

### **3<sup>th</sup>. and 4<sup>th</sup>. Sunday after Epiphany**

#### **Romans 12:16-21 and Romans 13:8-10**

#### **CHRISTIAN REVENGE.**

*[\*This and the last sermon are one in some editions. Hence the paragraphs are numbered as one sermon.]*

*"Be not wise in your own conceits."*

64. The lesson as read in the Church ends here. We shall, therefore, notice but briefly the remaining portion. "Conceits," as here used, signifies the obstinate attitude with regard to temporal things which is maintained by that individual who is unwilling to be instructed, who himself knows best in all things, who yields to no one and calls good whatever harmonizes with his ideas. The Christian should be more willing to make concession in temporal affairs. Let him not be contentious, but rather yielding, since the Word of God and faith are not involved, it being only a question of personal honor, of friends and of worldly things.

*"Render to no man evil for evil."*

65. In the counsel above (verse 14) to "curse not," the writer of the epistle has in mind those unable to avenge themselves, or to return evil for evil. These have no alternative but to curse, to invoke evil upon their oppressors. In this instance, however, the reference is to those who have equal power to render one another evil for evil, malice for malice, whether by acts committed or omitted – and usually they are omitted. But the Christian should render good for evil, and omit not. God suffers his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good. Mt 5, 45.

*"Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men."*

66. This injunction is similar to that he gives the Thessalonians (I Thes 5, 22), "*Abstain from all appearance of evil*"; and the Philippians (ch. 4, 8): "*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" The reference is purely

to our outward conduct. Paul would not have the Christian think himself at liberty to do his own pleasure, regardless of others' approbation. Only in the things of faith is such the Christian's privilege. His outward conduct should be irreproachable, acceptable to all men; in keeping with the teaching of first Corinthians, 10, 32-33, to please all men, giving offense neither to Jews nor to Gentiles; and obedient to Peter's advice (1 Pet 2, 12), *"Having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles."*

*"If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men."*

67. Outward peace among men is here intended – peace with Christians and heathen, with the godly and the wicked, the high and the low. We must give no occasion for strife; rather, we are to endure every ill patiently, never permitting peace to be disturbed on our account. We must not return evil for evil, blow for blow; for he who so does, gives rise to contention. Paul adds, "As much as in you lieth." We are to avoid injuring any, lest we be the ones to occasion contention. We must extend friendliness to all men, even though they be not friendly to us. It is impossible to maintain peace at all times. The saying is, "I can continue in peace only so long as my neighbor is willing." But it lies in our power to leave others at peace, friends and foes, and to endure the contentions of all. *"Oh yes,"* you say, *"but where would we be then?"* Listen: *"Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord."*

68. Note, in forbidding us to return blow for blow and to resort to vengeance, the apostle implies that our enjoyment of peace depends on our quiet endurance of others' disturbance. He not only gives us assurance that we shall be avenged, but he intimidates us from usurping the office of God, to whom alone belong vengeance and retribution. Indeed, he rather deplors the fate of the Christian's enemies, who expose themselves to God's wrath; he would move us to pity them in view of the fact that we must give place to wrath and permit them to fall into the hands of God. The vengeance and wrath of God are dispensed in various ways: through the instrumentality of political government; at the hands of the devil; by illness, hunger and pestilence; by fire and water; by war, enmity, disgrace; and by every possible kind of misfortune on earth. Every creature may serve as the rod and the weapon of God when he designs chastisement. As said in Wisdom of Solomon, 5, 17: *"He shall . . . make the creature his weapon for the revenge of his enemies."*

69. So Paul says, "Give place unto wrath." I have inserted the words "of God" to make clearer the meaning of the text; the wrath of God is intended, and not the wrath of man. The thought is not of giving place to the anger of our enemies. True, there may be occasion even for that, but Paul has not reference here to man's anger. Evidently, he means misfortunes and plagues, which are regarded as expressions of God's wrath. Possibly the apostle omitted the phrase to avoid giving the idea that only the final wrath of God is meant – his anger at the last day, when he will inflict punishment without

instrumentality. Paul would include here all wrath, whether temporal or eternal, to which God gives expression in his chastisements. This is an Old Testament way of speaking. Phinehas says (Jos 22, 18), "Tomorrow he will be wroth with . . . Israel." And Moses in several places speaks of God's anger being kindled. See Numbers 11: 1, 10, 33. I mention these things by way of teaching that when the political government wields the sword of punishment against its enemies, it should be regarded as an expression of God's wrath; and that the statement in Deuteronomy 32, 35, "*Vengeance is mine,*" does not refer solely to punishment inflicted of God direct, without instrumentality.

