

# FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Peter Hay, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 21 November 2021

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

## Introduction

We concluded our last session with the point that we are not to draw back from the effect of the word. The reason for this is, when we don't draw back, but instead draw near, we begin to mourn alone for our sin and for the effect of that sin upon Christ which has led to the loss of our own sonship.

We remember the words of Jesus, who said, 'Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.' The comfort that a person who mourns receives, is the comfort of receiving the kindness of God.

That kindness of God establishes us as 'the friend of God'. I will speak about His kindness and our resultant friendship with Him.

## Understanding the kindness of God

It is important to recognise that a true appreciation of the kindness of God is not merely a presumptive awareness of His benevolence, or of the benefits of His offering. It is not some notion that God is inherently a kind Person because of what we think we can get from Him.

The kindness of God can only be appreciated by a person who meets the Lord and does not draw back from Him in unbelief. Therefore, we don't know the kindness of God unless we have first interfaced with the severity of God.

This is why the fear of the Lord is fundamental to both appreciating His kindness, and to becoming His friend. The apostle Paul made this point quite helpfully and clearly in his letter to Titus.

We will read two passages from Titus and correlate them so that we can see, more clearly, what it means to appreciate the kindness of God.

## The first aspect of God's prevenient grace appearing to us

'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.' Tit 2:11-12.

The grace, or lovingkindness, of God is *the prevenient grace that brings salvation*; and it appears to all men.

If then, the Lord has appeared to us, we also have 'looked on Him'.

This is the first thing that happens to someone when they look on Him. They see Him whom they have pierced, and they either recoil from that gaze or they draw near and begin to mourn.

We could say, 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, causing them to look on Him whom they have pierced and to mourn.'

## Living soberly, righteously and godly

In verse twelve, he goes on to say, 'Teaching us.' Therefore, the appearance of Christ, by the prevenient grace of God, teaches us that 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age'.

How do we know that we have to deny such? It is because it has been *revealed in our hearts*. The grace of God, bringing salvation, has appeared. It reveals to us ungodliness and worldly lusts so that we can deny these things. It then teaches us that we should 'live soberly'.

The word 'soberly' doesn't mean 'not drunk'. Rather, it means 'not intoxicated by a mixed conversation that, in the end, bites like a viper'.

It is, therefore, teaching us to avoid such conversation; teaching us to live soberly, righteously.

## A process of living righteously by faith

The word 'righteously' refers to a person who has received faith, just as Abraham received faith and believed God, and it was 'accounted to him for righteousness'.

It refers to the process which 'teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, so that we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age' or from day to day. This is what 'the grace of God that brings salvation appearing to all men' does for us.

As we have considered previously, when the word from the beginning is proclaimed to a hearer, and they are caused to look on Christ whom they have pierced, they are first made aware, by His eyes, of their ungodliness and worldly lusts.

### **Two responses to Christ's scrutiny**

At this point, a person either fears death and draws back in unbelief or they fear the Lord and draw near, receiving the instruction to live soberly, righteously and godly.

This is possible because of the mercy of God, through which we obtain forgiveness. As well, the faith of God enables us to believe His word, which He then accounts to us as righteousness.

Remember, the grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men, and it first reveals to us our sinful condition. When we see Him eye to eye, and do not draw back, we learn the fear of the Lord. This teaches us to live soberly, righteously and godly.

### **The second aspect of God's prevenient grace**

The second passage in Titus states, 'But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.' Tit 3:4-5.

In verse 4, Paul referred to the same appearing as in Titus 2:11. Instead of the grace of God, which is bringing salvation, appearing, he's saying that a person who has interfaced, or drawn near, is receiving Christ as well as the messenger. In this way, Christ is now appearing to them with the kindness and love of God.

The point is that the first interface with the appearing of Christ through the prevenient grace of God is the *awareness of our sinful condition*. Then, as a consequence of our drawing near (and not drawing back), He appears to us with the kindness and love of God.

### **His righteousness is given to us as a gift**

'Not by righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.'

