

# John 15 (Part 2) :10–17 • The Dynamics of Friendship with God

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We're in John chapter 15, so open your Bible there, John chapter 15. And we are continuing here on Sunday morning, our study through the Gospel of John, which is the last book that we're studying through on our third pass through the Bible because we break up the Gospel accounts and we don't do them back to back. So John is the last one and then we are in the second part of John chapter 15.

We're going to be picking up and covering this morning, verses 10 through 17, so follow along as I read these verses. It goes like this, *“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. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

*<sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

*<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” (ESV)*

I'm going to have you stop there, Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you would fill our hearts with wisdom and insight this morning. Help us, Lord, to lay hold of the truth of this word and the insights that it contains. These are such important words, and we pray that you would help us to assimilate them into our hearts, into our lives, into our daily walk with you. We ask these things, Father, in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen. Amen.

I don't know if you ever do this, but you know, when you go through and you read a passage, if you just highlight, if you look for the key words in the passage or even words that are repeating and highlight them, you can get a pretty good sense of what the passage is saying. And as you look through this passage, you notice that words like command or commandments occur 5 times in this single passage. The word abide, which we dealt with quite extensively last week comes back and occurs 3 times in this passage and the word love and/or loved occurs 6 times.

So, you know, that gives you a sense of where Jesus is going in this passage. And we see that what He's saying here in these verses are very connected closely with the message that we dealt with last Sunday when we talked about what it is to abide in Jesus. But you'll notice that Jesus goes on to use a little bit stronger language in this particular grouping of verses.

And He uses phrases like these, I'll show you up on the screen.

- Keep my commandments
- These things I command you

You got to admit, those are strong words. If I were talking to somebody and I say, I command you, you know, to do this or that, that's a rather strong sort of a thing to say to someone. And along those lines, I have to tell you that there are some Christians that I have run into, who simply cannot see the word command or commandments in the Bible without connecting those words with something that they have to do to be saved.

And those are people who have a tendency to be unsure usually about their salvation. There are people who maybe, even have a gravitational pull toward legalism, but they see the word command or commandments in the Bible and they kind of go, oh, you know. And if some of you this morning saw or heard me reading those words and you got a little bit uncomfortable in your chair, you may be one of those people.

But I want you to understand something here, Jesus is not talking in this passage about how we are saved. It's not the way He's using the word command or commandments. What He's talking about is something else altogether and that something else is I believe the real focus of this group of verses that we're going to be unpacking here this morning and it's expressed most perfectly in verse 15.

So look with me again in your Bible, verse 15, Jesus says, *“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”* And the reason I focus on that verse from this passage is that it is the pinnacle of what Jesus is trying to communicate to you and me.

Because you got to understand, in the ancient world, the term friend meant more than it does today. I might use it very casually and say, yeah, here's Joe, he's my friend, we enjoy..., yeah, we're friends. Yeah, it doesn't,... you know, we may only have known each other for a few minutes, but I'm introducing him already as my friend.

But in the ancient world, the word friend was used to express the existence of a special and exclusive relationship, it was not used casually. It was used purposely to speak of something intimate, connected, and we're going to see that throughout this passage. But that means that this word that Jesus is using in this verse when He says that, in verse 15, that would have come as a complete shock to His disciples.

Because you see at the time that Jesus spoke, a disciple would never dream of calling himself the friend of the master, you just, you wouldn't do that. Because in a disciple's mind, the word disciple was synonymous with servant, even slave, okay. So to think of myself as a disciple, I would think of myself naturally as a servant of the master. When the master comes along to me and says, I now call you friend, I would have been blown away back in that culture, completely unexpected. You know, Jesus used the word disciple earlier, in fact, in our study of John, let me put this up on the screen. Remember back in John chapter 8,

**John 8:31 (ESV)**

*...Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,*

Notice He didn't use the word friends there, He's talking to a larger group of people. He says, if you know, follow my Word, if you abide in my Word, if you stay in my Word, you are my disciples. Completely understandable, that wouldn't have surprised anybody, that was expected. What is unexpected, is for Jesus to come along and change that whole paradigm and begin to call these men friends, but that's exactly what He did. No longer do I call you servants, no longer, but I've called you friends.