*"But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head."*

70. This teaching endorses what I have already stated – that the Christian's enemies are to be pitied in that they are subjected to the wrath of God. Consequently it is not Christian-like to injure them; rather, we should extend favors. Paul here introduces a quotation from Solomon. Prov 25, 21-22. Heaping coals of fire on the head, to my thought, implies conferring favors upon the enemy. Being enkindled by our kindness, he ultimately becomes displeased with himself and more kindly disposed to us. Coals here are benefits, or favors. Coals in the censer likewise stand for the favors, or blessings, of God; they are a type of our prayers, which should rise with fervor. Some say that coals represent the Law and judgments of God (see Psalm 18, 8, "Coals were kindled by it"), reasoning that in consequence of the Christian's favors, his enemy is constrained to censure himself and to feel the weight of God's Law and his judgments. I do not think a Christian should desire punishment to fall upon his enemy, though such explanation of the sentence is not inapt. In fact, it rather accords with the injunction, "Give place unto wrath"; that is, do good and then wrath – the coals-will readily fall upon the enemy.

*"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

71. With this concluding counsel, it strikes me, Paul himself explains the phrase "coals of fire" in harmony with the first idea that the malice of an enemy is to be overcome with good. Overcoming by force is equivalent to lending yourself to evil and wronging the enemy who wrongs you. By such a course your enemy overcomes you and you are made evil like himself. But if you overcome him with good, he will be made righteous like you. A spiritual overcoming is here meant; the disposition, the heart, the soul – yes, the devil who instigates the evil – are overcome.

**First Page**



## Fourth Sunday after Epiphany;

Romans 13:8-10

### CHRISTIAN LOVE AND THE COMMAND TO LOVE

*Rom 13:8-10*

*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

1. This, like the two preceding epistle lessons, is admonitory, and directs our attention to the fruits of faith. Here, however, Paul sums up briefly all the fruits of faith, in love. In the verses going before he enjoined subjection to temporal government – the rendering of tribute, custom, fear and honor wherever due – since all governmental power is ordained of God. Then follows our lesson:

*”Owe no man anything, ” etc.*

2. I shall ignore the various explanations usually invented for this command, ”Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” To me, clearly and simply it means: Not as men, but as Christians, are we under obligations. Our indebtedness should be the free obligation of love. It should not be compulsory and law-prescribed. Paul holds up two forms of obligation: one is inspired by law, the other by love.

Legal obligations make us debtors to men; an instance is when one individual has a claim upon another for debt. The duties and tribute, the obedience and honor, we owe to political government are of this legal character. Though personally these things are not essential to the Christian – they do not justify him nor make him more righteous – yet, because he must live here on earth, he is under obligation, so far as outward conduct is concerned, to put himself on a level with other men in these things, and generally to help maintain temporal order and peace. Christ paid tribute money as a debt (Mt 17, 27), notwithstanding he had told Peter he was under no obligation to do so and would have committed no sin before God in omitting the act.

3. Another obligation is love, when a Christian voluntarily makes himself a servant of all men. Paul says (1 Cor 9, 19), ”For though I was free from all men, I brought myself

under bondage to all.” This is not a requirement of human laws; no one who fails in this duty is censured or punished for neglect of legal obligations. The world is not aware of the commandment to love; of the obligation to submit to and serve a fellow-man. This fact is very apparent. Let one have wealth, and so long as he refrains from disgracing his neighbor's wife, from appropriating his neighbor's goods, sullyng his honor or injuring his person, he is, in the eyes of the law, righteous. No law punishes him for avarice and penuriousness; for refusing to lend, to give, to aid, and to help his wronged neighbor secure justice. Laws made for restraint of the outward man are directed only toward evil works, which they prohibit and punish. Good works are left to voluntary performance. Civil law does not extort them by threats and punishment, but commends and rewards them, as does the Law of Moses.

4. Paul would teach Christians to so conduct themselves toward men and civil authority as to give no occasion for complaint or censure because of unfulfilled indebtedness to temporal law. He would not have them fail to satisfy the claims of legal obligation, but rather to go beyond its requirements, making themselves debtors voluntarily and serving those who have no claims on them. Relative to this topic, Paul says (Rom 1, 14), ”I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians.” Love's obligation enables a man to do more than is actually required of him. Hence the Christian always willingly renders to the state and to the individual all service exacted by temporal regulations, permitting no claims upon himself in this respect.