From this, we see that His righteousness in us is not achieved through our own works. That righteousness, which we receive because He appears to us with kindness and love, is *righteousness that is given to us as a gift*.

That gift comes because we believed, by the faith that we received from Him, in not drawing back from His eyes through which His word was coming to us.

### **Understanding how the kindness of God comes to us**

This is a straightforward principle, but it's very important to see the difference. If we have not known the kindness of God, it is because we have *not interfaced with the severity of God*.

If we believe that God is kind to us, without our denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and learning the fear of the Lord from His messengers, our view of His kindness is simply *imagination*. It is the imagination of an idol in our own heart. I will highlight this from the book of James later.

It is very important, therefore, that we understand what the kindness of God is, and how it appears to us. It first appears to us saying, 'No, your darkness doesn't belong in this light.'

The real kindness of God joins us to a process by which we are delivered from that darkness, so that we can obtain our place to which He is calling us.

### **Forgiveness and reconciliation proclaimed**

I'll summarise how we receive Christ in this manner. His eyes first appear to us and reveal the condition of our heart. As we respond in faith and draw near to Him, the kindness and love of God appear to us, revealing the love and mercy of God as the messenger proclaims His forgiveness to us.

Why does he proclaim forgiveness to us? It is because we are mourning alone, and that mourning is a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. In response to our desire for repentance, He offers His forgiveness. We need to understand that we do not touch or receive the kindness of God until we first are willing to mourn alone.

The messenger, therefore, proclaims to us the forgiveness and reconciliation of God. This is offered to anyone who resists the temptation to draw back, and who, in obedience, draws near and mourns. It is offered to all on account of the propitiatory and redeeming work that Christ accomplished for every person, on the cross.

### **Not living by presumption but by obedience to Christ's instruction**

The evidence of a person who knows the kindness and love of God is that they will not simply move on and live in presumption. It is quite the opposite.

The fact that they have experienced His love in this way means that they are grounded in the fear of the Lord, and they walk very carefully in the way that He's teaching them.

Rather than presuming on this kindness, the person who has received the kindness of God, ministered from His finished offering, obeys the instruction that He gives to those who receive Him.

What did Paul say? The grace of God has appeared to all men, teaching us that, having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, we are being taught and are receiving the instruction to live soberly.

We are being exhorted to change our conversation. It is not to be 'a mixed conversation' but, rather, one that belongs to an *agape* meal. It is to be a different table, not the table of the cup of demons. It is to be the table of which the cup of the fellowship of His life is found.

We are receiving this instruction to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and in a godly way, seeking for the appearing of Christ Himself.

### **Obedience – the evidence that a person has obtained faith**

A person's obedience to this instruction demonstrates that they have *obtained faith*. Why is this? You cannot obey that word without faith. In fact, Paul said that His apostleship had been given to Him for 'the obedience of the faith', or for the faith leading to the obedience of all His hearers.

Our obeying this word, therefore, demonstrates that by hearing it we have obtained faith, and now we are presenting ourselves for that obedience. Thus, a person's obedience to this instruction demonstrates that they have obtained faith to believe for *the treasure of sonship*.

This is because obedience is possible only by the faith that comes by hearing the word of the messenger.

This is the connection between the kindness, and the friendship, of God.

### **Obtaining like-faith to Abraham**

The faith by which we are obeying the teaching that comes to us as the kindness and love of God is the same faith that Abraham received when the Lord Jesus Himself came to him and said, 'Abraham, do not be afraid. I am your shield [of faith]; your exceedingly great reward.'

We then see that fear is the thing that causes us to draw away. 'Do not be afraid, I am your shield [of faith]; your exceedingly great reward.'

It was by this faith that Abraham was illuminated to see the promise of sonship. He didn't have it at that point, but he was illuminated to see it as the Lord likened that sonship to the stars of heaven. The Scripture recounts that Abraham looked up to the heavens and saw the stars, and he *believed the word*. Because of that belief, which was by the faith that he'd received, 'It was accounted to Abraham for righteousness'.

