

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Let Brotherly Love Continue

Louis Garbi

When a soul is first converted, he or she is filled with thanksgiving. There is appreciation for the mercy shown by God. Loving God takes on new meaning. In conjunction with this, there is gladness and appreciation for brothers and sisters in Christ. Glory to God — there are others who share the beauty of redemption! Thus, brotherly love is contained in a newfound love for God, and so it must continue in our lives. It has high value. It is similar to a marriage in this way; it begins with great joy and is maintained through loving sacrifice. “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another*” (Romans 12:10).

Jesus said,

'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31).

Love extends beyond the fellowship of believers. Jesus cited loving neighbors as ourselves as the second of the two greatest commandments. Note our Lord's emphasis: “*There is no other commandment greater than these.*” Whether toward brethren or our neighbors in the world, love must be the focus of our lives in Christ. It is the direction Jesus followed while on this earth.

Love does not always mean agreement or approval. It does not always mean we are happy with ourselves, our neighbors, or our brethren. Loving God often requires avoiding things we might be inclined to do. It also means weighing the suggestions and practices of others by using the scriptures to discern God's will. This is not to say that our life in Christ is a life of being critical and judgmental. That would be a wretched thing indeed! With apologies for mangling **Ephesians 6:15**, it would be like having our feet shod with the preparation the gospel of war. While the love of Christ avoids wrong, it also maintains the good will of God in the face of wrong.

The good will of our Lord includes, “*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men*” (Romans 12:18). The Lord does understand difficult situations, hence, “*if it is possible.*” However, “*if it is possible*” is not a justification for not getting along with others. The main message is to live

peaceably with all men. It is a primary practice of love. “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matthew 5:9).

Can we address problems we may see in others? Jesus taught us, “*Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him*” (Luke 17:3). Again we have it written, “*Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another*” (Romans 15:14). Yes, we can rebuke and admonish. However, if the spirit of reconciliation is not there, it is all in vain.

Concerning our address to the world, it is written,

Love does not always mean agreement or approval. It does not always mean we are happy with ourselves, our neighbors, or our brethren.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light (Ephesians 5:11-13).

To expose evil is to provide a contrast; otherwise, it is so much noise. We dare not be like those who declare the wickedness of pornography, all the while pointing to the pictures. On the contrary, we must provide an example of the mercy God has bestowed on us.

At times it feels difficult to practice love in a troubled world. We see things disturbing on the right and left of politics. We see souls adrift in atheism or a vague notion of God. So? We must answer to our Lord.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we

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Election Year

Rick Sparks

not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (**Hebrews 12:25-28**).

Our world around us is shaking. We are called to stand upon that which cannot be shaken. Therefore –

*Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain (**Philippians 2:14-16**).*

So wrote the man who endured beatings, imprisonment, and all manner of troubles from a world of opposition.

Brotherly love and loving our neighbor as ourselves seem close, almost the same. There is a distinction, in that brotherly love is a direct result of salvation. It comes from our being a part of God's family, "the Beloved" (**Ephesians 1:6**). We have a shared identity and appreciation. Whereas loving our neighbor is the ministry of Christ to a world in need: "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (**Romans 13:10**).

For the sake of all, love means appreciating others for the goodness they possess, or the potential for goodness which everyone has. It means trying to understand others – to see their point of view, then to act accordingly. We must leave the condemnation of others to God. It is not our place. In light of the ministry of Jesus, we can say that even Jesus sustains the hope of reconciliation to all without condemnation. Don't you think His intent was on what we could become (our potential) rather than what we were? Didn't that make our salvation possible? "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (**John 3:17**). "And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (**John 12:47**).

When the scripture says, "Let brotherly love continue," there is a need to keep the focus clear. When we came out of the water of baptism, love was the spiritual condition we emerged in, the new scene. As we continue, we must be conscientious about such things in order to stay alive in Christ.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article originally appeared in the April 2012 issue of The Gospel Message. Brother Rick gave your editor permission to reprint the article. Though over eight years have passed, the message remains true and relevant. Your editor prays the church will heed the call of Scripture as well as the wise recommendations of our brother.*

Given the nature of man, government is better than no government. Not only is our government better than no government--it could be a lot worse, and still be better than no government. When we leave our homes to assemble with the saints, we have a reasonable expectation that when we return home, we will find things as we left them. If we had no government, that expectation would not be nearly so reasonable. The end of the book of **Judges** shows that anarchy is not pretty.

Paul shows in **Romans 13** that civil government is ordained by God with its own definite duties. The Roman letter was written during the reign of Nero, the acme of cruelty. Yet Paul teaches us to be subject to even such a government.

Most of our readers are in the United States, where we have some voice in our government, and where we are now in the increasing heat of a presidential election year. This can be a distressing and divisive time in some congregations.

We need to remember that the form of government or the political situation under which we find ourselves is not the primary concern of our lives. Our kingdom is not of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our secondary citizenship on this earth has its place, and its place is second — a distant second. We must not ascribe to it more weight than it carries. We are not politically dependent. We can live a godly life and be saved under any political system man can devise.

David had the most perfect political system available on earth in his day. He was in the kingdom of God on earth, and he was the king. He was the policy maker, and he was in control. All he had to do was follow God's laws, and he had free rein to do so. But he still used his office to facilitate adultery, murder and cover-up. Having the best political system on earth at the time was no guarantee for David.

