

The Power of Friends Uniting Around the Truth for World Evangelism

Last week I had the privilege of speaking at the Independent Baptist Friends International Conference. It was an amazing meeting held in Knoxville, Tennessee. According to my math, there were sixty-four men from every stripe of Bible-believing Baptists from around the world speaking at this event. What an honor to be invited and have a small part in this magnificent enterprise. The theme was “Truth, Friendship and World Evangelism” and the conference most definitely lived up to its name. I spoke Friday night and to be honest, I was very nervous, understanding that over sixty men had spoken before me, therefore what could I offer or add to what had already been said? The final night of the meeting started at seven o’clock. At 4:30 of the same evening, God impressed me to speak on the simple biblical subject, “Friends.” I thought to myself how inauspicious and common and after all, that is the theme and it has been addressed thoroughly. I asked the Lord, could I not speak on a subject that would allow me the opportunity to pull out a more familiar subject that I often follow in Bible Conferences. It was one of those moments, I felt as though the Lord was saying, “Fine, you can preach your sermon or my message.” I opted for the latter. I would rather be nervous with God’s message than confident with my sermon.

When I awakened the next morning, my mind was spinning with Scriptures and applications that I did not address. As a matter of fact, those Scriptures are still in my mind as well as the application. Please allow me the catharsis of this venue to speak on something we all need.

1. God wants friends to communicate with each other.

“*Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things*” (Galatians 6:6). God has ordained being together and sharing His inspired words as one of the best methods for growing in grace and learning. “Communicate” in the Greek “to share with others, to be partaker.”

Lest we come together only to argue and fight, we are reminded, this is forbidden according to II Corinthians 12:20, where Paul said, “*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults.*”

We are not to fellowship with unbelievers and heretics in an attempt to carry out the Great Commission (II Corinthians 6:14). If however, there is a brother among us who has faltered, our coming together is not for the purpose of picking a fight, but to help as Romans 14:1 says, “*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*” The Greek word for “disputations” “judicial estimation” stemming from another Greek word means “to separate thoroughly, i.e. (literally and reflexively) to withdraw from, or (by implication) oppose.” In English, the word simply means “to disagree and to do so in heated argument.” We are forbidden in Holy Scripture to get together to just fight. If what we believe is the truth, it will strengthen the weaker brother. No wonder so many weak brothers abound in the work of the Lord! By the way, the Bible requires the pastor to be “*...no striker...but patient, not a brawler*” (I Timothy 3:3). And again God said, “*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry...no striker*” (Titus 1:7). Isaiah prophesied of Jesus, “*A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench...*” (Isaiah 42:3). This prophecy was repeated in Matthew 12:20. Our Lord will have mercy on the immature who have never been used of Him and the mature ones who feel like they have been “washed up” and cannot be used of God. In the preceding phrase it says of Christ, “*He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*”(Matthew 12:19). This means our Lord will not fight or complain. Our Lord rebuked hypocrisy, but He had great mercy toward those who were willing to learn. This is why He said, “*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Matthew 9:13). “*But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy...*” (Matthew 12:7).

Here is God's method: *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:13). The Greek word for "exhort" "to call near, i.e. invite, invoke console." This is where the name "Comforter," another name for the Holy Spirit originates. We are to be like the Holy Spirit with one another, one called to walk along side of and minister grace to the hearers.

2. God is God is keeping a record of friends who communicate with each other.

"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). The Lord shall remember those who fear Him, meditate upon His name and those who speak often to each other. Not only is God pleased when we communicate with each other, He is keeping a record of those who speak often to one another. This is convicting, is it not? Jesus said, *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"* (Matthew 12:36). Paul prayed that God would, *"Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work"* (II Thessalonians 2:17). *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments"* (Psalm 133: 1,2). Friendship among God's people, like the perfumed oil in the air of worship in the Old Testament, clears the air in New Testament evangelism!

3. God God uses friendship as a powerful tool in world evangelism.

In the same way there is power in corporate prayer (Matthew 18:19), there is power in corporate fellowship! Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:34,35). Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of Great Britain said to the artist assigned to paint his likeness, "Paint me, warts and all." In other words, don't try to make me look like someone I am not. My friends, this is the way our Lord loves us and, in turn, commands us to love each other - not merely the best we can, oh no! That is not good enough. He commands us to love each other like He loves us - "warts and all." And when we obey, the result is: *"By this shall all men know...."* The world says, "Okay, I believe that God could love me and I am willing to turn my life over to Him for salvation because I see it works among those who follow Him!"

Now we see more clearly why our Lord Jesus says, *"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"* (John 15:15). Our Lord wants us to move beyond the elemental and discover what He is doing and what He wants done in the world. Let us move out of the arena of bickering and fighting. The Lord desires us to move into friendship using the higher path of service: *"...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way"* (I Corinthians 12:31), the path of love. *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (God's 'agape' love)"* (I Corinthians 13:13)

- Pastor Pope -

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