

## Love Is The Highest Law.

Text: Matt 12:1-8

1) Love flows from faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) Love is taught by Christ Himself

191, 175, 344, 286, 354

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 Matthew 12:1-8, *<sup>1</sup> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. <sup>2</sup> And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"*

*<sup>3</sup> But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"*

*<sup>5</sup> Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? <sup>6</sup> Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. <sup>7</sup> But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Faultfinders have always played a notorious role in church life. Lacking in those virtues which glorify the Christian and make him an example to the flock, they make unrelenting efforts to put themselves prominently before the eyes of men.

Their own life is shipwrecked. Therefore they proceed to point an accusing finger at the members of Christ's Church, always eager to confess, not their own sins, but the sins of others.

They are always occupied, not in their God-given calling, but as busybodies. When they can find no commandment of God according to which they can condemn a fellow man, they *“teach as doctrines the commandments of men”*<sup>1</sup> and judge according to them.

This evil continually harasses the Church. It becomes an occasion for disgust and disheartenment for many people, causing them to lose courage and interest and enthusiasm for the real work which the Church is to perform.

Our Saviour Himself had representatives of this element in practically every audience. Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit had a special reason for seeing fit to record in Scripture a considerable number of conversations with these critics. On no occasion did such people ever succeed in discrediting Jesus whom they sought continually to destroy.

Time and again the Saviour sent them away speechless. Each time He exhibited them as examples of evils and vices which the Christian should avoid, and He extolled the Christian virtue which these critics lacked.

Our text relates just such an incident. Jesus becomes neither discouraged nor disheartened. Boldly He faces the issue and teaches a very important lesson. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit let us learn from His words that *Love Is the Highest Law*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Love Flows From Faith**

The unregenerate person, that is the unbeliever, cannot understand the love that flows from faith. It is entirely absent from his thinking and from his life. *<sup>1</sup>At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. <sup>2</sup>And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!”*

They had found a fault. With the greatest personal satisfaction they pointed the accusing finger at Jesus. His followers were sinners, bad people, Sabbath-breakers. Definitely, they implied, it was a demerit mark for Jesus to be accompanied by such people. Not only had they criticised, but they had already judged. *“Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the*

***Sabbath!***” Had there been a pile of stones in that field of grain, they would have been ready to take the next step beyond judging.

Who were these faultfinders? What kind of men were these judges? They were Pharisees, members of the ‘better-than-you’ group. We meet them often in the New Testament. Their glory was not in the Cross of Christ, neither was their boast in the Saviour, who came to redeem all mankind.

They took pride in the fact that they were the children of Abraham, that they had kept the Mosaic law to the letter, and that in addition they observed all of their own traditions. The promises of a Saviour and Redeemer meant nothing to them.

Jesus tells of the Pharisee who went to the Temple to pray. He recounted to God how good he was and how superior to sinners. The entire sect of Pharisees could have been placed under the description in Stephen’s sermon: ***“Uncircumcized in heart and ears.”***<sup>2</sup>

They hated Christ and their fellow man. There was no love in their hearts, neither could there be, for they rejected Jesus who alone could work this virtue in them. The group of Pharisees who appeared at the scene in the grainfield had already in their hearts sentenced Jesus to death for having healed the sick man at Bethesda on a Sabbath Day. They were enemies of Christ. They hated Him. These were the faultfinders and judges.

Is it a wonder that such men would stoop to criticism of that which is holy? Where there is no faith, there is no love, neither is there anything that will please God.

Love would have restrained them from judging. It would have permitted them to inquire conscientiously whether the act of the disciples was permissible. But these men, versed in the Law of Moses, as they claimed to be, knew that it was permitted for hungry persons to pluck grain. Men who believed in Jesus as God and Lord would have been constrained by love to let Him correct His disciples if they were in error. But the hearts of the Pharisees were unregenerate. Their hearts were filled with hatred toward the Holy One.

So likewise God-pleasing love is absent and unknown in the heart of every unregenerate person. We read in Romans 8:7 that ***the carnal mind is enmity against God.*** And in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that ***the natural man does not receive***

*the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

That a man ought to do good to one who abuses him — yes, that there is something even greater than the Law of Moses — can never be discovered in the entire realm of human wisdom. It can be learned only from Christ.

## **2. Love Is Taught By Christ Himself**

Love, which is absent in the life of every unregenerate person, is taught us in our text by Christ Himself. His disciples have been charged with breaking the Sabbath Day.

Boldly Jesus meets the charge, *“Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?”*

Jesus refers to an incident which occurred many centuries before. A Levitical law, applying to the ordinances of worship in the tabernacle and Temple, specified that the hallowed showbread, after being removed from the altar, could be eaten only by the sons of Aaron.

One day David appeared before Ahimelech, the priest. David was fleeing from Saul and had been without food for several days. In hunger he asked the priest for five loaves of bread. Although the Levitical Law forbade any, but sons of Aaron to eat the showbread, the priest gave David to eat of it. It was a case of emergency. They needed it to survive.

And although King Saul, out of hatred toward David, commanded Ahimelech and eighty-four others to be put to death, the Lord does not condemn the priests. Rather He cites the incident as a proof that the love which moves one to help a starving man takes precedence over the Temple law.

The Lord continues against the faultfinders, <sup>5</sup> *Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?* Moses had declared the Sabbath a day of rest. Ordinary manual labour on that day was transgression.

