

A Friend's Love

Scripture Text: John 15:12-17

Introduction

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. It is a day for many to have cook outs and spend time with family and friends. But, it is really a time for us to remember those who gave all they had for us to have our freedom. That does not mean just giving up their freedom to serve or giving up some material possessions for us to have something. Many gave their very lives for us to have the freedom and security we enjoy. As followers of Jesus Christ, we ought to be able to relate to this. Our faith is based on Jesus giving everything He had so that we would have freedom. Our freedom is not from a human dictator or some oppressive government. Our freedom is from sin and death. Jesus gave all so that we would be free from sin and its deadly consequences. Jesus gave His life to give us freedom because God loved us so much. In this passage, we see a commandment to love, a specific category of love, a companionship resulting from that love, and a charge to produce something out of the love we have for Jesus and for each other.

The Commandment to Love

Love is the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples. Jesus said that if you are His disciple, it will be demonstrated by a love for each other. This should not be hard to believe. Throughout scripture, we are reminded of the importance of love. God devoted an entire chapter in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians about love. In this passage, Jesus commanded His disciples to love. In fact, this commandment was so important, not that anything Jesus said was not important, but Jesus said it twice here. Perhaps He wanted us to really pay attention to this. Look at the following two verses.

John 15:12 *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

John 15:17 *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

This section of John's Gospel account is wrapped in a commandment to love one another. The opening and concluding statements are intended to be bookends that hold together the statements between them. Jesus' command to love others was not new. In fact, He mentioned it earlier in the Gospel According to John. Jesus had also declared earlier the two greatest commandments: *love God and love others*. Therefore, to love others was not a new command, but there was something new about the way Jesus described this love. The newness of this command was found in the way this love was to be expressed. Jesus' disciples were to love one another *just as* Jesus had loved them. We are to love each other *just as* Jesus has loved us.

There are people in God's church who either do not love each other or at least do not demonstrate that love to one another. How is that possible? How do we follow Jesus, who loved us so much to die for us, and then disobey Him by refusing to love others?

How do we follow Jesus and refuse to obey this most important commandment from our Lord? We must love one another *as* Jesus loves us. Jesus is the example we must follow! In light of Jesus' subsequent death, *just as* implies a love that is willing to lay down one's life for another, which brings us to the next verse.

The Category of Love

There are different categories of love. For instance, the love that a soldier has for his country is different from the love he may have for individuals. The love that you may have for a friend will be different from the love you have for your spouse. Likewise, the love you have for your spouse will be different from the love you have for your children. What is the love that Jesus was commanding His disciples to have? It is a love that He had for them. It is a sacrificial love. It is a love that is willing to lay our lives down for others. The model for this type of love is Jesus, who gave His life so that we would not have to give up our lives. Look at the following verse.

John 15:13 *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

The brave men and women who serve in the military love their country so much that they are willing to die for it. These brave individuals, along with police officers, firemen and other public servants, put their lives on the line to protect the rest of us. Jesus said that there is no greater love than to die for one's friends. Some object to Jesus saying that this is the *greatest love*, to lay your life down for a friend. They say that surely a greater love is to die for your enemies. Jesus is not setting out a comparison between love for friends and love for enemies. In this context, Jesus is addressing His friends, but before becoming His friends, they were enemies of God, just like every person who is separated from God because of sin. There is no love greater than that of one who lays down his life for others. Anything else must be less. This is the supreme test of love. This category of love refers primarily to the love Jesus demonstrated on the cross. Jesus gave His life for His friends to live.

If we love, in the sense in which Jesus loves us, we need no other rule. This love gives, and it gives everything. Sacrificial love like this is putting our own desires aside. This love means denying ourselves for the sake of others. How much do you love other people? Are you willing to put aside your own desires for the sake of others? How much do you love Jesus? Are you willing to lay aside your own desire for His will to be done? How much do you love each other? How much do you love the church? Will you put aside your own desires to see something that you do not necessary want to happen? That is a sacrificial love and it is a love we ought to have. The love we ought to have is a love that says "Thy will be done" and "Do whatever you want, Lord", without any ifs, ands, or buts. Do you love the Lord like that?

