

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FRIENDSHIP'S GUIDE.

A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17TH, 1914

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

On Lord's-day Evening, September 11th, 1870.

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”—John xv. 14.

It is very easy to understand how Jesus Christ is our friend. Did ever anyone deserve the name so well? Who can prove his friendship as Jesus proved it by laying down his life for those he calls his friends? But it is a mark of wonderful condescension on his part that he should call us his friends, and it confers upon us the highest conceivable honour that such a Lord as he is, so infinitely superior to us, should condescend to enter into terms of friendship with us. My friend, O Jesus, thou art, for thou hast redeemed my soul from death and hell, but that I should be thy friend—nothing but thy loving, condescending tenderness could ever have conceived of this. If thou dost put such a title as this upon me, teach me how I may act in conformity with it. Beloved, there is a *mutual friendship* between Christ and the believer. There cannot be friendship if it is all on one side. There is bounty, there is kindness, and there may be some gratitude in return, but friendship is a reciprocal thing. In its fullest sense it is between two, and the one heart must be as the other heart, or else there is no friendship. Now every believer is a friend to Jesus, and Jesus is a friend to him. They are friends because they have a mutual love for each other. The believer does not love his Lord so much as Jesus loves him, for his heart is little compared with Jesus' heart. But when the believer is in a right state, he loves Jesus with all his heart, and soul, and strength. He feels that there is none in the

world that can have a place in his affections at all comparable with his Lord and Master. He can say:—

“ My Jesus I love thee: I know thou art mine;
For thee all the follies of sin I resign.”

And if Jesus loves us, we also love him. Friendship has in it a *mutual delight*. Two friends value each other. Now the delight of Jesus is with the sons of men. In those whom he has redeemed with his blood he sees the satisfaction for the travail of his soul. He says of his Church that her name is Hephzibah—“ My delight is in her ”; and on the other hand, the believer’s delight is in Christ. “ He is all my salvation, and all my desire,” says the believer: “ He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.” None can be compared with him. It is sweet to think of the saint looking on the Saviour, and the Saviour looking on the saint, and the two together blending their love in mutual delight in each other. This love and this delight lead to *mutual converse*. Persons can hardly maintain friendship if they only see each other now and then. If there be no communion by letter or in any other way, I should think friendship could scarcely be maintained. But oh! Jesus reveals himself to his people, and his people tell out their hearts to Jesus. Do not suppose that because he is not here, for he is risen, that therefore we have no intercourse with him. Our prayers speak into his ears, our tears fall into his heart: when we are wounded, his wounds bleed afresh. He is the Head, and we the members, and, however great the body, if you wound the body, the head feels it at once, so close is the communion. Yes, and we do converse with him still in meditation, in adoration, alone in our chambers. Though we have not seen him with these optics, which are, after all, poor things, we have seen him with our soul’s eyes, which are brighter eyes by far, and as we have beheld him, our soul has melted for joy in the glance of his beauty.

Now to make friendship there will be not only mutual love, delight, and converse, but friends must have *harmony of thought*. I will not say identity, for man and man must always be two, and Christ and his people, though one in some respects, are two existences. But though two notes, though different, may be in perfect harmony, so is it with the heart of Christ, and the heart of his renewed child. What Jesus loves, we love; what Jesus hates, we hate; what Jesus seeks, we seek; what Jesus shuns, we shun. This is true friendship when there is but one heart in two bodies, and when one heart in the twain produces with undivided strength one object. Now Christ’s object is his Father’s glory. If you are Christ’s friends, that object is yours too. His object is to seek and save the lost: if you love him, you seek to save the lost also in your way. He loves truth, holiness, righteousness. He delights in that which puts an end to misery, to evil, to cruelty, to wrongdoing. Do you delight in the same? If so, unity of design, harmony of thought, will make up very greatly the friendship between

you and Jesus. Oh! but we are going to the same great end. Where he is, thither our hearts are drawn. We are living here for the same purpose that brought him here, and when our work is done, the same reward that gladdened him shall also gladden us—we also shall enter into the joy of our Lord. Some of you do not know much about this: I am talking strange things to some of you. Jesus—yes, you read of him—Jesus—you hear of him: it is proper to receive his name; but oh! you have never spoken with him: you have never known him to be real nor conceived of him as such. I pray you that may you be made spiritual, may you be born again. Until you are, you cannot be a friend of Christ; but when you are, and may it come now this very hour, may you discover that he is a great friend to you, and then, out of love to him, may you become a friend of his.

