

I JOHN... YOUR BROTHER (Rev. 1: 9)

In these end times no other book in the Scriptures assumes as much significance as the book of Revelation. While the world looks upon the future with horror, the Bible - taught Christian awaits delightfully the return of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The events of September 11, 2001 and more recently that of December 13, 2001 have sent shock waves through the length and breadth of this country. In this darkest hour the Christian waits for the Dawn -the thousand-year rule of Christ when "peace and righteousness" will reign over the nations.

Twenty centuries ago, Domitian, the Roman infidel banished John the apostle to Patmos, a deserted island. Thrown into hostile surroundings and cut off from all public spoken ministry, John must have spent his days and months in desperation. God, however, did not allow that to happen. God turned that very adversity into an advantage. It is a pleasure and privilege working with God. With God nothing runs on loss. Be it banishment or imprisonment, poverty or physical infirmity- "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom.8: 28). Confined to a prison cell Paul wrote to believers at Philippi, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil.1: 12). God takes the worldly -wise "in their own craftiness" (Job 5:13) and tempers devil -engineered human anger to His own praise. "Surely" Asaph tells us in Psa. 76: 10, "the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain".

The blood of martyrs in ages past was meant to bury the faith of the Bible and Christ of the cross. As the opposing wind currents enable every, kite to fly higher, God always uses the desolation of the enemy for His own cause! The past twenty centuries of Church history have seen enemies rising and falling. The Church militant strides triumphantly. Gamaliel's wisdom is yet to be proved wrong for he said to the persecutors of the church, "if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:39).

The Roman Emperor could shut out from John, all human company and comfort. Yet, his armies could not prevent one visitor -Christ and His gracious ministrations! Did not Christ tell John and the other disciples, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be"? (John 12:26). In Christian service, Christ takes us where He Himself goes. We not only work for our Master but we work with our Master. In the genealogy of Judah we read about the potters who "dwelt with the king for his work" (1 Chro.4: 23). Elijah's conviction and courage was born out of this inseparable union with his Master. He said, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years " (1 Kings 17:1). It is a solemn truth then, where Christ sends us; there He goes with us. Christ Himself enjoyed this inseparable union with His Father in His earthly service. He said, "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

Christ may sometimes withdraw all human company and consolation only to this end that we may enjoy and experience Him in a fuller measure. The disclosure of all end -time events, written for our profit today, is the direct result of such a divine visitation. Despite receiving such visions and revelations, John remains clothed in humility: He introduces himself in Rev. 1: 9 as "I John,... who also am your brother...".

As the only surviving apostle he had everything to boast of. His apostle-ship, intimacy with Christ in earthly ministry, maturity, visions and revelations were his exclusive privileges. Yet he rejoiced in the simple fact that he was a brother in the family of many brethren. God was pleased to use apostle Paul as an international, itinerant evangelist. He alone was transported to the third heaven. We would be at a great loss if God would not have revealed many truths to Paul. Yet, writing to Corinthians Paul wrote, "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor.4:5). Paul loved to call himself a Doulos, a slave (Rom.1: 1; Phil.1: 1 ; Tit.1 : 1) and also a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Philemon 1). His reference to himself at other times as "an apostle"- nearly 8 times- (1Cor.1: 1; 2 Cor.1: 1; Gal.1:1; Eph.1:1; Col.1:1; 1 Tim.1:1; 2 Tim.1 :1; Tit.1 :1) was used out of necessity to authenticate his message which depended on the genuineness of his calling. John the Baptist follow this holy company to confess, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1: 23).

The endearing term "brother" is a family word. It links us at once to the brotherhood of all believers. Peter tells us to "love the brotherhood" (1 Pet.2: 17). Why should Peter tell us to do something that we all obviously know? Though adopted into the royal family of God we often face inter- personal problems. Think of Joseph and the events, which led to the happening as recorded in Genesis 45. Joseph was envied and hated. He suffered cruelty, ingratitude from the hands of his brothers. They sought to kill him. He was sold as a slave into Egypt. God sovereignty engineered the circumstances for Joseph's advantage. God allowed men to walk over his head. Joseph was taken through fire and through water but God brought him into a wealthy place (Psa.66:12). After years of separation, the very brothers of Joseph were entered into his presence. They could not recognize in the ruler, the slave - turned premier. Joseph tried for sometime to hide his identity but he could not do it any more. The Bible says that Joseph could not refrain himself from weeping. He commanded every Egyptian to leave his presence.

