

CHRISTIANS' OBLIGATIONS TO ONE ANOTHER FINANCIALLY

This is a study on the unconditional and self-sacrificial love Christians are to manifest for one another, and the forgiveness with which they are to forgive one another's debts, according to Scripture. The study highlights the obligations of Christians to their brothers and sisters in Christ specifically in need of help financially. Sadly, many church leaders and individual Christians in the contemporary church are able but unwilling to help these brothers and sisters, generally because of bad experiences with other Christians they have previously helped financially, letting them down and still owing them money. But that is not how Christians who profess to love one another according to Scripture and to have forgiven those who have let them down, are to respond (CP Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-17).

Loving one another is not an option for Christians – it is a command and there are no boundaries. Christians are to love one another with the same love wherewith Jesus loved them – unconditional and self-sacrificial – the love of God Himself inspired by Jesus. This love keeps no record of past bad experiences or of money still owing. This is the English rendering of Jn 13:34-35 from the Greek according to **Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament**:

“A commandment, a new one I am giving you, that you should be constantly loving one another with a Divine and self-sacrificial love; even as I have loved you, you also be loving one another. In this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you constantly have love among one another”.

Anyone who says they love God, but does not express that love by their unconditional and self-sacrificial love for other Christians are only deluding themselves thinking they are saved (CP Jas 2:14-26; 1Jn 3:16-19). James and John both teach the same thing here: the only faith that can save is that by works out of Christians' love for God and for each other. This is the acid test of Christianity whereby Christians know whether they are following the example of God's love to others. If they are not willing to give of their material things to other Christians in need, then they certainly would not lay down their lives for them like God expects them to, and like Jesus did for them. 1Jn 3:16 is the exact counterpart of Jn 3:16 (CP Jn 3:16).

Christians who profess to love their brothers and sisters in Christ must not only express that love in words but in deeds also. It is only their love for one another manifest like this that ensures their place in God's Eternal Kingdom (CP Ga 6:7-10). Notwithstanding that they profess to love God, it will avail Christians nothing if they have the wherewithal, but refuse to unconditionally and self-sacrificially help Fellow-Christians in need financially. In the Greek construction of V 10 Paul is exhorting Christians to not only do good when the opportunity presents itself, but to look for opportunities to do good. The Christians walk is not only a Spiritual walk, it must also serve the needs of others, “...especially unto them who are of the household of faith”. It is only Christians' unconditional and self-sacrificial love that gives of itself for the happiness and well-being of other Christians that proves their

love for God, perfects His love in them, and assures them of their place in His Eternal Kingdom (CP 1Jn 4:7-21).

Here John traces the love Christians should have for one another to its source in the nature of God as revealed in Him giving His Son up to die for their sins (CP Ro 5:8-11; Eph 2:12-13; Col 1:20-22; Tit 3:3-8). In 1Jn 4:7-21 John is again stressing Christians' love for each other as the test of their Christian life. Christians are to show they are God's children by manifesting attitudes and actions like God's to each other. It is only by the expression of their love for one another like this that God's love is made perfect in them. The effectiveness of God's love in Christians demonstrates itself in their love for each other. This is the perfect love that lasts out of fear in 1Jn 4:18. This fear relates to the fear of being eternally damned. Christians in whom God's love is perfected do not have this fear – they have passed from death to life (CP V 18 with 1Jn 3:14). Christians need to heed these Scriptures because they all emphasise the love Christians are to have for each other demonstrated by their response to one another's needs, as the key to eternal life (CP Ro 12:9-10; 1Pe 1:22).

In Ro 12:9-10 Paul stresses that Christians' love for each other has to be sincere, unfeigned, without pretence or hypocrisy. It must be a sincere expression of the esteem in which they hold one another. In 1Pe 1:22 Peter commands Christians to “love one another with a pure heart fervently”. *Fervently* means stretched out, intensely, without ceasing, continually. The idea is that of a love that is extended to its fullest capacity to reach the one loved (CP Col 3:12-14). Christians are to adopt and practice diligently every form of relational righteousness; love, compassion, humble attitudes, self-giving behaviour, freely flowing forgiveness, and patience towards their brothers and sisters in Christ. This love keeps no account of past bad experiences, or money still owing, but responds affirmatively to every brother and sister in Christ with needs on their own merits, through Christians in whom this love manifests. This in no way condones Christians' failure to honour their debts to one another, but forgives the offenders, as they are meant to be forgiven in God's order for the New Testament church (CP Mt 18:21-22).

