

KEENER THOUGHTS

May, 2012

BUT AS TOUCHING BROTHERLY LOVE

***B**ut as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; (1Th. 4:9-10)*

Love is a word which Christendom throws around as freely, and casually, as requests for prayer, or commitments to pray for one another. No doubt, it should be a real and common part of our Christian vocabulary, but are we as zealous in guarding and exercising this characteristic as we are in claiming the possession of it? Paul's statement that they don't need him to write to them about brotherly love is not based on an implication or observation that they perfectly practice it, but rather that it is such a basic teaching of God. This is true both in scriptural statements such as Mark 12:31, Jn. 13:34, and dozens of other Scriptures like it. Love is also listed as a basic fruit of the Spirit of Christ, (Gal 5:22) without which no man is in Christ. (Rom. 8:9)

During more than fifty years in the ministry, I have observed all too often, what seems to be a terrible absence of this fundamental Christian attribute called brotherly love, not only among Christians, but also among Gospel ministers. In the first decade of my ministry, a pastor friend of mine died, and I knew he had become quite cynical about many of his preacher friends before his death. That seemed then, and does now, very sad to me. Shortly after his death a mutual friend of ours told me of a short list this minister had made of the ministers he still trusted. He said our friend had progressively marked off names until only six were left when he died. I, of course, was honored, and perhaps puffed up, to be told that my name had not been

marked off. However, I have often wondered how long my name would have survived the elimination process, had my friend lived. During over fifty-three years in the ministry, I have seen such separation of ministerial friends occur hundreds of times. How sad to observe that, and how much sadder to experience it with men I loved, and still love, as a brother.

I have no idea of how many times I have been "marked off" without ever knowing why. When I have a friend, I believe it is my nature to love him for life, and I am never able to stop grieving if he "Marks me off." I may disagree with him about an issue, doctrinal or practical, but the brotherly love does not cease, or at least, I believe that to be so.

I consulted Dr. John Gill on this passage and felt his comment was so poignant that it, at least in part, should be copied here. **But as touching brotherly love,....** "Another branch of sanctification; which is distinct from love to God and Christ, though it always accompanies it, and from love to all mankind; and is what is peculiar to brethren in a spiritual relation, and ought to be universal, fervent, and sincere, and as Christ has loved them: concerning which the following things are said," **ye need not that I write unto you.** The reason is, **for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;** "...not merely by the light of nature, which teaches men to be kind, courteous, affable, and beneficent; nor by the law of Moses, which obliges men to love their neighbours as themselves; nor only doctrinally by the ministry of the Gospel, which frequently inculcates the exercise of this grace as a matter of great importance and consequence; nor only by the new commandment, and example of Christ; but by the Spirit of God internally in regeneration, who, according to the tenor of the new covenant, writes this law of love, and of Christ, upon the heart; and this being written upon the hearts of the Thessalonians, by the finger of the Spirit of God, whereby they were dearly directed, and powerfully taught to exercise this grace, and discharge this duty, and under the influence of the same spirit did exercise it, it was unnecessary for the apostle to write about it, and press them to it."

I wonder if the apostle could, or would feel disposed to, say to you and me today, "*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I should write unto you?*" We all have the biblical knowledge of divine admonition to this brotherly love, in a far more available teaching format than did the young Christians at Thessalonica. We carry, and supposedly believe and preach, a Bible that is literally filled with this "New commandment." Yet, I fear that I see a terrible tendency not to "**Let Brotherly love Continue.**" (Heb. 13:1) Oh that God might with his own finger write it anew, and afresh, and repeatedly, upon our hearts, so effectually that all who hear us preach, and watch us live, might see, hear and experience that "Brotherly Love" more than all our knowledge, piety and doctrinal orthodoxy.

I beseech **US** brethren, that we increase more and more;

--FLK