

GOD'S LOVE TO THE SAINTS

NO. 2959

[Also see sermon #2958—The Saints' Love to God]

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“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.”
1 John 3:16

TRUE love cannot long be dormant. It is like fire, of an active nature—it must be at work. Love longs for expression—it cannot be dumb. Command it to be without expression and you command it not to live. And true love is not satisfied with expressing itself in words. It does use words, but it is painfully conscious of their feebleness, for the full meaning of love is not to be conveyed in any human language. It breaks the backs of words and crushes them to atoms when it lays upon them all that it means.

Love must express itself in deeds, as our old proverb says, “Actions speak more loudly than words.” Love delights, too, in sacrifices. She rejoices in self-denials, and the more costly the sacrifice, the better is love pleased to make it. She will not offer that which costs her nothing—she loves to endure pain, and losses, and crosses—and thus she expresses herself best.

This is a general principle which is not only applicable to men, but it reaches even up to God Himself, for “God is love,” and being love, He must display love, nor can He rest with merely speaking of His love. His love must manifest itself in action. More than that, God could not rest until He had made the greatest sacrifice that He could make, and had given up His only-begotten Son to die in the place of sinners. When He had done that, then He could rest in His love.

God does not come to us and say, “Men and women, I love you, and you must believe that I love you although I do nothing for you to prove My love.” He does ask us to believe in His love and He has given us abundant proofs of it. And therefore He has a right to claim our belief in it. The apostle of love, who wrote the chapter from which our text is taken, tells us, “Hereby we are made to know”—for that would be the real translation of the original—“Hereby we come to know, we do know, the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.”

Just as we learn the love of others by seeing what they are prepared to sacrifice for us, so is it even with God Himself, we discover, discern, perceive, and are made to know, the love which He bears for us by the fact that “he laid down his life for us.”

I. First, I want to show you that THERE ARE MANY ACTS OF GOD IN WHICH HIS LOVE IS VERY CLEAR, BUT IN WHICH THE MOST OF MEN FAIL TO SEE.

There are many of His acts of which it might be said, “Hereby the love of God is manifested,” yet many men fail to perceive the love which lies behind the actions. Let us examine ourselves to see how we stand with regard to this matter.

There are some of us who ought to have perceived the love of God to us *in the surroundings into which we were brought at our very birth*. I am addressing many who, like myself, owe very much to Christian parents. Many of us could truly say, in the words of the children's hymn,—

*“I was not born, as thousands are,
 Where God was never known,
 And taught to pray a useless prayer*

To blocks of wood and stone."

But without being born slaves or heathens, it might have happened that we should have had to spend our childhood in the slums of London. Some of you think that you have been very good, but would you have been better than the boys that fill our reformatories—would you have been better than those who crowd our prisons—if you had had the same training, or lack of training, that has been their lot?

If you had had such an example as they have had—if the taste of strong drink had been familiar to you almost from your birth—if the first thing you ever heard was blasphemy—if you had lived in the thieves' kitchen—do you think that you would have been any more clear from guilt than they have been?

When we look down upon others and despise them, it may be that, if we knew all their temptations and the conditions of their upbringing, we might almost admire them for not being worse than they are. It costs some people a great struggle to be honest. And there are many women in this dreadful London whom we, perhaps, think ill of, who, nevertheless, have suffered almost a martyrdom and who have fought stern battles with temptation. If they have fallen somewhat, they are to be honored because they have not fallen still further.

But what a blessing it was to us that, when we woke up in this world, we looked up into a face that smiled upon us, and to lips that, by and by, spake to us of Jesus Christ. The first example that we had was one that, to this day, we wish to follow. Our companions, from our youth up, have been of a godly order and there are some who are in heaven now, who had much to do with the formation of our character—and for whom we should always thank God.

Now, had we been wise—had we understood the meaning of this gracious arrangement—we might, in the very conditions in which we were born and brought up, have perceived the love of God to us. Yet many of us did not. I should not wonder if some of you thought that you were badly treated because you were placed in such a strict family, where you were checked and kept from what you regarded as the pleasures of life.

Many a young man has felt that he has been tied to his mother's apron-string a great deal too much. He saw other young men enjoying themselves, but he could not—his father, like a grim jailer, was always looking after him so closely. That is the way many of us put it in the days of our ignorance. But now that God has opened our eyes, we can see the love of God in it all. Yet we did not see it then, and as a general rule, young men and women, who have the high privilege of Christian parentage and training, do not perceive the love of God in it, but often kick against it and wish they had not to endure what they regard as so great a hardship.

