

What Does It Take To Become a “Friend” of the Lord

The answer may not be what you think, and those who qualify may not be who you might expect to qualify...

by
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On the day He was betrayed and crucified the Lord explained to His disciples, who, up to that point, had known Him only as a man, that He would return to them in the form of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor, and that their (and our) relationship with Him would be more intimate and powerful than it was in His physical presence.

One of the most exciting and least recognized promises that the Lord made to the church was that He would make Himself real (manifest Himself) to the ones who demonstrated that they truly loved Him by their obedience (through faith) to the revealed truth, promises, and commands of the Lord.

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. John 14:21 NASB

Then He said that those who demonstrated that they truly loved Him by “having” and “obeying” His commands, would be His “friends.”

You are My friends if you do what I command you. John 15:14 NASB

As a new believer, having been delivered from heavy New Age occult involvements at the age of thirty-eight, I went through a time of intense cleansing as the Lord removed the many strongholds of Satan in my soul, and one morning I was awakened by the sound of my name being called.

I sat straight up in bed with the first rays of sunlight shining in through our bedroom window, and I saw “**John 14:15**” written across my mind’s eye as a vision.

I quickly awakened my wife, saying, “Peggy, Peggy, wake up! I’ve been given a scripture from the Lord!”

At the time I was ignorant of the fact that believers are continually given a “word” from the Lord in various forms, including that of our spiritual consciences, but I knew that the vision was an important “word” for me.

I opened my Bible and read it aloud, ***If you love me, you will obey what I command.***

I remember distinctly expecting John 14:15 to be the great call of the Lord on my life, and I remember, if you can imagine it, being disappointed with what I had received.

“Maybe I saw it wrong,” I said to my sleepy wife who was staring at her strange, wide-eyed husband.

“Maybe it was John 15:14,” I said hopefully as I turned to that passage, just as He knew I would.

You are my friends if you do what I command.

There it was. No doubt about it. His word to me, and the great call on my life was to have and obey His commands. And this not by being in obedience to religious rules and the expectations of men, but obedience to His direct commands as I learned to clearly hear His voice.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me... John 10:27 KJV

Some born-again Christians think that hearing a word from the Lord is a rare thing for believers, and woe to those shepherds who foster that idea to the sheep of their pasture.

The reality is that we are meant to “hear” and “obey” the voice of the Lord on a daily, hour by hour, moment by moment basis, not merely as a rare moment of spiritual insight or a prophetic “word” spoken to us by one with the gift of prophesying.

As John 10:27 clearly states: **His sheep hear His voice.**

Get this clear in your mind and in your heart. We may hear His voice through Spirit-anointed preaching and teaching or through a word of prophesy, but that is not to be our primary source. The primary source is the indwelling Holy Spirit, our Counselor, our *parakletos*, the Spirit of truth who was sent to guide us into all truth and who “bears witness” with our spirits on a day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment basis in those who have “ears to hear.”

We are even told that we are to allow the peace we have when our unique spirit-soul connection is in harmony with the Holy Spirit to rule as “umpire” over our thoughts and actions.

And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds...Colossians 3:15 Amplified (emphasis is the author’s)

The “heart” is our unique spirit-mind connection and the source of our ability to hear with spiritual ears. The “mind” is where questions arise....yes/no? stay/go? And note that it is the harmony between our soul (mind, emotion, will) and the Holy Spirit that gives us the peace of mind and lets us know that we are walking in the will of the Lord.

This revolutionary truth was revealed by the Lord to His disciples on the day He was betrayed and crucified, and His instructions, reported by the apostle, John (John 13-17), is vital for every believer, especially new believers, as we learn how to “hear” and “obey” the voice of the Lord.

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. John 14:21 NASB (emphasis is the author’s)

What does it mean to “have” His commandments? What it does not mean is to have them in the sense of having religious rules....thou shalt....thou shalt not. It means having them as a

living word of faith imparted by the Lord Himself to our hearts (our unique spirit-soul connection) by revelation.

