

PREFACE

The following sermon was delivered by Elder Sam Bryant at the 2002 Smoky Mountain Spring Meeting. It expresses my sentiments so much better than I can, that I asked for his permission to use it as the preface for this Anthology. Hlh

THE POWER OF LOVE

It is a great joy to be here at this meeting. And I have enjoyed so much the preaching, the singing, and the sweet fellowship. It has been a real boost to me personally. And I am thankful now for the opportunity to speak to you for a little while. Brother Franklin and I came up together, and as we were riding along, we were talking about exactly why we were coming. We know when you come to a meeting like this, your primary purpose ought to be to worship the Lord and be drawn closer to him, but I also love these beautiful mountains and enjoy doing some sightseeing. That's quite an incentive to come to the meeting. And, of course, I love you all; I love the fellowship of the saints and I believe there is room in our lives for all of these reasons to come together for this meeting. Now I hope you'll pray for me as I endeavor to speak to you at this time.

Brother Harold quoted tonight in his opening remarks a passage of scripture from Ps 133:1, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." That helped to settle my mind on what I would try to speak on tonight. David in his life knew what it was for brethren not to dwell together in unity. His own brethren according to the flesh, at times, had it in for him. King Saul hunted him down, and tried to kill him.

There was a lot of fighting among his children. Much of David's life on this earth was spent when brethren were not dwelling together in unity. But he knew how good and pleasant it was when brethren did dwell together in unity.

And you know if you are going to have unity among the brethren, you've got to work at it, and it's not an accident. I want to call your attention tonight to what I think would help as far as having unity among the brethren, help more than anything else, and that's in 1Jo 4:18; "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us. 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."

And so in this passage that I've read to you, John talks a lot about the subject of love. He begins, first of all, I think, to talk about the love of God for us. And, you know, the more we learn about God's love for us, the more it helps us to love one another. That's a powerful motivator to love one another, when we think about how much the Lord loved us. And John said here in 1Jo 4:18; "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear".

Now the only perfect love I know anything about in this world is God's love. Brotherly love is a wonderful love. The love people have in marriage is a wonderful love. So is neighborly love. And what about a mother's love? Those are all wonderful manifestations of love, but they are not perfect. But God's love for us is a perfect love. And the more you and I learn about God's love for us, his perfect love for us, the less fear we will have in this world, because we'll know that he loves us with an everlasting love, and that he will take care of us. He will not leave us, nor forsake us.

And I believe God's love is an eternal love, and it's an unconditional love. Did you know, if I understand the love of God tonight, as it is presented to us in scripture, he could never love us any more than he

loves us right now. And he could never love us less than he loves us right now. If you and I should read this bible through ten or twelve times a year, and go to every gospel meeting we could possibly get to, and visit all the nursing homes and hospitals weekly, and give half of our goods to feed the poor, and spend three or four hours a day in fervent diligent prayer, and lived that kind of life for the next fifty years, you know, God wouldn't love you a bit more than He loves you right now.

Because God's love is an unconditional love, you don't make God love you more by living a better life. God forbid, but if you didn't ever go to another meeting or read the Bible again, wasted your life in this world, I don't believe God would love you a bit less than he loves you right now. You all agree with that? Now a lot of people don't understand that about God's love, because human love isn't that way. In this world, in our relationships with people, our love for one another can grow, or it can be diminished.

There are people here tonight that I've known a long time, and I love you tonight more than I've ever loved you in my life. My love has grown for you.

But my love for people can be diminished, it can grow cold. People can treat you so cruel, and betray you, and reject you, to the point where your love and respect for them can be all but destroyed. We are humans. But not God's love. It can't grow, and it can't be diminished. His love is a perfect love. And I believe God loved his people from all eternity, and he chose them in Christ, and he loved them, when he died for them on the cross. He loves them tonight. He'll love them when this world is no more.

And I want to tell you, if that doesn't make you feel safe, I don't know what it would take to make you feel safe. "Perfect love casteth out fear," and when fear comes into our hearts, and we worry about the circumstances of this life or impending danger, it's usually because we have forgotten how much God really loves us, and how much he is able to take care of us. So we need to dwell a lot on the perfect love of God. Oh my friends, "perfect love casteth out fear." I think if people, who are not Primitive Baptists, could ever come to understand God's love, as it is presented in scripture, they would have to believe like

we believe. If God loves a person, and gave his Son to die for that person, to put away their sins, do you think there is any possibility that God would ever let that person be lost, spend eternity in hell? No!!

