

Rapport with God: Friend of God

The believer in Jesus Christ has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with God the Father. This relationship requires the filling of the Holy Spirit plus Bible knowledge we sometimes call Bible doctrine. Let's explore various facets of this relationship. Below are listed some candidates for discussion.

- Believer is a Friend of God
- Believer is a Child of God
- Believer is in the royal family of God
- Believer Can Fellowship with the Father & Son
- Believer is "In Christ"

Today I would like to start exploring friendship with God. Herman has often referred to Jesus Christ as our friend.

Part I: Friends and Lovers of God

- Abraham – Friend of God (Loved by God)
- Righteous Person – Loved by the Lord
- Wisdom Seekers – Loved by God
- Solomon – Loved by God

Part II

- Characteristics of Friendship Love for God
- Obedience that is Faith
- Judas Iscariot as friend of Jesus?

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition includes:

Friend: "1 a: one attached to another by affection or esteem..."

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Affection is “tender attachment.” Esteem is to “value highly.”

This doesn't help me understand the relationship between friends. It becomes an exercise of looking up a word in the dictionary only to look up additional words.

What does the Bible have to say about this topic?

Abraham – Friend of God (Loved by God)

When teaching Faith-Rest from 2 Chronicles chapter 20, we ran across the phrase “friend of God.”

**2 Chronicles 20:7 Did You not, O our God,
drive out the inhabitants of this land before
Your people Israel and give it to the
descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?**

What surprised me is that the word friend in Hebrew is a word for love. In Hebrew, a word Herman has repeatedly told us about is chesed, lovingkindness, which has books written about it. But, the word here is ‘ahabh, not chesed. It is the normal word for love in Hebrew. It is usually translated in the Septuagint (LXX) with the word agape. But sometimes in certain contexts it is translated philos. There is a second passage in the Old Testament that refers to Abraham as the friend of God, Isaiah 41:8

**Isaiah 41:8 “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob
whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham
My friend,**

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It also uses ‘ahabh for friend. In this case, God Himself says “Abraham, My friend.” Neither passage gives us what qualified Abraham as God’s friend.

There is one final “Abraham friend of God” passage. This one is in the New Testament.

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.

Here is an interesting development. First, the word friend is the Greek word philos, not agape. It is the word we would expect the Greek to use for “friend.” It raises a question which I cannot answer. Should the LXX have translated the word ‘ahabh in 2 Chronicles 20;7 and Isaiah 41:8 as philos the way James did? The meanings of words change over time. But we know from James that we are talking about “philos” friend instead of the New Testament agape love.

Second, there seems to be a process here:

- 1) Abraham believed God,
- 2) God imputed righteousness to him
- 3) he was called the friend of God.

God and Abraham shared God’s righteousness as a result of Abraham’s belief. It is imputed (reckoned) to Abraham. It is not his own. It is one of the items in the gospel. We cannot have fellowship with God because our

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righteousness isn't the right kind. Only God can provide it. And that righteousness is by faith.

Here, James has clearly pointed us to Genesis chapter 15. What happened here? God chose Abram, which means "exalted father" (Ryrie Study Bible), or as one pastor put it, father of high and windy places. Later God renames him Abraham which means "father of many" (Ryrie Study Bible). God gave him information about the Abrahamic covenant. Abram believed. God imputed righteousness to him. And then, according to James, "he was called the friend of God." So, one question has led us to a hint that the friendship of God is perhaps based upon faith on information God provides resulting in imputed righteousness. It is something we now have in common and share in: God's righteousness, not ours.

Thomas Constable in his commentary on James, available at <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/james.pdf>, says the following:

"James seems to have included the fact that God called Abraham His friend for the following reason. He wanted to show that continued obedient faith, not just initial saving faith, is what makes a person God's intimate friend (cf. 4:4; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; John 14:21; 15:14)."

He includes reference to Jesus instructing his disciples in John 15:14

John 15:14 You are My friends if you do what I command you.

So, a logical question is, "How can I be a friend of God?" And, "What does it mean to be a friend of God?" Based upon James 2:23, can we be friends by continually exercising righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit which comes by faith?

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But, step back and reconsider. We are talking about love. What does Herman say about love?

Love observes a need.

Love attempts to fill that need.

Let's move to other passages in the Old Testament and then shift to the New Testament to get some clues. All I am trying to do here is to sketch out an understanding of God's friendship for the believer. This is not a definitive rigorous academic study. The intent is to get you thinking about your friendship with Jesus Christ and the Father through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at some other Old Testament passages on friendship/love. Do the concepts of knowledge (doctrine), faith and righteousness show up in them as well?

Righteous Person – Loved by the Lord

Psalms 146:8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves (our word) the righteous;

Literally, the last phrase is composed of three Hebrew words:

Yahweh (the God of the Covenant, the pre-existent Christ)

loving (participle of our word 'ahabh)

righteous (meaning righteous ones).

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The only way someone can be righteous is through imputation of God's righteousness. That goes back to Genesis 15:6 that is quoted three times in the New Testament. Paul uses it in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. James refers to it in the passage quoted above.

Psalms 33:5 He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord.

This passage is interesting because both of the words for love that I mentioned earlier are used. **He (God/Yahweh) loves ('ahabh) righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness (chesed) of Yahweh.** God loves righteousness and righteous people. Remember, we have no righteousness from ourselves. The righteousness that God loves is perfect righteousness that comes from God Himself which we receive by faith, constant faith, faith dependence or faith reliance.

Wisdom Seekers – Loved by God

Proverbs 8:17 “I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me.

Proverbs chapter 8 personifies God's wisdom. As Proverbs 8:12 tells us, “I wisdom...” So, wisdom, knowledge from God, loves ('ahabh) those who love it. And this wisdom is the mind of Christ.

