

LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN

By Benjamin J. Williams

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. [10] ... but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;” (I Thessalonians 4:9-10). The words of Paul in this passage are just as applicable today as at anytime. While the command and duty to love each other is one of the oldest and most familiar of all God’s commandments, a lack of brotherly love causes just as many problems today as ever. While all Christians know to love, we must follow the instruction of God to “increase more and more.”

The Old Commandment Is New

I John 2 gives a decisive explanation of the necessity of brotherly love. Verse seven of that text reads, “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.” The context later identifies this commandment as the instruction to love one another. The “beginning” here points all the way back to Genesis, as the term is also used in the first verse of the same book. This sacred order proceeds from the nature of God (I John 4:8) and is a directive tied to the very existence of Jehovah buy inspired Moses (Lev. 19:18), No time or place has ever existed without the mandate to love for no time or place has ever existed without Jehovah God.

However, verse eight of the same text indicates that the same command is now a “new commandment ... because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.” The riddle alludes to the same principle seen in so much of the New Testament. Christ came not to destroy the Old Law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Christ took many of the Old Testament laws and fulfilled them by bringing to light the imperative to keep both the law and the intended disposition of the law (Matt. 5:18-48). In like fashion, Jesus illuminates the ancient commandment to love and fulfills it by commanding the intended measure of love. In John 13:34-35 our Lord proclaims the newness of the commandment to love, saying, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. [35] By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Jehovah would now show humanity the fullness of love in the cross of Christ. In so doing, the law is made new. We are no longer commanded only to love in some fashion to be determined by our whims, but we are bound to love others as Christ has loved us.

I John chapter 2 further explains the gravity of the love’s requirement. In verse 10-11 the Scriptures say that whoever does not love his brother, no matter what he may proclaim to the world, walks in darkness, “and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

How To Love Faithful Brethren

Love demands that we meet the spiritual needs of those around us. To fail in this is to administer hate, not love. For brethren that keep the faith, the spiritual needs may not be as obvious, but they are no less urgent and pressing.

Faithful brethren need to be exhorted with regularity. We are instructed to “exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13) To preserve the spiritual strength and purity of our brethren, we must continually offer encouragement. The Scriptures emphasize that the exhortation is to be made now. If we love our brethren, we dare not wait until they fall into weakness and sin before we offer our help and assistance. Exhortation is to **prevent** sin, not repair it. Proper exhortation keeps the Christian spiritually healthy, and preserving the spirits of our brethren is an action that our love should demand. One way to offer this strength is in the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:23-25). By loyal attendance to the gathering of the saints, we can encourage those that assemble just as we are encouraged by their steadfastness. A simple act like attendance then becomes an act of love. The absence of regularity in gathering with brethren to be about the Lord’s business shows not only contempt for the Lord’s work, but also hatred toward the brethren who need our strength just as we need theirs.

Another method for loving faithful brethren is in doing our part of the church’s work. No one enjoys “working” with those that watch while you work! Love does not allow others toil while you sit at ease. Instead, Paul commands that we must “by love serve one another. [14] For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Galatians 5:13-14) The Scriptures call our ministering to each other a “labour of love” that God will not forget (Hebrews. 6:10). Also, without serving a brother directly, we can love them by doing our part in whatever work needs to be done. We should recall the gratitude expressed by Paul for the church at Thessalonica for their efforts in the “work of faith, and labour of love” assigned to the church of our Lord (I Thessalonians 1:2-3). Instead of delegating the duties of the kingdom to be completed by a faithful few, we must show our love for the Lord, the church, and our brethren by doing our part in the service of the Master.

How To Love Unfaithful Brethren

Unfaithful brethren need love as much if not more than strong brethren. The unfaithful are weak and in desperate need of strength and correction. Our love for their souls must be fulfilled in the often unpleasant work of restoring them. It is often unpleasant because so many emotions and feelings are often hurt at the slightest word of correction. Few like to be told to change, but love does what is best for others. Just as Christ endured all for our souls, we must let no price be too high in the restoration of unfaithful brethren.

The duty to restore is given in Galatians 6:1-2, where we read, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. [2] Bear ye one

another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Once again we read that the filling full of the law is in actions of love. Refusing the need of a brother in a fault leaves both him and ourselves in darkness. In this effort we are told to treat the erring brother as a brother none the less, in the "spirit of meekness".

Meekness means that we must be under control, not filled with malice that drives souls away or even overcome with kind emotions that might compromise the truth to keep everyone happy. We must meekly present the truth in love so that the one in error can plainly see how to correct the sad situation. To the brethren, James writes, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; [20] Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20) Could any greater act of love be named than to save a soul from death? No. This kind of love is precisely the measure of Christ's love for us and is therefore the love we must show.

In this effort, we must remember that love demands persistence. Paul commanded that we "warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." (I Thessalonians 5:14) Once you were lost and someone patiently taught you the gospel, and now you must patiently correct those that have left the service of God. The very nature of love requires this patience from us, for "charity suffereth long ... [7] Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [8] Charity never faileth: ..." (I Corinthians 13:4-8) The attributes of love must be the attributes of our correction of the faithless. We must never fail or count any price too high in our efforts to save souls from death.

Let Love Continue

Upon love hangs all the Law and the Prophets and our very identity as disciples of Christ our Lord. The Scriptures ask a profound question of us concerning love when it says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? [21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (I John 4:20-21) Let us love with the love of Christ, a love that cares for the souls of our brethren. Let us exhort faithful brethren to continue in their work of love. Let us do our part in that work, not permitting the duties of the church to fall upon a dedicated few. Let us strengthen weak brethren and lovingly correct the erring for the sake of their souls and our own. In all things, "Let brotherly love continue." (Hebrews 13:1)