

"BECAUSE WE LOVE THE BRETHREN"

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." – 1 John 3:14.

WE are glad to testify that both from personal contact and through correspondence we have every reason to believe that the Bible Students, who constitute the large majority of our readers, have been growing in grace lately – during the past few years. Contrasting the present with three, six or ten years ago, we notice a great increase in spirituality – the Spirit of the Lord – the Holy Spirit of Love.

Not only is this manifested in activities in the service of the Truth, but also in broader sympathies one for another and for all Christians – and, indeed, for the entire groaning creation. This is just what it should be every year; every week, indeed, should mark progress in Christ-likeness, as we remember that, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His," and therefore will have no part in the Kingdom – whatever inferior blessing he may obtain under stripes and disciplines necessary to the development of the proper character.

We remember further the Apostle's statement that the Divine predestination respecting the Church is that we must each individually in character become copies of our Lord. (Romans 8:29.) Surely such clear statements of the Divine will and of the terms upon which we may make our calling and election sure should be stimulating.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all the progress noted, many of the little classes are experiencing friction, which causes more or less concern and unhappiness. As the Truth makes us free and opens the eyes of our understanding, it enables us to see our own

imperfections and the imperfections of the brethren and of the world more clearly than ever. Unless there be a large amount of love, this will mean a disposition to find fault, to criticize.

We may safely give ourselves considerable liberty along these lines in dealing with our own character. We may find fault with ourselves and criticize ourselves often to advantage. Yet even this should not be carried so far that we forget the Lord's gracious promise that He will judge us according to our heart intentions and not according to our imperfect attainments. We are, perhaps, better able to appreciate our own shortcomings, and how they were unintentional; but when the shortcomings are those of others, it tests our love, patience, brotherly-kindness, meekness, gentleness, etc. Yet such testings are very profitable. We pray that the Lord will assist us in growing in the graces of the Holy Spirit. Let us remember that the only way to assist us would be by giving us testings along these very lines. Our strength of character, our development in these graces, will be in proportion as we receive these testings in the proper spirit.

PROOF OF RELATIONSHIP AS NEW CREATURES

Our text seems to imply that the love of the brethren is one of the most beautiful experiences of the Christian. Whoever finds that he has full love for all the brethren, full sympathy for them, therein has a specially strong Scriptural proof that he himself is a New Creature – that he has passed from death unto life. And whoever has any other sentiment than love to any of the brethren surely lacks proof, or demonstration, along this line of his relationship to God as a New Creature.

If we keep this always in mind, how valuable an assistance it will be to us! Do we not frequently desire to reassure ourselves of the Lord's favor and of our continued relationship to Him as New Creatures, passed from death unto life? If we do, here is the text,

the application of which, if we are in the right condition, should bring peace and joy. And if we are in the wrong condition, it should bring alarm for our personal safety as New Creatures.

One of the points of friction in many of the classes is the relationship between the class and its servants. So far as we can judge, the fault is sometimes with the one and sometimes with the other. We are frequently asked in respect to the duties of the Elders, the responsibility of the classes, etc. In general, we prefer to refer all such inquiries to our very full discussion of the subject in the sixth volume of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*. We know not how to improve on the suggestions there made. We believe that if what we have written were thoroughly studied, the recommendations there given would be found ample for every case.

On doctrinal matters we prefer not to write personal letters; for in a few cases we have found that the persons receiving the letters have either misunderstood them, or only partially communicated their contents to others when discussing the matter. Again, some have said, "Brother Russell wrote thus and so in *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*, but we have a later letter which intimates [R5347 : page 340] that he has changed his mind." We wish the dear friends to feel assured that if our judgment changes respecting any important truths we will put the change before all *THE WATCH TOWER* readers as speedily as possible. Until you see such changes mentioned in *THE WATCH TOWER* give no credit to them; esteem the statements of the *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES* just as though they were written yesterday and direct to yourself.

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Briefly summarizing the principles governing the Church of Christ, let us say: There are two views prevalent amongst Christians respecting Church government:

(1) The Episcopal view, which holds that the Church is to be ruled and governed by bishops, because of the claim that these are Apostolic bishops; that is, that they are successors to the Apostles, and invested with Apostolic wisdom and inspiration and authority for the regulation of the Church and its affairs. This view is held by Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics and Episcopalians.

