

FRIENDSHIP.

A FRIEND LOVETH AT ALL TIMES, AND AS A BROTHER IS BORN
FOR ADVERSITY. Proverbs 17. 17.

One of the most striking contrasts between the ancient and the modern world is in the place which is given to friendship by moralists and religious teachers. In Aristotle's famous treatise of Ethics two books out of nine are devoted to the moral bearings of friendship. Our Lord - Jesus Christ - gave a great new commandment to His disciples, that they should love one another; and though Christian men have yet but imperfectly understood what He meant, or carried out what they have understood, an ideal was created which far transcended the lower meaning of ancient civilizations. Greek friendship was to be merged in Christian love. The meaning of Friendship proposed by Aristotle can be explained in two essential characteristics; Firstly- Friendship is based upon selfishness; springing from a wish to realise oneself in the life of another. In this experience the friend is fed by the benefit or pleasure derived from their mutual companionship- not for the good of the friend or his improvement but for one's own benefit. In the second point - Aristotle explains that friendship can only exist between equals- one can be a friend with those who has as much of life's goods as he has - from the standpoint of a modern interpretation - One needs a friend to use or one needs a friend with equal possession or attainment- this gave rise to a distinctive classification. Christian friendship, on the other hand, springs from the complete denial of self. It seeks nothing; it gives all. It is never motivated by the equality of conditions because it desires to raise the other even to a position that exceeds his own. Therefore it embraces the weak, the fallen, the sinful and it seeks to raise them from that lowly position. .. even though they may never be able to repay one for the efforts extended. Christian Friendship seeks nothing but it gives all.

In the book of Proverbs; Friends according to the original sense of the Hebrew word, are those who delight in one another's companionship; either they are useful to one another because each possesses gifts which the other has not, or they are agreeable to one another

because they have certain taste in common. Thus there may of course be a friendship in evil, in vice, in destructive practices; thieves may enter into a league to carry out their anti-social designs, and may be true to one another; vicious men and women may find a bond of friendship in the common indulgence of crime. Thus friendship does not necessarily mean good - for friendship can be the cause for one's destruction. Sometimes folk are friends to pull you down- destroy you. There may also be an interested comradeship which is entirely hypocritical; such a friendship is usually marked by a loud and ostentatious demonstration- "... Proverbs states in another scripture-" He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning it shall be counted a curse for him." But, in the main friendship implies a certain amount of goodness; for it is in itself a virtue. The ties that bind in friendship for the doing of evil deeds - or for the destruction of another exist for time but soon begin to fail- Honor among thieves exist for a while but soon fades.

Our attention - therefore - is directed toward the good within friendships. In the heart of our friend we see our own character reflected just as gazing into a mirror we see the reflection of our own face. It is in the frank and sympathetic relationship of friendship that we really get to know ourselves, and to realise what is in us. We unfold to one another, we discover our similarities and mark our differences. Points are immediately which remained unobserved in our own hearts are immediately detected and understood when we see them also in our friends; faculties which remained unused are brought into play to supplement the discovered defects in our friend's nature. We hardly guess what a fund of happy humour is in us until we are encouraged to display it by observing how it flashes light up the face we love. Our capacities of sympathy and tenderness remain undeveloped until we wish eagerly to comfort our friend in a sudden sorrow. In a true friendship - we discover that we are living a life which is doubled in all its faculties of enjoyment and of service; I shudder to think what kind of people we would be without a friendship that brings out the best within us. A friendless person has a lack-lustre face; his talk has a dull edge, his emotions a poor and flow. -

The use of friendship its growing and survival depends upon these distinctive elements. Friendship depends upon frankness. If frankness is kept in the background - friendship cannot survive. If you have to be so careful about your use of words and suggestions - friendship cannot grow. We are inclined to think that only those who speak soft words to us are our friends - but soft speaking is not always a token of love.. and the hard saying of our friend may be uttered at a great personal cost - My Bible plainly states - The Lord chastens those He loves. There are two extremes here - the person who never disagrees with you is just as bad as the person who never agrees with you. So frankness in a friendship is mixed with mutual consideration which sweetens friendship. If, however, friendship ripens through many years of kindly growth- two people have learned thoroughly to understand one another, and have become in a certain sense one. Each recognises the service that the other renders, and welcomes the advice or even the rebuke which is made possible by their relationship. When one sees a fault in the other, and with a tenderness begotten of affection, and a humility which trembles to presume, speaks gently but frankly to his friend.

But the decisive test and the most beautiful proof of real friendship will be found in the day of adversity. A friend is never known till needed. When calamity falls upon us, false friends make excuses and go; lip-friends relapse into silence; but we begin then for the first time to find out who is a true friend indeed. Then it appears that the true friend is entirely unchanged by the changed aspect of affairs; it seems as if he had been ~~admitted~~ born into a brotherhood with us for this occasion. There is no wish to cry off; he seems even to press the brotherly tie in a way which we should not have presumed to expect, and thus he contrives to lighten the oppressive burden of obligation for the favour that he confers, by making it appear that he is bound to act as he does by a necessity of kinship - To me that what the text means- a friend loveth at all times- and as a brother is born for adversity-. A brother is and remains a brother no matter what happens in life- time, distance, no factor can change a brother relationship- A real friend is at all times a friend- and adversity cannot and does not change this relationship. What you do or what folk say you did - does not change a friend.

Now if you have such a friend as this- take care to retain him, do not by negligence or a deficient consideration lose this friend. Put yourself out of the way to show that you appreciate and value him; do not allow false reserve or a foolish shyness to check your expression of gratitude. If you have real friends then, take pains to keep them. Watch carefully for the small beginnings of a rupture and hasten to heal it. Think not effort is wasted, and no apology or explanation is too humiliating to avert the loss of a true soul comrade.

The whole tendency of the Gospels is put every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ on a spiritual level so that we can be not His servants but as He said to His disciples - Not His servants, but His friends, if they did whatsoever He commanded them. It is a very unequal friendship, as we must all feel. Jesus has all the strength, all the wisdom, all the goodness, all the gifts; but the sense of inequality is removed by His own gracious friendliness. Jesus attaches such importance to a heartfelt love that He is willing to accept that as the fair equivalent of all that He does and gives to us. When You and Christ - or Christ and you become friends - there is a delight in mutual companionship, the interchange of thought and feeling, the quick and quickening response of love and comprehension, exist between you and Christ. You may gaze into the face of Jesus by applying His life to yours and and see yourself mirrored in Him - your faults and your failures show plain and the larger, truer, holier self is there in that reflection. And then the words of the text have a deeper meaning - the friendship with Jesus - A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother is born for adversity - The Friendship of Jesus - when you know Him as a Friend - is extended at all times ~~and born~~ and is as a brother is born for adversity... When adversity comes into your life - Jesus is ready to help you. And it has been my experience - that He gives help not because - I am so worthy - but it is in the nature of Jesus to help mankind. And sometimes it has been my experience - that He extends that friendship - when it is needed. He told the Disciples that ^{for} in life's adversities - He would send the Comforter. Then when the adversity of death came - He would as a Friend be near. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends - Not servants but friends - I like words of hymn - What a friend we have in Jesus etc.