You know, in the old Testament, Abraham was the only person whom God called a friend, Moses was referred to only by, inference, as a friend of God. The Bible tells us that God spoke to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. (Exodus 33:11) And so by inference I suppose you could say, Moses was called a friend of God, but he was never outright called that, only Abraham. So one person in the whole Old Testament, you can see then how the disciples would have perceived this language that Jesus is saying to them.

I'm sharing this with you because, again, the word friend for you and me is just an everyday occurrence, to them, as it relates to a disciple and his master, unheard of, absolutely unheard of. But when we look at these verses and we begin to see what they're saying, we're going to understand that Jesus goes on to clarify what He means to be identified with Him as a friend.

And the reason this is important to you and important to me is because He's calling us friends. This is not just limited to these 11 men who happened to be with Him at the time because Judas is gone by this time. He is talking about believers here; the relationship of the Savior to believers, all believers over time.

And so it's important that we understand what He means by friendship and the dynamic of friendship with Jesus is expressed several ways throughout these verses and it starts in verse 10. Look with me again in your Bible, in verse 10, Jesus says, *"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."*

You know, you look at this verse and you think, okay, that verse is all about obedience, what does that have to do with friendship? See, we don't typically connect friendship with obedience. When we, you know, like, as a parent to a child, when your children are little, you're not really friends with your kids, you're there to be the parent, and that means you're there to guide them and direct them and tell them what to do.

You know, one of the coolest things I ever experienced in my whole life was when our 4 kids grew up and left the home and we became friends with them. It's a wonderful relationship that a parent begins to then have with their children, it's like, wow we're friends now, we're buddies. We call each other just to chat, you know. We look forward to getting together and so forth and that's lovely. But that wasn't the way it was when they were children.

We weren't there to be their friends, we were there to be their parents, Sue and I. And it was a matter of, here, this is what you need to do, right? You need to

obey. You know, you say that to your kids when they're really little, you need to obey, I always, I'm tempted to say that when I see a kid acting out. I saw it the other day. I'm walking into Costco, there was a woman who was trying to keep her son from walking out into the street or into the road parking lot there and she kept saying, come back here and he was not, you know, and I'm walking toward them and they're kind of semi walking toward me and she's over and over telling him, hun, get back over here. And he's just..., and I wanted to say to the little boy, obey your mommy, you know. I didn't, I held back, I want you to know that.

But I really wanted to, you know, because that's what children are supposed to do. So when we hear the words of obedience here, when we hear Jesus saying here in verse 10, if you keep my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands, and da, da, da, and so forth. We don't tend to look at this as a statement that helps us to understand the dynamics of friendship, right? It's all, it just seems like it's just about obedience, this isn't about friendship. Oh, yes, it is.

Did you notice that Jesus used His own relationship with the Father as an example for the relationship between Himself and us? Did you catch that? Jesus talked about us keeping His commandments, but He qualified it this way. He said, *"just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* So you see, He's highlighting this profound relationship and love that He has for His Father as the focus.

Now, for the friendship, the connection, the relationship that you and I now have with our God, with Him, and by speaking of His own relationship to the Father, Jesus is opening our eyes to something far deeper and more intimate than just a master servant relationship. Because guys, Jesus and the Father didn't have a master servant relationship. They had a love relationship that was connected in the most intimate of ways. Friendship? Oh yes, and that's the intimacy that Jesus is speaking about as it relates to our relationship with Him, but it centers around the idea of obedience.

But obedience centers around the idea of love and that's the crazy thing. We don't often think about that. When we're parenting our little kids, we're not, you know, when we need to get them to obey, like that mom that was trying to keep her little kid out of harm's way, or out of the way of traffic. She wasn't trying, you know, saying to him over and over again, I love you, I love you, I love you, she was saying, get back here.

Now, underneath it all was I love you, right? That's what it was predicated upon, but the command was given, get back here, get safe, right? So Jesus is saying here that the bottom line of our obedience to God is governed by our love for God, right? Love is not just this, oh, I really love you, but I'm not going to do what you say, that's an oxymoron, that's saying the opposite. You know, we've heard this before.