Revelation is not a word to recoil from as though we are treading on sacred ground meant only for those prophets and apostles who wrote scripture. They did receive a revelation and were given the supernatural ability to remember the specific words of the Lord, but it is interesting to me that they often were not given a revelation of the full meaning of all that they wrote.

Then we are given the specific meaning by revelation as it applies to us, and without revelation we cannot “**believe in our hearts**” and then act on what we believe in our hearts, which is faith.

Faith comes by “hearing,” but not with our natural ears. Faith comes by hearing with spiritual ears what the Spirit is revealing to us as we read or meditate on scripture, as we hear anointed teaching and preaching, through the spiritual gifts of others, through our own spiritual gifts, through spiritual dreams and visions, through certain circumstances such as answered prayer, through angelic visitation, and through the still, small voice of the Spirit, our spiritual conscience.

Thus we “have” His commands when we “hear” them with our spiritual ears, and we “obey” them when we act on what we have heard, which is active faith.

What are the promises for those who respond to this passage by “having” and “obeying” the Lord’s commands?

1. We will be loved by the Father (experience the covenant love of the Father toward us and through us);
2. We will be loved by the Lord (experience the love of the Lord toward us and through us);
3. The Lord will make Himself real to us; He will manifest Himself to us (and, as He promises in John 15:14, we will become “friends” of the Lord with all the intimacy and fullness that this term implies.)

I found out quickly that the denomination in which my wife was comfortable and in which I served as deacon and teacher, believed and taught some things that were contrary to the revelation I received from scripture as I was guided by the Spirit of truth. And I found by experience that the pastors in that denomination (and practically all denominations, including “non-denominational” denominations) were more interested in protecting what they already believed (and were taught in seminary) than in knowing the truth as revealed by the Spirit of truth. Likewise, they were more interested in the sheeps’ obedience of religious rules and the expectations of men than they were in the sheeps’ direct obedience to the voice of the Lord.

There is comfort in believing and practicing what we are told by our chosen denominational authorities to believe and practice, just as there is comfort in fellowshiping with those who share our denominational beliefs and practices, but this comfort is primarily psychological rather than spiritual.

And the command for those who are determined to “love” Him and to be a “friend” of the Lord is to “have” His commands (as He reveals them to us by the Spirit) and to obey what we have thus received, even when it contradicts our rational judgment, our mere intellectual beliefs, or what we have been told to believe by religious authorities.

This is “having” and “obeying” as spoken by the Lord in John 14:21.

*He who **has my commandments**...*(as a living word of faith)... *and keeps them*...(by acting in complete obedience to the commands he has received directly and supernaturally from the Lord, even when they contradict other religious “authorities” in the believer’s life)... *is the one who loves Me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father*...(will experience the covenant love of the Father for him as it is being expressed through him)...; *and I will love him*...(so that he experiences the Lord’s love for him and the Lord’s love being expressed through him)... *and will disclose Myself to him*...(make Myself real to him so that our relationship is exquisitely real, personal, and powerful). John 14:21 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

Is there any believer who would not want this promise to be realized in their own lives?

There are many seminary graduates with doctorates in biblical Hebrew and Greek who do not “hear” His voice at all, just as some of the intellectual giants of Israel who know every jot and tittle of the Old Testament do not “hear” His voice at all. This statement is not a denial of the importance of studying scripture in the original languages, or of having excellent exegetical skills, but a statement that intellectual knowledge apart from the revelation and guidance of the Spirit of truth is not only worthless but a religious stumbling block for many and a source of division in the body of Christ.

I am reminded of a black and white, made for TV, documentary film called “Bill.” The story was about Bill Sackter, a mentally challenged man played by Mickey Rooney. A social studies student at the university filmed Bill’s life as his senior project, and this true story, based on Bill’s relationship with the social studies student making a documentary film, revealed an amazing event in Bill’s life.

Bill maintained a job as janitor at a private school, and he was befriended by a young girl in kindergarden. When the parents found out about the relationship, they told the principal that he must order Bill not to engage in conversations with their daughter.

The parents’ fear was obvious and prejudicial. If the man is mentally challenged he may also be a sexual pervert and a pedophile.

