



Conducted by
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“The scriptures say that we should love all men – should we love them more than God’s truth? The scriptures likewise say that we should love our brethren – should we love them more than God’s truth, i.e., to which do we give first priority?”

In attempting to answer this question I am assuming that the questioner is wanting me to establish priorities between the christian’s love for all men and his brethren on the one hand, and God’s truth on the other. I am also assuming that God’s truth means the revealed will of God, i.e., the Bible. Anyway, I shall comment from these basic assumptions –something I never like to do if it can be avoided – and I trust that the questioner will inform me if I have assumed wrongly.

Establishing Priorities

This is a very important thing to do. In simple terms it means that we are endeavouring to deal with the most important things first, and leave the less important until later. To put it another way, we are dealing with those things first which will have the greatest impact on that which we are attempting to do. I suppose this is what Jesus meant when he said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” Matt. 6:33. So let us say, as a general rule, that it is a good thing to establish priorities if at all possible. We need now, in fact, to see if we can establish priorities in terms of the question.

The Truth of God

When Jesus prayed to his Father He said. “Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth” John 17:17. Here we have the first fundamental lesson, and it is quite an important one, that the truth of God is the Word of God. Jesus emphasised this importance when, earlier in the prayer, he said, “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me” John 17:8.

From this we see that Jesus identifies himself absolutely with the truth of God. That truth came in words which he, Jesus, had delivered to men who received them. The reception of them engendered belief on the part of those who heard them. There is no doubt at all in my mind that God’s truth was manifested quite clearly by the personification of His love in Christ Jesus His Son. It was Jesus who said of himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me”.

So here we have the clue. It is God’s word which teaches us about His love. We cannot love as we ought until we have apprehended God’s love through Christ Jesus. It is only when we receive Christ in faith and obedience that we can enter fully into the love of God, and conse-

quently learn how to love in our own right. Therefore, I would say that if it is absolutely imperative to treat God's truth as first priority, because it is from that truth and because of that truth that we are able to love anyone else in the christian context.

Loving our Brethren

Love prompts us to do good things. The scripture says that Jesus went about doing good. Paul wrote to the Galatians and said, "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. AS we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men. especially unto them who are of the household of faith" Gal. 6:9,10. The word "especially" means, "most of all", and is the superlative of 'very much'.

As brothers and sisters in Christ we are related to Christ in a unique way. Concerning the husband and wife relationship Paul said, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh: but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" Eph.5:28-30. If we apply this reasoning to our spiritual relationship with Christ then we can see that it is impossible to hate our brethren because they are in the same body as we, and so long as this relationship is maintained in the church, which is the body of Christ, then we should be continually demonstrating that love for each other which prompted Jesus to die for the church. We, the church, are precious to Jesus, and because we are 'in' him we are precious to each other. As John says, "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" 1 John 4:20,21. Yes, loving our brethren is a very high priority, and we must always remember that it was the revealed Word, the Truth of God, Jesus himself, who taught us how to love.

Loving all Men

Isn't this exactly what was in the mind of God in the first instance? He desires that none should perish but that all should come to eternal life through Christ Jesus. The gospel according to John sums up God's attitude to fallen mankind, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16.

Clearly, we can say from God's point of view that love toward all men was the chief priority. As a matter of fact, those who are now his children once fell into the "all men' category, and if they had not been recipients of God's love they would have no grounds at all for differentiating between the relevant priorities of His word and their brethren. Therefore, we can say that if the love of 'all men' is a great priority with God then it can be no less a priority so far as His children are concerned.

Summary

I think I have said enough to indicate that it is not easy to separate the priorities as the questioner is asking. It is undeniably true to say that the love of God's truth is of paramount importance to the christian, revealing as it does God's will and His love. It is no less true to say that love of the brethren could be and should be an extension of that primary love which is revealed in God's truth, and it should be beautiful to behold and dynamic in its application to the world in which we move. And who would say that he is not moved with extreme compassion when he sees millions of people going to Christ-less graves because they either do not know of, or have not yet responded to, the love of God toward each one of them?

Let us try to summate. God's love, God's truth, Christ's sacrifice, the unification and effectiveness of the church, are all designed for one end; the salvation of all men. The beauty, worth, and importance of the inter-relationships which we have are bonuses to the extreme pleasure which we have of seeing some of the "all men" turn to Christ.

(All questions please, to Brother Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.)