Remember the conversation that went on between someone and Jesus. I'll put this up on the screen, it's from Matthew 22. A question was posed to him, it says,

**Matthew 22:35-38 (ESV)**

*And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."*

*And one of them, a lawyer, (which is an expert in the law of Moses) asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."*

Isn't that incredible? What's the most important rule of all the rules that God has ever given? What's the number one? What's the most important one? "*Love the Lord your God.*" Do you see? The whole idea of obedience is based on love, it's the most powerful dynamic behind the obedience of friendship, the obedience of friendship.

Then I want you to see one of the other dynamics of friendship when we look here at verse 11 in your Bible, says, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*" This is another dynamic of friendship, it's simply the sharing of joy. Anybody who ever has had a companion; husband, wife, you understand that being able to share your joy is one of the most powerful parts of being connected with another human being on earth.

If I go through something that's just really incredible, and I don't have anybody to share that with, oh, what a bummer, doesn't it...? It's like throwing cold water, you know, on a fire. It's such a joy and Jesus is doing what friends do, He says, I want you to know my joy. Do you know where that joy comes from? It comes primarily, principally, through obedience, the love of obedience, the

obedience of love. I guess you could probably say it either way. There is a great joy that comes from that and Jesus wants us to be able to share that.

You know, when you think about joy or you think about en-joy-ment, which I think by the way are two different things, God has factored a lot of enjoyment into the world in which we live. You look at a beautiful sunrise or sunset, great enjoyment. You know, you look at a majestic snowcapped mountain, it's one of my personal favorites, great enjoyment. Hearing about a new baby born, great enjoyment. Hearing about someone coming to faith in Jesus, obviously. But you know, it's one thing to experience enjoyment, which is, you know, a general sense of pleasure, or, if you will, being pleased with what you see here or know, but it is another thing altogether, to have the joy of the Lord in us through relationship, that's different you guys, that is an abiding joy.

That is not a joy based on, ooh, guess what I heard? Or ooh, guess what I saw? It's a constant, ongoing, joyful sense of understanding that I am in right relationship with God and we're friends, we're friends. Not just on friendly terms, that would be good enough. Frankly, I would be happy with just being on friendly terms with God, but He goes beyond that. He says, I call you friend. Oh, just blows me away, this is a connection, this is a joy that people outside of Christ, they don't experience, they don't know this thing.

They don't know this joy that you and I have of being one with the Lord, one in spirit with Him, being on friendly terms and being a friend. They don't know that, they don't, they can't relate to it from that perspective. It is a connection of intimate friendship and a mutual sharing of joy between 2 friends.

But then, when we think we begin to understand all this and what it means to be a friend, Jesus goes on in verses 12, 13 and 14, and He raises the bar to the whole thing. Look at this, beginning of verse 12, *"This is my commandment, (He says) that you love one another as I have loved you."* And then He goes on to say, *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."*

Sue reminded me before she left for a women's retreat, you know, this is the verse that we put on the back of our Calvary Chapel t-shirts that we made available during the summer. She said, Paul, it took you all this time to get around to doing this verse. She picked that verse because she thought I'd be doing it in the middle of the summer, we didn't get there nearly that fast.

But notice what Jesus is saying, there is no greater expression of love that one should lay down his life for his friends. And then He goes on in verse 14, again

to say, *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."* Right? Here, you'll notice in these 3 verses, Jesus zeros in on a specific commandment, and that is to love one another. He's talking about how we, now He's talking about how we love one another. This is where He's really meddling in our lives. It's one thing we talk about loving God, you know. I say, hey, you, just need to, you really need to grow in your love for God and He really loves you and people are good talking about that.

Now we begin to talk about something that's much more messy, that creates much more drama and that is how we treat one another, how we love one another. And He says here, this is my commandment that you love one another. But he doesn't just stop there, He says, *"that you love one another as I have loved you."* And that single clarification of what love ought to look like is so important because, you know, we live in a world today that likes to talk about love. Have you ever noticed that the world's definition of love is often very, very different from yours? Have you ever kind of figured that out?

You know, back in the 1970s, there was a musician, not a tremendously well-known musician, but a musician, nonetheless, by the name of Todd Rundgren, who wrote a song entitled, Love is the Answer. He didn't actually popularize it, although in my personal opinion, he did the best version of it, former disc jockey talking here. But it was actually popularized by a group in the 70s called England Dan & John Ford Coley, I was never a big fan of theirs, but anyway, the song kind of became an anthem of the time: Love is the Answer. And it was actually a cool, good song, you know, Love is the Answer.