Now we are not left in the dark as friends of Jesus as to the best way of showing our friendship. Two persons may be great friends, and one may wish to serve the other, and say, "I hardly know what I can do to please my friend. I wish I knew his wants, I wish I knew his desires: I would strive to gratify them." Now you have to-night given to you, as lovers of Jesus—you have the guide as to how you can prove yourselves his friends. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." We have, then, in the text the guide for friendship, and I will say this about it: it contains seven things. The first is:—

I. TRUE FRIENDS OF CHRIST HIMSELF DISTINCTLY ACKNOWLEDGE HIS TRUE POSITION TOWARDS THEMSELVES.

That position is contained in these words, "I command you." We are friends of Jesus, but Jesus must still be first: "I *command* you." The genuine friend of Christ does not command himself: he has taken Christ's yoke upon him, and is now Christ's liege man and servant. He does not now follow his own whims in religion, nor does he think he is to be dictator to himself. In becoming Christ's friend, he agrees to subordinate his mind and will to the supremacy of Christ Jesus the Lord. Now then, friend of Jesus, note thou this. Thou art not thine own henceforth, not thine own master, neither art thou thine own guide. I am often afraid when I hear persons talk of the glorious excellence of liberty of conscience, that they make a mistake as to what liberty of conscience is. What is liberty of conscience? Is it liberty to believe anything I like—liberty to hold any doctrine I please? No; it is such liberty with regard to the civil magistrate and with regard to my fellow-man. Before my fellow-man I have a right to believe what I will, and he may not call me to account; I am free there. But does such freedom exist before God? I trow not. The friend of Jesus asks to have his conscience taught: he lays his judgment at the feet of the great Teacher, and all the liberty that he wants to his conscience is to have it purified and cleansed, that it may be a fit guide for him to follow; otherwise a distorted, perverted, dark, polluted conscience may as readily

lead a man to hell as if he never had a conscience at all. It is not because I am conscientious that I am right. As I have often told you, a man may conscientiously drink arsenic or prussic acid, and believe that it will do him good, but he would die for all that. Ah! and a man might conscientiously believe a lie, and he will reap the fruit of that lie. Thou art a friend of Jesus to take thy command from his lips, and lay down at his feet, for he says, "I command you."

But mark, though Christ has to command his friends, *we are not to let anyone else command us*. Oh! shun the slavery of all who take their religion from men, be they who they may, whether called priests or presbyters, or from human creeds or books. Read them, gather what you can from them all, but "One is your Master, even Christ," and all ye are brethren. No church may lord it over your minds, for the church may err, but not so Christ. "Whatsoever I command you," saith he. He is infallible: he will bid you do no ill, but a church of fallible men is still fallible, and may slide aside, first a little, then more, then much, then monstrously; then utterly apostatise from the faith of God's elect. Therefore your guide, your leader, is nothing but Jesus. "Do whatsoever I command you." There is too much among us of doing whatsoever our particular *religion* may command us. I charge you, brethren, do nothing of the sort. What are your councils? What are your assemblies? Nothing—less than nothing, I trow. If they decree anything contrary to God's will, they are mischief makers. Christ is the head of the Church, and he has not vacated his high position in the midst of his Israel. Yield you to him. Go to the fountain-head, the statute book, that shows his will, and get it there. You have enough there, though all contradict you. You have enough there, and all the councils of the fathers, and all the Church will be less than the small dust in the balance, if you find not the law to be Christ's. Whatsoever he says, the true friend of Jesus does—neither less nor more—for he knows that none can legislate in his realm but the King himself, and all that pretend to legislate do but err, when they get away from the "It is written" of the grand old Word of God.

Remember, too, all friends of Christ's that *this doctrine of Christ's supremacy stands good always*. He is your Lord, and he is to command you everywhere, not in your religious thought only, but at home, in the chamber, in the parlour, in the drawing-room, out of doors, in the street, on the mart, on the 'change, in your shop. His rule contained in his own life—his golden rule, "Do ye to others as ye would they should do to you"—his new commandment that ye love one another—these are always binding. A soldier may have a furlough, but a Christian never. You might plead that concerning such and such a law you were exempt before men, but to Christ you are never exempt, nor would you wish to be, for his service is freedom, and his law, O friend of Christ, has now become your delight. Grasp, then, that first thought, "Ye are my friends if

I command you"—if you recognise me as being the leader and the commander unto you his people. You must recognise Christ in that capacity, and him only, or you are not his friends.

