
A Brief Review of Scripture

“One thing we learn from history is that people do not learn from history.”

In the previous lessons we have sought to represent “love” as an essential and prominent part of Christianity. If this thinking is correct, it should be reflected in the Christian Scriptures. A brief review is therefore in order.

The words of Jesus “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another” were spoken in the upper room the evening before His death. We shall therefore begin with the Book of Acts and continue to the Book of Revelation. Time and space will not permit us to tarry long in one place, but we encourage each student to search your own Bible to see if these things are so.

Acts

The word “love” is not found in the Book of Acts, yet the doctrine of love is much in evidence. It is here that we discover the amazing generosity of the Jerusalem Christians, selling their possessions and goods and distributing to all men as every man

had need (2:44-46; 4:34-35). Here we read of swift action by the church in dealing with discrimination and poverty (6:1-7); of Dorcas making coats and garments for the needy (9:36-39); and the Church in Antioch sending relief to the poor saints in Judea (11:27-30). Surely the world could see that these believers loved one another.

Romans

Rome was a melting pot of races, creeds, and nationalities. Racial and social differences sometimes place additional strain on personal relationships. Therefore, love between brethren would receive a severe testing in the crucible of the Roman Church. Note these verses:

“Kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” 12:10

“Bless them which persecute you” 12:14

“Be of the same mind one toward another” 12:16

“Live peaceable with all men” 12:18

“Owe no man anything but to love one another for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law . . .” 13:8

The whole of the fourteenth chapter teaches against excluding a Christian brother over his opinions.

“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 neighbor for his good to edification” 15:1-2

Re-read the whole section from Romans 12:1 — 16:27 from the vantage point of love and unity. Remember that those who cause divisions are to be marked and avoided because they serve not Jesus Christ but their own belly (16:17-18).

I Corinthians

The church at Corinth was plagued with an alarming number of serious problems. They had division, immorality, court hassles, marriage problems, difficulties over idolatry, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. Surely this was not the harmony for which Christ prayed. The divine antidote for the poison infecting the church was love. Chapter 13 exalts love to a place of prominence above all else and chapter 14 begins with an admonition to make love our aim.

II Corinthians

Love and interpersonal relationships are so essential to evangelism that Paul admonished the Corinthians to confirm

their love toward a man whom they had been forced to discipline (2:8). Two whole chapters are devoted to a relief offering for the poor saints in Judea (8 and 9) and their generosity to these poor Jews is considered as "subjection to the Gospel" (9:13).

Galatians

The Galatian letter is distinguished by the fact that it is without one word of commendation. After a few introductory remarks Paul launches into a denunciation of them for accepting a perversion of the gospel. Love is again given as a divine prescription for their problems. By love they were to become enslaved to one another (5:13). All the law is fulfilled in love (5:14). If they would "walk in the Spirit" they would experience the fruit of the Spirit (which is love) and they would not fulfill the lust of the flesh to bite and devour one another (5:16-22). Bearing one another's burdens is the fulfillment of the law of Christ (6:2).

Ephesians

The theme of the Ephesian letter is "unity" and love is an essential means to achieve that end. The letter was written from Rome, yet Paul had heard of their "love unto all the saints" (1:15). Their care for one another was not an irrelevant tangent, but an essential element of the gospel "rooting and grounding" them in their relationship with Christ and enabling them to experience all of the fulness of God (3:17-19). They were to forbear one another in love (4:2); speak the truth in love (4:15); edify one another in love (4:16); and walk in love as Christ also loved us (5:2).

The love of the husband for his wife, and the submission of the wife to the husband is used as an illustration of the way that believers are to be submitted to one another in the fear of God (5:21). The analogy has a specific application to Christ and the church (5:32).

Philippians

The church at Philippi was distinguished by its generosity to Paul. When he departed into Macedonia no church shared in his affliction by sending a gift but them. Even in Thessalonica they sent once and again unto his necessity (4:14-17). When Paul was sent to prison in Rome they dispatched a personal ambassador named Epaphroditus to minister to his wants (2:25).

