

Call to Obedience #244  
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Three of the 1595 “ifs” of the Bible.

## **The Three Big “Ifs”** By Reimar Schultze

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love...” —John 15:10

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” —John 15:14

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” —John 15:18

The greatest concentration of Jesus’ teaching is found in the short hours of the night between the Passover Supper on Thursday night and his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane Friday morning before daybreak. In this period of time, Jesus gave us all of John 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. We can call these teachings Christ’s final instructions to his disciples before his departure from the earth.

In brief, the first point of Jesus’ final instructions consisted of his establishing the doctrine of succession. No king ever leaves the question of succession unaddressed and to chance. Jesus knew that he would leave the earth and that he would need earthly representatives who would continue his work by him and through him, and so he said, “He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (John 13:20). If you receive a pastor sent of Jesus, you receive Jesus. If you reject a pastor sent of Jesus, you reject Jesus. If you slight him, you slight Jesus. If you forsake him, you forsake Jesus. That is the doctrine of succession. All those sent by Jesus are in his right hand (Rev. 1:20). Jesus holds them and governs through them, and if you hurt these servants, then you slap the hand of Jesus.

Then in the final instructions, Jesus proceeded to speak about the Holy Spirit. He promised a day when his spirit and character and virtues would dwell in his ministers and in all who would abide in him as a branch abides in the vine through obedience. Now this gets us into three great realities of sainthood: love, friendship, and hate.

**DIVINE LOVE** “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10).

First observe that the word “if” occurs ten times in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, 82 times in the Gospel of John, 602 times in the New Testament, and 1595 times in the whole Bible. Are there any “ifs” about Christianity? Is this matter of religion all settled and sealed when we come to Jesus, or are there still uncertainties to be dealt with? The word “if” is a conditional participle, and hence the word “if” is as a fork in the road; it is that precise point where the road divides, one branch swerving to the left and the other to the right. How are you doing with the “if” parts of your walk with God?

So look for the “ifs” in the Old Testament. God’s covenant relationship is based on “ifs”! If Israel would obey God, God would bless her; if not, he would punish her. And then there is the New Covenant—if we forgive others, Jesus will forgive us; if not, he will not (Matt. 6:14–15). If we love Jesus more than our families and even our own life, we will be his disciple (Luke 14:26). If we do not believe Jesus is the Christ, we shall die in our sins (John 8:24); but if we do believe that Jesus is the Christ, we shall never see death (John 8:51). Now, look at some “ifs” of John 15:

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch...” (v. 6).

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will...” (v.7)

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love...” (v. 10).

So then, how do we get love—divine love? How do we get the kind of love that does not fall apart when our wife tells us that we are negligent in putting away our clothes? Do we have to come back right away and say to her, “And you are not keeping the house as clean as you used to”? Can we take correction without retaliation? How do we get love that does not resent correction? How do we get love that is quick to say, “I am sorry,” to God and to man? How do we get love that when reviled, reviles not again, being threatened, threatens not again (1 Pet. 2:23)? How do we get this love that suffers long, is kind, never envies, never boils over, never boasts, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (1 Cor. 13)? “If ye keep my commandments (if you do what I tell you), ye shall abide in my love...” How great is this if? It is great enough and powerful enough to separate us from all that is of God. Is there any more powerful two letter word in the English vocabulary than this word “if”?

Oh, my friend, what is it worth to obey Jesus? What is it worth to be filled with Jesus love, a love that caused him to become a servant to all, a sacrifice for all, and a savor and savior for all? Did you ever realize that Jesus had to get this divine love the same way as you do—by obedience? The rest of this verse says, “even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”

There is no mystery on how to be filled with the love of God. Hallelujah! It is simply a matter of obedience, as Peter also stated, when he said the Holy Ghost is given to as many as obey him (Acts 5:32). Consistent obedience brings the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit brings divine love (Rom. 5:5).

**FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD** “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14).

Here is another “if.” There are some popular, sentimental statements about friendship. Oh, they sound so good: Once a friend, always a friend; friends are friends forever; etc. But let us face it, these statements are not rooted in biblical truth but in man’s poetic minds.

To Jesus, friendship had an “if” in it, like so many other things. To Jesus, friendship was not a friendship forever, a “no-matter-what-happens” proposition but an “it-all-depends-on-how-you-behave” proposition. “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” To Jesus, friendship was based on obedience, on commitment, on surrender, on our getting one hundred percent behind his will, his cause, his plans, his mission. Anything less than that would break that friendship. Yes, pay attention to “ifs”—the 1595 “ifs” in the Bible.

Do not be reckless in your assumptions. Don’t take God for granted. Don’t be sloppy. Be accurate, be precise, be cautious. Don’t project your thoughts of anything, such as friendship, upon Jesus. Let us go by his definition of friendship and not ours, even as Paul said that we should avoid brethren who cause division, occasions of stumbling, and who are disagreeable (Rom. 16:17–18). When a brother in the Lord becomes disobedient to Jesus, Jesus no longer considers him a friend and neither should you. We are talking here about brothers, about Christians. We also see this in 1 Corinthians 5:11, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”

Jesus does not even mind to be called a friend of sinners—but a friend of them who have once tasted of the heavenly gift (salvation) and then have trodden under foot the blood of the Lamb of God by which they were sanctified—a friend of such? NO! (Heb. 10:26ff)

But oh, what a privilege, what a blessing to be a friend to the Friend with the capital "F." Abraham was a friend of God, and God could not keep secrets from him.

"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).

Praise the Lord! You don't take a servant or an employee with you on your vacation. However, you take a friend with you everywhere you can. If you are a friend of Jesus, you will never spend a vacation without him, you will never turn the television on without him, you will never do anything without him. And as he reveals secrets to you, so you can tell him yours; and you will be like unto Moses of whom it is said that "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend..." (Ex. 33:11).

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

**HATE FROM THE WORLD** "Yes, this message is about love, friendship, and hate. What else did Jesus tell his disciples in these short hours of his marathon teaching between the Last Supper and his arrest? What is another "if"?

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18–19).

If you obey Jesus, you abide in his love, you will be a friend of Jesus, and so as the world hated Jesus, it will hate you because you will no longer be of the world: its toys, its fashions, its entertainments, its value system, and its ways. When you no longer cooperate with the world, the world will hate you as it hated him. So, as a friend of Jesus, you have a constant stream of love coming to you from heaven and a perpetual assault of hate coming your way from the earth. This is the life of a true saint.

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love..." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

Dear one, do you have divine love in your heart? As a friend of Jesus, does your love hold up under hate, resentment, persecution, correction, or any other pressure in a hell-bound world? If not, the cause is a neglect of three big "ifs," a lack of total surrender and absolute obedience to all that Jesus wants you to do. Aren't you glad that it is that simple?