

The Greatest of These

By: Phillip Hayes

*“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;
but the greatest of these is charity”*

[1Corinthians 13:13]

As each of us journey through life on this earth, we are faced with many trials, tribulations, temptations, and heartaches. No matter if you or a saint or sinner, life in general is hard. Everyone makes mistakes. In most cases restitution and reconciliation is attempted, sometimes with success, but most times without.

During the course of my ministry I have experienced rejection, betrayal, heartbreak, jealousy, envy, strife, bitterness, and hatred. The majority of these things did not come from worldly people, but from people that professed to be Christians.

I have witnessed the destruction of many good Christian people, churches, and fellowships. Almost in every case where divisions were brought I saw Christians give themselves over to vile things that God hates. Of all the things that God hates, there is one that I am sure tops the list; when someone sows discord among the brethren.

Proverbs 6 says, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" [Proverbs 6:16-19].

Many brothers and sisters are backslid today because of someone's condemning, judgmental spirit, or lying tongue. Many stay at home and won't go to church because of the emotional pain inflicted by a cold insensitive brother or sister in the Lord.

I have seen and heard of many churches being split because of jealousy among the preachers or silly doctrinal isms that gender strife, rather than edification. Petty bickering over if the saints should have foot washings or not. Disputing the Communion being spiritual or natural; practiced with wine or with grape juice? Debates over should we attend church on Saturday (the Sabbath) or Sunday? Should women wear their hair up or down; pants or dresses? Should men be allowed to have mustaches or beards? How short should the men wear their hair? Should they wear ties or not? Long sleeves, short sleeves, rings, jewelry, bright clothing, dull clothing, and on and on it goes . . . ! The rules of carnal men can go on forever!

While we struggle with one another, each trying to convince the other that he or she is right and everyone else is wrong, the whole world

continues to plunge into hell.

There is so little unity and love of the brethren among ministers that it is shameful. Among the churches I have ministered in over the years it was rare to hear someone speak well of other ministers of the Gospel. Brethren and sisters should be able to disagree without being disagreeable!

What is and what has been wrong? Why is there so much strife and bitterness among God's people? I believe the answer is a lack of real godly love for one another.

First Corinthians chapter thirteen, verse eight tells us what godly love is: *"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away"*. The Greek word translated Charity is *Agape* which is love unfeigned (godly love) and it never fails! This is the love Apostle Peter says a born again person has. *"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" [1Peter 1:22]*.

If God were gracious enough to allow me to know when my last service would be, what would my message be? Of all the subjects I could preach I would try to choose one that I felt was the most important to God and to the people. Would it be a thundering message on the judgment of God, or holiness, or perhaps water baptism? Maybe I could preach an end time message about the great

tribulation? Maybe a message on the resurrection; that's important! Of course I could talk about the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues, prophesy, miracles, signs and wonders. Perhaps I should preach about the coming great revival that I have always loved to preach about! What would be the most important to our Lord?

Children of God, if I knew for sure my end was at hand and I had only one more message to preach, it would be on love. For love is the Great Commandment! It was the commandment that our Lord gave us in the beginning; love God with everything within us and love our neighbor as ourselves.

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" [John 15:12-13].

If we loved one another as Jesus loved us, there would never be any division so great that it would divide us. I have told our local assembly many times that if we truly loved one another with godly love the enemy could never divide us and our church would never be split. Think about it! Loving one another so much that we could die for one another! The devil could never enter the heart of someone with this kind of love. There would never be a broken church, broken marriage, or broken home!

I believe that many have let their love wax cold which is a very dangerous thing. People don't seem to realize if they cannot forgive anyone that has done them wrong, God will not forgive them!

Consider these sobering words of Jesus: *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"* [Matthew 11:25-26].

Wouldn't it be horrible to go through your life hating someone, or not being able to forgive someone, all the while thinking that God has forgiven you when He has not!? You would make hell your home instead of Heaven! Love will empower you to forgive! The Bible says that love (*Charity*) will cover a multitude of sins! *"And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins"* [1Peter 4:8].

Unforgiveness is a great tool of the devil. If you fail to walk in the spirit and the enemy finds you walking in the flesh, he can easily make you feel justified in hating someone that has done you wrong.

I have found that you have to walk in love! If you are a Christian, you have love abiding in you. Loving God and the brethren is walking in the Spirit. If we walk in the spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The lust of the flesh is the opposite of the fruit of the spirit. The lust of the flesh is to envy, be jealous, to hate and strive. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"* [Galatians 5:22-23].

