

THE LORD'S EXAMPLE OF FRIENDSHIP

Excerpts from a sermon by Rev. James P. Cooper

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).

The entire time He was in the world, Jesus Christ associated Himself with people who were considered “undesirables.” His twelve disciples were mostly common fishermen. Among the others who were often with Him were former prostitutes and practicing tax collectors—who were hated because they took money away from Jews and because they then sent it to Rome. Jesus was frequently criticized by the scribes and pharisees for keeping the company of such people. The Lord replied to them, saying, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31). In another place He referred to Himself as the friend of tax collectors and sinners (see Luke 7:43).

In a very real sense, because no one of us is without sin, both real and potential, we are *all* tax-collectors and sinners, we are *all* the sick to whom the Divine Physician has come. The Lord is our physician and our friend!

Knowing that the Lord is our friend should cause us to reflect upon the concept of friendship, to seek to understand it more fully so that we can know (1) in what sense the Lord is our friend, (2) what we can do to return His friendship, and (3) how we can follow the example He set by His life in the world by being friendly to others.

A friend is someone who loves something that you love, who shares a common interest with you. Once brought together, a true, genuine friendship can be built as you and your friend come to know each other very well and begin to love each other for the good qualities that each discovers in the other.

We are not really talking about the kind of casual friendship we establish with the cashier at the shop, or the fellow down the street who lets us borrow garden tools from time to time, because this kind of friendship is based only on what a person has, not on the kind of person he is.

A genuine friendship is not based on what a person has, or can do for you, but on the kind of person who is within—the moral, spiritual person that can only be seen after some time and experience.

This is the kind of friend the Lord is to us. He is able to see our true spiritual character perfectly, and He loves the good that He is able to see in us. He constantly seeks to build on that good, and to draw it near to Himself.

The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church each contain many passages which clearly state that we must do what the Lord commands us: we must do good to our neighbors. We must follow the Lord's own example and seek out what is good in others, and build on and encourage it. We must reach out to others and be a friend, as the Lord Himself reaches out to us.