

“Let Brotherly Love Continue”

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.”

—Hebrews 13:1-3

THE BEGINNING OF THE

year is an opportune time to renew afresh our vows of consecration. It is also appropriate that we examine ourselves carefully as to our progress in the narrow way, and in the development of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter counsels us to “give diligence” in adding the various attributes of Christian character to our foundation of faith, that we might make our “calling and election sure.” Only

“if these things be in you, and abound,” Peter says, can we expect to share an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:8,10,11

Among the various “graces” Peter tells us we are to “add to” our faith, and (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) which must “abound” in our thoughts, words, and actions, is the quality of “brotherly kindness,” or brotherly love. (II Pet. 1:7) Love of the brethren has always been of vital importance throughout the Gospel Age, but it seems that now it is even more critical in order that we may maintain our steadfastness in the faith. As the present “harvest” period has hastened onward, the consecrated followers of Christ on this side of the veil have become fewer in number. This is not to our surprise, for it is God’s will that the body of Christ be soon completed, in order that the Messianic kingdom can be instituted for the blessing of mankind. With fewer numbers of brethren in our fellowship, it is all the more important that we draw together ever more tightly the cords which bind us together in brotherly love.

“As being yourselves also in the body.” These closing words of our opening text reveal the true meaning of the term “brotherly love” as used by the Apostle Paul in this passage of scripture. Simply stated, it is a love which we bear toward our fellow brethren in the body of Christ. In a natural body which functions normally, each member, or part, works harmoniously with every other member. When one part of the body suffers, the entire body suffers; and no member of a natural body deliberately inflicts injuries upon another member. So it should be in the body of Christ, and so it is in that body to the extent that brotherly love continues to operate among all its members.

Our text has a setting which suggests its special appropriateness for the Lord’s people at this end of the age. In the closing verses of the preceding

chapter, Paul gives a prophecy which is having its fulfillment in the world-shaking events of our day. He tells us that not only the symbolic earth, “but also heaven” is to be shaken. (Heb. 12:26) Today we stand in awe as we watch the fulfillment of this and other prophecies which tell of the shaking of both civil and religious systems in the earth.

We know from the Word of God that this shaking will continue until, as the apostle declares, the only things which will remain are “those things which cannot be shaken.” That “which cannot be moved” is the kingdom of Christ soon to be established. (vss. 27,28) It is our hope to receive a share in that kingdom, and to live and reign “with Christ a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4,6) With this prophetic lesson in mind, Paul then counsels those who desire to have a part in the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom to “let brotherly love continue.”

Brotherly love is a quality of character which seeks uniformly to bless and help, not merely when things are going smoothly for fellow members of the body. Just as importantly, it desires to act when our brethren need help the most. It is brotherly love which prompts us to “remember them that are in bonds.” We are to do this not only in the sense of wishing them well, but also with the same deep concern and determination to help as though we were in a similar position, “as bound with them.”

At the time this epistle was written, it was not an uncommon experience for some of the believers to be in prison, and to suffer adversity in other ways. Many of these Hebrew brethren to whom Paul wrote had endured “joyfully the spoiling” of their goods, and had been “made a gazingstock both by

reproaches and afflictions.” A true brotherly spirit had been manifest among them, in that those who had not been apprehended and punished became the “companions of them that were so used.” (Heb. 10:33,34) It was, no doubt, because of this that Paul uses the word “continue” in our text. They had displayed brotherly love toward those in the body, and his admonition was that they should continue doing so. In Hebrews 6:10,11, Paul tells this same group that “God is not unrighteous” to forget their “work and labour of love” in ministering to the saints. He encourages them to continue this program of sacrifice on behalf of the brethren with “full assurance of hope unto the end.”

BROTHERLY LOVE IN SUFFERING

Brotherly love is an essential element to bind the body members together, not only in their mutual joys, but also in their communion of suffering. The apostle explains that it was God’s will “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (chap. 2:10) These “many sons” are the fellow members of the body of Christ—his brethren. Paul speaks of them as “holy brethren,” and explains that Jesus is the “Apostle and High Priest” of their profession. (chap. 3:1) Thus, we are provided the added understanding that the “brethren,” the “many sons,” and the “body” members are also priests.

