

## **Brotherly Love - The Real Test**

What kind of people were the Christians of the first century? Were they "super-Christians," totally dedicated, so devoted to the Lord that they would put twentieth century Christians to shame? We tend to think so. And if we look only at the Christians of Jerusalem before the church was scattered, our conclusions will be well founded. But by the time Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, the churches of his day were much like those of our day. His description of those with whom he was associated is given in this verse: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21).

There were notable exceptions, however, among Paul's associates, men and women whose devotion to the Lord and love for their brethren serve as wonderful examples. Paul himself was one: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2:17). Timothy was another: "For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). Epaphroditus was yet another: "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Phil. 2:30). Not regarding his life! There is the real test of brotherly love. This is the love manifested by Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. These did not regard their own lives when their brothers and sisters were in need. The love which they manifested is the love required of all: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16).

The phrase, "Love . . . seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:4,5), suddenly takes on new meaning. Love does not just send a card to the sick, or prepare a dish for the bereaved. Love does not just do repair work for a widow, or carry a fruit basket to the aged. These are all good works and are manifestations of love. We do not mean to minimize the value of such works. But real love, if the occasion arises, goes beyond such acts of service. Real love does not seek to preserve even her own life. Real love willingly lays down her life for the brethren. Love gives more than material things; love gives herself.

Few Christians of the first century had that kind of love. And when we observe the selfishness, the petty jealousy, the greed, the desire for pre-eminence, the gossip, the backbiting, feuding, and quarreling that are characteristic of brethren of our day, we are sure that few have that kind of love today. Aquila and Priscilla once "laid down their necks" for Paul (Rom. 16:3,4). Let the reader make a list of the Christians of his acquaintance for whom he would lay down his neck! It is easy to think that we would die for the Lord if our faith were so tested, but "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20)?

Doctrinal error that threatens the salvation of God's people must be fought. Sin must be corrected. But we have little doubt that many of the problems that trouble the church today result from our being like the "all" who "seek their own" rather than like those who "regard not their lives" for the sake of brethren.

How is this love developed? The same chapter of Philippians provides the answer: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Here is the great goal of Christians -- becoming "conformed to the image of His Son." When we reach that goal, we will have found maturity in all aspects of Christianity, and we will have learned to love others as God would have us to love, even to willingness to die for them.

**- by Bill Hall**

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## **How Is Your Vision?**

How is your vision? Jesus observed that . . .

- Some have *envious* eyes, longing for the material advantages they see others have (Matthew 20:15).
- Some have *sensual* eyes, looking to lust, thereby committing adultery in their hearts (Matthew 5:28-29).

- Some have *critical* eyes, looking for specks in others while ignoring obvious problems in themselves (Matthew 7:3-5).
- Some have *closed* eyes, not wanting to see the truth (Matthew 13:15).

How important is all this? The Lord put it this way:

*"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"* (Matthew 5:22-23).

**- by Frank Himmel**

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## ***Demonstrating Our Love***

Here's a challenge for you: Try to explain what love is without stating what it does. Consider that for a minute, and you will surely agree that it is nearly impossible.

Husbands and wives, think back to when you were courting your mate. Feelings of love were on your mind continually. Agree? But what do you remember most about those days? Almost certainly you will recall quiet walks in the park, "love letters" in the mail, a bouquet of flowers, etc. You were "in love", but what you remember is what you did, and what was done for you.

So it is with love for God. It can only be explained or identified by the action it produces. You say that you love God, but love (as we have just observed) demands that you prove it by the way you act. Jesus put it in unmistakable terms, when He said: "If you love me, keep my commandments" ( John 14: 15). The apostle John stated this truth succinctly when he noted: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments . . ." (1 John 5:3).

Consider this: husbands/wives would you have "caught" your mate if you had done as little for her/him as you sometimes do for God? In connection with this, maybe we ought to reflect more seriously about the simple question that Jesus asked: "What do ye more than others?" (Matthew 5:47). Think!

**- by Greg Gwin**