

LESSON 14 HOW CHRISTIANS ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Loving one another is not an option for Christians - it is a command, and there are no boundaries (CP Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-17). Jesus commands us here to love one another with the same love wherewith He loved us. That means that Christians' love for each other is not self-seeking, but unconditional and self-sacrificial as Christ's was for us (CP Jn 13:2-17). Jesus was not instituting a foot-washing ordinance here that the Church has to practice, but was demonstrating the true meaning of servanthood to His disciples. The act of washing the disciples' feet was to inspire them to love and honour each other above themselves. It teaches us that we should be willing to do the lowliest service for each other, and prefer the least among us above ourselves (CP Php 2:1-5). Christians are to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility are to consider others better than themselves. In doing this Christians imitate Christ (CP Ro 15:1-3). *Neighbour* in V2 here means fellow-Christian.

Christ is the model of conduct in relationships between weak and strong Christians. His example demands mutual forbearance and love. We are to follow Christ's example and not live for our own self-interests, but to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ (CP Ga 5:13-15; 6:2). The law of Christ is to love one another unconditionally and self-sacrificially, even as Christ loves us. *Neighbour* in Ga 5:14 also means fellow-Christian as in Ro 15:2. Love expressed like this surpasses by far all moral systems of all other religions and is a sign to the world of the reality of Christianity (CP 1Cor 12:18-26). This clearly shows how the lives of Christians are inextricably woven together in Christ, and how we need to relate to and depend upon one another in order that God's purpose for the Church be fulfilled. If we all loved one another the way Christ directed us to in Jn 13 and 15, then whatever affects one of us will affect all of us. If one suffers, then all will suffer with that one, and if one is honoured, then all will rejoice with that one.

Here is the literal English rendering of Jn 13:34-35 from the Greek according to **Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament**,

"A commandment, a new one I am giving you, that you should be constantly loving one another with a divine and self-sacrificial love; even as I loved you, you also be loving one another. In this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you constantly have love among one another."

The key word there is *if* (CP 1Jn 2:3-5, 9-11; 5:1-3; 2Jn 5-6). These passages all underline the test of true Christianity: obedience and love. Firstly, they teach that the only sure way of knowing that we are saved is by being obedient to God's commands. Anyone who professes to be a Christian but lives as they please will have no part in God's eternal

kingdom. This clearly refutes the teaching that "once saved" means "always saved". It is only by continued obedience to God's word that salvation is assured and God's love is perfected in Christians. Christian love expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to God's commandments. Secondly, those scriptures teach that Christians reveal the genuineness of their love for God only by their love for each other. In 1Jn 2:9-11 love is characterized by light, and hate, by darkness, which signifies hell and eternal damnation. Anyone who says they love God but does not express that love by their unconditional, self-sacrificial love for other Christians are only deluding themselves thinking that they are saved (CP 1Jn 3:10-19,23-24).

The theme of John's teaching in this epistle is summed up for us here in V10 where he distinguishes between the true children of God and the children of the devil. The true children of God do not habitually sin, and they love each other unconditionally and self-sacrificially. The word *loveth* here is **agapao**, the love of God Himself - the same love commanded and inspired by Jesus in Jn 13:34-35 and 15:12. 1Jn 3:14 teaches that it is only Christians' love for each other manifested like this that assures them of their place in God's eternal kingdom, and this is confirmed in V16-19 (CP Jas 2:14-26). We learn here that the only faith that saves is that demonstrated by works out of our love for God and for each other. This is the acid test of Christianity whereby we know whether we are following the example of God's love to others. If we are not willing to give of our material things to other Christians in need, then we certainly would not lay down our lives for them as Jesus laid down His life for us, and expects us to do for each other. James teaches the same thing here as John. Notwithstanding that we profess to love God, we are deluding ourselves thinking that we are saved if we do nothing unconditionally and self-sacrificially for our brothers and sisters in Christ (CP Lu 16:19-31).

