

“Vital Vintage Union” (Part 3)

John 15.12–17

¹²“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. ¹⁷This I command you, that you love one another.” [NASB]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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I. Introduction

Most of us would rather be slaves than friends. It’s easier that way. We don’t have to think so much about what we do or how we do it—we’re just following orders. We can blame someone else for our actions if things don’t work out. We can grumble about someone else getting credit for something good we’ve done. We don’t have to spend much time worrying about whether our motives are pure. We don’t have to be creative. And we don’t have to be surprised by disappointment—we expected it all along.

Most of us would rather be slaves than friends. It’s easier that way. We know and understand the work; we know and understand the wages. And we have lots of company. We have plenty of other slaves to commiserate with and dream about forming a labor union, though we know such talk will never amount to much. And we can wistfully whine how happy we would be if only we had a best friend or two nearby.

Most of us would rather be slaves than friends. It’s easier that way. We can collaborate about vast conspiracies. With our own despond we can feed the collective FEAR and marvel how it flourishes. We can drop subtle hints of distrust in the Master, adding to the festering undercurrent of discontent among the slaves. And we can justify despising our neighboring slaves for not raking their leaves and letting the wind blow them onto our nice clean lawn.

Most of us would rather be slaves than friends. Why, then, did Jesus have to go and spoil all that by calling us “friends”? Well, I’m not entirely sure why. But I suspect it has something to do with Him loving us. Perhaps He thinks we’re better off as friends than as slaves. Perhaps someday we’ll fully agree with Him on this point. Until then, perhaps it would at least be worth trying to understand what He said to His disciples... even if He is trying to get us to obey Him more heartily.

Are you in? I think Jesus is trying to tell us something about recognizing friendship, receiving friendship, and responding to friendship. You have to admit, Jesus does not force friendship on us. It’s not some cynical politically correct move to manipulate us. And yet there is something irresistible about it. It is what it is. He calls us friends. Somehow there doesn’t seem to be another option. It’s not as if He says, “I sure hope you’ll choose to be My friend, but if you really rather remain slaves, well, that’s up to you.” No. *“I have called you friends.”*

II. Recognizing the Friendship

A. Recognize the Foundation

Okay, that moves us into the first thing I think Jesus is saying here: Recognize the Friendship. And to recognize the friendship, you need to recognize the Foundation and the Founder of the Friendship. So firstly, the Foundation of the friendship; and I think Jesus in these verses hints at three aspects of this foundation.

1. Just as I have loved you

One, this friendship lies upon the foundation of the words, “Just as I have loved you.” We have heard this before. ^{13.34}“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another.” Paul also said, ^{Eph5:2}“Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering

and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” And Jesus said earlier, ^{Jn3.16}“For God *in this way loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Recognize, then, that this friendship is not founded on some foreign, unrelated, impersonal philosophical principle. It’s not a website or a book along the grocery cashier-line listing the steps to being a better friend. The Foundation of this friendship is the One who said “just as I have loved you.”

2. Lay down My life for you

Two, a little more specifically, this friendship lies upon the foundation of the One who laid down His life for His friends. He says there is no greater love than this... because He laid down His life when we were still His enemies. But God had “chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.”^{ep1.4} He laid down His life for us that we might be made His friends.

Jesus laid down His life to take away from us everything that kept us enemies—everything that kept us from being friends. On His cross He suffered for us all the righteous anger of God against our hatred and rebellion against Him. How can dead people be friends? Jesus died so that we might live and be His friends.

3. He may give to you

And three, this friendship lies upon the foundation of the Father giving whatever we might ask in Jesus’ name.^{v16} You see, Jesus asked the Father to give *us* to Him.^{ps2.7f} Jesus laid down His life according to His Father’s will, and His Father promised to give us to the Son. To ask the Father for anything in the name of the Son is to ask for whatever the Son wants. How then will He not do all for us that we ask in the name of His Son?

The Foundation of the Friendship, then, is Jesus Christ who laid down His life that the Father might give us to Him to be His friends.

B. Recognize the Founder : I chose you

Secondly in recognizing the Friendship, is to recognize not only the Foundation but also the Founder. We think we like to choose our own friends. But it is quite presumptuous to say we can choose to be God’s friends, without recognizing that God must first choose us to be His friends. Slaves can, to some degree, control whether their masters like them or not. And slaves enjoy that kind of perverted power.

But this is different. The Founder of this friendship can be none other than the One who said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” Have you ever tried to make yourself the friend of someone who does not choose for you to be their friend? It is a slavishly miserable situation. But here is One who chose us to be His friends even though we first became His enemies. He alone is the Founder of this Friendship.

III. Receiving the Friendship

A. Remember what you know (15)

Second after *recognizing* the friendship, is *receiving the friendship*. You might say there is a passive receiving and an active receiving. Here Jesus reminds His friends that we passively received our friendship with God when Jesus laid down His life. He took

away our sins and gave to us His obedience. But now He focuses on actively receiving the name of “Friend,” and shows three ways.

Firstly, *remember what you know*. ¹⁵“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” In ch14 Jesus said, ^{14.21}“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will *disclose Myself to him*.”

Slaves are always second-guessing their master. He doesn’t tell them his plan, he just tells them what to do. That keeps them small. They don’t know where they are going. They have no big picture. All they know is the next step. And they can never be sure that the next step is good for them. Their hard labor might break their health, but as far as the master is concerned, their health doesn’t really matter so much as his cash crop.

