

Love In Deed And In Truth.

Text: 1 John 3:13-18

Suggested Hymns:

376, 380, 356, 282, 375

1) Let us not love in word or in tongue

2) But in deed and in truth

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 John 3:13-18, ¹³ *Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.* ¹⁴ *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.* ¹⁵ *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

¹⁶ *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* ¹⁷ *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* ¹⁸ *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“The end of all things is at hand.”¹ Among the signs that mark the approach of the end of the world, the consummation of all things, Scripture lists three things which will strike believers and workers in the vineyard of the Lord with particular force.

First, the Gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth, and then the end will come. Today there are practically no people that have not come within the sound of the Gospel by word of mouth, radio, TV, satellite or Internet.

Again, Scripture clearly states that like in the days of Noah preceding the Flood, there will be iniquity and hatred of the testimony of the Holy Spirit through His Word, and violence will sweep the world as a tidal wave. He who can run should read and take note.

The third sign of the approach of the end is a sign in the visible Church, among the very people who with their lips confess Jesus as their Lord. Jesus speaks of this sign as we read in Matthew 24:12-13,¹² ***“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”***¹³ ***“But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”***

As coldness creeping over the human body is an unmistakable sign of dissolution, so the process of declining love and charity, the growing colder and colder of increasing numbers of church-members in their sympathy for their afflicted brethren is the most appalling sign of the times.

Have we reason to be aroused in our age and day? The danger is real and present. Will God’s elect be swept away by this world-engulfing tide of selfishness which so clearly marks the approach of the end? Shall we stand by idly and lift neither voice nor hand in stemming the tide? God forbid!

St. John, realising the seriousness of the situation, with untiring zeal and apostolic earnestness sounds a wonderful, cheering, inspiring message to the Church of these latter days in our text. It is the apostle’s appeal to all believers to cultivate, and excel in, Christian charity.

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Let Us Not Love In Word Or In Tongue

The appeal of the apostle to Christians of his day, of all times, especially of these last days, is introduced in the climax of our text, the last verse, with the tender words ***“my little children.”***

The Christians to whom the apostle addresses his epistle were indeed his children, not after the flesh, but after the spirit. The preaching of the Word of Truth, the glorious Gospel of Jesus, crucified and raised, had wrought the miracle of transforming by divine grace “spiritual strangers and foreigners” into ***“fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”***²

John was their spiritual father, and their spiritual care was committed to his charge by Jesus Christ, the chief Bishop of the Church. His earnest appeal therefore could not and should not fall on deaf ears. As dear children heed the

words of a loving parent, so God's children surely will gladly and gratefully accept the divine precepts and appeals from their shepherd.

After reminding his readers of the fact that they through faith in Christ have become one family, he proceeds to tell them to love the brotherhood. If it is natural for members of a human family to be kindly affectionate toward one another, how much more does it obligate those who through the new birth of the water and the Spirit, who have become members of the family of Christ, and united by the sacred bonds of one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, and one hope, - to love one another!

The days of the early Christian Church were trying days. One wave of persecution followed another. At different times and places, church-members suffered untold hardships and persecutions. Appeals to the brotherhood were frequent and persistent.

Since human nature changes very little, we can understand how Christians were in danger of becoming callous and indifferent to these recurring appeals. It is painful to the apostle to see this spiritual coldness creeping into the Church. He pleads, *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

To limit charity or love toward a brother in need to words only is unworthy of a member of God's family. Using hollow phrases and lengthy verbal pretences of interest and sympathy with the misfortunes of others is the *trade mark* of the hard-hearted, selfish, greedy worldling. Their actions give the lie to their words.

What pagan system of so-called religion has ever launched or fostered any worth-while charitable undertaking? Knowing not the love of God revealed in the sending of God's Son Jesus Christ, it follows of necessity that their conduct and their actions move in the vicious circle of selfishness and greed, and in their carnal struggle of the survival of the fittest they ruthlessly crush the less fortunate.

Christians are prone to be carried away by the spirit of the times and by the example of evil people who do not know the love of God. Hence the warning, *whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

Our discipleship either stands or falls with Christian love. We know that it is not charity, but a living faith in Jesus, which makes a Christian, according to the word, *“You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* We also know from Scripture that true faith in Christ will and must manifest itself, its power, by works of God-pleasing, Christian love, or charity. Faith without works of love is dead.

To pretend love with words but deny this spirit in actions comes under the censure of the apostle, *He who does not love his brother abides in death.* The apostle reasons in our text that refusing charity to a brother in need shows an absence of love. Where there is no love, there is hatred. *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* There is no evading the issue.

As in apostolic days, as well as today, the temptation to deny the faith by withholding love from the faithful is also present. The times in which we are living bring so many appeals for charity to our attention, both in our country and overseas.

