

BROTHERLY LOVE ROMANS 12: 10 -21

¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; ¹¹ Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; ¹² Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; ¹³ Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. ¹⁵ Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. ¹⁷ Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. ²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:10-21 KJV)

Dear Brothers and Sisters

The 11 verses under consideration written by the Apostle Paul were given in a particular context. It is a context which relates to the Lord Jesus Christ and his overcoming of sin. Sin is spoken of in two ways in this letter addressed to the ecclesia in Rome, an ecclesia which consisted of Jews who first received the gospel of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost through the preaching of the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:14 – 39) and Gentiles who received instruction from the apostle Peter (Acts 10:34 – 48) and later from the apostle Paul. At the time there were other Jews who, though accepting that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah or Christ, still believed that the law of Moses had to be followed as delivered to the Jewish nation through Moses. Consequently there were in the ecclesia at Rome some who advocated that the dietary laws of Moses and other practices were required of all in the ecclesia including the Gentile believers. Some of the Jews had a sense of superiority over the Gentile believers, treating them with disdain, and it is this issue that Paul was determined to deal with because it undermined the unity required among the believers to all believe the same things as well as putting them into practice. He shows how in the second chapter that

while many Jews considered themselves competent as teachers of the law and boasted about God and were confident that they were guides of the blind and those who were ignorant (2:17-19) nevertheless they were not keepers of the law. They boasted of the Jewish sign of circumcision as the chosen of God but they did not keep the law. Some would steal, others committed adultery, and transgressed the Law in other ways. On the other hand Gentiles who followed the instruction of the Lord Jesus, though not circumcised, kept the law in the spirit of it and these were manifestly true Jews in heart and mind.

Paul goes on to show how that as by one man's sin many were made sinners, so God had purposed that by the righteousness and obedience of one many would be made righteous (5:18,19) In chapter 7 & 8, Paul describes the way sin operates in the mind and bodies of mankind and how though he might strive to resist sin, the very fact that something was forbidden aroused in him the desire to discover why it should be forbidden. The very suggestion that he should not, aroused the desire to do it anyway. Consequently he discovered a law in his members making war against his conscience, in his mind bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. Of himself he could not cleanse himself of evil desires. But in the eighth chapter he describes how that which the law could not do owing to the weakness of the flesh God in fact achieved by God sending his own son, Jesus Christ, in the exact likeness of sin in the flesh, and he condemned sin in the flesh by his perfect obedience to his Father's will. This is plainly and emphatically illustrated when the Lord Jesus knowing that his crucifixion was imminent, prayed to his Father, as Luke records, *Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* (Luke 22:42-44). He was in an agony, the Greek word is 'contest', a battle was taking place between two wills, the will of the Father and the will of the flesh in Jesus. The battle was won when he surrendered his own will and submitted to the will of God, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou (God) wills. (Mat 26:39) This was the supreme sacrifice that was made on the cross at Calvary. This determination to love and serve God above every other consideration, including life itself, is described as the Spirit of Christ, and if anyone has not this Spirit, (8:9) says Paul, He is none of his.

Now there are people who believe that when Christ Jesus died to save sinners, it was by one sacrifice for sins for ever, and consequently no other sacrifice is necessary for believers. But this is not true to the Word of God. This is illustrated in the chapter from which our study is taken Romans 12. Paul having demonstrated how Abraham and King David (Romans 5) were justified by faith, the one before the Law of Moses came into existence and the other as a transgressor of the Law of Moses, shows how by becoming members of the body of Christ, true believers are to participate in His sacrifice. This follows the pattern of the sacrificial service under the law which as the letter to the Hebrews demonstrates pointed forward to the greater sacrifice accomplished by the Lord Jesus. Under the law, every evening and every morning of the Jewish year a lamb was offered as a burnt offering on the altar which was continually burning for this purpose, and it was duplicated every Sabbath day, this typified the Lord Jesus Christ who gave every day of his life to the service of God. The fact the Jesus Christ performed some of his notable miracles on the Sabbath day, reflects back to the duplication of the offering on that day. However this continual burnt offering was the foundation upon which all the sacrifices on the altar were made. In a similar way the supreme sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus laid the foundation for all other sacrifice by those who through belief and baptism become members of his Body consequently the apostle Paul writes I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom 12:1-5)

So we notice this spiritual sacrifice is referred to also by the apostle Peter "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1Pe 2:5)

Paul emphasizes that the offering of these spiritual sacrifice are to be developed by genuine heartfelt love, the Greek word **agape**, which stands for Divine love, therefore it must be without dissimulation, or hypocrisy, or unfeigned. It is described as BROTHERLY LOVE, which is interesting because the Bible has a record of the absence of love between brothers. Consider Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and Miriam and

Aaron, David and his brothers, and coming to the New Testament we see the reaction of Jesus's brothers, those in whose upbringing he may well have been involved, "His brothers therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that your disciples also may see the works that you do. For there is no man *that* does anything in secret, and he himself seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him. (Joh 7:3-5) In the examples provided in the scriptures in many cases there does not seem to be much love between brothers, often to the despair and sorrow of parents, whereas there is much that was sensual and devilish with those who were filled with hatred.

