

ARE YOU A FRIEND OF JESUS?

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

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

BELOVED, it is the highest honor in the world to be called the friend of Christ. There is no title surely that excels in dignity that which was worn by Abraham, who was called the "Friend of God." Lord Brooke was so delighted with the friendship of Sir Philip Sidney that he ordered to be engraved upon his tomb nothing but this, "Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sidney." There is beauty in such a feeling, but yet it is a small matter compared with being able to say, "Here lives a friend of Christ." O wondrous condescension, that he should call me "friend." If I am indeed a true believer, not only is he my friend, without which I could have no hope here, or hereafter; but he hath, in the aboundings of his grace, been pleased to regard me as his friend, and write me down in the honored list of intimates, who are permitted to speak familiarly with him, as those do between whom there are no secrets, for their hearts are told out to him, whilst he hides nothing from them, but saith: "If it were not so, I would have told you." Beloved, in what a light this sets obedience to Christ's commandments. I cannot help, at this early moment in the sermon, noticing how the doctrine of our text transfigures obedience, and makes it the joy and glory of life. How precious it is, for it is a better seal to friendship than the possession of the largest gifts and influence. Christ does not say: "Ye are my friends, if ye rise to a position of respectability among men, or honor in the church." No; however poor you may be—and those to whom he spake these words were very poor—he says: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Obedience is better than wealth, and better than rank. Jesus values his friends, not by what they have, or what they wear, but by what they do.

I. Let us come to the subject more closely, and notice, first, that-

OUR LORD HIMSELF TELLS US WHAT OBEDIENCE HE REQUESTS from those who call themselves his friends. True friends are eager to know what they can do to please the objects of their love. Let us gladly hearken to what our adorable Lord now speaks to the select circle of his chosen. He asks of one and all obedience. None of us are exempted from doing his commandments. However lofty, or however lowly, our condition, we must obey. If our talent be but one, we must obey: and, if we have ten, still we must obey. There can be no friendship with Christ unless we are willing, each one, to yield him hearty, loyal service. Let it go round, then, to all of you upon whom the name of Jesus Christ is named. If enrolled among the friends of Jesus, you must be careful about your own personal obedience to his blessed will. Forget not that even to the queen, standing on his right, in gold of Ophir, the word is given: "He is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

It must be **active obedience**—notice that. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Some think it is quite sufficient if they avoid what he forbids. Abstinance from evil is a great part of righteousness; but it is not enough for friendship. If a man can say: "I am not a drunkard, I am not dishonest, I am not unchaste, I am not a violator of the Sabbath, I am not a liar," so far so good; but such righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, and they cannot enter the kingdom. It is well if you do not willfully transgress; but if you are to be Christ's friends, there must be far more than this. It would be a poor friendship which only said: "I am your friend; and, to prove it, I don't insult you, I don't rob you, I don't speak evil of you." Surely there must be more positive evidence to certify friendship.

The Lord Jesus Christ lays great stress upon positive duties; it is: "If ye do whatsoever I command you." At the last day he will say: "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." In that memorable twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew nothing is said about negative virtues; but positive actions are cited and dwelt upon in detail.

We are clear, from the wording of the text, that the obedience Christ expects from us is **continuous**. He does not say: "If you **sometimes** do what I command you—if you do it on Sundays, for instance—if you do what I command you in your place of worship, that will suffice;" but no, we are to abide in him, and keep his statutes even unto the end. I am not now preaching works as the way of salvation, but as the evidences of fellowship, which is quite another thing. We must seek in every place, at all times, and under all circumstances, to do as Jesus bids us, out of a cheerful spirit of reverence to him. Such tender, loving subjection as a godly wife gives to her husband must be gladly yielded by us throughout life if we are his friends.

This obedience must also be **universal**. "Ye are my friends, if ye do **whatsoever I** command you." No sooner is any thing discovered to be the subject of a command, than the man who is a true friend of Christ says: "I will do it," and he does it. He does not pick and choose which precept he will keep, and which he will neglect, for this is self-will, and not obedience. I have known some professors to err greatly in this matter.

