

"LOVE AS BRETHREN"

– 1 PETER 3:8 –

LOVE for the brethren is set forth in the Scriptures as one of the indisputable evidences of our having attained membership in the body of Christ. This love may be of varying degrees, but it must be ours in some degree if we are the Lord's, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9.) But this flame of sacred love for the brethren kindled in our hearts is not sufficient; it must blaze, burn, and produce in us not merely a warmth of love but a consuming love – love which will not only overlook various weaknesses and imperfections in the brotherhood, and will carefully note every good quality, but love which is ready to lay down life on behalf of the brethren because they belong to Christ, because they are of his consecrated ones, however much they may need to strive against sin and weaknesses.

As we have previously pointed out, the Gospel message fails to attract many of the noblest, least-fallen members of the race, because they have a self-satisfied feeling, and do not realize their need of a Savior, but think of him as necessary only to the more degraded of the race. On the contrary, the less known, more depraved, realizing to some extent their miserable condition, are more likely than the others to respond to the invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The sin-sick and heavy laden, therefore, constitute the majority of true believers. And in harmony with this we have the words of the Scripture that not many wise, not many noble, not many learned, not many great according to the flesh have been called of God to the privileges of his Church, the elect class. Consequently when any of the more noble minded or better educated or more talented accept the Lord's grace, it becomes

somewhat of a trial to them to find amongst those whom they must recognize as brethren (because of faith in Christ and desire for the higher things) some of the ignoble, whose company and fellowship according to the flesh they would have scorned. This is another reason why not many great, wise, learned and noble will not make their calling and election sure – many such will allow their fleshly instincts to govern, and repudiating the humblest member of the body of Christ they are to that extent repudiating the Head, who has accepted that member, and who demands of all who would be his members that they shall love one another as he loved them.

True, the Lord does not say that we should love all the brethren with the same degree or intensity of love: on the contrary, he showed by his own conduct that we may indeed more highly esteem those who have most of his Spirit, those whose hearts are most in accord with the divine will. Thus our Lord, while he loved all of his disciples, had some special favorites, Peter, James and John. His special love for these was doubtless because of their special interest and zeal for him and for the cause he served. So, therefore, may we, followers in the footsteps of Jesus, have special love for all who are specially zealous and true hearted. But this love ignores wealth, education, earthly standing – ignores the flesh and takes cognizance of the spirit, the will, the heart.

Tested by this love for the brethren, many who had a loving respect for the Lord as their Redeemer have apparently hindered their own spiritual development, slackened in their race for the prize – running the risk of losing the great reward because of their failure to come up to this divine requirement, "Love as brethren." The proper course for all such is to think of the matter soberly from the Scriptural standpoint, and to decide that the humility requisite to an acceptance of some of the naturally less noble is undoubtedly a necessary element of character for them to

develop. Amongst the fruits of the Spirit the Apostle names meekness. The unmeek, the proud, are not in the condition of heart for the Kingdom; and the higher stations of life, intellectually, morally and socially, are unfavorable to meekness, humility and long suffering with the weaknesses and frailties of others. We see, then, that while [R3932 : page 36] the weaker brethren, the naturally more impaired, have more to struggle against, more to overcome in one sense of the word, the others of more noble birth and talents have a harder battle along other lines. Let both classes be encouraged, for although the lessons they must learn are considerably different, the results to be obtained are the same, and the instructor, the great Teacher, is the same. He is able to assist the ignoble to gradually overcome their natural meanness and depravity, and to war more and more a good warfare in his name and by his assistance; and he is likewise able to assist the more noble minded to exercise patience, sympathy, toward the less reputable. They have an illustration in himself: he who was rich in every sense of the word and beyond all compare, perfect in every element of character, talented, noble – he for our sakes became poor, he humbled himself on our behalf, he took the bondman's place, he suffered in our room and stead, he died the just for the unjust. He has therefore set us an example that we may walk in his steps, and the more nobility we may have naturally the more readily we shall be able to do this, and to appreciate and exercise the fruits of the Spirit, and grow up more and more in accord, in sympathy, in likeness to him.

