

What is True Christian Friendship? Part 3 | identifying fakes

I. Do you have enemies in your life? Do you have fake friends?

- Yes, you do. We're all sinners, and any time we sin against someone or in the presence of someone, we're being an enemy. We're either hurting them directly, encouraging them to do something sinful — which is hurtful to them — or we're modeling a sinful lifestyle — which is just as hurtful.
- **You need to know what true love and friendship are. You need to know what Christ-honoring influence looks like.**
- **You need to maturely and biblically evaluate the people with whom you associate.**
 - "7 Trademarks of an Unhealthy Friendship" by Paul David Tripp
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward self-indulgence?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward deceit?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward anger?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward selfishness?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward unhelpful communication?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward division?
 - Does the relationship have a tendency toward an unforgiving spirit?
- **You have to understand how God expects you to relate to enemies.**
 - **All relationships must be redemptive.**
 - God wants all of our relationships to be redemptive relationships. That means that every person with whom we interact should be drawn closer to God because they were with us. And God wants our influences to be redemptive as well.
 - **All relationships with unbelievers are to be focused on evangelism.**
 - If the individual is unsaved, then there's clear biblical expectation that we be salt and light in their life.
 - But there is also clear teaching that we are not to *fellowship* with them. I John teaches us that there is no fellowship between light and darkness.
 - God doesn't command us to ignore and run away from unbelievers. He simply points out that we don't have anything in common and cannot — therefore — truly *fellowship*.
 - But influence is a two way street. We must be a friend to them, but we have to acknowledge that they're not a friend to us. We must influence them redemptively and not be sinfully influenced by them. We are obviously commanded to love them and share God's Truth with them. If we're being a true friend to them, there should be nothing more important to us than sharing the Gospel with the unsaved.
 - If the individual isn't born again, we must not be unequally yoked with them in influence. If we're yoked to them, they will affect our gait. We can't undistractedly follow Christ if we're chained to someone trying to get as far away from Him as possible.
 - **All relationships with believers are to be focused on discipleship.**
 - God wants us to sharpen, admonish, exhort, encourage, edify, teach, and strengthen each other.
 - This is an all too neglected element in our relationships that reduces a lot of potentially Christ-honoring friendships to nothing more than fake friendships.
 - Remember, we don't only sin against someone by doing something *to* them. Sometimes our enemy behavior involves keeping something from them.
 - When we aren't engaged in Christ-honoring, discipling, one-anothering, we're stealing something vital from the people in our lives . . . and that is not friend behavior.

- What do we do if a professing Christian is doing the same to us? What if they're not only not influencing us for Christ, what if they're living in open sin? I Corinthians 5:9-13
- Our redemptive relationships with professing Christians are to be identical to our relationships with unbelievers in that our interactions must draw them to God. And in the case of a professing brother or sister in Christ, if they are living in unrepentant sin, God says, "Don't rub shoulders with them at all."
- There is a pattern that is to be followed. In Matthew 18 Jesus makes it clear that we don't jump ship the first time someone sins against us. Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20
- We have more freedom in associating with unbelievers for the purpose of introducing them to Christ than we do to associate with professing believers who are living like unbelievers.

II. How to Limit Bad Influences

- **How do you limit influence with people outside of your family?**
 - Limiting influence is always a secondary response. It must follow two other steps. We only need to limit influence with someone after we have tried to build them up in Christ and they have refused. We shouldn't be ghosting anyone without first having been a friend to them.
 - That means that we need to start sharing the Gospel. We need speak the truth in love.
 - Whether they're born again or not, we need to be the friend God commands me to be. And that right there will impact our relationships. Some of your friends won't like the "new you." They won't be sure what they think about the God-talk and desire for personal holiness. They may remove themselves from your sphere of influence all by themselves. Lord willing, others will be drawn to Christ because of it.
 - And when it becomes clear that the individual with whom you used to spend a lot of time isn't interested in being the follower of Christ that they should, it will be much easier to have a loving conversation with them.
- **How do you limit influence with people inside your family?**
 - If you're in a situation where you need to limit influences from a family member, please connect with a pastor/biblical counselor.
 - How much someone influences you is up to you.
 - I Corinthians 10:13
 - In a best case scenario, we need to get ourselves away from the sinful influences. But that isn't always an option in a family.
 - If a person is breaking the law, they need to be instantly held accountable for that, and they may be removed from an influential position for a time.
 - Regardless of whether you're a minor, a spouse, or you're someone else in a difficult situation where escaping the bad influences just isn't a Christ-honoring option . . . you need to intentionally limit how much you allow the sinful influence to actually sway you.
 - When it comes to turning influences into non-influences, you don't change the influencer, you change the person being influenced. If you doggedly want to please the Lord, and you're submitted to the the filling of the Holy Spirit, and you work your hardest to mature in Christ and be conformed to His image, you will be influenced less and less by the sinful examples in your life.
 - In best case scenarios, the Bible is clear that we should carefully manage the influence from our enemies. But if you find yourself in a situation where you cannot do that, please know that there is hope. You don't have to be swayed by the enemies in your life.