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The Friendship of God - Saint Irenaeus

From the treatise Against Heresies

The Friendship of God - Saint Irenaeus, Bishop



Our Lord, the Word of God, first drew men to God as servants, but later he freed those made subject to him. He himself testified to this: *I do not call you servants any longer, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. Instead I call you friends, since I have made known to you everything that I have learned from my Father.* Friendship with God brings the gift of immortality to those who accept it.

In the beginning God created Adam, not because he needed man, but because he wanted to have someone on whom to bestow his blessings. Not only before Adam but also before all creation, the Word was glorifying the Father in whom he dwelt, and was himself being glorified by the Father. The Word himself said: *Father, glorify me with that glory I had with you before the world was.*

Nor did the Lord need our service. He commanded us to follow him, but his was the gift of salvation. To follow the Saviour is to share in salvation; to follow the light is to enjoy the light. Those who are in the light do not illuminate the light but are themselves illuminated and enlightened by the light. They add nothing to the light; rather, they are beneficiaries, for they are enlightened by the light.

The same is true of service to God: it adds nothing to God, nor does God need the service of man. Rather, he gives life and immortality and eternal glory to those who follow and serve him. He confers a benefit on his servants in return for their service and on his followers in return for their loyalty, but he receives no benefit from them. He is rich, perfect and in need of nothing.

The reason why God requires service from man is this: because he is good and merciful he desires to confer benefits on those who persevere in his service. In proportion to God's need of nothing is man's need for communion with God.

This is the glory of man: to persevere and remain in the service of God. For this reason the Lord told his disciples: *You did not choose me but I chose you.* He meant that his disciples did not glorify him by following him, but in following the Son of God they were

glorified by him. As he said: *I wish that where I am they also may be, that they may see my glory.*

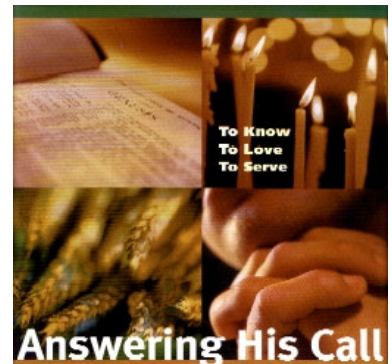
St. Irenaeus was one of the most important Church Fathers of the 2nd century AD. His life reveals the cosmopolitan nature of the Roman Empire at the height of its power. Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons, in Southern France, though he appears to have grown up in Smyrna, in Modern day Turkey. There he had personal contact with St. Polycarp, one of the Apostolic Fathers who in turn knew the Apostle John, son of Zebedee. Before becoming bishop, Irenaeus apparently studied in Rome where he was influenced by St. Justin Martyr. His major work, Against Heresies, which appeared around the year 185 AD, exposed the absurdities of the Gnostic cults of the day and included a strong presentation and defense of Catholic Christianity. For an overview of the Early Church Fathers visit www.dritaly.com.

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