"LOVE YOUR ENEMIES"

There is a difference between the injunction to love as brethren and to lay down our lives for the brethren. Whatever we may do for any member of the body of Christ, for any consecrated believer, the Lord tells us he will esteem as though it were done unto him. Hence as it would be our duty and our privilege and our joy to lay down our lives in the service of the Lord, we must

attain to such a love for the brethren, because they are his, that we will delight to lay down our lives for them as a means of demonstrating to the Lord our loyalty to him and his cause. This does not necessarily mean the laying down of physical strength and health and life in the physical services and ministries to the brethren, though these may be and are in many instances very profitable. It is not according to the flesh that the Lord's followers are brethren but according to the spirit, and hence the injunction to lay down our lives for the brethren would more particularly signify the laying down of our physical health or strength, knowledge, talents and means in the service of the spiritual interests of the Lord's people. As for instance, in the preaching of the Truth, if there be sacrifices or self-denials, loss of strength, etc., in connection with this service, it is the laying down of that much of one's life for the brethren, for the fellow-members of the body of Christ.

These brethren for whom we are to lay down our **[R3933 : page 36]** lives are not merely those who are with us in fellowship of spirit, in the enjoyment of Present Truth. Perhaps we may have fewer opportunities for laying down our lives for such than for other brethren. For instance, there are brethren, true believers in the Lord, truly consecrated to him, who are yet in Babylon – in bondage, in darkness. These especially need that we should devote some of our time or influence or means for their aid, for their deliverance. True, the Lord himself could deliver them, because all things are in his power, including all the gold and silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills. But he has graciously left opportunities for us, that we may use the time, talents and means put within our control and which we have consecrated to his service. How much it would be to our disadvantage were we so situated that we had no opportunities for exercising these talents in the service of our King; how much we would lose of the joys of the service and sacrifice; how much we would miss of the spiritual exercise and the growth which this exercise assures.

God, therefore, has left open before us doors of opportunity for service to the brethren, and the degree of our love for the brethren is measured in his sight by the zeal with which we endeavor to use the talents in our control. Let this thought of our love, zeal and devotion for the brethren, which testify to the Lord our love and zeal for himself nerve us to greater energy and faithfulness in his joyful service.

We remarked above that loving as brethren is a different matter. As we grow in grace and knowledge – as the love that is of God, that is inspired by his Spirit, grows in our hearts and fills us, being "shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5) – we are led to still wider love – beyond the household of faith, for whom we delight to lay down our lives. We learn to love all mankind, yea, even those who misunderstand us and are therefore our enemies – we learn to love all these as brethren. Not as brethren in Christ – that is a very special, very dear relationship – but we learn to love them as brethren of the one family of Adam, redeemed by Jesus and hence by purchase the family of the second Adam.

As we grow in grace and knowledge we are able more clearly day by day, year by year, to appreciate the fact that the whole world was born under sin and are children of wrath, blinded by ignorance and superstition, mentally and physically unbalanced through the fall, and really in a terrible state, as the Apostle declares, a "groaning creation." In proportion as we are able to take God's standpoint in looking at the poor, fallen world, we are able to sympathize with them, even as the Scriptures declare that God looked down and beheld the groans of the prisoners – prisoners of sin, in captivity to death, going down to the tomb. (Psa. 102:19,20.) We realize that they were born in sin, shapen in iniquity, that in sin their mothers conceived them – that in addition to this their associations with evil have all tended to drag them downward, and that, furthermore, Satan the great adversary, a wily foe to our race, is continually exerting his

powers to blind the minds of their understanding and to misrepresent the divine character and plan.

With all this before our minds, what sympathy it gives us for our brothers according to the flesh, sinners, strangers, aliens, foreigners, yet redeemed, and in **[R3933 : page 37]** God's gracious plan *en route* for the glorious blessings of the Millennial age. We say to ourselves, If God so loved these, if Christ died for them as well as for us, why should not we be very merciful, very compassionate, very sympathetic with them, and do all in our power to assist them out of darkness into God's marvellous light, out of the ways of sin into the ways of righteousness, out of bondage to Satan into the liberty wherewith God has made us free – the liberty of the sons of God, which he has promised shall be available to all peoples, kindreds, nations and tongues in the sweet by and by.