Here is a paragraph from Billy Graham's website
[<https://billygraham.org/devotion/the-mind-of-christ/>]

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“Many diseases of both body and mind are self-inflicted. For example, ulcers are often caused by worry and anxiety. Heart attacks are caused many times by overexertion. Unjustified worry, fear, prejudice, hatred, and envy can contribute to mental stress, which could lead to mental illness. So, one way to have a healthy mind is to avoid those practices. But the Bible way to a healthy mind is this, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” If you have the mind of Christ, worry will be offset by trust, enmity by love, and fear by faith.”

Deuteronomy 4:37 Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power,

God not only loved Abram as a friend, God loved the ancestors of the children of Israel. And as a result, God acted on their behalf. God acts from His love constrained only by His justice. Are you familiar with the phrase, “I would give him the shirt off my back?” God gave us His Son. That is how He loved us (John 3:16). I add one more person because it surprised me.

Solomon – Loved by God

God even loved Solomon, in spite of his sins.

2 Samuel 12:24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went into her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named

him Solomon. Now the Lord loved (our word) him

2 Samuel 12:25 and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah (means beloved of Ya or God) for the Lord's sake.

This surprised me. I didn't realize that God gave Solomon a special name identifying him as His beloved. Solomon failed in so many ways throughout his reign. Yet, he must have kept on returning to God in faith like his father David.

1 Kings 3:3 Now Solomon loved (Hebrew: 'ahabh) the Lord, walking in the statues of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

Characteristics of Friendship Love

Now let's look at some New Testament passages. Now I am shifting from individual people to characteristics we have already encountered with people.

John 15:13 Greater love (agape) has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (philos). (sacrificial love, exactly what Jesus did for us, while we were yet enemies)

John 15:14 You are My friends (philos) if you do what I command you. (I assume we are talking obedience, which we will delve into later on, as obedience that is faith)

John 15:15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends (philos), for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Here, in the Greek, we again have two different words for love: agape and philos. Here it appears we are delving into the fellowship aspect of friendship. Jesus has shared information, doctrine, wisdom with the disciples. We know from various declarations that the disciples, except for Judas, believed in Jesus Christ. We know that from time to time, the disciples trusted Jesus and responded to His commands. Peter walks on water while he trusts Jesus. He can be obedient to Jesus' command in Matthew 14:29. And then, falls when he stops trusting Jesus. Peter, in Matthew 16:16 says

Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Does God have needs? I am not sure that "need" is exactly the right word, but it is the only one I can come up with right now. God needs to demonstrate His character by blessing us. God wants to be glorified because of who He is and what He has done. God wants His character to

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be demonstrated in us just like it was demonstrated in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This now dovetails with what Herman has been teaching for years. “The fruit of the spirit is love...” And that love is by obedience, which is faith.

Obedience that is Faith

This journey through the Bible may seem circuitous and brief. But I am trying to show that God’s friendship love of the believer is based upon the obedience that is faith (Romans 1:5) resulting in righteousness from God.

Herman said, commenting on Romans 1:5 that the obedience that God is looking for is our faith! The obedience which consists in faith itself!

Douglas Moo, conservative Christian theologian, in his commentary on Romans does not exactly agree. But he does say, after examining two positions on the interpretation of “the obedience of faith,” in Romans 1:5, “In light of this, we understand the words “obedience” and “faith” to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience—for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord—and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith—for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith.”

Faith based upon doctrine causes the Holy Spirit to produce righteous works in us. And we become loved by God. Or perhaps it is better to say, we are now benefited by God’s love.

Summary

Read Philippians 2:1-11 Jesus Christ was “obedient.” We know from Herman’s teaching of Romans 1:5 that it is obedience that is faith (Romans 5:1). Jesus as a man on earth was our model which we are to follow. Faith dependence on the spirit, the obedience that is faith, using doctrine which receives righteousness from God sets us as friends or loved of God.

What follows is more of an appendix to friendship.

Judas as Friend of Jesus?

For a moment, I feel compelled to answer a question about Judas Iscariot. Why did Jesus call him “friend?” That has bugged me for a while. Now I had the opportunity to investigate.

Matthew 26:47 While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Matthew 26:48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him.”

Matthew 26:49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and kissed Him.

Matthew 26:50 And Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

To my surprise, this “friend” is not philos but a different word, “hetairos.” It can mean associate, companion, even comrade. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) notes that this word is used only in Matthew. The two other occurrences (Matt 20:13 and Matt 22:12) do not paint the “friend” as someone who is good.

Per TDNT, “It always denotes a mutually binding relation between the speaker and the hearer which the latter has disregarded and scorned. Another source on the Internet [<https://biblehub.com/greek/2083.htm>] says “2083 hetairos – properly, a companion (normally an imposter), posing to be a comrade but in reality only has his own interests in mind.”

So, here is an example in which the Greek calls foul on the translation. In Matthew 26 it is possible to translate the word hetairos as friend, but in this context and in Matthew’s usage of this word, its meaning is closer to “impostor.” I could see Jesus using a term that has a double meaning. On the one hand it can mean associate. But both Jesus and Judas, indwelt by Satan, know it means impostor, deceiver. He is not really a disciple friend with humility toward Jesus but an unbelieving traitor.

There are two other related passages on this topic. In John 13

John 13:18 “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill

this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.’

This is referring to Psalm 41:9

Psalm 41:9 Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.

Once again, the translation from the Hebrew is not using “friend” for a word of love or friend. It says “man of my peace.” It does not in the Hebrew or even in the Greek translation (LXX) say friend. I don’t have a solid explanation of what man of my peace means. That is a topic for another time.

So, in summary, the question is no longer why did Jesus call Judas a “friend,” but why did the translators use the word “friend” to translate something that doesn’t mean that?

Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 30:20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”