However the knowledge and obedience to the truth introduces us to a much closer relationship than our natural associations. This is because we receive instruction regarding what is and what is not acceptable to the Father and there must be agreement between brother and brother as well as sister and sister. In Amos 3:3 we read "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). This principle holds good perhaps more strongly in matters of faith than anything else. The very essence of fellowship in such matters is unity. Peace comes from unity, and peace permits and fosters the growth of love; but neither peace nor brotherly love can exist apart from unity. So it is that Jesus taught "I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34.) His mission in its ultimate results is a mission of peace, and in his essential character, he is "the Prince of Peace;" but all this peace is to come through the unity based on mutual acceptance of the doctrine which he establishes between God and man. So the apostle John writes "Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. (2Jo 1:9 KJV) in those that do so abide love will flourish.

The important thing in developing brotherly love is unity of belief and practice and where these are established among the brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus the fruits of love will grow and become established.

The word used in 12:10 for kindly affectioned or affectionate is a word in Greek used of the mutual love of parents and children, or we might say family love, and the point is that the call of the truth is to become joined to a family, a divine family of which the head is Yahweh, the Father, and the Lord Jesus is the elder brother, and the love that should bind us together is faith in the New Jerusalem

in which all our hopes reside and therefore the apostle refers to her as “But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Gal 4:26)

Brother Thomas gave much thought to the development of unity and love among believers and perhaps a reminder of his thoughts may not be amiss in our study of this passage. He writes

“No organization, not even an apostolic one, can work well, that is, scripturally, which is not composed of elements more zealous for the advancement of the truth, and the promotion of the glory of its divine Author, than of their own notions and *exaltation*. The first necessary thing is, that the members shall have become as little children, having their old Adam subdued by faith, and Christ substituted in his place by the same principle. Without this disposition, which is “peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy,” no organization could work harmoniously and efficaciously, though framed and administered by the apostles themselves. Even a bad organization with good materials would work better than a good one with a self-willed, heady, factious, and self-glorifying people. The members must all respect the apostolic teaching if they would have an organization that would be scriptural and satisfactory to all good men. This teaching says, “By love serve one another.” “Be not desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another.” “Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind *striving together for the faith of the Gospel*.” “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind *let each esteem other better than themselves*. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” “Let your moderation be known unto all men.” “Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which (peace) also ye are called in one body; and be thankful.” “Be at peace among yourselves.” “Be *all of one mind*, having compassion one of another: love as brethren, be pitiful, *be courteous*.” “Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; *in honor preferring one another*.” And the great teacher, even Christ, who, though the Lord of all, humbled himself, and became the servant of the least, enstamps this doctrine with the seal of his authority, saying, “He that is

greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall *exalt himself* shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

“A people imbued with such doctrine as this would make almost any organization work well; and indeed would get along peaceably together without any written constitution at all; because peace, and righteousness, and the law of the spirit of life, would be written in their hearts and minds. A people so disposed is the great want of our age—a people who not only believe the gospel of the kingdom, but manifest the fruit of it in their walk and conversation, to wit, “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” It is the extreme scarcity of such that makes it almost impossible to plant heritages in the land with administrations even remotely approximating to the apostolic. An association of believers is better without an eldership, than to have one made up of persons destitute of the qualifications indicated in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. All who have obeyed the gospel are not “blameless,” “watchful,” “decorous,” “given to hospitality,” “apt to teach,” “of a well-regulated mind”—*δωφζονα*—“judicious rulers of their own house,” and of good external report. These qualifications are as necessary as faith and obedience to the gospel; and in order that their aptness to teach may be beneficially exercised, it is necessary that “*the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom.*” Persons thus qualified would preside over an association of believers with great advantage all to concerned. These were the sort of persons the apostles exhort us to obey; but before we can do what they require in the premises, the right persons must be manifested. They do not exhort us to obey the incarnations of accident, or of majorities, or of party feeling; but only such as the Holy Spirit makes overseers—“able men, such as fear God; men of truth, hating covetousness.” They should be wise, not in their own conceits; this the apostle forbids: but wise in the estimation of those that be wise, and disposed to avail themselves of their services. The greatest amount of the knowledge of divine things possessed in these days is but little at best. How very minute, then, that which is little compared with this! and how little ability is there to use this small amount aright! A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. It puffs up, and “lifts up with pride,” or inordinate self-esteem. It is expedient, therefore, that a newly-formed ecclesiastical association should enter upon such an arrangement as would give expression probationally to the principles set forth; that being taught by experience they may be the better able to judge of measures and of the fitness of individuals to carry them into effect with permanence.”

Brother John Thomas.

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