They have been very strict over one point, and they have blamed every body who did not come up to their strictness, talking as if that one duty fulfilled the whole law. Straining out gnats has been a very leading business with many; they have bought a choice assortment of strainers, of the very finest net, to get out all the gnats from their cup, but, at the same time, on another day, they have opened their mouths and swallowed a camel without a qualm. This will not do; the test is: "If ye do whatsoever I command you." I do not mean that little things are unimportant; far from it. If there be a gnat that Christ bids us strain out, strain it out with great diligence; do not let a midge escape you, if he bids you remove it. The smallest command of Christ may often be the most important, and I will tell you why. Some things are great, evidently great, and for many reasons even a hypocritical professor will attend to them; but the test may lie in the minor points, which hypocrites do not take the trouble to notice, since no human tongue would praise them for so doing. Here is the proof of your love. Will you do the

smaller thing for Jesus, as well as the more weighty matter? Too many say: "I do not see any use in it; I can be saved without it; there are a great many different opinions on the point," and so on. All this cometh of evil, and is not consistent with the spirit of friendship with Christ, for love pleases even in trifles. Is it Christ's will? Is it plainly a precept of his word? Then, it is not yours to reason why, nor to raise any question. The reality of your subjection to your Lord and Master may hinge upon those seemingly insignificant points. "**Whatsoever** he saith to you, do it." Only by an earnest endeavor to carry out the **whole** of his will, can you live in happy friendship with him, and be indeed his friends.

Note well that this obedience is to be rendered as to Christ himself. Put the emphasis on the little word **I**: "Ye **are my friends**, if ye do whatsoever **I** command you." We are to do these things because Jesus commands them. Does not the royal person of our Lord cast a very strong light upon the necessity of obedience? When we refuse to obey, we refuse to do what the Lord himself commands. When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Redeemer, is denied obedience, it is treason. How can rebels against the King be His Majesty's friends? The precepts of Scripture are not the commandments of man, nor the ordinances of angels; but the laws of Christ, and how dare we despise them? We are to act rightly because Jesus commands us, and we love to do his pleasure; there can be no friendship without this. Oh, for grace to serve the Lord with gladness!

To close this first point, it appears that our Lord would have us **obey him out of a friendly spirit**. Obedience to Christ, as if we were forced to do it under pain and penalties, would be of no worth as a proof of friendship; every one can see that. He speaks, not of slaves, but of friends; he would not have us perform duties from fear of punishment, or love of reward; that which he can accept of his friends must be the fruit of love. His will must be our law, because his person is our delight. Some professors need to be whipped to their duties; they must hear stirring sermons, and attend exciting meetings, and live under pressure; but those who are Christ's

friends need no spur but love. "The love of Christ constraineth us." True hearts do what Jesus bids them without flogging and dogging, urging and forcing. Constrained virtue is spoiled in the making, as many a piece of earthenware is cracked in the baking. The wine of our obedience must flow freely from the ripe cluster of the soul's love, or it will not be fit for the royal cup. When duty becomes delight, and precepts are as sweet as promises, then are we Christ's friends, and not till then.

II. Having thus set forth what kind of obedience Christ requests, I now notice, in the second place, that our Lord leads us to gather from this sentence that—.

THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY HIM ARE NO FRIENDS OF HIS.

He may yet look upon them, and be their friend, by changing their hearts, and forgiving their sins; but, as yet, they are no friends of his, for a man who does not obey Christ, does not give the Savior his proper place, and this is an unfriendly deed. If I have a friend, I am very careful that, if he has honor anywhere, he shall certainly have due respect from me. If he be my superior, I am anxious that he should not think me intrusive, or imagine that I would take undue advantage of his kindness. He will be higher in my esteem than in the regard of any one else. He who is truly Christ's friend, delights to honor him as a great King; but he who will not yield Him his sovereign rights, is a traitor, and not a friend. Our Lord is the Head over all things to his Church, and this involves the joyful submission of the members. Disobedience denies to Christ the dignity of that holy Headship, which is his prerogative over all the members of his mystical body, and this is not the part of a true friend. How can you be his friend, if you do not admit his rule? **It is vain to boast that you trust his cross, if you do not reverence his crown.** He who does not **do his commandments** cannot be Christ's friend, because he is not of one mind with Christ; this is evident. Can two walk together, except they be agreed? True friendship exists not between those who differ upon first principles, and there can be no points of agreement between Jesus Christ and the man who will not obey him; for he,

in fact, says: "Lord Jesus, thy pure and holy will is obnoxious to me; thy sweet and gracious commands are a weariness to me." What friendship can be here? They are not of one mind; Christ is for holiness, this man is for sin; Christ is for spiritual-mindedness, this man is carnal-minded; Christ is for love, this man is for self; Christ is for glorifying the Father, this man is for honoring himself; how can there be any friendship, when they are diametrically opposed in design, object and spirit? It is not possible.

