

GROWTH IN LOVE

(Third part of a symposium under the general heading “Development in Christlike Character”—Growth in Love by T. A. Smith, given at Langley, B.C., Canada convention, Saturday, May 24, 1975.)

We are going to develop our subject as Training For God’s Approval. Our Lord was pleased with his disciples because they were men that were honest and had a desire to be in harmony with God and who were inspired by the promises of God concerning the coming Kingdom which was to bless all nations through Israel. With the one exception of Judas, these were men that Jesus could work with and use as his apostles in the purposes and promotion of the Christian religion.

It is interesting to follow the history of these men as Jesus dealt with them. These disciples were faulty, but Jesus knew he had the right material character-wise, so he patiently instructed them so they could be useful in the work of the Christian religion. Let us review some of the episodes in the lives of the disciples and see how Jesus handled these weaknesses. As we study Jesus’ methods we learn from him what the spirit of love really is, and it is this spirit of love that is our topic.

In the 13th chapter of Matthew we find recorded a number of parables of our Lord. In V. 36 we read, “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.” Then Jesus responded and spent time with his disciples, patiently explaining one of the parables in particular, and he added a few more parables for them to ponder. Then Jesus said unto them (V. 51), “Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.” Then Jesus said (V. 52) “Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.”

In the 14th chapter of Matthew there is a record of Jesus walking upon the sea when it was the fourth watch of the night. “And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, it is a spirit; and they cried out in fear.” (V. 25, 26) We note the kind words of Jesus to the frightened disciples: “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” This was the time too, when Peter wanted to walk on the water to meet Jesus; but when the wind was boisterous, Peter was afraid and began to sink. “Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31)

In the 16th chapter of Matthew, Jesus was warning against the “leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” (V. 6) As the disciples had forgotten to bring bread along, they misunderstood Jesus and thought he was rebuking them for their forgetfulness, and as

they were talking about it Jesus perceived their misunderstanding and explained to them in a forceful manner that he referred to the false doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (V. 12) He did not reject them because of their obtuseness of mind, but instructed them—he knew the disciples were sincere and they had not yet penetrated into the deep reasonings of his teachings.

A little farther along in the chapter Jesus asked the disciples (V. 13) “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” After their reply, he asked, “But whom say ye that I am.” Peter’s reply was “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then our Lord rewarded Peter with words of commendation: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (V. 17)

It was at this time that Jesus began to “shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (V. 21) Peter took our Lord aside “and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” (V. 22) Then Jesus showed another facet of his character—whenever there was any suggestion that something be done contrary to the Truth or the will of God, Jesus acted promptly and with force. Our Lord turned “and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” This is an important facet to impress upon our minds deeply, as it represents a balanced character—God’s will and the Truth come first and personal friendship must not in any way interfere. We are confident that Peter learned this lesson well and made it a part of his own character structure.

In the 17th chapter of Matthew we have a record of the vision on the mount. The three disciples were deeply moved by what they saw and heard and “They fell on their faces and were sore afraid.” (V. 6) Jesus saw their condition and came to them “and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.” Jesus was always solicitous for the comfort and peace of his beloved disciples. We should take note of these characteristics of the Master, for we are supposed to become like him in practical love.

In the 18th chapter of Matthew, V. 1, we find the disciples asking Jesus a question “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This was a natural question for natural men to ask, and Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for asking the question, but he did see the necessity for teaching the disciples a lesson that would lift them up from their natural condition of selfish considerations to the proper state of humility: something new that they did not consider before—“Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, [yes, converted, changed] and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (V. 2 to 4)

In the 21st V. Peter came to the Lord and said, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” It is important to note what our Lord did not say—our Lord did not say: Peter, Peter, what is the matter with you? Don’t you know better than that—just seven times? We note how carefully Jesus treated his disciples—here was his answer to Peter: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.” (70 times 7 is 490 times.) Peter must have gasped at that—490 times?! What a lesson in mercy toward those who trespass against us and ask for forgiveness! So these incidents teach us what love really is.

