



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

July 2020

“I’LL BE A FRIEND TO JESUS”

Those words are the title of a spiritual song with which many of us are quite familiar. The words of the song’s chorus are:

I’ll be a friend to Jesus,
My life for Him I’ll spend;
I’ll be a friend to Jesus,
Until my years shall end. [Public Domain, words
by Johnson Oatman, Jr., music by John W. Dennis].

Do you think it is even possible to be the Lord’s friend? Abraham was. Jehovah called him “*Abraham My friend*” (Isaiah 41:8), and in James 2:23 he is described as “*the friend of God.*” In James 2, we are reminded that Abraham believed God, submitted to His will, and was willing to sacrifice his son for Him. By showing such devotion, he was counted as the Lord’s friend.

Under the new covenant, is it really possible to be Jesus’ friend? It certainly is, but let us observe first that not every single person in the world is His friend. Jesus had adversaries when He lived on earth (Luke 13:17), and today there still are those who openly oppose Him and His teaching. But what about a person who wants to be non-committal? He does not openly embrace the Christ, yet he does not count himself as His opponent, either. The Master declared, “*He who is not with Me is against Me . . .*” (Matthew 12:30), so there can be no neutral ground. Either one *is* Jesus’ friend (he is with Him) or he is *not* His friend (he is against Him).

In John 15:13-15, we read a portion of Jesus’ message about friendship. As He spoke to the apostles about their need to love one another as He had loved them, He said, “*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends*” (15:13). Friends sacrifice for each other, being willing, if need be, to give their lives on behalf of one another. Jesus did that.

Jesus continued: “*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*” (15:14). According to this statement of our Lord, there is a condition of being His friend. What is it? To do whatever He commands. Biblically speaking, there is no way to be a genuine friend of God’s Son without obeying His instructions.

Look at Jesus’ next declaration about friends that is recorded in John 15: “*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you*” (15:15). The idea is not that they *ceased* being His servants, but rather now they *are more than* servants . . . they are His friends, too. It is similar to Onesimus’ scenario. When Paul sent him back to Philemon, he still was a bondservant, but since he had become a Christian, he was *more than* a servant. He now was a brother, too (Philemon 16). Remember, those who have Jesus as their Lord obey Him (Luke 6:46). Ditto for His friends. In fact, His friends and His servants are the same people.

The Bible says, “*A friend loves at all times . . .*” (Proverbs 17:17). That is true in the friendship between two humans, and it also is true in how Jesus’ friends treat Him . . . they love Him at all times. If one is a friend of Jesus, his love for the Master is continuous, unconditional, and unending. As we pledge in the words of the old song, “I’ll be a friend to Jesus, until my years shall end.”

The evening before Jesus went to the cross, some of His friends let Him down. One of them (Judas Iscariot) betrayed Him. One of them (Simon Peter) denied Him three times. That night the twelve apostles did the unthinkable when they all forsook Him (Matthew 26:56). In Jesus’ hour of trial, a number of His friends did not act like true friends, did they? Is our loyalty to Jesus any better than what the apostles showed that fateful night? Are we big-talkers and put on an appearance of being strong when we are with God’s people, but act nothing like a real friend of Jesus when we are with unbelievers, weak members, or by ourselves?

You and I have got to make a choice: are we “in” or “out?” Either our loyalty is to Master Jesus or else it is to someone or something else. Jesus’ friends obey Him. By one’s initial obedience to the gospel, the Lord adds Him to His family, the church (Acts 2:47). After that, Jesus keeps on saving His friends as they obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Are You a friend to Jesus?

-- Roger D. Campbell

PARENTING PRINCIPLES FROM PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs is part of the Old Testament, and we know that Jesus took away the first covenant (Hebrews 10:9). However, there are timeless principles in the book of Proverbs that are appropriate for folks of every generation to consider and heed.

That certainly is true when it comes to what we learn about parenting in the book of Proverbs. The Bible says, “*My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves, He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights*” (Proverbs 3:11,12). Fact: God chastens/disciplines/corrects those whom He loves. Fact: when the Lord does that, He is doing what an earthly father does when he loves his son . . . he corrects/disciplines him. It is clear that the Lord expects parents to discipline their kids.

The Bible’s message is, “*Do not withhold correction from a child*” (Proverbs 23:13). Again, according to God’s word, which is the correct action: (1) to correct/discipline a child or (2) *not* to correct him? God says to correct/discipline him.

But, what if? What if parents choose not to discipline their kids? Do you really want to know what the Bible says? Here it is: “*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*” (Proverbs 13:24). One can disregard that instruction if he so chooses, but ignoring it, denying it, or arguing against it will not change what God says. Parents who love their kids discipline them. True, it is possible for a parent to discipline a child without truly loving him, but true love demands discipline. Be clear about this distinction: the Lord sanctions *disciplining* children, not *abusing* them.

A number of years ago, after the conclusion of a lesson I presented about disciplining children, a father excitedly told me, “Brother, I sure do like that passage in Proverbs that you used.” We should love *all* Bible verses, not because they support what we want to hear, but because they are from God.

