"Let Us … Provoke Unto Love"

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works …" (Heb. 10:24).

This is the third of three exhortations in this section. The first two were directions to give attention to ourselves: *"Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith"* and *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not."* Taking heed to oneself is a first priority. To those disposed to remove a mote from a brother's eye, Jesus said, *"Cast out first the beam that is in thine own eye, then thou shalt see clearly the mote out of thy brother's eye"* (Mt. 7:5). Paul instructed Timothy, *"Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine"* (1 Tim. 4:16). When one seeks to have a true heart and hold unswervingly his hope, he is therein taking heed to himself.

Still, no man is an island. We interact with others and we must be as concerned for their well being as for our own. *"Not looking each of you to his own things, but also to the things of others"* (Phil. 2:4). The golden rule is, *"All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets"* (Mt. 7:12). And it was the law and the prophets! The law gave specific instructions that should one see a loose animal not his own, even though it belong to his enemy, he was to pen it and keep it until its owner secured it (Ex. 23:4). The tears of Jeremiah were for his rebellious brethren upon whom God had unveiled to Jeremiah the sorrow and anguish which awaited them. Paul said, *"I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh"* (Rom. 9:2f). He wrote, *"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, weep with them that weep"* (Rom. 12:15). One should expect that although we are commanded to watch ourselves; we should likewise be commanded to care for others. This is the root of this third exhortation: *"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works."*

The word *"provoke"* usually carries the sense of one who stirs up another in a an evil way. Paul commands, *"and ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath …"* (Eph. 6:4). While *"provoke"* in Hebrews 10:24 and Ephesians 6:1 are from two different Greek words, the English word each of them are translated into is *"provoke."* Israel, by her idolatry and infidelity, provoked the Holy One of Israel (Is. 65:3). Still, although the thought of *"stir up"* is inherent in both passages, it is used in a bad sense in one but a good sense in the other. Peter used the word *"stir up"* in a good sense when he wrote to *"stir up your sincere minds by putting you in remembrance"* (2 Pet. 3:1). There are two things the Hebrews were to stir up in others.

Love. Love what? He does not say. Certainly to love God, for this is the greatest commandment. To love God's law, for it is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). To love Christ's church, for we cannot love Christ unless we love what He loved and He loved His church (Eph. 5:25). To love to praise God; to love others and the souls of men. We can stir up others to love by reflecting love for them. Did not John say, *"We love, because he first loved us"* (1 Jn. 4:19)? How can one not be moved to love another who *"doeth him good and not evil all the days of his life"*?

Good works. Good works naturally follows love. Where good works do not follow, that love is pretended and feigned. *"We know we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. But whosoever hath this world's goods and beholdest his brother in need, and shuttest up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth"* (1 Jn. 3:14-18). Just as James showed that faith without works is dead, so John shows that love without words also is dead. So, let us stir up one another to love and good works. Let the word of Christ dwell so richly in us so that we become rich in good works. There is nothing more conducive toward being rich in good works than to see the same richness of works in others. Jesus, the Master Teacher, said, *"Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16).

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