

TRUTH FOR TODAY

VOL. XXVII, NO. 9

JULY, 2019

PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS #3

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

This month, we’re concluding our series of studies on the topic, “*Provoke unto love and good works,*” looking at the concepts as taught in Hebrews 10:23-25. Here, the writer mentions three needs, two of which we’ve already covered: (1) the need for holding fast to the faith (v. 23); and (2) the need for properly provoking each other (v. 24a). Now, let’s look at the third:

THE NEED FOR LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

“...provoke unto love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24b).

We are admonished to provoke - stir up - the internal motivation of others regarding love. Love for God is expressed in obedience (*Matthew 22:37-39; John 14:15*). Think about it - how can I reveal my love for God in any other way than by obedience? I can’t write Him a letter, call Him on the phone, or send a gift as token of my admiration for Him.

Not only should I be stirred in my love for God, but also for my fellow man, and God’s own people: “*Let brotherly love continue*” (*Hebrews 13:1*). The original term used to translate “*brotherly love*” is “*philadelphia*.” This is the name William Penn gave to the city he founded in Pennsylvania years ago; unfortunately, today the designation is somewhat of a misnomer, as the “city of brotherly love” is one of the most violent and vicious cities in which to live! Frequently, we too become vicious and violent in our attitudes and actions, we irritate instead of

stimulate, and such is detrimental to the body of Jesus. Instead, let's have the proper attitude of love for our God, love for our neighbor, and love for our brethren.

But also, we are encouraged to provoke each other to "*good works.*" That is, the emotion of love should be stimulated until it spills over into positive external actions. Indeed, there are many good works in which we should be involved, including seeking the lost (evangelism), serving the suffering (benevolence), and strengthening the saved (edification).

An example of both love and good works is seen in our assembling with the saints: "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:25). Forsaking the assembly is the same as forsaking God, as such will not encourage but discourage saints, will lead one to waver and perhaps cause others to do the same. In fact, one of the first visible signs in the gradual process of apostasy is not assembling with the saints. In view of such, why would anyone ask, "Is church attendance important?"

Wayne Cox

HATRED, VARIANCE, AND EMULATIONS

When one mentions the word "*heart,*" he normally refers to that vital nine-to-eleven-ounce-fist-sized-muscular organ that lies in the cavity of our chest and receives blood from the veins and pumps it into and through the arteries. What a workhorse the heart is!

The heart:

beats an average of 75 times a minute, forty million times a year, or two and a half billion times in a life of 70 years. At each beat, the average adult heart discharges about four ounces of blood. This amounts to three thousand gallons a

day or 650,000 gallons a year - enough to fill more than 81 tank cars of 8,000 gallons each.

The heart does enough work in one hour to lift a 150-pound man to the top of a three-story building, enough energy in twelve hours to lift a 65-ton tank car one foot off the ground, or enough power in seventy years to lift the largest battleship afloat completely out of the water.¹

No wonder we're tired at the end of the day!

Our topic for consideration concerns the heart of man. Obviously, these words are not lessons on human anatomy, nor am I qualified to address such! We're talking about a heart of a different kind - the spiritual heart of man which involves our "desires, affections, perceptions, thoughts, understanding, reasoning powers, imaginations, conscience, intentions, purpose, will, and faith."²

Hopefully, an examination of our inner man would reveal positive spiritual health, since we are incorporating into our lives the wonderful fruit of the Spirit, nine elements listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22 - 23. Reality, however, would reveal that the majority of people would receive a markedly different diagnosis of their heart's condition, as so many are involved in wrongdoings called "the works of the flesh," listed by Paul in Galatians 5:19 - 21. The apostle had just mentioned the "desires of the flesh" in verse 17, and now sets forth ways in which these passions are fulfilled.³

A. T. Robertson combines these works of the flesh into four groups of "manifest vices;"⁴ Hendricksen does likewise and labels his categories immorality, idolatry, rivalry, and inebriety.⁵ The third group is the largest; the reason why so much prominence is given to this category of

sinful practices is perhaps because of Paul's statement in Galatians 5:15: "*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*" Evidently, the Galatians were doing exactly that!

Here, in verse 15, people - church members at that! - are pictured in the act of rushing at each other like wild beasts. By means of an ascending series of gruesome acts their violence and its threatening woeful result is pictured: they bite each other, "gulp each other down," and, if they persist, will in the end be totally consumed by one another.⁶

Let's discuss these rather unpleasant dispositions and sins of attitude - the terrible trio of hatred, variance, and emulations. What detrimental effects these can have on our hearts! But, before noticing each term, does it really matter what is in my heart? Is it really important what I think, as long as I don't commit some outward evil?

Indeed, it does matter. The type heart one has is largely determined by his thoughts. "*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). As one has well said, "*We may not be what we think we are, but what we think, we are.*" Tragically, the number is legion who believe they can harbor evil thoughts without committing evil acts. In fact, some religious leaders in Jesus' day were guilty of that very thing, and the Lord did not mince words when addressing them! For instance:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:25 - 26).

These Pharisees were righteous on the outside, but rotten within; their righteousness was all show and no substance. Though their lips said the right things, their hearts reflected the wrong attitude. For them, there was nothing more important than looking good, appearing clean, going through the motions, and impressing people with their trimmed robes and large phylacteries. They could quote the Law verbatim, but within they were corrupt. No wonder the Lord admonishes: *“A clean plate does not mean a clean heart!”*

Indeed, internal problems require internal solutions. This principle, so simple to understand, is so often ignored when it comes to our heart problems. We feel guilty, and so we shine our appearance by contributing more. We have bad thoughts, so we sing louder, trying to drown out the noise of a bothered conscience. Hatred, contention, and jealousy rage within, so we buy new clothes and new toys to make us feel better for the moment. Like those ancient Jews, we modern Pharisees never really solve the problem because we’re focusing on the external, not the internal where it really counts.

[continued next month]

ENDNOTES

1. Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979), p. 452.
2. W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words Vol. 2 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p. 207.
3. William Hendricksen, Galatians and Ephesians (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 218.
4. Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament Vol. 4

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1931), p. 312.

5. Hendricksen, Galatians and Ephesians, p. 219.

6. Ibid., p. 212.

AREA-WIDE YOUTH MEETING

September 8, 2019

Speaker: Jameson Steward

6:30 p.m.

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

GOSPEL MEETING

June 26 - 28, 2020

Speaker: Jameson Steward

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

WEBSITE

Be sure to check out our presence on the Internet at **www.veronacoc.com**. On our site you will find information about the Verona congregation, as well as past issues of Truth for Today available for viewing and/or download in PDF format.