We need to know something about the love of God, the perfection of God's love. In Joh 13, the Bible says, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." To the end of what? To the end of his life. In other words he gave his life for his people. Now that's love. He didn't love us just enough to give us a cool drink of water, or shelter for the night. He loved us enough to give his life for us on the tree of the cross. As John said here in 1Jo 4: "Herein is love." 1Jo 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God." Oh, we ought to love him, and I want to love him more. But my love for God is so fickle, compared to his love for me, until it's not worth mentioning. "Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us." How much did He love us? He loved us and gave—now listen to this— "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Our sins have been paid for, because he loved us so much, he gave his Son to die in our room and stead.

Now let me tell you, that's love beyond comprehension. That's love beyond our ability to understand. But the more I do understand it, the less fear I have in this world. And I don't believe that anybody God loved, and Jesus died for, will ever perish in hell. They will be saved.

I like that song we sing, *Safe In His Love*. You are safe in the love of God. Oh, how we like to preach on the love of God for his children. But now the apostle says: "We love him because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother," what is he; "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?" That's very good logic. "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." So you and I are commanded in scripture to love our brethren.

Now I want to notice with you in Heb 13:1, this expression. As he begins in the first part of this chapter, Paul gives the Hebrews a long list of admonitions. He begins by saying this to them in this concluding chapter of this marvelous book, "Let brotherly love continue." Now he didn't say to go out and get it. I believe God puts that love in our heart. We don't have this kind of love by nature. By nature we don't love the brethren. But if we are born again, God has put love in our hearts for the brethren. Now he says, "Let brotherly love continue." If you can let it continue, obviously, you can hinder it. God's love will continue, but ours can be hindered. We don't want to do that as God's children. We want to let it flow freely in the midst of the church among the brethren. "Let brotherly love continue."

Now Paul could have had reference primarily to the Hebrew brethren loving other Hebrews. When Paul wrote this letter to them, they were going through a very trying time in their history as Hebrews. They were facing great trials and tribulations, and there was tremendous unrest among the Hebrews. They were suffering Roman domination of the Hebrew nation, and one Hebrew was set against another. And there were many Hebrews, who had come to understand that Jesus was the Savior and the Messiah. Many other Hebrews were holding on to Moses and the law, and that had caused tremendous friction among the Hebrew brethren.

Why, there was a time, even in Paul's life that he thought he did God's will to put Hebrews to death who believed in Jesus. And I want to tell you, that kind of friction would cause brotherly love not to flow. Paul is writing to the Hebrews, and saying to love your Hebrew brethren, that have not yet come to understand that Jesus is the Savior and the Messiah. That was a tremendous challenge to those Hebrews in the first century, to love other Hebrews, who were still observing Moses's law and putting animal offerings on the altar. What an insult to their precious Savior they loved, and knew he was the end of the law for righteousness sake. Now I want to tell you tonight, beloved, you and I are to love our brethren, who do not understand the doctrine of grace as we do. We're to love them for Jesus's sake. We're not to be hostile toward them.

In our community last year, a church of another denomination that had run down, had gotten a young preacher in from the seminary, and he had a lot of new ideas about how to build a church, and he was really building the congregation. They were having housefuls, and I heard about some of his gimmicks—like if you get a certain number here on Sunday morning, "you can hit me in the face with a pie."

You've heard those gimmicks. On Sunday, if they got a certain number there, he would get on top of the church building and preach. One Sunday, he was going to kiss a goat, if they got so many there.

Well, those people went out and got others to come in, and they had the house full. When I heard about those gimmicks, I chuckled and laughed, and thought, how ridiculous.

Sometime later, I had a funeral service with him at that particular church building. I got there a little early that day, and I saw up over the pulpit this quotation, "Whatever it takes," in broad letters, "Whatever it takes." You know my attitude toward that young preacher changed in a moment, and I thought, "If he believes what his denomination says they believe, that you've got to do something in order to get people to accept Christ and go to heaven, and if they don't, they are going to hell, I would agree with him. Whatever it takes get them to church. If me kissing a goat would save just one sinner from eternal hell, I should be willing to kiss a 1000 goats.