Priests, Peter explains, are those who offer up sacrifices. (I Pet. 2:5) As we put these thoughts together and associate them with Paul’s admonition to “let brotherly love continue,” there is no escaping the thought that Christian love is closely associated

with sacrifice. Sacrifice is to be the motivating principle which governs the heart of every follower of the Master, and which prompts to faithfulness in service to the brethren. Such sacrifice leads to death—as indeed it must before the Christian’s walk in the narrow way is finished.

This is in harmony with the Master’s own exposition on the subject of brotherly love. He said to his disciples, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you.” (John 13:34) We all know the manner in which Jesus loved us. It was a self-sacrificing love, a love that motivated him to sacrifice his life in order that we might live. His “new commandment” to us is that we love one another as he loved us—that our brotherly love be shown toward our brethren in the same self-sacrificing way. Christian love is more than an emotional sentiment of kind feelings toward our brethren. It is also an impelling force which manifests itself in unselfish devotion to a great cause. The great, common cause of all the fellow members of the body of Christ, and the cause of sacrifice in the interests of one another, is that all may receive an abundant entrance into the kingdom.

As Jesus delves deeper into the subject of love, he uncovers another heart-searching fact concerning it in the question, “If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” (Matt. 5:46) We are loved—or should be—by our own brethren in Christ. At first glance it might appear that Jesus is here discounting somewhat the importance of his own “new commandment” to love our brethren, indicating that there is no

sacrifice involved, nor a particular reward, in loving those who love us.

There is a danger that we may adopt this viewpoint, and in our hearts and minds try to separate love from sacrifice. If we do this, the next easy viewpoint to embrace is that sacrifice is not essential in the Christian life, and that only love is required. Such reasoning is of the fleshly mind, not the new mind, and those overtaken in this thought will begin to go into spiritual decline.

However, the commandment Jesus gave us to love one another certainly does not imply that we love, and are willing to sacrifice on behalf of, only those who love us. Note the Lord's added explanation, "as I have loved you." Our love for one another is to be the same kind of love, and to operate under similar conditions, as Jesus' love for us. When we take this into consideration, the whole viewpoint of the new commandment is broadened considerably. Divine love through Christ was exercised on our behalf "while we were yet sinners," long before we were in a position to love him.—Rom. 5:8

God's will for consecrated followers of Jesus, whereby they exercise love toward one another upon the same basis as Jesus loved them, is outlined by the Master himself. He commanded his followers, including those living at this end of the age, to go into all the world and preach the Gospel for the purpose of making disciples. These disciples which are to be "made" through the ministry of the Truth become our brethren—for whom we have the privilege of sacrificing, even while they are still sinners, just as Jesus laid down his life for us before we came to him in faith.

LOVE DESPITE INGRAINED SIN

Not only did Jesus lay down his life for us while we were yet sinners, but his love continues after we hear and accept the call to follow in his steps. This is the case despite the many imperfections which continue with us and cause us many times to transgress the laws of righteousness. Therefore, if we love one another as he loved us, we will have a love that manifests itself for the good of our brethren even though there may be many things about them which may not be pleasing to us. Such blemishes in our brethren may, in fact, be a real trial to us.

In this connection, we are again reminded of the Master's assertion that if we love only those who love us, our love is not of a very high order, being merely on the same level as that of the "publicans." Jesus' expression, "them which love you," might well be broadened to mean those who are congenial to us, and whose ways of life do not irritate or vex us. It is easy to love these, and it is a pleasure to serve them. To love those among the brethren who are in this category is not, therefore, the final test of loving one another as Jesus loved us.

