

LOVE IN THE CLASSES

"LOVE one another, as I have loved you," is the Master's instruction. (John 15:12.) "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren," writes the Apostle. (1 John 3:16.) "He that loveth Him that begat, loveth also him that is begotten of the Father." (1 John 5:1.) As a matter of fact, all who belong to the Church of Christ have the spirit of love at the time of their spirit-begetting. And if progress be made in preparation for the Kingdom, that spirit of love will increase and abound more and more, until it will be perfected in the resurrection. Then we shall have our new bodies, which will permit our loving hearts to manifest themselves fully. But in the meantime, how frequently the dear brethren of the Lord seriously try each other, vex each other, and fail to provoke to love and good works – inciting rather to strife!

While we should properly attribute such weakness, not to the New Creatures, but to the old, nevertheless we are never to forget that the growth of the New Creature means the death of the old creature, and hence in proportion as our flesh is not dead to sin and selfishness, in that same proportion we, as New Creatures, have not yet reached the ideal for which we strive.

The Editor frequently receives letters from Elders of Classes, asking advice as to how they shall deal with the Classes, and from members of the Classes asking how they should deal with their chosen Elders and Deacons. The chosen servants of the Classes frequently feel that their brethren, who elected them, do not repose a sufficiency of confidence in them and entrust them fully enough with the management of the affairs of the Class – that the Class wishes to manage its own affairs and merely to have the advice of the Elders. In such cases we recommend that the Elders be fully content with such a condition – that it is the Class as a whole which

represents the Lord, and that no servant of the Class has the privilege of exceeding the authority which the Class gives to him by its vote.

It is our experience that the Bible Students feel a great need of protecting their rights and fulfilling the obligations which the Lord has placed upon them. Surely they are excusable even if they seem to exercise too great care in this matter – in view of the examples all around us, amongst both Protestants and Catholics, of the power of priestcraft, and the inclination of ecclesiastics to grasp power and authority and to ignore the Ecclesia.

On the other hand, frequently the Classes feel that they are being ridden or "bossed" by their Elders – whether this is really so or not. They complain sometimes, for instance, that the Elders get a fever for preaching and desire to give lectures on every possible occasion, sometimes even turning prayer and testimony meetings and Berean Study classes into lecture opportunities. If intimations are given that Berean lessons are preferred, and that changes from the Class order are not appreciated, the Elders sometimes take offense with the whole Class, declaring that they are not appreciated; and other times they either take offense at the individual who has had the courage to kindly mention the matter to them or fancy that he is an exception and that they are pleasing the Class – a case of too much self-esteem sometimes.

PASTORAL ADVICE

It is difficult to know how to advise Classes in such cases where the Elders seem to have lost, not the Spirit of the Lord, but the proper balance of a sound mind. We generally refer inquirers to the extended treatise on the subject in **SCRIPTURE STUDIES**, Volume VI., and ask them to read afresh and act accordingly. But even after reading, some of the Lord's dear sheep do not know how to obtain proper Scriptural order and maintain the liberties of the Class and refrain from permitting an Elder to injure himself and the interests of the Class!

Our general advice to the brethren is that they take such matters to the Lord in prayer, while watchful of any and every opportunity to promote what we believe to be the Lord's will in the Classes. On the one hand, we must admit that it would be entirely wrong for a Class to permit an elder to "boss" it or, as St. Peter said, "to Lord it over God's heritage." (1 Peter 5:3.) It would be injurious both to the Elder and to the Class interests.

On the other hand, the Classes should seek to avoid captiousness and faultfinding. They should esteem the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of devotion, the knowledge of the Truth and talents for its presentation, wherever these are to be found, and should gladly help one another to opportunities for development in grace, knowledge and utterance – each according to the talents which the Lord has bestowed upon him and in harmony with the directions of the Lord's Word. Forbearance, one with another, a willingness to wash one another's feet, symbolically, and to esteem each other for all Christ-like qualities, should be cultivated.

While the will of the Class should be carefully sought by every Elder, and fully expressed by every Class in respect to all the order and arrangement of its affairs, nevertheless we should not be over-exacting in respect to **[R5921 : page 206]** how the will of the Class is expressed. In other words, we should consider what is satisfactory to the majority of the Class. Elders are not to be found fault with simply because the Class satisfaction has not been expressed in some special, particular manner. In other words, a minority of the Class should not feel at liberty to distract the Class and stir up strife simply because methods which the minority prefer have not been accurately followed. Each member of the Class has full liberty to express his conviction at opportune times – especially at election time; but he should be fully satisfied, after expressing his thought and preference, to abide by the preference of the majority, whether expressed positively or negatively.

JUSTICE FIRST – THEN LOVE

Let us, dear brethren, ever remember that while we are striving after Love and its bond of perfectness, nevertheless our own course of action should be squared first of all by absolute *justice*, and then love may add to that as much as it may please. For instance, at an election some brother may unwisely nominate, for some service of the Class, a brother who is not qualified for the position. We must not find fault with the brother, for he has his liberty of making the nomination and manifesting his unwisdom; but, on the other hand, we should not feel bound by his suggestion, nor should we allow fear of offending the nominated brother to hinder us from expressing, by vote, what we understand to be the Lord's will in the matter. And if voted down by the Class, the nominated brother has no right to take offense, but should rather admire the courage of the brethren, as expressed in his rejection.

One thus rejected by a Class has no right to inquire either of the Class or of any member of it why they voted against him. That is *their* business and none of his. They merely exercised the right which they had according to their own conscience. It was a matter of justice. Love, in the sense of human sympathy, has no place in the deciding of such questions where the Word of the Lord lays down the rules to be followed by each member of the Ecclesia. A failure to recognize principles of justice – righteousness – seems to lie at the foundation of nearly all Class difficulties. We request that all who get into such troubles take the matter to the Lord in prayer and then consider the matter along the lines of absolute *justice*.

We have advocated in the Sixth Volume of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES that, if possible, the will of the Class be expressed by the majority – at least eighty-five per cent of the whole number. This, however, does not mean that either justice or love would turn over all of the affairs of the Class to the remaining fifteen per cent

and allow them to dictate, as for instance, to permit them to determine that there shall be no Elders or Deacons elected because the minority would hold fifteen per cent of the whole amount and insist that its ideals should be met or that the whole work of the Class should come to a standstill. This would neither be loving nor just, and ***should not be submitted to.***

The ***majority*** rule is the standard of ***justice***, and what we suggested in excess of that was a concession of love – an attempt to meet the tastes and preferences, if possible, of the entire Class, or at least a large majority of the Class. The majority should lovingly desire to regulate the Class affairs, so far as possible, to suit every member of the Class; and to whatever extent there is a failure to do this there is an invitation to discord and to a split in the Class. While, of course, a division of the interest into two Classes is always deplorable and should be striven against, and ***sacrifices*** be made ***by all*** to maintain a "unity of spirit in the bond of peace," nevertheless a division of the Class for a time would certainly be preferable to a continual strife, which would hinder the spiritual progress of all concerned.

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