Then, dear friends, the love of God may be clearly seen in reference to all of us *in His giving us a wise and judicious law*. That law of the ten commandments is a gift of great kindness to the sons of men, for it tells us the wisest and the happiest way of living. It forbids us nothing but what would be to our injury, and it withholds from us nothing which would be a real pleasure to us.

The commands which say, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" are like the signs which you sometimes see at swimming places, bearing the words, "Dangerous! Keep so many yards away from this spot." God does not make laws denying us anything that would really be for our good.

There is a poisonous berry growing in your garden and your child has been told that he is not to eat it. If he is a wise child, he will understand that it is your love to him which has told him not to eat of that poisonous berry. If you had no care about him at all, he might eat what poison he chose. But because you love him, you say to him, "My child, do not do this, and do not do that, because it will be to your serious injury and possibly, your death, if you disobey." We ought to see the love of God in the gift of the law, but nobody ever does that till he is led to the love of God in other ways. We cannot say of it, though we ought to do so, "Hereby perceive we the love of God towards us."

We have also had, *in the daily bounties of divine providence*, abundant manifestations of the love of God. If our eyes were really opened, every loaf of bread would come to us as a token of our Father's

care—and every drop we drink would come as the gift of our Father's bounty. Are we not clothed by His love? The breath that is in our nostrils—who gives it to us but our Creator? Who preserves us in health but our great Benefactor? Is it not a proof of love that you are not on a sickbed tonight? That you are not in the lunatic asylum? That you are not do the borders of the grave? Ay, and that you are not in hell?

We are a mass of mercies and a mass of sins—we seem to be made of mercy and ingratitude mixed together. But if the Lord will open our eyes, we shall then perceive the boundless mercies of which we are the recipients and we shall begin to perceive His love. But this is not the first place where man ever sees God's love. The cross is the window through which the love of God is best seen, but until that window is opened, all the bounties of God's providence fail to convince us of His love.

See how the mass of men reap their harvests and yet never thank the God who gives the harvest. See how they drive the loaded wagons to the granaries and thresh out the wheat—and send it to be sold in the markets—but did you ever hear of a song of praise being sung in the market when they brought the first new wheat to be sold? Did you ever hear of such a thing? Why, they would think we were all gone mad if, at Mark Lane, on the arrival of a sample of new wheat, we were to begin to sing—

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

The probability is that there are many of them there cursing because the wheat has gone down a shilling or two, and the poor people will, possibly, get their bread a little cheaper. Praising God seems to have gone out of fashion, and we are told by philosophers, who ought to know, that the wheat springs up naturally and that God has nothing to do with it. They say that whether it rains or whether the sun shines, the processes of nature are ruled by iron law with which God has no concern at all—and they practically imply that He has gone for a holiday and left the world to manage itself, or wound it up, like a watch, and put it under His pillow and gone to sleep.

That is the philosopher's religion and as far as I am concerned, the philosophers may keep it, for it is not mine. My religion believes in the God of the showers, and the God of the sunshine, and the God of the harvests. I believe in “the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” and let His name be praised for it.

Were our hearts right with Him, we would “hereby” perceive the love of God, but we do not—that perception comes to us through a stained glass window—the window that was stained crimson by the precious blood of Christ. There, and only there, do we perceive the love of God, “because he laid down his life for us.”

II. That brings me to my second point which is this—IN THE LAYING DOWN OF HIS LIFE, CHRIST'S LOVE IS BEST SEEN.

I have already said that in many acts of God, His love ought to be seen, but according to the text, we “hereby” perceive the love of God, “because he laid down his life for us.” It is universally admitted that *there can be no greater proof of love than for a person to lay down his life for the object of that love*. All sorts of sacrifices may be taken as proofs of affection, but the relinquishment of life is the supreme proof of love, which nobody doubts.

A man says that he loves his country, but suppose that man should be in the condition of Curtius, in the old Roman fable, when a great chasm opened in the Forum, and it was declared that it could only be closed by the most precious thing in Rome being thrown into it. The story goes on to say that Curtius, fully armed and riding his charger, leaped into the chasm, which instantly closed. Well, nobody could doubt the love of such a man for his country.

