

CHRIST'S FRIENDS.

A Sermon Preached at Manchester, England.

BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

Text: Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you, etc.—John 15: 14-17.

A wonderful word had just dropped from the Master's lips when he spoke of laying down his life for his friends. He lingers on it as if the idea conveyed was too great and sweet at once to be taken in, and with soothing reiteration he assures the little group that they, even they, are his friends.

I. Notice what Christ's friends do for him. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." In the former verse "friends" means chiefly those whom he loved. Here it means mainly those who love him. They love him because he loves them. In this verse the idea of friendship to Christ is looked at from the human side. And he tells his disciples that they are his lovers as well as beloved of him, on condition of their doing whatsoever he commands them.

How wonderful that stooping love of his is, which condescends to array itself in the garments of ours. Every form of human love Christ lays his hand upon, and claims that he himself exercises it in a transcendent degree. "He that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother." That which is even sacred, the purest and most complete union that humanity is capable of—that, too, he consecrates; for even it, sacred as it is, is capable of a higher consecration, and, sweet as it is, receives a new sweetness when we think of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and remember the parables in which he speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Great King and sets forth himself as the Husband of humanity. And, passing from that Holy of Holies out into this outer court, he lays his hand, too, on that more familiar, and yet precious thing—the bond of friendship. The Prince makes a friend of the beggar.

The peculiarity of Christianity is the strong personal tie of real love and intimacy, which will bind men, to the end of time, to this man that died 1900 years ago. We look back into the waste of antiquity; the mighty names rise there that we reverence; there are great teachers from whom we have learned, and to whom, after a fashion, we are grateful. But what a gulf there is between us and the best and noblest of them! But here is a dead Man, who today is the object of passionate attachment and a love deeper than life to millions of people, and will be till the end of time. There is nothing in the whole history of the world the least like that strange bond which ties you and me to Jesus Christ, and the paradox of the apostle remains a unique fact in the experience of humanity: "Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, ye love." We stretch out our hands across the waste, silent centuries, and there, amidst the mist of oblivion thickening round all other figures in the past, we touch the warm, throbbing heart of our Friend, who lives forever, and forever is near us. We here, nearly two millenniums after the words fell on the nightly air on the road to Gethsemane, have them coming direct to our hearts. A perpetual bond unites men with Christ today; and for us, as truly as in that long-past Paschal night, it is true, "Ye are my friends."

But notice the condition, "If ye do what I command you." He commands, though he is Friend; though he commands he is Friend. "Ye are my friends if ye do the things which I command you," may either correspond with his former saying, "If a man love me he will keep my commandments," or with his latter one, which immediately precedes it, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." For this is the relationship between love and obedience, in regard to Jesus Christ, that the love is the parent of the obedience, and the obedience is the guard and the guarantee of the love. They that love will obey; they who obey will strengthen the love by acting according to its dictates, and will be in a condition to feel and realize more the warmth of the rays that stream down upon them, and to send back more answering obedience from their hearts. Not in mere emotion, but in mere verbal expression, not in mere selfish realizing of the blessings of his friendship, and not in mere mechanical, external acts of conformity, but in the flowing down and melting of the hard and obstinate iron will, at the warmth of his great love, is our love made perfect. Obedience, which is the child and the preserver of love, is something far deeper than the mere outward conformity with the externally apprehended commandments. To submit is the expression of love, and love is deepened by submission.

II. Secondly, note what Christ does for his friends. "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth." The slave may see what his lord does, but he does not see his purpose in his acts. "Their's not to reason why." In so far as the relation of master and servant goes, and still more in that of owner and slave, there is simple command on the one

side and intelligent obedience on the other. The command needs no explanation, and if the servant is in his master's confidence he is more than a servant. But, says Christ, "I have called you friends;" and he called them so. He called them so before he now named them so. He called them so in act, and he points to all his past relationship, and especially to the heart-out-pourings of the upper room, as the proof that he has called them his friends, by the fact that whatsoever he has heard of the Father he had made known to them.

Jesus Christ, then, recognizes the obligation of absolute frankness, and he will tell his friends everything that he can. Every one of Christ's friends stands nearer to God than did Moses at the door of the Tabernacle when the wondering camp beheld him face to face with the blaze of the Shekinah glory, and dimly heard the thunderous utterances of the Godhead as he spake to him as a man speaks to his friend.

Ought not that thought of the utter frankness of Jesus make us very patient of the gaps that are left in his communications and in our knowledge? There are so many things that we should like to know—things about the meaning of all this dreadful mystery in which we grope our way—when it were so easy for him to have lifted a little corner of the veil and let a little more of the light shine out. Why does he thus open one finger instead of the whole palm? Because he loves. A friend exercises the right of reticence as well as the prerogative of speech. And for all the gaps that are left, oh! let us bow quietly and believe that if it had been better for us he would have spoken. "If it were not so I would have told you."

And that frankness may well teach us another lesson—the obligation to keeping our ears open and our hearts prepared to receive the speech that comes from him. If we kept down the noise of that "household jar within," if we silenced passion, ambition, selfishness, worldliness, if we withdrew ourselves, as we ought to do, from the Babel of this world, and hid ourselves in his pavilion, from the strife of tongues, and were accustomed to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High," and to say, "Speak, Friend, for thy friend heareth," we should more often understand how real today is the voice of Christ to them that love him.

Such rebounds the inward ear
Catches often from afar:
Listen! prize them, hold them dear,
For of God—of God!—they are.