Abraham did nothing except believe by faith of which he was not the source. He received the promise of sonship by faith, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.

Why is this important? The apostle James explained that Abraham received this gift of righteousness, which was reckoned to him simply because he believed God's word by the faith that came from Jesus Himself.

### **Called 'the friend of God'**

'Because of that righteousness Abraham was considered the friend of God.' Jas 2:23.

This is an extremely encouraging point for us to take hold of. Simply by hearing the word, receiving the faith, and believing and obeying the teaching, we are reckoned to be righteous even before we are born of God. Because we are reckoned to be righteous, God says, 'This is My friend.'

He said it to Abraham, and He says it to all of us. A 'hearer' becomes 'the friend of God' when they receive the free gift of righteousness through faith which comes by hearing the word of a messenger.

We have to receive the word as it comes through the administration that Christ Himself has established. When we do so, the faith by which we believe is recognised, or reckoned, as being

righteous, and the Lord considers us to be His friend.

### **Friendship with God necessitates discipleship**

As a friend of God, we give ourselves to receive and obey the commands of Christ. Jesus said, 'You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.'

We have the faith of God as we believe the word, and He is reckoning us as righteous. This means that, as a son, even though we are not yet born of God, He says, 'You are My friends.'

As we recognise the initiative of friendship from Him, the evidence that we have accepted His friendship is that we *obey Him*. That is, we become *disciples of Christ* who are committed to abiding in His word. This really is the key point today.

### **What it means to be a friend of God**

We will now consider this principle of friendship or what it means to be 'the friend of God'. This has bearing on what it means to be friends together in the body of Christ.

The first thing to note is that a person becomes a friend of God *before they are born of God* and are joined to the body of Christ. This is an amazing thing to consider.

What an outstanding example of prevenient grace it is that we become the friends of God even before we are born of God.

Second, friendship with God is entirely *His initiative towards us*. We need to ponder on this point. Friendship with God is entirely His initiative towards a person who hears His messengers, and receives the faith that He gives. In this case, it is not the messengers who are the origin of the faith; rather, the Lord gives faith to the person as they hear the word of His messengers.

### **Friendship with God is not dependent upon professed loyalty or service**

In this regard, we are not the friends of God because of our professed loyalty to Him or on account of our zealous service. We will look at this point in detail with regard to the disciple Peter. This is a major point, and reveals an area of confusion in broader Christendom.

Friendship with God is *His initiative to us*. He does not consider us to be His friends simply because

we are loyal or because we are zealous to serve Him in a particular way.

This is most important, because the evidence of friendship is not that we determine what our service will be. Rather, it is that we are *obedient* to His direction.

If we do not become clear on this, we could become involved in a whole range of activities, thinking that we are doing them for the benefit of our Friend, and it will turn out that we are either a 'denier' or a 'betrayed' of Christ and His body.

Remember that among Jesus' closest friends were Peter and Judas Iscariot. As his close friend, Peter ended up denying Him three times; and it was his best friend, Judas, who betrayed Him. So loyalty and our service, or our thoughts about how we best serve the Lord, cannot be regarded as being friendship with God.

### **Our friendship with God demonstrated by our obedience to His word**

My third point is that we demonstrate that we have received God's friendship *by our obedience to His word*. Friendship with God is His initiative towards us, and we receive that friendship by demonstrating our obedience to His commands.

'Greater love has no-one than this than to lay down one's life for His friends. 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 heard from my Father I have made known to you.' Joh 15:13-16.

### **Our friendship with God is foundational toward our entire Christian walk**

This describes the actions of the Father toward us. It includes all *the works of our sonship* and *the faith of Yahweh Himself*, so that we are able to walk in them in order to obtain what He has promised to us.

The friendship that is established when we fear the Lord continues throughout our entire Christian walk. Remember that its beginning is at an early point in the whole process of salvation.

The friendship that is established when we fear the Lord continues as the waypoints of salvation are established in our lives.