Jesus' response to Peter here that he had to forgive an offending brother “seventy times seven” simply underlines the fact that Christians cannot ever afford not to forgive an offending brother regardless of how many times they sin against them. Forgiveness is a matter of life or death for Christians – it too is not an option. If they do not forgive others who trespass against them neither will God forgive their trespasses against Him. Forgiveness has to be a constant attitude with Christians if they want to be forgiven themselves (CP Mt 6:11, 14-15 (also Lu 11:1-4); Mk 11:25-26; Lu 6:37). The forgiveness of God, though freely given to Christians upon their acceptance of Christ as Saviour, nevertheless remains conditional according to their willingness to forgive others (CP Mt 18:23-35).

This is called the parable of the unmerciful or unforgiving servant. Jesus told it in response to

Peter's question in V 21-22 regarding how many times an offending brother in Christ had to be forgiven. The judgement the king pronounced on the unforgiving servant in the parable equates with eternal damnation for unforgiving Christians, because just as the servant could never repay his debt to the king and yet the king forgave the debt, so too Christians are to forgive debts to them or they will be damned to eternity "...so likewise will my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses". Forgiving the debt means forgetting it too (CP Psa 103:10-12; Isa 32:25; 43:25; Jer 31:34; Mic 7:18-19; He 8:12; 10:17). Christians are to behave toward others as God behaves toward them. If it is good enough for God to forgive and forget their sins against Him, they too must forgive and forget others' sins against them.

Forgiving and forgetting are mutually inclusive in God's order, and it must be the same for Christians. Christians cannot profess to love their brothers and sisters in Christ and to have truly forgiven those who were indebted to them previously if they are able but unwilling to help others financially now (CP 1Pe 3:8-9). Peter teaches here that the calling of everyone who has received mercy and forgiveness from God is to bless others with the same mercy and forgiveness in order to inherit a blessing. The blessing is the inheritance to which Christians are called – eternal life. Let us read Lu 6:37 again now in bringing this study to a close (CP Lu 6:37). Apart from teaching that the forgiveness of God remains conditional according to Christians' willingness to forgive others, it also teaches that every action and attitude of Christians toward others will eventually reflect back on them. This is God's spiritual law of sowing and reaping. It applies to every aspect of the Christian walk. Read Ga 6:7-10 again (CP Ga 6:7-10 also Pr 19:17; 21:13; 22:2, 9). God equates Christians' treatment of others in need with their treatment of Himself.

Christians' financial circumstances can drastically change for the worse sometimes for whatever reason, which may necessitate them seeking urgent help financially. It is incumbent upon those having the wherewithal to help them, not scorn them or treat them with disdain (CP Mt 5:37). Regardless of how

their situation came about – that is immaterial - the fact there are Christians in need at all is sufficient reason to help them to the extent of one's ability to do so. This is God's order for the New Testament church as the Scriptures subject of this study all plainly teach. Christians who truly love their brothers and sisters in Christ and have unreservedly forgiven and forgotten past bad experiences and others' indebtedness to them, have no difficulty in giving of their resources to those in need. But those whose professed love does not manifest in like manner need to examine themselves in accordance with Scripture and correct the situation, lest they fail God's grace and forfeit their salvation (CP 1Cor 13:1-7; 2Cor 13:5; 1Jn 4:17-21).

1Jn 4:20 teaches that Christians who do not love their brothers and sisters in Christ hate them, because in God's economy love and hate, like light and darkness or life and death, necessarily replace, as well as necessarily exclude, each other. Whoever does not have one, of necessity has the other in each case (CP Mt 5:21-22; 1Cor 13:2; 1Jn 2:9-11; 3:14-15). Mt 5:21-22 teaches that Christians' attitude toward their fellow Christians is as significant to Jesus as what they do to them. In 1Jn 2:9-11 love is characterised by light, and hate, by darkness, which signifies hell and eternal damnation. This teaches that no one can say they love God and expect to spend eternity with Jesus, if they do not love their brothers and sisters in Christ the way Jesus commanded In Jn 13:34-35 – unconditionally and self-sacrificially. Scriptures give Christians no choice but to be sensitive to the material needs of others. In God's economy the primary purpose for Christians even having a job is that they can help others in need financially, especially their brothers and sisters in Christ (CP Eph 4:28).

(For a more detailed teaching on this subject see this author's studies *How Christians are to Love One Another* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith, Forgiveness a Matter of Life or Death for Christians** in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)** and *Christian – Beware of Falling God's Grace and Forfeiting your Salvation* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**).