

# Love in Action

*Br. Gilbert Rice*

Our remarks this afternoon do not examine the root meanings of love, nor the various Greek words so translated. They will not be technical; they may not even be scholarly. But I hope they will be practical because when we talk about love in action we're striving to speak about the practice or its manifestation. We hope to explore the manifestations of love in our relations one with another, and consider expressions made or problems created which may indicate inaction or love.

Our text is possibly somewhat strange for a consideration of this subject, coming from the 5th chapter of James, verse 16. You know if we have love for one another and love for the Lord it means that we love self less. We hope that we will eventually come to love self not at all. Here the apostle, speaking in relation to specific matters, lays down a general principle that many of us have followed for years in our testimony meetings. His counsel is, "confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." This sounds like strange advice, something like belittling one's self. This admonition causes us to consider—What attitude will a confession of this kind, confessing our faults one to another, create in ourselves? We admit that to the natural minded, this kind of admonition sounds like strange counsel.

The perspective of the scripture is that none of the Lord's servants is striving to convince us of his abilities to stand alone, to serve alone, nor to be strong alone. Rather the apostle is striving to develop a brotherhood in the complete meaning of that word. A brotherhood that loves one another, that will do and give and die to serve one another. And in this broad aspect of the brotherhood, we are thankful that the saints of the early age had in mind the complete brotherhood, even of those that were to come to a knowledge of the truth, in this, our time. Our aspect of this should be similar. A brotherhood that will assist and help and use what they know of one another, that is, of other members of the brotherhood, for their assistance and growth. Now it is reasonable to conclude that there are things which we know about one another, specially if we have known one another as long as is the case with many of you; and some of these things are not complimentary. Some of these unfavorable things that we know about one another are as a result of our experiences in mistakes, in failings, in irritations, in strivings. We consider the mistakes of others so we may assist, help, use what we know for good, for their assistance and growth. We do not want to contemplate on the unfavorable things with the thought of exalting ourselves above our brethren.

You know, it is possible that if we use a mirror with the wrong thought in mind we will come away rather pleased with what we have beheld. If that mirror forms a comparison between ourselves and our brethren, sometimes because of our self-approbateness, we may find that we are semi-satisfied with what we have wrought. But if we use the mirror for its true purpose of enabling us to make a comparison between ourselves and the perfect pattern, which is really the only logical basis of comparison to those who are striving to be like our Head, then we find that we are not well pleased with the findings of this examination.

James seems to have given us divine advice, and therefore we are convinced it is good advice. Taking the first person, then, (and I would recommend that you do so yourself in your examination)—when I confess my faults to you, it conveys to you the understanding that I have been watching myself and have made some consideration of the perfect pattern and have determined that there is a lack in me. That such watching, scrutiny, has revealed to me my shortcomings, which, I trust, you have uncondemningly observed, if indeed you have observed them. It assures you that others may be striving and failing as you may be, and this might be one of the principal encouragements that each of us can draw from hearing someone else reveal his awareness of his mistakes. It assures you that I want to do better and it tells you that subsequent failings of my own will not be approved any more

than past failings. It gives you an opportunity for prayer on my behalf, which was of course the specific point of the reference in James 5:16. It doesn't assure that you are going to pray on my behalf, but it gives you the opportunity of having knowledge of a specific. It assures you that I do not expect to find acceptance in my own strength, else I would be satisfied with past accomplishments. It testifies that I will not rejoice in your faults, expressed or unexpressed, even as I would not like you to ridicule me for my mistakes, expressed or unexpressed.

And yet how long do you think I might come to a testimony meeting and express from my heart the awareness I have of my mistakes; how many of these points of helpful conclusion will be your profitable experience, and how will such confession of mine aid toward your sanctification, if you don't believe my confession; if you don't believe my heart statement; if you don't believe my expressed feelings? If, instead, you think I am merely trying to gain your sympathetic ear; or if instead, you think I am not really doing an adequate job of fighting and after all just must not have been called by God; if instead, you think that I am weak and not overcoming because of lack of application; and if you conclude, perhaps properly, that I am always failing in the same test; if instead, you detect, and dwell on inconsistency with previous statements or actions on my part, which is entirely possible; if, in any of these points any of us concludes or judges or condemns another, then the love of the brotherhood is not functioning as it should. We're talking about love in action. It's not a one-sided thing. Love in action involves everyone. The love that believeth all things good should not be inactive.