I admired his zeal. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have any respect for him, if he didn't use every gimmick in the book to get them there. Now I still don't believe in his doctrine, and I'm sorry he is in the dark, because I believe Jesus did whatever it took to get us to heaven, and he did it by himself. He said on the cross, "It is finished!"

If Jesus didn't finish the work, he was deceived, because he sure thought he did! Many of our brethren don't know the truth about the finished work of Christ. What should our attitude be toward them? We ought not to ridicule them and make fun of them, we ought to love them and pray for them for Jesus's sake. Primitive Baptists have done much harm by being too harsh in our ridicule of those who differ with us in doctrine. We have to expose error, and we are bound to teach the truth, but we ought to love our brethren, who don't know the truth.

I want to tell you I was blessed in my life at the age of fourteen to find out salvation was by the grace of God, and I've been resting in that for thirty-six years now. And I would to God all of his children could know that.

I want to tell you, Paul loved the brethren. He loved those that didn't agree with him. I want you to listen to what he said over in Ro 10. He said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God," for who, "for Israel." And I think he is talking about God's people among the natural Jews. "My heart's desire," brethren, talking to the Gentiles in Rome, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

Saved from what? Not saved from eternal hell, but saved from a doctrine that enslaves them in this life. "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

He was praying for his brethren. You want to know how much Paul loved his brethren among the Jews, turn back to Ro 9:1. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Oh he loved the Hebrews. He could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren according to the flesh.

I don't know if I love anybody that much tonight, but Paul loved the brethren, the Hebrews, so much that he would even be accursed from Christ if his brethren could be blessed to see the truth. Oh, that's love. That man had a lot of love in his heart for the Hebrews. And let me tell you, they didn't love him

in return. No sir, they turned on him, they despised him, they thought lowly of him, because he had denied Judaism, and had committed himself to Jesus Christ and him crucified. But oh, how he loved the Hebrew brethren.

And this dear man had to spend most of life among the Gentiles. Paul loved the Jews. If any man on Earth ever loved his nation, Paul loved his nation. And yet God had called him to be a minister and an apostle to the Gentiles, and for most of his life he had to be away from his brethren according to the flesh. Oh, he wanted to go to Jerusalem. He longed to go to Jerusalem. Antioch was his headquarters but Jerusalem was his heart. He loved those Jewish people. He would have chosen many times to have been among them rather than the Gentiles, but in obedience to the call of God on his life, he turned his back on his brethren according to the flesh, and went to Antioch, and went to Rome, and went to Corinth, and went to Spain.

You know what drove him to those places, the love of God in his heart for his brethren. I want to tell you, love is a powerful thing. It's the most powerful force in the universe tonight, and Paul said, "Brethren, let brotherly love continue." I'll tell you what; he did love the brethren.

Now Paul didn't say, "Love the brethren when they are as sweet as little angels dipped in sugar." Did you notice that, he just said, "Love the brethren, let brotherly love continue." You know there are brethren in the world, who are easy to love. I can look around here tonight, and see some that I feel like are very easy to love.

I guess the easiest man I've ever known in the ministry to love was my pastor and father in the ministry, Elder Cecil Darity. He is easy to love. If you couldn't love him, you needed a heart check-up big time. He is an easy man to love.

And there's a lot of brethren and sisters, that are just easy to love. You don't have to work at loving them, they're easy to be around. They are humble, God fearing; they make you feel good. You all like to be around folks like that? Oh, I do, friends. I like to be around people that are easy to be around, and not always nit-picking and finding fault, but you know that they are just lovely people. And there's people like that in the world.

But God didn't say just to love the lovely, but he said, "Let brotherly love continue." We are to love brethren when they are mean, and hateful, and spiteful, and judgmental, and devilish, and resentful. We're to love them then, isn't that right? Now that's when you find out how much you really love the brethren. You know most of us ask God to help us to love the unlovely, but when he sends an unlovely person along, we don't like that too much.