If the question happened to be the love of humanity, we have the story—the true story—of the surgeon at Marseilles. And if we acted as he did, nobody could doubt our love to our fellow creatures. The plague was raging through the city and the people were dying by thousands. The good bishop

remained among them, discharging the last offices to the dying and cheering the living—and many of the surgeons of the town who might have departed, lingered to wait upon the sick.

At a consultation among them, it was resolved to make a *post mortem* examination of one of the worst cases of the pest, and the question was, who should make it, for whoever did it must certainly die of the disease within a few hours. One of them, to his honor, said, “My life is of no more value than that of any other man—why should I not sacrifice it, if I can, by doing so, discover the cause of this terrible malady and save this city?” He finished his grim task, wrote his notes about the case and then went to his home and died. Nobody doubted that he loved Marseilles, for he had laid down his life for it.

And you probably read, the other day, the story of a mother's love, which nobody could doubt. In the late disastrous floods, a mother, who had her two little children in a cradle, climbed a hill, carrying them with her. She reached a tree, or some other frail shelter with these two dear objects of her love and held them up till she found that the support on which she was resting was not strong enough to sustain herself and her two babies. So, placing them, as far as she could, out of harm's way, she leaped into the waters and soon sank. Nobody could doubt that mother's love when she laid down her life for her children.

This is the crowning proof of love. Even “the devil's advocate” will not rise up to dispute this truth. They that can die for others must surely love those for whom they lay down their lives.

Now, *our Lord Jesus Christ has proved His love to sinners by dying for them.* Do you need me to tell you the story again? O my brothers and sisters, read it for yourselves. Read it often! You have it written four times, but not once too often—the story of the Son of God, who, for our sakes, died a felon's death, barbarously nailed to the cross to bleed away His life. Read that story and see how He proved His love to us.

But there were certain points about Christ's death which are very extraordinary and which are better proofs of love than those I mentioned just now. The first is this—*Jesus need not have died at all.* When the Marseilles surgeon died, he only did then what he must have done a few years afterwards. When the mother perished to save her children, she did but die a few weeks, or months, or years before her appointed time, for, being mortal, she must die. If we do give our life for others, we do not really give our life—we but pay the debt of nature a little while before it is due.

But it was altogether different in the Lord Jesus Christ's case. Over Him, death had no power—It is of Him that Paul writes, “who only hath immortality.” Who could, without His own consent, have laid his hand upon the Prince of life, the Son of God, and said to Him, “Thou shalt die”? No one could have done that. It was a purely voluntary act for Christ to die at all—not merely to die on the cross, but ever to die, was a voluntary act on His part, and consequently, a most singular proof of His love to us.

Remember, again, that in our Lord's case, *there were no claims upon Him on the part of those for whom He died.* I can understand a mother dying for her children. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” I can see some reason why a noble citizen should be willing to die for his city.

When the six principal burgesses of Calais put the ropes round their necks and went out to Edward III, to offer to die instead of their fellow citizens, I can understand their action. Were they not the leaders of that community? Were they not put into a position of responsibility and honor which, if it might not exactly demand the sacrifice, yet, at least, rendered it a most likely thing that, if they were men of truly noble spirit, they would make it? But there were no such claims upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Queen Eleanor sucked the poison from her husband's wounds, at the risk of her own life, I can see reasons why she should do it. I say not that she was bound to do it, but I do say that the relationship of a wife accounts for what she did. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had no relationship to us until He chose to assume the relationship which He did assume out of infinite compassion.

There was no more relation between Him and us then between the potter and the clay. And if the clay upon the wheel goes amiss, what does the potter do with it but take it and throw it into a corner? And so might the great Creator have done with us. But instead of doing so, He shed His blood that He may make us into vessels of honor fit for His own use.

O Son of God, how could You stoop so low as to take upon Yourself our nature, and in that nature to bleed and die, when between us and You there was a distance infinitely greater than that between an ant and a cherub, or a moth and an archangel? Yet with no claims upon You, of Your own free will, You did yield Yourself to die because of Your amazing love to us.

Another extraordinary thing about Christ's love was that *there were no appeals whatever made to Him to die*. In the other cases which I have quoted, you may remind me that there were no vocal appeals made. The little children in the cradle did not beg their mother to die for them. No, but the very sight of them was enough to plead with their mother.

In the case of the city dying of pestilence, could the surgeon—who believed that, by an examination, he might discover the secret of the evil—go through the streets, and see the doors marked with the fatal cross, and hear the wailing of the widows and the children, without feeling that they did make most pitiful appeals to his heart?

