

RENDER OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

15 Just as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you; remain in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. 12My commandment is that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13No one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. 14You are my friends, if you do the things I command you. 15I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—so that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name he may give you. 17My commandment is that you love one another. (Jn. 15:9-17)

Introduction

There was a popular song entitled, "That's What Friends Are For." The words of the re-occurring refrain proclaimed:

You can count on me, for sure.
In good times, in bad times,
I'll be on your side forevermore;
'Cause that's what friends are for.

Those words are a very fit description of Christ's commitment to us—a very fit description of His expression of friendship to us. But are those words also a fit description of our commitment to Christ? Are they a fit description of our expression of friendship to Him?

The old familiar hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," is one of our favorites. Here we have a hymn praising Jesus for His loyal friendship to us: "What a Friend we have in Jesus! Can we find a friend so faithful?" But can the roles be reversed? Can Jesus testify the same about us?

We rejoice and take great comfort in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ offers His friendship to us:

I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (Jn. 15:15)

But do we appreciate the fact that the Lord Jesus also expects and demands that we reciprocate by offering our friendship and commitment to Him in return? *"You are my friends, if you do the things I command you"* (Jn. 15:14.)

Can true friendship ever be a one-way street? Is there not always the need for mutual commitment and self-giving?

James Small understood this correctly when he wrote these words:

I've found a Friend, O such a Friend!
He bled, He died, to save me;
And not alone the gift of life,
But His own self He gave me!
Nothing that I have my own I'll call,
I'll hold it for the Giver,
My heart, my strength, my life, my all
Are His, and His forever.

Jesus declares, *"You are my friends, if you do the things I command you."* If we would maintain an intimate relationship of friendship with Christ, we must render obedience unto Him.

I. Let Us Render Obedience to Christ, Because This is Our Covenant Responsibility

In verse 9a our Lord declares that His love for each of His disciples is patterned after the Father's love for Him: *"Just as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you."* Scripture indicates that this is a self-revealing, self-sharing love: *"the Father loves the Son and [therefore] shows him everything that he is doing"* (Jn. 5:20a); *"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands"* (Jn. 3:35.) In the same way, Jesus loves His disciples: *"I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father"* (Jn. 15:15b.) In the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus testifies, *"To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne"* (Rev. 3:21.)

But now our Lord goes on in that same verse to declare that we as His disciples are commanded to *"remain"* (or, continue) in His love. We may also take note of Jude 20-21,

"... beloved, by building yourselves up on your most holy faith, and by praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life." (Jude 20-21)

Note that those whom Jude addresses as *"beloved"* (vs. 20) are exhorted to *"keep yourselves in the love of God"* (vs. 21.) The means of doing so as prescribed in Jude 20-21 include the following: *"building yourselves up on your most holy faith"* and *"praying in [or, by] the Holy Spirit."* We are to build the "superstructure" of the

Christian life upon the “foundation” of our faith in Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Peter exhorts the church:

His divine power has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness by the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and virtue ... ⁵Now, for this very reason, giving all your effort, add virtue to your faith, and add knowledge to virtue, ⁶and add self-control to knowledge, and add perseverance to self-control, and add godliness to perseverance, ⁷and add brotherly affection to godliness, and add love to brotherly affection. (2 Pet. 1:3,5-7)

Furthermore, we are to be engaged in prayer, praying in communion with the Holy Spirit (as He reveals His mind and will to us in the Bible) and praying in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind, *“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know for what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express”* (Rom. 8:26.)

In addition to building upon the “foundation” of our faith in Jesus Christ and praying in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, we are also called to *“look [or, wait] for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.”* That is to say, we are to be found anticipating the return of Christ and living our present lives in the light of that great day—living our lives from the perspective of Christ’s return, not from the perspective of merely earthly goals and ambitions, or simply, mundane day to day existence.

John 15:10 more explicitly declares that, as disciples, we are to remain in Christ’s love by keeping Christ’s commandments: *“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.”* Obedience does not bring us into the covenant of grace and into citizenship in the kingdom of God, as Jesus testifies in John 15:16, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”* Obedience, however, is the obligation of the covenant, as is indicated, for instance, in Psalm 103:17-18,

But the lovingkindness of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him, and his righteousness is with their children’s children; ¹⁸with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. (Psl. 103:17-18)

As the Apostle Paul points out, obedience is the obligation of citizenship in the kingdom of God:

It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast. ¹⁰We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

Our Lord goes on to explain that the way of obedience is precisely the means by which He Himself continues to remain in His Father's love: *"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love"* (Jn. 15:10.) Christ wants us to know that what He requires of us is not anything more than what He Himself renders to His Father in heaven: this is the obligation of the covenant, the obligation of a faithful child of God.

Let us render obedience to Christ, because such is our covenant obligation. The Lord Jesus graciously supplies us with all we need to fulfill this obligation; namely, the provision of His Holy Spirit and His grace: *"His divine power has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness by the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and virtue"* (2 Pet. 1:3.)

II. Render Obedience to Christ, Because It is the Source of Joy

Our Lord Jesus commands us to render obedience to Him because such obedience is a source of joy to Him: *"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you"* (vs. 11a.) When Jesus speaks of His joy being in us He is referring to the fact that our obedience brings joy to Him—faithful, obedient disciples are a source of joy to Christ.

