

## MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

### Part 46: The Church: brotherly love

Love is essential to Christianity. "It is love that knits together the hearts and souls of believers with entire affection one unto another" (Owen).

The continuance of the church depends, in the second place, on the continuance of brotherly love. It depends in the first place on faith in Christ Jesus, whereby we hold the Head and are built on the Rock. But, in the second place, it depends on this mutual love. All other pretences about the succession and continuance of the church are vain. Where this faith and love are not, there is no church; where they are there is a church materially, always capable of evangelical form and order—John Owen [*Hebrews*, vol.4, 684-685]

Love is a grace so important that, like holiness, no measure of it is sufficient to satisfy the requirement of the Word of God. It is the basis, and cement, and beauty of Christian union. The church where it is lacking, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members, is nothing better than heap of stones, which, however polished, lack the unity and likeness of a palace—John Angell James [*The Church Member's Guide*, 69]

#### I. The Church

##### A. Five aspects of brotherly love

1. *Its importance.* "The stress which is laid on love in the Word of God, both as it respects the manner in which it is stated, and the frequency with which it is enjoined, sufficiently proves its vast importance in the Christian temper, and its powerful influence on the communion of believers" (James). "Love, and its exercise, is the principal grace and duty that is required among, and expected from, the saints of God, especially as they are engaged in church-fellowship" (Owen). [1] It's a necessary grace, fulfilling the law. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal.5:14). "Moses expresses the whole duty of man in ten commandments: Christ hangs the whole law upon these two, love to God and our neighbor" (Mk.12:30-31)" (Flavel). [2] It's an active grace, motivating the soul. "Love is the life, soul, and quickening power of all duties that are performed among believers toward one another" (Owen). "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love" (1Thess.1:3). "Though love serve one another" (Gal.5:13). [3] It's a beautifying grace, tempering our gifts. "Whatever duties you do perform, be they never so great and glorious, never so useful one to another, to any of the members of Christ; if they are not quickened and animated by love, they are of no value to thy communion with Christ, and edification of the church" (Owen). [4] It's a distinguishing grace, verifying our profession. "Whatsoever we think of our profession, if there be not an intense love unto the brethren, we have nether the truth of grace, nor evidence of God's love to us, or of our love to God" (Owen). "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (1Jn.3:14). [5] It's an eternal grace, lasting for all eternity. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1Cor.13:13). Love is the greatest because it will endure forever, whereas, faith turns to sight and hope ends in possession.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Love is the greatest of the graces, because it is the one which endures the longest. In fact, it will never die. Faith will one day be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. Their office will be useless in the morning of the resurrection and like old almanacs, they will be laid aside. But love will live on through the endless ages of eternity. Heaven will be the abode of love. The inhabitants of heaven will be the abode of love. The inhabitants of heaven will be full of love. One common feeling will be in all their hearts, and that will be love—J.C. Ryle [*Practical Religion*, 178-179]

(1) Matt.22:36-40; Rom.13:8-10; 1Cor.16:13-14; Col.3:12-14

2. *Its nature.* "Love entails three parts—the desire for union, the enjoyment of satisfaction (complacency), and the mark of good will (benevolence)" (Ames).<sup>2</sup> [1] The love of complacency.<sup>3</sup> Christian love entails a satisfaction or delight in others for Christ's sake. We delight in them as objects of God's electing and Christ's dying love. "As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Ps.16:3). "Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Phil.4:1). "Complacency is the very essence of love; and the ground of all proper complacency in the saints, is their relation and likeness to God. We should feel peculiar delight in each other as fellow heirs of the grace of God; partakers of like precious faith, and joint sharers of the common salvation. We must be dear to each other as the objects of the Father's mercy, of the Son's dying grace, and of the Spirit's sanctifying influence" (James). [2] The love of benevolence. Christian love entails the goodwill for another's physical and spiritual wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> "Love enlarges the heart and frees it from the bonds of selfishness, and makes us desire other's welfare as well as our own. Love for our neighbor breathes forth in fervent wishes that it may be well with him, both in time and to eternity" (Vincent). "Brotherly love is that spiritual benevolence and affectionate concern which Christians have one toward another, desiring and seeking their highest interests" (Pink).

