



“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.

Brotherhood

Lesson Aim: To strengthen the bond of Christian brotherhood

L456. Date: May 1976. **Text:** James 1:17-27; Hebrews 13:1-3.

Topic: Brotherhood; Church Covenant.

Covenant: “We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate that, when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God’s Word.”

Today's lesson aims “to strengthen the bond of Christian brotherhood.” The church is a body in which “. . . the members should have the same care one for another,” I Corinthians 12:25. The church is a family in which believers “. . . love as brethren . . .” I Peter 3:8. Brotherhood is at the very essence of church life.

How can Christians love one another as brethren? Some are young, and some are old. Some are rich, and some are poor. Some are educated, and some are unlettered. Some are cultured, and some are uncultured. Some are white, and some are black, or brown, or yellow. Some speak English, and some speak some other language. How can they love as brethren?

Brotherly love, in the Christian sense, is not based upon human affection. It is possible because “. . . the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,” Romans 5:5. Christian love is the love of God; Christian brotherhood is the expression of God's love in believing men.

Christian brotherhood is included in the Church Covenant: “We further

engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech. . . . We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.”

To be your “brother's keeper” does not mean that you meddle in his affairs. It means you are concerned about him, pray for him, and help him when opportunity permits. It is the kind of relationship in which the church will “. . . make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love,” Ephesians 4:16.

I. PRINCIPLE OF BROTHERHOOD

“Let brotherly love continue,” Hebrews 13:1.

There are two words in the Greek language which could have been used to express the idea of Hebrews 13:1. **“Agape”** is used of God's love. It is often used of Christian love also. It is love of intelligence coupled with corresponding purpose. **“Philein,”** however, is used in Hebrews 13:1. It means “affectionate love, showing kindness, sympathy, offering help, holding one dear.” It suggests that an emotion of mutual respect and appreciation, personal concern and willingness to help, should unite Christians in the church.

“In our times, when so many false brotherhoods are established that claim to be superior to our brotherhood in Christ and urge their claims and their benefits to the detriment and even the disruption of our spiritual brotherhood in the faith and the confession of Christ, it is especially necessary to emphasize the divine character of the bond of brotherly love which unites us as believers in Christ and to urge all our brethren to continue therein and to cut loose from every antagonistic tie” — R. C. H. Lenski.

Brotherly love is to “continue.” That means that it was threatened then, as it is threatened now. Satan is opposed to it. He seeks to destroy it. Paul wrote, **“. . . As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren . . .”** I Thessalonians 4:9, 10.

Why are Christians admonished to “let” (cause) brotherly love to continue? Brotherhood is costly. **“Hereby preceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . . My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth,”** I John 3:16, 18. Brotherhood is no

mere sentiment: it is costly. Its blessings, however, far outweigh its cost. Are you busy causing (letting) brotherly love continue (grow) into a stronger brotherhood in your church?

II. EXPRESSION OF BROTHERHOOD

How is Christian brotherhood to be manifested? It can be expressed in words of affirmation (I John 3:18). It is better shown in deeds.

A. Hospitality (Hebrews 12:2) — Show your brotherhood by acts of helpfulness toward members of your church when they are in need. Be sure that your hospitality does not stop there. Show kindness to strangers as well. God does not promise that you might entertain angels unawares, if you do! Some in the Old Testament period had such an experience, but it was the exception rather than the rule. God promises that you will be blessed by hospitality, as men of God have been blessed in times past. **“Use hospitality one to another without grudging,”** I Peter 4:9.

B. Empathy (Hebrews 13:3) — In the body of Christ if one member suffers, “. . . all the members suffer with it,” I Corinthians 12:26. Each Christian is to feel sympathy for every other Christian who suffers as if he were personally undergoing the trial.

It was not uncommon for early Christians to be jailed for their faith. The particular reference to suffering (Hebrews 13:3) is to being in bonds. Christians would seek to gain the release of any imprisoned brother. If their efforts failed, they would tend his needs with untiring devotion. Personal risks were ignored as Christians ministered to Christians in their times of trial. That is an excellent example of true brotherhood at work.

