

BROTHERLY LOVE.

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you . . . Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."—John xv.

Personal contacts in the Truth have a designed place in the work of the Spirit. In the means adopted by God for the preparation of a people to become the bearers of divine glory in the age to come, it is essential in the existing order of things that we associate the one with the other. In no other way is it possible for us to obey this commandment.

If our mental reaction is such that we find the company of those of like precious faith, irksome and comfortless, then we must begin to examine ourselves for the fault which prevents us giving due obedience to so vital a matter. Fault there must be or we should gladly hasten to meet the Master's request.

Speaking of the law in its relation to Christ, and with every special regard to its personal recognition, the writer to the Hebrews says: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith . . . And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together. . . ." (Chap. x.) These words do, of course, find their first and greatest application in the breaking of bread, but that is not their sole application. In the daily aspects of our walk in the Truth, personal contacts between brethren assume a vital importance, and, combined with ecclesial relationships, provide that broad and pleasant opportunity whereby we can work out our salvation in fear and trembling and thereby exhibit first our love for God and His commandments, and then our love for the brethren. Without this latter, the former is sterile. A man cannot love God and be indifferent toward his brother. The only way a righteous man can bring forth the fruits of godliness is by showing them in relation to his fellow pilgrim. Thus brotherly love becomes in itself a test of a man's sincerity, a testing of his ability to discern rightly the word of Truth. Without it all our protestations of love for God are hollow and valueless; with it, the warm exultant glow of the Spirit's teaching finds a rich avenue of expression which bears eloquent testimony to the Christ-like bias of the mind from which it comes.

Without these contacts between brethren, sober reflection shows that our life, even though outwardly conforming to all due ecclesial requirements, may tend to stagnation, to become narrowed and restricted in its perceptions, prone to consider unduly the things of self, and eventually any expression of ardent feelings may become warped to extinction.

It is not sufficient to attend to our duties in the ecclesia. That is a bare performance of the command. What is required is a loving and earnest attempt to do the utmost for our God, and in so seeking to render our all, our regard for the brethren will find a full and rich expression. That must be the case, for the only outlet of our love for God is our love for the brethren. The test is, if we find it impossible to love our brethren whom we see and meet in our daily lives, how can we love our Brother whom we cannot see? It is often said that a certain brother is an unlovely character. How much more truly can it be said that such and such a critic is an unloving character? We are not commanded to bestow our love upon those who love us. That follows, as a natural sequence to the ordinary friendships of life. The Christ request implies that we love those who do not love us. This is an obligation which searches the very heart and marrow of our protestations of righteousness.

Not only so, it becomes a means in the gracious handling of God, whereby our characters are sweetened, the rough acerbities of our minds reduced, and the obstinate corners of latent sourness polished into spiritual serenity.

Thus, meeting in a free fellowship, with no restraints of personal rancour nor grudging concession, the brethren we see, meet with and talk to in our walk to the kingdom of heaven, are those whose faith, zeal and love, all sharpen our own spiritual attributes, even as our like qualities sharpen

theirs. "Iron sharpeneth iron," saith the Wise Man, "so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend," *his* friend. That connotes association, a walking together.

If we exclude ourselves from such fellowship, our own personality in the Truth is starved in its fuller spiritual development, and the man in Christ Jesus fails to approximate to the fullness of the stature of the divine ensample.

It is only in the wider, fuller concept of association in the Truth, that the fruits of the Spirit come to fresh, vigorous growth, offering that superb maturity which alone makes us fit for the greater incorporation in the Multitudinous Christ of the Eternal Age. Without this association of brethren in the things connected with the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the human mind, even in its nobler expressions, cannot unfold itself in the sweetness of the Christ consciousness, and in consequence, it may be that the vision of the future glory, the grandeur in the picture of the Anointed imprinted on the mind with the reception of the Truth, becomes dimmed if not actually distorted. The desire manifested in the Christ-mind, the quiet zeal and purposeful endeavour, the patient reaching forward to divine precepts, the calm under trial and rebuff, all these are attributes essentially mature in the love we have to cultivate in Christ, and, as a proof of its cultivation, manifest it in turn to the brethren.

We must do all this having sought Christ out of a pure heart, in a good conscience, with faith unfeigned; avoiding vain jangling—as the Apostle wrote to Timothy. It is only upon this basis that we can possibly hope to build up a character comparable to that of the Shepherd who so loved His sheep that He has left on record the greatest example of love and self-abnegation the world has ever seen. He laid down His own life that His friends might live. Greater love than this hath no man. It is our ensample.

Thus, it is obvious, the ideal brother in Christ is not all head. Was Christ moved to His sacrifice just by the sheer logic of the Law? Did he comply with the divine requirements solely because of the exactness of the prophetic writings in relation to Himself? If such had been the case would He have been moved to tears at the grave of Lazarus? One has but to set the question to at once get the answer. The One who so precisely defined the first commandment also stated its complementary part. If we truly love God then we shall love our neighbour as if he were our very own flesh.

Perhaps the ideal is nowhere so beautifully set forth as in the case (and example) of Paul. We find that great brother moved by the entreaties of the brethren, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" Then again we find the Apostle "serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears" and with regard to the perils which confronted the Ephesian ecclesia, he "ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts xx. and xxi.)

The mighty scholar of the famed schools of Tarsus, a free-born citizen of imperial Rome, sired in the distinguished lineage of Benjamin, an eminent Pharisee and one who had sat at the feet of the learned Gamaliel, this man, who had certainly some boast to make in the world, this man abandoned all for the sake of the Truth of God. So he writes to the brethren whom he loves in Christ, in an exhortation which was not of deceit nor with flattering words, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

"So," wrote Brother Roberts, "to love God is more than all money-spending, meeting-holding, and doctrine-defining that men may engage in, without a sanctifying recognition of the Creator of heaven and earth. These things have their place, but if they are without Paul's love of God, they are as salt without savour." It is first laid upon those embracing the Truth that they should love God with all their strength, soul and mind. What a character Paul was . . . Paul the Pharisee, even before his

conversion, was zealous toward God (see Acts xxii 3); after being struck down on the way to Damascus, he "was the living embodiment of it in all its manifold relations."

Paul's letters to the various ecclesias are a compendium of good manners for aspirants for eternal honours. "Summarising them, we have found a man of good conscience and moderate self-esteem; yet of bold self-assertion when necessary; an earnest, ardent, devoted, thorough-going friend and servant of Christ; supremely, yea, exclusively interested in Christ's affairs on earth, for which he entertained an appreciation amounting to enthusiasm. We have found him a benevolent man, mindful of the needs of others; interested in the brethren; solicitous of their welfare and compassionate of the poor. We have found him a man of sympathy, of affection, and of tenderness of heart, even to tears. We have found him above all a lover of God, a man of prayer, with constant recognition and regard for the will of God in all His matters, and a constant exemplification of sobriety and godliness."

So Paul again went to school and this time learned the great lesson of humility. He bowed himself before the throne of the Eternal, he understood the supremacy of love, love toward God and love toward the brethren, and came to learn that although he could speak in the tongues of men and angels, yet had not charity, he would merely become as sounding brass, the empty tinkling of the fleshly mind. He lived a life of devotion to the Truth, suffered in mind and body for the Master he served, and left on record in Spirit words of imperishable beauty, the eulogy of love that never faileth.

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