And then there was, there were other songs that, you know, emphasize that theme as well, like, What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love by Jackie Deshannon. That was another big anthem of that decade, by the way, Jackie Deshannon is 82 years old. I just thought I'd say that to make you feel really old yourself, but you know, these things became musical anthems, they became themes, you know, that, oh, what the world needs now is love, sweet love.

I don't think anyone would disagree with the idea that what the world needs now is love, sweet love or that love is the answer, however you want to say it. But we do disagree on how to define it, big time. There are huge, just in case you were wondering, there are huge disagreements among people today about how to define that love or how to show that love, you know? What constitutes love.

On the one hand, you got people who are saying, you really want to love people? You really want to love people? Well, here's how they define it, you need to give unlimited handouts to the poor and you need to refer to all of their



life choices and behaviors as good and natural, you need to accept them just as they are, and that is love and that's what people will tell you. And then you got people on the other hand that say, oh, I disagree, I don't think either one of those things is a true expression of love. I think that if you're just going to give unlimited free handouts to people, I don't think that is loving because you actually end up removing their sense of self-worth that comes from being a productive member of society. You're literally stealing it from them, and that's not love. And they'll even, that side of the equation will go on to say that to accept and agree with any and all lifestyles and behaviors is also not loving because you're ignoring morality and the consequences that come from immorality and that's not loving when you gloss over immorality.

You see the differences? And you've got these 2 definitions of what the world needs now is love, sweet love or, you know, or whatever the case might be. It all is dependent on your world view, your world view makes the difference, you know.

Isn't it interesting though that Jesus cuts through all of the disagreement and all of the discord and He defines real love in one way. He says, you want to talk about real love? You want to talk about the greatest expression of love? And He points to the cross, there you go, and that's it, He says. You want to talk, you want to know the greatest expression of love? It's the cross, it's not what you do, it's what I did. *"Greater love has no one than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends."* That's it, that's the best you can do. That's the highest you can give because when you've given yourself, you've given everything that there is to give, there's no more to give because you've given all that you have, all that you are, you've given it away.

The next thing Jesus says about friendship is in verse 16. Look with me there quickly in your Bible, He says, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you."* Do you know that back in Jesus's day, it was actually common for a disciple to choose their master. They would choose whichever master they wanted to follow and so that was the norm. But Jesus says to His disciples, by the way, you didn't choose me, I chose you and by the way, this is not a statement about divine election, okay, He's not talking about salvation here. The context is friendship, He's been talking about friendship, He's still talking about friendship.

And He says, I chose you to be my friends, I chose you to come into this relationship. You didn't have to come and ask me, Lord, can I please be your friend? I chose you to be my friend, I did the picking, I did the choosing. Who do we choose to be our friends? People we like, people who are already friendly

toward us. People who we think are going to be a nice complement to who and what we are, those are the people we choose. Who did Jesus choose to be His friends? Let me show you this, Paul wrote about it in Romans chapter 5, up on the screen. Great, great passage, Paul writes,

**Romans 5:6-8 (ESV)**

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though (yea) perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, (and do you know what that means? That means enemies. While we were still sinners and enemies of God) Christ died for us.*

So when did Jesus pick you to be his friend? When you were at your worst, when you were railing against Him with clenched teeth and clenched fist, He chose you to be His friend. That's the difference between Jesus and us, as it relates to how we, you know, choose our friends and what did He choose us for? He goes on in verse 16, if you keep reading, to say, I “*appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*, (that means it should last, it's not just going to be there and then go away) *so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*” Again, friendship is about sharing.

Jesus chose us as His friends that He might share with us the joy of fruitfulness and relationship with the Father. He has a fruitful and joyful relationship with the Father, and He says, I wanted to share that with you. I have a very fruitful and joyful relationship with my Father, and I wanted you to have that same thing. And that's going to happen by me allowing you, enabling you, equipping you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that's going to last, you guys, to eternity. That's what he means by fruit that will last. He means fruit that will, when you're standing before God, He's going to point to that fruit, and He's going to say, look what you did, look what you did in my name, look at the things you accomplished, look at the people you reached, the people you prayed for, the people you loved in my name, the people you...