5. Paul's injunction, then, might be expressed: Owe all men, that you may owe none; owe everything, that you may owe nothing. This sounds paradoxical. But one indebtedness is that of love, an obligation to God. The other is indebtedness to temporal law, an obligation in the eyes of the world. He who makes himself a servant, who takes upon himself love's obligation to all men, goes so far that no one dares complain of omission indeed, he goes farther than any could desire. Thus he is made free. He lives under obligation to no one from the very fact that he puts himself under obligation to all. This manner of presenting the thought would be sustained by the Spirit in connection with other duties; for instance: Do no good work, that you may do only good works. Never be pious and holy, if you would be always pious and holy. As Paul says (ch. 12, 16), ”*Be not wise in your own conceits*”; or (I Cor 3, 18), ”*If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.*” It is in this sense we say: Owe all men that you may owe no man; or, ”*Owe no man anything, but to love one another.*”

6. Such counsel is given with the thought of the two obligations. He who would perform works truly good in the sight of God, must guard against works seemingly brilliant in the eyes of the world, works whereby men presume to become righteous. He who desires to be righteous and holy must guard against the holiness attained by works without faith. Again, the seeker for wisdom must reject the wisdom of men, of nature, wisdom independent of the Spirit. Similarly, he who would be under obligation to none

must obligate himself to all in every respect. So doing, he retains no claim of his own. Consequently, he soon rises superior to all law, for law binds only those who have claims of their own. Rightly is it said, "Qui cedit omnibus bonis, omnibus satisfacit," "He who surrenders all his property, satisfies all men." How can one be under obligation when he does not, and cannot, possess anything? It is love's way to give all. The best way, then, to be under obligation to none is, through love to obligate one's self in every respect to all men. In this sense it may be said: If you would live, die; if you would not be imprisoned, incarcerate yourself; if you do not desire to go to hell, descend there; if you object to being a sinner, be a sinner; if you would escape the cross, take it upon yourself; if you would conquer the devil, let him vanquish you; would you overcome a wicked individual, permit him to overcome you. The meaning of it all is, we should readily submit to God, to the devil and to men, and willingly permit their pleasure; we are to insist on nothing, but to accept all things as they transpire. This is why Paul speaks as he does, "*Owe no man anything,*" etc., instead of letting it go at the preceding injunction in verse 5, "*Render therefore to all their dues, etc.*"

## **LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW.**

*"For he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law."*

7. Having frequently spoken of the character and fruits of love, it is unnecessary to introduce the subject here. The topic is sufficiently treated in the epistle lesson for the Sunday preceding Lent. We will look at the command to love, in the Law of God. Innumerable, endless, are the books and doctrines produced for the direction of man's conduct. And there is still no limit to the making of books and laws. Note the ecclesiastical and civil regulations, the spiritual orders and stations. These laws and doctrines might be tolerated, might be received with more favor, if they were founded upon and administered according to the one great law – the one rule or measure – of love; as the Scriptures do, which present many different laws, but all born of love, and comprehended in and subject to it. And these laws must yield, must become invalid, when they conflict with love. Of Love's higher authority we find many illustrations in the Scriptures. Christ makes particular mention of the matter in Matthew 12, 3-4, where David and his companions ate the holy showbread. Though a certain law prohibited all but the priests from partaking of this holy food, Love was empress here, and free. Love was over the Law, subjecting it to herself. The Law had to yield for the time being, had to become invalid, when David suffered hunger. The Law had to submit to the sentence: "David hungers and must be relieved, for Love commands, Do good to your needy neighbor. Yield, therefore, thou Law. Prevent not the accomplishment of this good. Rather accomplish it thyself. Serve him in his need. Interpose not thy prohibitions." In connection with this same incident, Christ teaches that we are to do good to our neighbor on the Sabbath; to minister as necessity demands, whatever the Sabbath restrictions of the Law. For when a brother's need calls, Love is authority and the Law of the Sabbath is void.

8. Were laws conceived and administered in love, the number of laws would matter little. Though one might not hear or learn all of them, he would learn from the one or two he had knowledge of, the principle of love taught in all. And though he were to know all laws, he might not discover the principle of love any more readily than he would in one. Paul teaches this method of understanding and mastering law when he says: *"Owe no man anything, but to love one another"; "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law"; "If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"; "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor"; "Love is the fulfilling of the law."* Every word in this epistle lesson proves Love mistress of all law.

9. Further, no greater calamity, wrong and wretchedness is possible on earth than the teaching and enforcing of laws without love. In such case, laws are but a ruinous curse, making true the proverbs, *"summum jus, summa injustitia,"* *"The most strenuous right is the most strenuous wrong";* and again, Solomon's words (Ec 7, 17), *"Noli nimium esse justus,"* *"Be not righteous overmuch."* Here is where we leave unperceived the beam in our own eye and proceed to remove the mote from our neighbor's eye. Laws without love make the conscience timid and fill it with unreasonable terror and despair, to the great injury of body and soul. Thus, much trouble and labor are incurred all to no purpose.

