

John 15:12-27

Introduction

This passage follows the teaching about the vine and the branches. All the time Jesus has in mind His impending departure. He has told the disciples to remain in Him and this will lead to fruitful service, answered prayers and joy. Now He gives them another warning because He knows they need teaching about what will happen when He goes. He speaks to them about the follower of Christ as the “friend of Christ”, and the “enemy of the world”.

The Christian as the friend of Christ

You are my friend (John 15:14). What a fantastic thing to say. The prince befriending the pauper has nothing on this. These poor, rebellious, stubborn, pigheaded fishermen are called “friends” by the Lord of glory. In the Old Testament, men of God were called servants. Abraham is the only one referred to as “friend” (Isaiah 41:8). But in the New Testament all of Christ’s disciples are called His friends, not just servants, followers, workers and soldiers. Such friendship was formed at Calvary where, out of the greatness of His love, He gave His life for His friends. **Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends** (John 15:13).

This friendship is made real and genuine on our part by obedience. **You are my friends if you do what I command** (John 15:14). So we are called into a closeness of relationship and intimacy with God which was impossible before Christ came. Brought into the inner circle. Aware of His secrets. **Everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you** (John 15:15).

In the ancient world a very select group in the royal courts were known as “Friends of the king”. At all times they had right of access to the king. He talked to them before he talked to his generals and statesmen. They had closest and most intimate connection with him, hence the right to come to him at any time.

So with God and us. God is not a figure afar off, and we are no mere slaves in court. Neither are we in the crowd who only get a glimpse of the king on state occasions. But He is our intimate friend. By His Word and His Holy Spirit He has shared His mind, opened His heart to us, revealed His plans and aims. He promises to hear our prayers. **Ask whatever you wish and it will be given you** (John 15:7).

Be encouraged to be familiar with Christ in prayer. Never say, “I have no friend to turn to”. Never be afraid to pour out all your heart to Him, and bare all your secrets. He is your friend. This word cheers us and gives us confidence in the Lord. He will not forsake us. He will stand by us and keep us to the end. No one is so strong and rich as the man of whom Christ says, “This is my friend”.

There is absolute rest for us here. Why need we feel solitary if He is our friend? Why do we fear if He is at our side? What is there in life that cannot be faced and indeed overcome if we have Him as a friend?

The Christian as an enemy of the world

And this is the other side of the coin. The world hated Jesus, and put Him on a cross. Therefore the world hates His disciples because they belong to Him and because they have been chosen out of the world. A servant is not greater than his master; therefore if the world persecuted Christ, it will persecute His followers. The reason is the world does not know God, i.e. the one who sent Jesus.

The “world” has various meanings. Basically it means society apart from God. God is irrelevant to the world. The world organizes its life, outlook, standards and values without reference to God, His will and law. Most people are of the world. That is why Christians find themselves in an entirely different camp when mixing and talking with people of the world. What we regard as wrong, the world regards as good. Our jewels are its tinsel, and its jewels are our tinsel. What we prize and value and regard as fundamental, the world passes by, as of little importance. The world is diametrically opposed to God, so we can expect opposition.

If we share Christ’s life, we will also share His fate, and we know how far the world was prepared to take opposition to Christ. Why this opposition? To begin on the surface, people always suspect those who are different and who behave and think differently. One of the commonest items today is the umbrella, but when John Hanway tried to introduce it into England and walked down a street with one, he was pelted with stones and dirt. The same fate met the founders of the Salvation Army and the Boy’s Brigade.

At a deeper level, the world does not know God. People might believe in His existence, but they do not know His grace, friendship, love, or submit to Him. People only do those things with heart when they are born again. At new birth, God becomes a reality, and we have a new attitude to Him. To someone not regenerated, in practical terms God is a nuisance who cuts across his or her selfish plans and aims. So those who love Him are similarly disliked.

Again, the world dislikes Christians because Christians’ lives are so often a condemnation of their own. People hate lives that show up their own, even if no words are spoken. It is dangerous to be different and have higher standards than the world – nowadays Christians can be persecuted for working too hard and too conscientiously and too long. Sometimes antagonism is masked. We are bound together with the world because of domestic ties or because we work together. We share many things on the surface – the same needs, same kind of work, same kind of cars and food. But this is just a thin film of externals covering fundamental differences.

The world’s outlook has been influenced by Christian standards since the time of Christ, and its conscience is, to a degree, influenced by Christian outlook. The world is prepared to acknowledge and respect goodness so far as it is convenient. But below the surface, we are a gulf apart. The world may not burn Christ at the stake, but their

treatment is still as vicious in other ways. It loves to expose faults in the Christian, laugh scornfully when a prominent man on Christ's side has failed.

The nominal Christian, who professes to be a Christian but is hardly distinguishable from the world around, try to be harmless, and not offend anyone – so his “Christian” life is very easy and undisturbed. But the real Christian who avows unpopular beliefs, tries honestly to act out the teaching of the New Testament, and apply Christian principles to fashionable and popular sins of his class and country, soon finds himself in trouble.

If facing opposition, make sure you are opposed for the right reasons. Sometimes we are opposed because of contradictions in our lives, inconsistencies or unwise and silly mistakes. In these cases, we deserve all we get. Make sure it is our goodness, and not our weakness, that men dislike. Our cleaving to Christ, and not our failures, which produce sneers, sarcasm and criticism. Make sure it is Christ in us that men turn from and not us and our sins.

Never be surprised at opposition. Our treatment is the same as Christ's all down the ages. Human nature has not altered. It helps to prove we are God's children and belong to Christ. If we were of the world, it would love its own. People are perplexed because of persecution. Expect it, and be prepared for it. But pity those who are persecuted. Jesus prayed for His enemies. His reason – “They know not Him that sent me”. Their persecution will do us no harm. Learn to be patient. Remember Christ also suffered. No one did more good than He, and no one was more persecuted. The Cross shows how irrational and vicious and unreasonable the world's hatred can be.

Meet antagonism without dropping standards one inch. Keep the flag at the masthead. No point in conciliating by compromising. Trying to pretend that we really are no different from the world, in order to gain the world's approval, is to sell out to the world.

Do not, under any circumstances, diminish the clearness of your testimony. Our victory is won only by faithfulness to Christ. Basic demand on the Christian is to have courage to be different. This is dangerous, but no one can be a Christian if they are not prepared to take that risk. Remember His promises – His friendship is our strength and stay in persecution. While some will continue to persecute, others will receive our testimony as a message from God, and will respond.

Conclusion

To which army do we belong? Which country is ours? Are we in Christ's ranks or the world's? Do we love Him back again, or meet His open heart with a closed one, and His hands laden with blessings with hands clenched in refusal? The church or the world? In one or the other. No neutrality or halfway house. To which class do we belong? Here is the question of questions. Is Christ your friend or enemy? Have you yielded your heart to Him, or have you kept your heart closed to Him?