How are you going to love the unlovely, if you don't have any unlovely folks in your life? And most of us have some of those along the way.

May I say that love does not mean we have to let people walk all over us, and that we have no right to call their hand, or rebuke them when we feel they are wrong. But it does mean we have to be kind and longsuffering. Now he says, "Let brotherly love continue."

Talking about Paul's love for the Hebrews, I think he loved God's people among the Gentiles also. I think he proved that in his attitude toward the Corinthian church. Have you all ever—well I know you have—but have you recently read the books of First and Second Corinthians, and noticed just exactly what kind of church that church was? Listen to what Paul said in the first verse of the first chapter of First

Corinthians, (1Co 1:1) "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of....," what? "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth."

Now when you get through reading the first book of Corinthians, you'll scratch your head and wonder is that really the church of God, because I'm telling you, that church had a lot of major problems in it. Why, here in the first chapter, Paul talks about one of the biggest problems they had, and it was a division in the church over preachers.

Some of them said, "I like Paul. If he's not preaching I won't be there. I like his depth. Oh that man can teach you something that's out of this world." And others said, "If Paul's there, I'll go to sleep. I can't follow him. He's too deep for me. But if Peter is preaching, that old rugged fisherman, I will be there. He butchers our language, but I tell you I can relate to him." And others said, "Well I don't care a thing for him. You can have both of those fellows but if Apollos is in the pulpit, I'll be there." And some of them didn't want to hear any preacher, they just said, "Jesus is all I want."

Now they didn't have a good attitude, either I don't think. But anyway, Paul talks about the church being divided and he brings that up in the first chapter. You know, I have said I believe ninety percent of the trouble among the Old Baptists is caused by preachers, who are walking in the flesh. Would anybody here agree with that? Sometimes it is about ninety-nine percent. But you know what? The preachers were not the problem in the church in Corinth. I believe Peter and Paul and Apollos were united. They were standing together for the cause of Jesus Christ. Now there were differences in their styles and personalities and gifts, but these brethren were united under the blood stained banner of Jesus Christ.

The problem was the church was carnal and worldly. And Paul says, "I didn't die for you; you weren't baptized in my name." That's the first problem. That's enough right there to kill a church, to get divided like that. You know sometimes today when the Old Baptists have a little trouble and there's a little war,

you hear a war drum beating, our brethren say, "Oh what's going to happen to us." And they just make out like this is the first time in the history of the church there has ever been any trouble.

A brother told me one time years ago, "Brother Sam, I just tell you, I'm just so discouraged I'm ready to quit." He says, "There is just so much trouble going on." I said, "Have you read the New Testament lately?" He said, "What's that got to do with it?" I said, "It's got everything to do with it. They had more problems in the first century than you've ever known in your lifetime, and, Brother, they didn't quit." And there is no place for you and me to quit tonight."

Now the Corinthian church was divided over preachers, and they had the big head. See, these were Greeks. They weren't little short, olive-complected Jews with big noses. Brother, these were Grecians. They had all but perfected the human body. They had invented the Olympic games. Oh yes, they were brilliant intellectuals, and fine physical specimens of the human race. And Paul had gone over there as a little Jew, and they laughed at him and said, "Why he can't even talk good. He stammers when he talks."

I'll tell you, they had the big head. These Greeks were high-minded, arrogant people. They thought they were really something—even in the church, born again, and baptized. They were in the church, and still had a lot of pride in them. The first chapter deals with that. He told them that God uses the weak and foolish to confound the mighty and wise, so we would glory only in God.

Well, I could spend the whole night talking about the problems at Corinth. You know, in the fifth chapter (1Co 5) they had a case of incest. That was unspeakable. And they had brethren taking one another to law, suing one another in a court of law. They had long haired hippies. They had women who weren't subject to their husbands. They had brethren getting drunk at the communion service. According to the 13th chapter (1Co 13), they really didn't love each other like they should. They even

had a major doctrinal problem, because some were denying the resurrection of the body. Now I'm telling you, I don't know of any of our churches as bad off as they were, do you all?

I mean, all of our churches have problems, and by the way, I want to say this, if you all are looking for a perfect church, don't ask me for directions. I don't know where one is. And if you find one, please don't join it, because if you joined it, it wouldn't be perfect anymore. Would you all say amen to that? Was that an oh, me, or an amen?