What do we learn in the book of Proverbs about the benefits of child discipline? Discipline drives foolishness out of a child’s heart, from which his actions and speech flow: “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him*” (Proverbs 22:15).

Another benefit of disciplining kids is it delivers a child from an unhappy ending: “*You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell*” (Proverbs 23:14).

Third, administering discipline to a kid helps him gain wisdom, as it is written, “*The rod and rebuke*

give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (29:15). Right-thinking parents understand that the long-term purpose of disciplining their kids is to help them develop the self-control/self-discipline to make good decisions on their own.

An additional benefit of child discipline is it helps a parent’s state of mind. That is not the top priority in administering discipline, but it is a consequence of it: “*Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul*” (Proverbs 29:17).

Here are some thoughts about a few practical aspects of parents disciplining their children:

(1) Be completely certain that the child has done wrong before rebuking/disciplining him.

(2) Avoid disciplining children while angry . . . when mad, a parent may say or do things that he/she will regret later on. Does that sound familiar?

(3) Understand the personality/character of each child. What works as effective discipline with one child may not be the most effective method with another one, and vice versa.

(4) As much as the kids are able to understand, explain to them the reason for the discipline.

(5) Be consistent in administering discipline. This one is challenging. Be consistent with each individual child – if an action gets punished the first time, but not the 2nd time or 3rd time, but it is punished again the 4th time around, the child will be confused, not knowing what is unacceptable and what is not. Also, be consistent from child to child. If child #1 does it and gets punished, but child #2 goes unpunished despite making the same mistake, the partiality shown will create resentment. In addition, be consistent from parent to parent. If a child gets punished for his behavior when mom is around, but does the same thing in front of dad and there are no repercussions, this is sending the wrong message to the child. Parents need to communicate, cooperate, and make sure they are on the same page in all discipline matters.

(6) Parents need to be credible. If a child commits an offence and is told that he will receive some type of punishment for his misbehavior, then that discipline needs to come. Otherwise, how much stock will a child place in what their father or mother says?

Are there rules at school that have to be obeyed? Are there rules/laws in society that have to be obeyed? Of course. Children first need to learn respect for authority/rules at home. The book of Proverbs gives some great principles about disciplining kids. Parents who take them to heart are a blessing to their children.

-- Roger D. Campbell

ARE YOU AN ENCOURAGER?

Barnabas was. His original name was Joses. It was the apostles of Jesus who saw his character and called him “Barnabas,” meaning “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). At a later time, when the church in Jerusalem learned that the gospel had gone to Antioch of Syria, the brethren sent Barnabas there. What did he do after he arrived? No surprise: he “*encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord*” (Acts 11:23). The early church was blessed to have Barnabas as one of its encouragers!

Jonathan, King Saul’s son, was an encourager, too. When his good friend, David, was facing a troubling time in his life, Jonathan “*arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, ‘Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel . . .’*” (1 Samuel 23:16,17). By word and deed, Jonathan encouraged David to be strong in the Lord.

What about Shechaniah? That man also was an encourager. Who in the world is that? He was a Jewish man who lived in the days of Ezra. After Ezra led a group of Jews back to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, it was discovered that a number of Jewish men, in violation of the law of Moses, had married foreign wives. Shechaniah told Ezra, “*We have trespassed against our God . . . Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God . . . Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it*” (Ezra 10:2-4). Shechaniah exhorted Ezra to step up and do the right thing, pledging to be supportive of him. Ezra put the encouraging words of Shechaniah into practice, and it was a blessing to God’s people.

Jesus was a great encourager. In the same conversation in which He foretold that Peter would betray Him later that night, our Lord told His apostle, “*Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*” (Luke 22:31,32). Jesus knew Simon had his faults, but He wanted him to know that He had confidence in him and still planned to use him in His work. Peter wept bitterly after he betrayed the Master (Luke 22:62), but he must have been greatly encouraged each time he recalled the encouraging words Jesus spoke to him.

What kind of people need encouragement? Our first instinct might be to say, “People who are going through a rough time need to be encouraged.” They certainly do! When a friend is facing serious challenges in his marriage, he needs encouragement.

When my child is disappointed because he did not do as well as he thought he would on his exams, he needs to hear some encouraging words. When a brother or sister in the Christ has lost a spouse or some other loved one, they need to be encouraged. And, yes, when one is struggling in his commitment to the Lord and is not regular in assembling with the saints, he needs encouragement.

But what about those Christians who are not showing outward signs of being weary or “down” due to some struggle in life? They need to be encouraged, too! Shepherds of the flock need to hear words of encouragement. Sadly, in many cases a congregation’s overseers hear from the flock only when someone is upset about something. Why not go to your elders and tell them how much you appreciate their labors and their concern for your soul’s well-being?

Who else needs to be encouraged? Deacons do. So do Bible class teachers, those who work to prepare the Lord’s Supper, those who help clean the church’s facilities, and gospel preachers. Parents need to hear words of encouragement, as do their children. Widows and widowers need to be encouraged, as do bachelors and bachelorettes. Youth need encouragement, as do middle-aged, and elderly folks. New Christians and those who have been faithful members “forever” need to be encouraged. Yes, there are times when *everyone* needs some type of encouragement.