Now some of the things that I might confess would not be good things, but the itemization and the realization of the lack is good, because it indicates a knowledgeable point of application to remove those things. And so it is that we are admonished, having love, to believe all things, and we know that we can properly qualify this with the thought to believe all things good. How inclined will we be to express the sentiments of our heart one to another if we are compared on the basis of our admitted mistakes and judged (condemned) by one another because of those confessions?

I believe we all know that we are not to condemn one another, but sometimes our manner can be such of condemnation, even without words. We all want to feel the warmth of fellowship, partnership in spiritual blessings and we all want to feel the warmth of growth and prosperity in the truth, to experience stimulation of our minds in the truth, to feel true closeness to His people. But we can prevent this experience for ourselves or we can hinder others participation in the full blessings of the truth, by lack of the warmth of heartfelt love.

Is it truly possible for any of us to draw near to God and not draw near to His people? This was apparently a subject that John considered in his association with the early brethren, because he comments specifically on this thought. The question was, Is it truly possible for any of us to draw near to God and not draw near to His people? 1 John 4: 20, "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."

Does not love for our brethren create within us the fortitude to tolerate the brethren? Are we able to forebear them or avoid them or hold aloof from them? Is this the depth of love's effect upon our attitudes? Surely it must be deeper, warmer, more personal than this. Do we get help but refrain from giving encouragement? This brings us to a consideration of a point we have been only touching the fringes of: what brotherly love really is.

Bringing this to our notice in Corinthians, Paul calls to our attention the closeness of the brotherhood and suggests certain emotions should be shared by every member who claims to be a participant in the body of Christ. Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. And the reason for this is, ye are the body of Christ and members in particular. Now this suffering, of course, can have its many aspects, and it has

over the years of the age; but, indeed, personal attachment, interest, concern, is part of participating in the brotherhood, sharing the things of the truth, recognizing life's experiences, and striving to encourage one another to overcoming in each of the experiences that has caused suffering.

There is a sizeable variance in the way that each of us was found before we were drawn to the Lord. This difference might be broadly described as a difference of character, a difference of attitude, because of the varying backgrounds. Character might be described as the aggregate of distinctive qualities belonging to an individual. The stamp of individuality is impressed by nature, impressed by education and habit. Characteristics, traits, refinements, attitudes, appearance, demeanor, impressions we convey, these may be things we would sum up as constituting our character. Now you can see that just at this convention there have been different characters among us. That is, each of us as individuals displays varying qualities. Some may be outgoing and enthusiastic from an outward appearance; some may be more reserved. These qualities of character might all be valued and appreciated and acknowledged, without any ridicule or disparaging thought just because there is this variance.

How did we get to be what we are in respect to these elements of character? We probably got them by heredity, by environment, by education, by training and economic situation. We got them from parentage, that is, interest that our parents showed in us, the understanding and love that they manifested in us. And we got our odd or varied qualities of character from religious influences, from other bondages, from all sorts of disciplines, or lack of discipline. We got them from being granted responsibilities, or from being protected from responsibilities when growing up. But the Lord has one common, finished character in mind; and that is why each of us is engaged in the perfecting of character. There are certain distinctive qualities which the Lord designs to develop in all his children during the Gospel Age. We may say, then, that there is one common character.