Our Lord furthermore commands us to render obedience to Him because such obedience is also a source of joy to us: *"I have told you these things so that ... your joy may be complete"* (vs. 11b.) True joy and happiness will always elude us until we realize that they are the by-products of obedience to Christ. The pathway of obedience leads to joy, as the Apostle Paul informs the church at Rome: *"the kingdom of God is ... a matter ... of righteousness, peace and joy by the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17.) Note that peace and joy succeed righteousness and are the result of it. The Book of Hebrews presents the Lord Jesus Himself as an example:

Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)

The pathway of obedience may entail "hacking" our way through "the underbrush" of trial and temptation, but that path always leads to a paradise of divine joy. Conversely, the pathway of disobedience eventually leads to misery: *"the way of the transgressor is hard"* (Prov. 13:15b.) By way of illustration: the "juicy raspberries" of sin look so tempting and desirable, but as we reach for them we lose our balance and tumble into an awful "briar patch."

Let us render obedience to Christ, because it is the source of joy—the life of obedience is a source of joy to Christ our Savior and it also proves to be a source of joy to us.

III. Render Obedience to Christ, By Practicing Brotherly Love

In the previous verses our Lord has spoken of His love for us as His disciples and the way in which we are to exhibit a reciprocal love for Him. Now in verses 12-15 He focuses our attention upon one specific commandment, one specific way we are to render obedience to Him, the commandment to practice brotherly love: *"My commandment is that you love one another, just as I have loved you"* (Jn. 15:12.)

This commandment has been a central concern of our Lord throughout this final evening together with His disciples—it was first introduced in John 13:31-35,

After [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, Now the Son of man shall be glorified, and God shall be glorified in him. ³²God shall glorify him with himself, and shall glorify him [very soon]. ³³Little children, I will be with you for only a little while longer. You will miss me; but what I told the Jews, I now tell you, Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. ³⁵All men shall know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. (Jn. 13:31-35)

Now He again come back to it; it is a central concern of Christ for His church.

What does this brotherly love look like? What form does it take? It is to be patterned after our Lord's own love for us: *"My commandment is that you love one another, just as I have loved you"* (vs. 12.) Our Lord's love for us is first of all a sacrificial love: *"No one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends"* (vs. 13.) Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ may mean the sacrifice of our time, our comfort, our personal interests, plans and desires, our resources:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others higher than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ may mean the sacrifice of our pride, our wounded spirit, our sense of moral indignation against offenses perpetrated against us:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the LORD forgave you. (Col. 3:12-13)

Secondly, our Lord's love for us is the intimate love of friendship:

I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (Jn. 15:15)

We cannot necessarily become intimate friends with all the members of Christ's body throughout the world, or even in one given place. But we can and should develop close and caring friendships with some of them—and we should stand ready to befriend each and any one of them.

The Book of Proverbs reveals to us some of the characteristics of a true friend. From Proverbs we learn that a true friend is one that demonstrates commitment. *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Prov. 17:17.) Consider the example of Jonathan and David. Jonathan exhibited his friendship for David even in the face of the evil wrath of his father and despite the prospect of losing the throne of Israel:

Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself ... ³And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. (1 Sam. 18:1,3-4)

Consider David's eulogy for Jonathan: *"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women"* (2 Sam. 1:26.)

A time of adversity is when you really need a friend, and that is when you discover who will prove himself to be a true friend. Cherish the friend who demonstrates true commitment.

Secondly, a true friend is one that is willing to confront us with godly counsel. *"An open rebuke is better than love that is hidden. ⁶The wounds inflicted by a friend are given in faithfulness, but the kisses of an enemy are profuse"* (Prov. 27:5-6.)

The *"wounds"* inflicted by a friend are referring to the words of rebuke spoken by a true friend for your well-being. Here is the mark by which to gauge a true friend: Does he love you enough to rebuke you when you are in the wrong? Such rebuke demonstrates his commitment to God and his commitment to you.

Conversely, beware of flattery, for it is deceitful. Such words conceal an ulterior motive: *"A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet"* (Prov. 29:5.) Such words reveal an uncommitted heart: *"the kisses of an enemy are profuse"* (Prov. 27:6;) an enemy may display a great show of affection and affirmation, but in fact his heart is not for you.

What counsel does Scripture give about administering and receiving a rebuke? In giving a rebuke we are to *"speak the truth in love"* (Eph. 4:15.) By the grace of God, we are also to be ready and willing to receive a sincere and well-meant rebuke; may we be like the Psalmist: *"Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it"* (Psl. 141:5a.)

In addition to Proverbs 27:5-6, we may also take note of Proverbs 27:17, *"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the expression of his friend."* *"Iron sharpens iron;"* when you scrape iron against iron you take off the dullness and make it razor sharp. Likewise, as a man interacts with his friend—exchanging insights, receiving counsel and rebuke when necessary, being challenged by his godly example—the man's *"expression,"* literally, his *"countenance,"* is sharpened. Note: The *"countenance"* refers to the face and its expression as it reveals the mood and character of the person.

Do you have a friend who provokes you in the way described in Hebrews 10:24? We read there, *"Let us consider how we may provoke one another to love and good deeds."* If so, thank God for him; and may the LORD make us to be such a friend to fellow Christians.

Let us render obedience to Christ, by practicing brotherly love among all those who profess the name of Christ. *"My commandment is that you love one another"* (Jn. 15:17.)

Conclusion

Jesus declares, *"You are my friends, if you do the things I command you"* (Jn. 15:14.) If we would maintain an intimate relationship of friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we must render obedience to Him.

We must do so because it is our covenant responsibility, and because it is a source of joy for our Lord and for ourselves.

One way in particular in which we must do so is by practicing brotherly love towards fellow believers who bear the name of Christ our Savior.