

"Our Accountability to Jesus"

I John 5: 1-6 and John 15:9-17

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+john+5:1-6

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:9-17

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Jesus does hold us accountable for our choices!

The Scripture reminds us often that there will be a time when the Great General calls us for an inspection. At that time we will be responsible for our choices. Blaming will not work. The victim role is not available. We must stand before the Great General and report on our obedience to Christ's direct order. Being evaluated is difficult for all of us. Standing in review is not easy. Knowing that we must pass inspection is frightening. All of us have experiences with being called before a person of authority. We know the awesome fear those memories evoke within us.

In a certain suburban neighborhood, there were two brothers, 8 and 10 years old, who were exceedingly mischievous. Whatever went wrong in the neighborhood, it turned out they had a hand in it. Their parents were at their wit's end trying to control them. Hearing about a priest nearby who worked with delinquent boys, the mother suggested to the father that they ask the priest to talk with the boys. The father replied, "Sure, do that before I kill them!" The mother went to the priest and made her request. He agreed, but said he wanted to see the younger boy first and alone. So the mother sent him to the priest. The priest sat the boy down across a huge, impressive desk he sat behind. For about five minutes they just sat and stared at each other. Finally, the priest pointed his forefinger at the boy and asked, "Where is God?" The boy looked under the desk, in the corners of the room, all around, but said nothing. Again, louder, the priest pointed at the boy and asked, "Where is God?" Again the boy looked all around but said nothing. A third time, in a louder, firmer voice, the priest leaned far across the desk and put his forefinger almost to the boy's nose, and asked, "Where is God?" The boy panicked and ran all the way home. Finding his older brother, he dragged him upstairs to their room and into the closet, where they usually plotted their mischief. He finally said, "We are in BIIIG trouble." The older boy asked, "What do you mean, BIIIG trouble?" His brother replied, "God is missing...and they think we did it!"

We know the fear that grips the pit of our stomachs when we know that we have done wrong and we know that we must "face the music." How much better it is to know the commands that must be obeyed and follow them rather than to live in fear.

You might ask what command in the Scripture the Great General is apt to hold you accountable. There are a number of commands within the Holy Text. We can remember the attorney who asked about the greatest commandment. Jesus quoted the Torah, the books of Moses, when He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, mind and strength. And, you must love your neighbor as you love yourself." This summary of the Hebrew commandments is recorded in Matthew 22:37-39

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+22:37-39

and in Mark 12:29-31

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+12:29-31

Another commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples is found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. In both places Jesus says to do unto others and you would have them do unto you. We have called this commandment the Golden Rule. This is not unique to Jesus. Rabbi Hillel who lived before Jesus is quoted as saying, "What you would not want others to do to you, do not do to them."

If we look closely at scripture there is one commandment that is uniquely Jesus. Jesus taught and lived a heavenly love that transformed earthly living. Jesus commanded that we love like he loves. Listen again to Jesus' words. *"My command is this: love each other as I have love you."* (John 15:12)

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:12) "*Love each other,*" is in the present imperative state in the Greek. That means that this love is to be continuous, ever present love.

This kind of love is not an emotion. We too often hear love and think emotion. A young man walked into a card shop. "I want just the right card for a special girl that I love," he said. The clerk pointed to their best selling card. It said very simply, "To the only girl I have ever loved." "Terrific!" said the young man. "I'll take six of those!" In our American minds love is associated with feelings. Nothing could be further from the reality of what Jesus is talking about.

The direct order is to love in the same manner, with the same heart, in like mind with, Jesus Christ. Jesus thought of the other person before himself. Jesus saw beyond the person standing before him to see the person that God was creating. Jesus was willing to sacrifice his life on behalf of the other person. Jesus has commanded us to live within the context of Christ like love.

There are no exceptions here. We cannot quibble. We cannot argue. We cannot even plead ignorance. Not learning the basics is not an excuse the Great General will accept. Not even big executives will be exempted from the review. Harry Cohn, the legendary Columbia Pictures tycoon, once bet his brother, Jack, that he did not know and could not recite the Lord's Prayer. Jack Cohn accepted the wager and began his recitation: "Now I lay me down to sleep..." A disappointed Harry Cohn interrupted him and forked over the money. "That's enough," he said, "I didn't think you knew it." Ignorance will not be an acceptable excuse for anyone. Jesus command is simple and straight forward. It is a direct order. "*Love each other as I have loved you.*"

Before the Great General calls you before His face and reviews your life, I suggest you conduct a prior review. What is the condition of your soul in relationship to Christ-like love? That is the question. The **key words** for you to consider in defining Christ-like love are **friend** and **forgive**.

Friends with Jesus and with Jesus' friends.

In verse 14 Jesus says that we are His friends when we love as He commands us to love. Friendship with Jesus is both possible and important. We are to so involve ourselves in His life that we can say that Jesus is our best friend. Such friendship involves constant communication. A friend is someone you share with on an ongoing basis. Prayer then, is not something we have to do to satisfy some law of God. Rather prayer is a constant conversation with a personal friend. With Jesus as our friend with whom we are in contact every day, our circle of friends will expand.