This is called the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is not teaching that the rich man went to hell just because he was rich and Lazarus went to heaven just because he was poor. Neither affluence nor poverty determines our eternal destiny but the life we live on earth. The rich man went to hell because his life was filled with self-centred living, not caring about others of God's children worse off than himself. In his self-indulgent lifestyle the rich man violated God's two greatest commandments (CP Mt 22:36-40). Lazarus went to paradise where all the righteous dead went before Christ's death and resurrection. Christ took them to heaven with Him when "He ascended up on high" (CP Eph 4:8-10). Lazarus was saved, not because he was poor, but because he found his help in God. Lazarus' name depicted his relationship with God. It means "God has helped", or "God the helper". The significance of Lazarus' name suggests that Jesus

meant Lazarus to symbolize all the outcasts of society who have no other help but God (CP Mt 5:3; Lu 4:17-18). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches above all else that Christians cannot profess reverence for God while at the same time living only for the fulfilment of their own self-gratifying desires. Scriptures are quite clear - anyone claiming to be born again of the Spirit of God who at the same time consciously sows to their flesh is guilty of mocking and despising God, and will forfeit their place in his eternal kingdom (CP Pr 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; Mt 25:34-40 with Mt 25:41-46; Ga 6:7-10).

God says that it is only our unconditional and self-sacrificial love that gives of itself for the happiness and well-being of our fellow-Christians that proves our love for Him, perfects His love in us, and assures us of our place in His eternal kingdom (CP 1Jn 4:7-21). Here John traces the love Christians should manifest for each other to its source in the nature of God as revealed in Him giving His Son up to death to provide salvation for His enemies, again stressing Christians' love for each other as the test of the Christian life. Christians are to show they are God's children by manifesting attitudes and actions like God's toward other Christians. It is only by the expression of our love for each other like this that God's love is perfected in us. The effectiveness of God's love in us demonstrates itself in our love for each other. This is the perfect love that casts out fear in V18 which is the same thing we learned in 1Jn 3:14 - Christians in whom God's love is perfected through their unconditional, self sacrificial love for other Christian's need have any fear of not being saved. They can confidently look forward to Jesus' return, knowing that they have ensured their destiny in eternity with Him. They have proved their love for God by their love for each other. We need to heed all that these scriptures teach because they all emphasize the love Christians are to have for each other as the key to eternal life (CP Ro 12:9-10; 1Pe 1:22).

In Ro 12:9-10 Paul impresses upon us that Christians' love for each other has to be sincere, unfeigned, without pretence, or hypocrisy. It must be a sincere expression of the esteem in which we hold other Christians, honouring them above ourselves. In 1Pe 1:22 Peter commands Christians to "love one another with a pure heart fervently". *Fervently* means literally stretched out, intensely, without ceasing, continually. The idea is that of a love that is extended to its fullest capacity to reach the one loved (CP Eph 4:1-3). Paul is exhorting Christians here to practice what they preach. That is essentially what "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" means. The Christian life we live should always be in accordance with the profession of Christianity we make. *Lowliness* is humility. It means a total absence of arrogance, conceit and haughtiness, a sense of moral insignificance and a humble attitude for the concern of others (CP Col 3:12-14). Christians are to adopt and practice diligently every form of relational

righteousness: love, compassion, humble attitudes, self-giving behaviour, freely flowing forgiveness, and patience toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. The love shown at Calvary was a forgiving one. Ours should be the same - a love that causes us to be long-suffering toward each other, a love that makes us kind to each other, a love that so causes us to rejoice in the welfare of another that there is no room for envy in the heart, a love that is not jealous, a love that keeps us from boasting of ourselves, a love that keeps us from bearing ourselves in a lofty manner, a love that keeps us from acting unbecomingly, a love that keeps us from seeking our own rights, a love that keeps us from becoming angry, a love that does not impute evil, a love that does not rejoice in iniquity but in the truth, a love that bears up against all things, hopes all things, endures all things. That is the kind of love God says one Christian should have for another (CP 1Cor 13:1-7).