We don't mean identical characters, but characters which have in common all the needed qualities, faith, hope, love, justice, wisdom, peace, sobriety, moderation. The Apostle Peter refers to some of these in 2 Pet. 1:4-7. At the same time there are certain distinctive characteristics which we may possess even after entrance into the school of Christ, which he will want us to remove under his hand and instruction. So there are certain objectives, and there are certain things that we have with us that are not desirable. Just because we have been called and have made an intelligent response to this call does not mean that all of the things that we inherited through Adam's family have evaporated. This does not mean that we have been able in the first year, or the first ten, to divest ourselves of these qualities, undesirable though we recognize them to be. Some of these the apostle refers to in Romans 1:28-32—envy, pride, back-biting, mercilessness, being implacable or disposed to not forgive, boasters, pitilessness. We have eliminated from that list given in Romans 1:28-32 those elements which are unlikely to be with us after we entered the school of Christ, and listed just those which we might still be fighting against.

Now if you're not still fighting against envy and pride and backbiting and mercilessness, a disposition to be unforgiving, never boasting, and never lacking in pity, you may be ahead of most of us and perhaps closer to the goal. Remember we said that these are qualities of character which may be prevalent with us after we have heard the call and make an intelligent response. If some of these are still with us, this should not signal discouragement or despair, but rather a recognition of the need for application to the heart to perfect a character that would be more pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

It is not to be wondered at, it is not to be astounding to us, that we may have to fight against such things, for Paul has said in 1 Cor. 1: 26-31 that God has pursued a strange procedure in the calling of His elect. He has decided not to call the well-born and the things that are, but rather to call those that are low-born and who, in the world's estimation are not, that the glory and the accomplishment of this New Creation might properly reside in His workmanship. So it is that we find cause for our possessing qualities of character that we want to put away. The Lord has through His Holy Spirit

promised us power and strength that we might be perfected if we will be rightly exercised. So we must conclude that we have a task before us of fighting and development and improvement before the Lord finds us acceptable for that which is reserved for the overcomers. And if this be so with us, reason teaches that it also may be so for our brethren, that they also may be aware of the work that is still to be done in them.

We will not be victorious in this narrow way if we strive merely for the polish or the surface character, or for powers of restraint so we can keep from manifesting our heart's characteristics. This isn't going to be acceptable to the Master workman. This is kind of like the thought of grinning and bearing it, but still having the turmoil within. What we need is to perfect and purify and cleanse the heart from these characteristics, so the service of the Lord and the accomplishment of His will is the very epitome of our desire and objective.

Jesus possessed a perfect character and He proved completely obedient and completely loving and faithful by the trials that He endured, faithful unto death. It's not the same with us. We do not have a perfect character, nor do we have a perfect organism to withstand the test without mistakes, but we are perfecting a character, we are striving to develop the desired qualities. The qualities of character must be the same as He possessed, but on this side the vail we lack the perfection of organism in which to express them perfectly.

In previously discussing this subject, some brethren thought we overstressed our essential need of the same qualities of character that Jesus had. Our thought is not that we must manifest them perfectly but that we need to have and actually achieve the perfect intention, the perfect desire to manifest them and then, having this perfect intention, we can identify when we have fallen from the achievement of this accomplishment. We must reach this perfection of intention before we will be granted perfect spiritual bodies in which to accomplish His will perfectly. So if there is in any of our intents that inclination to do what we want to do, or do what someone else wants us to do which is contrary to what the Lord would have us do, this would be displeasing to Him. It's the intent that we are striving to align fully, and striving to avoid unloving practices as much as we can.

The apostle says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." That is, we are developing or incorporating into our characters, Christlikeness. It's just like it was with Jesus. He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I in difficulty till it be accomplished." With this status of the Master's objective we must get the proper focus. When Paul says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ," this is not to say that we have completed the activity, but that we have begun to knowledgeably progress in this work. It will be completed in the fruition of our labors, if we continue this baptism.

Paul again says we should "put on the new man and put off the old man with his deeds." Peter joins with counsel concerning the manifestation of love, which is love in action. In 1 Peter 3:8 he says, "Finally be ye all of one mind having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, sympathetic, courteous." Now we know that when he says "finally," he doesn't mean that we should postpone this until old age. But he's drawing to our attention that this is the objective of our moulding of a character in relation to the body oneness. "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren be pitiful, sympathetic, courteous." He continues in 1 Peter 3:9, riot rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."