What is love? I answer briefly, It is a fruit of the Spirit of God, an effect of faith, whereby believers, being knit together by the strongest bonds of affection, upon the account of their interest in one head, Jesus Christ, and participating of one Spirit, do delight in, value, and esteem each other, and are in a constant readiness for all those regular duties whereby the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good of one another may be promoted—John Owen [*Works*, vol.9, 259]

The main thing in that love which is the sum of the Christian spirit, is benevolence, or good-will to others...love of benevolence is that is that disposition which leads us to have a desire for, or delight in, the good of another; and this is the main thing in Christian love, yes, and the most essential thing in it, and that whereby our love is most of an imitation of the eternal love and grace of God, and of the dying love of Christ, which consists in benevolence or good-will to men, as was sung by the angels at his birth (Lk.2:14). So that the main thing in Christian love is good-will, or a spirit to delight in and seek the good of those who are the objects of that love—Jonathan Edwards [*Charity and its Fruits*, 103-104]

(1) Rom.12:9-10; 1Cor.13:1-7; 1Jn.3:16-18

3. *Its expression.* Love is active. It shows or manifests itself in various practical ways and activities. [1] Giving. "It is vain to pretend to a spirit of love to our neighbors, when it is grievous to us to p[art with any thing for their help, when under calamity. They who love only in word, and in tongue, and not in deed, have no love in truth" (Edwards). [2] Caring. "This is done by assisting and relieving each other in distress, as much as in us lies, by sympathizing with each other in trouble, as

<sup>2</sup> Love is the congenial frame of heart of God's children, wrought of God, whereby their heart is engaged with desires to have harmonious fellowship with their neighbor, and to seek their welfare as well as their own—Wilhelmus a Brakel [*The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol.4, 53]

<sup>3</sup> *Complacency*, n. 1. Pleasure; satisfaction; gratification. 2. The cause of pleasure or joy (Webster Dictionary, 1828)

<sup>4</sup> The love of the Bible will show itself in a believer's doings. It will make him ready to do kind acts to every one within his reach—both to their bodies and souls. It will not let him be content with soft words and kind wishes. It will make him diligent in doing all that lies in his power to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of others. Like his Master, he will care more for ministering than for being ministered to, and will look for nothing in return—J.C. Ryle [*Practical Religion*, 170-171]

the members of a natural body do, rejoicing with them that rejoice, and weeping with them that weep" (Gill). Love makes a person sympathetic to the trials and pains of others. "Sympathy is one of the finest, the most natural, the most easy expressions of love" (James).<sup>5</sup> [3] Longing. Love longs for and desires its object. "Without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you...that I may be filled with joy" (2Tim.1:4). [4] Praying. "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt.5:44). "A Christian should take the interests of his brethren into the closet. private devotion is not to be selfish devotion. It would much increase our affection did we devote more of our private prayers to each other's welfare" (James). [5] Forbearing.<sup>6</sup> "Bearing with one another in love" (Eph.4:2). "Love suffers long (love is patient)" (1Cor.13:4). "In very many persons there will unhappily be found some things, which, although they by no means affect the reality and sincerity of their religion, considerably diminish its luster, and have a tendency, without the caution of love, to disturb our communion with them...Now here is room for the exercise of love...I do not say we are to love these individuals *for* their peculiarities, but *in spite* of them. Not on their own account, but for Christ's sake, to whom they belong" (James). "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for *'love will cover a multitude of sins'*" (1Pet.4:8).[6] Confronting. "Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1Cor.13:6). Because love seeks the good of others, it humbly and gently points out sin.<sup>7</sup>

(1) Lev.19:17-18; Gal.6:1-2; 1Thess.4:9-10

4. *Its pattern.* [1] Christian love is patterned after our love for ourselves. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; You shall love your neighbor as thyself" (Gal.5:14). "What is meant by loving one's neighbor as one's self? It does not mean with the same amount, but with the same kind of love—which realizes or acts out the spirit of brotherhood—which seeks for a neighbor what you seek for yourself, and feels his welfare involved in your own" (Eadie). [2] Christian or brotherly love is patterned after Christ's love for us. "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us" (Eph.5:1). Christ's love was selfless, sincere, fervent, undeserved, and enduring. [a] Selfless. Love seeks the good of others at personal cost and sacrifice. "Love does not seek its own" (1Cor.13:5). Love puts the needs and desires of others before its own. [b] Sincere. "Let love be without hypocrisy" (Rom.12:9). "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1Jn.3:18). [c] Fervent. Christ loves the church earnestly and passionately. "Love one another fervently (deeply) with a pure heart" (1Pet.1:22; 1Pet.4:8). [d] Undeserved. Christ loved His bride when she was morally ugly and unlovely. "True brotherly love is a reflection of god's love for us, and he loves His people not for their native attractiveness, but for Christ's sake; and