"Cause every man to go out from me". Who are these? These are the Egyptians who received and elevated him in their palace. They were in constant service attending on him. Yet they could never be a part of his intimate brotherhood, such a privilege belonged to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Zebulun, Issachar, Naphtali, Gad, Asher and Dan. What made Joseph to long for fellowship of these his enemies? Just this -the fatherhood of Jacob, his father. Joseph remembered his beloved father and poured out his love to his brothers who deserved no mercy. How often Israel would later annoy and anger God Jehovah! Yet, He would not destroy them for the sake of Abraham, His friend. How heart -rending are the words of God spoken through Hosea the prophet in Hos.11: 7-9! "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim".

Admah and Zeboim are two places destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah according to Deut.29: 23. God would not give up Ephraim or Israel. Joseph would not give up his brothers. How tender are the words of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene in John 20: 17, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God!" Who are these brethren? The disciples who were deserters were His brethren.

Thomas the doubter, Peter, the one who denied thrice, and the rest who ran away, composed His team; Christ pursued them. He would not give them up. That is the spirit of Christian brotherhood. Peter has failed much. It is unthinkable that a man who confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" should later say "I know not the man". Peter not only failed the Lord but failed in the brotherhood.

He quickly condemned others while commending himself. He said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will never be offended" (Matt.26: 33). His loud protestations of love proved false. Even after meeting the risen Lord, he went back to his old trade, fishing. His retreat was not quiet and secretive but public and contagious. He dragged six others with him (John 21). God restored him. Thirty - three years after this restoration he wrote his first epistle. In 1 Pet.1: 22 he says: "Seeing 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".

Peter began saying in 1 Pet.1: 2, about the purpose of sanctification, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience...". Twenty verses later he comes back to the subject of purification. Why? To emphasize the need of loving the brethren. "Obedience to God, unfeigned love towards brethren". May it adorn us for His glory. What is impossible in our natural state is possible with God. Christ died on the cross to bring in this transformation to any repentant sinner. Call on Him today.

Next to Christ and His Word, the most sacred thing for a believer is the brotherhood of believers. Salvation brings us into the Fatherhood of God, Headship of Christ, Leadership of the Holy Spirit and the brotherhood of believers. Such a brotherhood comes because of our position –our position in Christ. The practical outworking of such a brotherhood demands four realities.

1.LOVE: Biblical 'Agape' love is more than human sentiment. By our natural birth we have acquired human love -kindred feelings towards our equals or close - knit family members. Divine love is wholly of a different nature.

Firstly, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. "...the fruit of the Spirit is love..." (Gal.5: 22). The Bible says in Rom.5:5,"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us". Hence it is a Spirit - wrought love offered to every regenerate person.

Secondly, it is impartial. Paul praised the believers at Colosse for possessing this love. It was love for all saints (Col.1: 4). At Colosse there were Jewish as well as Gentile converts. In Christ, they found a new oneness. rich and poor, male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile, all found togetherness in Christ.

Thirdly, it was Christ -inspired. Christ told His disciples in John 13:34, "...as I have loved you, that ye also love one another". Christ left us an example that we may follow His steps.

Fourthly, divine love is sacrificial love. The Lord Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Christ expended and exemplified that love on the cross.

Fifthly, it is a testifying love. The Lord Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another". We are not told that we witness if we congregate, sing and worship together, but if we love one another. Love is the unmistakable badge of Christian discipleship.

Sixthly, it is a forgiving and cleansing love. Rev.1: 5 tells us that Christ "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood". Christ chose to forgive and cleanse us because He loved us.

Seventhly, it is an unchanging love. Christ loved His own which were in the world. He loved them unto the end (John 13:1).

Eighthly, it is a love, which has concern for truth. Paul admonished the believers at Ephesus to speak "the truth in love"(Eph.4: 15) and we read in 1 Cor. 13:6 that divine love does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in truth. In human equations 'love' and 'truth' rarely go together. We sacrifice love in the name of truth or we sacrifice truth in the name of love. We are made to believe that "love is blind". Such a love is not divine but human. Christ rebuked Peter openly, publicly; "Get thee behind me, Satan" in Matt.16, but Christ did it out of concern and compassion. Later, when Peter rebuked Simon the sorcerer at Samaria, he did it out of concern for his soul. Though Simon professed to have believed and also got baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus, the Apostle saw that his heart was not right in the sight of God.