Notably, we are made the friend of God before we even receive adoption. Receiving adoption,

regeneration and new birth does occur in due course and in an accepted order; however, *friendship with God is foundational* to this process.

This means that we do not lose our friendship with God or its implications for how we receive and respond to the word, as we continue to grow up as sons of God.

I have made the point that friendship with God is *His initiative* toward us. We demonstrate that we have received it because we are *obedient to His commands*.

We should not lose this friendship as a foundation as we progress through the other elements of our pathway of salvation. If, in fact, we do lose it, we will not obtain these other elements.

This point also means that friendship with God is not in and of itself sufficient for entry into the kingdom of heaven.

### **Friendship with God is only a starting point**

Think about how wonderful it is for God to consider us to be His friends. If, however, we do not progress from *friendship* to *be born of God*, joined to the body of Christ, laying our life down for one another in a fellowship of offering in the light of the word - even though we began as His friend - we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Scriptures are patently clear on this. In fact, the parable of the wedding feast, which is an *agape* meal, demonstrates this principle. We have looked at this in the past but, in light of this point on friendship, it's very helpful to understand that friendship is not enough.

Friendship is a *foundation*, but it should be the foundation leading to these other elements of our salvation being apprehended.

### **The parable of the wedding feast**

Jesus said in this parable, 'Then he [he' refers to the father of the bridegroom] said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore, go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding".' Mat 22: 8-13.

Is this not the Father sending out messengers in the spirit and power of Elijah before the face of the Lord, saying, 'Come in. Now is the time to come.' This is where we are at this point of time.

There is a great falling away from the church at the moment, and there will be a time where the Father will send us out to the highways and byways in the spirit and power of Elijah. This is the preventive grace of God coming to these ones ,inviting them to the wedding feast.

'So those servants [you and me going house to house] went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good.' This sounds a bit like the net, bringing all these fish into the church. 'And the wedding hall was filled with guests.'

### **The absence of a wedding garment**

'But when the king came to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.'

We talked about this in terms of our bad dream of turning up at a place while still in our pyjamas or night attire.

'Who didn't have a wedding garment, so He said to Him, "Friend".'

This person has actually received the friendship of God under the condition of the preventive grace of God.

This is still on wayside ground, but they have presumed on that friendship, and have not progressed from that friendship to be clothed with the garments of their priesthood for fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

### **The necessity to progress from friendship to sonship**

This is a person who does not accept the reality of new birth and baptism. 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?'

From this, we see that friendship with God is not enough. Friendship with God is necessary to gain entry to the wedding feast, but it should be a foundation upon which we are obtaining all of these other elements, so that we have a full participation in that fellowship to which we've been invited.

' "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth".'

That appears to be quite a severe penalty for a friend who doesn't come to the wedding feast attired properly.

### **Friendship based on a sound foundation**

Friendship, therefore, is important, but friendship in itself is not sufficient.

We cannot presume on our personal friendship with God when, on the basis of that relationship, we are supposed to be established in the other waypoints of salvation which we have been considering (those being adoption, new birth, baptism, and so on).

God's initiative of friendship to us is the only basis for friendship within the church. Hence, we are moving from God's initiative for friendship to us, and our friendship with Him, to understand that this particular quality of friendship is to be the only basis for *our friendship with one another in the church*.

This is true also of the foundations for courtship. If this principle of friendship is not the basis of friendship within a courtship, the relationship is on the wrong foundation, and it will 'stumble'.

Therefore, friendship on any other basis than *believing the proceeding word and obeying by faith* is of another spirit. It is not of the spirit of faith.

'Having received the same spirit of faith, I believed and therefore I spoke', or I participated with my friends at the *agape* meal.

### **Friendship with the world is idolatry**

If this is not the basis of our participation, then it is of a different spirit. It is friendship based in the spirit of the world. James called this friendship 'idolatry'.

This is extremely important because, in our next session, we will speak about the invitation to the friends of God to come to the altar where we are washed and where He delivers us from our idols.

