

If Any See His Brother Sin

"If thy brother shall trespass, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" — Matthew 18:15

I HAVE omitted the words "against thee." Some early manuscripts do not contain them.* And the text with the omission appears to me to read more in harmony with other parts of the Scriptures.

* The 2 BEST manuscripts, Sinaitic and Vatican, omit "against thee."

This is an affirmative answer to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and fixes grave responsibility upon every brother of Christ.

The injunction to warn the wicked is as binding upon us as it was upon Ezekiel, and the omission on our part to give warning to a righteous man who may turn from his righteousness and commit iniquity, will bring us under the same condemnation as would the prophet's neglect (Eze. 3:17-21).

Yes! We shall certainly be answerable to Christ for our attitude toward our brethren, and as to how we have performed that part of Christ's service due to them.

If we can get this idea firmly implanted in our minds, our duty will be easily recognized, and our service in this direction rendered much easier.

It is a command of Christ of PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE that we—

"Love one another."

"Let love be without dissimulation."

"Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love" (Rom. 12:9-10).

"Seeing ye have purified your soul in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22).

"ABOVE ALL THINGS, HAVE FERVENT LOVE. AMONG YOURSELVES, FOR LOVE SHALL COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS" (1 Pet. 4:8).

This is the most vital principle in the whole counsel of God.

Love is the only present existing principle among us that will continue eternally (1 Cor. 13:8). Its claims are inculcated and reiterated more emphatically, and frequently, than those of any other principle. This certainly is not without significance.

"Love is the fulfilling of the law; he that loveth another; hath fulfilled the law"

(Rom. 13:8-10).

"Let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (John 4:7-8).

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

"And this is the commandment that we have from Him, THAT HE WHO LOVETH GOD LOVE HIS BROTHER ALSO" (John 4:20-21).

Owing perhaps to our aggressive attitude in contending earnestly for the Faith, we are liable to overlook, or underestimate, the superlative importance of this principle.

We are frail, and whilst building up one side of our spiritual fabric, we may unconsciously allow another to suffer from the stress brought to bear upon it.

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THIS golden thread of love runs through all God's revelation: from Adam to Christ: from Christ to John. Without it we are positively NOTHING (1 Cor. 13:2). It was inculcated under the Mosaic dispensation.

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him. **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self**" (Lev. 14:17-18).

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16).

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; is not easily* provoked: thinketh no evil: beareth all things (or covereth the faults of others), and endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:5-7).

* "Easily" is not in original: RV omits. Love is NOT provoked.

When the force of these passages is fully realized, and acted upon, the commandments of Christ are sure to have their full place and weight—

"For this is love that we walk after His commandments."

In such cases the offender will not be evilly thought of, or spoken of; for "love covereth all things," and the transgressors' status and feelings will be as fully considered and respected as one's own. Yea! much more so.

Neither will he be visited from motives and feelings personal to the visitor, but solely and purely for the good of the brother who has transgressed. The love of Christ will constrain such an one to seek to uphold the Truth, and to obtain a recognition of its claims, and obedience to its precepts.

With the object of gaining, not of sacrificing, his brother, he will, in the spirit of meekness, strive to restore the faulty; and will consider his own imperfections and weakness and consequent liability to fall into temptation and transgression (Gal. 6:1).

Trivial matters of intended disparagement of a brother will not enter or occupy his mind. He will be ready with the cloak of love for human frailties, while serious detraction of a brother he will refuse to listen to, as unworthy of a son of God; and an offence against Christ's law. He will silence the would-be scandal retailer by the admonition—

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren" (Jam. 4:11).

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BUT where he has good reason to think sin exists, he will, in the spirit of love and obedience, immediately communicate with the brother.

A visit made in such a spirit will generally be satisfactory, and bear good fruit. The mere mention of the matter at this right quarter, may immediately show the trespass to be mythical both in motive and action. (What a terrible injustice and trespass if it had been previously talked of to others!)

Or it may reveal the fact that the trespass was committed ignorantly or undesignedly. Exhibition of the Truth's bearings will in such a case be sufficient to show an earnest brother his exact position; and, profiting, by the brother's righteous example, he will be thereby—

"Provoked to love and good works."

The offending brother is thus benefited: and the Truth is upheld, and Christ is glorified.

On the other hand, enquiry may show the matter of offence to have a grain of truth in it, and a bushel of misrepresentation. Side-shaking of the head, and unintelligible hints, which may mean

almost anything, and help to convey sly innuendoes, may have made a mountain out of the original mole-hill.

You do the Truth and the brother good service by thus affording him an opportunity of explaining his part and position.

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AGAIN, perhaps the trespass was committed in a moment of weakness, reveals the operation of a besetting sin, which has caused the brother painful and continued remorse and anguish of mind, and against which he has struggled more or less successfully for some time.

He is distressed sufficiently. Upbraid him not, lest he be overwhelmed with "overmuch sorrow," and in despair fall away. Forgive him in sincerity and truth, even to seventy times seven, as you would have your trespasses forgiven. Point him to a merciful Deity for further forgiveness, and do all you can to encourage him.

Your object is to gain him for Christ's sake. Do not be sparing in your efforts. Pray constantly for him, and let him see that you are really anxiously concerned for his eternal wellbeing. Remember that—

"He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:20).

Many weak and falling ones may be upheld by such Christ-like treatment.

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THERE is a further possibility of its being an extreme case, where the brother has designedly trespassed. "Judge not," even in this. Be merciful. Take the Godlike attitude of—

"Come now, let us reason together."

If, after your utmost effort, there is no alteration of position, take further and necessary measures; and, if finally the ecclesia have to take action, and sorrowfully withdraw from him, remember **EVEN THIS SHOULD BE DONE IN LOVE**, for the good of the offender—

"For the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5).

"Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15).

In the carrying out of the commandments there is no room for spite, or tale-bearing, evil speaking, or personal animus of any kind. **LET NO BROTHER IMAGINE HE CAN "WORK THE WORK OF GOD" IN THAT SPIRIT.**

That is not obeying Christ's law, although it may possibly have that appearance. **It is the operation and prompting of the carnal mind**, and to be "carnally-minded" is death; for the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:6-7). Christ knoweth the heart and motive, and he will judge accordingly.

Those who act from fleshly motives are among brethren what Samson's foxes were to the Philistines' cornfields. If there be any such, let them read carefully through Proverbs, and particularly note every one of Solomon's wholesome remarks concerning such characters.

Fleshly feelings, uncontrolled by divine wisdom, are a terrible snare, and lead to Sheol; and those who sow them will "reap corruption."

"If ye have bitter envyings and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits. Without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them that make peace" (James 3:14-18).

They only who take Christ's attitude in this matter will "of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

It is essentially "sowing to the Spirit," and will be so regarded, and rewarded at the righteous tribunal of Christ, where doubtless many, who have been condemned even by their brethren, will, much to the chagrin of their detractors, be welcomed by Christ with approval, while the self-considered more righteous will be sent empty away.

We are all faulty, and have great need of mercy and forbearance, for—

"If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared" (Ps. 130:3, 4).

Therefore (Eph. 4:31-32)—

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." —Christadelphian, 1889 Berean May 1964
