

Friendship: The Outward Expression of Love

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“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15).

Expressing His infinite love and mercy toward the whole human race, the Lord came on earth and extended the hand of Divine friendship to all people. Infinitely wise and powerful, He accommodated Himself to finite comprehension. So completely was this done, so hidden was the reality that this man, Jesus Christ, was God Himself, that for the most part He was unrecognized, unacclaimed, and unworshipped. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11). Yet the purpose for which He came was so that people might come to see and know Him, and thus be set free from the forces of evil. He came not as a God of command and punishment, anger and vengeance, but as a friend, saying: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends... (John 15:15).

Friendship is a bond between people that is an outward manifestation of love. It implies reciprocation—the sharing of thoughts and ambitions, ideas and intentions. It involves giving and receiving, confidence and trust, and free cooperation between people. When one person takes without giving, or betrays and violates the confidence and trust and no longer shares or cooperates, the friendship is at an end. And the quality of friendship is determined by the love from which it springs, for love is the inner sustaining force that brings and holds people together. The spiritual heat of love conjoins friend with friend. Yet, like its earthly counterpart, it not only warms, expands, renews, heals, and promotes life; it can also sear and burn, deface and destroy. Love, like fire, can vivify or consume (*Arcana Coelestia* 4906). This is why friendship, which is the outward expression of love, can be the manifestation of the mutual love of heaven or it can be a dangerous tool in selfish hands.

But on what basis are we to contract our friendships? What friendships should we foster, and which should we avoid? The Lord Himself answers these questions, both in the New Testament and in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. For although He is in a very real sense the Friend of all people (even addressing the wicked man who came to the feast without a wedding garment “friend” (Matthew 22:12)), He limits His friendship, as it were. He stipulates the requirements of true friendship. “You are My friends,” He says. On what condition? “If you do whatever I command you.” “I have called you friends.” Why? “For all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Evidently, then, the foundation of true friendship is doing good from a knowledge of truth.

In the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord describes every possible type and degree of friendship, from the inmost friendship between conjugal married partners to the seeming friendships between those who inwardly burn with hatred toward one another. True and useful friendships are always shown to have something of the basic elements taught in the New Testament, while those dangerous and false friendships which should be avoided do not.

The universal test of friendship outlined in the Heavenly Doctrine is use. What use does the friendship serve? Friendships between those who are in the same business, profession or situation in life that contribute to a use should be fostered. We are taught that friendships may be formed with any one, “even with the clown who jokes at the table of a nobleman” (*True Christian Religion* 446), for such friendships belong to civil life (*Spiritual Experiences* 4524). The reason for this is that, “no one is able to explore the interiors of the mind of those with whom he associates or deals” (*True Christian Religion* 449). External friendships, including the social obligations which are necessary to maintain them, are good and desirable as long as they are for the sake of uses. For in so far and to the degree that anyone performs uses, he can be befriended, since he is doing the Lord’s commandments.

Yet such friendships have their limitations. They should not be entered into any more deeply than the use demands, since to do so is spiritually dangerous. External friendships can be formed with any person, but we are warned to guard against forming an interior friendship, or what the Heavenly Doctrine calls a “friendship of love” with just anyone (*True Christian Religion* 449). We are not to form interior friendships based on personality which ignore the quality of the person’s religion—his internal standards and ideals. For when the person is loved apart from his internal quality, the good can be linked spiritually to the evil and dragged by them into hell where they suffer terrible things before they can be released and elevated into heaven (*True Christian Religion* 449). Interior friendships must be based on ideas and purposes gained from the Word and a mutual desire to express them in life. Such relationships can be eternal because the uses they serve are eternal.

When one regards a friend from good, that is, from what he does and thinks that is in keeping with Divine truths, then there can be a mutual giving and receiving of good, and thus mutual love. Mutual love, we are told, “regards the good which is in a person, and because it is directed to good, it is directed to him who is in good” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3875:5). Friendship may also be mutual love “when it regards the person from good, or for the sake of good; but when it does not regard him from good or for the sake of good, but for the sake of self, which it calls good, then friendship is not mutual love, but approaches the love of self” (*ibid.*).

These statements make it clear that good or use is the neighbor that is to be loved and made a friend, and that our friendships must not be formed on merely external grounds. We should look to the quality of affection and thought that make the real person. This does not involve internal judgments, for only the Lord can know the human heart. But it does involve discrimination, not an absolute judgment such as, “You are this way in internals, and therefore you will be saved or condemned,” but a conditional judgment, taught in the Heavenly Doctrine, “If in internals you are such as you appear in externals you will be saved or you will be condemned” (*Conjugal Love* 523:2). These statements make it clear that that we are to form friendships which relate to uses, allowing the depth of the relationship to be determined by the quality of the use. It is on this basis that internal friendships should be cultivated, and maintained.

Today, a new relationship with the Lord is possible, because He has come again in the teachings of the New Church. And from this a new relation among people is also possible. This new relation is to be based on angelic love to the Lord, of which we learn: “In heaven loving the Lord does not mean loving Him in with respect to His person, but it means loving the good that is

from Him...and to love good is to will good and do it from love” (*Heaven and Hell* 15). It is said further: “By loving the Lord is not meant loving Him as a person, for by such love only, a person is not conjoined with heaven, but by love of Divine good and Divine truth, which are the Lord in heaven and in the church” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1099:3). And again: “Loving the Lord as a person and not loving uses is loving the Lord from ones self, which is not loving.” (*Love* xiii).

The reason why the Lord and one’s neighbor must not be loved from person is that everyone who thinks of God or the neighbor only from person or externals, and not from essence, that is, from his qualities, thinks materially; but to think from essence to person, from qualities and attributes concerning the person, is orderly and right (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 611). The truth is, that anyone who thinks of God from person infuses his own ideas into God, and in so doing fashions God in the image of man. Whereas someone who thinks of God from God’s essence, from the qualities and attributes God Himself reveals in His Word, thinks from the truth, and the Lord can form his mind into an image and likeness of that truth.

It was this formation of the human mind into an image and likeness of Himself that the Lord made possible by coming to humankind and revealing Himself as their Friend. And He did this not only in the New Testament but in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church as well. Indeed, in the Heavenly Doctrine He completely and fully manifests all things of the Divine love. Through the Heavenly Doctrine He shares His inner qualities, purposes, and modes of operation, so that people need no longer be servants of ignorance and sin, but can enter into an intelligent cooperation with Him. As His friends, we are shown the inner workings of the human spirit and the eternal uses which the Lord provides so that a person may, as if of himself, enter into the joy of his Lord.

It was in order to lead people into genuine spiritual relationships with each other that the Lord willed to come again in the Heavenly Doctrine. In this new revelation of spiritual truth, He provides the wisdom necessary for true happiness. When, from Him, we know the importance of friendships built on internal grounds, we can apply this teaching to our own lives. In giving this wisdom, in sharing His thoughts and purposes with us, the Lord acts as our greatest and truest Friend. “You are My friends,” He said in the New Testament, “if you do whatever I command you.” In the Heavenly Doctrine this same Lord Jesus Christ says, “But, my friend, go to the God of the Word, thus to the Word itself and so enter through the door into the sheepfold...” (*True Christian Religion* 177). And in another place, He says, “[T]herefore, my friend, go to the Lord and shun evils as sins and reject faith alone, and then your understanding will be open and you will see wonderful things and be affected by them” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 914).

Amen.

Readings: Isaiah 41:1-9; John 15:12-27; *True Christian Religion* 446, 448, 449