Idolatry is a very important consideration in relation to being able to be the friend of God. For the moment, however, the point that we need to register is that *friendship based in the spirit of the world is idolatry*. We will look at this in James Chapter 4.

### **Spiritual adultery - the worship of idols**

'Adulterers and adulteresses.' James was referring to a whole company of people, in his writing. He was not saying that every one of those households

was caught up in adultery. Rather, he was addressing people who were worshipping idols.

On reading this, we might wonder why he associated idols with the act of adultery. James quoted from a prophecy in the book of Ezekiel, where the Lord Himself described idolatry as 'adultery'.

Ezekiel wrote, 'The Lord also said to me: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire, to devour them".' Exe 23:36-38.

The point that I want to focus on is that James' reference to 'adulterers and adulteresses' more specifically addresses those who are involved in idolatry.

### **Idolatry affects our friendships in the church**

For us, as for the early New Testament Christians, the practice of idolatry affects the nature of our friendships in the church. After making reference to 'adulterers and adulteresses', which we now understand to be the practice of idolatry, James then said, 'Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?' Jas 4:4.

Adulterers and adulteresses, those who are living in idolatry, are friends with the world. This describes the actions of a different spirit. James stated that there are friendships in the church which are based in idolatry, and those friendships are over and against God, who offers friendship in a very specific way.

'Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?' But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Jas 4:4-6.

### **God gives grace to the humble**

The 'humble' are the ones who come, drawing near to the Lord under the prevenient grace of God. They mourn; they are receiving the kindness of the Lord; they are receiving faith - and they are the ones whose friendship is from God Himself.

James is saying to us all, that this should be the basis of our friendships with one another. If it's not, it is of a different spirit and is motivated by idolatry. It's an imagined view of who God is and what it means to be a Christian.

### **True friendship stems from mourning**

With this in mind, we recognise that true friendship in the church is because we mourn alone in response to the word. The beginning of our friendship is in our individual response to the word.

Then, by the same faith that we receive in this word, we stand in grace on the one ground of fellowship.

We participate in offering according to our unique sanctification, or name, as a son of God.

That participation is in evidence as we lay down our life to reveal someone else.

This process begins as an individual response, which then draws us into fellowship, where our friendship is demonstrated as we lay down our life to reveal another. This is the only friendship that belongs in the church. Any other style or expression of friendship leads to our becoming 'adulterers and adulteresses'.

### **A fellowship of care, kindness and affection**

Within this fellowship, living or standing in grace, and exulting in sonship, is where our capacity for care, kindness and the affection of friendship is found.

True friendship is not manifest through our embracing the diverse views and expectations of the gospel as though we maintain our friendship by 'accommodating' one another.

Neither is it based in personality compatibilities or shared experiences.

This does not mean that we shouldn't go on holidays with one another or enjoy going fishing or picking flowers, or whatever we enjoy doing together as friends.

### **The source of our friendship is the word**

This is not the reason why we are friends and, if it is, our friendship is no different from the friendships of those in the world.

What it does mean is that the foundation of our friendship should be the word; and every other expression or engagement with one another comes out of that.

It is demonstrated as we lay down our lives for one another and encourage one another to fellowship in the light. This is a true and living example of friendship.

If someone is taking us away from the fellowship of light or is facilitating a conversation that is not established through the word proceeding from the presbytery, they cannot be counted as a friend.

Solomon exhorted us as to the quality of friendship. He said, 'The righteous should choose their friends carefully.' Pro 12:26.

The 'righteous' are ones who have received the kindness of God. 'They should choose their friends carefully for the way of the wicked leads them astray.'

### **Faithful are the wounds of a friend**

The very positive point that I want to convey is, 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend.'

'Faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.' Pro 27:6.

If, in our day to day interactions, someone begins to complain about the word because they're offended, our response is to be a faithful one.

If we are a friend to them in Christ, we will speak and testify to the word of the cross, which is a sword.