In the 19th chapter we find that little children were brought to Jesus “that he should put his hands on them, and pray; and the disciples rebuked the parents for doing this.” (V. 13) But Jesus taught his disciples another important lesson in humility and showed incidentally his own kindly nature—“Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (V. 14) Jesus, in love for his disciples, taught them what they needed to understand. Near the end of chapter 19 of Matthew, we find Peter asking a question and it is interesting that there is no rebuke here. I think we could take this as an evidence that the Lord is pleased for us to be practical people—we are not to spend our lives on something that we have not carefully thought out as worthwhile. Our Lord answered Peter’s question in a matter-of-fact way, and included a wonderful inspiring promise. Peter asked “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you. That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in his throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (V. 27 to 29) We note how kind Jesus was when he instructed his disciples in the proper spirit to have.

In chapter 20, beginning with V. 20 we find Jesus, in love for his disciples, carefully teaching them another important lesson to assist them to rise above selfish considerations. The mother of Zebedee’s children requested that her two sons be granted a special position in the kingdom—one to sit on the right hand of the Master and the other one on the left. Jesus replied that it was not his province to decide such matters but the Father would place each one in his proper place in the Kingdom. The other ten disciples were indignant—perhaps they coveted choice places in the Kingdom themselves. So Jesus, patiently taught another lesson in humility to his beloved disciples. Jesus called the disciples unto him and said, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercised authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man

came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (V. 20 to 28) Our hearts go out to the Lord for his patient treatment of his disciples.

In the 26th chapter of Matthew we find a glaring imperfection manifested by the disciples—they were critical of a loving act on the part of the woman who poured some precious ointment upon the head of our Lord as he sat eating, and they presumed to take the Teacher’s place. It was Jesus’ right to respond to the loving act of the woman. Again Jesus showed his love for his disciples—they were so faulty and needing lessons in unselfishness, and he did not despair but constantly worked with them to improve their spirit. He said to the disciples, in brief: “Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

In the 9th chapter of Luke we find another vital lesson our Lord taught to the disciples. On every occasion he carefully worked with his disciples to create in them the proper spirit—the spirit that Jesus himself had. Jesus sent messengers before him into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him as he was on his way to Jerusalem. The Samaritans were antagonistic to the disciples and when they reported the matter to Jesus, they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” But Jesus turned “and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” Jesus wanted the disciples to put aside this vindictive spirit and not be warlike but try to avoid violence. The Kingdom will be the time for straightening out all injustices of this life. Our Lord showed longsuffering in instructing his disciples in what was right for them.

Coming now to the last of the Gospels we find a most significant expression in John 13:1: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” Yes, we find in the acts and words of Jesus what love for his disciples really meant. He served them in every possible way—did everything that was for their good. He instructed them, rebuked them kindly when they needed it, comforted them. He was their loving Master and caretaker. By studying the life of Jesus as he taught and served his disciples we learn many vital lessons as to the true meaning of love in the Scriptural sense. And this final thought found in John 13:1 leads us on to some of the most meaningful and precious evidences of Jesus’ love for his disciples that you can possibly find.

At the last Passover and the institution of the Memorial of his death, Jesus did something that was unheard of amongst the Gentiles—here he was their Lord, their Master and their coming Redeemer, who had come down from heaven, where he was exceedingly rich,

and he performed a menial service that must have astounded his disciples. He girded himself, took a towel and basin of water and washed the disciples' dirty feet and dried them with the towel. Our Lord knew he was faced with death within a few hours, and yet his loving character was such that he continued to serve his disciples with needed instructions for their eternal good. We note the new commandment to the disciples —“Love one another as I have loved you.” (13:34)

