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“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (I John 3:17)?

Brotherly Love

Central Truth: Christians should treat one another with loving-kindness.

L243. Date: January 1991. **Text:** Hebrews 13:1-3; I John 3:11-18.

Topic: Love: Of Others.

“Giving all diligence, add . . . brotherly kindness” (II Peter 1:5, 7). The seventh of the Christian graces to be cultivated is called *“brotherly kindness.”* It means brotherly affection, love to the brethren, and a spirit of brotherhood.

Brotherly kindness consists of being sympathetic, friendly, gentle, and tenderhearted to others as if they were members of your own family. It is goodness in action, expressing itself in deeds of grace. Indeed, brotherly kindness is related to both grace and compassion.

Brotherly kindness calls Christians to relate to one another as loving members of the same family. And indeed we are! God is the Father of us all. Each of us is a brother or sister to every other. *“Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: . . . knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing”* (I Peter 3:8, 9).

Someone told of a man meeting a boy who was carrying another boy on his back. “Isn't he too heavy for you to carry?” the man asked. The boy replied, “He's not heavy. He's my brother.” It would be difficult for us to put up with one another sometimes if it were not for the brotherhood which joins us together in Christ.

The central truth of this study is, “Christians should treat one another with loving-kindness.”

I. THE CALL FOR BROTHERLY LOVE

“Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1). *“Let,”* suggests that the will is involved, so we can permit or prohibit the expression of brotherly love. *“Brotherly love”* is the kind of devotion shared by members of the same family who have a mutual interest and a permanent relationship — a good description of the relationship of Christians in their Lord. The writer of Hebrews calls the Christian to *“continue”* that sense of family interest, understanding, affection, and long-suffering. It is needed by every person in every circumstance through all of time.

Brotherly love is to continue to be a fixed practice with the saints. It is never to be permitted to falter. To cease to love our fellow Christians is to sin against God. He has personally commanded us to abide by that practice. *“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment”* (1 John 3:23). *“As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another”* (I Thessalonians 4:9).

What more could be said to encourage Christians to practice brotherly love? God commands it and teaches us to do it. Then He calls for such brotherly love to continue. Are you living in love toward your peers?

II. THE HOSPITALITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). That is a surprising command, isn't it? Brotherly love refers to a family relationship. I extend it to my brothers and sisters, my father and mother, and others to whom I am related in the flesh. But to show it to strangers?

That is exactly the difference in the love God gives. It reaches beyond the realms of physical family and includes all the family of God. Therefore, receive guests into your home in the name of Jesus. Practice hospitality to the extent that it is as if you were keeping an open house.

Look for God's messengers to come your way — evangelists, pastors, missionaries, and other fellow Christians. Abraham extended hospitality to three unknown men and later discovered that he had welcomed the Lord and two of His angels (Genesis 18). The rescue of Lot from destruction in Sodom was related to Abraham's willingness to receive strangers into his home.

Being hospitable is not always convenient, of course. It might cost you some money on occasion. But the rewards of hospitality are much greater than the responsibilities it brings. Try it and receive a blessing from God

himself.

III. THE SYMPATHY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrews 13:3). That is a call for Christian empathy, identifying yourself with the person in need, so that you feel his pain as if it were your own. That is what Jesus did for us. That is what He enables us to do with one another.

I remember a family that was extraordinarily close and affectionate. When one became ill, the whole family seemed to suffer the same ailment. I thought it was funny until I realized that they were sincere in their complaints.

Members of the same church are to identify with one another. *“Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it”* (I Corinthians 12:26). As members of the body of Christ, we share fellow feelings of joy and/or sorrow.

But brotherly love does more than sympathize. It helps solve the problem. It hastens to lift the fallen, comfort the sorrowing, assure the discouraged, and bring aid in whatever way it is needed. Brotherly love is more than feelings. It is a tender spirit that helps to heal the hurt. You feel it in your heart, don't you?

IV. THE COMMAND FOR BROTHERLY LOVE

“This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother” (I John 3:11, 12). God leaves no question about the exercise of brotherly love among His children. It is His specific command. Three things are said about God's command for us to love one another.

