight," "cannot but," and "will." **For friends find the very life, the very voice of their friendship in mutual obedience.** And God, the heavenly Friend, will do what we wish.

Now in that very connection Jesus Christ put the two thoughts of friendship with Him and His executing His disciples behests, saying in one breath, **"Ye are My friends if you do whatsoever I command you."** And in the next, **"Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall**

be done for you.” **This conformity of will, so that there is but one will in the two hearts, which is the very consummation and superlative degree of human friendship and love, applies as truly to the friendship between man and God.**

4. FRIENDS GIVE GIFTS TO EACH OTHER.

Let us look once again at Abraham. What did Abraham give God? “Forasmuch as he hath not withheld his only son from Me. I know that he fears Me.” And what does God give to His friends? “HE THAT SPARED NOT HIS ONLY SON. BUT FREELY DELIVERED HIM UP TO THE DEATH FOR US ALL. HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?”

Abraham’s gift of his son to God was but a feeble shadow of God’s gift of His Son to mankind. And if the surrender on the part of the human friend was the infallible token of his love, **surely the surrender on the part of the heavenly Friend is no less the infallible sign of His love to the whole world.** If you generalize this principle you will come to this conclusion: **If we are God’s lovers God will give us Himself, in so far as we can receive Him, and all other gifts in so far as they are good and needful.**

If we are God’s lovers and friends we shall give Him, in glad surrender, our whole selves. And remember, if you feel that you have separate interests from Him, if you keep things and do not let Him say “These are Mine,” **if you grudge sacrifice, and will not hear of submission, and are living lives centered in, ruled by, devoted to, self, you have little reason to call yourself a Christian.**

“Ye are my friends if ye,” not only “do whatsoever I command you, but if you give yourself to Me.” **Yield yourself to God, and in giving of yourselves to Him, you will get back yourselves glorified and blessed by the gift. There is no friendship if self shuts out the friend from participation in what is the others.** As long as “mine” lies on this side of a high wall, and “Thine” on the other, there is but little friendship. Down with

the wall, and say about everything, “ours,” and then you have a right to say, **“I am a friend of God.”**

5. FINALLY, A WORD, ONE WORD, FRIENDS STAND UP FOR EACH OTHER.

“I am thy shield, fear not Abraham,” said the Lord when His friend was in danger from the vengeance of the eastern kings whom he had defeated. All of the time through his life the same strong arm was cast around Him. Abraham, on his part, had to stand up for God amidst his heathen neighbors. **IF WE ARE GOD’S FRIENDS AND LOVERS, HE WILL TAKE UP OUR CAUSE. BE SURE THAT IF GOD BE FOR US, IT MATTERS NOT WHO IS AGAINST US.**

If we are God’s friends and lovers we have to take up His cause. What would you think of a man who, in going away to a far off country, said to some friend, “I wish you would look after so and so for me as long as I am gone,” and the friend would say, “Yes,” and never give a thought nor lift a finger to discharge the obligation?

GOD TRUSTS HIS REPUTATION TO YOU CHRISTIANS. He has interests in this world that you have to look after. **You have to defend Him as really as He defends you.** And it is the dreadful contradiction of Christian peoples profession of Christianity that they often care so little, and do so little to promote the cause, to defend the name, to adorn the reputation, and to further what I may venture to call the interests, of their heavenly Friend in the world.

Now as Christians, can we look at these principles and say we are friends of God? If you can’t say that, what are you then? Our relationship with people divides them into three categories: Friends, enemies, and nothings. We may love, we may hate, we may be absolutely indifferent and ignorant.

But I don’t think these three states can be transferred exactly to our relationship with God. If not His friend, what are you? Have you a far off bowing acquaintance with Him? Well, then, that is because you have ne-

glected, if you have not sinned, His offered friendship.

And how much you have lost! **There is no human heart that is one-millioneth a part so sweet and gracious and so capable of satisfying you as God's. All friendships on this Earth here have their limits, they change and some end. But God is boundless, immutable, eternal.**

All things are the friends of God's friends, and all things are arrayed against him who rejects God's friendship. **Won't you let the Lord woo you to love Him, and receive Him? Because if when we were His enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being friends, all the fullness of His love and**

GRACE of His heart will be poured upon us through the living, seated Christ.

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," Proverbs 18:24. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend, by hearty counsel," Proverbs 27:9. "Yea mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread hath lifted up his heel against Me," Psalm 41:9.

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