

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 1 also (316)

The sentiments of the words we have just been singing (Hymn 46) is strikingly reflected in the opening statement of the chapter which has just been read—“*Let brotherly love continue*” (Heb. 13); and it would be a profitable thing for us to dwell upon it and realise it, and to let it prevail. There can be nothing more certain than that the sentiment of love, which is here referred to, is at the very bottom of the whole scheme of the truth in which we rejoice; there can be nothing more certain than that the very object of the truth is to manifest God’s love to us, and to develop God’s love in us. There can be nothing more certain than that the truth in its ultimate and eternal development, as we might say, will present the very highest form of this impulse of love; and there can be nothing more certain, either, than that those who are not carried along by this prevailing impulse—which originates the truth, and which we may also say is the essence of the truth—will be left behind.

Those who are not of love are not of God. John distinctly says that God is love, and that those who are of God walk in love. And he says “*He that sayeth he loveth God and hateth his brother, is a liar, and deceiveth himself.*” Such a case as this we can conceive to be possible, where a man may know the truth and may console himself with the idea, which so far is legitimate, that knowing the truth and having been immersed, he is a child of God; and yet who, notwithstanding his legal status in the matter, is personally destitute of the principle in which it has its origin, which is here expressed by the word “Love.” We have the distinct assurance of John, of Paul, of Jesus, and of all who in fact have spoken in the name of God, that such individuals are spiritual abortions—out of harmony with the system with which they are connected—excrescences upon it, as it were, which will in due time be cut away. Such unfruitful branches will be lopped off. Jesus says “*Every branch in me that beareth not good fruit shall be taken away.*”

Now if we only look this sentiment in the face, we shall see it to be a very attractive one, and capable of affording the highest happiness—a sentiment which, when once it begins to control our mental being, will, without much difficulty, hold the sway. If we only reflect for a moment what the object of existence is, we shall then see that the Scriptures, in presenting the fact that God is love, and that love is the highest object of being, is presenting us with something, both the most sensible and attractive that can possibly be considered. People live to be happy; as soon as they cease to be happy, they cease to have any object in life. We see this practically illustrated in the case of the suicide. He has lost every sort of happiness, and the consequence is, that having no object in existence, he deprives himself of it. If that be true (and it is true), what we have to think about is, the fact that love is the highest source of happiness, whether existing in our own bosoms, or manifested by others towards us.

The longer we live, and the more we study, the more we shall find that the deepest sources of happiness—happiness that will be genuine and enduring—are only to be found in connection with the things of God; for God has associated the highest blessedness with the things which pertain to Himself—with those actions of the mind which He desires. There is no blessedness apart from these. Love is the highest and the strongest. There is no sentiment capable of giving a man or woman more power for enduring, or accomplishing an object, or of being really happy, than this one of love. There is nothing can equal the pure delight that springs from the love of another. I do not now mean the love that exists between the sexes; though that might be referred to as an illustration since it is chosen to represent the relation that exists between Jesus and the church. I refer to friendship in its purest and most disinterested form; the pleasure it gives surpasses all the gratifications in which men ordinarily indulge.

We are in a state of society in which the selfish instincts rule, and we very rarely get an opportunity of realising this love. We have endless opportunities of kindness, but few for real,

spontaneous, unchecked love. There are two kinds of love; and one is more enjoyable and easy to accomplish than the other. To love a person who is lovely, is delightful and costs no effort. This is perhaps the most perfect form of love, the form which exists in the complete body of Christ prospectively contemplated. When the scattered fragments of that body (at present mostly hid in the dust) are united, and the community of the righteous made perfect by resurrection and judgment, love will prevail over all. All will love, for all will be lovely. Christ will have blown away all the chaff, rejected every unworthy person, and there will remain only those who are truly distinguished by their love to God, to Christ, and to each other.