And remember, we know that even a cup of cold water to a child isn't going to go unnoticed and He's going to point to that, and that's going to be a great point

of joy and rejoicing and lasting fruit. It's going to be wonderful. So these are some of the dynamics of friendship, the things that we've seen in these verses.

But as I close here this morning, I want to remind you of a statement that I made at the outside of this study, because I want to show you a little bit of the backside of that if I could. Do you remember when I said in the ancient world that the term friend was more than what we see it as? That back in that day was used to express a special and exclusive relationship, do you remember when I said that? Well the word exclusive means singular and undivided. So the friendship that Jesus wants to have with you, He wants to be singular and undivided, okay? Singular and undivided and that means if you're a friend of God, you cannot, at the same time, be on friendly terms with anything that has positioned itself contrary to God, or in opposition to God, right? Friendship is exclusive, friendship is exclusive. That's what it meant, in the day that Jesus spoke these words, that's what friend meant. It was exclusive and so you can't be on friendly terms with the world and that is precisely why James wrote these words that I'll show you on the screen.

**James 4:4 (NIV84)**

*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

And that's a sobering passage, that's one of those passages that kind of smacks you and gets your attention because every single one of us is at one time or another drawn toward the world, all of us. But the reason that we can't connect with the world in that way of friendship, again, friendship means exclusivity, is because the world is a kingdom that is ruled for the time being by none other than Satan. Jesus told us that. He's the one who called Satan the prince of this world, I didn't, He did.

And even though that's a temporary position of rulership, it is a position of rulership nonetheless and it is going on right now. That's why the world that you see and that you live in is filled with chaos and violence and pain. It's because it's under the rulership, temporary though it may be, of Satan. It is a kingdom that defies God, it is a kingdom that rejects God and all that He stands for. You remember what Jesus said to Pilate? He said, My kingdom is not of this world, my kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36) This world is the complete antithesis of my kingdom. The kingdom of this world says, trust in yourself and follow your heart, you see it over and over again in movies and so forth. The kingdom of God says, trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5) The kingdom of this world is fixated on

advancing one's own identity and it's constantly making huge issues of things like ethnicity, skin color, ideologies and politics.

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is the unifier of all people. We stand shoulder to shoulder, toe to toe in the kingdom of God because when we recognize that we are sinners in need of a Savior and we come to faith in Jesus, all those other things like race, skin color, political leanings, all those things fade into the background. We are just children of God and that's all we are and our goal is not to advance our unique ideologies any longer, our goal then becomes sharing the love of Jesus with all people without prejudice or condition. It's a completely different scenario, it's a completely different way of thinking.

The kingdom of this world is intrinsically unforgiving and violent. If you want to advance your cause, you do it by overpowering your opponent, you use things like slander, false accusation, bitter words. They're all accepted as a means of battling those who you are against, you have to take down your enemy at all costs.

But the kingdom of God tells us that we are never to return evil with evil or violence with violence, instead, we are to return evil with good. The kingdom of God tells us to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, love people, pray for your enemies, do good to your enemies, seek their well-being, and the Bible tells us our battle is not against flesh and blood. You see how different it is? The kingdom of this world is fixated on eternal, I should say external. As I said already, you know, it's all about how you look, it's a, you know, a person's skin color, it's all about their body shape, or their height, or weight or personal beauty or lack thereof. The condition of their clothing, the size of their bank account. In this world, it's all about what you own, what you possess. It's all about having more, having better, getting what we can get, and holding on to it at all costs, that's what the world is all about.

The kingdom of God, you'll notice, is not so concerned about things, rather, the kingdom of God is concerned about the heart, what's in your heart? It's not about what you own, it's about who you are on the inside. God cares about who you are on the inside. It's not about getting things that are better, it's about being better people. Loving as God loves, sharing as God shares, it's not about getting, it's about giving your life away in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God asks us, what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Mark 8:36) Those aren't the words of this world. Is it any wonder that the apostle Paul wrote these words to the Galatians up on the screen?

**Galatians 6:14 (ESV)**

*...far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

So friends with the world? No, no we die to the world every single day, amen.