10. An illustration in point is the before-mentioned incident of David in his hunger. 1 Sam 21, 6. Had the priest been disposed to refuse David the holy bread, had he blindly insisted on honoring the prohibitions of the Law and failed to perceive the authority of Love, had he denied this food to him who hungered, what would have been the result? So far as the priest's assistance went, David would have had to perish with hunger, and the priest would have been guilty of murder for the sake of the Law. Here, indeed, *"summum jus, summa injustitia"* – the most strenuous right would have been the most strenuous wrong. Moreover, on examining the heart of the priest who should be so foolish, you would find there the extreme abomination of making sin where there is no sin, and a matter of conscience where there is no occasion for it. For he holds it a sin to eat the bread, when really it is an act of love and righteousness. Then, too, he regards his act of murder – permitting David to die of hunger – not a sin, but a good work and service to God.

11. But who can fully portray this blind, perverted, abominable folly? It is the perpetration of an evil the devil himself cannot outdo. For it makes sin where there is no sin, and a matter of conscience without occasion. It robs Of grace, salvation, virtue, and God with all his blessings, and that without reason, falsely and deceitfully. It emphatically denies and condemns God. Again, it makes murder and injustice a good work, a divine service. It puts the devil with his falsehoods in the place of God. It institutes the worst form of idolatry and ruins body and soul, destroying the former by

hunger and the latter by a terrified conscience. It makes of God the devil, and of the devil God. It makes hell of heaven and heaven of hell; righteousness of sin, and sin of righteousness. This I call perversion – where strictest justice is the most strenuous wrong. To this depravity Ezekiel has reference (ch. 13, 18-19): "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe to the women that sew pillows upon all elbows, and make kerchiefs for the head of persons of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and save souls alive for yourselves? And ye have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hearken unto lies." What is meant but that the blind teachers of the Law terrify the conscience, and put sin and death in the place of grace and life, and grace and life where is only sin and death; and all for a handful of barley and a bit of bread? In other words, such teachers devote themselves to laws concerning strictly external matters, things that perish with the using, such as a drink of water and a morsel of bread, wholly neglecting love and harassing the conscience with fear of sin unto eternal death; as Ezekiel goes on to say (verses 22-23): *"Because with lies ye have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive; therefore ye shall no more see false visions, nor divine divinations: and I will deliver my people out of your hand; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah."*

12. Mark you, it is making the hearts of the righteous sad to load them with sins when their works are good; it is strengthening the hands of the wicked to make their works good when they are naught but sin. Relative to this subject, we read (Ps 14, 5): "There were they in great fear; for God is in the generation of the righteous." That is, the sting of conscience fills with fear where there is neither reason for fear nor for a disturbed conscience. That is feared as sin which is really noble service to God. The thought of the last passage is: When they should call upon God and serve him, they fear such conduct is sin and not divine service; again, when they have need to fear a service not divine, they are secure and unafraid. Isaiah's words (ch. 29, 13) are to the same effect: "Their fear of me is a commandment of men which hath been taught them." Always the perverted people spoken of corrupt everything. They confidently call on God where is only the devil; they refrain in fear from calling on God where God is.

13. Such, mark you, is the wretched condition of them who are blindly occupied with laws and works and fail to comprehend the design of law and its mistress Love. Note, also, in the case of our miserable ecclesiasts and their followers, how rigidly they adhere to their own inventions! Though all the world meet ruin, their devices must be sustained; they must be perpetuated regardless of bodily illness and death, or of suffering and ruin for the soul. They even regard such destruction and ruin as divine service, and know no fear nor remorse of conscience. Indeed, so strongly entrenched are they in their wickedness, they will never return from it. Moreover, should one of their



wretched number be permitted to alleviate the distress of his body and soul – to eat meat, to marry – he is afraid, he feels remorse of conscience; he is uncertain about sin and law, about death and hell; he calls not on God, nor serves him; all this, even though the body should die ten deaths and the soul go to the devil a hundred times.

14. Observe, then, the state of the world; how little flesh and blood can accomplish even in their best efforts; how dangerous to undertake to rule by law alone – indeed, how impossible it is, without great danger, to govern and instruct souls with mere laws, ignoring love and the Spirit, in whose hands is the full power of all law. It is written (Deut 33, 2), *”At his right hand was a fiery law for them.”* This is the law of love in the Spirit. It shall regulate all laws at the left hand; that is, the external laws of the world. It is said (Ex 28, 30) that the priest must bear upon his breast, in the breastplate, *”the Urim and the Thummim”*; that is, Light and Perfection, indicative of the priest's office to illuminate the Law – to give its true sense – and faultlessly to keep and to teach it.

15. In the conception, the establishment and the observance of all laws, the object should be, not the furtherance of the laws in themselves, not the advancement of works, but the exercise of love. That is the true purpose of law, according to Paul here, *”He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.”* Therefore, when the law contributes to the injury rather than the benefit of our neighbor, it should be ignored. The same law may at one time benefit our neighbor and at another time injure him. Consequently, it should be regulated according to its advantage to him. Law should be made to serve in the same way that food and raiment and other necessities of life serve. We consider not the food and raiment themselves, but their benefit to our needy neighbor. And we cease to dispense them as soon as we perceive they no longer add to his comfort.