The quality of love which reached out for our salvation while we were yet sinners is a superlative expression of unselfishness. It is this example which we need to emulate in order to fully lay down our lives for the brethren, and to love them as Jesus loved us. We are to love all the brethren, and not merely those who take a special interest in us, or whose company we especially enjoy. This manifestation of love covers a "multitude of sins." (I Pet. 4:8) It helps us to esteem our brethren not according to

their outward appearance, but according to “righteous judgment.” (John 7:24) It extends mercy when our brethren fail, and a helping hand in their weakness. All this is implied in the words of our text, “Let brotherly love continue.”

LOVE—A MOTIVATING FORCE

Brotherly love is that great principle of unselfishness which each member of the body of Christ exercises toward every other member of the body. Consequently, it is the motivating force of all true Christian activity, and is a principle which must find expression in service if it is to remain alive. The Scriptures tell us that the “body of Christ” is a cooperative arrangement, set forth by God, for engaging in active service in the outworking of his plan. This is clearly shown to us by Paul in his lesson found in I Corinthians, chapter 12.

In this body, he explains, “there are diversities of operations,” or activities. (vs. 6) We note the emphasis on “operations.” When there ceases to be operation, or activity, that member of the body which becomes inactive must either be revived or else risk loss of his place in the body. In this remarkable chapter, the apostle emphasizes that there is given to each member of the body some special function of service, and that these all combine to accomplish the Lord’s will. One member cannot truthfully say to another, “I have no need of you.” (vs. 21) In the same way, no true member of the body can say to himself, “There is no service that I need to render, so I will just enjoy the benefits of the body, but not exert myself to do anything for the other members.”

Organized and continual activity is one of the important lessons of the “body” illustration. It is only in connection with Christian activity that brotherly love has an opportunity to function in a complete sense. Let us never think of brotherly love as being manifested merely in kindness of manner, or as a lofty platitude to be talked about in our meetings. God has set every member in the body as it has pleased him. (vs. 18) His purpose in giving us a place in the body at all is that we may actively function in whatever capacity he indicates is his will for us.

By way of contrast, inactivity is an unnatural state for any of God’s intelligent creatures. We are so constituted that we are truly happy only when we are active. However, the mere fact of being active is not sufficient. It is perhaps for this reason that in I Corinthians, chapter 13, Paul enhances his lesson concerning the active functioning of the body of Christ. He gives us the warning that without love as the motive, nothing we might do would have the Lord’s approval. In other words, we are not to think that all God is looking for in his people is that they be continually engaged in a frenzy of activity. He wants us to be active, but he wants us to be motivated in what we do by brotherly love.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,” writes the apostle, “and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy . . . and have not charity [love], I am nothing.” (vss. 1,2) In the preceding chapter, Paul stated that some in the Early Church had been given the gift of speaking and interpreting other languages, or “tongues.”

Others had received the gift of “prophecy,” or public speaking. These were gifts of God, given by him to be used for ministering the Gospel of Christ. The apostle is not implying that it would be better to possess love than to use these gifts. Rather, he wants us to realize that even these gifts of God could be used selfishly—without love as their motivating force.

The miraculous gift of speaking with tongues, or other languages, did not continue with the church, but the gift of prophecy, or public speaking, has. Some may have this talent, and those who do should use it. Public speaking, as an activity of a body member of Christ, does not imply the necessity of addressing an audience from a platform. The most effective preaching is often done to an audience of one. Think of the wonderful sermon that Jesus preached to the Samaritan woman at the well. Regardless of what our opportunities may be, if we are overflowing with brotherly love, we will be using every possible occasion to speak of the loving-kindness of our God. Indeed, we will wish that we had “a thousand tongues to sing” our “great Redeemer’s praise!”

Verse 2 continues, “Though I . . . understand all mysteries, and all knowledge.” (I Cor. 13:2) Paul gloried in the fact that God had made known to him the “mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations.” (Col. 1:26) We rejoice also in our knowledge of that mystery today. How essential is a knowledge of the plan of God if we are to be acceptable coworkers with him. Yet the apostle hints here that it may be possible to possess this wonderful knowledge, and not hold it in love.

