

## Fruits of Friendship With Christ (vv. 21, 22)

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*“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. And at the same time also prepare me a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be given to you” (vv. 21, 22).*

“As face answers face reflected in water, so one man’s heart answers another” (Proverbs 27:19; NEB). This proverb speaks about the beauty of intimate friendship. In such friendship a tie binds two souls together with a unique closeness. Think back to the “best” friend you had in high school. That friend was always with you. You two were always doing things together, dressing alike, talking with the same zany expressions, and even wearing your hair in the same style. It is assumed that close friends are going to be very much alike. This “reflective” friendship shows us how friends become the same in all they do. It is the “face answering face,” the mirrored image of friendship.

This principle of reflective friendship also applies to the friendship we share with the Lord Jesus. Friendship with Christ is a blessing we should never take for granted. “Doctor, what shall I do?” asked a patient. “My friends are all out of town.” He replied, “You have one Friend who is never out of the way, but ever near and ever true. Jesus is the best friend you could ever seek in heaven or earth.” An aged saint was on his deathbed, and his last words were, “Now, where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?”

Those who know Jesus Christ as a true Friend will reflect some essential qualities which Jesus

possesses. Philemon was a friend of Christ, and we are able to see the principle of reflective friendship in his life. Read the text and observe how Philemon displayed four significant traits of our blessed Lord.

As Paul closed his short letter, he mentioned a number of requests. These petitions are asked of one whose character had proven open to solicitation of Christian benevolence. The requests reveal four fruits in Philemon’s life that had resulted from his intimate friendship with Jesus.

### **FACTORS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST**

Before we observe the traits reflected in Philemon’s life, it is necessary to discuss what makes one the Lord’s friend. Several texts reveal the conditions which qualify us as Christ’s “friend.” In John 15:14 there is the condition of obedience to God’s will. In Amos 3:3 there is the condition of agreement with God’s will. And, in James 4:4 there is the duty of keeping separated from the world (cf. 1 John 2:15).

In simple terms God has told us that we must choose friendship in a careful manner. We must look and obey His will if we want to be a friend of the risen Lord. Philemon had made his choice. Having obeyed the gospel, Philemon became God’s friend (vv. 1, 5). This friendship brought great blessings (v. 3).

### **FRUITS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST**

As mentioned before (v. 3), Philemon enjoyed the fruits of peace and grace when he became

God's friend. These two fruits (peace and grace) were spiritual blessings belonging only to God's friends. But other blessings belong only to those who are God's friends. These blessings can be called "fruits" because they spring from the fertile soil of faith. Philemon demonstrated these "fruits" in his association with others. Since Philemon was Christ's "friend," he would show the reflective traits of this friendship. These reflective traits would be visible, and others would readily recognize them (cf. Acts 4:13).

### **Obedience (v. 21a)**

The Greek word for "obedience" does not refer to conforming to a command. Paul had not issued a command. Thus Philemon was not responding to one. This word refers to an attitude of positive response (cf. Romans 1:5; Philippians 2:12). It refers to an act that goes beyond hearing and doing. It speaks of one's desire to obey.

This obedience is a call to accept duty simply because one has an intense love for Almighty God (John 14:15). Paul was confident that Philemon would not refuse Onesimus because Philemon had the attitude that responded from an eager love.

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*Obedience becomes easy and delightful when it is in response to trust and love.*

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This kind of obedience was a key trait in our Lord (Hebrews 10:5-7). Friendship with Christ enables us to reflect this wonderful desire to obey. In fact, obedience becomes easy and delightful when it is in response to trust and love.

### **Generosity (v. 21b)**

Paul stated that Philemon would go further than what was required—"the second mile." Some debate exactly what Paul meant by this verse. It is almost certain that Philemon would receive Onesimus back and would cancel his debt, but how would he go "beyond" these things? Some suggest that Paul wished for Philemon to return Onesimus to Rome. Some say that Paul wanted

Onesimus set free of slavery. Most likely, Paul was simply urging Philemon to be "over-kind" in all dealings with the fugitive slave.

Generosity has always been a trait of our Lord (Acts 20:35b; Philippians 4:19; etc.). Christ was generous in His deeds of kindness and benevolence. In words of cheer and encouragement, He was also generous. Perhaps our Lord's generosity is best illustrated in His great amount of patience in dealing with others (cf. Luke 6:35-38).