But anyway, this church had a lot of problems in it, and Paul didn't let them off the hook, Brother. I'm telling you, when you read this book, you can find out why they got angry with him. He let them have it with both barrels. And we should be faithful to point out errors today, that we see among the churches. Now why would Paul continue to labor with a church like Corinth?

You know Primitive Baptists in our day, and I think we've had this habit a long time, when a church starts doing something we don't like, the first thing we want to do is put up bars against them. unchurch them. That's just a bad habit. It has never worked. And it is very unscriptural. Some people think a church split is a sign of great strength. Well, I don't.

I believe with all my heart, we should be set for the defense of the gospel, and if there should be someone, who would trouble your church by perverting the gospel of Christ, let him be accursed. That is the individual, who would be perverting the gospel. Surely a local church has a right and duty to bar a preacher from its pulpit, if they believe he is unsound or immoral in his personal life.

But who would want to bar a church Jesus Christ has not unchurched? Not me. I might not feel comfortable visiting them, and I don't have to, if I don't feel impressed to, but it is not my business to unchurch them. You know what I really think the problem is with some brethren who want to bar churches and declare them out of order? They really don't trust Jesus as the head of the church. Do you believe He is still the head of the church today and able to sit in judgment over each church? I do. He said he would remove the candlestick. He never told one church to go over and remove the candlestick from another church. That is his job and I trust him enough to leave that in his hands.

Most churches I know have enough problems in their own local fellowship to keep them busy without trying to tend to some one else's business. And I can tell you for sure, if this church at Corinth was around today, the war drums would be heard, and many would be tempted to bar them. I don't know that I would want to raise children in that church. That church was a mess, and yet it was the church of God. Paul said it was.

Now how do you explain why Paul would continue to labor with them. I believe the explanation is given to us in 1Co 13 where Paul is writing on the great subject of love, and he says when he begins to define love, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind." And Paul had so much charity in his heart for these Corinthians, he was suffering long with them. Now this kind of love is not always a warm fuzzy feeling for the brethren.

This love is often a decision you make, because you know it is right to act loving and kind toward the brethren. "Charity suffereth long." Now it doesn't suffer forever, but it suffers long. It is obvious today that God did not suffer forever with the church at Laodicea. He loved them, but he told them if they did not repent, he—not a sister church—would spew them out of his mouth. And He won't suffer forever with churches today that are in disorder.

Now these people at Corinth had it in for Paul. You know, I'm probably just as bad about this as any preacher here, but some of our preachers are bad about getting it in their minds they are being persecuted today. I heard about a preacher, who was no longer being invited into a certain part of the country, and he said he was being persecuted. Now would you consider that persecution? I tell you what, when you compare your little sufferings to what Paul went through, Brother, you'll get back into reality right quick, and realize we are all on easy street today.

He straightened these Corinthians out, because he said, "I'm a fool for naming off my sufferings." Paul didn't want to brag about what he had suffered for Jesus sake, but these Corinthians had backed him into a corner, and they were questioning his apostleship. Why they were even saying he was not an apostle. He said, "Am I not an apostle?...have I not seen Christ." He let them know, look, if I'm not an apostle, you are not a church because I planted you.

Brother, I'll tell you he loved them, but they didn't intimidate him. Did they back him down and give him lockjaw? No sir, he had some tough love in his heart for these folks.

He said..... Oh, I better not get into that. My time, thirty minutes, is gone. Somebody said, "I am the last one up." Well, I won't be stealing anybody's time. You know, some brethren, when we ordain them, we don't teach them how to tell time. I don't want to be accused of stealing another brother's time, but since I'm last, I may just stay on this just a moment more.

Paul said to the Corinthians, "I'm a fool for bringing up my sufferings." But he said, "I want to tell you something, I have suffered for Jesus sake." He begins to name off all his sufferings.

We think we suffer when somebody won't speak to us, don't look at us like we think they ought to. Brother, that's not persecution, not in the context of what my Lord went through, and what the apostles went through. We need to get over feeling pitiful for ourselves. Grow up. Get a grip and grow up.