(2) The other view is the Congregationalist, and holds that each congregation of the Lord's people is a unit, and has the right to govern itself and to make its own regulations for its own welfare, subject to Divine guidance. Congregationalists, Baptists and some others claim to be governed by this view. Other denominations, with more or less confusion and indecision, divide authority between the ministers and the laity.

We hold that the Bible arrangement combines the Episcopal and the Congregational views. Thus the Scriptures teach that the twelve Apostles were and still are the Episcopate – the only inspired and authoritative Apostolic Bishops. Whatsoever these declared to be binding on earth is binding amongst the Lord's people. Whatsoever they declared loosed, or not binding, would not be obligatory upon the Church in the sight of Heaven. From this viewpoint, the words of Jesus respecting all other so-called apostolic bishops are quite pointed. He declares that they are "false apostles and do lie" – they are not apostles in any sense of the word. (Revelation 2:2; 2 Corinthians 11:13.) Hence we are not to give heed nor to in any manner recognize the claims of these bishops, whom Satan has deluded into thinking that they have Apostolic power – Apostolic succession.

As the people of God have the original Episcopacy, the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, for authority and direction, they are thus organized under an Episcopal government, or government of the Apostolic Bishops – nevertheless their organization is properly congregational. Each company of the Lord's consecrated people is

entirely free, and should have its own faith in the Bible and all the precious truths of the Bible. No congregation and no individual can properly be bound by the vows of other congregations or other individuals.

The Congregation, Ecclesia, Church, coming together to act as one, to worship together, to serve God's Cause together, should do so because of their mutual appreciation of the Divine character and Plan. They are not under anybody's government, or rule, except that of the Bible Episcopate – the Apostolic teachings. As for the Elders and Deacons of each Congregation, they are to be chosen by the Congregation from their own number, in accordance with the instructions of the Bible. No earthly power has a right to intervene between the instructions of the Divinely-appointed twelve Apostles and the companies of the Lord's people who choose to assemble themselves in harmony with the Apostolic instructions. This at one stroke wipes out all papal authority and the authority of all apostolic bishops falsely so-called.

Since the Deacons and Elders, Pastors and Teachers, are lifted to their places of service and honor by the *votes of the brethren*, it places the Congregation in greater authority than its servants. But the Congregation, in turn, is bound not to force its preferences, but merely to act loyally in harmony with the Divine direction given by the Apostles in the Bible. Thus we see that the truth on the subject from the Divine standpoint has been measurably lost sight of for centuries, to the disadvantage of the Church – some taking one part of the Truth and some another – few, if any, recognizing the whole. Indeed, this is what we find to have been the case in respect to nearly every doctrine.

While particulars have been set forth in *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*, Volume VI, yet in what we have above stated lie the principles involved. Whoever thoroughly grasps the principles should be able to appreciate the details. And it would be only a

question of thought and patient deliberation to settle all the details of the affairs of any little Class, in accordance with the Scriptures. Thus while the Class gives certain authority and service into the hands of those chosen to be its Elders, and appoints others to assist them in the work as Deacons, or servants, nevertheless, both Elders and Deacons are answerable to the Congregation, to the ecclesia.

THE ECCLESIA SUPERIOR TO ITS SERVANTS

In case of any dispute, the judgment, or decision, of the Congregation should stand as the right thing for the time being. If it prove later to have been unwise, the Lord is able to overrule the error of judgment for good – for instruction. To illustrate: Should the judgment of the Class at any time differ from the judgment of the Elder or Elders, the proper course would be for the Elders to submit to the higher authority, which is the Class, the Church, the Ecclesia; for he who *appoints* is superior to him who is appointed. Our Lord's arrangement for the Classes, or Ecclesias, is, "Wherever two or three of you are met in My name, there am I." The Lord has promised to be with the *Class*. He has not said, Wherever there is an *Elder*, there am I, and to him shall the Class gather; but, Wherever there is a *Class* there am I; and it may appoint an Elder, whom I will recognize and bless as its representative and for its good, in proportion as he shall strive to be a suitable vessel to be My servant in blessing that Class.

