

No Greater Love

John 15:9—17

Introduction

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer! (LSB #770)

It doesn't come through when we sing it, but these two sentences end in exclamation marks. And why shouldn't they? Being able to take all our sins and griefs to a friend like Jesus is something to get excited about. Being able to carry everything to God in prayer is the only thing that makes our burdens bearable. But what else does it mean that Jesus is our Friend?

You Are My Friends If ...

I grew up in the Friends church, what began as The Society of Friends. The early Friends were known for being peace-loving, kind, and generous. Some people think that was how they got their name. But they chose their name from **John 15:14**, "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" Being peace-loving, kind, and generous was how they showed they were friends of Jesus. Doing what Christ commands doesn't *make* us His friends. We do what He commands *because we are* His friends. And what is His command? To love one another.

Commanded to Love

It sounds strange to be commanded to love. It's like the father telling his fighting children to "shake hands and make up." You may get them to shake hands but that doesn't mean they will make up, even if they mumble, "I'm sorry." It's not in our fallen nature. But as Christians, we are not to be enslaved to our fallen human nature. When we are saved by His grace, God makes a change in us. ***The Formula of Concord*** says: *It is false to say that believers might or could act against God's Law and still have faith and God's favor and grace* (***Formula of Concord SD, Art. IV Good Works, par. 20***). But what does that love look like?

The Law of Love

The love we're talking about is an active love and is fleshed out in the Ten Commandments. If you don't talk back to your mom and dad, but respect and obey them, that's love. If you don't steal, but help another person improve what is theirs, that's love. If you don't talk badly about someone, but put everything in the kindest light, that's love.

Keeping the Commandments?

But we must remember that, even if we could keep the Commandments perfectly, that wouldn't save us. We have been saved, been made friends of Jesus, not by our own doing, but by the greatest act of love, performed by Jesus Himself.

The Ultimate Love

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). But Christ went beyond that. Yes, we are His friends and yes, He died for us. But we were *not* His friends *when* He died for us (Read **Romans 5:6—8**). Johannes Brenz explains it this way: *Sometimes citizens die for their country, but they do so on account of their gratitude and are inspired by ambition. ... But to die shamefully for one's enemies, “this is the work that is the labor” (Exegesis on the Divine Gospel of John).*

Chosen & Appointed

Jesus makes it clear that we have not chosen Him, but He has chosen us. As Luther says: *Christ has called and chosen [Christians] through His Word to be His beloved branches and to have everything He gained for them, victory and dominion against sin, death, and the power of the devil (Sermons on John).*

Our Living Friend

So, Christ has died for us, chosen, and called us to be His friends. And since we are His friends, we will love one another as He has loved us. But He did not leave us alone to fend for ourselves. He is still our living Friend, for:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
