

Brotherly Love

By John R. Gibson

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1). The elders selected this verse as our theme of emphasis for 2019 and from time to time we need to appreciate how important this is and reflect on how we can improve.

It doesn't take a lot of reading in the New Testament to see that God has made this a point of emphasis. In 1 Corinthians 13 we are warned that great talents, gifts, and deeds are worthless if they are not done in love. Col. 3:14 describes love as that “which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (ESV). Sincere, fervent love of the brethren is to result from our souls having been purified by our obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). And we could go on and on with inspired Scriptures commanding us to love one another, for this is truly one of the great emphases of our Lord.

But let's think about what the apostle wrote to the spiritual family in Thessalonica. “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and **indeed you do so** toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you **increase more and more**” (1 Thes. 4:9-10; emphasis mine—JRG). Here was a group of saints noted for their brotherly love, yet told they could do even better. If we have not been committed to the love God intends us to have, we need to make that commitment today, but even if we have been allowing brotherly love to continue, we can do better.

Biblical love is like biblical faith in that it can never be found alone, but will manifest itself in action, but we do need to be aware that great sacrificial acts can be done without genuine love (1 Cor. 13:3). Before thinking about different ways we can allow brotherly love to continue, let's be certain we are committed to “love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). Get the heart or attitude right!

Love in Action

“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:21). We need to do a better job of greeting one another and letting them know they are important to us. And we must avoid falling into the trap of greeting only our closest friends or family. We may not be able to greet every saint at every assembly, but over a period of several gatherings every saint should be the recipient of our greeting.

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). Having people in our homes or taking them out to eat is one of the best ways to get to know people and let them know we care about them. Do we lack the time and money to do this? Hospitality doesn't have to be costly—some inexpensive snacks on a Sunday evening will work just fine. This is not about the food, but the time spent together. And if we are too busy to practice hospitality, we are too busy and may need to get some thorns out of our lives (Luke 8:14). And as we think of hospitality and its connection to brotherly love, don't forget the exhortation of James 2:1—“My brethren, do not hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

Send cards or notes to our shut-ins, those dealing with chronic sickness or pain, those who have lost loved ones, parents working hard to raise godly children, elders, deacons, et al. Use the group sheet as a starting point, but a fervent love doesn't have to stop there.

Be aware of those who could use some encouragement and do what you can to provide it. Go visit a shut-in or offer to help one of our older people with some yard work. If you see someone who appears to be struggling, be sure to greet them, make them an object of your hospitality, send a card, go by and visit, etc. Even when people are not necessarily struggling, they can usually benefit from some

encouragement. Parenting is a challenging task and most parents could use a kind word, an offer of assistance, etc. Those who put a lot of time and effort into teaching Bible classes could probably benefit from a little show of appreciation and a few kind words. There are many different people who need it and many ways to show it, but the key to this encouraging spirit is the brotherly love that looks for needs and then fills them.

“Let brotherly love continue!” “Increase more and more.”

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