But man made no appeal to God to die for him. Our father Adam—and he was the representative of us all—did not fall down on his knees in the presence of God and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner. O God, whom I have offended, provide for me a Savior and deliver me from Your wrath!” No prayer came from Adam's lips, and not even a confession—only a wicked and mean attempt to cast upon God the blame for his disobedience. “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”

That is all that human nature usually does—it will not acknowledge that it needs a Savior and it will not confess that it has sinned sufficiently to need an expiatory sacrifice. And consequently, the sullenness of man might have paralyzed the love of Christ if anything could have done it. You did not sue for mercy—you did not ask for an atonement—you did not desire expiation for your sin, yet Jesus came, unasked, undesired, unsought—to lay down His life for sinners.

Notice, again, that Jesus Christ well knew that if He did lay down His life, *He would get no love in return from those for whom He died, unless He Himself created that love*. This He has done in the hearts of His own people, but in the hearts of others who have been left to themselves, there is no love to Jesus Christ.

Here, Sabbath after Sabbath, it is our privilege to preach a dying Savior to dying sinners, but of all themes in the world, it seems to make the least impression upon some of our hearers. If we were to come here and talk of Howard's devotion in living and dying to ameliorate the woes of the prisoners in our jails, many would be moved to admiration of the philanthropist. But how little admiration have most men for our sweet Lord and Master!

It is an old story, you say, and you have heard it so often that you care little for it. Now, that mother, who died to save her children, felt that they loved her. How often they had charmed her with their coolings and smilings while they were lying on her bosom—and she felt that she could freely give up her life for them.

But our Lord Jesus Christ knew that He was dying for stony-hearted monsters, whose return for His love, if left to themselves, would be that they would utterly reject Him. They would not believe in Him. They would trust in their own righteousness rather than in His—and they would try to find a way to heaven by sacraments and ceremonies rather than by faith in the meritorious sacrifice which He made when he laid down his life for sinners.

Remember, too, that *our Lord died by the hands of men, as well as for the sake of men*. The surgeon at Marseilles was not to die by the act of his fellow citizens. The mother was not to die at the hands of her children. Curtius, leaping into the gulf, was not forced there by the anger of his fellow citizens. On the contrary, all would have been glad for them to continue to live.

But it was this that made the death of Christ so sadly unique, that He came to die for men who wished that He should be made to die. “Crucify him, crucify him,” they cried in their mad rage, foaming at the mouth. “Oh!” say some of you, “but we never said that.” No, not then, but perhaps you are saying

it now—for there are still many who hate the Gospel of Christ—and to hate the Gospel is to hate Christ Himself, for that is His very essence and heart.

And to reject Christ to choose your own pleasure, and to keep on delaying to repent, as some of you do, and to live at enmity against Christ, is very much the same thing as crying, “Crucify him,” and comes to the same thing in the long run. You know that, if you could be quite sure that there is no Christ, and no God, and no heaven, and no hell, you would be perfectly happy. That is to say, you would, if you could, crucify Christ and put Him out of existence, with everything that has to do with Him. Well, that is the very same spirit as that which made the Jews of old cry, “Crucify him, crucify him.”

Yet once more, there was this remarkable thing about Christ's death—that, *in dying for us, He was taking upon Himself an awful mass of shame and dishonor, and also a most intimate connection with sin.* There was nothing shameful about the leap of Curtius into the chasm. Had I been there to see him, I would have clapped my hands and cried, “Well done, Curtius!” Who would not have said the same?

But when our Lord died, men thrust out their tongues at Him and mocked Him. His was indeed a shameful death. And methinks, when that mother put her babes up in a place of safety and herself sank into the raging flood, the angels might have smiled as well as sorrowed at such a deed of heroism. But when Jesus sank into the raging flood to save us, even God Himself did not smile at Him.

Among our Savior's expiring cries was that agonizing utterance, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” This was because He had, as our Representative, come into contact with human sin—and so with human shame. The just and holy Son of God was made a curse for us. Or as Paul tells us, God “hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

All this helps to manifest to us Christ's amazing love, so I finish my discourse by asking—as the text says, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us”—*have you and I perceived that love?* Do we know it? That is a very simple question, yet I take the liberty to press it upon you.

I think it was Aristotle who says—and he was a great master of thought—that it is impossible for a person to know that he is loved without feeling some love in return. I think, as a rule, that is true. So, if you do really perceive that Christ loved you so much as to die for you, there will leap up in your heart somewhat, at any rate, of love to Him.