Peter further said, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity". He urged him to repent of his wickedness. This is love in action. Proverbs tells us that "Open rebuke is better than secret love" (27:5) and that "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (27:6). God charged Eli, the priest for being soft towards his wicked children in the name of love. Thou "honorest thy sons above me" (1 Sam.2: 29) said the man of God to Eli. 1 Kings 1: 5,6 speak of Adonijah, the son of David who exalted himself saying "I will be king". His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?" Later, the same Adonijah wanted to marry Abishag, the wife and concubine of David for which Solomon put him to death.

The sons of Eli and the son of David had ignoble deaths partly because of their fathers' human sentiment. It was love, which sacrificed truth.

2. UNITY: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" sang the Psalmist in Psa.133: 1. Christian brotherhood calls for unity. Uniformity is based on outward appearance but unity is based on inward life. The body of Christ is an organism and not an organization. Organization functions purely on rules and regulations. For a common objective members form and abide by certain laws. Organizations like political alliances can build or break at will. Christian unity is based on life that holds the Head. There is a vertical, upward relationship that keeps the horizontal relationships going.

Such a unity is a Spirit -wrought unity. No- where in the Scriptures are we commanded to make unity but we are expressly told to keep unity. Eph.4:3 tells us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The indwelling Holy Spirit makes unity possible and the humility and love of Christ make unity actual and practical.

In practical life such an unity is not easy. As believers we are drawn from varied backgrounds — economic, social, lingual, cultural, regional and religious. No

two persons have the same temperament. Someone wrote this poem—I do not know who, but the meaning makes my statement clear.

To live with Christ in Heaven above will certainly be glory; To live with saints on Earth below, well, that's another story.

In John 7 we read that the brethren of Jesus did not believe in Him but mocked at Him. Joseph was forced to share a home with brothers who hated him. Moses was called to serve the Israelites who never appreciated his labor or sacrifice. Paul, after 31 years of ministry had this to write before his death, "Demas hath forsaken me;" "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil"; "all men forsook me", "All in Asia turned away from me" in 2 Timothy. Yet Paul, Joseph and Moses sought the unity of God's children.

3.SERVICE: Service marks the spirit of Christian brotherhood. It' is contrary to Christian spirit to ask like Cain, " Am I my brother's keeper?" The simple answer is that we are. In Gal.5: 13 we are commanded by love to serve one another. Eph.4: 7 and 1 Cor. 12:7 tell us the unmistakable truth that each believer is gifted. What is a gift? A gift is a God -given ability to serve. Differences in gifts are for the total well - being of the Body of Christ. The sovereign God divides to every man severally as He wills (1 Cor.12: 11) and demands the members to have "the same care one for another" (1 Cor.12: 25). The active ministry of every individual member "maketh increase of the body"(Eph.4: 16).

There is no justification for any member to be a passive spectator. We are expected to serve. There are only two kinds of members in the Body of Christ; the givers and the grabbers –the participants or the parasites he participants both give and receive. The parasites always receive and never give. If at all they give anything—it is death to the body. Cancer in the human body is nothing but a few cells, which independently develop themselves. They absorb all the nutrients to themselves; grow unusually large causing death to the whole body.

Diotrephes is one such parasite about whom we read in 3 John. He loved pre-eminence. He discredited the ministry of John. He exercised "a reign of terror" forcing believers to toe the line. Those who dared to disagree were put out of fellowship. How different in the same assembly was Gaius! Though he had failing health, he walked in truth, cared for brothers and strangers too. The visiting preachers were much warmed by Gaius' hospitality. Gaius refused to give up his good behavior despite the bad example of dictatorial Diotrephes. It is sad that Diotrephes refused to learn from Gaius.

Nehemiah is another good example of a true servant. Though a cup bearer in Shushan palace to the king, Nehemiah's heart was linked to God's people. When Hanani, one of his brothers came, he enquired about the welfare of God's people. Hearing about the broken walls and burnt gates of Jerusalem, he sat down to weep and pray for four months. Out of that long season of prayer conviction ripened in him to go to Jerusalem and undertake the huge task of rebuilding the walls. He had much opposition to his good labor but yet he continued to serve God's people.