### **A faithful response**

In this situation, our response should be, 'Don't speak like that. You are doing yourself an injury. I believe that word and I am found in that fellowship. Why don't you let that go and come and join with me in a conversation of faith?'

This may cause a wound; however, it is the faithful wound of a friend and will serve to secure that one in the very fellowship where they can find the life that you have.

If, however, you accommodate what has been said, your response may become 'the kisses of an enemy which are deceitful'. This response indicates that all of those aberrant views are acceptable. This is a complete lie. These are 'the kisses of an enemy which are deceitful'.

### **Restoration of friendship through the agape meal**

In reality, this does not apply to most of us. In fact, as I was writing this, I was thinking about

how much our fellowship and even our friendships have changed over this last two years, and I have written this.

'In this season many are finding a renewing of friendship in the church as the Lord has restored us to the *agape* meal as the cultural foundation of our fellowship.'

I don't know about you, but certainly I can testify of my own change in the way in which I engage with my friends, and the way in which friends have engaged with me. It is based in *the conversation of the word*, which is alive in us and in our families.

We are finding a renewing of friendship in the church as the Lord has restored us to the *agape* meal as the cultural foundation of our fellowship. As we, individually, and as households, have given our ear to the word and have devotionally applied it to our lives, the way in which we relate with one another has changed.

### **A new way of relationship**

I would say that this would be the case for most of us., For some it won't be, but that's the dignity that we all have. For most of us, the way in which we relate with one another has changed.

We are receiving faith for obedience, faith to encourage our friends to the truth as faithful ones, and faith to receive encouragement to continue in the way of the Spirit.

We can give thanks for that. We can rejoice that this spirit of fellowship is alive among us, that our friendships are being renewed, and that we are being established in this culture.

### **The importance of friendship in proceeding in our sanctification**

I will finish this session by looking at the example of Peter and the importance of friendship in our capacity to proceed in our sanctification as sons of God.

Before he was established as an apostle of Christ, Peter needed to become a true friend of Christ as a disciple. We know that Peter certainly identified himself as being a friend of Christ. His notion of friendship, however, was the expression of his self-righteous zeal.

In the same way, our zealous activity and our self-righteous service toward the Lord can appear as though we are the friend of God. In reality,

however, it may be over and against what He is doing and will cause us to be unable to hear what He is saying.

### **The need for Peter's friendship with Christ to be renewed**

This is exactly what happened to Peter. Because of his self-righteous zeal, he was unable to receive or to obey the words of Christ.

This is highlighted in the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John's Gospel, Chapter 13 verse 36 to 38.

Jesus answered Peter, saying, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow Me afterwards.' This is a clear instruction and explanation of what was happening.

Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for You.' Jesus Himself had outlined that this is what it meant to be a true friend.

### **Preoccupation with our own understanding of friendship**

Peter was implying, 'I am your best friend', but he couldn't hear what Jesus was saying. He was too preoccupied with his own expression of friendship.

'Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times".'

The other Gospels record that Peter insisted that this was not the case. He could not hear what Jesus was saying to him, even though he professed to be a friend who would lay down his life for Him.

From the account of Christ's trial, we know that Peter's self-righteousness failed spectacularly in the court of Caiaphas. Not only did he deny Jesus three times, but he began to swear and to become increasingly aggressive in his defence. He was having a very bad time of it. His self-righteous zeal didn't hold up under the pressure of this testing.

This is where I want to focus. Even after Peter had been born from above, he had not yet renegotiated his friendship with Jesus. Peter was born from above three days later, on the evening of Christ's resurrection. Jesus entered the room where His disciples were gathered. He breathed



on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit', at which point they were born from above.

### **The clear lines of our sanctification**

Despite Peter's having been born from above, he was not able to proceed to do the works that belonged to his sonship and membership of the body of Christ until he re-negotiated the all-important issue of friendship with Jesus.

While the friendship issue is not sufficient as a foundation alone [that is, it needs to be followed by being born of water and of the Spirit], we cannot progress to obtain or enter the finished work of Christ's offering and sufferings if we are not established as Christ's friend.