Christ-like friendship is very real and concrete. We are not talking about good feelings alone. Friendship extends us beyond our comfort zone. Christian friendship goes beyond ethnic, racial, national, or religious boundaries. Jesus' direct order is not just to talk about love, but to actually practice it. So, if you are in touch with your friend Jesus and Christ-like love is in your heart, be sure to notify your face so that you give the world a smile. Tomorrow, get your co-worker a cup of coffee when you get yourself one. Or, perhaps someone in your work place cannot afford to buy lunch. In the name of Jesus Christ, take them to lunch. (Don't make a big deal of it. Jesus' gifts always come with no strings attached.) Maybe, you could bring bagels for everyone in the morning. Food might not be the answer, but what about common courtesy. Remember to be thankful and affirmative! You might even use your lunch time to pray for those persons in your immediate work area who are in need. They don't know that they are God's children yet. But, they will if you begin to share friend Jesus' love. Friendship with Jesus is real. We are friends with the Christ of our hearts and the Christ in the hearts of persons who surround us every day.

Just talking about friendship with Jesus and doing nothing is disastrous. According to an Inter-varsity leader in the country of Rwanda, the problem with the ethnic genocide that has happened within a country that is 90% Christian is that missionaries preached a gospel of having a right relationship with God but not necessarily a right relationship with each other. Preaching or living a gospel that separates the relationship with God from human relationships is blasphemy.

Jesus puts friendship with him in the same breath as friendship with all God's children. A poem by Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) describes a man by the name of Abou Ben Adhem who had a dream. He awakened in the night, and there in his room was an angel of the Lord writing in a golden book.

He said to the angel: "What writest thou?"
The angel answered: "...The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou.
"Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still, and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed;
And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!
When Adhem saw his name at the top of the list of those who love
the Lord, he asked the angel what had happened.
"If we love not our brothers and sisters whom we have seen, how
can we say we love God whom we have not seen?"
--Masterpieces of Religious Verse, ed. James Delton Morrison
(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 1286.

When we are friends with Jesus, then we are friends with all God's children. Friendship then is the key word to describe Christ-like love. Friendship means involvement and interaction. Friendship means accepting the person just the way they are and helping them to grow to be who God is creating them to be. Friendship recognizes that life is a continuing process of discovery and letting go. Friendship is commitment to support, to stand by, to be there for each other, no matter what happens. Friendship is what Jesus wants with you and what He expects from you. People who live Christ-like love as friends make a difference in the lives of people.

Mary Ann Bird wrote a short story entitled "The Whisper Test." It is a true story from her own life of the difference Christ-like love made in her life. Her second grade teacher was a true friend to her and it changed her life. She writes: *"I grew up knowing I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I must look to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth and garbled speech. "When schoolmates would ask, 'What happened to your lip?' I'd tell them I'd fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me. "There was, however, a teacher in the second grade that we all adored -- Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy -- a sparkling lady. Annually, we would have a hearing test. I was virtually deaf in one of my ears; but when I had taken the test in past years, I discovered that if I did not press my hand as tightly upon my ears as I was instructed to do, I could pass the test. Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something and we would have to repeat it back ... things like, 'The sky is blue' or 'Do you have new shoes?' I waited there for those words which God must have put into her mouth, those seven words which changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, 'I wish you were my little girl.'" (As told by Spencer Morgan Rice, "The Drama of God," Trinity Church, Boston.)*

Jesus direct order is that we live our lives as friends with every one of God's children. And, in the process we souls will grow intertwined with Christ. You might; however, check your own heart right now and say that such loving is not possible. After all, you only want to associate with the right kind of God's people. As you check your the quality of your souls love, you might become somewhat fearful of facing the Great General too soon. Maybe another hundred years are needed. Because Jesus knows the condition of your soul, the next key word in Christ-like love's definition is important.

Forgiveness is crucial.

In verse 16, Jesus says, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit...*" Notice that at the heart of your new birth. At the very core of your soul is a gift of God's sacrificial love. While you were still a sinner, Christ chose you. While you were an enemy of God's, Christ chose you. While you went your own way, doing your own thing, living your own life, Christ chose you. Even as you participated in building up the "Big I" while neglecting and ignoring others around you, Christ chose you. God granted you in your heart of hearts the gift of forgiveness before you even asked. That gift of salvation from the consequences of your sin is made plan when Jesus chose you.

Through the choice of Jesus, you have within you a world transforming power. That power begins each day with your humble acceptance of your human limitations and God's eternal love. That power begins when you accept Christ's forgiveness and choice. Because we are saved and transformed by God's grace, we can embody that same forgiveness filled love with all our relationships, including--indeed, especially those persons who might be considered our enemies.

Christ Jesus dwells within your soul. There is a large area within your soul that is filled with forgiveness. When you stay in touch with Christ undeserved, unearned, un-merited, even unasked for forgiveness, then you are more likely to forgive another human being.

Jesus Direct Order: "Love One Another"

This passage of John's Gospel ends with a repeat of Jesus' direct order. We can feel confident facing the Great General one day when we grow in our friendship with Jesus Christ. His order is to grow in Christ-like love. We can grow in that way if we daily keep in mind the two key words. What is your relationship with your friend Jesus and Jesus' friends? And, how are you accepting and sharing God's forgiveness with all people? Well? How are you doing?

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