When the girl contracted spinal meningitis and was in the hospital under an oxygen tent with the prognosis of impending death, Bill showed up at the hospital, asking to see her.

The parents denied Bill permission to visit their daughter’s room, but, after Bill stayed in the waiting room for sixteen hours, the doctor convinced the parents to allow Bill to visit the girl who was now in a coma only hours away from death.

When Bill entered the room he looked at the girl and softly spoke these words. “Jesus, heal my little friend.”

Then he turned and walked away.

The documentary, which was not a “Christian” film, showed the real life events just as they happened, and the very next scene was of the little girl at her next birthday party.

Now, what I learned from this testimony is that Bill, whose reading skills were almost non-existent, could “hear” the voice of the Lord, and he “obeyed” what he heard without considering any other option. And, in doing so, he demonstrated that he was a friend of the Lord’s who was loved by the Father and the Son and through whom the love of the Father and the Son was manifested to others.

Bill’s testimony brought me to tears and to brokenness. I wanted, and still want, the simplicity, intimacy, and power of Bill’s relationship with the Lord.

This is not the only such testimony I have heard. My friend, Phil Christensen, pastor of Hill Country Bible Church in Oak Hill, Texas went on a mission trip to New Guinea as a college student. The remote area he visited had been under missionary influence for twenty-five years, and only five families had been converted in that entire time.

This had nothing to do with the missionaries' lack of effort or ability but with the fact that the entire region in which the village was situated came under the influence of a powerful shaman who dominated the people through fear.

Thus these families were in constant spiritual warfare and persecution for their faith in Christ, and, at that point they only had a few books of the New Testament translated into their language, which they received primarily by oral recital.

For a reason known only to the Lord Himself, the elders of the five families determined to hold an all night prayer vigil for the old shaman. And, when Phil found out about it, he asked if he could join them, but they refused his participation.

Phil's pride was hurt by their rejection, but, as he woke up several times during the night to see them still singing, dancing, and praying around the fire with their arms interlocked, he realized that he did not have either the physical or spiritual stamina to participate in their all night vigil. Early the next morning as the fog began to rise along the steep, jungled side of the mountain behind the village, Phil saw the old shaman, dressed in his full regalia of feathers and bones, as he came to the elders' campfire and got down on his knees, with tears streaming down his weathered and deeply lined cheeks, to ask their forgiveness and to receive their Lord as his own Lord.

Another testimony that many of us can identify with was given by a famous television preacher who said that he was confused as a new believer when he heard others say things like, "The Lord told me..." or "While the Lord and I were on the way to..." as if, for these believers, the Lord was as real to them as their own families.

He confessed that his first thoughts were that they were faking it, or that they were using this personal terminology for something that was merely taking place in their own minds.

Eventually he became jealous of their supposed intimacy with the Lord, and in his prayer closet he said, "Lord, if this is real, if these men really are experiencing you as if you are literally walking and talking with them, why haven't I had that experience with you?"

He said he heard the voice of the Lord in his spirit for the first time in answer to his prayer. It wasn't an audible voice, just a supernatural knowing of the Lord's specific answer as He said, "Because, _____, you aren't that much fun to be with."

What he quickly realized from the Lord's somewhat humorous answer, was that these men were thinking about, saying, and doing exactly the kind of things that any disciple of the Lord's would be thinking, saying, and doing in the Lord's literal, physical presence.

What these testimonies reveal to me is that the modern western church values intellectual knowledge about the Bible and about the Lord and religious conformity to doctrine and practice over the simplicity, intimacy, and power of a deep and very real personal relationship with the Lord in which we clearly hear His voice and obey the revelation of His will on a day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, event by event basis.

Therefore, the very first thing those who are responsible for equipping the saints for works of service and for helping them to come to maturity in Christ should be doing is to teach new believers how to "hear" and "obey" the voice of the Lord.

The object of discipleship is not Bible study, quiet time, prayer, giving, fellowshiping and worshipping with other Christians, etc. The object of true discipleship is learning to “hear” and “obey” the voice of the Lord.