Notice here that the apostle makes reference in V. 8 to our being "courteous". It would be a great mistake were we ever to conclude that courtesy is a deceptive manner of conduct. Some might suggest that frankness, saying it like it is, or as we see the matter, or as we think it is, is the procedure. However, the apostle counsels us to have our best manners in the brotherhood so that we might encourage one another, and remain ourselves in a position to receive encouragement from others. To make a conclusion that it is wrong to be courteous in a time of difference or

misunderstanding, in substance indicates that in our hearts we have judged and condemned both the thought and attitudes and actions of another toward us, and is assuming that they are covering or hiding what we may judge to be their real sentiments. If we think that it is not appropriate to be courteous we have certainly become involved in improper logic. The judging of others would be that which particularly displeases the Lord in this matter. Hard words, strong talk, which seem to have little courtesy involved in them, may often betray the fact that a judgment has already been made.

Some have suggested that it is wrong to conceal or hide our feelings or our thoughts or our conclusions about brethren when we are unfavorable toward them, that to conceal our feelings is deceptive. But this conclusion that to conceal our feelings is deceptive, I believe itself to be grossly wrong. It is not wrong for us to conceal our feelings or conclusions when they are not favorable, though let us not conclude that such concealment is a manifestation of love. At most, concealing our conclusions could be simple justice, or wisdom, or both because so often such thoughts or feelings are incorrect, and if you conceal that which is incorrect this is a happy doing. It is not hypocrisy to conceal a judgment or deduction of our own and act as though we didn't feel that way. Our conclusion may be possessed in direct violation of Divine law, which is judging, failing to believe our brother's expressed good intentions or other similar principles that we would want to adhere to, but have temporarily failed to heed. How many times have we later learned of our erroneous conclusions, and having restrained our words and actions, are most thankful we have only our conclusions to correct, and to seek forgiveness for, and have not also the responsibility for the effect such wrong words might have had on the others with whom we shared our conclusions?

Have you ever done that? Have you ever found at the close of a convention or at the close of a Sunday or the close of a telephone conversation, all of a sudden it strikes you hard that you have got to go to brother so-and-so or sister so-and-so and tell them forthright that you have told them something that was not right. It was not accurate, it was not proper, it was not just, it was not wise. Has that ever happened to you? If it has, you know of the value of concealing your personal opinions and judgments, because we are not yet enthroned to be the judge.

There will seldom be an occasion when we may rightfully be discourteous to our brethren. We may think discourtesy is required but we have probably made an improper conclusion. We may think we have to overly criticize a brother's conviction. But seldom does the Lord arrange that there is no other way to accomplish correction or improvement. We suggest that it is proper for us to remember that the Lord doesn't require or ask us to step out of line or act out of the bounds of love to correct another, or bring mistakes to their attention, no matter who we may be or who we may think we be. The Lord does not require us to adopt methods of discourtesy, condemnation or busybodying in others business to correct others. How is the matter going to be taken care of then? Well, first, let us consider: is the Lord doing anything about it? And if, so far as we can see, the Lord may not be doing anything about a matter we seem to think is of so great importance, the next question might be, do you think the Lord could do something about it? Well, of course the answer is obvious. Let us keep in mind that the Lord has unnumbered agencies and avenues open through which He can overrule and accomplish all the testing, all the perfecting, all the correcting of His people that He sees to be needed without our acting beyond the bounds of love and the conduct which love would dictate. And you know we are striving to consider love in action.

Sincere courtesy should be felt and expressed, it may appear to be unattainable but in our relationships with one another there never is a need for friction and animosity. Oh, I know we're not in utopia. And I'm not suggesting that friction or animosity will never be experienced while we are yet in the flesh. But don't you really believe that there is never a need of it? There is never a need for strained feelings, though they may exist without a need. Love should be without partiality, and this is an activity too, without partiality. In brief, this means that we treat all the brethren the same way, the same basic way at least. we are as patient toward all, as kind toward all, as courteous toward all, as solicitous with all of their well-being, as anxious to greet all with the same cordiality, as anxious to assist all. It is expected that there will be different manifestations, even as there was with Jesus in his

manifestations toward the apostles. But the basic appreciation of one another should be the same.

