

THE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

SERMON preached by Mr. H. Dawson, at Union Chapel, Bethersden, on Sunday Morning, January 25th, 1959

1 John 3: 14. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

The governing principle in the church of Christ should be: "Let brotherly love continue." The hall-mark of the religion that is of God, which alone will do to live by and die by, is love. "The fruit of the Spirit is love," and godly John, who was the Apostle of love, made love the main theme in his ministry. I have told you often that every man who God sends to preach is given his own especial line of things in which he is most of all at home in preaching. Some are helped to set forth doctrine, and others can define gracious experience, and some contend for godly practice. Godly John had his theme of love, and this first Epistle of John is full of it. "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." The word I have read for the subject is one that is often quoted, and it is a sure evidence of being born again if you and I possess it. We know, and something must be known and felt. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I would, as the Lord shall help me, look at the subject from three viewpoints. One is Translation. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." The second viewpoint is Transformation. If you and I are born again, then, by the grace of God, you and I will be transformed. What one is by nature will be subjugated, what one is by grace will be uppermost, and govern our lives, and this will be the evidence that "we love the brethren." Then there will be the third viewpoint, and that is Testimony. If you and I do love the brethren, it will be made manifest that we do. What

a great mercy if this knowledge has been granted to some of us, so that, as we are here in the attitude of worship, our great concern is to be one with God, and one with each other in this brotherly love, which does continue wherever grace is found.

"Thus may we abide in union
With each other, and the Lord;
And possess in sweet communion
Joys which earth cannot afford."

Let us then, as the Lord shall help us, contemplate this subject, and look at this translation that is made plain in the text: "We have passed from death unto life." The Apostle Peter speaks about this translation:- "a peculiar people", having "passed from death unto life", and the evidence is "out of darkness, into His marvellous light." Then Paul speaks about it to the Church at Colosse: "And hath translated us out of the kingdom of darkness, into the Kingdom of God's dear Son." You and I must know what that translation is, otherwise you have no evidence, worth the name, that you belong to God's people; and many of you do desire to be found amongst them, living and dying. The text gives us a sure evidence that you do belong to God's people: "We know" says godly John. Sometimes, this evidence the text adduces, is rather minimised and underestimated by some, and there are those who will tell you that, while it is an evidence, you must have much more to be quite sure that things are right between God and you. It will be well to heed what the text tells us. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren," and, if that love is born in you, you will want to go on, following on to know the Lord, until you can declare: "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." "We know", says godly John; and, if that evidence is possessed by you, then you know what this blessed translation is. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." The love of the brethren, - to love them for who they are, and to love them for what they are; - and what you

love in them is what you see there is of God, and His grace, manifest in their lips and lives, and this bespeaks you to be one of them. Now I want to amplify this translation, and give you some evidences whereby you may know - some of you desire to know - that you have "passed from death unto life." The text tells us of two states. One is death, and the other is life. Death! In that state every one is found in coming into the world, being the sinner that he or she is. "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins", the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus, and that is the meaning of the state of death the text tells us about. The people referred to, were "dead in trespasses and sins", in the world, and of it, and living their lives "after the flesh, the things of the flesh"; they were dead Godward, and their attitude was: "We will not have this Man to reign over us." "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thee, or Thy ways." Very solemn it is to look round the world, and see the state wherein all mankind is - a state of death, enmity to God, and godliness. I would like to think that some of you look round at times and feel a concern about it, a sorrow that it is so, that the world does lie in wickedness, like it does, and the wicked are doing wickedly. What a great mercy if you and I have been made to differ from the world at large; if we do "know that we have passed from death unto life"; if there is deep down in us an aching void which the world cannot fill. Death! It means to be dead under the Law. The Word of God tells us: "Now we know what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom.3.19) I will make that plain, as God shall help me. The meaning is that every sinner beneath the sun, as a creature, owes to God as his Creator, under the Law, what the Law demands. "Pay me that which thou owest." "Do this, do that; do not do this, do not do that." Obedience to that Law should be rendered by every creature under heaven, but the great majority of

mankind are "dead" as to the state in which they are born under the Law; and they have no concern whatever to render unto their Creator what is due to Him from them as His creatures; but, when a sinner is born again, he becomes aware of it. If I can make it plain (it is difficult to get right words to do it), in passing from death unto life, he becomes aware of the state he is in, and his being dead under the Law as he was born. If you can understand it, - it becomes a paradox, - he becomes alive to the truth that he is dead. He is conscious of the death, - the state in which he was born; and he realises he is under the Law, a debtor to God, as His creature, owing to God, his Creator, a life of obedience to all that the Law demands. A very solemn experience it is, when a sinner is born again, and he is made aware of what his state is before God under the Law. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin." "Pay me that which thou owest", saith the Law to the sinner under it.

"Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought,
Lacking naught
Fearless of rejection."

Now, the sinner whose case I am describing, is in real earnest about his soul, - he is born again, he wants to be alive unto God; but, all he knows in his soul's experience as yet is the death of the state in which he was born, and that he is under the Law, guilty before God, helpless to do what the Law demands, and hopeless of it ever being done. Death! It means that he is brought at length to accept the punishment of his iniquity, and to say "Amen" to his condemnation, being the sinner that he is, as he was born, and as he has lived hitherto. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." (Isa.130.3,4) The sinner now comes to that place I have already referred to; "all the world may become guilty before God, and every mouth be stopped;" and this sinner realising how he was born, and what he is as a sinner, his helplessness, his hopelessness under the Law, has to confess:-

"If my soul to hell,
Thy righteous Law approves it well."

Death! But he is to pass from that death unto life. He is a sinner born again, and the Holy Spirit will bring that sinner, having taught him somewhat of what he is by nature as a sinner, led him into the truth of it, taught him to confess it, and put his mouth in the dust of self-abasement, if so be there may be hope, - the Holy Spirit will bring that sinner to be under the Gospel, where he will find life.

"Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' Blood
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret Love of God."

"We know that we have passed from death unto life". The sinner is brought before Calvary's Cross, and there he is made to understand that blessed, bedrock truth: "I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," (John 11.25). The evidence that the sinner is born again is made plain: "Behold, he prayeth," and that is a sure evidence that "he has passed from death unto life" when he is found knocking at Mercy's door: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." "We know that we have passed from death unto life." I will shew you, as grace is given, some characteristics of this life, that a sinner, who has "passed from death unto life", will be living. First of all, it will be a life of separation from the world. The sinner born again having "passed from death unto life" is alive to what the world is, the nature of it, the spirit of it, and he can no longer settle down in it, and be of it, but he desires to be "dead to this world, and alive to that which is to come." He finds :-

"I cannot here contented live
With all the dainties earth can give."

It is made plain in the life he lives that he is separated from the world: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Heb.11.25) A life of separation, and it is also a life of dependence. Man would, if he could, be independent of God. Men now-a-days, in the world at large, are doing all they can to be independent of God, if it were possible for man so to be, but, the day is not far off, when God will make it plain, Who He is, and what men are, who fight against His truth. Sinners taught of God, who have "passed from death unto life", have to live a life of dependence on God, and so you find in the Word of God, words like these: "Pray without ceasing." "Continuing instant in prayer:" "Praying always:" "Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" "Leaning, moves along", - dependent on God. Oh, that lesson is learned: "In Him we live and move and have our being;" and it is good when grace is given to live that life of dependence; "The just shall live by faith." Says the Apostle Paul: "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." A life of dependence upon God when understood aright is a beautiful life to live. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil.4.6) A life of dependence; - the Hymnwriter sums it up in beautiful language:-

"Ever on thy Captain calling,
Make thy worst condition known;
He shall hold thee up when falling,
Or shall lift thee up when down."

A life of dependence on God is the life that these people in the text are enabled to live. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." I might add that life of dependence upon God is essential. You cannot live the life of the righteous without Divine Aid, the thing is impossible. "The preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps"; no. It is good when faith is given, and the sinner who has "passed from death unto life" can realise his dependence upon God.

"He, Who has made my heaven secure,
Will here all good provide,
While Christ is rich, I can't be poor,
What can I want beside."

"They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." Much might be said under that heading. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." This life will be a life of conflict. As soon as a sinner is born again, he is made aware of it by how he feels within. He feels a kind of tug-of-war beginning, a conflict; he is still what he is by nature, and that will be turbulent, and fight to have the ascendancy. As he has "passed from death unto life", he has another principle within, for godly fear has been communicated, and that will resist what the sinner desires to be by nature. "The fear of the Lord is clean," and what one is by nature is unclean, and so there are ~~these~~ two opposing principles. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." (Gal.4.17). There is this conflict: "I would do good, but evil is present with me." "What will ye see in the Shulamite, as it were a company of two armies?" You will

