



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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**Volume 18 Issue 29**

**August 11, 2019**

### **Love of the Brethren Part 2**

A most helpful and important passage of Scripture is Revelation 2-3 which contains Christ's message to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. What makes this teaching so crucial is that while each of the messages were intended for seven different churches that existed at the time of the writing of Revelation, nevertheless it is well understood that each of these churches represent seven types of Churches found throughout the interadventual period. John describes Christ's work as He tends His church,

Revelation 1:10-13a, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands [which represents NOT just the seven churches, BUT all the churches of this age]; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man...”

Furthermore, we see it in the admonition given to each church:

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In this regard, it is interesting to note the types of churches that are in the world today.

- The Loveless Church: Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)
- The Persecuted Church: Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)
- The Worldly Church: Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)
- The Church Indulging in Baalism/Mysticism: Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)
- The Dead Church: Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)
- The Healthy Church: Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)
- The Apostate Church: Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

Which church are we?

Secondly, notice how this section is organized. John/God addressed the churches in a circular progression presuming the one who delivered the letters began in Ephesus. Consider the map,

Thirdly, while John could have started with any church, God deigned to begin with Ephesus. Was it because it was the only port city? No, Smyrna also was a port city. I believe God started with Ephesus because of the nature of its problem. Ephesus struggled when it came to love, which is a big deal!<sup>1</sup>



Matthew 22:34-40, “But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “You shall

love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

In commenting on this verse, Jack Miller wrote:

Under God’s direction from Jesus, we learn that the heart of obedience is to love others... It’s easy to externalize our religion. We go to church regularly, we pray, we fast, we tithe, we do everything that is required of the religious person, and as a result we congratulate ourselves. But the very heart of the law is a call for us to be merciful. Do you love others? Do you love God? Have you missed that what God desires is that in all your relationships you be touched by a spirit of compassion, that you be merciful in your basic approach to people?

In light of this it is little wonder that one of the first exhortations Peter gave in this epistle (to the churches of Asia Minor suffering severe persecution) was that of love! When the pressure is on, it is easy to revert to living in the flesh. And so rather than loving each other, the churches at this time were at risk of “biting and devouring” each other (cf. Galatians 5:15). And so as of first priority, Peter exhorted them (and us by application) to “love one another fervently from the heart.”

Now the only way they and we can do this is if we take our focus off of ourselves, our surroundings, and so our path, and place it on the Lord: honoring Him, loving Him, knowing Him, and serving Him. The more you enjoy the love of God, the more of that love you will be able to share with others!

John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

All of that brings us to the glory of loving the brethren.

Do you have any idea the blessing that awaits us if set aside the hostility or bitterness that we might have toward another believer and love them? Notice the text.

1 Peter 1:22, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for [εις (*eis*)-unto] a sincere love of the brethren...”

In the Bible, there are a variety of ways to denote “to” or “for”- the two most common ways is with the preposition *σ πρός* (*pros*) or *ἐπί* (*epi*). The word used here, *εις* (*eis*), can be translated as “for.” However, the root definition is “to” or “unto.” In this regard, it is a special word for it denotes more than simply movement toward something, but the indulging in or the enjoyment of something.

Consider Death Valley.

Death Valley (between Nevada and California) is one of the hottest and driest places on the

earth. Its average rainfall is 2.36 inches a year. It has the record for the highest, verified ambient temperature on the face of the earth — 134 degrees back in 1913. In 1972, the surface temperature got to 201 degrees. Now imagine inventing a device that could water this valley with as much water as we might like. At first we'd go slowly so that soil wouldn't be washed away. In the span of ten years, this desert could resemble a tropical climate if we added enough water.

Now if we later wrote, "We invented a device that we might transform Death Valley "unto" life (εἰς [*eis*]) that would NOT denote the FACT of the transformation, BUT the enjoyment of it. That our machine was εἰς (*eis*) life would imply the enjoyment of it; fully submerging ourselves into this paradise on earth. Laying under the stars in the plush, green valley where now wildlife was in abundance and the days as well as the nights were mild.

This is the idea behind εἰς (*eis*)! That our text says that we have been regenerated "εἰς (*eis*) a sincere love of the brethren" indicates that this love of the brethren is something that we not only cognitively understand, BUT something that we fully indulge in, embrace, and so enjoy! In this regard, you must see that this is an important statement on the part of Peter, telling us two things:

One of the reasons God saved us was to bring us into a holy communion, NOT ONLY with Himself, BUT with each other! He wants us to resemble the Godhead who enjoy perfect unity/harmony/love!