There is no law against these things of the Spirit! The Lord Jesus has told us to "love our enemies." How can we fulfill His commandment to love our enemies when we cannot love the brethren? The Apostle John was very bold when he said that you didn't know God if you didn't have love. Speaking in tongues is wonderful, but I have heard many speak in tongues that had very little, or no love for the brethren.

There are many scriptures that describe what love is. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 gives several definitions of love: *"Charity (LOVE) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [1 Corinthians 13: 4-7]*

When we search the scriptures we find that perfect love will cast out fear. *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" [1John 4:18].* We also find the scriptures telling us that God has not given us the spirit of fear, but love. *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" [2Timothy 1:7].*

We know that love comes from God, for God is love! God gave us His kind of love when He saved us! We have it but you must walk in it!

God gave His only begotten Son that we might be saved; therefore He loved us and forgave

us while we were still sinners! Therefore, if we have the love of God in us, we should forgive those that trespass against us and mistreat us, or talk about us, even though they continue to do these things. Did not the Lord Jesus command us to walk in this kind of love? *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" [Matthew 5:44].* Jesus went on to say, *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."*

There are many that want to be perfect because they believe they will then have the same power that Jesus had. Mt friend, you will never attain unto perfection unless you walk in God's love.

Many Christians today cannot get along with one another for two or three services a week, let alone love one another on a continual basis. It is shocking how saints of God will attack one another most times over nothing. Let a rumor start, and I guarantee you that before the day is out, it will be broadcast all over the country. And usually by the time the rumor is told by three or four people it is so twisted that it doesn't resemble in any way the first story told. The Bible has a name for people that do these things: Backbiters and Gossipers!

However, if you have the love of God, you will not rejoice in iniquity, you will not think evil of your brother or sister, you will not be easily provoked, you will be kind and long suffering, you will pray for them that despitefully use you, you

will do good to them that hate you, and you will love your enemies. Oh, love of God! This is what we need to walk in children of God!

Can you imagine a body of believers coming together with this kind of love?! The enemy wouldn't have a chance to destroy anyone! Our love for God and for one another would never allow the enemy to destroy our unity.

Look at yourself today. Do you still have trouble forgiving someone that has done you wrong? Oh, you might say, "I have forgiven him or her." But have you really? Do you still love that person? Do you still talk to that person or do you avoid that person? Not only are we supposed to forgive, we must demonstrate our forgiveness. Never forget, Jesus said, *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* [Matthew 6:14-15]

Several years ago, the Lord spoke to me and told me that His people would have to come to the place that they loved each other as much as they loved Him. I believe the time is now!

We are all being tried! You will have enemies! You will have people that lie about you, and use you. You will have people that will cheat you, rob you, and attack you in every way imaginable. But remember, these things must come! How can you ever enjoy the fruit of forgiveness if you never have anyone to forgive?

Love is the only resource you have to draw forgiveness from! Without love, you will never be

able to forgive! Without love, you will always be the one that the enemy can use to destroy others.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" [1John 4:7-8].

John also said, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 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 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 3:14-18].*

This is how we should love: *in deed and in truth!* Giving to one another, sharing with one another, feeding one another, clothing one another, visiting one another, building one another up, encouraging one another, commending one another, forgiving one another, and yes, *dying for one another.*

Love is the missing ingredient! Loving one another in the same manner Jesus loved us. Wouldn't it be wonderful! Never condemning one another. Never speaking evil of one another. Always having something good to say about your brother, your sister, your minister, and your

church.

You know, my mother always told us, "If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything." Oh, if we would all live by this rule, what a difference it would make. Gossip use to be a sin!

Folks, you can't change the past, but you can change your future! If you have any bitterness against anyone, I ask you now to please ask God to help you forgive. Bitterness will grow in you and become hatred if you allow it. There is no one worth going to hell over. We have all been hurt, and yes we must all confess that we have brought pain to others, whether intentional or not, it matters not. Forgiveness will bring revival to your soul, and love is the key to forgiveness. If God forgave you for all the wrong you have done in your life, why should you not be able to forgive those that have hurt you. And remember, you are also guilty of hurting others! Yes you have, take responsibility, admit it! It's imperative that you deal with your innermost feelings.

Let us love one another! Let us forgive one another! This will bring a true revival to your life, your home, your church and the world. Frankly, I believe without love, we will never experience a real God sent revival.

Forgiving others will free you from hatred and bitterness. I pray our Lord Jesus Christ will give you the grace to love and forgive. Discover the peace you will have by living a life of forgiveness. Forgive and you will be forgiven!