He who **obeys not Christ**, cannot be Christ's friend, though he may profess to be. He may be a very high and loud professor, and for that reason he may be all the more an enemy of the cross—for when men see this man walking according to his own lusts, they cry out: "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth," and they attribute all his faults to his religion, and straightway begin to blaspheme the name of Christ. Through the inconsistent conduct of our Lord's professed friends, his cause is more hindered than by any thing else. Suppose you and I had some very intimate associate, who was found drunk in the street, or committed burglary, or theft, should we not feel disgraced by his conduct? When he was brought before the magistrate, would you like to have it said: "This person is the bosom friend of so-and-so?" Oh, you would cover your face, and beg your neighbors never to mention it. For such a fellow to be known as your friend would compromise your name and character. We say this, even weeping, that Jesus Christ's name is compromised, and his honor is tarnished among men, by many who wear the name of Christian, without having the spirit of Christ; such cannot be his dear companions. Alas! For the wounds which Jesus has received in the house of his friends. When Caesar fell, he was slain by the daggers of his friends. In trust, he found treason. Those whose lives he had spared, spared not his life. Woe to those who, under the garb of Christianity, crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame. Nothing burns Christ's cheek like a Judas kiss, and he has had many such.

Those that obey him not, cannot be owned by Jesus as his friends, for that would dishonor him indeed. Time was—I know not how it is now—when, if

any man wanted to be made a count, or to get an honorable title, he had only to pay so much at Rome into the Papal exchequer, and he could be made a noble at once. The titles thus purchased were neither honorable to those who gave nor to those who received them. Whatever his pretended vicar may do, our Lord himself sells no dignities. The title of "Friends of Jesus" goes with a certain character, and cannot be otherwise obtained. Those are his friends who obey him—"If ye love me, keep my commandments." He grants this patent of nobility to all believers who lovingly follow him; but on his list of friends he enters none beside. Do you not see that his honor requires it? Would you have our Lord stand up and say: "The **drunkard** is my friend?" Would you hear him say: "That **fraudulent** bankrupt is my intimate companion?" Would you have Jesus claim friendly companionship with the vicious and profane? A man is known by his company; what would be thought of Jesus, if his intimate associates were men of loose morals and unrighteous principles? To go among them for their good is one thing; to make them his friends is another. Where there is no kinship, no likeness, no point of agreement, the fair flower of friendship cannot take root. We may, therefore, read the text negatively: "**Ye are not my friends, if ye do not the things which I command you.**"

III. Our third observation is—

THOSE WHO BEST OBEY CHRIST ARE ON THE BEST OF TERMS WITH HIM.

"Ye are my friends," he seems to say, "and live near me, enjoying practical, personal friendship, and daily intercourse with me, when you promptly obey." Some of you know, by personal experience, brothers and sisters, that you cannot walk in holy converse with Christ, unless you keep his commandments. There is no feeling of communion between our souls and Christ when we are conscious of having done wrong, and yet are not sorry for it. If we know that we have erred, as we often do, and our hearts break because we have grieved our Beloved, and we go and tell him our grief, and confess our sin, we are still his friends, and he kisses away our tears,

saying: "I know your weakness; I willingly blot out your offenses; there is no breach of friendship between us: I will manifest myself to you still." When we know that we are wrong, and feel no softening of heart about it, then we cannot pray, we cannot speak with the Beloved, and we cannot walk with him as his friends. Familiarity with Jesus ceases when we become familiar with known sin. If, again, knowing any act to be wrong, we persevere in it, there cannot be any happy friendship between us and our Savior. If conscience has told you, dear brother, that such a thing ought to be given up, and you continue it, the next time you are on your knees you will feel yourself greatly hampered; and when you sit down before your open Bible, and hope to have communion with Christ, as you have formerly enjoyed it, you will find that he has withdrawn himself, and will not be found by you. Is there any wonder? If sin lieth at the door, how can the Lord smile on us? Secret sin will poison communion at the fountain head. If there is a quarrel between you and Christ, and you are hugging to your bosom that which he abhors, how can you enjoy friendship? He tells you that sin is a viper that will kill you, but you reply: "It is a necklace of jewels," and, therefore, you put it about your neck. Do you wonder, that because he loves you, he is grieved at such mad behavior? Oh, do not thus bring injury upon yourself! Do not thus pour contempt upon his wise commands.