Learning how to do basic inductive Bible study is important in the process, but the purpose of thorough inductive Bible study is not knowledge about the Bible or about the Lord. The purpose of learning how to do basic inductive Bible study is to continually position ourselves through our understanding of what the text is actually saying so that we can be easily guided into truth by the Spirit of truth, who is the Teacher.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. John 16:13,14 NASB (emphasis is the author’s)

Who will disclose it to you? The pastor? The prophet? The Pope? And who are we to believe? The pastor? The prophet? The Pope? Our denomination?

We may receive it through them, if they, themselves, are “hearing” and “obeying,” but we cannot receive it from them. We can only receive the truth, promises, and commands of the Lord from the Lord, as He quickens the written word, the meditated word, the spoken word, or the circumstance by His Spirit acting in us as our Counselor, our *parakletos*, who has come alongside to help us.

But you are not to be called rabbi ... (teacher) ..., for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. Matthew 23:8-11 ESV (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

Like baby talk, having “ears to hear” begins with the simple straightforward truths of God as we build up the base of our spiritually attained and confirmed knowledge, and it gets gradually more and more complex until we can receive even the profound truths of God.

And, out of this, we begin to recognize that those things which we hold to be true on the basis of our intellectual beliefs about God and about scripture **divides** us, while everything we receive and confirm by revelation from the Spirit of truth **unites** us.

The Spirit is not divided against Himself, and the absolute, immutable truth of God is not revealed differently (though it may be revealed more completely) to individual believers.

Thus the purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers is to fulfill the Lord’s commission of making disciples by teaching them how to “hear” and “obey” the revealed will of the Lord, and what they “hear” with spiritual ears will unite them in the faith, while anything they “hear” only in their intellects, will cause them to be divided by winds of doctrine.

***And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the... (personal, experiential)... knowledge of the Son of God... (not knowledge about the Son)..., to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* Ephesians 4:11-13 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)**

The definition of a disciple, then, is not one who attends church regularly, believes whatever his/her denomination believes, and fulfills all the religious duties and activities expected by that denomination or that particular group of Christians.

The definition of a disciple is one who clearly “hears” the voice of the Lord, the Teacher, and “obeys” what he/she has heard with spiritual ears and believed in his/her heart, which is active faith.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19,20 NASB

The word translated as “observe” in Matthew 28:20 is the Greek word transliterated as *tereo*, and this is sometimes translated as “keep” or “guard”, meaning that the proof of true discipleship is that we have the Lord’s commands as a living word from Him and we prioritize His commands over all the demands of the flesh, the world, or contrary religious authorities.

One of the ways I have learned to know when I am moving in a positive direction or a negative direction is my appetite, my appetite for hearing the word being preached or taught, my appetite for Bible study, my appetite for teaching, my appetite for fellowship with other believers, my appetite for worshipping, my appetite for inspired Christian music, or a contrary appetite.

When the disciple begins to experience an increase in his/her appetite for all things related to the Lord, the “disciple” is beginning to experience what it means to be a “friend” of the Lord. Bible study is no longer a discipline that we know we should do but only do half-heartedly. Bible study and meditation on the word of God becomes our natural desire. What we allow our minds to be occupied with becomes more and more focused on Him and on the revelation of His will in all things. Our appetite for teaching, preaching, Bible study, prayer, worship, and ministry increases exponentially. Prayer is no longer something we have to make time for. It is constant and spontaneous throughout the day and night. We no longer have to be motivated by others, like our pastors and other leaders in the church, to minister to the confused, the hurting, the lost. Our hearts are tender and easily provoked by the pain and suffering of others, and we act spontaneously and unselfishly on behalf of those He has allowed our paths to cross. Witnessing is not something we have to gear up to do, we can no more prevent it than a river can prevent itself from flowing downstream. And, even in the midst of painful spiritual warfare on behalf of ourselves or on behalf of others, the joy of the Lord rises up inside us, and we hear His voice clearly, the voice of the one that loved us and gave Himself for us that we might love others and give up our lives for their sakes.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Matthew 16:24 KJV

Those that did, and those that do, are those He calls a “friend.”