This appreciation of the true relationship between the Elder and the Class should help the Elders to cultivate those fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit described by St. Paul as meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly kindness, long-suffering, love. But, on the other hand, the Congregation, Ecclesia, having chosen one of its number to serve it as an Elder Brother and to look out for its interests, should hope that they had wisely chosen in harmony with the Lord's Word and providences. So hoping, they should be prepared to give support and encouragement to the Elder, in

proportion as they see him striving to know and to do the Lord's will and faithfully to lay down his time and talents in the service of the Class. Should they subsequently find that apparently they had not fully discerned and followed the Apostolic instructions respecting the selection of the Elder, they should still be kind and gentle toward him, remembering that the fault was theirs in electing him – a fault to be rectified at the next election – and trusting and praying [R5347 : page 341] that they may know the will of the Lord more perfectly and be wiser in their selection.

DUTIES OF THE ECCLESIA

From this viewpoint the Congregation has everything to say in respect to the number of meetings to be held, where they are to be held, by whom they are to be conducted, the character of the lessons or studies, etc. Nothing of this kind is for the Elder to decide, though as a member of the Congregation he has the same right to be heard that the others have. In proportion as he is esteemed highly, his opinion will have weight with the Ecclesia, Class, or Congregation. Nevertheless, the Class should never forget the thought that however highly the Elder may be esteemed, he is not their guide. The Elders and all others are to be heeded in proportion as they are seen to wisely interpret the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

We believe that with these principles seen, approved and looked up to, there will be less and less friction in the Classes. The Elders, in just their proper sphere and conscientiously seeking to serve in harmony therewith, will be restrained from doing and saying many things out of their province and likely to stir up difficulties among the members of the Classes.

A POTENT FACTOR IN ALL DISPUTES

It will generally be found, we believe, that *pride* is a potent factor in all Church disputes. Sometimes the Elder undertakes to do for the Class more than it wishes him to do and more than it has

authorized him to do. Or, misguided by the sentiments prevalent among all denominations of Christendom, he thinks of his Eldership as an office of authority over the Church, and not as an honorable *service*, the authority being vested in the Class. Sometimes the difficulty is with some member of the Class, who, seeking to preserve the rights and authority of the Class, goes to an extreme, and unnecessarily harries the Elder, criticizing him for doing the right thing, but not doing it exactly the way this well-intentioned brother thinks he should do.

Love should apply the Golden Rule. We should be willing to give the Elder as much reasonable liberty of action as we would like to enjoy if we were in his place – provided, of course, that this liberty should be in full harmony with the Word of God. Furthermore, we should remember that the Elder is the servant of the *whole Class*, and not the servant specially of any one member of it. Any criticism, therefore, of his conduct should come from the Class and not merely from an [R5348 : page 341] individual member of it. If an individual member has an important thought which the Elder ignores he should be at liberty to ask the judgment of the Class on the subject for his own instruction and for the instruction of the Elder; but no individual member should undertake to criticize the Elder or to find fault with his procedure.

If the Class approves of the Elder, the individuals thinking differently are at liberty still to *think* as they please, but should *yield* to the *majority*. In other words, peace and order in a class are items of great value in respect to all progress in Bible study. Nothing should be done to disturb the peace and order unless there be something positively wrong, unscriptural, connected with the matter. Then the brother or the sister calling attention to the matters which he considers unscriptural, should say little about his own opinion and deal chiefly with the Scriptural injunctions which he believes are being violated.

"LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE"

These suggestions are intended to increase and promote peace and unity amongst the Lord's brethren wherever this journal goes. We have confidence that all who are begotten of the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are desirous of knowing and doing that which is right – that which is pleasing and acceptable to God and for the best interests of His Cause. "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Our thought is that all being one with the Lord – of one heart, of one will – our difficulties lie almost entirely in our heads, in our misapprehension of some of the principles governing the Divine arrangement. And these principles, we may be sure, are perfect, right. In proportion as we can come into harmony with these principles, we shall be at peace one with another, joyfully assisting each other toward the Kingdom, in which we shall have a share with our Lord.

Let us continually remember that love for all the brethren is a sure indication that we love as New Creatures. And love for the brethren means that we will do them no injury, that we will speak no evil respecting them unless of absolute necessity; and, finally, that we will not even surmise evil in respect to their words and deeds. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God (by His Spirit dwelleth) in him." For though we should give all our goods to feed the poor, and though we should even sacrifice our bodies to be burned in the interests of righteousness, yet if we have not *love* – the *Spirit* of *love* – we are nothing in God's sight. – Romans 13:10; I John 4:16; I Cor. 13:3.

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