

The Christian's Duty To Love Friends And Enemies.

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-15

1) How Christians Should Love Their Friends

Suggested Hymns:

2) How Christians Should Love Their Enemies

194, 610, 344, 286, 797

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Peter 3:8–15, ***8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.***

10 For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Towards the close of our text the Apostle speaks of the Christians' sufferings, and he tells them how to feel about it, if they must suffer for righteousness' sake.

To this day Christians are often sneered at because they endeavour to lead a godly life, and they are made to suffer for it when they refuse to join the world in its evil lusts.

This is suffering for righteousness' sake, and the advice which the Apostle gives to those who must suffer for righteousness' sake is, "*do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.* ¹⁵ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*"

And in the following verses he comforts those innocent sufferers with the sufferings Christ endured, and says, "¹⁷ *For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* ¹⁸ *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.*"¹

How Jesus suffered when He bled and died on the cross, and how innocent He was who had never done a wrong, and in whose mouth no guile was ever found! And all His sufferings He endured for us sinners; the Just died for the unjust. ²¹ *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"²

The innocent suffering and death of our Saviour, who suffered and died for us that we might have forgiveness of sins and live forever, will give us comfort and strength to bear our sufferings with patience when we must suffer for righteousness' sake.

But it is not an easy thing to take things without murmur and complaint when you know that you are perfectly innocent, and have not given the slightest cause that insults should be heaped upon you and wrongs done to you.

A strong heart is required to bear such suffering, a heart filled with love, not mere human love, but divine love, love coming from God, and poured out into the human heart.

This divine love enters into the Christian's heart, and although his love is never made perfect in this sinful world, he still begins truly to love all people, not only those who do him well, but also those who cause him suffering, not only the friend, but also the enemy.

Let us consider, then, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *The Christian's Duty To Love Friends And Enemies*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How Christians Should Love Their Friends

The Christians' duty to love their friends, their fellow-Christians, is in this way set forth by the Apostle, "⁸ ***Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous!***"

It has been nicely said: "*This one verse has a cluster of five Christian graces or virtues. That which is in the middle as the stalk or root of the rest is love; and the others growing out of it, two on each side— being of one mind and compassion on the one side, and being tenderhearted and courtesy on the other side.*"

In this verse St. Peter analyses love to the brethren; and this love, according to the Apostle, has five ingredients.

First, agreement. ⁸ ***Finally, all of you be of one mind***" says the Apostle. The Apostle obviously speaks to the members of a local congregation, and the members of a local congregation, brethren among themselves, may hold different opinions.

They may differ as to worldly matters in the church. One may have this idea and another that idea. One may have made up his mind as to what is to be done under the existing circumstances, and another may think altogether differently as to the same matter.

But as to doctrine and practice, the members of a Christian congregation should be unanimous and all be of one mind. It will never do in a Christian congregation, for instance, that one person believes that he receives Christ's true body and blood in the Sacrament, but another believes that his brother is an idiot and silly for believing that, and that the bread and wine is only an emblem of Christ's body and blood.

How can there be love to the brethren, if the hearts are not united in the faith, if all are not of one mind? Scripture says that there is "⁵ ***One Lord, one faith, one baptism;*** ⁶ ***one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.***"³

The second ingredient of brotherly love is *compassion*. "***Having compassion for one another,***" says the Apostle. We should rejoice with those who rejoice; and weep with those who weep. If you see that your brother or your sister in Christ is meeting with success in the world, and getting along better in

life than you are, do not make a wry face at them for that, do not envy them and begrudge them the blessings which God bestows on them.

Envy is one of the most despicable traits of character, and betrays a most miserable, selfish soul. Rejoice with those who rejoice; congratulate them, let their joy make you happy also! This is compassion and empathy.

And weep with those who weep! When misfortunes come upon those with whom you are bound together by the tie of the same faith; when they meet with earthly losses; when illness comes to them; when they are bowed down with sorrow and grief; when they are bereft of those whom they love, O what a consolation it will be for them to be soothed, to be kindly spoken to, to be cheered up, and assisted!

Show them your compassion then, and give them a word of condolence in their misery. Weep with those who weep, and let love move you to do so.

The third ingredient of brotherly love is brotherly feeling. “*Love as brothers*” says the Apostle. This is the same thing as when St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, “¹⁰ *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*”⁴

Especially the members of a local congregation should feel toward one another as if they were members of one family. There should be no factions in a congregation, no little bands of friends complete in themselves, isolating themselves from the rest, and deporting themselves as a separate family in the Church of God. The whole congregation should be that family, and every member should be treated in such way that he feels at home.