As a friend of Jesus, Philemon was going to do everything he could for his brethren. If you claim to be the Lord's "friend," you need to demonstrate this reflective trait of generosity. "A heart truly touched by the love of Jesus will not seek to know the lowest limits of duty, but the highest possibilities of service!" The true friend of Jesus does not content himself to do enough to just get by. No, he goes "beyond" and does much more than that.

### **Hospitality (v. 22a)**

Paul had enjoyed the domestic hospitality of Philemon, as had so many brethren (vv. 4-7). Because of the warm hospitality, Paul was eager to return. The duty of hospitality is a strong command to New Testament saints. (Cf. Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 8:2; 1 Peter 4:9.)

The joys of earthly hospitality are but a small taste of the divine hospitality waiting in eternity (cf. John 14:2, 3). The friends of Christ who exercise hospitality on earth will receive a rich blessing as He provides room in the splendid heavenly mansions!

### **Faithful and Urgent Praying (v. 22b)**

One cannot be Christ's friend and not become an enthusiastic participant in praying! "Your prayers" is plural, indicating that not only was Philemon praying, but also all in his house and in the congregation. Although removed from Paul by hundreds of miles, Paul knew Philemon was praying for his situation.

The practice of intercessory praying is a definite trait of the Lord (Luke 22:32). Philemon reflected this admirable trait.

Today we can ask no greater service than one would pray for us. In a like way, we can offer no greater service to another than to pray for him! (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

## CONCLUSION

"I have called you friends" (John 15:15). This statement is filled with comfort! Imagine its meaning—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, claims to be our "best" friend! We must be careful to reflect the traits of our "best Friend" just as brother Philemon did.

One spring morning two youths were walking through the woods. "Let us try," said one, "to find the image of our friendship in the nature around us." They looked and finally decided upon an ivy vine and a young oak. "Look, the ivy is clinging to the oak. The tree is growing in beauty and vigor, and the vine is clinging and also growing upward. The two seem to be as one. If it were not for the oak, the vine would remain in the dirt."

One who is the Lord's "friend" will be lifted to heights of greatness. When we are united with the Lord, we will find many blessings. Are you Christ's "friend"? (John 15:14). Are you reflecting the fruits of that friendship? Close friends resemble one another in so many unique ways, and they delight in pointing out these similarities. This "reflective" friendship is heart-warming and cheer-bringing! Especially is this the case when all saints "reflect" the fruits of the blessed friendship with Jesus Christ!

—John Kachelman

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## *Brotherly Benefits* (*Philemon 20*)

Paul expected to benefit from Philemon. He expected to gain benefits because:

1. Philemon was a Christian—a Christian should always bring benefit to those associated with him (Matthew 5:13-16).
2. Philemon was the possessor of great faith in God—being around him meant a constant discussion of God.
3. Philemon had the disposition to bring cheer and joy—once you were in his presence the sky became blue, the sun shone, and the clouds disappeared.
4. Philemon was a great encourager—his brethren knew that he could "refresh" them.

This character prompted Paul to say, "Let me benefit from you!"

## *The Beauty and the Blessing* (*Philemon 20*)

In these closing words Paul's remark goes right to the core of Christian fellowship. In a brief sentence we are introduced to the beauty and blessing of Christian fellowship.

1. The *beauty* of fellowship—"brother."
2. The *blessing* of the fellowship
  - a. There will be joy and benefit.
  - b. There will be refreshment; a lifting of spirits.

## *Unashamed Hope* (*Philemon 22*)

Paul's hope to be freed was bold because:

1. All his hope was placed in God (Colossians 4:3, 4).
2. All his hope was undergirded with prayer (v. 22; Philippians 1:19).
3. All his hope was supported by brethren—"you"; "you."

## *Attitude of Obedience* (*Philemon 21*)

Paul knew Philemon would obey God. This certainty was due to Philemon's attitude.

1. He loved Christ (v. 5).
2. He loved the church (v. 5).
3. He desired the spread of the gospel (v. 6).

Basically, Philemon desired to obey because he knew God and glory's rewards. Such an attitude caused Paul to write, "I'm sure you will obey." May all saints share a like attitude of obedience regardless of the command issued.

## *Christian Fellowship* (*Philemon 17*)

1. Its practice—"accept."
2. Its equity—"as you would me."
3. Its basis—"brother in the Lord."
4. Its benefits—"refresh my heart" (v. 20).
5. Its maintenance—"forgiveness" (vv. 18, 19).
6. Its tenure—"forever" (v. 15).