Having Companionship with Jesus

Knowing that Jesus loves you and commands you to love others, what is your relationship with Jesus like? Do you have a relationship with Jesus? Do you know Him personally and do you have an intimate relationship with Him? It is common to refer to Jesus as Lord and Savior. That is correct, in fact, we are told to confess Christ as Lord to receive salvation (Romans 10:9). Something happens, however, when we confess Christ as Lord. Our relationship with Jesus changes. Look at the following verses.

John 15:14-15 ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

When we confess Jesus as Lord, we become His friends. What does this imply? To be friends of Jesus implies an extraordinary level of personal interaction with the One who is also the eternal, omnipotent Creator of the universe. This is a special privilege. In the Old Testament, only Abraham and by implication Moses were called “friends of God.” Here Jesus extends this privilege to all obedient believers. This obedience is not what *makes* them friends, though. It is what *characterizes* His friends. The true test of friendship with Christ is obedience. Once again obedience is the test of discipleship. The friends of Jesus are those who habitually obey him. What did Jesus command here? He commanded His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. Therefore, we show our friendship with Christ by demonstrating sacrificial love to one another. It is not for a servant to know the purposes of His master. His task is simply to do what he is told. But this is not the pattern of relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus has called us “friends.” He has kept nothing back from us. He has revealed to us all that the Father has made known to Him. Jesus is still Lord of all, but the relationship has been altered for His disciples.

A Charge to Bear Fruit

Having this special relationship with Jesus, what does it mean for us? In other words, why does God save people? Why did Jesus die for you? Some think of their salvation as just a forgiveness of sin and a privilege to live forever in heaven. Indeed, those are true and important aspects of our salvation; however, Jesus revealed in this passage a different reason for having a right relationship with God. It has to do with being productive. Look at the following verse.

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

That you should go and bear fruit implies that the purpose of Christ’s *befriending* people is not merely that their sins be forgiven and they have eternal life, but also that their lives be fruitful and productive in fulfilling God’s purposes. The first thing we ought to realize about our relationship with Jesus is who initiated it. The relationship we have with Jesus does not happen because we chose it. Based on this passage, it was given

to us because we were chosen by Jesus. The second thing we should notice about our friendship with Jesus is why He chose us to be His friends. The why is important! Jesus chose us to be His friends so that we would bear fruit for Him. God calls us into fellowship with Him in order to produce something. It is to spread the good news of salvation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to others.

This verse is tied to an earlier statement in this chapter where Jesus said that He is the True Vine and we must abide in Him. We can only bear fruit while abiding, remaining in Jesus. Branches cannot bear fruit apart from the vine. If you cut a branch from the vine, which supports it and gives it sustenance, the branch will not only cease to bear fruit, it will die. So it is with the church. If a church ceases to remain in Christ, it too will cease to bear fruit and it will die. Therefore, are we abiding in Christ? Are we remaining in Him, surrendering to Him, drawing every thing in life from Jesus? We will only be fruitful if we remain in Jesus. We will not be productive by our own power.

Notice in this passage the emphasis on *going* and *bearing* fruit. You will not reap spiritual rewards by remaining complacent, by sitting still, by doing nothing, by not serving Jesus. The emphasis on *going* and *bearing* fruit probably means fruit that emerges from being on mission for Jesus. This fruit comes from being sent by Jesus to share the Gospel. In short, this fruit is new converts. One purpose of becoming a friend of Jesus is to share the Gospel of love with others — *fruit that will last*. Again, Jesus' statement about bearing fruit should be understood in the context of His command to love one another. If we truly love Jesus and each other, we will be willing to do whatever it takes to see more people come to know Jesus and to see God's church expand and impact the world around us. What will it take for us to bear fruit? What do we need to give up or to do to see God's church bearing fruit?

Conclusion

In closing, we see in this passage the importance of love. Jesus commanded us to love each other. We also see the specific kind of love we ought to have. It is a sacrificial love that is willing to die for others, just as Jesus died for us. We also see the effect of God's love for us in that we are now friends of Jesus. And lastly, we see the purpose of loving like Jesus and becoming His friends. It is to bear fruit for Him, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him. It is making disciples for Jesus. This is a friend's love. It is obeying Jesus to love one another just as He loved us and sharing the message of hope and love with others. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!