First, it is an enduring command. It was what we heard from our first acquaintance with the gospel. “God loves you” was good news indeed to those of us who were dead in sins. His love was so great that He gave His only begotten Son to bear our sin guilt so we could be set free. God freed us from the penalty of our sins and promised ultimate deliverance from the very presence of sin because of what Jesus did for us. No one ever witnessed such love before.

That was the first message we heard from God. That same message continues to be true today. But to it is added the command that we show to

others the same kind of love that God showed to us. And we can because His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. The command for us to love one another will continue until the end of time.

Second, it is a clear command. How could God say it any more clearly than He has? We are to go on loving one another. The only permissible change is that we may grow in our capacity to love. To love is to commit oneself for the welfare of the beloved. Another way to say it is, “*By love serve one another*” (Galatians 5:13). All can understand that command.

Third, it is an often-disobeyed command. John calls Cain's murder of his brother Abel an illustration of the absence of love. Murder starts in the heart, Jesus said (Matthew 5:21, 22), and it is there because love is absent. Cain was of the devil and had no love for Abel. Only those who know God can love with His love.

We see the command to love disobeyed today when there is gossip, suspicion, ill will, or lack of fellowship among God's people. The Holy Spirit is grieved at such disobedience of God who has commanded us to love one another sincerely and unconditionally.

V. THE TESTIMONY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Here is a surprising statement: Brotherly love is a proof that a person is saved! “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*” (I John 3:14). To hate one's brother is to make one a murderer before God.

Brotherly love is not of this world. The world is characterized by hate. Paul characterized it as “*hateful and hating one another*” (Titus 3:3). We talk about “the rat race” and how it is “dog eat dog” in the business world. How strange it is when, in the midst of such a world, one sees people who are moved by love and manifest it in word and deed. Immediately the unregenerate world knows that those people are different, not a part of the depraved culture of the ungodly. Because the love of the godly shows up the hate of the ungodly, the saints are hated. Do not be surprised when it happens to you.

Because brotherly love is so different from the tenor of the world, it is a testimony to the believer himself that he is born again. The absence of divine love is a proof of spiritual death that one has never been saved.

VI. THE DEMONSTRATION OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Some may try to show love by pious words. That alone is never

enough. Actions must accompany words for love to be shown as sincere.

Jesus showed God's love to us by laying down His life for us. We show our love to our brothers and sisters by laying down our lives for them. We could know God's love only by the sacrifice it made. That is how people know our love today.

Lighthouses do not fire guns and ring bells to call attention to their lights; they just shine. So by our loving not only in word but in deed and in truth, God's love shines through us.

VII. THE APPLICATION OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Divine love always calls for the sacrifice of self-interests for the benefit of another. That is the very nature of God and is the nature He put in His children (1 John 3:16).

The practical expression of love is essential. To see a need and not try to meet it is proof that God's love does not rest in one. God's love sees a brother have need and opens its own resources to meet that need, whatever the personal cost may be. The challenge is to move from a theoretical to a practical expression of love.

That principle includes all people. What have you done this week that you would not have done if you had not been a Christian? How does the love of God in you influence your relationship with a person you do not like, or a stranger you do not know, or an acquaintance who did you an injustice? How would God show His love in such situations?

Should you show brotherly love when you do not “feel” like it? Absolutely! Is that not hypocrisy? Not at all. Do acts of love and then you will feel emotions of love. Feelings are commonly the product of the obedience of faith.

Memorize I John 3:18, 19 and put it into practice this week. What difference do you think it will make in your relationship to God and to people who bear the image and likeness of God? Try it and see.

Questions for discussion

1. What is brotherly kindness?
2. What does it mean to obey the command of I Peter 3:9?
3. How can we “let” brotherly love continue?
4. How does God teach us to love one another (I Thessalonians 4:9)?
5. How is hospitality an expression of brotherly love?

6. How is Hebrews 13:3 a sign of brotherly love?
7. What is your personal experience of God's love?
8. How can you love another with the love of God?
9. What does 1 John 3:14 mean?
10. How can you show brotherly love this week?