16. Suppose you were to come across an individual foolish enough to act with no other thought than that food and clothing are truly good things, and so proceed to stuff a needy one with unlimited food and drink unto choking, and to clothe him unto suffocation, and then not to desist. Suppose to the command, *”Stop, you have suffocated, have already over-fed and over-clothed him, and all is lost effort now,”* the foolish one should reply: *”You heretic, would you forbid good works? Food, drink and raiment are good things, therefore we must not cease to dispense them; we cannot do too much.”* And suppose he continued to force food and clothing on the man. Tell me, what would you think of such a one? He is a fool more than foolish; he is more mad than madness itself. But such is about the character of our ecclesiasts today, and of those who are so blind in the exercise of law as to act as if works were the only requisite, and to suffocate body and soul, being ignorant that the one purpose of law is to call forth the exercise of love. They make works superior to love, and a maid to her matron. Such perversion prevails to an extent distressing to think of, not to mention hearing and seeing it, or more, practicing and permitting it ourselves.

17. The commandment of love is not a long one; it is short. It is one injunction, not many. It is even not a commandment, and at the same time is all commandments. Brief, and a unit in itself, its meaning is easily comprehended. But in its exercise, it is far-reaching, for it includes and regulates all commandments. So far as works are enjoined, it is no commandment at all; it names no peculiar work. Yet it represents all commandments, because properly the fulfilment of all commandments is the fulfilment of this. The commandment of love suspends every commandment, yet it perpetuates all. Its whole purpose is that we may recognize no commandment, no work, except as love dictates.

18. As life on earth apart from works is an impossibility, necessarily there must be various commandments involving works. Yet Love is supreme over these requirements, dictating the omission or the performance of works according to its own best interests, and permitting no works opposed to itself. To illustrate: A driver, holding the reins, guides team and wagon at will. If he were content merely to hold the reins, regardless of whether or no the team followed the road, the entire equipage – team, wagon, reins and driver – would soon be wrecked; the driver would be lying drowned in a ditch or a pool, or have his neck broken going over stumps and rocks. But if he dextrously regulates the movement of the outfit according to the road, observing where it is safe and where unsafe, he will proceed securely because wisely. Were he, in his egotism, to drive straight ahead, endeavoring to make the road conform to the movement of the wagon, at his pleasure, he would soon see how beautifully his plan would work.

19. So it is when men are governed by laws and works, the laws not being regulated according to the people. The case is that of the driver who would regulate the road by the movements of the wagon. True, the road is often well suited to the straight course of the wagon. But just as truly the road is, in certain places, crooked and uneven, and then the wagon must conform to the course and condition of the road. Men must adapt themselves to laws and regulations wherever possible and where the laws are beneficial. But where laws prove detrimental to men's interests, the former must yield. The ruler must wisely make allowance for love, suspending works and laws. Hence, philosophers say prudence – or circumspection or discretion as the ecclesiasts put it – is the guide and regulator of all virtues.

20. We read in a book of the ancient fathers that on a certain occasion of their assembling, the question was raised, which is really the noblest work? Various replies were given. One said prayer, another fasting; but St. Anthony was of the opinion that of all works and virtues, discretion is the best and surest way to heaven. These, however, were but childish, unspiritual ideas relating to their own chosen works. A Christian views the matter in quite a different light, and more judiciously. He concludes that neither discretion nor rashness avails before God. Only faith and love serve with him. But love is true discretion; love is the driver and the true discretion in righteous works. It always looks to the good of the neighbor, to the amelioration of his condition; just as

the discretion of the world looks to the general welfare of the governed in the adjustment of political laws. Let this suffice on this point.

## **How can love fulfil the Law?**

21. But the question arises: How can love fulfil the Law when love is but one of the fruits of faith and we have frequently said that only faith in Christ removes our sins, justifies us and satisfies all the demands of the Law? How can we make the two claims harmonize? Christ says, too (Mt 7, 12): "All things, therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." Thus he shows that love for one's neighbor fulfils both the Law and the prophets. Again, he says (Mt 22, 37-40): "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . thy neighbor as thyself. On these two the whole law hangeth, and the prophets.*" Where, then, does Paul stand, who says (Rom 3, 31): "*Do we then make the law of none effect through f faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.*" Again (Rom 3, 28): "*We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*" And again (Rom 1, 17), "*The righteous shall live by faith.*"

