

If I Really Love My Brother

By

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Everyone who claims to be a child of God, by that very statement, is acknowledging that he has spiritual brothers and sisters. For God does not have just one son or daughter but many. As children in the family of God, we have a commitment to brotherly love just as surely as a husband and wife have a commitment of matrimonial love. Brotherly love in the church is an essential, not an option.

The term *brother* holds emotional warmth. Devoted brothers live together, talk together, enjoy things together, have similar traits, and defend each other. When one brother is in trouble, the others come to his aid. These very same things are included in our Father's plan for brotherhood relationships in the church. In fact, our spiritual relationship is superior even to a blood relationship (Prov. 18:24).

My relationship to my brother is an integral part of my relationship to Christ. I cannot be right with God and with Christ apart from a right relationship with my brother. If I am in Christ, I am of necessity in the body—or I am not in Christ. The body is where the life-giving substance flows. A severed member of the physical body soon withers and dies. Similarly, spiritual life flows only within the body of believers to keep each member healthy.

According to the New Testament, my relationship to my brother is based on a spiritual tie rather than a mere social tie. As church members we may have similar social backgrounds and feel a special tie with our group, but our relationship should rise above these things. We are brothers and sisters as a result of our spiritual relationship with Christ.

My relationship to my brother is not based on perfection but on a commitment of love. Just because a brother “rubs me the wrong way” is no justification for me to have ill feelings toward him. I am to have “fervent charity,” as commanded in 1 Peter 4:8. So, regardless of how my brother responds to me, I am responsible and committed to him on one point—fervent charity. Holding a grudge is beneath the dignity of brotherly love. We are to work through those things which strain our relationship; and if they cannot be worked through as outlined in Matthew 18, they are to be settled by the church. We must not overlook sin, neither should we just absorb it and go on; but we do need to choose to love in spite of things that, according to human nature, would hinder that love.

My relationship to my brother reveals my level of spirituality. In 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, Paul accused the Corinthians of being carnal, and he based that on the fact that they were not getting along. James also wrote that if there were hard feelings and ill will among believers, then they are relating “beneath” rather than to “above” (James 3:14–16). A spiritual person is one who demonstrates 1 Corinthians 13. He will not undermine the reputation of others or carry feeling of resentment and ill will. Neither will a spiritual person have a peevish, a contrary, or a none-of-your-business attitude. This does not mean that we “brother” everybody who claims to be a brother, but it does mean that within the church my relationship to my brother exposes my level of spirituality.

My relationship to my brother is to minister to his needs. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification” (Rom. 15:1, 2). Our concern should not be to so much what we can get out of the relationship as what we can put into it.

We do need to witness to the world and to fulfill our duties in church life, but one of our chief responsibilities is to make it easy for one another to get to heaven. To do that we need to edify one another and provoke one another to love and good works. “Let us therefore follow after the things whereby we may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).

We need to under-gird each other in prayer support. Samuel said, “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:3). This ought to be the mutual feeling we share for one another.

We need also to be sensitive to one another’s needs in times of discouragement and weakness. Know when your brother’s load is heavy and be there to support and encourage him. Unless we are faithful in edifying, encouraging and strengthening one another, our efforts will not be effective when it becomes necessary to talk to each other in corrective ways. Both the positive and negative are needed if the negative is going to be effective.

My relationship to my brother requires that I guard the influence from my life. “For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself...But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:7, 15). We are to do nothing that will cause a brother to stumble; and one area to guard very carefully is our talk, both about the brotherhood and about our brethren individually.

My relationship to my brother means that I will answer for his life in eternity. Cain was asked, “Where is Abel thy brother?” (Gen. 4:9), and that call rings throughout the New Testament. I have the responsibility to look over my brother’s shoulder, and he is responsible to look over mine. If one of us fails, there is a sense in which the other is also responsible. We at least ought to stop long enough to re-evaluate and see where we have failed to be aware of each other’s needs and to help one another.

Finally, my relationship to my brother affects my preparedness for the Lord’s return. Jesus spoke of servants who decided that their lord was delaying his return, so they began to beat each other, and they were not ready when their lord came...Individuals may say that being prepared for Jesus’ return is simply a matter between ourselves and God. But the New Testament teaches that we are united as a body, and therefore your preparedness and my preparedness either build up or tear down our readiness for the Lord’s coming.

The Christian life involves more than a vertical relationship with God; there is also a horizontal relationship with our brethren. Each one should have a vital interest in the other’s welfare, both for time and eternity.

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