find in your everyday life, if you belong to the brethren the text tells us about, that, when you come to the end of the day, you are often brought low in your soul's experience through the conflict going on within you; - between what you are by nature, and what you would be by grace superabounding over it; and you come, oh, so short therein; - sins in thought, word, and deed, testify against you; and, at the end of the day, there is but one place for you to be found in: "God be merciful to me a sinner." "We know that we have passed from death unto life". This life will also be a life of communion. You cannot live without communion with God, if you belong to the people that are in the text, you desire to have to do with God, and also that God shall have to do with you. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." "Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me." "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people, O visit me with Thy salvation." A life of communion, - you cannot live without it, if you have "passed from death unto life." You want to live a life of prayer. You cannot always put into words what you feel, yet the Psalmist speaks like this: "I commune with mine own heart;" and he says again: "I poured out my soul in me", and you will know what that line of things is, if you belong to the brethren. Many a sigh, and cry, and groan will ascend, many a wish; many a longing, many a hope, and sometimes just words: "Lord, help me:" "Lord, save or I perish," and so you live a life of communion. "We know that we have passed from death unto life." If you and I have "passed from death unto life", then the life you and I must be living, God will ordain to be a life of sanctification. It is a great word: "This is the Will of God, your sanctification"; and that means, if you belong to the brethren, God has ordained a life that you shall live. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way." God has ordained a niche for you to fill, a sphere wherein He will place you. You read in the Word of God, concerning His people: "And I will place them. (Ezek. 37.26) I have thought on that word many times, and it will be well if you and I can realise grace all-sufficient to be content to be where God

has placed us. You desire to see the cloud move in God's dealings with you, and then, where the cloud stays, is where your place will be, and where God places you, you will have to live unto God, live for God. A life of sanctification.

"This prayer, and this ambition mine,
Living and dying to be Thine."

Do you ever find in your heart any concern to live such a life, any exercise unto godliness to be shut up to God in the life you live? Did you ever say "Amen" to the Hymnwriter's petition:-

"O Lord, I would seek the charms of Thy mind,
The grace to be meek, and lowly, and kind;
Forbearing, forgiving, and loving always,
And only be living to publish Thy praise?"

A life of sanctification. "Ye are My witnesses", the Word of God declares. "This people have I formed for Myself, they shall shew forth My praise." Translation. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Let us look a little at the second viewpoint, which is Transformation. Enemies to truth, wrought upon, and now loving the truth, concerned to live it, and desiring to heed the hymnwriter's words:

"Hoard up the Sacred Word,
And feed thereon and grow;
Go on to seek to know the Lord,
And practice what you know."

They are designated "brethren" and that means God's dear people make up one

family; "Of Whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named"; Jesus Christ, the Elder Brother, and all within the Church, brethren and sisters. "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus." "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; irrespective of any denominational label whatever; remember that! Brethren, bound together in a bond which is for time and eternity too, the bond of love:-

"Love is the golden chain that binds
The favoured souls above;
And he's a heir of heaven who finds
His bosom glow with love."

The Word of God says - I would have you heed it - : "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." You will understand that there is a distinction between the unity of the spirit and uniformity. There is not uniformity in church order in "the church of Christ possessing" beneath the sun, - not yet. Not uniformity in church order, but there is unity of spirit. You may meet a man, a woman, who carries a different denominational label to what you do, but when they speak about the dealings of God with their souls, and say: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul"; - when that word is fulfilled, you find you come together in the things of God; you are one in heart; the unity of the spirit is known. As I have quoted: "He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit". You should aim for this "unity of the spirit", and not be too much concerned and cast down about the want of uniformity in church order that you would like to see. A day is coming when there will be uniformity and unity of the spirit, and all be one, when "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea"; then brotherly love will continue, as it should do, and as God ordained it to do. "That they may all be one", the dear Saviour prayed to God the Father in the "Holy of Holies" chapter in John's Gospel. Brethren, one in heart. You read: "I will

give them one heart, and one way;" and you will find that, whoever it is you get in touch with, when "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth is speaking", you "flow together to the goodness of the Lord," and the "unity of the spirit" is known, and it is a wonderful mercy to realise it. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I say just a little about this "unity of the spirit". There are some characteristics that will denote it, and evidence it, wherever it is known. In this "unity of the spirit" there is a unity of aim. Each one, every one has the same aim, to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit". The things of God first of all; to have in our lives, as we go on: "In the beginning God", one aim, the glory of God. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" and that is a characteristic of the brethren, whoever they are, wherever they are. One in aim, one in their desire to "win Christ and be found in Him". One in the knowledge that they desire to possess: "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." One in their souls' exercises: "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee, and let Thy judgments help me." Oh, they are one in their concern to live unto God, live for God, and shew Whose they are, and Whom they serve; and, I might add, they are one in spirit in their prayers, because there is no prayer indited by the Holy Spirit, but what every sinner, born of God hearing that prayer, will say "Amen" to it. Think it over, and look into the Word of God, and see some of the petitions recorded there, and you will find, if you belong to the brethren, that when you read the petitions that dropped from the lips of sinners taught of God long, long years ago, you find in your heart an "Amen". Think of the woman of Canaan: "Lord, help me", and how often you have said "Amen" to that petition, and taken up the same words to set forth what you feel, what you desire, "Lord, help me". They are one in their prayers, dear friends:-