Christian love seeks the welfare of all and works no ill to any (CP Ro 14:13-15). This proves that one Christian can be destroyed by another, and it teaches that whoever places a stumbling block in another Christian's way has ceased to walk according to love, and has violated the law of Christ, which as we saw earlier, is the supreme Christian rule (CP 1Cor 8:1-13). Christians who do not love their brothers and sisters in Christ as God commands, hate them. Anything less than active benevolence is hatred. Scriptures all teach that there is no neutrality in Christianity. Jesus uses the same illustration in Mt 12 (CP Mt 12:30). Those who are not actively involved in doing the work of God for Christ are actively involved in doing the work of the devil in opposition to Him. In God's economy love and hate, light and darkness, life and death, obedience and disobedience, necessarily replace, as well as necessarily exclude one another. Whoever has not the one, of necessity has the other in each case (CP Mt 25:41-46 with Ro 6:16; Jas 2:14-26; 1Jn 3:14-19; Rev 3:15-16). These scriptures all teach the same thing: there is no neutrality in Christianity. Like John said, "...he that loveth not his brother abideth in death" - he is going to hell (CP Rev 3:7-13).

The Church at Philadelphia is one of seven Churches Jesus addresses in Rev 2 and 3, and while they were all Churches that existed at that time, they are also representative of Churches in all ages since then up until the end of the Church age, and what Jesus is saying to them is for our admonition too. *Philadelphia* means love of the brethren, and what Jesus is teaching us here is that it will only be those Christians who belong to the Philadelphia Church - those who love their brothers and sisters in Christ - who will be saved from the Great Tribulation (CP V10). The Church at Philadelphia were the only ones who did all that Christ charged the New Testament Church to do. They obeyed His commandments and loved one another with a pure heart fervently (CP He 13:1; 1Pe 2:17; 4:8).

The reason for the exhortation to love one another in 1Pe 4:8 is because love covers a multitude of sins. This is not teaching that the love we display toward others will cause God to pass up or pardon their sins, but that when Christians truly love one another, one will not make public the sins of the other, but will keep them to himself. How much gossip would be eliminated in the Church if we loved each other like this (CP Pr 10:12; 1Cor 13:7). A classic example of the love of a New Testament saint covering up the sins of another is Paul with Onesimus in Paul's letter to Philemon (CP Phm 9-21). Can we truly say that we have obeyed God and love our brothers and sisters in Christ as Paul loved Onesimus (CP Eph 5:1-2). Christians are to order their behaviour toward each other in the same love wherewith Christ loved us. When our love for each other becomes the deciding factor in our choices and the motivating power in our actions, we will be exemplifying in our lives the same self-sacrificial love for each other as Christ's was for us. If our behaviour toward each other is ordered in this fashion, then we can know that we have passed from death to life. If not, then we are still dead. The children of God are characterized by love which originates in God, expresses itself in self-sacrifice, and is evidence of eternal life (CP 1Pe 3:8).

The only way Christians can ever be of one mind as Peter commands here is to be brethren who are loving, tender-hearted, humble-minded, and have fellow-feeling - compassion - for one another; able to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep", which is what we learned early in this study in 1Cor 12:26, and which Ro 12:15 also teaches (CP 1Cor 12:24-26; Ro 12:15). There is

one last point that we need to be clear on here before closing this study and that is, just who is my brother and sister in Christ whom I have to love? Everyone who possesses a living faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and remains loyal to God's word as they sincerely understand it, while standing against the things that God hates, is a brother or sister in Christ and deserves our special love, honour, and support (CP 1Th 3:12-13; 4:9-10). Not only are we to love all who belong to the household of faith, but we are to increase our love for them. This does not mean that we have to compromise our particular biblical beliefs or doctrinal differences to accommodate them all, but we are to love them in spite of our differences (CP Lu 9:49-50).

This is a lesson for divided Christendom today. There is no place for narrow exclusivism in the New Testament Church. We are to love fellow Christians regardless of their denomination. If the work they do is for God's glory they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Christian life throughout is to be motivated by divine love - the love of God; the love that God is Himself - which is what we learned in 1Jn 4:16. This love is produced in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit as they are yielded to His sanctifying grace (CP 1Jn 4:16 with Ro 5:5 and Ga 5:22). Most Christians love each other with a mutual friendly love which is called out of their hearts because they find pleasure in each other's fellowship, but God calls us to increase that love to an unconditional, self-sacrificial love - the same love wherewith He loves us, and as the scriptures we have studied here all clearly teach, that is the only love that will ensure our place in His eternal kingdom (CP 1Th 3:12-13; 4:9-10; 2Pe 1:5-7).