

Text: Heb. 13:1

Title: "Let brotherly love continue"

Time: 8/7/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – We have all experienced times when we needed to nurse our bodies back to health. After the fishing expedition on Thursday, Kara, I, and a few others were dealing with the effects of sunburn. We had to apply some aloe vera lotion to nurse our skin back to health.

Now it is one thing to know that you need to nurse yourself back to health, and another entirely different thing to actually do it and to commit yourself to what you need to do to do it. Another day in the sun's rays is a bad idea when you have sunburn, but doing exactly that is not unheard of.

Our text this morning is a command. It tells these Hebrew believers – "Let brotherly love continue." We know from the rest of the epistle that this was a command these believers needed to hear, because their love for one another had become burned by the rays of their sinful natures. In order to continue, their brotherly love had to be nursed back to health again.

Westcott said of the choice of our author's words: "[It] suggests that the bond [of brotherly love] had been in danger of being severed" (p. 429). The fact of the matter is that brotherly love among believers is always in danger of being severed. You may remember that this letter is filled with warnings against apostasy – falling away from the faith and falling back into the former life without Christ, in this case Judaism. Let's read some of these warnings again (2:1-4; 3:6; 3:12-14; 4:1; 4:14; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:15-17; 12:25).

Each of these warnings against apostasy is also a warning against the severing of brotherly love. So as we come to this last chapter and read, "Let brotherly love continue," we are reading about something in the lives of these believers that needed to be nursed back to health again, or they were in danger of seeing many of their number fall away from the faith in apostasy.

But just like nursing our bodies back to health requires some specific changes in our practice, so nursing back to health brotherly love will require specific changes in our lives. The word for *brotherly-love* is *philadelphia*. We are familiar with Philadelphia, PA. Well, it turns out that there was in the first century a Philadelphia, Lydia. There was a small church there, of whom the Lord's letter in the Book of Revelation to them said, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8). This church did not have much, but they had one another. They had not allowed their brotherly love to be severed. They let it continue, and the Lord was pleased to keep their door of ministry open.

This word for *brotherly-love* is used in five other contexts in the New Testament, and I want to spend some time in these passages this morning as we discover together what it is going to take to let brotherly-love continue in our church. We too need to be a church of *philadelphia*.

I. Brotherly love requires selfless devotion (Rom. 12:10).

III: When the apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was on death row in Nero's prison after having lived a life of selfless devotion to his brothers and sisters in Christ. He looked back on his life and said it was like being poured

out. In chapter 3 of that book, however, Paul describes what would become the perilous times of the last days. The first thing he mentions in that list, is that men will be lovers of themselves.

Appl: That term *lovers of themselves* is a single word in Greek. *Lovers of the brethren* is *philadelphia*. *Lovers of self* is *philautos*. When I fail to love my brothers and sisters in Christ, the problem is often that my heart is full of the love of self. The phrase *one another* is very important to letting brotherly love continue (used twice in this verse). A godly local church filled with brotherly love is a very unselfish place. If we are to let brotherly love continue, or even nurse it back to health, we are going to have to decide that we are going to live like disciples of Christ rather than inhabitants of the perilous times of the last days. We must love our brothers, not ourselves.

When you decide whether to serve the Lord in a ministry opportunity, is it love of one another or love of self that determines the decision? When you decide what your schedule is going to be on the Lord's Day, is it love of one another or love of self that makes the plans? Prayer meeting is Wednesday night. Will love of one another supersede love of self in determining whether or not you come to pray? Brotherly love requires selfless devotion to one another. If we are to let it continue in our church, we have to get self out of the way.

II. Brotherly love requires learning from God (1 Thess. 4:9-12).

III: Verse 10 mentions all the brethren in Macedonia, which would have included the church at Philippi. During Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, he wrote the prison epistles,

including his letter to the church at Philippi. He desired to know how the church was doing, but he was not free to go to them. His solution was to send Timothy, whom he described as a unique person. He said of Timothy, "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state." And then he gave the reason why it was that Timothy was the only one qualified to care for this church at that time in this way. He put it in the form of a universal axiom: "For all seek their own things, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:20-21).

Appl: In our passage here in 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives a similar commendation to this church for their brotherly love. Like Timothy, they let brotherly love continue. And the reason why they did so is that they had been taught of God to do so. So while it is true that "all seek their own things, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," it is nevertheless possible to let brotherly love continue through the power of God's teaching in our lives to give victory over self.