The second form of love, is the one which Jesus refers to when he says *“Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.”*

That love requires a distinct effort. It cannot develop itself in a selfish bosom. It is an impulse created from within; and not from without, like the other. Its cultivation helps to assimilate us to the supreme source of love, and tends to amalgamate and improve inferior elements. In an ecclesia, while there are those who by the power of the truth are made lovely, there are those who, by reason of weakness, are destitute of power to attract. To these, this love makes advances in kindly words and deeds. We have loved God because He first loved us. The same principle acts between man and man, but at the same time we must expect failures. In some bosoms manifested love will have no power to enkindle a reciprocal flame, because the truth does not dwell deeply. A great many pass current among us who will be rejected. We must remember that few will be chosen; only those will be accepted who are the jewels; the precious stones of the sanctuary, transparent to the rays of the truth, and yielding a beautiful refraction of them in the beautiful tints of individual excellence.

A selfish man is an opaque and unpolished stone. He is not of God. *“God is love,”* and it is only in proportion as we remember this, that we shall become capable of reflecting this quality. We must remember the whole of the truth, and not a part only. We must not leave out the love. This is our danger. We are not likely to leave out anything else. We see from the Bible that God is angry with the wicked; that corrupt and sinful human nature is nothing in His sight; that Jesus will be manifested to destroy the sinners of mankind, and that there is no salvation except in God’s appointed way. We see the necessity of placing ourselves in opposition to the corruption around us, and are forced into a continual attitude of defence and attack. Therefore we are not liable to forget our duty in these things. But we are liable to forget that God is love, and that the whole truth is but the exemplification and expression of it.

Even God’s judgments have their origin in love; for the reason He destroys is, that those principles upon which He has been pleased to establish the harmony of the universe, may be preserved intact. If God were to allow the compromise of His authority, allowing life to continue in rebellion, there would speedily be developed a state of things which would quickly approximate to the hell of popular imagination. It must not be forgotten that every manifestation of the divine character, and every form of the divine law, are connected in their roots, if we could only trace them downwards, with this primitive impulse of love, benevolence, and kindness. This principle must therefore prevail amongst those who are God’s. Jesus said *“Love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* Love is unquestionably the first characteristic of the divine family.

We may sometimes feel distressed at our want of ability to love many that profess the truth; but there is this consolation given by John, that it is no evidence of a wrong disposition in ourselves. It is quite evident that he contemplated the possibility of a man failing to realise this sentiment of love in certain directions, and he gives an answer to the question, which we might be prompted in such circumstances to put to ourselves: how do we know that we are such as love those who are of God? In the 5th chapter of his first letter, verse 2, he says,

“By THIS we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments.”

Now one who really loves God, and whose inmost delight is in obeying His commandments, may rest assured that he or she will love the children of God when brought into contact with them. This is a sure apostolic test, and one that stands to common sense, as all true things do. There are, and always have been, many who get into the circle of the professing brethren of Christ who are not lovers of God, nor doers of His commandments, but who are under the power of the flesh continually; and evince it in all their sayings and doings. To such, we may be kind, but love is out of the question.

On the other hand, it is impossible for those in the flesh to love those in the spirit; they are sure to misunderstand and dislike them, because of the dissimilarity of taste and motive. There is a continual opposition arising between them. It is the old antagonism which Paul takes notice of in Galatians 4:29. We must not be discouraged by the fact that we do not realise the perfect condition of love in the present state. It is a great mistake to look for it because it is part of the divine arrangement, that those who are false shall mingle with those who are true, and there never can be a perfect amalgamation between the two elements. The one acts as a means of discipline upon the other.

Yet we are not to discriminate in the matter. We are not to judge. When men walk in external conformity to the laws of Christ's ways, we must leave the rest. We take cognisance of these general facts simply to fortify the mind against the discouragement that some may instantly feel in connection with the imperfections or the disagreements of the present. It is a mistake to be discouraged or disappointed in the matter. This is a time of trial—we must not look for perfection. All duties must be performed; all truth must be remembered. In nothing let us be terrified or diverted from the way of God. "*God is love,*" and we are a family of love, though the full manifestation of this will not be witnessed till the age to come.

Taken from "The Ambassador" of 1867
Sunday Morning Pages 302-304
& "The Christadelphian" of 1900
Sunday Morning Pages 232-234
By Bro Robert Roberts