22. I reply: As we have frequently said, we must properly distinguish between faith and love. Faith deals with the heart, and love with the works. Faith removes our sins, renders us acceptable, justifies us. And being accepted and justified as to our person, love is given us in the Holy Spirit and we delight in doing good. Now, it is the nature of the Law to attack our person and demand good works; and it will not cease to demand until it gains its point. We cannot do good works without the Spirit and love. The Law constrains us to know ourselves with our imperfections, and to recognize the necessity of our becoming altogether different individuals that we may satisfy the Law. The Law does not exact so much of the heart as of works; in fact, it demands nothing but works and ignores the heart. It leaves the individual to discover, from the works required, that he must become an altogether different person. But faith, when it comes, creates a nature capable of accomplishing the works the Law demands. Thus is the Law fulfilled. So Paul's sayings on the subject are beautiful and appropriate. The Law demands of us works; it must be fulfilled by works. Hence it cannot in every sense be said that faith fulfils the Law. However, it prepares the way and enables us to fulfil it, for the Law demands, not us, but our works. The Law constrains us – teaches us that we must be changed before we can accomplish its works; it makes us conscious of our inability as we are. On the other hand, love and works do not change us, do not justify us. We must be changed in person and justified before we can love and do good works. Our love and our works are evidence of justification and of a change, since they are impossible until the individual is free from sin and made righteous.

23. This explanation is given to enable us to perceive the true nature of the Law, of faith and of love; to ascribe to each its own mission; and rightly to understand the Scripture declarations in their harmonious relations that while faith justifies, it does not fulfil the

Law, and that while love does not justify, it does fulfil the Law. The Law requires love and works, but does not mention the heart. The heart is sensible of the Law, but love is not. Just as the Law, in requiring works before faith exists, is a sign to the individual leading him to recognize his utter lack of faith and righteousness, and to conclude he is conquered, so love in its fulfilment of the Law after faith intervenes is a sign and a proof to the individual of his faith and righteousness. Law and love, then, witness to him concerning his unrighteousness or his righteousness. After faith comes, love is evidence of righteousness. Before faith, man is sensible of the Law's oppression because he knows he does not possess what the Law requires. And the Law does not require a changed heart, but works. Love and works do not effect the fulfilment of the Law; they are themselves its fulfilment.

24. Now, though faith does not fulfil the Law, it contains that which effects its fulfilment; it secures the Spirit and love whereby the end is accomplished. On the other hand, if love does not justify us, it makes manifest the faith whereby we are justified. Briefly, as Paul says here, "Love is the fulfilment of the law." His thought is: Fulfilment of the Law is one thing, and effecting or furnishing its fulfilment another. Love fulfils the Law in the sense that love itself is its fulfilment; but faith fulfils it in the sense that it offers that by which it is fulfilled. For faith loves and works, as said in Galatians 5, 6, "*Faith worketh through love.*" The water fills the pitcher; so does the cupbearer. The water fills of itself; the cupbearer fills with the water – effective et formaliter implere," as the sophists would say.

25. Faith is ever the actor, and love the act. The law requires the act and thus forces the actor to be changed. The Law is then fulfilled by the act, which, however, the actor must perform. Thus Paul rejects the fancies of the sophists, who in the matter of love would make a distinction between the external work and the inner affection, saying: "Love is an inner affection that loves our neighbor when in our heart we wish him well." Its expression in works, however, they call the fruit of love. But we will not discuss this idea. Note, Paul terms love not only an affection, but an affectionate good act. Faith and the heart are the actor and fulfiller of the Law. Paul says, "He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law." And love is the act, the fulfilling; for he says, "*Love is the fulfilment of the law.*"

26. Another question arises: How can love for our neighbor be the fulfilment of the Law when we are required to love God supremely, even above our neighbor? I reply: Christ answers the question when he tells us (Mt 22, 39) the second commandment is like unto the first. He makes love to God and love to our neighbor the same love. The reason for this is, first: God, having no need for our works and benefactions for himself, bids us to do for our neighbor what we would do for God. He asks for himself only our faith and our recognition of him as God. The object of proclaiming his honor and rendering him praise and thanks here on earth is that our neighbor may be converted and brought into

fellowship with God. Such service is called the love of God, and is performed out of love to God; but it is exercised for the benefit of our neighbor only.

27. The second reason why God makes love to our neighbor an obligation equal to love to himself is: God has made worldly wisdom foolish, desiring henceforth to be loved amid crosses and afflictions. Paul says (1 Cor 1, 21), "Seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." Therefore, upon the cross he submitted himself unto death and misery, and imposed the same submission upon all his disciples. They who refused to love him before when he bestowed upon them food and drink, blessing and honor, must now love him in hunger and sorrow, in adversity and disgrace. All works of love, then, must be directed to our wretched, needy neighbors. In these lowly ones we are to find and love God, in them we are to serve and honor him, and only so can we do it. The commandment to love God is wholly merged in that to love our neighbors.