### **Christ's interface with Peter on the beach**

This happened for Peter during an *agape* meal of fish on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius. I love the thought of having an *agape* meal of fish on the beach.

Throughout this discussion, Jesus addressed Peter, who had become poor in spirit, accepting his inability to love Jesus with *agape* love. *Agape* love is the love of God, and this is the love that lays down one's life for his friend.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter was recorded in the Gospel of John. 'So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" [the love that Jesus referred to is *agape*]. Peter said to Him, "Yes, Lord, You know that I [*phileo*] You".' Joh 21:15.

The love that Peter used there was not *agape*. It was another Greek word for love, which is *phileo*, and that Greek word for love is 'the love of a friend'.

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus again said to Simon Peter, 'Do you love Me more than these?' Peter replied, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You [with friendship love].'

This question and response happened a second time, and then, on the third time, Jesus really got to the heart of this issue of friendship, because He asked, 'Do you *agape*?' And Peter answered, 'No, I don't *agape*. I can't, but I'm still Your friend.'

### **Jesus defines the nature of godly friendship**

Jesus then said, 'Hold on a minute, your friendship is not on that basis. This friendship can only be an *agape* love, and your response is not

commensurate with what I am coming to establish with you.'

On the third time, Jesus said to Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you [*phileo*] Me?'

The first two times, He asked, 'Do you *agape* Me?' and Peter said, 'No'. He reiterated, 'You know that I [*phileo*] You.'

Jesus then said, 'Do you really love Me as a friend?' Peter was grieved by this. Hence, we see that the grief that Peter was expressing was not just that he was a bit hurt.

This grieving was part of the mourning which was associated with the appearing of the Lord to him. Immediately, he understood Jesus' point, and his expectations of what friendship meant were undone.

'Simon, son of Jonah, do you [*phileo*] Me?' He was questioning him. Another way of saying it is, 'Simon, Son of Jonah, you *don't* [*phileo*] Me.' Peter was grieved because He asked a third time, 'Do you love Me?' and he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things.'

### **Peter's illuminated response**

At this point, something has shifted and changed in Peter's response. First, he made confession of Christ's lordship.

Further, instead of being the source of friendship and the definer of the parameters of sonship, he said, 'You are the source of this friendship, and I am Your friend only if You know it to be true.'

This reveals a major shift in Peter's understanding. As Jesus asked the question, 'Do you love Me?', Peter replied, 'Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.'

Peter's agenda had completely changed. He was no longer the one who was defining the friendship. Rather, he was now saying that the reality of his friendship was what he was receiving from the Lord.

The grief of Peter was the evidence of his acceptance that he could not love as a friend. As he submitted to the lordship of Christ, the Son Himself became the initiator of their friendship; and this was now the basis of their friendship.

### **Jesus' forward direction for Peter**

At this point, Jesus commanded Peter to obedience. 'You are My friends if you do whatever

I command you.' And then he commanded Peter to go and lay down his life.

'Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you Peter, when you were younger [or immature], you girded yourself and walked wherever you wished [You thought that zealous action was friendship, but we are past that.]. When you are old [mature], you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' Joh 21:17-19. This is friendship.

'This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.' This speaks of someone who is joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering. And, through that, someone else is being revealed. Peter laid down his life for his friend.

'And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me.' Jesus established Peter on the proper ground of discipleship as 'the friend of Christ'.

### **The temptation toward comparison with others**

Significantly, Peter then commented on John, who identified himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. So, a man who was also the friend of Jesus asked, 'But Lord, what about this man?'

This is a classic observation of human nature. Peter had just been restored to proper friendship, and been given a clear path forward. In a very short time, he looked to *compare himself* with another friend.

Jesus quickly reminded Peter that John's walk was none of his business. The friendship of Peter and John was not to be driven by comparison or measurement.

Rather, it was to involve the recognition of the unique sanctification of each person in Christ, and the encouragement of each other to that obedience.