

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)*

## Light from the Word

### The Faithful Church - Defined by Love



*Writings based on God's Word*

In Revelations 3:7-13 we are given an encouraging description of a church that Christ found to be very sound in their service toward God. We often hear the church in Philadelphia described as the faithful or loyal church. Christ had nothing negative to say about the church that was in Philadelphia.

What was so special about the church in Philadelphia? Jesus said the church of Philadelphia “... *has kept my word, and has not denied my name*” (Rev.3:8). Philadelphia was faithful to the Word of God and to the name of Jesus.

What does it mean to be faithful? To be faithful is to be firmly connected to the truth and to duty; to be constant in performance and true to one's word.

Throughout the year the concept of “the faithful church” will be explored in a number of ways in these “Light from the Word” articles. In this first one, we will look at the faithful church as defined by love.

Since the faithful church is defined by love (Col. 1:2-4), we need to understand what that means. We must go beyond simply defining love. We need to better understand the application of godly love, which always seeks what is best for us. We could easily go to the dictionary for definitions or we could go on-line and get hundreds of opinions about what it means. However, since we are talking about the faithful church, the bride of Christ, we should look to the Word of God for application of His love through instructions as to how we should live. The Word gives many teachings which establish standards and boundaries that are for our spiritual welfare. Through submission to God's loving direction and care, we can benefit from the many instructions in His Word that guide us aright and enable us to overcome the temptations that Satan brings. (1 John 2:15, 5:1-3; Rev. 12:11).

Love comes to us from many sources. We must begin with “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16) and “...*love is of God*” (1 John 4:7). There is no greater definition of love, nor is there a greater source of love than God. “*We love him because he first loved us*” (1 John

4:19). If we want to live godly lives, we must demonstrate godly love. We must also be willing to share our love with many others and in many circumstances. Godly love is an attribute of holiness. God said “*Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy*” (Lev. 19:2).

Jesus said, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self*” (Matt. 22:37-39). If we apply these two commandments to our daily walk of life, we will find many opportunities to expand and share our love.

Our love for God extends to our love for Christ who is of God. Our love for Christ can best be expressed by following His example as portrayed in the Word of God. Jesus emphasized the importance of being faithful through obedience when He said “*If ye love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). He also said, “*as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*” (John 13:34).

Part of loving God is to recognize that, unworthy though we may be, God still loves us and shows it in powerful ways. “*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). God's love for us exceeds our ability to comprehend it.

Our love for God will be evident if we love God's people. This is a direct application of the second great commandment. It was also emphasized by Peter when he wrote that we should see that “...*ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*” (1 Pet. 1:22), and “*Love the brotherhood*” (1 Pet. 2:17).

Additionally, our love for God is expressed by our love for the church, the bride of Christ. Each congregation is made up of brothers, sisters, converts, friends and children. How much we love them is a reflection of how much we love God. We know that some people are easier to love than others. We also know that a chain is

only as strong as its weakest link. If our love for God is only as strong as our love for the least of His people, perhaps the brother or sister who is most difficult to love, how strong is our love for God?

We also demonstrate love for God through our love for our family. It is easy to love everyone in our family when everything is going well, but how do we respond if our spouse or child frequently disappoints us? If God only loved us as much as we love our spouse or child at the most difficult of times, would we truly feel the love of God? God loves us in spite of who we are and in spite of our imperfections.

If the only requirement to be a part of the faithful church would be to love our Heavenly Father, His Son, the Holy Spirit, our brotherhood and our family, that would seem to be enough of a challenge. However, to truly fulfill the requirement for godly love, we must go much further.

We are to love our neighbor as our self (Matt. 22:39), and although the word “love” is not used in these scriptural references, we are to love the fatherless and widows (James 1:27), and the stranger (Matt. 25:35). To complete the definition, or boundaries of biblical love, we must add Christ's exhortation to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). In order to apply the standards which godly love sets for us, it is necessary to examine our lives very carefully. We must also examine the Scriptures carefully to grasp what they teach us about love. Jesus did not overlook sin (as evidenced by His actions in the temple or His reaction to those who thought themselves perfect), but He never allowed His dissatisfaction with sinful behavior to cause Him to lose sight of His mission on this earth—to reach out to everyone in love. We must do likewise.

There will be individuals and situations that will try our love to the limit, but he who is faithful until the end will find his name in the Book of Life. If the faithful church is defined by love, it must consist of members whose lives are defined by love.