Brotherly love will cause us to proclaim the Truth to others. Not only will we want to do this, but we will be happy to have the effort cost us something—even the vitality of life. It is exactly this sort of love which we see exemplified in Christ. We have covenanted to follow in his steps, and to follow the pattern of living and dying which he shaped for us.

The apostle tells us that even a mountain-moving faith would not be of great profit to us spiritually, if unaccompanied by love. Indeed, we will need this sort of faith if we are active in God's service, for there will be many difficulties to overcome due to diverse trials that will be encountered. (James 1:2) Faith without love, however, will leave us as being "nothing" in the Lord's sight.

FEEDING THE POOR

When the rich young ruler inquired of Jesus the way of life, the Master outlined the terms of discipleship to him, explaining that he would need to sell all that he had and give to the poor. (Matt. 19:16-22) Paul alludes to this, yet emphasizes that even in doing this, unless love is the motive, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) Jesus told the young ruler that his profits would be great—that in sacrificing all his earthly wealth he would be laying up treasures in heaven. However, as Paul explains, this is true only in the case of those who give all their goods to feed the poor because of their love.

The most poverty-stricken people in the world today, and those who need our help the most, are those who are "poor in spirit," and who "hunger and thirst after righteousness." (Matt. 5:3,6) It is our privilege to feed these spiritually with the bread

of life, and to refresh them with the water of truth. This is what we will be doing with all that we have and are, as long as brotherly love continues to rule in our hearts.

Giving our bodies “to be burned” may be a reference to a heathen form of worship. We are inclined to think, however, that the apostle is speaking primarily of the privilege of presenting our bodies “a living sacrifice,” as mentioned in Romans 12:1. The typical picture of this privilege was shown by the offering of the “LORD’S goat” on Israel’s Day of Atonement, when the body of the goat was burned “without the camp.” (Lev. 16:9,27; Heb. 13:13) Here again, love must be the motive, else our sacrifices in the service of the Heavenly Father will profit us nothing.

THE BEHAVIOR OF LOVE

Love “suffereth long, and is kind,” says the apostle. (I Cor. 13:4) The way of love is a difficult one, a way of sacrifice and suffering. Selfishness as a motive might spur us on for a while, but there is no motive more powerful than love. Love will enable us to suffer long—yea, even unto death.

Herein also will come the need of love from the standpoint mentioned by Jesus—that we are to love one another as he loved us, even as sinners. He “suffereth long” in his love to us despite those things which are unlovable, and often contrary to his will. So it is to be also in our association with one another. Some of our greatest trials may come from our brethren, but love will enable us to endure these experiences and be longsuffering to one another.

The way in which we know that brotherly love is enabling us to endure and suffer long is shown by the words which immediately follow—"and is kind." If we discover that we are dealing unkindly with our brethren, we may know that we are deficient in brotherly love. There can be no legitimate excuse for a Christian ever to be unkind. Let us not deceive ourselves along this line. If we are unkind, we may know that selfishness is still ruling to some extent in our hearts, or that we have been deceived by the spirit of the Adversary.

Love "envieth not," Paul continues. Envy is a very subtle enemy of the New Creature, because we seldom show it in an outward manner. If we did, we would most likely recognize it immediately and be ashamed. Instead of announcing that we are envious of others, their position in the ecclesia, or special blessings they enjoy, we may be inclined to criticize them, calling attention to things they do which we think are wrong. We might emphasize that our ways would be much better. Thus, perhaps without recognizing our wrong course, we endeavor to debase those whom we envy, and exalt ourselves. This is not the way of brotherly love.

Love "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." Just as with envy, the fallen human heart is too cunning to openly boast about itself, and no Christian goes around announcing that he is "puffed up." These conditions of heart and mind seem, rather, to manifest themselves in strange things which one says and does. A brother, for example, may manifest humility in his association with the Lord's people for many years. He is meek and teachable. In time, the local ecclesia perhaps elects him to eldership.

