

## I Have Called You Friends

by Ward Fenley

"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."—John 15:15

When I first began reading the Bible in my teens, this passage struck me as somewhat contradictory to other passages, even in the New Testament, in which God's people are called servants. Then, as I began to become more acquainted with certain phrases, and theological and practical concepts, it was evident that we are encouraged to serve (worship) the God we know. While God's servants prior to the advent of Messiah were His enemies; since the redemptive work of Christ, His people are servants who are His friends. There is a distinguishing factor in this verse which sets apart the friend from the mere enemy/servant. Jesus says, "the servant does not know what his lord does;" but in contrast, "I have called you friends; for *all* things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Obviously this is not speaking of the omniscience of Jesus but instead is speaking about the unfolding of the Father by Jesus Christ:

John 1:10,18 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not...No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

When we carefully look at these two passages side by side, we see that Jesus equates friendship with God with knowing God. That is, Christ has revealed all things about the Father to His people. At this point, if *all* things is the same as knowing or being the friend of God, how can we be sure we are God's friends? What must we know? To what does "all things" refer? All theological concepts? All the names of Jesus? What does it mean to have all things revealed or made known to us? Perhaps we have literalized certain passages, including references to "all things," to the destruction of a very significant redemptive aspect concerning God and His people. Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Eternal life is knowing God. Knowing God is having all things revealed to us. Having all things revealed to us is being the friends of God. Being the friends of God is knowing God. What many have done is made salvation very difficult by literalizing certain terms. For example, many have dangerously assumed that obtaining eternal life by keeping His commandments refers to obeying the law of God. They might use the following passage to prove this:

John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 15:10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John quoted Jesus as saying this. It is clear that keeping His commandments is what is necessary to remain in His love. It is also very clear that one who keeps His commandments will have the privilege of having Jesus Christ *manifest* (made known)

to *him*. Jesus said this of His friends:

John 15:14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Jesus said, "You are my friends *if* you do *whatsoever* I command you. The "if" and the "whatsoever" can be disheartening at best and frightening at worst if we are not careful to determine the meaning Jesus intends. This is where we briefly turn to Paul to find a clear explanation of the righteousness of the law being fulfilled (past tense) in us who "walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (4) That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

So then, we must do "whatsoever" He commands us if we are to be His friends; we must "keep" His commandments to remain in His love—a daunting task to say the least, and certainly a hopeless one if all these things are taken literally. But what if we take them *contextually literally*? Is it possible that each of these contexts must be guided by John's knowledge of the words of Jesus? Most new believers and students of the Bible run to Paul for comfort when they find themselves in disobedience: "For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Yet, if by "commandments" Jesus is referring to obedience to the law of Moses, then not only do we have a contradiction, we also have to pick whom we will believe. Paul or Jesus? Thankfully, John unites the two. He clarifies Christ's meaning when he uses the word "commandments":

1 John 3:22-24 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. (23) And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. (24) And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

John is very clear in communicating to us that "keeping His commandments" is believing on His Son and loving one another. The first is easy, by the grace of God. After all, faith is a gift, and it is simply trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from sin. The second is the logical outgrowth of that faith: that is, if Christ loved us and cleansed us and forgave us when we confessed our sin, we love others and *cleanse* them when they confess their faults to us. By *cleanse* I do not mean in the redemptive way that Christ has cleansed them. Rather, it is more of a conscience issue. By forgiving them, we ensure that their conscience is confident that they are restored in our sight. That is, we become friends. Love covers a multitude of sins. Just as Christ covered our sins, so we cover each others "sins" or offenses.

We know we dwell in him and he dwells in us when we believe and love one another. We know that He abides in us or loves us when we believe in Him and love one another. It is fairly friendly to dwell with someone, let alone dwell *in* them. God does not merely dwell with us. He also dwells in us. We are His friends. Being His friends is not contingent upon keeping the Mosaic law or the moral code. Being His friends is

contingent upon faith in Him. Here is the friendship context in John:

John 15:12-17 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (14) Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (15) 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. (16) Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (17) These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Love is the bond of perfection (Colossians 3:14). It is the demonstration of mercy and grace and forgiveness. It is the evidence of friendship, and that we know each other. Through mercy triumphing over judgment, it is evident that we are friends to each other and that there is no separation or barrier. We remain with each other and in each other.

John 6:56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

And of course, we are all one in Christ, as Paul tells us in Galatians 3. We are one in Him and one in each other. We are friends through faith in, and love for, God. His redemptive work brings about the faith which He gives to those He has chosen to have as friends. We were enemies and were separated from the Father:

Colossians 1:21-22 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled (22) In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight:

Just as we are friends of God and no longer enemies (that is, Christ has reconciled us through His death to be holy and blameless before Him), so also we are friends of each other by viewing each other as holy and blameless. When we know each other and God, we are friends of each other and God. Jesus Christ has manifested all things to us. That is, through faith, all things are manifested to us. In other words, when we love and believe Christ for the forgiveness of sins, He considers that the equivalent of having all things made known to us and thus we are the friends of God. Jesus said, "all things I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." This fascinating truth can only be realized and internalized when we understand the meaning of friendship with God, and stop imposing an unhealthy literalism to verses which use words like "all" and "every". Even the Great Commission becomes clearer with this approach:

Matthew 28:19-20 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

The apostles taught their hearers to "observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

There is that "whatsoever" again in context with "all things". We remember:

John 15:14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

In Matthew Jesus was simply saying: "Teach people to believe in Me and love each other." Though these tasks take the grace of God, nevertheless, it is much simpler than what many have made the Great Commission out to be. Besides, what kind of friendship would it be if Christ said, "follow the Mosaic law in a literal, hard-line, whatsoever fashion and then and *only then* will you be My friends? That wouldn't bring the rest Jesus promised those who come to Him:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

And isn't it interesting that the verse just prior to verse 28 brings us back to this same theme of knowing God:

Matthew 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

Those to whom God has chosen to *reveal the Son*: "Neither does any man know the Father except the son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him." Very similar to:

John 15:15 For all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

Hopefully it is evident that "all things" refers to knowing God and becoming His friend through faith. God foresaw this friendship and was (and is) that Person of whom it is spoken, "Greater love hath no man than this, than a man lay down His life for His friends...You are My friends (that is, I have paid the penalty for sin for you) if you whatsoever I command you (that is, believe on Me and love my other friends).