One Sunday night I was reading, in Exeter Hall, the hymn beginning,—

“Jesu, Lover of my soul,”

and just at that time, there strayed into the hall a man of fashion, a man of the world, careless of all spiritual things, but that line caught his ear,—

“Jesu, Lover of my soul.”

He said to himself, “Does Jesus really love *me*? Is He the Lover of *my* soul?” And that line was the means of begetting love in his thoughtless heart—and there and then he surrendered himself to the love of Christ.

Oh, that such a result as that might come of my repeating the story here—that some, who have never loved the Lord Jesus Christ up till now, would say, “Did He thus love His enemies—thus strangely love them even to the death? Then we, though we have hitherto been His enemies, can be His enemies no longer, but we will love Him in return for His great love to us.”

And you Christian people, who do love Him, if you have perceived His love somewhat, try to perceive it still more, that you may love Him more. And if you really love Him more, try to show that you do. Notice the rest of the verse from which my text is taken. I did not leave out the latter part

because I was afraid of it, but because I had not time to deal with it as it deserves—"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

We ought to prove our love to our God by our love to our fellow men—and especially by our love to our fellow Christians—and to prove our love by our actions. I do not know what the love of some professors is worth. I suppose they do, if they put down how much it costs them in a year. I fear that it does not cost some professors nearly as much for their religion as it does for their ribbons, or for some foolish indulgence.

They pay their shoeblacks better than they pay their ministers and they take care to spend upon themselves, in perfect waste, a hundred times as much as they spend upon spreading the Gospel, saving the heathen, helping the poor, or rescuing the fallen. We do not believe in such Christianity as that, and we certainly do not wish to practice it. If we profess to be Christians, let us be Christians in deed and let us especially show our love to Christ by loving our fellow Christians. If you see any of them in need, aid them to the uttermost of your power. If they need cheering and comforting, give them good cheer and comfort. But if they need substantial aid—financial aid—let them have that, too.

In the old days of persecution, there were always some noble souls who tried to hide away the Christians from those who sought their lives, although they did so at the risk of their own lives. And many a Christian has given himself up to die in order to save the lives of his fellow Christians. Some of the old people came tottering before the judge, because they thought that they would not be so much missed from the church as the younger ones would be—and possibly, some of them also thought that they had more faith than the younger ones had. And if they had more faith, they were more ready to die, and so to let the younger ones live on until they grew stronger in faith, and hope, and love.

But on the other hand, sometimes the young men would gently push back the fathers and say to them, "No, you are old—you had better linger here awhile and teach the young. But we young people are strong, so we will go and die for Christ." And there was many a contention in the church of God, in persecuting times, as to who should first die for Christ. They were all willing to lay down their lives for their brethren.

Where has this self-sacrificing love gone to now? I would like to see some of it. I would even wear microscopes over my eyes if I thought that I could so discover it—but I am afraid I cannot. Why, if we loved each other now as Christians loved each other then, we should be the talk of the town and even worldings would say, "See how these Christians love one another." Yet this is only what we ought to do. So, brothers and sisters in Christ, let it be what we will do. God help you to do it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 JOHN 3

Verse 1. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:*

Behold it, wonder at it, and never cease to admire it. Is it not one of the greatest marvels that even God Himself has ever wrought that we should be called the sons of God?

1. *Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

It does not know the Father, then how should it know the children? It did not know the elder Brother—the firstborn among many brethren—and as it did not know Him, how should it know us?

2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

And that vision will be transforming and transfiguring. The pure in heart see God and they are pure because they see God. There is both action and reaction—when God has purified us, we shall see Christ

and when we see Christ as He is, our purification will be complete. When will that day arrive? Oh, for the blessed vision! Meanwhile, let us be content to look at Him by faith, and to be always growing more and more prepared for that brighter vision which is yet to be ours.

3. *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

It is the nature of this divine hope—this hope of being like Christ—that it helps us to grow day by day more like Him and so we purify ourselves, as Christ is pure.

4. *Whosoever committeth sin, also transgresseth the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

And there will never be a better definition of sin than this. However men may philosophically try to mar it, this simple statement will be better than any that they can give us—“Sin is the transgression of the law.”