C. Self control (James 1:19, 20, 26) — The man who is “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” and who “bridles his tongue” is a mature man, indeed. He is manifesting the highest quality of the spirit of brotherhood. Christian brotherhood is wonderfully manifested when a brother bears with the faults of another without vexation or anger.

A person may recount an experience and conclude, “So I naturally became angry.” One may “naturally” do such a thing, but the Christian is not a “natural” man. He is a “spiritual” man. James positively stated that the anger of man never works out the righteousness of God. That is the time when control of the tongue is most difficult. It is no wonder that the Bible declares that the control of anger is an indication of true spiritual maturity. Baptists have covenanted to show “Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech . . .”

D. Benevolence (James 1:27) — **“Pure religion and undefiled before**

God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction . . .” That is a part of your commitment “to aid each other in sickness and distress.” Service to God is performed by serving people in the name of God. To care for those in need is the highest expression of love to God and concern for the brethren. That one passage makes valid all the benevolent work of the churches. Christian brotherhood is the basis of their benevolent concern.

E. Purity (James 1:27) — It is no small thing for one to keep himself “unspotted from the world.” “The world” is a common Bible term used to designate the ungodly, unbelieving mass of men. It is the Satanically-dominated system in the midst of which Christians live.

The world is vile and foul. To keep oneself unspotted from the world means that none of its uncleanness is permitted to lodge permanently in the human frame. That is possible only as he walks in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses from all sin (I John 1:7). Follow the direction of God's Holy Spirit, and you will be “pure and unfiled” in the midst of a “wicked and perverse” generation.

III. BASIS OF BROTHERHOOD

A common relationship to God is essential, if Christians are to be joined in true brotherhood (Romans 8:17). He is the only Giver of all that is good; every act of giving is inspired by Him. Christians render good each to the other because they are joined to Christ by faith. “. . . **One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren,**” Matthew 23:8.

God's good will toward men is manifested in redemption. Man's good will toward men is manifested in brotherhood. The redeemed are witnesses to the world of the kind of God whose they are and whom they serve. Christian brotherhood is not based upon the flesh but in the Spirit. It is not temporal but eternal. It is expressed in general among all believers. It is expressed in particular in the local congregation of Christians.

IV. STRENGTHENING THE BROTHERHOOD

How can the brotherhood of your church be made stronger? The formula is recorded in James 1:21-25.

A. Keep clear of sin. “Put away all sin, but particularly that sin which clings to you.” That is the admonition of James. As sin mars one's relationship with God, sin will mar his relationship with his brethren. Nothing base nor defiling should be retained in the Christian's life, if he

would enjoy the blessings of brotherhood.

B. Receive the word. “Make the soil of your heart a humble modesty ready to receive the Word which is already implanted in you.” That means “hear the Word; accept its truth, and commit yourself by an act of the will to live by it.” Let your heart be that “good soil” which brings forth a hundred fold to the divine Sower.

C. Obey the Word. “Put that message into practice; do not merely listen to it. Whoever looks carefully into the flawless law that makes men free, and makes a habit of doing so, not just listening to it and then forgetting it, but obeys and acts upon it, shall be blessed in that deed.

Today's study concludes a series of thirteen lessons based upon the teachings of the Church Covenant. Review the subjects considered. There is a solemn responsibility resting upon one who joins one of the Lord's churches! Let the studies of the quarter make you more nearly committed to serve the Lord God through His church. Read that covenant over and over until you have it memorized. Keep its precepts before you. Live in the light of your commitment to Christian conduct made when you became a member of a Baptist church.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20, 21.

Questions

1. What is brotherhood?
2. How is Romans 5:5 related to Christian brotherhood?
3. How can “brotherly love” continue in your church?
4. How does I John 3:16, 18 show the cost of brotherly love?
5. How is hospitality a sign of brotherhood?