Soon, however, a marked change is noticeable in the brother. He becomes opinionated and considers that his judgment is better than that of those who have been serving faithfully as elders for many years. At times he is almost arrogant in his insistence that he have his own way. In such a case, what has happened? He has become “puffed up,” and is no longer being governed by brotherly love. Indeed, an overly inflated attitude can cause brethren to act in unexpected ways. Thus, in the very next verse, Paul reminds us that love does not “behave itself unseemly”—that is, in such an unbecoming fashion.—I Cor. 13:5

Verse 5 continues, saying that love “seeketh not her own,” particularly her own way. Motivated by love, we have presented ourselves and all that we possess to the Lord. We have agreed to give up everything. If we have been sincere, we will not be concerned about what we feel are our “rights.” Every Christian should stand for right principles, but let us be sure that we do not make principles out of mere preferences.

Love “is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” At no time in the history of the world have people been so prone to attribute evil motives to others as now. Every consecrated believer is surrounded by these influences, and nothing but a rich indwelling of brotherly love will prevent him from indulging in the same sin. We may get “provoked” at a brother or sister over what we suppose they have said or done. Then, unless we are on our guard, we will begin to think evil of them. Too often, thoughts of this kind are not based on anything except hearsay or surmising. It is always well to ask ourselves if

we actually know that the brother or sister truly said or did what we have supposed. Moreover, a rumor, or even what seems to be a definite report, is not sufficient grounds for thinking evil of a fellow body member. If the matter is serious enough, we should go to our “brother . . . alone” to find out for ourselves. (Matt. 18:15) In most cases, when this is done it will be discovered that the report was merely a misunderstanding, or as in some cases, idle gossip that has been passed on to us.

If our thinking is governed by brotherly love, our joy will be in the Lord, his truth, and his people, for love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” (I Cor. 13:6) Let us examine our habits of thought. Are they wrongly seeking to find flaws and imperfections in our brethren? If so, we may know that we are severely lacking in brotherly love. Love rejoices in the Truth, and if that is the fountain of our rejoicing, we will see in our brethren the things which we love, and we will rejoice together with them in all those things which pertain to our common cause as fellow members of the body of Christ.

Love “beareth [covereth] all things,” even the imperfections of our brethren. Love “believeth all things,” not rumors of evil, but the good reports of our brethren, and their professions to be faithful to their consecration vows. Love “hopeth all things,” even when circumstances seem to present a dark picture. Finally, love “endureth all things.” (vs.7) How important this is, for only those who “endure unto the end . . . shall be saved” with that “great salvation; which . . . began to be spoken by the Lord.”—Matt. 24:13; Heb. 2:3

Having mentioned these many situations in which brotherly love should be depended upon to keep the Christian in the right way, the apostle makes a blanket statement by way of summary, adding that love “never faileth.” (I Cor. 13:8) It never falls from its position of importance. Love was essential in the Early Church, and is no less essential now. The gift of tongues was important then, but Paul said the need for it would “vanish away”—not so with love.

The importance of brotherly love cannot be over-emphasized, but we are not to suppose that it can take the place of other important considerations in the Christian’s life. It cannot take the place of sound doctrine, but it guides us in the proper use of doctrine. Love cannot take the place of activity in the Lord’s service, but it is the only motive for service which is acceptable to God.

We cannot limit brotherly love to those in the body whose natural characteristics may be especially pleasing to us. We are neither to restrict it only to those who may be in agreement with our understanding of the Truth in all its details. Those who may err from the Truth need our love even more than others, and often it is on behalf of these that we find our real opportunities for sacrifice.

Let us, dear brethren, at the beginning of this new year, resolve to more fully love one another, not merely in “word, . . . but in deed and in truth. (I John 3:18) Love is far more than merely something to talk about. Those who possess it do not need to tell others of their love. It will be manifested in self-sacrificing zeal on behalf of all the brethren, and in devoting time, strength, and means

to reach and assist all those who can be contacted through a proclamation of the Truth. “Actions speak louder than words,” and, if the tender voice of love is to be heard, there must be activity on our part which will cost us our lives before we reach the end of the way. May our prayer for 2016 be that we “let brotherly love continue” toward its full attainment in the body of Christ. ■