

The Friendship of Christ

The sweetest bliss of rational beings comes from friendship. Nothing can take its place. Without it, all things else leave in us an aching void. We must both love and be loved, or be wretched.

Friendship implies two or more persons, and love on both sides. There may be love without friendship, but there can be no friendship without love. There must be reciprocity of affection.

Hence, whatever may be the love of Christ toward us, unless we also love Him, there is no friendship between Him and us. The Sun of righteousness shines upon us, but we walk blinded in darkness; He diffuses warmth, but we do not feel it; He graciously deigns to bless us, but we still go unblessed.

But when we through grace open our hearts to Him, give back the generous flame, and thus become partakers of His love, then are we cordially embraced in His glorious and eternal friendship. Its distinguishing characteristics are included in the following particulars.

The friendship of Christ is purely spontaneous. It springs up unsolicited from the depths of His generous heart, as the crystal water gushes up from its fountain. It is not the affection of

consanguinity, nor the result of early intimacy; much less does Christ love us, because we first loved Him.

It is exactly the other way! We love Him because He first loved us. Nor did He see anything lovely in us to engage His affection. He found our hearts selfish, cold, dead in sin. He loved us while we were yet enemies.

And why did He thus love us? The only answer is, because of the pure, spontaneous benevolence of His heart. God is love, and Christ is God manifest in the flesh.

"I delight to do thy will," He says, "...yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8, KJV). It is hence a pure spontaneity of His heart to lift up the fallen, heal the broken, pardon the guilty, save the lost and gather them all into the fold of His grace. There is no other love like this.

The friendship of Christ is wholly unselfish.

Human friendships are, to a great extent, bought and sold for value received. But no mercenary motive stains the luster of Christ's friendship. He is infinitely above all need of any favors from us, and it is equally above our power to make any adequate returns for His favors.

Because He has felt from eternity in His divine nature an unceasing love toward us, it has been with the knowledge that

for this
we could never repay Him and that all His reward must be in
His own
bosom. Behold, what manner of love is this!

The friendship of Christ is surpassingly self-sacrificing.
It cost Him an amazing price. What love must that be, that
made Him
willing to dishonor the glories of His Godhead, take upon Him
the guilt
and sorrows of humanity, endure the scorn and malice of wicked
men and
devils, and finally die the shameful and agonizing death of
the cross,
all to save us from our sins!

It is common to estimate friendship by the sacrifice it
makes for its object. If we thus estimate the friendship of
Christ, it
transcends all thought. Indeed, it often seems to us more like
romance
than reality, and it is only as we think of Him in His divine
nature
that we can accept the record of His sacrifice for us as
literally
true. Yet here is no romance nor bold figure, but a stupendous
fact,
into which the angels desire to look.

The friendship of Christ is unchanging. He often
rebukes and chastens us, but He loves us still. We sometimes
forget
Him, but He never forgets us. We turn away from Him, but He
never turns
away from us. We grow cold in our affection, but His affection
for us
is ever the same bright flame.

We have our days of sunshine, when we seem to walk in high places, regaling amid the sweets and flowers of paradise; and our days of darkness, when we seem to dwell in the lowest depths and eat ashes for bread; but through all these changes, the love of Christ toward us is the same deep, pure, vivid affection. Like the sun in the heavens, which rides high above all the clouds and storms of Earth, such is our glorious Savior's love.

The friendship of Christ, though always essentially the same, is most realized by us when most needed. The world is full of sunny-day friendships. They are often reversed by the reverses of fortune.

"The friends that in our sunshine live, / When winter comes, are flown; / And he who has but tears to give / Must weep those tears alone."

Precisely otherwise is the friendship of Christ. In our days of affliction, when lover and friend have gone from us to the land of darkness, He embraces us with His tenderest affection and is to us then verily "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely" (Song 5:10,16).

In our losses, reverses of fortune and desolation of earthly hopes, He shows us the exceeding riches of His grace. When former friends forsake us, He is to us the "friend that sticketh closer

than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). When our sins are felt pressing upon us as a heavy burden, He kindly says to us, "Come unto I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Where sin abounds, His grace much more abounds.

When we are languishing on the bed of death, and all earth-born hopes are dying out of our hearts, He plucks the thorn from our pillow, dispels all fear, and enables us to sing, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4).

Finally, the friendship of Christ is all-sufficient. He can do for us all we need, and no other friend can. The loving parent often yearns in vain toward his suffering child. The fond father would rescue his penitent son from the hands of civil justice, and the judge would fain spare the relenting criminal, but justice forbids.

And not unlike these are the feelings of God himself, when He is called, as the righteous Guardian of the universe, to execute justice upon the wicked. "How shall I give thee up?" He exclaims; "...my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8).

It is, then, no irreverence and no limitation of divine power to say that, irrespective of Christ, God cannot in justice pardon and save the repenting sinner. But Christ, by His sufferings and death

for us, has removed all obstacles to our forgiveness. The law is not in His way; justice is satisfied and even smiles upon Him, when He lifts the repenting sinner from the depths of his guilt, clothes him with His own righteousness, and puts the song of salvation on his joyful lips.

No other being in the universe can do this. Hence the Scriptures declare, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

And thus does Jesus Christ stand preeminently forth, among all on Earth and all in heaven, as the Friend we all need. To have the witness of the Spirit that Christ loves us and that we love Him, to realize the blessedness of the life that is hid with Christ in God, by the conscious "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) is the very richest of heaven's boons.

We make progress in the hidden life to the degree that we learn to live upon the friendship of Christ. We are encouraged to bring all our wants to Him and to expect sympathy and full supply from the fact that He has himself personally felt them.

Are we bereaved? So was He. Are we poor? So was He. Are our efforts to do good thwarted by the unbelief and opposition of men? So were His. Are we spoken against? So was He. Are we tempted by the adversary? So was He. Are we sometimes grieved by the

unfaithfulness of
professing Christians? So was He. His deepest wounds were
inflicted in
the house of His friends.

There is no trial to which He is a stranger, no sorrow He
has not felt. We should then feel the assurance of His
sympathy, succor
and support at all times. To trust Him in prosperity requires
only a
little faith; it is walking mostly by sight.

But to rest finally in His friendship—to feel that He is
all our salvation and all our desire, when all things seem to
be
against us—this is the faith that carried the martyrs to
glory.

I would then earnestly invoke the reader to make it his
first object to secure and to cultivate the friendship of
Christ. Part
with all for this, like the merchant “when he had found one
pearl of
great price” (Matt. 13:46).

Let there be no delay; do it now. What Christ demands of
you as the terms of His friendship is that you trust in Him
alone for
salvation, renouncing every sin, and henceforth prize His
friendship
above everything else. This is reasonable and right, and it
must be
done, or you will perish in your sins.

If you will not accept Christ as the Friend you need to
save and bless you, if you will not love and trust Him, I know
not to
whom you can go. Though an angel from heaven preach any other,

let him
be accursed.

There is no other; you need no other. Then concentrate at once on Him all your desires and expectations, all your faith and hope;
and, from this time, let it be your highest aim to enjoy His friendship
and promote His glory.

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