John 17:20-21, "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me."

It is "unto" this unity of love that we have been saved! This no doubt is why it is through our love that "...all men will know that we are His disciples" (John 13:35)! Paul is so strong when it came to disunity in the body.

1 Corinthians 6:7b, "...Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" — than to compromise our love before a watching world.

That we have been saved "unto the love of the brethren" tells us something rather important: fulfillment — realizing that for which we have been redeemed — comes NOT when we get what we want in life, BUT as we give ourselves to the Lord and to each other. When we do this, we realize in our lives today a little more of the heaven God has deigned to grant us in Christ! And that most certainly is "Glorious."

Speaking of the call of widows to minister to the body of Christ rather than live to please themselves, Paul said this:

1 Timothy 5:6, "But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives."-

Paul was NOT calling into question the salvation of any of the widows in Ephesus, BUT that which they would reap if they chose to live for themselves. And what would that be? NOT eternal death, BUT the death of their well-being! When a person neglects the love of the body and lives for themselves, the pleasure they seek ultimately will elude them. Instead they will reap in their lives death! In contrast, listen to the words of David which are sung by God's people as they approach the temple to worship:

Psalms 133:1-3, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing- life forever."

When a priest was commissioned unto the service of the Lord, joy and gladness permeated the occasion. Because of the dew from Mount Hermon which daily descended upon Palestine, the Land of Promise could be called "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8)! That is what "love of the brethren" is to a local body of believers!

So not only is "love" the chief command for any church body or Christian, but it is a command that comes with healing, satisfaction, fulfillment, and joy! You say, "You mean to tell me after all that so-and-so did to me, I'm supposed to forgive them and love them? What about me and what they have done to me?" Yes, you are to forgive them, and you are to love them- so much so that your love "covers a multitude of their sin" (1 Peter 4:8)! But if you do not, the momentary delight you might have in holding a grudge against the one who hurt you will in the end rot your soul! The word used in the Bible for this is "bitterness" which is a sin that severely hurts NOT the other person, BUT only the person who indulges in this sin!

So truly before us is life and death (so to speak). We can love the unlovely and enjoy "life indeed" or we can withhold our love and become a bitter, broken Christian!

This raises an important question: how relevant is this command? Peter/God gave it so long ago... does it still apply to us today? Will this be true of us?

## The Applicability of this Calling

1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again [once again a perfect tense which tells us that Peter's focus here is on the continuing effects of the gospel in the lives of the believer] not of seed which is perishable but imperishable..."

Peter first has in mind the natural process of reproduction in which a child is conceived in the womb, develops, is born... only, in the end, to die!<sup>2</sup> In the words of Spurgeon, every newborn has, "...received the evil virus that was first infused into us by the fall." (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 1:23)

In contrast, those who have been born again in Christ, enjoy a life that is “imperishable” which speaks of something that does NOT die. The life that God implants in us at regeneration — the “seed” — can and so will never perish BUT will endure into and throughout eternity! That is why “eternal life” is best understood NOT as ceaseless existence, BUT “life pertaining to the age to come.” When you and I were “born again” we began living the life which we shall forever enjoy in the New Heavens and Earth! Of this Spurgeon wrote this:

When we are born again, we receive a nature that is indestructible..., which is not to be consumed by fire, drowned by water, weakened by old age, or smitten down by blast of pestilence. A nature invulnerable to poison. A nature that shall not be destroyed by the sword. A nature that can never die... (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 1:23)

Now, what in part constitutes this “imperishable life”? As we saw last time, it includes the glorious call of “love”- loving God and so loving each other! As that is the case, the call to love the loveless, the one who has and maybe even continues to hurt us even to this day, will never end or be inapplicable! And why is that? Because we have been “born again.”

1 Peter 1:23, “...through the living and abiding word of God.”

In the beginning God generated life through His word.<sup>3</sup> In redemption God REgenerates life also through His word which is described as “living and abiding.” Now because it is “living and abiding,” God’s word will indeed never perish, never cease, and therefore never be out of vogue! To this end, Peter quoted Isaiah 40:6b-8 to strengthen his argument.

1 Peter 1:24-25a, “For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off [from the common ‘grass’ to the delicate and valued ‘flower’ ... everything in this creation perishes], but the word of the Lord abides forever.’”

