

A True Friend

It's hard to know who your friends are these days. I'm beginning to think that "good-ol'-day" era when a handshake and a smile sealed a deal is more myth than memory. To be sure, deception, intrigue, and subtlety are not a late invention.

In the current climate of smiling salesmen, with disclaimers, fine print, and lawyers on retainer, we are inclined to bemoan the loss of trustworthiness as unique to our age. However, these problems existed in Jesus' day and, whereas Paul was not bashful about appealing to Cæsar (Acts 25:11), he hammered the habit of frivolous lawsuits (1 Corinthians 6:6). In the media, advertisements frequently speed up the disclaimers and lower the announcer's voice to a drone. "Not including tax, title, and license" is just one of the many hidden costs associated with a purchase and "face value" is frequently two-faced.

This wiliness is particularly onerous in the arena of religion. One might think that those who at least make a pretense of being Christ-like would be reliable and trustworthy. However, religion seems to be especially vulnerable to duplicity and fraud. There is a measure of faith upon which hypocrites rely and which allow them to operate; in churchly circles, a friend may not be a friend. Therefore, the Scriptures are replete with warnings concerning conduct (Romans 1:27-32), associations (1 Corinthians 15:33), and especially doctrine (Romans 16:17-18) where a failure to test the spirits (1 John 4:1) can lead to eternal damnation.

True friends don't use you for who you are; they love you for who you can be. (Proverbs 27:17). They will not compromise their integrity to participate with you in conduct that God condemns (Job 2:3, 9) and will not run with any crowd that does evil (Exodus 23:2). They certainly will not sit silently by while you promote damnable heresy and soft-peddle its consequences (Isaiah 30:10). The best friend you have is the one who comes to you (Matthew 18:15-17) in meekness (Galatians 6:1); he or she will not allow you to blissfully waltz into Hell feeling good about yourself (Luke 6:39). And, most importantly, a true friend will not seek out an uninvolved, uninformed audience with which to share speculation and gossip to your detriment. It takes courage and conviction to truly be a friend. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6). Perhaps that is why the consummate expression of a friend is Jesus the Christ (Luke 7:34), for "a friend loveth at all times" (Proverbs 17:17) but will not approve of sin (John 8:11).

Which gets back to our original statement: It's hard to know who your friends are these days. Professors of piety are not always friend and "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). If your friend's chief employ is the rumor mill, just imagine whom he or she will be talking about when you don't play by their rules. Yet, there is nothing sweeter than true friends (Proverbs 18:24).

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