But note, again, the text has in it a word which I may paraphrase in this way:—

II. WE ARE TO RECOGNISE OUR OWN PERSONAL OBLIGATIONS.

Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command *you*. The mass of mankind who pretend to be religious suppose this book to be written to all sorts of good people, but not particularly to themselves, and there be they who think that the commands of Christ are very proper to be read, and to be heard, and to be proclaimed, but they do not look upon them as being binding on themselves. Friend of Jesus, Jesus has a right to your service, to your obedience. What he bids, he bids *you*—if to no other, yet to you. Then the zeal of some good men does not exempt me. If my minister be very useful, that is not myself. I am Christ's friend if I do whatsoever he commands me. Then the intense fervour of the Church does not permit me to recoil, and say, "There is nothing for me to do." No; I am his friend if I do what he commands me. If, on the other hand, I dwell among a slumbering church, if I see all around me the signs of sloth, yet I am not to judge the church and excuse myself, and say, "I do as much as others—perhaps a little more: I am not so hard-hearted as so-and-so." Oh! sirs, what have you to do with your brethren, with your fellow-servants? To your own Master you must stand or fall, as they must, and you are Christ's friend if you do whatsoever he commands you. It does seem to be very hard to get men to individualise themselves in the things of God. They do not count themselves rich because England is rich: they do not consider themselves to be getting rich because the bank-rate is lower: they want to get the solid coins in their own grasp, and to their own banking account. But when I come to religion, men talk of this denomination and that church, and that other—anything but about themselves. But ye, O friend of Christ, ye must live before the Lord as though there were no other. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Now we will lay the force of our thought on another word. Observe here that:—

III. THE TRUE FRIEND OF CHRIST OBSERVES CAREFULLY ALL THAT CHRIST SAYS.

It is not "Ye are my friends if ye do *some* things that I command you." But "Ye are my friends if ye do *whatsoever* I command you"—*whatsoever*. Are there public duties? Do they require courage? I must perform them. Are there private duties? Are they unseen of men? They are as much incumbent upon me: I must discharge them. Are there commands of precept by way of ordinance? I must keep them. Are there commands by way of morals? I must obey them, however hard or stern they may seem. *Whatsoever* Christ commands is the law to his people. O England, England, when will the day come back when this book which is said to be

the only religion of Protestants shall be truly so? The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants—so they say, but it is not so. There be many things practised by so-called Protestants that are not here. Where are your holy baptisms? Where are your confirmations? Where are half the ceremonies, if not all, of the Church of England, and many other bodies? They are inventions of man, and man only, having not so much as a shred or vestige of foundation in God's own Book. Ye have made another book—your bishops have made another book—and laid it on the top of God's own book, and these be your Bible—not the Bible, and the Bible only, but the Book of Common Prayer. And with other denominations, dissenting denominations, there is too much of the same sort of thing. "What said John Calvin?" What care I what he said, or did not say? "What said John Wesley?" What care I what John Wesley said, or did not say? The Master, the Master, let us do whatsoever *he* commands us. These were his good servants, as I believe, both of them, John Wesley and John Calvin; and if they did better than I, which I know they did, therein will I rejoice, and bless God, and wherein they followed the Master, I, with unequal footsteps, would seek to follow too; but to say that I will do this because John this or John that taught it—shame on the Christian man that dares to bow his head to such a yoke as that. Let every Christian man contend for this that he is to do whatsoever Christ commands. Does it kick over the conventionalities of the church? Let them go over. Does it burn the tag rags you thought so much of—your venerable things that you laid up as holy relics? Burn every one of them. What right have they to stand in contradiction to the law of Christ? Nay, whatsoever he commands—not more, not less—this is to be our religion and our law, and to it let every Christian stand. Happy day shall it be for the church and for the world when this is true. Once more, it is clear from one word, that:—

IV. THE TEXT IS VERY PRACTICAL.

"Ye are my friends if ye *do* whatsoever I command you"—not "if ye do some things," not "if ye talk about it," for lip service is hypocrisy—not "if ye tell others to do it"—there is a great deal of religion that is very like charity, and you know what charity is. A sees B is very badly off, and he writes a letter at once to C to help B. So is it with religion. A sees it a duty that such a thing should be done, and tells B that he is very wrong not to do it. That is what is called religion. But as I understand religion, it is this. A sees B needing help, and gives it to him: A sees a duty and does it himself, and after he has done it himself, then he may talk to B about it, and not till then. "Ye are my friends if ye *do* whatsoever I command you." Well, some of you have been thinking about it a long while—it is time for you to *do* it. He commands you to love your brother: you have been talking about that—well, do it. Don't grumble, and complain, and criticise any longer. You know he commands you to forgive any who offend

