

Brotherly Love

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The Gospel breathes the spirit of love. Love is the fulfilling of its precepts, the evidence of its power, the pledge of its joys, and the ripe fruit of the Spirit. "A new commandment," saith our Lord to His disciples, "give I unto you, that ye love one another" (John 13:34). "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 John 3:23). This is emphatically a new commandment. It has a new object, not specified in the original law of love and obviously a different affection than that which is required in the moral law. Brotherly love is an affection which is limited to particular characters. There can be no doubt but the children of God are kindly affectioned toward all men because Christian benevolence runs parallel with rational being. Genuine love to our neighbor is extended to all, according to their character and circumstances. It blesses those who curse us, and does good to those who hate us. This, however, is not the distinguishing nature of brotherly love. Brotherly love differs materially from the love of a general feeling of good will. It is the love of good men, and for their goodness only, and extends only to the followers of Christ. It is an affection which is directed toward the excellence of religion, and consists in a delight in holiness. Everyone that is of the truth, everyone that is born of God, of whatever condition, or nation under heaven, is to be loved with this affection.

There is something in the character of every child of God that reflects the image of his heavenly Father, and it is this that attracts the eye and wins the heart. There is something which is amiable and lovely, and it is this loveliness that gives a spring to the affections and draws forth the hearts of God's people toward God Himself. The children of God are partakers of the Divine nature. From bearing the image of the earthly, they now bear the image of the heavenly. God has imparted to them a portion of His own loveliness; He has formed them new creatures; of His free and distinguishing grace, He has made them more excellent than their neighbors and hence they are lovely. They are the excellent of the earth. God loves them, Christ loves them, the Holy Spirit loves them, angels love them, and they love each other. It is around them that the virtues cluster; from them that the graces of heaven are reflected, though shaded, and very often darkened by debasing and reproachful sins.

Love to the brethren is also an affection which rests upon the union which believers sustain with Christ. The Lord Jesus, together with all true believers, forms one mystical body. Christ is the Head and they are the members. The same bond which unites believers to Christ binds them to each other. The love which is exercised toward the Head extends to the members. The union necessarily involves a union of affection. Those who love Christ love those who are like Him and those who are beloved by Him. Here all distinctions vanish. Name and nation, rank and party, are lost in the common character of believers, the common name of Christian. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, rich and poor, are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). They have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all (Eph. 4:5-6). Actuated by the same principles, cherishing the same hopes, animated by the same prospects, laboring under the same discouragements, having the same enemies to encounter, and the same temptations to resist, the same hell to shun, and the same heaven to enjoy, it is not strange that they should love one another sincerely and often with a pure heart fervently. There is a unity of design, a common interest in the objects of their pursuit which lays the foundation for mutual friendship and which cannot fail to excite the "harmony of souls." The glory of God is the grand object which commands their highest affections and which necessarily makes the interest of the whole the interest of each part, and the interest of each part the interest of the whole. There are no conflicting interests and there need be no jarring passions. In a common cause which in point of importance takes the place of every other and all others, the affections of the sanctified heart are one.

The Lord Jesus has given peculiar emphasis to the duty of brotherly love, by constituting it the easy and decisive standards of true godliness. It is by this standard that His disciples are to judge of themselves. "We know," saith an apostle, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). This is the criterion also by which He would have the world judge of the sincerity of their religion and the truth and divinity of His Gospel. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). In that memorable prayer just before His death, He also prays for His disciples "that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). With this standard before him, may not every man ascertain whether he is a child of

God?

The love of good men is not one of the native affections of the carnal mind. This cold, degenerate soil bears no such heavenly fruit. The affection which Christians exercise toward each other as Christians is the offspring of brighter worlds. It is a principle of celestial birth. Love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God (1 John 4:7).

It cannot be difficult to distinguish this Christian grace from a mere natural affection of mercenary or sectarian attachment. A parent may love his child, and a child his parent; a husband may love his wife and a wife her husband; and there may exist much and reciprocal affection between one man and another; while the personal religion of the party beloved constitutes none of the reasons of this affection. Persons may have been educated to esteem and respect pious men while this respectful sentiment falls far below the love of men as Christians and for their Christianity. Men may love Christians merely because they imagine that Christians love them. This, like every other affection that is purely selfish is unworthy of the Christian name. They may love particular Christians because they are of their denomination and imbibe their sentiments. This too is nothing better than that friendship of the world which is enmity with God. The obvious inquiry is: Do you love the people of God because they are the people of God? Because you discover in them the amiableness of that religion which is altogether lovely? Do you love them, not merely because they love you or have bestowed favors upon you; not because they are of your party, but because they bear the image of your heavenly Father? Do you love them for their love of God, their self-denial, their heavenliness, their usefulness in the world, their reproachless example, their faithfulness and love of duty? Do you love them when they reprove you, and when their example condemns you? And do you love them in proportion to the measure of these excellencies which they possess? Do you feel an interest in them and for them? Can you bear and forbear with them? Can you forget their infirmities, or do you rejoice to magnify them? Can you cast the mantle of charity over their sins and pray for them, and watch over them, and pity, and love them still? And can you feel thus and act thus toward the poorest and most despised of the flock and that because he is a Christian? If so, here is your encouragement "He that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4:7).

Taken From: *The Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character*