

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, November 9, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 34, 17:1, 396, 394, 644.

Lessons: Exodus 10:1-17, Ephesians 5:1-17, Matthew 22:34-40.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:20-5:5.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Does the earthly proverb ‘you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar’ make sense to you? The idea is that by being pleasant and showing love, you are more likely to motivate someone in a positive way.

In our Old Testament lesson, which lists the Ten Commandments, did you notice how God introduced his commandments? He told his people that he is the one who rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Then, after that, he tells them they are to have no other gods. That we recognize as the First Commandment. They are not to make any kind of idol. He says *"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."* (Exodus 20:5-6) He warns them, but he also shows that his love is infinite, and to make that point he says it will last for a thousand generations. Now that is a remarkable length of time – 25,000 to 35,000 years at a time when the world was maybe 2500 years away from the time God created all things! Martin Luther puts these words into what we call the “conclusion” of the commandments, at the end. But it is important that we recognize that it is our loving creator and Savior who gave us these commandments. God tells us of his love to make us willing and glad to obey his commandments, because they really show us the way of wisdom, freedom, and happiness in our lives. John tells us today *"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome."* But remember that he loved us.

So in a sense, God draws us to him first with honey, not with vinegar. In a very human sense, it is much easier to serve and do something for someone who loves you than for someone who dislikes you. We are much more willing to obey someone, and want to do things that please them.

Today we hear again about love, about another aspect of God’s love for us.

GOD’S LOVE IS A GREAT MOTIVATOR

1. **Love leads to obedience of his commands. “*And his commands are not burdensome.*”**
2. **God loves us and works faith in us.**
3. **Through faith, the source of all Christian life, we are overcoming the world.**

John tells us *"This is love for God: to obey his commands."*

Our verses today include a warning: *"If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."* This is the same idea we read earlier in this letter. *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."* (1 John 3:14-15)

John seems to be referring to those who are Christians in name only or have left the enthusiasm of their first love as it was worked in them by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Aren’t there many who claim to have love for the brethren but their behavior indicates that they are completely indifferent toward their welfare, both temporal

and spiritual? John by inspiration of God calls such a person a liar. It is a comparatively easy matter to love people whom we see. It is harder to love those we cannot see.

So we ask ‘Who is it that truly loves God? If you hate your brother, you really don’t love God. John repeats it: If you do not love your brother, whom you have seen, you are not able to love God whom you have not seen. So if you love God, truly love God, you also love your brother and you show it.

If you don’t love someone you can see, how can you love someone you can’t see? When a disaster strikes the other side of the world, we think “Oh, that’s too bad.” When disaster strikes someone we know, it really hits us. It is closer to home and closer to the heart. We really get involved, emotionally and perhaps even physically and financially. When we hear that people in some foreign country far away are starving we think “that’s too bad.” When someone we know can’t pay bills or can’t buy food, it strikes home and touches us personally.

So God says that if we do not love or are indifferent toward those whom we ought to love, namely, all of our brethren, then all our claims regarding our love toward God are empty, and we are deceiving ourselves. We are lying even to ourselves.

The main reason why love toward God cannot exist without love toward the brethren is given in the words: ***“And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*** This is a clear restatement of the command of our Lord Jesus Christ ***‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*** (Matthew 22:39) You heard that in our Gospel lesson, together with the command ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*** (Matthew 22:37) The one commandment cannot be without the other, for God’s will is to love.

The words just before our text tell us ***“he first loved us.”*** (1 John 4:19) To break the command regarding brotherly love is to transgress the commandment to love God. Whoever does not show brotherly love cannot say that he loves God, for he is transgressing the commandment of God. True love toward God and the right love toward the brethren is inseparable

So what can work that kind of love in us, or in anyone? It is the Gospel, not law. It is only the Gospel that can achieve the desired results.

The first thing God said after ascertaining that Adam and Eve did sin was to tell Satan ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** (Genesis 3:15) That is Gospel.