Would you all say "amen" to that. Get back into reality and find out we're really on Easy Street. This man said, "I was beaten by the Jews, and I was beaten by the Romans." They would strip his back, and beat him with rods, and they would beat him with a whip, and gave him thirty-nine lashes on five occasions. Listen, if they put me in jail one night for preaching the gospel, I doubt if I would ever preach again, without bringing it up. Paul spent much of his life in prison. Now, let's wake up, folks.

And when he was in jail, it looks to me, like he had a good time, because Jesus was there. When he was in Philippi and they put him in the innermost stocks, I could just imagine he was concerned about his brother and would have said, "How you doing, Brother Silas?" And I can hear him saying, "Well, I'm hungry, and my back hurts from that whipping, and I'm cold, but other than that I'm alright. How are you Brother Paul?" I can hear him saying, "Brother Silas, I'm not even worthy to suffer for my Lord. Let's sing a song." And they began to sing at midnight, and the jailhouse opened, Brother. Let me tell you, when Jesus is first in your life, you don't sit around complaining, and murmuring about how bad everything is. You are talking about how good everything is. So Paul didn't bring up all his sufferings here, because he wanted to show out. But these Corinthians had backed him into a corner.

But anyway. I just want to say this tonight, you and I need to love the brethren, and we need to show love toward one another. What good is love in your heart, if you don't show it? Do you all think love is any good? There is an old poem I heard one time that says, "A bell is not a bell till you ring it. And a song is not a song till you sing it. Love is not love until you show it."

Now you could argue all night about whether a bell is a bell before you ring it. I reckon it would be a bell, before you ring it, but it's not functioning as a bell till you ring it. What good would a bell be up

there if you didn't ever ring it? What good is a song if you don't sing it? And what good is love if we don't show it and manifest it?

I believe a lot of love's been shown here in this meeting. Somebody had to go to a lot of effort to get us here, and provide this place. They're not taking up any offerings for that. That's love.

There is a lot of love going on in this world. Love is a glorious thing. I suppose the greatest love in the world, from a natural standpoint, is a mother's love. I don't know of any love greater than that. We had a dear mother in our community who lost her son last week. Franklin and I conducted the funeral. He was fifty-four years old, and he had a brain tumor, and they kept him at home with Hospice assistance, and that was a wonderful thing. The family could be there right to the end. And the Hospice nurse said to his mother and to the family, "Is there anybody in the family he hasn't seen yet, that hasn't gotten here?" And they said, "Not that we know of."

She said, "Well he should have been dead three days ago. We see death all the time. He's waiting. Something is not right." She said, "I want all of you to go in there and talk to him. I want his sisters and brothers to go in there and give him permission to die. And I want you to go in there, dear mother."

And, you know, they all went in. Then the mother went in, and I'll tell you, if there's ever been a woman that loved her child, this mother did. She's already lost two children, and this would be the third child she would have to give up to death. And she went in there, and it was the hardest thing she'd ever done, but she put her arms around him, and she hugged him, and she said, "Tom, you've suffered enough. It's time to go and be with Jesus. I'll be there in a little while." And, do you know, in a few moments he left this world. Now I believe love was holding him on. He was concerned about his mother. She assured him, "Your brothers and your sisters are going to take care of me." That's love in this world folks. It's a wonderful thing. It's the most glorious thing in the world, and you and I ought to be showing love tonight.

Now when you love people, that doesn't mean you love all their ways. Now we have got to stay in reality tonight. I'll just have to confess, there are brethren, whose ways I don't like. I don't enjoy being with them. Is that ugly to say? You know when you're a preacher, you have to make a few confessions publicly. There's brethren among us that, I've known for thirty years. I love them. I appreciate their labors in the kingdom, their sacrifices for God, but they have never felt comfortable around me, and I have never really felt too comfortable around them. It's just personality clashes. And I don't think God requires us to be with people much, that we don't really feel comfortable with. I think Paul had that struggle with some of the brethren. But we can still love one another, and pray for one another, and labor together for Jesus's sake. We can reach out to one another, and show that love. I want to tell you, I don't know of a soul here tonight, that I'm not willing to shake hands with.