you. Do not *know* it any longer, but go and *do* it. Some of you believe that you ought to be baptized and make profession of your faith. What is the good of thinking of it? Go and do it: go and do it. It is in the keeping of his commandments that there is great reward. He does not do the will of God who says, "Well, I am turning it over, and one of these days I suppose I shall be moved to do it." What do you want to move you but this, that you owe everything to Christ, and that Christ commands you? A soldier in the day of battle only wants the command, and on he marches, and a true friend of Jesus pays to him as perfect an obedience as a soldier to his captain, or at least he desires to do it. A lift of Jesus' finger, and away he goes. One look from Jesus' eye shall cause him to stop, or make a rapid advance, just as the word may be.

V. THIS COMMAND IS VERY SIMPLE.

I shall close by commending this text to you because it is so. Ye are my friends if you own me your Master in everything, your own personal Master, and then do what I tell you. Now how plain this is? There is no mistake about it. It is obedience Christ asks for. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams," and what a blessing it is that this text gives us such a very simple thing to do. Suppose Jesus Christ were to say, "That man is my friend who will support a minister, who will build a place of worship, who will go out abroad for a missionary." Oh! there are some of you who would weep and say, "I can do neither of those things: I wish I could! It would be my greatest pleasure if I could." My dear friends, the poorest man, the poorest woman here, that is a true friend of Christ can do this: you can do whatsoever he commands you. By the power of his blessed Spirit that has made you love him, you can watch earnestly to be holy, to be loving, as Jesus was. The notion with a great many is, "I want to show that I am Christ's friend; now I must shut myself up and get away from everybody." That is not what Christ says. He says, "Do whatsoever I command you"—not run out of the battle, but fight through, and win it. "No; but," saith another, "what can I do my Saviour to praise? I must speak about him." Yet, perhaps, that dear friend could not put three words together consecutively. Dear brother, if God has not given you that gift, you need not cry that you have not got it. Go and do whatsoever he commands you; that will be better than sacrifice. I know some persons who are very attentive to sermons. I am glad they are. They wish to get out on week-nights, and I am glad they are. I wish all were able to. But many a mother will be serving God much better by keeping the house clean, and the garments mended, than by coming to a sermon. You must do *whatsoever* he commands you, and what he commands you as a wife, is to discharge a wife's duty. When I sometimes see a religious serving-man a great talker, who does not groom his Master's horses well, and who, if he can get an excuse for leaving work, will, I think "That man

might do more good in minding his master's business than in running here and there to make a show of religion. I believe plain, holy, godly living is more wanted a great deal more than fine preaching; and if my preaching does not, by God's grace, produce in you a finer character than that, then I am preaching for nothing. I heard of a man the other day who could preach with his feet, and I know a great many who do. That is, preaching with living and daily walk and conversation. It is, after all, to be upright in business, to be affectionate in the family, to make those around you happy, to live Christ—that is, after all, true friendship with Christ. No big words of ready talkers, no polished periods, no gift of prayer will ever be so acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ as the simple piety that graces the fireside, that adorns the private and the public life of the believer. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. Practically to prove that Jesus Christ is your Lord is the highest service that you can any of you render to him. May God help you to render it from this time forth, with undeviating correctness, and with the help of his Spirit may you yet do it more and more. For let me conclude by observing that, though this seems a very simple thing, yet after all:—

VI. IT IS A MOST USEFUL AND NEEDFUL THING.

It is not possible that a rebel should be a friend to Christ. If a man says of any law of Christ, "I do not mean to keep that," then, sir, you have virtually said, "I do not mean to have Christ for my Lord," and that means that you cannot have him as your Saviour. If you do not know a thing to be Christ's, well, I believe you are sinful still, for you ought to know it. The laws of our country never excuse a person for breaking the law because he says he did not know the law. It is presumed that everybody ought to know it. And the Bible is not such a book as they cannot understand if they try. Any person can find out Christ's will if he likes. But suppose you know it is Christ's will, and do not choose to do it—if you put your foot down there and say, "I shall not do it," then there is an end of all friendship. Obedience, then, is an essential of true friendship to Christ, for those who make a profession of friendship and don't do what he commands are the worst enemies he has. No city that is besieged need fear so much the enemy outside, as treachery inside. If there be known to be treachery inside, then the stress of war becomes severe. So if inside the church there be persons who deliberately say, "We are disciples of Christ, but we will not be obedient to his will," there is sedition and treason inside the camp; and these are they of whom Paul said, "I have told you even weeping—that they are the enemies, the especial enemies, of the cross of Christ." And let me say this keeping of the law of Christ is, after all:—