Daniel, by contrast, was a slave taken away from home at a young age. He was subjected to the political vagaries and vicissitudes of one idolatrous foreign power after another. Though he had every social and political excuse to fail, we're never told that Daniel did. We can serve well and please God no matter what government we live under. And we are expected to.

Though it is a secondary citizenship, we in the United States do love our wonderful country. I put my hand over my heart, and pledge allegiance to our flag. I get goose bumps when we sing our national anthem. I believe that the United States of America was providentially established by God on this continent at a specific time for a specific reason. We who are citizens of it are among the most blessed people ever to have lived. Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required.

It is our obligation as the church to teach the Bible. The Bible light will expose the political corruption of man. It is our obligation as the church to pray for our country. It is your right as a Christian and as an American to legally and peacefully protest to bring about change.

I caution you not to polarize one another in the church over political issues. I have been guilty of this in the past, to no good end. Do not set at nought a brother for whom Christ died over these differences.

I believe in having strong, well-considered convictions, being fully persuaded in your own mind. I also believe in

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keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I have been guilty of flippantly making public political statements that I shouldn't have made. It was unnecessarily polarizing in the church.

The church is above and beyond politics. My kingdom is not of this world. The church as such does not endorse political candidates. The church is not in that business.

If you as an individual decide to run for office, I believe you have that right. But don't campaign in the assembly, and don't expect all your brethren to vote for you.

When did the Apostle Paul try to change the politics of Rome? In the New Testament, the main concern was not for a particular country. Jesus didn't try to change things politically. He knew that a changed world would be brought about by changed people. So he got beneath the superficial, and he worked on the hearts of people.

We don't change things primarily by legislation, but by persuasion, repentance and conversion. We preach the gospel and change the world one life at a time. When people believe the Bible, they tend to live, and vote, according to the teach-

ing of the Bible.

I don't know what the future holds politically, but I know Who holds the future spiritually. Our Lord has given us a citizenship worth living for and worth dying for.

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Influence

Tom Allen

You, too, can be an influencer! Sometimes we believe we are too unimportant or insignificant to influence the actions or beliefs of another individual. We may think no one will pay any attention to what I have to say or what I do. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

It is true that some people may have a greater sphere of influence than others, but there is no one who has no influence at all. We all have some influence or effect on other people. That influence can take different forms as we live our lives. We influence others with our speech, with our actions and with our lives. People listen to what we say and how we say it and what kind of person we are. They see what we do and determine what is important to us. They may look at our lives and modify their lives based on what they see in us. We will have an influence on others. The questions we need to answer are:

1. What kind of influence are we?
2. What kind of influence do we want to be?

I believe, as Christians, we all want to be an influence for good. We want people, seeing our lives, to see the influence Jesus has had on us. We hope they see us conducting our lives similar to the way Jesus handled the issues He faced while here on earth. We know:

- He was gentle - **Matthew 11:29**
- He was humble - **Philippians 2:8**
- He was forgiving - **Luke 23:34**
- He was merciful - **Hebrews 2:17**
- He was just - **Zechariah 9:9**
- And to sum it up, He was righteous - **Isaiah 53:11**

What kind of influence would we be if people could see those same characteristics in us?

Then there is the other side of the coin. There have been other Bible characters who did not have an influence for good, rather an influence for evil. When we study the kings that reigned over Israel after the death of Solomon, we find that most of those leaders influenced their people, but not in a good way.



Please check your expiration date!

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They caused the Children of Israel to sin and because of that sin, the people were ultimately taken into captivity. When the kingdom was divided between Israel and Judah, Jeroboam became king over Israel. He is notable for leading the people astray by his wicked ways (**1 Kings 13:33-34**). He is even given credit for causing Israel to sin in future generations, because they continued to follow the example he set. All of the kings that followed him continued in sin because,

Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. For the Children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did, and did not depart from them (2 Kings 17:21-22).

We realize we are going to have an influence on the people we come in contact with. It may be the people in the grocery store or the people in the car next to us on the highway or the people we meet walking down the street. They will see how we act and form an impression about us and our character. They will be influenced by what they see and hear. Therefore, we need to conduct ourselves in such a way that the impression they receive will reflect the same values and life style that Jesus displayed. We need to be sure their lasting impression of us is nothing like the wicked Jeroboam or those he influenced. Rather, we want the people who observe us to be drawn to Christ, drawn to Him by our influence because they see the way we conduct our lives.

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Blessed Are the Dead

Dale Loney, 91, of Flagstaff, AZ, laid down his earthly tabernacle on December 11, 2019. Brother Dale was a faithful member of the church in **Williams, AZ**. He is survived by his daughter, **Becky (Jay) Graham**.

Neal Warren, 86, of Indianola, IA, went to be with the Lord on March 19. Brother Neal was a member of the **Dean Avenue Church of Christ** and enjoyed preaching sermons, leading songs, teaching and leading prayer. He served as an Elder of

the **Pleasant Hill Church of Christ** for many years. Brother Neal is survived by his wife of 61 years, **Peg Warren**.

Special Meetings

The brethren in **Pleasant Hill, IA** decided to cancel their annual **Labor Day Weekend Meeting** due to concerns over the Covid-19.

The brethren who meet on **Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO**, have decided to cancel their one day VBS scheduled for September 12.

The **White Oak Church of Christ** which meets in rural Ethel, MO continues to plan their special meeting for **August 23**.

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