A careful study of Jesus' final sermon to his disciples and prayer for them reveals a depth of unselfish love that is unparalleled in all human history. The 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th chapters of John are just throbbing with unselfish love. He starts out, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” He was going away to prepare a place for the disciples so that when he would return they would be with him. He said they would do greater works than any they had done or even the Lord had done. He said he would send the Comforter to be with them during his long absence. “As I live, ye shall live also.” “As the Father loveth me, so he loveth you.” “I will leave my peace with you, be not afraid.” “I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman, and ye are the branches.” Bring forth fruit—“herein is my Father glorified that ye bring forth much fruit.” “If you keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.” “I call you not my servants, but my friends.” “I am telling you certain things, so when they come to pass, you will remember that I told you”—this will comfort you. “The world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful, but **YOUR SORROW SHALL BE TURNED INTO JOY!**” “For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came from God.” “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” In his prayer Jesus said: “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” “Sanctify my disciples through the Truth.” “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me...” “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Thus ended the most loving and intimate message and prayer the world has ever known.

As we turn to the writings of the apostles, and with this knowledge of our Lord's love for his disciples as a foundation, we are prepared to comprehend what the apostles meant when they exhorted us to have love for one another. Jesus set the example and his words of love and acts of love are easy to comprehend. Near the end of the New Testament we have the 1st, 2nd and 3rd epistles of John. Over and over again the Apostle John exhorts us to have love for one another. And with our understanding of the love of Jesus for his disciples we can grasp the thought that John has in mind—the spirit of unselfish interest

in one another. This was a new teaching in the world and needed to be emphasized over and over again. Jesus himself set the example that we should study carefully—“ye should love one another as I have loved you.” This love is not based upon social attachment nor does it proceed from emotionalism. Jesus selected his disciples because of their honest heart condition. He worked with these men in the framework of the purposes of God. So our love must be. God has a purpose, a divine plan and we are to love within that framework.

Let us note some of the pointed statements, strong exhortations of the Apostle John, in these three final epistles, and then let us keep in mind the example of Jesus as this will assist us to know what John is talking about. We begin with the 1st Epistle of John. We start with chapter 1, Vs. 5 to 7: “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” We must walk in the “light” and as we all know “light” is a symbol of truth. So we must confine all our thinking, all our words, all our actions to Truth, the light, then we will have fellowship with one another. Otherwise we “walk in darkness.”

Then in the 2nd chapter, Vs. 3 to 5 the Apostle exhorts us to keep the Lord’s commandments and these commandments are expressed in the truth. And he adds that “whoso keepeth his word in him verily is the love of God perfected.” In the 8th to 11th Vs. the Apostle is saying that light now has come and darkness was passing away, and if one is responding to the intention of the light he would be developing love for his Christian brother; but if one hated his brother he would be walking in darkness. These are strong words indeed. And in the last verse of this chapter, the apostle says “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of him.” So falling in line with righteousness is essential to a Christian character.

In the 10th and 11th verses of the 3rd chapter, a contrast is made between the children of God and the children of the devil—those who do not righteousness are not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother; and in the 12th verse we are informed as to why Cain killed his brother—Cain’s works were evil and Abel’s works were righteous—a plain case of jealousy. So in learning to love our brethren, we must beware of jealousy, and if we spot it, we must crush it out with loathing.

A very wonderful thought is given us in the 14th verse, and a vital test: “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” Contrariwise if we do not love our brethren we abide in death. And the 15th verse tells us that one who hateth his brother is a murderer, and no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. And in the

16th verse Jesus' love is referred to—he laid down his life for us; and we are to follow his example by laying down our lives for our brethren.

Then the Apostle touches upon a very practical point—“But who 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?” In the following verse the Apostle warns us against using endearing words and failing to prove our love by “deed and in truth.” If we love “in deed and in truth” then “we know we are truly of the truth.” In the 23rd verse John repeats a thought that he had stated earlier: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.”