VII. THE BEST WAY OF SERVING HIM AS A MATTER OF USEFULNESS.

Sermons preached at home are the best sermons. Sermons at sick beds by holy women, sermons to drunken husbands by the patient godliness of the much-suffering wife, sermons by holy fathers

and mothers in their loving anxiety for wayward sons and daughters, sermons by servants in the rectitude of their conduct to their employers, sermons by Christian tradesmen preached in their bills and in their trade by strict attention to everything upright—these are sermons that the world must hear; these are things that must glorify Christ; these are the most friendly actions that you can do for Jesus. You raise his name in the market, you make men think the better of his religion by the holiness and consistency of your conduct. You are his friend then.

I dismiss you with this upon your minds. If you are his friends, obey his command and imitate his example, and seek to have this not in theory, but as a matter of fact, of daily life. The day will come, my hearers, when to be a friend of Christ will be the grandest thing beneath the heavens. He is an exiled prince in regard to this world now, and men despise him, but he is coming to his crown ere long; and when he shall appear in the clouds of heaven, as he shortly shall, all those who were his friends on earth, who stood in the pillory with him, and suffered for him—these shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Father. Oh! it will then be a grand day, a brave day, for those who died for him, for those who were made poor for conscience sake, for those who left kindred and friends for his name. I think I hear the King say, "Make way, angels; make way, cherubim and seraphim; these poor men and women were friends with me; when I was in exile they suffered with me; they were willing to bear reproach for me—let them come; they shall be courtiers round my throne. They were friends of mine in my humiliation; they shall be friends with me in my glory. 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.'" And oh! how will all men who were not his friends—how will they hide their heads and wish they had never been born to continue at enmity with him! They did not know who it was they were despising when they laughed at his people. They did not know what it was they trampled on when they put their profane feet upon the cross of Christ. They did not know who they insulted when they broke the Sabbath, and lived godless, Christless lives, but they will know it then when they see the King on his throne, for their cry will be—their bitter lament shall be—"Fall on us, ye mountains; cover us, ye rocks, and hide us—hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne." What! can ye not face him? You used to jeer at his people; you used to say, "It is all nonsense this religion." Cannot you face him? Cannot you face him? He has not spoken yet; no thunderbolts are in his hand; can you not face him? No; they are ashamed; they dare not look; they dare not gaze on such heavenly beauty; they seek a shelter; they hold their hands before their eyes. They ask the mountains to afford them a hiding-place, for could they be such fools as to despise him who died for his enemies, to despise the Christ of God, to despise the everlasting Creator, who out of mighty love gave up his life for men? Before

he speaks a word, before he pronounces a sentence, this shame shall begin their hell. "Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." God bless you, dear friends, save you by his great mercy, richly bless every one of you, and make you Christ's friends. Amen and amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN XII. 37—50; ISAIAH VI.

JOHN XII. 37—50.

Verse 37. *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him :*

They had an opportunity of seeing with their eyes what the Christ could do. He had even raised the dead in the midst of them, and yet this is the sorrowful statement.

38 40. *That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again. He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*

This passage is very frequently quoted in the Old Testament: it was so exceedingly apropos to the condition of the unbelieving Jews. They were wilfully blinded. They could see it; they were forced to hear it; there was much that even touched their hearts; but they hardened their heart against it, and to this day they remain the same.

41-43. *These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

And this is a common disease to this day. There are many who know the truth, who, nevertheless, keep very quiet about it. They do not like to be despised; they cannot endure to seem to be separate from their fellow-men; it is not respectable to be decided for Christ, and to come out from among them, so they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

44. *Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.*

Faith in Christ is faith in God; he that trusts the Son hath accepted the witness of the Father.

45. *And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.*

Wonderful expression. Perhaps, we never fully realise it. Christ is seeable; God is not; but when we see the Christ, we do virtually see all of God that we may desire to see: the Invisible hath made himself visible in Christ—in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

46. *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

True faith in Christ sheds light on everything concerning which light is desirable. You shall understand things when you have come unto the right standpoint, when you have gotten to believe in Christ. I wonder not that those who doubt concerning him, doubt about everything; if they will not have this light, how shall they see?

47. *And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*