

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:35

The scriptures are very plain concerning the love with which the LORD has loved HIS people which were given to HIM before the foundation of the world and chosen in CHRIST. This is a perfect love because it has its origins in HIM who is perfect, and whom John says is the very epitome of love. *"For love is of God; ----- for God is love."* (1John 4:7-8)

This is a specific love which is bestowed upon them, (to the exclusion of others, see Romans 9:13) *"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."* (John 13:1) They were the ones for whom HE prayed, *"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."* (John 17:9)

This is an unmerited love since it is bestowed on them, not in light of their worthiness nor because of any form of obedience which was seen in them. In fact quite the opposite is true as we read, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom 5:8)

This is a demonstrated love, because, not only were the sons of GOD transgressors of HIS commandments but they were in a state of actual animosity towards HIM when HE was pleased to demonstrate HIS everlasting love of them, and to call them by HIS grace to a knowledge of HIS redemption. *"When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."* (Rom 5:10)

This is a manifested love because it has pleased HIM, to cause it to abide in those HE has called by HIS grace and indwelt by HIS SPIRIT. John repeats the declaration which the LORD JESUS made in John 13:35 when he says; *"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."* (1John 4:12-13)

One cannot begin to discuss the love of the brethren one towards another, until first, the basis and example of the nature of this love is set forth. When Judas was sent out of their midst upon his dastardly errand, the LORD told HIS inner circle (which is symbolic of HIS elect bride) *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."* (John 13:34) HE went on to reiterate this thought again, saying, *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 15:12) (see John 20:22)

This is not an "external commandment" which is written in tables of stone and enacted as a requirement in order to gain eternal life or some reward, rather this is a "commandment" which is written in the "fleshy tables" of the heart (see II Cor 3:3) according to the promise of HIS covenant given in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and is an evidence of HIS SPIRIT in HIS children. This is the outworking of that which HE is pleased to work in HIS people according to the good pleasure of HIS will. (see Phil.2:13) *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the*

brethren. *He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*" (1John 3:14) If a man does not love his brethren, (i.e.; those who are the called according to HIS purpose and whose delight is in the LORD JESUS CHRIST) then that man has no reason to believe that he has been born again.

This "love of the brethren" both exceeds and transcends the natural love which a man has for those who are his flesh and blood. The LORD JESUS demonstrated this by HIS own action. *"And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it."* (Luke 8:20-21) (see also Mat 12:47-50) HE also taught this principle quite clearly when HE said, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:26) (see also Mat. 10:37)

This "love of the brethren" causes a man to be concerned with the needs and welfare of them, even as Paul said, *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* (Gal 6:2) This is spoken of by John in a very practical manner. *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."* (1John 3:17-18) While a concern and compassion for the needs of men in general is quite commendable, those in whom the SPIRIT of CHRIST dwells have as their primary concern the needs of their brethren. General benevolence cannot be spoken against but one must never mistake this or substitute this sort of kindness for that which the LORD would have HIS children to be doing specifically for one another. (see Mat 25:34-46; Eph 4:28)

This "love of the brethren" is that which would have them esteem one another above themselves as Paul exhorted those at Philippi. (see Phil.2:1-5) This is especially true in regards to what a man may have liberty of conscience to do. Regardless of how much liberty a man may have in CHRIST, he must first consider his brethren before exercising that liberty. *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."* (Rom 15:1-3) *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."* (1Cor 10:23-24)

The "love of the brethren" causes them to delight in the fellowship of the saints one with the other. John speaks of this common bond which the saints have with one another in CHRIST, *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* (1John 1:3) He goes on to say *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (1John 1:7)

The saints of GOD are joined together in CHRIST. *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."* (Rom 12:5) Now this is surely true in a mystical sense wherein all of GOD's children share in their common ANCESTRY. Yet there is a very practical manifestation of this bond which is demonstrated in the gathering together of the saints in local assemblies, commonly called "churches". It is these "gatherings" or "assemblies" that the saints are exhorted not to neglect. *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."* (Heb 10:25)

Due to the "institutionalization" of "churches" over time, the true purpose and benefit of this "assembling" has been hidden from the minds of many. The purpose of these assemblies is not primarily to hear men preach, but rather that the saints might be edified by that which every part of the body supplies. *"From whom (i.e. CHRIST) the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* (Eph 4:16) Each part of the body is vital to the health of the whole. We assemble because we love the brethren and desire their benefit, not primarily in order to have our own needs met. This is the love of CHRIST. mam