Nevertheless the priests sacrificed, prepared the showbread, and circumcised on that day. They profaned the ordinance, and yet everyone considered them

blameless. The works performed by them were necessary for the prescribed worship and hence, as deeds of love, took precedence over the Sabbath law.

The Lord proceeds, <sup>6</sup> *Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.* The argument is this: “The ordinary rules for the observance of the Sabbath must give way before the requirements of the Temple, but there is One here before whom even the requirements of the Temple must give way.”

In the external part of the Jewish worship there was nothing more important than the Temple. But the Son of God, who came from heaven to perfect forever with one sacrifice those who are sanctified, is greater than the Temple and all of its ordinances.

Jesus now quotes from the Old Testament, in which they claimed to be so well versed, and shows that they lack understanding. <sup>7</sup> *But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.*

God wants mercy. He wants deeds of love that flow from faith. Far greater than the Temple sacrifices, which were to atone for sins committed, are the deeds of love and mercy, which flow from faith and require no more sacrificing for sin. *Love is the fulfillment of the Law.*<sup>3</sup> Love is greater than any and all laws. This the unregenerate Pharisees did not know. Had they known, they would not have condemned the men whom Jesus pronounced guiltless. Rather than condemn they would have exercised love and mercy. They would have offered food to the hungry.

With these powerful proofs Jesus convicted the men who accused His disciples of Sabbath-breaking. His source was the Old Testament Scripture, in which the Pharisees claimed to be well versed. He cited the case of David and the showbread as an instance to prove that love for a hungry fellow man takes precedence over a Levitical law.

He reminded them that although the priests must work on the Sabbath, they are blameless. He reminded them that the One who was present with them was greater than the Temple and all its ordinances.

He recalled to their minds that even in the Old Testament God laid emphasis, not on sacrifice, but on the deeds of mercy and love. Then Jesus vindicates the

disciples, showing that the Pharisees likewise would have done so had they understood Scripture.

Now He concludes with the final statement, <sup>8</sup> *For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*” The Sabbath ordinances were but a type, a shadow, of Him who was to come. Since Jesus has come, one no longer looks to His shadow, but to Him in whom dwells also the fullness of divine love and who alone can supply this love in the lives of men. This Lord has spoken. His Word is true, and it stands forever.

The warning of this text concerns not only the unbelievers. God’s children likewise are tempted daily by Satan to envy one another, to find fault, to judge and condemn their fellow Christians. If they knew the meaning of Scripture, they would not condemn the guiltless. *Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.*<sup>4</sup> But there is something far more powerful to restrain us from faultfinding and judging than the fear of God’s judgement and condemnation.

It is the mercy, the love, which, as Christ emphasises here, God already in the Old Testament desired above sacrifice. That love, a product of faith, can exist only in the hearts which the Spirit of God has turned to Christ.

How that love works in a God-pleasing way is pictured by the Saviour. A desperately hungry man asks the priest for bread. The Levitical Law has reserved this bread for priests only. But love supersedes this regulation. It moves the priest to take that very bread reserved for him alone and to give it to the famished one. Christ does not condemn the action.

Ordinary labour was forbidden on the Sabbath. However, love for God’s house and worship moved the priests to perform their labours on that day. Christ pronounced them blameless. Love restrains the observers from condemning such acts.

Even in secular affairs an emergency may supersede the existing laws. A city regulation requires the arrest of a motorist who exceeds the speed limit. The same officers who arrest violators may be seen escorting an ambulance through the city streets at a rate of speed twice and three times as great as the limit. They do not arrest the driver. In his car lies an injured man whose life depends on

immediate medical attention. Concern for the injured man's life takes precedence over all existing regulations.

Laws are necessary to restrain transgressors from evil. But very sensibly *Dr. Martin Luther* has written the positive side of each Commandment in the Mosaic Law. Love toward God moves us to worship Him alone; to pray and to give thanks; to hear and learn His Word gladly; to honour and serve our parents; to help our neighbour in every need; to live in chastity and purity; to speak well of our neighbour and to put the best construction on everything; and to protect his property. Against these there is no law. These deeds of love are greater than any law.

How many are the opportunities that God gives us to exercise this love! The poor, He says, we shall always have with us. How easy it is to say to the beggar at the door, "*We have no extra food today!*" In our congregations there maybe someone who is weak and erring. How easy it would be to lose patience and ignore them! But there is an opportunity to exercise special patience and love in trying to lead them back to the right path.

There are the widows and fatherless, the aged, and others, and therefore opportunity to exercise love in visiting, comforting, cheering, and aiding. The war-torn world needs food and clothing and homes. What an opportunity for love to exercise itself in distributing of our abundance to the desolate and distressed throughout the world.

The world needs Christ above all other needs. What an opportunity for love to exercise itself by contributing our manpower, our material abundance, and our prayers to bring to the sick world its only cure!

Christ laid two opportunities before the Pharisees in the text. First, He marched His hungry disciples before them. The Pharisees failed to give them food. Secondly, the Pharisees had opportunity to consider charitably the action of the disciples in plucking grain on the Sabbath Day. Not only did they fail again, they positively condemned those whom Christ pronounced guiltless.

May our faith not falter and our love not fail in the many opportunities which our Lord lays at our door. May we daily seek strength in His Word and pray the Spirit of God to open our eyes to understand the Scriptures so that we will not

condemn the guiltless. May we appear regularly at the Lord's Table for renewed strength to love God and our fellow man. Amen.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 15:9

<sup>2</sup> Acts 7:51

<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:10

<sup>4</sup> Luke 6:37