5. *And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

What a marvelous thing it was for Christ to bear sin as He did, and yet to have upon Him or within Him no taint arising from it. You have to go into the world and you say, “How can we help sinning while we have to mix with so much that is evil?” Well, the Lord Jesus Christ had to mix with evil more than you will ever have to do, for He not only lived in this sinful world, but the transgression of His people was actually laid upon Him, so that He came into very close contact with sin—“He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.”

6. *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

If this declaration is related to any one act of sin, none of us could ever say that we have seen or known Him—but it relates to the habit of sin—if we love sin and live in sin—if the main course of our life is sinful, then we have “not seen him, neither known him.”

7. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

You must judge a tree by its fruit. If it brings forth good fruit, it is a good tree—and if it brings forth evil fruit, it is an evil tree. Do not be deceived about that matter, for there have been some who have dreamed of being righteous and of being the children of God, yet they have lived in sin as others do. They have been self-deceived. It has been a mere dream on which they have relied. Practical godliness is absolutely needful to a true Christian character—and a man is not righteous unless he does that which is righteous.

8. *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.*

Ever since he became a devil, he has continued to sin. It was sin that changed the angel into a devil—and a sinner he has always remained.

8-9. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;*

That is to say, this is not the course, and habit, and tenor of his life—there is sin in much that he does, but he hates it, loathes it, and flees from it.

9-11. *For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

Love is the essential mark of the true child of God. “God is love” and therefore, he that is born of God must love. Hatred, envy, malice, uncharitableness—these are not the things to be found in the children of God. If they are found in you, you are not one of His children.

12. *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And why did he slew him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

That was the real evil at the bottom of his great crime—it was the wickedness of Cain's character that made him hate the good that was in Abel—and therefore, after a while, he slew his brother, “because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”

13. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

This hatred is too old for you to wonder at it. If it began with the first man who was born into the world, even with Cain, do not marvel if it should spend some of its fury upon you.

14-15. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

What a warning this is against the evil spirit of hate, revenge, and all that kind of feeling! These things are not compatible with the possession of the life of God. Where hatred lives, there is no life of God in the soul. That evil must be shot to the very heart by the arrows of Almighty grace or else we are not free from the dominion of the devil.

Every man who hates another has the venom of murder in his veins. He may never actually take the deadly weapons into his hand and destroy life, but if he wishes that his brother were out of the way—if he would be glad if no such person existed—that feeling amounts to murder in the judgment of God. It is not the lifting of the dagger, nor the mixing of the poison, that is the essence of the crime of murder. It is the hate that prompts the commission of the deadly deed. So, if we never commit the crime, yet if the hate is in our heart, we are guilty of murder in the sight of God—and eternal life cannot be abiding in us.

16-17. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

Indeed, it cannot be there at all. He has the love of himself, and not the love of God, dwelling in him.

18-19. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

You notice how the apostle constantly writes about knowing. Take your pencil and underline the word “know” in John’s epistles and you will be surprised to find how frequently he uses it. He is not one of those who suppose, or fancy, or imagine, or have formed a certain hypothesis—but he knows, and he tells us what he knows, in order that we also may know. Love has a knowledge which is peculiarly her own—a full assurance which none can take from her.

20. *For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*

If you, with your narrow knowledge of right and wrong—your imperfect understanding of your own motives—if you find reason to condemn yourself, what must be your position before the bar of the all-seeing, heart-reading God? That little flutter in your bosom, my friend—that trembling, that uneasiness—what does it mean? Is not this a forewarning of the sounding of the trumpet of the great assize, when you will have to stand before the Judge of all the earth and answer for yourself to Him? It is easy to deceive your fellow man—but it is impossible to deceive your God.

21. *Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

Other people may condemn us, but that does not matter. They may impute to us wrong motives and misrepresent us, but that is no concern of ours so long as we have confidence toward God.

22. *And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.*

Notice the link between confidence as to our rightness and power in prayer. When a child has done wrong and knows it, he cannot run to his father and ask for favors as he used to do—he feels timid in his father’s presence because of the sense of his guilt. But if you and I know that we have endeavored with all our heart to love the Lord and our fellow men, and to act righteously in all things, we have a sacred confidence which enables us to speak with God as a man speaks with his friend. And this kind of confidence God greatly loves and He listens to those who possess it. Such people may ask what they will of God—they have learned to bring their minds into conformity with the will of God, so the desire of their heart shall be granted to them.

23-24. *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*

Oh, to be more and more under the sacred influence of that blessed Spirit!

**HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—286, 293
AND FROM “SACRED SONGS AND SOLOS”—44**

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.