

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



Volume 3

June 14, 2015

Number 17

God's Friend

There are many great things said about Abraham in the Bible. But perhaps the greatest compliment of all is the fact that he is called a friend of God (James 2:23). The place where he is called God's friend is Isaiah 41:8. Actually, in that passage God is doing the speaking, and He refers to Abraham as His friend. "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Abraham is the only person, in the scriptures, to have received this compliment. That doesn't mean, however, that Abraham is the only one whom God would ever consider His friend. In fact, anyone who develops the character and walks in the steps of Abraham might be called the friend of God. What are some of these characteristics that one must possess if he is to truly be a friend of God. Let's look at some of the characteristics of Abraham.

1. Abraham was a man of faith. The same passage in James where Abraham is called a friend of God first states that Abraham believed God (James 2:23). No man could ever be considered God's friend without having faith in Him (Hebrews 11:6). It took faith on the part of Abraham to leave his homeland and venture out on a journey, not knowing where he was going. The Hebrew writer said, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). That was the faith of Abraham. He did whatever God said because he trusted Him. When God said that Abraham's seed would be numbered as the stars of heaven, Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Genesis 15:5, 6). It didn't matter to him that he was childless and his wife was barren; God said it, and that was enough for Abraham because he was a man of faith. Friends believe in each other and such was the case with God and Abraham.

2. Abraham obeyed God. Faith alone does not make a person a friend of God. There are many who do not doubt in the least that God is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. James tell us that even demons have believed in God (James 2:19). Satan knows that there is a God, but he certainly is not God's friend. Why? He rebelled against God. He was disobedient and thus expelled from the presence of God. Abraham was different. His faith in God moved him to obey God even when the commands were not to his liking. When God commanded Abraham to offer his son as a burnt-offering, Abraham rose up early in the morning to carry out the command (Genesis 22:1-10). Could there be a harder command than to kill your son and offer his dead body to the Lord as a sacrifice? God never intended to let Abraham go through with it, He was merely testing Abraham to see if he would obey Him in all things. Abraham passed the test. When God

commanded Abraham to be circumcised, him and all his house, Abraham did not hesitate. He simply did as God commanded (Genesis 17:9-27). Abraham did not complain or try to rationalize why he shouldn't have to do as God commanded. He simply obeyed. That was characteristic of his life. That is why God considered Abraham his friend. God loves sacrifices. But "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 11:22).

3. Abraham feared God. When Abraham showed God that he would obey him in all things by sacrificing his son, the response of God was "...now I know that thou fearest God..." (Genesis 22:12). To fear God is to give him the proper respect He deserves. It is to understand His power and unsearchable strength and to live accordingly. This Abraham did. No man can be a friend of God unless he has the utmost reverence for Him, for to fear God is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Abraham did not shiver at the thought of God. That is not the kind of fear under consideration. Abraham was not afraid to talk to God or even to reason with God (Genesis 18:23-32). But Abraham always, without fail, gave God his due respect by trusting and obeying Him all the days of his life.

That is what it takes to be a friend of God—believe, obey, and fear Him. When you do this, you will be a friend of God now, and you will be able to see your Friend in heaven after awhile.

Don

What Would You Do?

Steve Dewhirst

Massachusetts' Supreme Court recently ruled that a man will not be allowed to take his children to church, nor teach them his personal religious beliefs. Welcome to the New American.

The case originated with a divorced couple. Figures, huh? They married in 1988 when she was a Reformed Jew, but in name only. He was a Catholic with a similar degree of disinterest. They wore the names, but were admittedly committed only to themselves. In 1991 he joined the Boston Church of Christ (of the Boston/Crossroads heresy fame) which requires a serious commitment. Three years later, she converted to Orthodox Judaism. Then they split.

The woman objects to her former spouse taking the children to his church, as it is causing them "emotional distress." The church teaches that one must accept Christ to be saved, while their orthodox upbringing denies the same. Since the wife has custody, she wins. The man is now prohibited by court order from teaching his children about Jesus Christ.

Several points could be made, including the foolishness of selfish people foolishly marrying, to the destruction of their offspring. But the real issue is obvious. What would you do if the courts or the government restricted your right to instill faith in your children? It's not an abstract issue; it's a growing likelihood as modern society grows more and more antagonistic toward Christianity. What would you do?

Some, sadly, might throw in the towel, assuming they were powerless to do anything else.

But what *should* one do in such a case? As Christians, we understand the biblical charge to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1). But when governments defy the will of God, we should recognize the higher authority of God, Himself. Animosity from one’s government is no excuse for rejecting God. That’s why the gospel is preached in places like China, despite the illegality involved. God’s law is higher than man’s. And so it must be in the rearing of our children. Even at the risk of fines or imprisonment, how can a New Testament Christian turn his back on the spiritual nurturing of his children? Men have excused themselves from responsibility for lesser reasons, but not with impunity. Isn’t the call to persecution an inherent part of the gospel message? Let us never forsake God, cowering behind the flimsy pretext of obeying men.