You know, they say there's two kinds of people in the world. There is the "Here I am" people and there is the "Hey, there you are" people. Now the "Here I am" people are those who walk in a room and they stand there and they say, "I'm here now. You all can come over and speak to me, and affirm me, and make me feel good about me. You know, just wallow all over me." You all know any folks like that? Full of insecurity. May God deliver me from insecure people. You can't love them enough for them to feel safe.

And then, there's people like Brother Cecil Darity, who would walk into a room and say, "Hey, there you are. I've been wanting to see you," and they go over and hug you and they say, "Man, it's so good to see you. You look great. I'm so happy to be with you." What kind of person are you tonight?

Now we need to lay aside petty little differences and love one another for the cause of Jesus Christ. Because there's a great cause in this world, as far as I'm concerned, greater than any man in this world tonight, and that's the precious cause of Jesus.

Now I would say, if I had to guess, I would say Paul felt a lot closer to the Philippian church than he did to the Corinthian church. What would you all say about that? He said, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," talking about the Philippians. That's quite a compliment to make, isn't it? When you read about that Philippian church, and their attitude, you can understand why he loved them so much. I don't know that he ever felt that way about the Corinthians, but he loved them, and he was faithful to them, and he labored long and hard to save them, as our brother said last night, "from the error of their ways." Now, beloved, I believe God's children can live together in the church in peace and harmony.

Now if you get too close to people you don't click too much with, you'll have a little fire, and we don't need that. And people have enough sense to know who they can be with a lot, and, really, anybody that you're with too much, they are going to get on your nerves. Brother Tom Hagler was good enough to invite Franklin and me, and some other good friends up to his lovely mountain home in Cashiers, North Carolina, this week, and they treated us like we were really something. I mean they gave us a nice bedroom, two wonderful meals, best steak I ever ate in my life, and they said we just made them happy when we got there. But I am sure we made them real happy when we left.

One sister said that her children made her happy twice at Christmas time—coming and going. She said, the prettiest Christmas lights she ever saw were the tail lights on those kids' cars.

Well, now listen, company is the same way. I love company but company is like fish. You know. After the third day! Now when we all get to heaven we are going to be together for eternity and I don't believe we'll mind being together up there, but we'll be perfect up there. We are a long way from that down here.

I love my brother Franklin as much as anybody in the world. I got a reason to love him, because he's been so good to me all my life. But I tell you what, I know he's about had enough of me on this trip. And

he's got to ride home with me tomorrow afternoon, and he'll be glad to get in town and let me out. Now that doesn't mean we don't love one another. That's just being real, and that's the same way in the church. And we've got to learn to be longsuffering. Somebody said, "The only way to get four Old Baptists in one accord is to put them in a Honda." Well I just don't believe that. I believe we can dwell together in unity, and be in one accord.

That reminds me of the fellow, driving through the country, and he saw a beautiful church building, "Harmony Baptist Church." Big sign out front. You know that's a beautiful name for a church, Harmony. He drove on through town, and he saw another beautiful church building and another sign that said "New Harmony Baptist Church." Well that's sort of been the history of the church. But it doesn't have to be. God's children can labor and toil together. On essentials there must be unity, but on non-essentials there must be charity and longsuffering.

There are people among us more liberal than others, and some more conservative than others, and they don't need to get together and fuss too much about those things. There are some things I just don't discuss with some brethren, because I know we are not going to agree. I can't change them. I don't think they are going to change me.

We all need that "Serenity Prayer." "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change."

I like the new version of that. "God grant me the serenity to accept the people I can't change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know that person is me."

Another version of that is, "God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked, the good eyesight to recognize those I do, and enough mind to know the difference." Well, that's enough of the foolishness of this world.

But I want to tell you, I love you people for Jesus sake. And I know some of you love me with great effort, and I understand that, because I'm not real loveable a lot of the time. I understand that. But I love the Lord Jesus, and I believe he loved me, and I believe he loves you, and I know I'm a liar, if I say I love him, and don't love you. So if I don't show my love in the right way, you can talk to me about it and we'll work out something. But for goodness sake, let's all put the unity of the kingdom of heaven above any personal preferences or differences. Let's love the Hebrews and Gentiles like Paul did. "Let brotherly love continue." Thank you for your wonderful attention.