In Matthew 18:16 Jesus gave some good advice in connection with our in-the-body relationships. The fact that there were conflicts is apparent from Matthew 18:15. It's quite possible that Jesus saw some differences, which led to this counsel. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone. If he shall hear thee thou shall have gained thy brother." We recognize in our association with our brethren that our very differences do contribute to the creation of misunderstandings, difficulties, and sometimes even to animosities. Jesus apparently knew this was then true and would be true in the future, for he gave this far-too-seldom-used advice. But what kind of advice is this? What kind of a formula is it? It is not a device which Jesus suggested to assure victory of one over the other in a dispute. Perhaps this is one reason it is seldom used, because it is not a formula whereby one can gain a victory over another. It is rather a method to restore brotherly love conditions, and that is the result when the procedure is properly used, and a victory is gained over our own self, with a vow to serve in greater diligence.

What is it that refrains us from following Jesus' advice? Why is it that if we have a variance we cannot go to our brother and strive to gain a restoration of the attitude of brethren in the brotherhood? Surely that which restrains us is not the prospect of accomplishing some-thing good. That which restrains us is not the doubting that Jesus knew what he was talking about. Could it be lack of humility? Could it be we might find we had imagined that a wrong had been done that was never intended? And this would mean we were incorrect in thinking we were trespassed against. Yes, there is a lot of imagination among the best of us, but just a little imagination travels so far, so quick. Or down inside might we be refrained from following Jesus' advice because we are ashamed to admit we carry a grievance against our brethren which is attributed to the flesh? And so let us not hold against our brethren acts of omission or commission that we have reason to believe those who have aggrieved us are repentant for. Let us not hold these things in our hearts against them, if we know they are repentant for them. To require a face-to-face acknowledgement of facts and whereas might really be feeding self and striving to be proved the victor.

Is our love for our brother so slight as to allow no effort in compliance with Jesus' instruction? Really, how do we love? How deep do we love? Do we love enough to comply with the divine wisdom?

We believe that love also has an important function involved in the hearing of evil communications. How do you feel when someone confides to you secret information about another's faults or mistakes? Do you feel appreciative when you have now received privileged information? Do you feel appreciative of the information, do you feel warm and tender-hearted toward the informant? Do you feel grateful for inclusion in the inner circle? For in substance, this is now where you are, in the inner circle. But with you, in this inner circle are the attitudes of the flesh. There is really no cause for gratitude, for in us has been planted a seed of corruption, a seed which will corrupt unless identified for its true nature and rooted out. To be selected as a recipient for this kind of privileged information is uncomplimentary when properly identified. The conclusion has been begged and reached that you feel more kindly and sympathetic to the informant than you do to those who are the topic of the discussion. And therefore in the emotional aligning of support for a position, and the schoolboy method of choosing sides, you now have been found as an ally. Really that is the true analysis of the situation if we will permit ourselves to see it and acknowledge it.

Did you ever stop someone from further speaking to you about another's attitudes or shortcomings or wrong-doings (something you did not need to know for your own protection or for the protection of your ecclesia)? It is an interesting experience. It is good if we can control and stop our interest in such things and help others to control theirs. Of course, their first reaction is that you have sided with the one about whom the conversation was to have been, and against the present communicant. However, this need not be true, or should not be true if we are really pursuing the counsel of scripture. "He that answereth or concludeth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly unto him." So we

can with firm scripture have a closed mind to the entertainment of a topic and still be fully free from rendering a judgment for or against whom the controversy would have involved. Such a termination of the conversation does constitute the mildest form of a rebuke to your communicant and this will seldom improve your immediate attitudes, the it will doubtless assist those who will in the future contemplate upon your restraint to hear.

This too would have been love in action, but it means love for the word of the Lord, and love for its principles and less love for self. And when any of us have come to the attainment where we can prefer not to hear ill even about those with whom we differ, there may be an opportunity for us for future service in the kingdom.

(G. rice-8)