28. These facts restrain those elusive, soaring spirits that seek after God only in great and glorious undertakings. It stops the mouths of those who strive after greatness like his, who would force themselves into heaven, presuming to serve and love him with their brilliant works. But they miss him by passing over him in their earthly neighbor, in whom God would be loved and honored. Therefore, they will hear, on the last day, the sentence (Mt 25, 42), "I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat," etc. For Christ laid aside his divinity and took upon himself the form of a servant for the very purpose of bringing down and centering upon our neighbor the love we extend to himself. Yet we leave the Lord to lie here in his humiliation while we gaze open-mouthed into heaven and make great pretensions to love and service to God.

### **ALL COMMANDMENTS SUMMED UP IN LOVE.**

*"For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*

29. Love being the chief element of all law, it comprehends, as has been made sufficiently clear, all commandments. Its one concern is to be useful to man and not harmful; therefore, it readily discovers the way. Recognizing the fact that man, from his ardent self-love, seeks to promote his own interests and avoid injuring them, love endeavors to adopt the same course toward others. We will consider the commandment just cited, noticing how ingeniously and wisely it is arranged. It brings out four thoughts. First, it states who is under obligation to love: thou – the nearest, noblest, best individual we can command. No one can fulfil the Law of God for another; each must do it for himself. As Paul says (Gal 6, 5), "Each man shall bear his own burden." And (2 Cor 5, 10): "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ;

that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." So it is said, "Thou, thou thyself, must love;" not, "Let someone else love for you." Though one can and should pray that God may be gracious to another and help him, yet no one will be saved unless he himself fulfils God's command. It is not enough merely to pray that another may escape punishment, as the venders of indulgences teach; much rather, we should pray that he become righteous and observe God's precepts.

30. Second, the commandment names the most noble virtue – love. It does not say, "*Thou shalt feed thy neighbor, give him drink, clothe him,*" all of which things are inestimably good works; it says, "*Thou shalt love him.*" Love is the chief virtue, the fountain of all virtues. Love gives food and drink; it clothes, comforts, persuades, relieves and rescues. What shall we say of it, for behold he who loves gives himself, body and soul, property and honor, all his powers inner and external, for his needy neighbor's benefit, whether it be friend or enemy; he withholds nothing wherewith he may serve another. There is no virtue like love; there can be no special work assigned it as in the case of limited virtues, such as chastity, mercy, patience, meekness, and the like. Love does all things. It will suffer in life and in death, in every condition, and that even for its enemies. Well may Paul here say that all other commandments are briefly comprehended in the injunction, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

31. Third, the commandment names, as the sphere of our love, the noblest field, the dearest friend – our neighbor. It does not say, "*Thou shalt love the rich, the mighty, the learned, the saint.*" No, the unrestrained love designated in this most perfect commandment does not apportion itself among the few. With it is no respect of persons. It is the nature of false, carnal, worldly love to respect the individual, and to love only so long as it hopes to derive profit. When such hope ceases, that love also ceases. The commandment of our text, however, requires of us free, spontaneous love to all men, whoever they may be, and whether friend or foe, a love that seeks not profit, and administers only what is beneficial. Such love is most active and powerful in serving the poor, the needy, the sick, the wicked, the simple-minded and the hostile; among these it is always and under all circumstances necessary to suffer and endure, to serve and do good.

32. Note here, this commandment makes us all equal before God, without regard to distinctions incident to our stations in life, to our persons, offices and occupations. Since the commandment is to all – to every human being – a sovereign, if he be a human being, must confess the poorest beggar, the most wretched leper, his neighbor and his equal in the sight of God. He is under obligation, according to this commandment, not to extend a measure of help, but to serve that neighbor with all he has and all he controls. If he loves him as God here commands him to do, he must give the beggar preference over his crown and all his realm; and if the beggar's necessity

requires, must give his life. He is under obligation to love his neighbor, and must admit that such a one is his neighbor.

33. Is not this a superior, a noble, commandment, which completely levels the most unequal individuals? Is it not wonderfully comforting to the beggar to have servants and lovers of such honor? wonderful that his poverty commands the services of a king in his opulence? that to his sores and wounds are subject the crown of wealth and the sweet savor of royal splendor? But how strange it would seem to us to behold kings and queens, princes and princesses, serving beggars and lepers, as we read St. Elizabeth did! Even this, however, would be a slight thing in comparison with what Christ has done. No one can ever equal him in the obedience wherewith he has exalted this commandment. He is a king whose honor transcends that of all other kings; indeed, he is the Son of God. And yet he puts himself on a level with the worst sinners, and serves them even to dying for them. Were ten kings of earth to serve to the utmost one beggar, it would be a remarkable thing; but of what significance would it be in comparison with the service Christ has rendered? The kings would be put to utter shame and would have to acknowledge their service unworthy of notice.