From his Roman prison Paul prayed that their love would abound yet more and more in knowledge and judgment (1:9).

Euodias and Syntyche had a disagreement (4:2) and perhaps others in the church were at odds with one another (1:27 — 2:14). An emotional appeal with Christ as the example is used so that they might be "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind . . ." (2:2).

Colossians

Paul had never been to Colossae (2:1) yet he had heard of their faith in Christ and love to all the saints (1:4). The recurring expression about "love to the saints" undoubtedly refers to social action in behalf of the poor and the needy.

A long list of Christian virtues is recommended in chapter three with the admonition to put love on top of them all because it is the bond of perfectness (3:14).

I Thessalonians

"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love" (1:3)

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men . . ." (3:12)

"But 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 . . ." (4:9-10)

"But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love . . ." (5:8)

"Esteem them highly in love for their work's sake, and be at peace among yourselves . . ." (5:13)

II Thessalonians

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth . . ." (1:3)

I & II Timothy and Titus

The reader is referred to chapter one for more details concerning these books which are designated as "pastoral epistles." Timothy and Titus were both urged to avoid argumentation and strife and to devote themselves to "sound" or healthy teaching.

This directly involved the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. The end, or goal, of their teaching was love out of a pure heart (I Timothy 1:5).

Philemon

"I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (vs. 4-5)

"For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee . . ." (vs. 7)

Hebrews

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister . . ." (6:10)

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (10:24)

"Let brotherly love continue. Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (13:1-2)

(Note - the command to love thy neighbor as thyself had a direct association with loving strangers - see Leviticus 19:33-34)

James

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (1:27)

"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . ." (2:8)

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone" (2:15-17)

"Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned" (5:9)

I Peter

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1:22)

"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (2:17)

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren . . ." (3:8)

"And above all things have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (4:8-9)

II Peter

". . . and to your brotherly kindness (add) love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (1:7-8)

I John

There are over forty references to love in five short chapters. John who once was surnamed by Jesus "boanerges" or "Son of Thunder" came later to be known as the "apostle of Love." These few verses are representative of many others:

"Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath of this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth." (3:18)

II John

"I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we have from the beginning, that we love one another . . ." (4-5)

III John

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy love before the church . . ." (4-6)

Jude

"Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied" (vs. 2)

"These are spots in your feasts of charity" (vs. 12)

(Note - The early church had feasts of love to demonstrate their affection for one another in Christ.)

Revelation

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love . . ." (2:4)

Christians First in Antioch

". . . and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch . . ." (Acts 11:26)

The distinguishing characteristic of the Christian was love. Jesus taught, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The Church in Jerusalem demonstrated a tremendous love for Jewish Christians, but not for Gentile Christians. It has been suggested that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch because it was the first integrated congregation in the world. It was the first group of believers who put into practice the lack of racial bias exemplified by Jesus. They were the first to "love one another" to the extent that Christ had intended. Not just people with whom they related because they had similar background and experience, but all people regardless of their background. The church in Antioch stands out in the spotlight of divine history as an honorable example for all. If we are to be called "Christian" we too should love all men as they did, and as Jesus did.

We have scanned the pages of New Testament Scripture and shown that love is an integral part of apostolic teaching. The Scriptures are strangely silent about attendance drives and contests. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one to another.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Eleven

1. Were the New Testament Epistles written to Christians or non Christians?
2. What was the purpose of these letters?
3. Do we have any basic problems today which are not mentioned in the Scriptures?
4. If an inspired apostle were writing to your church, what do you think he would say?
5. "Fellowship" to us often means only "cookies and kool-aid." What did it mean to the Christians of the First Century?
6. There are many references in the Scriptures to "love for the saints." (Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:4; II Thessalonians 1:3; Philemon 5; etc.) What does this expression mean?

7. What does your church do that could be classified as "love for the saints"?
8. Name several areas of need among the saints which are not being met.
9. Which is more important, social justice or Christian unity?
10. Can a church be segregated and still be "Christian"?