

Let Brotherly Love Continue . . . and Increase!

By Daryl Wingerd

Brotherly love (meaning the love Christians have and express for other believers) heads the list of characteristics that ultimately distinguish real Christians from those who falsely profess to follow Christ. Also residing in this list, of course, are belief in biblical truth and rejection of error, as well as the practice of righteousness along with ongoing repentance from sin. But Jesus described brotherly love as *the* characteristic the world may rightly look for in us to see that we are truly His followers (John 13:34-35). It even caps Peter's list of qualities that prove (to others and to ourselves) that we really have been chosen by God for salvation (2 Peter 1:7-10).



So when we read, in Hebrews 13:1, the author's simple four-word exhortation—"Let brotherly love continue"—we should be, *must* be, supremely interested in heeding it. The characteristic of brotherly love, after all, defines who we truly are.

Paul commended the Thessalonians for their brotherly love. He said, "Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing . . . But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Keep on doing what you are already doing, even strive to excel at it more and more. "Let brotherly love continue" . . . and increase!

Being imperfect and prone to error as we all are, we dare not rely on chance opportunities to express brotherly love, being aimless and haphazard lovers of one another. We need to be intentional. Here are a few suggestions for how to purposefully exercise and increase your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ:

Pray for them. When you enter into your brother or sister's need to the extent that you bring that person to your Father's throne of grace, your affection cannot help but increase.

Invite them into your home. Serve them delicious food. Spend time talking with them, sharing their burdens and their joys. Play games together. Laugh! Discuss what you are learning in the Bible. Compare

notes about parenting, schooling, household projects, hobbies, and current events. Love them by becoming friends with them.

Meet their needs. Whatever your financial or economic status, you have a certain set of skills, abilities, and resources that you can use to meet the needs of others. By meeting theirs, you will also encourage (and perhaps even enable) them to meet the needs of others, even yours. Through all of this, love will continue and increase.

Forbear and forgive. Your brothers and sisters won't always seem lovable. They, like you, have rough edges that can tend to rub holes in relationships. When appropriate, simply overlook them. When necessary—when sins have been committed that require repentance and reconciliation—quickly and sincerely forgive the repentant brother or sister. We love Christ because He has forgiven us. We love Him more when forgiven more. Brothers and sisters in Christ will also love more as the result of forbearance and forgiveness.

Refuse to gossip. When you speak about another believer in a way that lowers them in the estimation of other believers, you may be telling the truth, but you are hindering love. Build them up in the eyes of others. Major on their strengths and refuse to focus on their faults. Speak of them to other believers in ways likely to increase their esteem in the church.

Fellowship together. Spend regular, special times with the whole church, not just once each week on Sundays, but whenever the church (or a subset) is gathered. Increase your love for them by being with them as often as possible. Make this the overwhelming priority in your life, far above any competitor (sports, family, recreation, etc.). These regular times of fellowship cannot replace the other items I've mentioned, but they also cannot be replaced in the life of a healthy and growing Christian and local church. It was, after all, for this very purpose—that of stirring up one another to love and good deeds—that the same writer of Hebrews exhorted his readers to not neglect their assembling together (10:24-25).