Remember that the Master has the prerogative not only of not making Himself known, but even of making his slaves *unable* to know Him. Jesus spoke in parables and performed miracles, in part to *prevent* His enemies from knowing Him. ^{12.40}“He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.”

But you, remember what you know. He has called you *friends*. He has made known to you the big picture. He has made known to you the Father’s will for your salvation. He has spoken to you everything you need to know in order to receive eternal life and bountiful liberty. He is hiding nothing from you that you need for infinite happiness and joy. He is holding nothing back out of envious fear that you will surpass Him. Rather, He went to the depths of the deepest sorrow and anguish. He ^{Php2.7}“emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

B. Receive more friends

Secondly to receive the friendship, *receive more friends*. ¹⁶“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain.” “Going and bearing fruit” means receiving more friends. It means gathering and perfecting the saints. It means ^{Mt28.19}“Going therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”

In the OT, only Abraham and Moses are directly called “friend” of God. ^{Ex33.11;Is41.8} But now, all disciples are called “friend” of God! Abraham and Moses were types of Christ. In Adam, all became foe of God. In Christ, all who believe in Him become friend of God. To receive the friendship Christ offers, receive more friends. Invite more people to Church who may hear Jesus calling them *friends*. God has made Himself known to you. You know that He is faithful and true. You know that the friendship He has secured with the blood of His Son is fruit that *remains*. No one can snatch away from His hands those He calls *friends*.

C. Ask for Increase (16)

Thirdly to receive the friendship, *ask for more*. He chose you as friends, so that whatever you ask of the Father in His name He may give to you.^{v16} We heard last week that God is *honored* to do what we ask in His name. If we are His friends, then we want what is best for Him. Honor and glory and praise are best suited for Him. Slaves think they have to do what needs to be done, and this brings reward to them. Friends want God to be honored by doing what is impossible for them to do.

Happily, God honors Himself most when He does what is best for His friends. He saves His friends from sin and death and hell. He purifies His friends by forming His own image in them. He shows His faithfulness to His Son by giving to Him a bride consisting of all His friends made blameless and holy as He is holy. That’s you!

IV. Responding to Friendship

A. Do what I command: Love one another

Recognize the Friendship; receive the Friendship. And third, *Respond to the Friendship*. How do you respond to the friendship? Firstly, by *doing what He commands*.¹²“This is My commandment, that you love one another.”¹⁷“This I command you, that you love one another.” But this is where things get a little weird. There is just something a little weird about being commanded to love. Isn’t love supposed to be ‘freely given’?

Yes, of course. It is impossible to give love by compulsion. But compulsion is NOT the purpose of the command. The purpose of the command is to distinguish and divide the new you from the old you. We need the command because we are too weak to maintain the division ourselves.

There is in those united to the Vine a principle of freedom, liberty, desire to give, willingness to love. But there is also in us a domineering compulsion to put our own selves first before others, and this compulsion would all too easily usurp the place of the *vital* principle. And if it could, it would extinguish that lively principle altogether.

The new you—the principle of vital fruitfulness—*hates* the old you and its domineering compulsions. The new you loves the Law—the command to love one another—and rejoices with gratitude that God gave us the gift of the Law to restrain and ultimately crush the domineering compulsions of the old you. As Paul tells Timothy,^{1Ti1.9}“law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane.”

The new you, though the process is painful, is very grateful and eagerly anticipates the mortification of the old you, of the domineering self-serving flesh. The new you—the principle of fruitful vitality—does not need the Law, the command of Jesus. The principle itself *is* the very essence of the Law, and that principle is written on your heart if you are His friend.

The reason you and I need the commandment, is that we might carefully distinguish between the old you and the new you. That that we might hate the old and seek to mortify it; rejoice in the new and ask God to grow it; that we might walk in the new by the help of the Holy Spirit. Thus we need the Law as the rule of life... of love. The Law

is the measure of love in our life. The fuller the tank, the higher the pointer on the gauge. The fuller we bear the fruit of love, the more we appear in conformity to the Law.

B. What about the “if”?

Respond to the friendship by doing what He commands. But secondly, what about that ‘if’? If we stopped after v14, we would run into very deep trouble. We would speedily slip back to our druthers and become slaves. Jesus says, ¹⁴“You are My friends if you do what I command you.” But then He immediately proves that you *are* His friends in v15: “*I have called you friends.*” This pulls the rug right out from under all our attempts to become His friends by doing what He commands.

Jesus is NOT saying we become His friends by doing His commands. What He is saying is that friends have the same Spirit, the same principle of life. Thus friends do things because of a common spirit, not because of a compulsion impressed upon them from outside. We demonstrate the dominion of His Spirit in us by the love we give to one another.

When we put aside the plans that we think best suit us and take up the plans that best suit one another, we do what He did when He laid down His life for His friends. That is how His friends respond to being called His friends.

V. Conclusion

Most of us would rather be slaves than friends. It’s easier that way. But the fruit of vital vintage union with Jesus is not produced by slave labor. Vintage fruit is freedom fruit. Love for one another is the premiere vintage fruit.

There is good news—those who are friends of Christ would in fact *not* rather be slaves. You have been set free. You did not purchase your freedom; He purchased it for you. You are free to enjoy the benefits of friendship with Christ. You are free to love one another. Enjoy your liberty. You will enjoy the fruit. Sit down and enjoy it with your Friend who sticks closer even than a brother.