In Isaiah 40, the focus is on the promise that God would restore His people from exile. As such, the “grass” and the “flower” were used there in reference to the nations surrounding Israel — both the bad and the good. Yet in time both would come to an end, BUT the word of God’s promise concerning their restoration would never change! In our text Peter took this and used it in light of the gospel call of brotherly love. Accordingly, “the grass withers and the flower fades” — everything in life changes (how especially so amongst a persecuted people)- “but the word of the Lord [which calls us unto love and devotion to one another] will abide forever!” That is the idea here! Now you talk about encouraging as well as inspiring! It is as the Hebrew writer wrote:

Hebrews 6:17-18a, “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath [IOW, God gave His word], in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement...”

Do you see how relevant — how applicable — this call is here? Though it was given now 2,000 years ago, it is as relevant and applicable as the day it was given!

What a contrast to the laws and commands pertaining to this world. When they were made, no doubt they served a purpose. But given enough time and change, many if not all of them wilt into obscurity. Consider laws that are still on the books in this land:

- If you are driving at night through rural parts of Pennsylvania, state law still requires that you stop every mile to send up a rocket signal.
- In Michigan, a bride's hair is the legal property of her husband and as such it is illegal for a married woman to get a hair cut without the permission of her husband.
- In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania it is illegal for a housewife to hide dirt under any rug or carpet.
- In Hartford, Connecticut it is against the law to educate dogs in the city limits.
- In Cleveland, Ohio women are not allowed to wear patent leather shoes in public.
- In Norman, Oklahoma, it is illegal to tease a dog by making ugly faces at it.
- In Memphis, Tennessee, women can't drive a car unless there is a man with a red flag in front of the car warning the other people on the road. (Morrow, 2019)

Now we might laugh at these laws. Yet that laughter oft-times spills over to more serious laws. Such that today in many places, laws are looked upon with levity and even disdain. If we do not like them, provided we think we can get away with it, we don't observe them!

Yet, and this Peter's point, such is NOT an option when it comes to the "love the brethren." This is a law which will "never wither or fade into obsolescence." It is a law that will govern our relationship for the rest of eternity — which is why he ends with the statement, "And this is the word which was preached to you." Contained in the gospel — and therefore any preaching of the gospel — is the implicit call to love God and love the brethren. This flows from the nature of God. God asked of His people a very important question:

Jeremiah 22:16, "'He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?' declares the Lord."

And therefore, we can say our highest calling as servants of God is that of love.

Matthew 9:13, "But go and learn what *this* means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' [a quote from Hosea 6:6] for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

What, practically speaking, does Hosea 6:6 mean for us on a day-to-day basis? As Reformed people, we love the idea of worship... how our chief end is to glorify God! And so, we glory in our theology which from start to finish is God-centered!

Yet what does Christ say here? As important as worship is (and honestly, there is nothing more

important), in our relationship with each other we must functionally live as if compassion/love/grace were more important! That is how important love must be in our lives!

And so NOT ONLY are we personally blessed when we take our focus off of ourselves and place it on God and so His people, BUT the call to love the brethren is an activity you will engage in for the rest of eternity. From this perspective, consider while everyone has their “Alexander the Coppersmiths” who have “done them much harm” (2 Timothy 4:14), if they are brothers or sisters in the Lord, you are going to spend eternity not only with them but loving them. As that is the case AND knowing that NOT to love them here is to harm your walk with God, it behooves us to respond to the passage before us with the words and the willingness of Isaiah, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8b)



## Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Recall Christ's words to His disciples in Jn. 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."- on the surface, this is a confusing statement. Christ here gives a new command... what is "new" about it? The OT stresses the love of the brethren! By "new" Christ does NOT mean "as in time" BUT "as in priority."

If in the OT you inquired of a Jew as to the most important commands of Judaism, while they could have said "Love" nevertheless the answer undoubtedly would have been to quote the ten commandments! Yet here Christ essentially said, "As love is the fulfillment of all commandments, the priority when it comes to your Christian walk must therefore be love: Love for God and Love for one another." That no doubt is why God began His exhortation to the Seven Churches taking on the issue of love!

<sup>2</sup> Everything that grows from natural seeds is a sovereign creation of God (Gen. 1:11-12), BUT it eventually dies (Is. 40:8; Jam. 1:10-11). Yet that is NOT the case when it comes to salvation.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Gen. 1; Ps. 33:6, 9; Rom. 4:17; Jn. 1:3; Is. 40:26.