

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“The Brotherhood”

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Pet. 2:17).

The word **“brotherhood”** here is translated from *adelphotes*. It appears only twice in the New Testament, both times in First Peter (2:17; 5:9). The King James renders it **“brethren”** in 5:9, but the New King James renders it **“brotherhood”** in both verses. Of *adelphotes*, *Vine* says, “primarily, ‘a brotherly relationship,’ and so, the community possessed of this relationship, ‘a brotherhood,’ 1 Peter 2:17 (see 5:9 marg.)” and *Thayer* says, “brotherhood”; the abstract for the concrete, a band of brothers i.e. of Christians, Christian brethren: 1 Pet. ii. 17; v.9).

It is clear that Peter uses the term to refer to what *Vine* calls “the community possessed of this relationship” throughout the world. In 1 Peter 5:9 he compares the sufferings of those immediately addressed in his epistle to that experienced by their **“brotherhood in the world”** (NKJ). In 1 Peter 2:17, it seems to be a contrast to **“all men.”** Hence, when we as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ speak of **“the brotherhood”** we are speaking of ourselves along with all in the world that share in this great relationship. What a great throng of people! It is this throng that Peter especially tells us to love.

It seems to me that in recent years we have lost much of that keen sense of *brotherhood* that we once enjoyed. Those of us who consider ourselves “conservative” and “non-institutional” have done a pretty good job of teaching that each local congregation is autonomous and independent of any other congregation in the world. We have shown that a failure to recognize this fundamental Bible principle has historically led to most of the wholesale apostasies of the past. We have rightly pointed out that the congregation of which we are members can exist and scripturally function as if there were no others like it in the world. We have also emphasized that each member of a congregation has a relationship and responsibility to the local church collectively and distributively that he does not have toward brethren elsewhere.

I fear that during all of this we may have developed a mentality that is a bit too “independent.” As a result of this perverted sense of independence, brethren have almost isolated themselves from any real concern, contact or sense of fellowship with their brethren elsewhere – even other brethren meeting across town. An invitation can come (in some cases no invitation is sent) from faithful brethren elsewhere to their gospel meeting. It may or may not be announced at the receiving congregation, but it is generally ignored because it not a function of “our” congregation. In some areas preachers of local congregations have little contact or interaction with preachers or other members of other congregations. This writer confesses his own guilt to a degree at times along these lines.

We can remember a time when a church, in an area where there were several congregations would have a gospel meeting that the house would be filled mostly with members from the other congregations. Often, we would travel miles to encourage another congregation in its gospel meetings. We were just as interested in seeing another congregation prosper in the Lord as we were to see the congregation where we attended. We showed an interest in and often inquired about how that brethren meeting at such and such place were doing. That was before we conceived that “autonomous” and “independent” meant “isolation.” Have we forgotten how to heed Peter’s admonition to **“love the brotherhood?”**

The *brotherhood*, of which Peter wrote, is not a *brotherhood* of churches organized together as a unit nor is it a *brotherhood* of Christians organized into a unit. It is a relationship that exists between all Christians. They share a common faith and have common interests. While New Testament congregations were not tied together organizationally speaking, they were tied together doctrinally because they subscribed to the same standard. Paul declared that what he taught and ordained in one church he ordained in all (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17).

They shared in a common faith. I do not have the right to meddle in the internal affairs of another congregation nor

infringe upon its autonomy. It can decide, without any interference for me, its meeting times, when it will have a gospel meeting, how it can best use its treasury, who will do its teaching and preaching, lead its singing and praying, what kind of facilities it will provide to do its work, which of its members it may or may not discipline, etc.

But, because of my duty to **“love the brotherhood,”** I have an obligation to **“speak the truth in love”** to my brethren everywhere I have the opportunity to do so, just as I have an obligation to preach the gospel to every creature in the world because I love their souls. It is not interference into the affairs of other congregations when I demonstrate my love of the *brotherhood* by teaching them the truth and warning them of departures from the faith once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3) and even the Bible teaching that should govern them as they exercise their autonomy.

Let us love and appreciate those of the *brotherhood* that we meet and work with regularly in the local congregation; but let us also broaden our scope of interest and **“love the brotherhood”** as a whole – enough to **“correct, rebuke and encourage”** (2 Tim. 4:2 - NIV) as needed. – *The Reflector*, December 2007. ■

Reverence in Worship

By R. J. Evans

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those who are around Him” (Psa. 89:7).

One of the most vitally important lessons to be learned in the church today is that of *reverence*. **“Reverence”** means “profound respect, affection, veneration” (*Webster*). Worship is not an accidental, hit or miss exercise. It is a holy privilege involving preparation, concentration, consecration, and meditation.

God required *reverence* during Old Testament times (Ex. 3:5). Likewise, He requires fear and *reverence* of New Testament Christians today. **“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, For our God is a consuming fire”** (Heb. 13:28-29). How can we **“serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”** in our worship services?

1. By entering into the worship with joy and gladness. **“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’”** (Psa. 122:1). We, too, should come to the worship services with joy and gladness of heart! The song leader is ready and prepared to sing, the preacher is ready and prepared to preach, and all the worshipers are ready and prepared to worship. Let all worship God joyfully together with *reverence* and Godly fear.

2. By being silent. **“But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him”** (Hab. 2:20). Silence is an excellent way of showing respect. Most of us have been in a stadium when, out of respect for people who had lost their lives, “a moment of silence” was observed in their memory as a means of showing respect. Silence in the presence of the dead at a funeral indicates respect for the occasion and for the deceased person and his family. It seems to help by having a few moments of silence just before our worship begins. It is good to form the habit of being seated a few moments before it is time to start the service, being silent and preparing our minds and hearts to be ready for reverent worship. It is important for parents to teach their children so that they learn to be silent during worship.

3. By being orderly. Christians are commanded to **“Let all things be done decently and in order”** (1 Cor. 14:40). This applies to worship. While worship should not be so ritualized as to destroy the very simplicity and spirit of our worship (Jn. 4:24), there should be enough orderliness to maintain *reverence*. That is why we have assignments given ahead of time to eliminate any confusion as to what men are taking part in leading the worship. Our overall demeanor in worship should manifest respect. Why do we stand when a bride walks down the aisle or when a judge enters the courtroom? To show respect! Truly, it is to be a special, serious, reflective, respectful, reverent period when we come to worship God Almighty. There are other ways that indicate respect for God and the occasion when we come to worship – our dress, our behavior, our demeanor, our attitude, etc. May this brief article encourage us to worship the Lord **“in spirit and truth”** (Jn. 4:24). And in so doing, may we always have *reverence* for Him. – *The Reflector*, February 2017, page 4. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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