III. Thirdly, notice how Christ's friends come to be so, and why they are so. "Ye have not chosen," etc. (Verse 16.)

In all cases of friendship between Christ and men, the origination and initiation come from him. "We love him because he first loved us." He has told us how, by his divine alchemy, he changes by the dropping of his blood our enmity into friendship. In the previous verse he has said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Since he has thus by the blood of the cross changed men's enmity into friendship, it is true universally that the animosity between us and Christ comes entirely from him. But there is more than that in the words. I do not suppose that any man, whatever his theological notions and standpoint may be, who has felt the love of Christ in his own heart in however feeble a measure, but will say as the apostle said, "I was apprehended of Christ." It is because he lays his seeking and drawing hand upon us that we ever come to love him, and that the Shepherd always comes to seek the sheep that is lost in the wilderness.

This, then, is how we come to be his friends; because, when we were enemies, he loved us and gave himself for us and ever since has been sending out the ambassadors and the messengers of his love to draw us to his heart. And the purpose for which all this forthgoing of Christ's initial and originating friendship has had in view is set forth in words with which I can only touch in the lightest possible manner. "That ye may bring forth fruit." He goes back for a moment to the sweet emblem, with which this chapter begins, and recurs to the imagery of the vine and the fruit. "Keeping his commandments" does not explain the whole process by which we do the things that are pleasing in his sight. We must also take this other metaphor of the bearing of fruit. Neither an effortless, instinctive bringing forth from the renewed nature and the Christ-like disposition, or a painful and strenuous effort at obedience to his law, if we take the two things separately, describes the whole realities of Christian service. There must be effort; for men do not grow Christ-like in character as the vine grows its grapes, but there must be, regulated and disciplined by the effort, the inward life, for no mere outward obedience and tinkering at duties and commandments will produce the fruit that Christ desires and rejoices to have. First, unity of life with him; and then effort. Take care of modern teachings that do not recognize these two as both essential to the complete ideal of Christian service, the spontaneous fruit-bearing, and the strenuous effort after obedience.

"That your fruit should remain." There is nothing

that corrupts faster than fruit. There is only one kind of fruit that is permanent, incorruptible. The only life's activity that outlasts life and the world is the activity of the men that obey Christ.

And the other half of the issues of this friendship is the satisfying of our desires, that "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he may give it to you." How comes it that it is certain that Christ's friends, living close to him, and hearing fruit, will get what they want? Because what they want will be in his name, in accordance with his will. Make your desires Christ's, and Christ's yours, and you will be satisfied.

IV. And now, lastly, note the mutual friendship of Christ's friends. "These things I command you, that ye love one another." This whole context is, as it were, enclosed within a golden circle by that commandment which appears in a former verse, at the beginning of it, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another," and re-appears here at the close, thus shutting off this portion from the rest of the discourse. Friend, of a friend should themselves be friends. We care for the lifeless things that a dear friend has cared for; books, articles of use of various sorts. If they have been of interest to them, they are treasures and precious evermore to us. And here are living men and women, in all diversities of character and circumstances, but with this stamped upon them all—Christ's friends, lovers of and loved by him. And how can we be indifferent to those to whom Christ is not indifferent? We are knit together by that bond, Oh, brother, we are but poor friends of that Master unless we feel that all which is dear to him is dear to us. Let us feel the electric thrill which ought to pass through the whole linked circle, and let us beware that we slip not our hands from the grasp of the neighbor on either side, lest parted from them, we should be isolated from him, and lose some of the love which we fail to transmit.

REVIVALS—WHY NOT NOW?

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

Powerful revivals are not as frequent in the churches as they once were. However this may be accounted for, the fact remains. That distinguished veteran of the American pulpit, Dr. Storrs, in his recent "jubilee" discourse recognizes "a drift in the general Christian thought and feeling which has presages of evil." As one of the evidences of this drift he says that "unquestionably the secular spirit in the churches at large is more active and pronounced than in the simpler, earlier days—the days marked by the great revivals, of sixty, fifty or forty years since." If this be so, then there is all the more need of just such spiritual quickening. They are just as possible as they ever were. Can the churches have them if they seek for them in the right way? Most assuredly they can.

A genuine soul converting revival is simply an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That Divine Spirit can do to-day what he wrought at Pentecost and many times since; the reservoir of heavenly blessings is inexhaustible. Lately the city of Buffalo has begun to turn the mighty electric energy generated by the falls of Niagara into its own streets, for the furnishing of light and the propulsion of cars and various machineries. The energy has been there all along; now Buffalo begins to use it. The divine energy of the Almighty Spirit, which Jesus Christ promised to his followers, is always waiting and willing to descend upon us. That Spirit is often "resisted"; that Spirit may be "grieved" away and may be "quenched," but it is equally true that our Heavenly Father is more ready to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit to them that ask him than an earthly parent is to give bread to a hungry child.

Mark you—the promise is to them who "ask." The quickening, converting Spirit comes in answer to prayer. He did at Jerusalem eighteen centuries ago; he does so now. But not every kind of praying brings a revival. There is an awful amount of so called prayer that is only from the throat outward; it begins nowhere and ends in nothing. Such pointless repetitions of stereotyped phrases must be as wearisome to God as they are unprofitable to the utterers. There must be pitch point and purpose as well as faith in every effectual prayer. At an evangelistic meeting for 'roughs' over in New York, when the leader called on some one to pray, a hard looking character in the crowd arose and said, "Oh, Lord, forgive me for being a bad man; and please excuse me, Lord, from saying any more now. Amen." He did not need to say any more; he had told God just what he wanted. Brethren, if you really and earnestly long for an outpouring of the Spirit, tell God so; ask in the name of the divine intercessor, Christ Jesus.

One of the most striking incidents in Dr. Spencer's once famous "Pastor's Sketches" is the account of a godly old mother in Israel who called him in when passing her house, and said to him "a revival is coming." She went on to tell her pastor that when she was out in her garden, she heard every day, through an open window, a venerable deacon who was confined to his room

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