Some Christians will never get into full fellowship with Christ, because they neglect to study his word, and search out what his will is. It ought to be a serious work with every Christian, especially in commencing his career, to find what is the will of the Lord on all subjects. Half the Christian people in the world are content to ask: "What is the rule of our church?"

That is not the question; the point is: "What is the rule of Christ?" Some plead: " My father and mother before me did so." I sympathize, in a measure, with that feeling; filial reverence commands admiration; but yet, in spiritual things, we are to call no man "father," but make the Lord Jesus our Master and Exemplar. God has not placed your conscience in your mother's keeping, nor has he committed to your father the right, or the

power, to stand responsible for you; every man must bear his own burden, and render his own account; search ye the Scriptures for yourselves, each one of you, and follow no rule but that which is inspired.

Take your light directly from the sun. Let Holy Scripture be your unquestioned rule of faith and practice; and, if there is any point about which you are uncertain, I charge you, by your loyalty to Christ, if ye are his friends, to try and find out what his will is; and, when once you are sure upon that point, never mind the human authorities, or dignities, that oppose his law. Let there be no question, no hesitation, no delay. If he commands you, carry out his will, though the gates of hell thunder at you.

You are not his friends, or, at any rate, you are not so his friends as to enjoy the friendship, unless you resolutely seek to please him in all things. The intimacy between you and Christ will be disturbed by sin; you cannot lean your head upon his bosom, and say: "Lord, I know thy will, but I do not mean to do it." Could you look up into that dear face—that visage once so marred, now lovelier than heaven itself—and say: "My Lord, I love thee, but will not do thy will in every point?" By the very love he bears to you, he will chasten you for that rebellious spirit, if you indulge it. It is a horrible evil; holy eyes will not endure it. He is a jealous lover, and will not tolerate sin, which is his rival.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." O beloved, see to this! Under all the crosses, and losses, and trials of life, there is no comfort more desirable than the confidence that you have aimed at doing your Lord's will. If a man suffer for Christ's sake while steadily pursuing the course of holiness, he may rejoice in such suffering. Losses borne in the defense of the right, and true, are gains. Jesus is never nearer his friends than when they bravely bear shame for his sake. If we get into trouble by our own folly, we feel the smart at our very heart; but if we are wounded in our Lord's battles, the scars are honorable. For his sake we may accept reproach, and bind it about us as a wreath of honor. Jesus delights to be the Companion of those who are cast out by kinsfolk and acquaintances for the truth's sake, and for

fidelity to his cross. They may call the faithful one fanatic, and enthusiast, and all such ill-sounding names; but over these there is no need to fret, for the honor of being Christ's friend infinitely outweighs the world's opinion. When we follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, he is responsible for results; we are not.

"Though dark be my way, since He is my guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide."

The consequences which follow from our doing right belong to God. Abhor the theory, that for the sake of a great good you may do a little wrong. I have heard men say, ay! and Christian men, too: "If I were strictly to follow my convictions, I should have to leave a post of great usefulness; and, therefore, I remain where I am, and quiet my convictions as well as I can. I should lose opportunities of doing good, which I now possess, if I were to put in practice all I believe; and, therefore, I remain in a position which I could not justify on any other ground." Is this according to the mind of Jesus? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? How many bow in the house of Rimmon, and hope that the Lord will have mercy upon his servants in this thing? We shall see if it will be so. We may not do evil that good may come. If I knew that to do right would shake this whole island, I should be bound to do it; God helping me, I would do it; and if I heard that a wrong act would apparently bless a whole nation, I have no right to do wrong on that account. No bribe of supposed usefulness should purchase our conscience. Right is right, and must always end in blessing; and wrong is wrong, and must always end in curse, though for a while it may wear the appearance of surpassing good.

Did not the Devil lead our first parents astray by the suggestion that great benefit would arise out of their transgression? "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods," said the arch-deceiver. Would it not be a grand thing for men to grow unto gods? "Certainly," says Eve, "I would not lose

the opportunity. The race which is yet to be would blame me if I did. I would not have men remain inferior creatures through my neglect."

For the sake of the promised good, she ventured upon evil. Thousands of people sin because it seems so advantageous, so wise, so necessary, so sure to turn out well. Hear what Christ says: "**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.**" If you do evil that good may come, you cannot walk with him; but if your heart is set toward his statutes, you shall find him loving you, and taking up his abode with you.