But the Gospel is meaningless without a knowledge of sin. God gave mankind the Law to show our sinfulness. But notice that they are commands. He gave mankind the “Ten Commandments”, not the “Ten Suggestions”. Knowing our sinfulness, we know we must desperately seek some remedy.

God provides that remedy. John has made that abundantly clear in this letter. We must realize and be assured that God loves us. If you have heard or read even one regular sermon here in addition to Reformation in the last four months, you know and have heard repeatedly that God loves us and he wants us to share his love with others and to reflect that love. Love is a key message of John’s first Epistle.

John here is showing us again that faith is the source of all Christian life. ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.”*** That is the great test of Christianity: a man’s attitude toward Jesus Christ. If he believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God and the Savior of the world, then there is unmistakable evidence that he is born of God, regenerated, that he has received the new spiritual life. Such a person will love God, his heavenly Father directly. And he will also show his love for everyone else who has been born again. All other children of God by virtue of their regeneration are his spiritual brethren. Love toward God and toward the brethren is a necessary consequence of the new spiritual life

This love of the Christians is a living power. ***“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands”.*** Love toward God is not a matter of sentimental feelings. It is not just saying that it is our duty to love the heavenly Father. There must be concrete evidence. That proof of faith is found in the keeping of God’s commandments and in living in accordance with His holy will. True children of God cannot help but show their sonship in this manner.

Not only will God's children strive mightily to obey God's commands, they will also show their love toward the brethren. This is also not just a matter of pious talk, but of behavior toward the brethren at all times as the will of our heavenly Father wants and commands.

Since the knowledge of our sonship toward God is so important in our lives, the apostle repeats: "***This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.***" That is the essence of true love toward God; that his children find their greatest delight in fulfilling his commandments, in doing everything that pleases him, and this includes loving our brethren. And such conduct on our part we do not consider a grievous, bothersome burden, for love feels no loads. Some of you may remember a slogan used long ago of an institution that cared for orphans. There was a picture of one boy carrying another saying "He ain't heavy, he's my brother". Faith in God, love toward God brings strength from God; and through his love and his strength all his commandments are not only easy and light, but pleasant and delightful. In fact, when we consider the third use of the Law, God's Law as a guide or guideline for the believer, we are reminded that the child of God says "***I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.***" (Psalm 119:32) The unbeliever is like the stubborn child who must be dragged where the parents want to go. The believer gladly runs in the way of God's commandments.

This fact, that to a Christian the commandments of God are not burdensome, is now explained more fully: "***everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.***" John tells us that this applies to every Christian without exception. Wherever the new birth has taken place, wherever faith has been planted in the heart, there this wonderful power exists, there the believer is able to conquer the world, that is, all the forces in this world that are opposed to the spiritual life in him. This victory, this overcoming of the world, is a continuous process. Not until we reach heaven will we stop fighting the devil, the sinful world, and our own sinful flesh.

Believers don't do this with their own power. They fight the powers of darkness with their faith.

Paul speaks of part of the believer's armor in this way: "***take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***" (Ephesians 6:16-17)

Without this faith anyone who claims to be a believer would be lost, no matter what human cleverness and wisdom they may try to use. But with this faith they are victors, for they become partakers of the victory which their Champion, Jesus Christ, won over the kingdom of darkness. He overcame sin, death, and hell, and thus these enemies are powerless against the faith which clings to the Savior and his victory.

This faith is, of course, not fiction. It is real. "***Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.***"

There is only one true faith, namely, this knowledge and conviction, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, that God himself was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, that he is gracious and merciful to us for the sake of Christ. This truly is faith. This kind of faith is the only thing which has that almighty power of which St. John speaks; everything else is vain imagination. As the entire Christian life is a fruit of justifying, saving faith, so also the Christian is ceaseless in his conquest of evil with all its power.

"Lord give us such a faith as this;
And then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home." Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 396:6)