

Message Four

Building in Love

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:3; 2:3-11; 4:7-8; John 15:8-12, 16-17; 21:15-17; 1 Cor. 14:1, 3, 26b; 8:1b; Eph. 4:16; Rev. 3:7

I. The church life is a life of brotherly love—4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17; Rev. 3:7; Eph. 5:2; cf. Jude 12a:

- A. In order to maintain the divine fellowship for the church life, we need to love the brothers; if we lose our brotherly love and if we no longer love one another, the church life will disappear; actually, brotherly love is the church life—1 John 1:3; 2:3-11.
- B. Just as the Lord Jesus laid down His soul-life so that we might have the divine life, we need to lose our soul-life and deny the self to love the brothers and minister life to them in the practice of the Body life—1 John 3:16; John 10:11, 17-18; 15:13; Eph. 4:29—5:2; 2 Cor. 12:15; Rom. 12:9-13.
- C. Brotherly love in the church life is expressed practically in our caring for the necessities of the needy saints without any self-serving purpose or outward self-display; in the sharing of material things with the needy saints, the grace of the Lord's life with His love flows among the members of the Body of Christ and is infused into them—1 John 3:17-18; Matt. 6:1-4; Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:1-7.

II. The Body of Christ builds up itself in love—Eph. 4:16c:

- A. Today we need to grow in love, and we also need to build up the Body in love; we love the Lord, we love the church, and we love every member:
 - 1. Regardless of how weak certain members may be or even how evil they may be, we love them because they are members.
 - 2. Our attitude should be that we do not like to expose them; we desire instead to cover them in love; this is growth, and this is building.
 - 3. The building up of the Body of Christ is in love; when all the members love one another, the Body of Christ can be built up—v. 16.
- B. The branches of the vine love one another to express the divine life in fruit-bearing—John 15:16-17:
 - 1. In John 15:17 the Lord commands us to love one another; this is to love one another in the Lord's life, the divine life, in the Lord's love, and in His commission of fruit-bearing—v. 17, note 1:
 - a. Life is the source, love is the condition, and fruit-bearing is the goal.
 - b. If we all live by the Lord's life as the source, in the Lord's love as the condition, and for fruit-bearing as the goal, we surely will love one another.
 - 2. The secret to our bearing fruit and having the fruit remain is seen in John 15:16-17:
 - a. If we intercede for one another and love one another, verses 16 and 17 will be fulfilled among us; if we are joined to Christ, are in His name, are joined to the Father, and love the brothers and sisters, we are the proper persons.
 - b. It is not sufficient for brothers and sisters only to be joined to God and to be in Christ while they preach the gospel fervently and endeavor to carry out home meetings to bear remaining fruit; if there is no mutual love among all the brothers and sisters, the impact will be diminished.
- C. According to John 21:15-17, after restoring Peter's love toward Him, the Lord Jesus charged him, saying, "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep":

1. Here, to feed the lambs is to nourish them with the riches of the inner life; to feed others, we need to enjoy the riches of the Lord's divine life; this requires that we love Him; to believe in the Lord is to receive Him; to love the Lord is to enjoy Him.
 2. Although we have already received the Lord, we still need to love Him:
 - a. We should tell the Lord that we love Him every day, morning and evening; it is good to pray each morning, "Lord, I still love You. I love You more today than yesterday."
 - b. No other kind of prayer will stir us up as much as telling the Lord that we love Him.
 - c. After the day has passed, when we get into bed, we should say, "Lord Jesus, now that this day has passed, I tell You that I still love You. I love You. I love You more than anything."
 - d. The more we tell the Lord that we love Him, the more He will show us how lovely He is until we realize that He is altogether lovely.
 3. The Lord loves His lambs and His sheep, and He is very concerned for them; if we love Him, we should love them.
 4. To bear fruit is a matter of abiding, and to feed the lambs is a matter of loving; we have to abide in the Lord that we may bear fruit, and we have to love the Lord that we may have a heart to take care of His flock.
- D. First Corinthians 14:1 says, "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy":
1. This charge is based on the revelation in 12:31—13:13; to pursue love is to seek after growth in life for the development of the gifts in life; hence, it must be matched with an earnest desire for the most profitable gift, the gift of prophecy.
 2. Paul's intention in chapter 14 is to help the believers realize that the main thing we need to take care of in our meetings is the building up of the church.
 3. Chapter 13 exalts love, but 14:1 indicates that love must be matched with prophesying for the sake of the building up of the church.
 4. Since to prophesy is to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord, that is, to minister Christ to people, which is the main element in the church meeting, prophesying requires the divine life to fill it as its content:
 - a. Love is the most excellent way to experience the divine life and make it the content of the gift of prophecy for the building up of the church.
 - b. Hence, we must pursue love and desire earnestly this greater gift.

III. The characteristic of the overcomers in Philadelphia is their brotherly love; love prevails among them so that they shepherd people according to God (1 Pet. 5:2) by cherishing them with the cheering presence of God and nourishing them with the healthy teaching of the economy of God (Eph. 4:11; 5:29; Acts 20:28):

- A. The Lord's recovery with Philadelphia is a recovery in quality, a recovery of the original substance of the church, the inner substance of God, which is love (1 John 4:8); to stand on the genuine ground of oneness, the ground of the church, is to choose to love all the brothers (Rev. 3:7a; cf. 2:4, 7).
- B. The Lord's recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus; the overcomers in Philadelphia stand on the genuine ground of oneness and keep themselves in the love of God to love the Lord and love all the brothers—Jude 20-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; John 12:3; Luke 7:47; 1 John 3:14-16; cf. Psa. 133.
- C. In order to minister life to others and maintain our victory for the building up of the church, we must have a revived living and a labor in shepherding that flow out from our love for the Lord and for the brothers—John 21:15-17.