4.SACRIFICE: Closely linked to "service" is the reality of "sacrifice". Think of Moses who loved God and God's people. The Bible says in Heb. 11: 24,25, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy

the pleasures of sin for a season". Moses sacrificed his worldly position and honor to stand for and to stand with the people of God. Sad to say, the very people for whom he sacrificed so much turned against him. They abused Moses and wanted to kill him. It was a bitter path to tread. He prayed to God in Num.11: 15, "...kill me, I pray thee..., if I have found favor in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness". The Lord encouraged Moses to go on in service.

Jeremiah is another prophet who sacrificially served God. He was commanded by God to deliver a stern message of judgment. The opposition he faced was so cruel and crushing that he wished more than once to resign from the office of the prophet. He endured however oppositions, beatings, imprisonment and kept faithfully proclaiming God's word for 40 years.

Paul was another who served sacrificially his Master. In 2 Tim.2: 10 he says, "...I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory". Often misunderstood, Paul went on to serve His Master.

Love, Unity, Service, and Sacrifice—four realities that constitute the spirit of brotherhood. In John the apostle, we find the same spirit at work for the edification of believers and for the glory of God.

The simplicity and humility of John's self-introduction "I John...your brother" exalts the nobility of Christian brotherhood. Biblical evangelism to be he "full Gospel" or "the whole counsel" should lead us to a twofold vision, the first vision being that of Christ, the Head, and then the second of the brotherhood, the Body of Christ. Saul of Tarsus as led into this twofold vision in Acts 9. He meets Christ first, Who, in turn, leads him to Ananias and other disciples.

We enter into Christian brotherhood positionally by virtue of the death of Christ. The practical outworking of our "brotherhood" depends upon four factors. They are the Divine Love, Unity, Service and Sacrifice. Against the backdrop of these four values let us consider Abraham and Lot is recorded for us in Genesis 13. We are introduced to Lot in Genesis 11. He lost his father Haran at an early age. God spoke to Abraham to move out of Ur of Chaldees. Abraham, the uncle of Lot, took Lot along with him. Abraham became a worshipper of Jehovah because the God of glory appeared to him (Acts 7:2). Abraham gave up all idolatry to follow the true God. We are not clearly told in the Scriptures as to how Lot came into the experience of knowing God. In all probability, his uncle must have shared this knowledge with him. The Bible tells us that Lot too came into the position of salvation like Abraham. 2 Pet. 2:7-9 refers to Lot as "just", "righteous" and "godly". Apostle Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit used these terms to show the positional sanctification of Lot. God had indeed "worked in" the marvels of His grace as we read in Phil. 2:13. Did Lot grow further in his knowledge of God is a serious question to ask.

His life, his attitudes and reactions to situations show that he did not "work out" his salvation with fear and trembling. In modern terms, here is a believer who repented and trusted God. He enjoyed the fellowship of a great man of faith, Abraham. That was the farthest distance he did go in his spiritual life. The second epistle of Peter is written for those who have obtained precious faith through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. To such, Peter wrote "... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; And to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to

godliness- brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity"(2 Pet.1 :5-7). Why this constant addition? That these believers be saved from "unfruitfulness and barrenness"(v.8), "fall"(v.10), and may receive an abundant entrance into the coming Kingdom of Christ (v.11).

Positional sanctification should lead us into progressive sanctification. Our Christian life must begin by "obtaining precious faith" but it should not rest until it reaches brotherly kindness and charity. Lot seemed to have been ignorant or indifferent to these realities.

Everything went on well in Lot -Abraham relationship till the happenings in Gen.13. The chapter discloses to us the riches of both Abraham and Lot. Gen.13:2 says, "And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold". Later, .in Gen. 13:5 we read, " And Lot also, which went with Abraham, had flocks, and herds, and tents". Notice that in describing Lot's wealth the Bible adds a parenthesis -inserts a clause, "which went with Abraham". Why this added information which is quite obvious? The Holy Writ will not record anything without significance. What could it mean? It is simply this: Lot became rich and was blessed because he went with Abraham. There was no other obvious reason for this orphan boy to become so wealthy. God blessed Lot for Abraham's sake. Look at the case of Laban who deceived his son - in -law and nephew Jacob by changing his wages ten times. At last he was forced to admit in Gen.30:27, "...I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake". In Lot's case the nephew was blessed because of the uncle. In Laban's case, the uncle was blessed because of the nephew. It is said of Joseph in Gen.39:5 that, "...the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake". Today, God has blessed us for Jesus' sake, for in Eph.4:32 we read that God has for Christ's sake forgiven us.