"There is a spot where spirits blend"

is to describe it "blend";)

(a nice word that

"Where friend holds fellowship with friend,
Though sundered far, by faith we meet
Around one common" (blood-stained) "mercy-seat."

One in
their prayers, yes; and they are one in their praises. They are one in taking down their harps from the willow-branches and

"Loud to the praise of Christ, our God,
Bid every string awake."

"Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name." You read the words as the words of godly David, but when you read the words, you put emphasis upon the word "me". "Let all that is within me, bless His Holy Name." One in their praises, and they are one in their troubles too. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." When a man is born again, he is born to unusual troubles, unique troubles, troubles the man in the street knows not, for all his troubles are to do with time, but when a man is born again, he finds eternity comes into his life as a contemplation, and he knows then a new trouble, and that is soul-trouble. The Puritans tell us: "Soul-trouble is the soul of trouble". You find all these people who are brethren are one in their troubles, and their chief trouble is that they cannot be what they want to be in things divine, and live the life of the righteous as they desire to do; they cannot exhibit in their lips and life the godliness that they would do if they could. It is a trouble to them that they should be like Peter, who "followed afar off"; and that makes them one in spirit in desiring:-

"Nearer, nearer to Thee clinging,
Oh, may my helpless soul be found."

Not only so, all these brethren are one in the joys that they desire to know, and their joy is summed up in this: "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." You will find that each one of the brethren has got that estimate of joy. God gives to all His people, when they are born again, a standard of what joy is:

"Eternal Source of joys divine,
To Thee my soul aspires;
Oh, could I say: 'The Lord is mine',
'Tis all my soul desires."

What do you know, dear friends, young and old, about this wondrous, blessed transformation the text brings before us: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

I look just a little at the third viewpoint I named and that is Testimony. The text declares: "We love the brethren"; do we? It needs to be weighed up. It is far deeper down, dear friends, than that which is just social, or sentimental, it must be spiritual, or you will have "Tekel" stamped upon it, and be "weighed in the balances, and found wanting". Among the brethren you may be in the attitude of worship, but there must be the testimony of the love in your lips and life. Godly John declares: "We love the brethren", and he makes plain what is the standard of love: "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." When all is said and done, love is always

practical, and it can only live by loving. Love in word will not suffice, love must do. This love of the brethren has that characteristic :-

"Behold the Gospel plan,
Trust in the Lord,
With all your heart
And do what good you can."

Love will move the heart at times so that you may have a brother or sister impressed upon your mind as being in need of sympathy, succour, help, and love will move you to do what is in your heart to do; "And thou doest well to have it in thine heart to do it" and thus "Let brotherly love continue". The Word of God tells us much about love reduced to practice. You have only to think of Dorcas, and the garments which she made, which were the evidence of that love she was the subject of; think of Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, and out comes the love, and she says to the dear Apostles: "If ye have judged me to be faithful in the Lord, come into my house", you have come into my heart, "come into my house, and abide there", and love shall care for you, being who you are, servants of the living God. Look how it was demonstrated with the Philippian Jailer. Paul and Silas were in the stocks, and their feet were fast, and their backs were sore with stripes unjustly laid on, but the love of God enabled them to sing praises at midnight, and the prisoners heard them; and there was the Jailer - (God had a purpose to do that Jailer good for time and eternity too), - and there was an earthquake in the jail, and an earthquake in the Jailer's conscience, and he "passed from death unto life", and he came in trembling before the Apostles: "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved", and he did believe, and all his house. What happened? As soon as he believed God, out comes the love, and he takes Paul and Silas in to wash them, and shew them all the kindness that he could and to receive them, being who they were,

servants of the Living God. The Apostles received him as a brother, and his name was enrolled on the church-roll at Philippi, along side Lydia's, "whose heart the Lord opened", and there was the unity of the spirit: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Oh, that the Lord would help you to lay these things to heart, and pour down this love of the brethren in abundance amongst us, that it may be demonstrated in our own Cause, more and more: "Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Amen.

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