

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

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

Camouflage

We are all familiar with camouflage, or 'camo' as we like to call it. We most commonly see it when hunters are preparing to hit the field in search of game. But this special clothing was originally perfected by the military. The main idea, of course, is to blend in with your surroundings so that you are not so easily detected by the enemy. More recently, since our army has been fighting wars in the desert, the patterns have been modified to help hide soldiers in that environment. There are even special camo types for arctic or snowy conditions.

This effort to disguise oneself to avoid detection by enemies is a good thing in the armies of men. But a problem arises when soldiers in God's army (2 Timothy 2:3) try to do the same. Remember, 'camo' is designed to make one 'blend in' to the surroundings. But, Christian soldiers should make no effort to do so. Unfortunately, many do. We see too many who want to talk, dress, and act like the worldly folks around them. They want to go to the same places and do the same things. In short, they want to hide their real identity and avoid detection as true disciples.

Why would a Christian do this? Jesus targeted the problem when He said: *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels"* (Mark 8:38). Sadly many are "ashamed" to show their attachment to the cause of Christ. The outcome for them, as Jesus warned, will be eternal loss.

May we all develop the unwavering devotion of the apostle Paul, who boldly said: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"* (Romans 1:16). May we, like him, be able to say in the end: *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7).

- by Greg Gwin