

60. Jesus Called His Followers Friends

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that we will only bear much fruit as we learn to abide in Christ. We also saw that abiding in Christ helps each person to become more like Jesus and that is a major part of the process to help our spiritual lives develop so that they bear much fruit. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus chose to call His followers His friends.

As Jesus walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples, He told them how to abide in His love. John 15:9-10 says, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” Jesus told the disciples that He loved them in the same way that the Father loved Him. Jesus had told the disciples in John 5:30 and then again in John 6:38, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me... For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” In both passages, Jesus made it clear that He came to do the will of His Father. Obedience to the Father was one way that Jesus showed His love for the Father.

Now, we see that Jesus told His disciples and all future followers that one way that we can show our love for Him is by our desire to be obedient to Him. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” We will do much more out of love than we will as a result of commandments. That is why Jesus summarized the entire Bible by just three commandments. Matthew 22:37-40 says, “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is *the* first and great commandment. And the second *is* like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Then, in John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The first two commandments summarized the whole Old Testament and the third commandment summarized the entire New Testament. We are able to respond to the love of Jesus by loving God, by loving our neighbor (every person of any culture), and loving one another (other Christians) as Christ loves us.

Jesus showed us how to love by His love for us. 1 John 4:18-19 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” Then, He gave us the Holy Spirit as our Helper so that we can respond with that same love to Him and to the people around us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are actually able to no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and rose again. As we depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to love, we will continue to abide in the love of Jesus. Jesus showed us how to practice that love by obeying the Father and abiding in His love.

Jesus promised His disciples and all future believers that we will experience a life of joy as we abide in Him. John 15:11-14 says, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Here, we see that as we obey Jesus, our lives will be filled with joy and His joy will remain in us. This is lasting joy rather than just temporary happiness.

It is very important to understand the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness depends on the things that are happening around a person and that can change in an instant. In contrast, joy depends on our relationship with the Lord and what is happening within. James 1:2-3 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” The joy of Jesus can remain within us even during difficult times in our lives because we are enjoying fellowship with the Lord even in difficult situations. In fact, Jesus said that our joy can be full. The word translated “might be full” means *to be filled up to the brim or to be complete*.

Jesus explained the way that the disciples and all future Christians can experience that full joy in our daily lives. The way to experience that full joy is to remember and obey the new commandment that Jesus gave. We will experience that full joy in our lives as we ask the Lord to give us His strength so that we can obey the new commandment and love one another as He has loved us. Then, Jesus explained how He would show that love to the disciples in just a few hours. Jesus said that there is no greater love than for a person to lay down his life for his friends. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” As a result, we see that Jesus treated every person as a friend.

That was true even of Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus. Matthew 26:49-50 says, “Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” At the very moment of betrayal, Jesus called Judas a friend. In contrast, Judas had not treated Jesus as a friend because at that very moment Judas had just betrayed Jesus. Jesus explained to the disciples how they could treat Him as a friend. Jesus said that they would show that they were His genuine friends by doing the things that he commanded them to do because then they would be showing that same love.

Jesus went on to explain to the disciples how He had shown them by His actions that they were His friends. John 15:15-17 says, “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. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.” Here, we see that Jesus went on to explain the difference between a servant and a friend. The word translated “servant” is the word for a bonds slave. In the time of the New Testament, about half of the people were slaves.

A bondsman did not normally know the plans of his master because his master never talked to the bondsman about his plans. This was one of the ways masters maintained control over their slaves. In fact, keeping people in ignorance is still one of the ways that those in power try to control the people they lead. In contrast, Jesus said that He had called the disciples His friends. Jesus said that He had passed on to the disciples all of the things that He had heard from the Father. Jesus also led the writers of the New Testament to write down the things that Jesus taught so that we also can know the plans of the Father and Jesus. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Jesus treats every follower as a friend because Jesus promised in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

Jesus then explained that He was the One who chose to develop this friendship with the disciples and all believers. However, Jesus did more than just choose us to be His friends. We also see that Jesus appointed us to go and bear fruit. There are several kinds of fruit in the New Testament. Paul prayed for the Philippians in Philippians 1:11, “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Here, we see that Jesus makes it possible for us to be filled with the fruits of righteousness. As we yield to the Holy Spirit moment by moment, Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Then, Hebrews 13:15 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.” Here, we see that the fruit of our lips is praise to God. These are all the result of yielding so that each member of the Trinity is able to make it possible for our lives to be fruitful.

However, one form of fruit in our lives is the result of our obedience to God. Paul said in Romans 1:13, “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.” Then, Paul explained how we can bear this fruit in our lives in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” We explain the Gospel to others and God blesses our prayer and witness by drawing others to Christ. This fruit will remain for eternity and will never perish.

Jesus said that as our lives are bearing fruit, the Father will also answer our prayers. 1 John 5:14-15 says, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” We can know that the Father will always answer our prayers as we pray according to the will of God. Then, Jesus explained one of the things that is the will of God and commanded us to do it by saying, “These things I command you, that you love one another.” Love shows itself by serving others. We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to carry out this command by the love that we show to other Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to bear spiritual fruit in their lives.