



# The Country Preacher's Newsletter

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## The Friendship of Jesus

By Randall F. Matheny

Much has been said about Jesus being our best friend. Unfortunately, the concept of friendship has occasionally been misused in attempts to de-emphasize the importance of the obedience of the gospel (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thes. 1:8). A brief look at a few Bible verses will help us to understand the importance and value of friendship with Jesus.

Proverbs 17:17 states, *"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* Jesus epitomized this constancy of love in His life and death. The worst adversity that man has ever faced is sin (Rom. 6:23), yet Jesus came to redeem sinners (Lk. 19:10), and died for that same purpose (Rom. 5:6-8). Jesus, our friend, loved us in our darkest hour of need. We may return a bit of that love in obeying Him (Jn. 15:13-14).

Proverbs 18:24 says, *"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* An

individual who would enjoy the friendship of others must be willing to take the initiative in establishing a relationship. Jesus did this when He left heaven to live, suffer, and die among us (Phil. 2:5-8). He took the initiative in reaching out to us when sin had so dulled our senses that we

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knew not who, or what, to reach out to. He became like us, was tempted and suffered so that He could care for us and serve as our high priest (Heb. 2:17-18).

Proverbs 27:17 relates, *"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."* A true friend will always serve to lift us up rather than drag us down. A true friend, in seeking to better those whom he has befriended, will make no excuse for error or overlook anything that would endanger his friend in order to maintain a relationship. Jesus challenges us daily to be better than we were the previous day (Lk. 9:23). The apostle Paul

recognized this (Phil. 3:13-14), and we, like Paul, ought to determine to break the shackles of the past and "...press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.*

*For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: But woe unto him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath*

*not another to lift him up."* Jesus stands ever ready to help those who come to Him, learn of Him and take His yoke upon them (Mat. 11:28-30). There are many burdens that man cannot bear alone, but none as weighty and sin and judgment. All accountable people sin (Rom. 3:10, 23), all are worthy of death (Rom. 6:23), and no sinner can plead his case without Christ. Do you really want to face the Judge without an Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1-3)? Jesus, like a true friend, stands ready to sever as an Advocate to satisfy the justice of God on behalf of all whom He knows through their keeping His commandments.

How might we respond appropriately to the friendship that is offered to us by Jesus? We must show ourselves friendly in laying down our lives for Him in obedience to His commandments (Jn. 15:13-15), and by laying down our lives in service for one another (1 Jn. 3:16). "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus. No, not one."

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### **Making the Correct Change**

By Randall F. Matheny

Just the other day I was thumbing through a magazine and came across an ad for a product that declared, "Change is terrible." This was said, of course, to reassure consumers that the product remained the same reliable one that they were accustomed to. There are some things that we do not want to change. Then, one sometimes hears the challenge, "Change or die." Obviously, there are some things in life that need to change.

What should change when men and women find themselves at odds with the teaching of the Lord Jesus? There are only two alternatives: Change the person or change the Bible, the rules by which we are intended to live. Historically, people have resisted changing themselves even to the point of condemnation, preferring rather to try

to change God's inspired word. Stephen called such people "...*stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears (Acts 7:51).*" Seemingly, some attempts to retranslate the Bible, when there are already many modern language versions in existence, will continue until man gets something he thinks he can live with. Still others have declared that the tradition of the church, as determined by synods, conventions, conclaves, councils, etc., is authoritative where the Bible is not. Others have attempted to reconcile their peculiar teaching with the Bible by writing equally peculiar denominational handbooks, doctrines and rules of faith. Yet, the Bible affirms that when man conflicts with God, "*We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).*" A doctrine that includes more than the Bible, includes too much; if it is less than the Bible, it is too little; if it is the same as the Bible, it is unnecessary.

Jehovah has expressed His will in the Bible, because "... *the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. (Jer. 10:23).*" God did not instill within us the ability to govern our lives apart from Him. It matters not how many may agree upon a doctrine, a tradition or a philosophy (Ex. 23:2), if it is inconsistent with

the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 6-11) it must be rejected or changed, for the doctrine of Christ remains changeless (Lk. 21:33; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). No matter what the religious institution, how popular the philosophy, how wonderful the family, how dear the relationship, or how old the tradition, Christ's word must, and will, prevail (Mat. 15:7-14; 10:33-40; Col. 2:6-9). All of us then, at one time or another, will hear something from the Bible that makes us initially uncomfortable, or perhaps even angry. When we do, and we surely will, let us remember that the change that is mandated must occur in us (Rom. 12:1-2), for God will accept us only on His terms (2 Tim. 2:15). The Word of God remains settled forever (Psm. 119:89).

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