The fourth ingredient is *tenderhearted*. “*Be tenderhearted,*” says the Apostle. The same Greek word is used in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, where the Apostle says, *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*⁵

The love of God will make a person truly tenderhearted, so that he pities those whom he finds in distress and want, and does for them all he can do to alleviate their suffering, especially for his own brethren in the faith, as the Word of God says, ¹⁰ *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*⁶

The last ingredient of brotherly love is courtesy. “*Be courteous,*” says the Apostle. True living faith abiding in the heart softens the roughest natures, and produces a sweetness and spiritual refinement far more beautiful and attractive than that superficial polish which comes only by education and habit.

A great deal of the courtesy in the world is damnable hypocrisy. But Christians should be truly courteous among themselves, refined in speech and manner, not vulgar, not disrespectful, but “*in honor giving preference to one another.*”

See, these are the five ingredients of brotherly love, - agreement, compassion, brotherly feeling, tenderhearted, and courtesy. In this way Christians should show love to their brethren. In this way they should love friends.

2. How Christians Should Love Their Enemies.

And now, in the second place, let us see how Christians should love their enemies also.

The remaining portion of our Epistle we may divide into two parts. In the first part the Apostle tells how Christians should show love to their enemies, and in the second part he states the reasons why they should love the enemy.

How should Christians show love to their enemies? The Apostle says, *“not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing.* Now if there is anything which does not suit the natural man, it is this teaching that we should return good for evil.

Is it not natural for us to return a blow when we are struck and to pay back with the same coin when we are wronged? Is it not considered cowardice and a lack of manliness in the world to submit calmly to insults and injury and not to resent evil? Is it not considered a duty which one owes to one’s self to assert his rights and to retaliate and take revenge in some way upon the enemy?

But how are the followers of Christ to deal with their enemies? “*Do not return evil for evil,*” says the Apostle, “*nor reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing.*”

He echoes the great command which Christ gave to all His disciples when He said, ⁴³ “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and*

hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.’⁷

He voices the same sentiments which his fellow Apostle Paul expresses in the words, ¹⁹ *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”⁸*

This is the climax of Christian ethics, this is the highest point of morality, not taught by any religion in the world except the Christian religion, that we love our enemies.

And how should we love the enemy? Both by word and deed. By word. The Apostle says, ¹⁰ *For He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.*

What do you gain if you render *reviling for reviling*, if you let your tongue run wild, and hurl vile epithets against the person who has wronged you and abused you in words? Do you brighten your own day by doing so? Do you not make your own life the more miserable? Is it not much better to return blessing for curses, and thereby to avoid worry and trouble?

And not only by word, but also by deed we should love the enemy. The Apostle says, ¹¹ *Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.* What do you gain if you get satisfaction, and make him suffer for it who has caused you suffering, or if you carry on an uncompromising warfare with the enemy so that continually you must be on your guard against him?

Is not your own life the more embittered by such hostility? It is much better to *turn away from evil*, to refrain from wrong-doing, to make peace, to extend the hand of reconciliation, to do good to the enemy, and thereby to win him over, and to turn him into a friend if possible.

The Word of God says in Romans 12:18, ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men?*

And why must Christians love their enemies? The Apostle states several reasons. He says, *knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a*

blessing. Christians know that they are called to inherit a blessing. We know that God has forgiven us all our sins for Christ's sake, and that He will receive us into life everlasting.

Now if God, whom we have so grievously offended by our sins, is so gracious and merciful to us, if He does not punish us for the evil which we do to Him, should not this unparalleled grace and mercy banish from our hearts all malice and all thoughts of resentment? Should not God's love to us teach us how to love the enemy?

Another reason the Apostle states in the words, ¹² *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*

God is displeased with us if we do evil for the sake of the evil which we receive. His face is against us, and His countenance is not changed if we say that we have been provoked, that we could not control our temper, and the like.

We simply should not do evil, and it is His will that we love the enemy. And if for the evil done to us and we return good, God is pleased with us, and promises us His blessing. Should not Christians, then, seek to please God also by loving the enemy?

Finally, the Apostle says, ¹³ *And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?* ¹⁴ *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.* What do we need to fear if we show love to the enemy? Is it not much better to go to excess in doing good to the enemy, to do even more for him than we would do for a friend, than to do a single wrong?

Will you not be happy, will you not enjoy the peace of a good conscience, if on your part you do all that you can, and all that can be done, to settle matters quickly with your adversary while you are on the way with him?⁹

May the Lord, then, grant to us all, His grace that not only to our friends, but also to our enemies we show true Christian love. In this way we show that we are true disciples of our divine Master, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory forever and ever! Amen.

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

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- ¹ 1 Peter 3:17–18
 - ² 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - ³ Ephesians 4:5–6
 - ⁴ Romans 12:10
 - ⁵ Ephesians 4:32
 - ⁶ Galatians 6:10
 - ⁷ Matthew 5:43–44
 - ⁸ Romans 12:19–20
 - ⁹ Matthew 5:25