John 13:1 (Walter Potter) 141280

The Activity of Love: December 2015, He Loved Them Unto the End (13:1)

These precious words are found in John 13:1. Most of us know that “to the end” there means continually, through every day. That is, He has loved and loves us with a love that nothing can stop; nothing can make Him cease to love us. We are loved with a love that will never cease to love us!

It is a little remarkable too, in that connection, that we find a passage in Hebrews 13 which says, “Let brotherly love continue.” What does that mean? Exactly what it says, that it is never to cease. Our brethren cannot act worse toward us than the disciples did toward the Lord. “This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). This means that we are to love our brethren in the same way He did in spite of everything.

The way in which this love has to manifest itself, of course, has to do with the way in which others conduct themselves. We find John lying on the Saviour’s breast, and we find Peter denying Him with oaths and cursing. He loved them both with the same love, but that love had to manifest itself according to the ways of each. I speak of the principle now. Of John it is written: “He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it?” (John 13:25). This interaction is communion.

What about the way Peter denied Him with oaths and cursing? There is no communion in this. The cock crows and he remembers the words that Jesus spoke unto him, and their eyes meet. Peter’s eye catches the Lord’s, and the Lord’s eye catches Peter’s. What is the result? The poor failing one went out and wept bitterly. The Lord’s love to Peter was not one whit less at that time.

I was thinking a little of Martha’s service to the Lord; it had become a burden (Luke 10:40-42). When service to the Lord becomes a burden, it loses its worth in His sight. And when does it become a burden? When love to Himself is not the spring, so that we hear the dear soul saying, “Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.” Her service has become a burden because He is not known as He should be, though in a sense He is still the object of her service; nevertheless, it is a burden.

Then there is that wonderful servant of God, Elijah. It is very interesting to note how we first meet him, and how we see him depart. He comes before us first directly from the presence of the Lord; out of a hidden place he comes forth saying, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). A passage from the New Testament (James 5:17) tells us he had been in communion with God about it. It was his love to the Lord and his people that led him. In substance he was saying, “Lord, if nothing else will bring the people to their senses — to a sense of their sin — withhold the rain.” It was a hard thing to ask, yet it was love that led to it. The Lord honored the request.

At the close of Elijah’s life he is carried to heaven in a whirlwind. Next we see him in the glory itself, and he is there with the Lord and Moses (Matt. 17:3). But what preceded his going to heaven? He was overcome with evil. In what way was he overcome? He made intercession against Israel! He said, “Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.” Then he asked to die. He was overcome of evil in that way.

We are told to not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). The love with which we are loved is the love with which we are to love. It is the love of Christ — it never can be overcome of evil. It is the remedy for us when we feel the danger of being overcome with evil, of being cast down when we see evil coming in like a flood.

Now in John 13 it says, “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” After saying this, He laid aside His garments, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He had girded Himself. Instead of being carried away with the thought that “now I am going to leave the world and depart to the Father,” He was thinking of them. He says, as it were, I know I will be up there, but I will not be happy without their fellowship and communion, and since without My services I cannot have it so, I will suit Myself to their need; I will take a position — an attitude — toward them that will maintain them in fellowship with Me while absent from them, until they do not need that service any more. His love never forgets its object. Oh what a humbling, blessed truth! How we feel more and more our utter unworthiness of it! Nothing humbles like grace — like love. That is how He loves us.

It was only after He had rendered them that service that He sat down. It is a type of the service in which He is now engaged in order to maintain us in communion with Himself. He does it, so to speak, because His love cannot do without us.

There in the upper chamber is the only place that I remember that the Lord calls the attention of the disciples to the fact that He is their Lord and Master. “Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another’s feet” (vss. 12-14). Never had He said this before. Then He adds, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” The little, two-letter word there is important: “Happy are ye, if ye do them.” Happiness is a result of washing one another’s feet.

All those who know what communion with Christ is know also that this is not possible without His present priestly work for us — what He did for His disciples. It is utterly impossible for us to restore our souls. “He restoreth my soul.” We are dependent on Him for the restoration of the soul as well as for its salvation. We cannot get on without this service — we cannot get on without the Lord. There is another thing, brethren: We cannot get on with one another without knowing how to do it with Him.

Communion

He says distinctly, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” And how often have we felt the communion broken — a cloud between. How is it going to be removed? There is just one way, and that is to put our feet into His hands. That is all. We will never get the cloud removed in any other way. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” It is just so, unless there is this service one to another. Think of the love that we are loved with — the love of Christ.

What the heart feels the need of is personal communion with Christ. What He looks for and values above everything else is personal devotedness to Himself, and no amount of service can ever compensate, can ever make up to Him, for communion with Himself. If there is devotedness, there will be communion; if there is communion, there will be service.

W. Potter (adapted)

clickbible.org