In the 4th chapter, beginning with the 7th verse, John continues his exhortation on love for our brethren: “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. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” What a powerful and practical thought is here expressed by John—God in kindness and generosity did something for us that we needed so badly—He sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Here is a key thought as to the meaning of love—to do something for our brethren that is needed—something, not for personal gain to ourselves, but for gain to our brethren. In V. 11 John continues: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” V. 12 and 13: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit.” The last two verses of chapter of 4 have this to say: “If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

In the 2nd and 3rd epistles of John, the apostle said he loved “in the truth.” In John 3:3 he wrote: “For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.” And V. 4: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” In the 8th verse of 2nd John he speaks of “fellow-helpers to the truth.” Not all however were “fellow-helpers to the truth,” for John said that “Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.” This particular individual seemed to do much harm—“Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.” So we can see what a dangerous spirit this was on the part of this man—apparently he was not interested in serving the brethren, but loved to “have the preeminence among the Lord's people.” That reminds us of something on Reprint page 1864, par. 5 which was written in 1895. Here is how it reads: “Beware of all who make a great palaver about love! for Satan often uses it as the garment of light to

cover bad conduct or bad doctrine—whose real lovelessness he would screen from criticism.”

In studying our Pastor’s writings carefully we note the same spirit of love that was displayed by Jesus toward the disciples. There is an article dated April 15, 1899 and we quote four paragraphs near the end. These paragraphs are found on Reprint page 2453, column 2, paragraphs 2 to 5: “One of the final and most searching tests of these ‘brethren,’ and the one under which probably the most of those once awakened and armed will fall, will be—love for the brethren. Seemingly many will fail at this point and be therefore accounted unworthy of an abundant entrance to the kingdom on this score. Whoever has the spirit of love according to the pattern (Rom. 8:29), is expected to agree with the Apostle John’s statement—‘Because he laid down his life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren.’—1 John 3:14, 16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8.

“This, like all other tests, will be most pointed and conspicuous during this time of special privilege and special trial in the end of the age. (Rev. 3:10) Let us consider how it will come that we may be the better prepared to meet it successfully. (a) It will recognize brotherhood neither along the narrow channels of sectarianism, nor on the unlimited plane of worldly disregard for the divine Word which declares of ‘the brotherhood of man.’ It will recognize children of the Evil one and children of God: and all of the latter will be esteemed and loved and served as ‘brethren’—all trusting in the precious blood of Christ for forgiveness, and fully consecrated to the Lord’s service.

“(b) If such are seen anywhere, in ‘Babylon’ or out of her, asleep, fettered and blinded by false doctrines and superstitions, by a soldier of the cross who has gotten awake and put on the armor, it is his duty, as it should be his pleasure, to speed to his relief in the wisest and best and quickest manner. Self-ease, self-repute, nor any other selfish spirit must hinder him; the spirit of love must energize him to do all in his power—even to the laying down of his life—for the brethren. All who have this spirit must yearn to help those in danger of losing their hold upon the Lord after the manner of those now blindly leading them into unbelief.

“(c) The same spirit of the ‘Captain’ (Heb. 2:10) will lead him not only to love the brethren that are still asleep, but if possible to be still more ready to lay down life for brethren who, like himself, have gotten awake and are putting on the armor. He will sympathize with their trials by the way and assist them to put on the sandals and to adjust every piece of the armor. Should any be specially weak and liable to stumble he will not despise him, nor revile him, even as the elder brother, the Captain, would not do so. On the contrary, he will be the more watchful and helpful toward the weaker, even though he most enjoy himself in the company of the stronger. This is not the time for the strong to gather by themselves for mutual admiration and enjoyment—that will come later on to all such who so love the brethren as to lay down their lives on their behalf. These will hear

the Master say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joys of thy Lord.’”
(End of quote.)

Paul was a noble example of practical love for the Christian brotherhood. We remember his calling of the elders of Ephesus when he was on the way to Jerusalem by ship. His words of holy love are profitable for us to consider. We turn to the 20th chapter of Acts, beginning with verse 18: “And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house... For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” He exhorted the elders to watch themselves and protect themselves from false teachers who would “arise, to draw away disciples after them.” “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Paul had the same spirit of love as the Master and did everything in his power for the advancement of the Lord’s people and for their protection from false teachers.