34. Learn, then, the condition of the world – how far it not only from Christ's immeasurable example, but from commandment in this verse. Where are to be found any who comprehend the meaning of the little phrase "thy neighbor," notwithstanding there is, beside this commandment, the natural law of service written in the hearts of all men? Not an individual is there who does not realize, and who is not forced to confess, the justice and truth of the natural law outlined in the command (Mt 7, 12), "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." The light of this law shines in the inborn reason of all men. Did they but regard it, what need have they of books, teachers or laws? They carry with them in the depths of their hearts a living book, fitted to teach them fully what to do and what to omit, what to accept and what to reject, and what decision to make. Now, the command to love our neighbors as ourselves is equivalent to that other, "*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you,*" etc. Every individual desires to be loved and not hated; and he also feels and sees his obligation to exercise the same disposition toward others. The carrying out of this obligation is loving another as himself. But evil lust and sinful love obscure the light of natural law, and blind man, until he fails to perceive the guide-book in his heart and to follow the clear command of reason. Hence he must be restrained and repelled by external laws and material books, with the sword and by force. He must be reminded of his natural light and have his own heart revealed to him. Yet admonition does not avail; he does not see the light. Evil lust and sinful love blind him. With the sword and with political laws he must still be outwardly restrained from perpetrating actual crimes.

35. The fourth thing the commandment presents is the standard by which we are to measure our love – an excellent model. Those are particularly worthy instructions and

commandments which present examples. This commandment holds up a truly living example – "thyself." It is a better model than any example the saints have set. The saints are dead and their deeds are past, but this example ever lives. Everyone must admit a consciousness of his own love for himself; of his ardent concern for his temporal life; of his careful nourishment of his body with food, raiment and all good things; of his fleeing from death and avoiding evil. This is self-love; something we are conscious of in ourselves. What, then, is the teaching of the commandment? To do to another as you do to yourself; to value his body and his life equally with your own body and life. Now, how could God have pointed you to an example dearer, more pleasing and more to the purpose than this example – the deep instinct of your nature? Indeed, your depth of character is measured by the writing of this command in your heart.

36. How will you fare with God if you do not love your neighbor? Feeling this commandment written within your heart, your conscience will condemn you. Your whole conduct will be an example witnessing against you, testifying to your failure to do unto others as the natural instinct of your being, more forcibly than all the examples of the saints, has taught you to do. But how will it go with the ecclesiasts in particular – the churchmen with their singing and praying, their cowls and bald pates, and all their jugglery? I make no comment on the fact that they have never observed the commandment. I ask, however, when has their monastic fanaticism permitted them time and opportunity to perceive for once this law in their hearts, to become sensible of the example set them in their own human instinct, or' even to read the precept in books or hear it preached? Poor, miserable people! Do you presume to think that God will make void this, love's commandment, so deeply and clearly impressed upon the heart, so beautifully and unmistakably illustrated in your own natures, and in the many written and spoken words as well – think you God will do this on account of your cowls and bald pates, and regard what you have been devising and performing?

37. Alas, how shamelessly the world has ignored this beautiful and impressive commandment wherein are so skilfully presented the individual, the task, the model and the sphere of labor! And, on the other hand, how shamefully it occupies itself with the very reverse of what is taught in this commandment! Its whole practice and tendency seem to be to place our responsibility upon others; monks and priests must be righteous for us and pray in our stead, that we may personally be excused. For the noblest virtue, love, we substitute self- devised works; in the place of our neighbors we put wood and stone, raiment and food, even dead souls-the saints of heaven. These we serve; with them we are occupied; they are the sphere wherein we exercise ourselves. Instead of the noblest example – "as thyself" – we look to the legends and the works of saints. We presume to imitate such outward examples, omitting the duty which our own nature and life present and which the command of God outlines, notwithstanding such duty offers more than we could ever fulfil. Even if we could accomplish all it offers, we would still not equal Christ.



## **LOVE WORKS ONLY GOOD TO ITS NEIGHBOR.**

*”Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love, therefore, is the fulfilment of the law.”*

38. The Ten Commandments forbid doing evil to our neighbor – ”Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery,” etc. The apostle, employing similar phraseology, says that love observes all these commands, injuring none. Not only that; it effects good for all. It is practically doing evil to permit our neighbor to remain in peril when we can relieve him, even though we may not have been instrumental in placing him where he is. If he is hungry and we do not feed him when it is in our power to do so, we practically permit him to die of hunger. We should take this view concerning any perilous condition, any adverse circumstance, with our neighbors. How love is the fulfilment of the Law, we have now heard.

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Fourth Sunday after Epiphany