In all the above examples -Lot, Laban, Potiphar and we, are blessed because of someone else. We could never be the cause of our own blessing. Left to ourselves, we would have been a curse. Lot should have remembered his former state and present blessing. He forgot it all wholesale. With all the advantages that riches and wealth bring us, they also bring us this evil.

Riches make us self -confident, blind and ungrateful. Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Daniel, Job, Nehemiah were all-rich in their generations, yet they never failed to give God the full credit. Deut.8: 12-14, 17, 18 warns us of this danger of forgetting God's goodness. Often, it looks like we are on much safer ground in poverty than in prosperity. The difficulty lies not with God but with us. Both Lev .26 and Deut.28 are written to show us that Scriptural obedience brings material prosperity. He is our God Who according to 1 Tim.6: 17 "giveth us richly all things to enjoy". In the argument of God, we are told in Rom.8: 32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The answer is obvious. In poverty Lot stuck to Abraham but in prosperity he chose to part ways with him. Genesis 13 tells us that there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot. The obvious cause might have been this. With the increase of cattle wealth, they found a shortage of available grazing land. The herdsmen came to a conflict. These herdsmen, drawn from heathen backgrounds could not be expected to behave better. Not so with Abraham and Lot who knew the true and the living God.

Notice that the problem did not begin with Lot or Abraham. It began in others. The situation offered an opportunity to prove the hidden natures of both men of God. Problems may often come from others but they often reveal ourselves to others. Lot chose to maintain silence. Was it wisdom that kept him quiet? It appears from the context that by his silence he gave tacit approval to the conflict. As "speech" conveys a message, "silence" too conveys a message.

Often believers try to maintain silence stating that they choose to stay away uninvolved and neutral. There is no neutrality in Christian life. Either we are for Christ or against Christ. Like the two thieves who hung on both sides of the cross of Christ, we must be either this side or that side. We cannot choose to be on "neither" side. Christ "nullified" and "invalidated" the neutral position. In Luke 11 :23 we read, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth".

It was not "spirituality" but "subtlety" that made Lot to be quiet when he should have spoken. It is true that speech is not always silver nor silence always golden. In this situation Lot should have spoken to bring an amicable settlement. Abraham speaks to bring about a solution. It is interesting to note that he does not go to the herdsmen to speak but he goes to Lot for Abraham knew where the problem lay.

From the way Abraham spoke in Gen. 13:8,9 Abraham's spirit of brotherhood comes out for our instruction, and edification. Abraham said, "...Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left". Clear, outspoken words!

Abraham used directness of speech and no diplomacy. In Abraham's words we discover four truths.

Firstly, he named the problem. It is "between me and thee" before it is between "my herdsmen and thy herdsmen". The ego -clash on top has resulted in two warring groups below. In the context, Abraham did not begin the conflict but was dragged into the conflict.

Secondly, Abraham was humble. Twice in this short speech he says, "I pray thee", which literally means "please". The senior who is the benefactor condescends to talk to the junior, the beneficiary .He did not remind Lot of his former destitution and poverty. "Humility" is the unmistakable badge of any great man. Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Thirdly, Abraham desired peace and avoidance of confrontation. It is said that the best way to win an argument is to avoid it. Abraham wished to avoid a conflict. Why? Was not Abraham right and Lot wrong? Well, a. Christian does not insist on his rights. He seeks the good of all.

Fourthly, Abraham did not wish to create a scene in front of his neighbors. Gen.13:7 says that "...the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land". The presence of watching unbelievers should put an end to all our strife. The unbeliever does not ask the question: "Who is right or who is wrong?" They will, gladly make a sweeping statement: "Christians are always trouble -makers". Abraham was more

interested in the testimony than in the treasures. Lot was more interested in the treasures than in the testimony.

Fifthly, Abraham chose to be the loser in the race by asking Lot to make the first choice. How wicked, hard -hearted and ungrateful was Lot to accept the proposal! Abraham knew that his safety and success lay with God and not in his calculations. He whom God blesses is blessed indeed. Balaam and Balak cannot reverse what God has blessed.

Why did Abraham condescend so much before Lot? For only one reason; Abraham says, "We be brethren". These three words should settle at once all our disputes. As subsequent history shows us Abraham was no loser for giving up his rights. Lot chose Sodom and Gomorrah and went into ruin. Abraham chose to honor his brother, love and follow God. He inherited Canaan and through him God brought Jesus, the Saviour of the world.