Are you and I taught of God to love our brothers and sisters in Christ? Unless we are, we will know nothing of the ability to do this. We do not have to be taught of God to seek our own things. But we do need to be daily taught of God and enabled by His power to have victory over our sinful selfishness and to be a loving blessing to our brothers in Christ.

Notice that even with the Thessalonians, there was room for improvement in this area (v. 10b). Some in the congregation still needed to develop that hard-working generosity that is a blessing to God's people. Are you and I taught of God to love our brothers and sisters in Christ? We often claim to be taught of God in regard to what is wrong with them and

what they must do differently, right? We need to ask God to teach us how better to let brotherly love continue.

### III. Brotherly love requires purity (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Ill: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is hosting the Olympic Games this summer. I read an article about the way that city officials have taken pains to hide the true condition of the city from the spectacle that is the Olympic Games. Large walls have been erected between the Olympic venues and the many poor slums of the city. Young black boys are not being allowed to go to the beach, and the police, some of whom have not been paid on time due to the financial straits of the city, have been brutal in their clearing the streets of street vendors and homeless people. The goal is to create the appearance of prosperity for the TV cameras.

Appl: Well, what can be done with the Olympic Games cannot be done with Christian brotherly love. It cannot be feigned or faked. You can try to smother it with all the false smiles and play-acting handshakes you want on a Sunday morning, but God knows our hearts. He knows whether we genuinely love one another. This is the purity this passage speaks of when it talks about brotherly love. We have to purify our souls or our lives unto an unfeigned love of the brothers. Our love must be sincere, not hypocritical. Two things are important in this regard.

(1) We must be saved to have a pure love of the brethren (v. 23). It does no good trying to be a part of brotherly love if you are not a Christian brother, a child of God. To become a child of God you must be born again. That happens not by your power to do good, but by the power of God's Word to speak the gospel to you (v. 25). The gospel is the news that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and rose from the dead

for your eternal life. You are born again the day you personally trust that work for your own salvation.

(2) We must be living with the results of our salvation (v. 22, "seeing ye have purified your souls"). This purifying is a perfect-tense idea. We were purified in the past, and the results continue today. If you are truly born again, you are living with the results of the day God purified your soul in the blood of Christ.

John put it this way (1 John 1:6-10): "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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

So to love our brothers, we have to walk in the light. We have to live under the power of the purifying blood of Christ. We have to deal with our sin and stay close to the Lord.

IV. Brotherly love requires unity (1 Pet. 3:8-12).

Ill: As we leave the service this afternoon, we are going to shake hands, and we are going to say to one another, "Have a good day."

Appl: How do you have a good day? Well, the passage tells us, right? (v. 10a, "love life and see good days"). It mentions two human body parts and three divine anthropomor-

phisms that are related to our loving life and seeing good days:

1. Our mind must be one – we need to be unified, and maintaining brotherly love is part of that.
2. Our tongue must be controlled – our tongue must bless even when the tongues of others do not.
3. The Lord’s eyes watch over us for good – we are confident that He loves us and is watching over us for our good.
4. The Lord’s ears hear our prayers – we know He hears our prayers as we cast on Him our every care.
5. The Lord’s face is always present – we walk in the fear of the Lord knowing that He will discipline the child of God who does evil.

V. Brotherly love requires spiritual growth (2 Pet. 1:7).

Appl: Peter describes Christian growth in this passage. The crowning virtue of spiritual growth in Christlikeness is *agape* love. Next to it is *philadelphia*, love for the brothers. Our church needs mature examples of this. We cannot expect younger Christians to take the lead on this, but those of us who have known the Lord for many years now should have at some point figured out how to add to our godliness, brotherly love, and to our brotherly love, *agape* love.

Ill: The church father Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and disciple of the Apostle John, was a mature example of brotherly love. He was martyred along with 11 other believers from the city of Philadelphia. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* describes this brother’s example of love for the brothers this way: “For he lingered that he might be delivered up, even as the Lord did, to the end that we too might be imitators of him, not looking only to that which concerneth ourselves, but also to that which concerneth our neighbors. For it is the

office of true and steadfast love, not only to desire that one-self be saved, but all the brethren also.”

Conclusion: Have we this love? Or has our love been burned by the rays of our own sinful pride and selfishness? Where must we nurse this love back to health? At New Boston Baptist Church, will we let brotherly love continue? Will you do your part, or love self more?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*