Far be it from us to love in word and tongue only. Rather let us do as written in Hebrews 13:16, *“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”*

A boy living in a poverty-stricken section of a large city found his way into a Christian day-school, where he learned to know Jesus and was led to faith in Him. One day, long after, one of those wicked grown-up people who take special pleasure in doing the work of the devil tried to shake the poor child’s faith by asking: *“If God really loves you, why does He not tell somebody to give you a pair of shoes or else enough wood to keep your home warm in winter?”*

The lad thought a moment and then, squaring his shoulders, looked at the speaker and said, *“I dare say Jesus does tell somebody, and somebody forgets.”* Shall it be said of us that, when Jesus calls to service for the needy believers in Christ, we forget ?

This duty cannot be done by praising the Golden Rule or by singing *“Blest be the Tie that Binds.”*³ Mere words will not feed the hungry. We read in James 2:15-16, *“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and*

one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

Let us heed Romans 2:17-23 which tells us of God's judgement on the Jews. Paul applies God's standards of judgement to His chosen people. They claim to be instructed in God's will and thus able to distinguish right from wrong. They aspire to teach others, yet their inconsistent conduct contradicts their knowledge. Their covenant of circumcision has been made of no effect by their faithless conduct.

2. But Love In Deed And In Truth.

Our text says, *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

St. John, appealing to God's children to cultivate the flower of true charity, reminds them, *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.* Christians have experienced the new birth.

Our first, or physical, birth found us not only members of the human family, but also flesh born of flesh, with the sinful nature of Adam. But the power of God, operating through the means of grace, saved us. We passed from death to life in the second, or spiritual, birth.

And our experience is the experience of every member of the Church of all times. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps the whole Christian Church in the true faith. As Jehovah breathed life into Adam's lifeless clay, so the spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, are bought to the life of God, spiritual life, through the saving power of God, our Redeemer.

But you ask, as did Nicodemus, *"How can these things be ?"* It is the mystery of the Gospel which St. John unfolds in our text, ***By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.*** The miracle of our new birth, our salvation, rests exclusively upon the sacrifice of Jesus, true God and true man. He was incarnate and became our Brother. He was made under the Law to offer a perfect obedience in our stead. He paid the penalty of our guilt and made the supreme sacrifice; He gave His life that we might live.

Scripture says that *"Jesus was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification."*⁴ And the motive of this marvellous vicarious

atonement of the Son of Man was only and solely the love of God. God so loved the world, the fallen, law-transgressing, God-hating, perishing world. The love of God opened for lost man the gate of Paradise. One died that many might live forever.

The Prince of Life has imparted His trophies to His believers through the means of grace, through the water and the Spirit, in the new birth. As physical life is manifested in physical actions, so spiritual life becomes apparent in spiritual actions.

Our text says that *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* And *“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”*⁵ is the law in the kingdom of God, which is binding upon every disciple of the Saviour.

Also we read in Matthew 20:28 that *“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,”* so those who have the Spirit of Christ should follow in His footsteps.

We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Giving our life in the same sense as Jesus did, namely, as an atonement for others, is impossible. Dedicating our lives to the interest of our brethren is the Christian’s duty. Love for the neighbour may at times demand that we jeopardise our own life.

Eusebius records that during the plague at Alexandria the difference between Christians and heathen was most apparent. During the plague at Wittenberg in 1527 Dr. Luther defied death for the brethren, saying, *“If I am to die here serving my afflicted brethren, I am in the hands of God; He has placed me here. His will be done.”*

And Besser comments, *“The Christian who denies himself, looking not only on his own things, but also on the things of others, is continually laying down his life for the brethren.”*⁶

Now, if our discipleship demands the sacrifice of our greatest treasure, life, for the brethren, then God’s children dare not refuse the lesser things, earthly possessions, to relieve a brother if they wish to retain the love of God.

“Whoever has this world’s goods,” an income and living above his actual needs, *“and sees his brother in need”* and still refuses to lend a helping hand,

“how does the love of God abide in him?” The final test of our faith and love is our willingness and readiness to do as Christ, our Saviour, did, to **“to do good and to share.”** With such sacrifices God is well pleased.⁷

The service of Christian love has the promise of the Master’s eternal recognition. We read in Matthew 25:40,⁴⁰ **“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”**

We read in 1 Corinthians 15:58,⁵⁸ **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

Let us conclude with the words of our text, **“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Peter 4:7

² Ephesians 2:19

³ Hymn 797

⁴ Romans 4:25

⁵ Philippians 2:5

⁶ Phil. 2:4, Wilhelm Friedrich Besser

⁷ Hebrews 13:16