Are *you* an encourager? You need to be! In the church today, we need encouragers like Jonathan and Barnabas. In order to encourage others, one does not have to be “qualified” with a high level of education, a high income, or lots of experience. Some of the ones who make us smile and make us feel good about ourselves are small children. If a person has a heart like Jesus and truly cares about others (Philippians 2:3-5), he/she can be an encourager.

Some saints of God encourage others by sending texts or e-mails. Some speak words of encouragement in a phone call. Others send short notes in a card or old-fashioned letter. Some encouragers pay visits to those who are confined at home. There also are those who tell others face-to-face that they have been praying for them. Find a way that works for you and make it a part of your weekly routine to do something to help brighten someone else’s day.

What if nobody notices that we are trying to be an encourager, and what if no one ever expresses their appreciation for what we are doing? Keep on encouraging! We do it because we want to help lift someone’s spirits, not to receive men’s praises, right?

-- Roger D. Campbell

John 21:15-23 — Some Personal Duties for Peter after Jesus Left This World

After He rose from the dead, our Lord remained on the earth for forty days (Acts 1:3). During those forty days, He often appeared to His followers. One of those post-resurrection appearances is recorded in John 21, where it is written that seven of Jesus' followers saw Him at the Sea of Tiberias.

After they had eaten breakfast, our Lord asked Simon three times if he loved Him (John 21:15-17). Peter had denied the Christ three times, and now He gives Peter three opportunities to express his love for Him. The whole conversation is fascinating, touching even on what would happen with Simon when he was an old man.

When a person is convinced that he/she soon will be leaving this world, if they give us instructions or make a request of us, those words stick in our mind. Let us look at this biblical text and see what expectations Jesus had for Simon Peter in the apostle's life after Jesus returned to heaven.

Feed – Jesus charged Peter, “*Feed My lambs . . . Tend My sheep . . . Feed My sheep*” (John 21:15-17). Jesus Himself is the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20). He is concerned about His sheep and wants them to be fed and tended. Without proper care and nutrition, sheep will struggle to survive.

Among humans, who is responsible for tending/feeding/shepherding the Lord's sheep? Obviously, in the first century Peter had a role in doing so. Jesus' words to him do not indicate that he was the highest ranked apostle. There was no such hierarchy. The apostles were of equal authority (Matthew 18:18), and Paul, who had great concern for all the local churches, was not a bit below the original twelve apostles (2 Corinthians 11:28; 12:11).

Other than the apostles, who else has the God-given duty to serve as shepherds of God's flock? Elders of the church, known as overseers/bishops and shepherds/pastors, have that responsibility (1 Peter 5:1-3). It is their role to care for, nourish, and protect every sheep under their watch (Hebrews 13:17).

Follow – Twice in that John 21 setting, we read that our Lord told Peter, “Follow Me” (21:19,22). At the point in time when Jesus said that to him, Peter already had been His disciple for a few years. It is clear that after one *begins* to follow Jesus, there is a need to *continue* following Him. Following the Son of God is a life-long commitment!

What does the word “Christian” mean? It means “a follower of Christ” [Thayer, word no. 5546 via e-Sword]. The Christ said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 10:27). Jesus' followers have this great assurance from Him:

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). When a person follows Jesus, He imitates Him (1 Peter 2:21) and obeys Him (Matthew 28:20). An unwillingness to do either of those things causes one to forfeit his relationship with the Good Shepherd. Following Jesus is serious business! Since one who follows the Christ is required to deny himself and take up His cross daily (Luke 9:23), it is obvious that one who still is in diapers is not yet able to be a Christian.

Glorify – Jesus informed Peter that the time would come when the apostle would be carried about against his wishes. John explains: “*This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God*” (John 21:19). Peter would glorify the Lord in death, indicating that he would be His loyal servant until the time of his departure.

Let us all be clear about this truth: no one can glorify God in death if they do not glorify Him in life. That is, the only way to be with the Lord in death is to be with Him while still alive. Jesus said that the Father is glorified when His disciples bear much fruit (John 15:8). Again, it is written that Christians are to “*do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). But what about if we are mistreated because of our commitment to the Lord? “*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter*” (1 Peter 4:16). We all need to learn to glorify God, not only when we sing spiritual songs of praise, but in our daily speech and action.

Focus on your own matters – After Jesus told Peter what would happen with him, when Peter saw the disciple whom Jesus loved, Peter asked, “*But, Lord, what about this man?*” (John 21:21). Jesus' answer was, “*If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow me*” (21:22). Yes, if Peter was going to be involved in taking care of the Christ's sheep, he would have to be concerned about people's needs. But, at the moment of Jesus' conversation with Simon, He wanted him to understand that his first concern should be to fulfill *his own* obligation to Jesus, not manage someone else's affairs. We cannot help others be what they need to be spiritually if we first do not have our own affairs in order.

Jesus was going away, but Peter's duties were not. What a privilege it is to live and work for our Savior!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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