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<sup>5</sup> The indifference of some professing Christians to the burdens of their brethren is shocking; they would see them crushed to the very earth with cares and sorrows, and never make one kind inquiry into their situation, nor lend a helping hand to lift them from the dust. Love requires that we should take the deepest interest in each other's case, that we should patiently listen to the tale of woe which a brother brings us, that we should mingle our tears with his, that we should offer him our advice, that we should suggest to him the consolations of the gospel; in short, we should let him see that his troubles reach not only our ear, but our heart. Sympathy is one of the finest, the most natural, the most easy expressions of love—J.A. James [*The Church Members Guide*, 71-72]

<sup>6</sup> If you had the picture of a valued friend, would you withdraw from it your affection, and throw it away, because there was a spot upon the canvass, which in some degree disfigured the painting? No: you would say, it is a likeness of my friend still, and I love it, notwithstanding its imperfection. The believer is a picture of your best friend; and will you discard him, neglect him, because there is a speck upon the painting—J.A. James [*The Church Member's Guide*, 76]

<sup>7</sup> We are to watch over our brethren, and admonish and reprove them as circumstances may require. I do not mean that church members should pry into each other's secrets, or be busy bodies in other men's matters, for that is forbidden by God and abominable in the sight of man (1Thess.3:11; 1Pet.4:15). Much less are they to assume authority over each other, and act the part of proud and tyrannical inquisitors. But still we are to *'exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'* We are not to suffer sin to be committed, or duty to be omitted by a brother, without affectionately admonishing him—J.A. James [*The Church Member's Guide*, 77]

therefore does He love them in spite of their ugliness and vileness" (Pink). [e] Enduring. Christ's love never ends. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (Jn.13:1). So too, Christian love is to be constant and not temporary. "Love brotherly love continue" (Heb.13:1).

(1) Matt.7:12; Jn.13:34-35; 15:12-14

5. *Its promotion.* Love, as all grace, must be nurtured and strengthened. "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all" (1Thess.3:12). "Brotherly love is a tender plant which requires much attention: if it be not watched and watered, it quickly wilts" (Pink). [1] Look upon others as objects of God's love.<sup>8</sup> "If we find a person that is admitted into church society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love, as if we saw him laying in the arms of Christ" (Owen). "'These,' should a believer exclaim, as he looks on the church, 'are the objects of the Redeemer's living and dying love, whom he regards with complacency; and out of affection to him, I feel an inexpressible delight in them. I love to associate with them, to talk with them, to look upon them, because they are Christ's'" (James). [2] Foster a close fellowship with every saint. "We cannot love those whom we do not know" (Brown). [3] Drink deeply from Christ's love toward you. The more we realize God's gracious love for us, the more we will return that love toward others. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love on another" (1Jn.4:11). [4] Guard against sins that hinder Christian love. "The root hindrance to the exercise of brotherly love is *self-love* – to be so occupied with number one that the interests of others are lost sight of" (Pink). "The causes of the decay of love, whence it does not continue as it ought, are, 1. Self-love. 2. Love of this present world. 3. Abounding of lusts in the hearts of men. 4. Ignorance of the true nature, both of the grace and the exercise of it, in its proper duties. 5. Principally, the loss of a concernment in the foundation of it, which is an interest in gratuitous adoption, and the participation of the same spirit, the same new nature and life" (Owen).

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<sup>8</sup> There are some Christians whom it is not very easy to love, on account of some disagreeable peculiarities about them; but we shall love them hereafter, as we love our own souls, and they will love us, in a similar manner. Besides, our Savior loves them, notwithstanding all these imperfections; and ought not our affections to follow his? If he were now visibly on earth, and we were permitted to stand by his side, if we saw him bend a look of love on any individual, would not our affections immediately flow out towards that person, however disagreeable or imperfect he might be? Such a look our Savior does bend on the most unlovely of his disciples. Let us, then, love them all, for his sake—Edward Payson [*Works*, vol.1, 529]