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ON CHRISTIAN LOVE: A SERMON BY HUGH LATIMER

BISHOP HUGH LATIMER (1485–1555)

BISHOP OF WORCESTER

This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.

—John xv., 12.



eeing the time is so far spent, we will take no more in hand at this time than this one sentence; for it will be enough for us to consider this well, and to bear it away with us. “This I command unto you, that ye love one another.” Our Savior himself spake these words at His last supper: it was the last sermon that He made unto His disciples before His departure; it is a very long sermon. For our Savior, like as one that knows he shall die shortly, is desirous to spend that little time that He has with His friends, in exhorting and instructing them how they should lead their lives. Now among other things that He commanded this was one: “This I command unto you, that ye love one another.” The English expresses as tho it were but one, “This is my commandment.” I examined the Greek, where it is in the plural number, and very well; for there are many things that pertain to a Christian man, and yet all those things are contained in this one thing, that is, love. He lappeth up all things in love.

Our whole duty is contained in these words, “Love together.” Therefore St. Paul saith, “He that loveth another fulfilleth the whole law”; so it appeareth that all things are contained in this word love. This love is a precious thing; our Savior saith, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye shall love one another.”

Charity is gentle, friendly, and loving; she envieth not." They that envy their neighbor's profit when it goes well with him, such fellows are out of their liveries, and so out of the service of God; for to be envious is to be the servant of the devil.





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So Christ makes love His cognizance, His badge, His livery. Like as every lord commonly gives a certain livery to his servants, whereby they may be known that they pertain unto him; and so we say, yonder is this lord's servants, because they wear his livery: so our Savior, who is the Lord above all lords, would have His servants known by their liveries and badge, which badge is love alone. Whosoever now is endued with love and charity is His servant; him we may call Christ's servant; for love is the token whereby you may know that such a servant pertaineth to Christ; so that charity may be called the very livery of Christ. He that hath charity is Christ's servant; he that hath not charity is the servant of the devil. For as Christ's livery is love and charity, so the devil's livery is hatred, malice and discord.

But I think the devil has a great many more servants than Christ has; for there are a great many more in his livery than in Christ's livery; there are but very few who are endued with Christ's livery; with love and charity, gentleness and meekness of spirit; but there are a great number that bear hatred and malice in their hearts, that are proud, stout, and lofty; therefore the number of the devil's servants is greater than the number of Christ's servants.

Now St. Paul shows how needful this love is. I speak not of carnal love, which is only animal affection; but of this charitable love, which is so necessary that when a man hath it, without all other things it will suffice him. Again, if a man have all other things and lacketh that love it will not help him, it is all vain and lost. St. Paul used it so: "Tho I speak with tongues of men and angels, and yet had no love, I were even as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal. And tho I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge; yet if I had faith, so that I could move mountains out of their places, and yet had no love, I were nothing. And tho I bestowed all my goods to feed the poor, and tho I gave my body even that I were burned, and yet had no love, it profiteth me nothing" (I Cor. xiii). These are godly gifts, yet St. Paul calls them nothing when a man hath them without charity; which is a great



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commendation, and shows the great need of love, insomuch that all other virtues are in vain when this love is absent. And there have been some who taught that St. Paul spake against the dignity of faith; but you must understand that St. Paul speaks here not of the justifying faith, wherewith we receive everlasting life, but he understands by this word faith the gift to do miracles, to remove hills; of such a faith he speaks. This I say to confirm this proposition. Faith only justifieth; this proposition is most true and certain. And St. Paul speaks not here of this lively justifying faith; for this right faith is not without love, for love cometh and floweth out of faith; love is a child of faith; for no man can love except he believe, so that they have two several offices, they themselves being inseparable.

St. Paul has an expression in the 13th chapter of the first of the Corinthians, which, according to the outward letter, seems much to the dispraise of this faith, and to the praise of love; these are his words, “Now abideth faith, hope and love, even these three; but the chiefest of these is love.” There are some learned men who expound the greatness of which St. Paul speaketh here as if meant for eternity. For when we come to God, then we believe no more, but rather see with our eyes face to face how He is; yet for all that love remains still; so that love may be called the chiefest, because she endureth forever. And tho she is the chiefest, yet we must not attribute unto her the office which pertains unto faith only. Like as I can not say, the Mayor of Stamford must make me a pair of shoes because he is a greater man than the shoemaker is; for the mayor, tho he is a greater man, yet it is not his office to make shoes; so tho love be greater, yet it is not her office to save. Thus much I thought good to say against those who fight against the truth.

Now, when we would know who are in Christ’s livery or not, we must learn it of St. Paul, who most evidently described charity, which is the only livery, saying, “Love is patient, she suffereth



But if we have this livery, if we wear His cognizance here in this world; that is, if we love our neighbor, help him in his distress, are charitable, loving, and friendly unto him, then we shall be known at the last day



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long.” Now whosoever fumeth and is angry, he is out of this livery: therefore let us remember that we do not cast away the livery of Christ our Master. When we are in sickness, or any manner of adversities, our duty is to be patient, to suffer willingly, and to call upon Him for aid, help and comfort; for without Him we are not able to abide any tribulation. Therefore we must call upon God, He has promised to help: therefore let me not think Him to be false or untrue to His promises, for we can not dishonor God more than by not believing or trusting in Him. Therefore let us beware above all things of dishonoring God; and so we must be patient, trusting and most certainly believing that He will deliver us when it seems good to Him, who knows the time better than we ourselves.

“Charity is gentle, friendly, and loving; she envieth not.” They that envy their neighbor’s profit when it goes well with him, such fellows are out of their liveries, and so out of the service of God; for to be envious is to be the servant of the devil.

“Love doth not frowardly, she is not a provoker”; as there are some men who will provoke their neighbor so far that it is very hard for them to be in charity with them; but we must wrestle with our affections; we must strive and see that we keep this livery of Christ our master; for “the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking to take us at a vantage,” to bring us out of our liveries, and to take from us the knot of love and charity.

“Love swelleth not, is not puffed up”; but there are many swellers nowadays, they are so high, so lofty, insomuch that they despise and contemn all others; all such persons are under the governance of the devil. God rules not them with His good spirit; the evil spirit has occupied their hearts and possest them.

“She doth not dishonestly; she seeketh not her own; she doth all things to the commodity of her neighbors.” A charitable man will not promote himself with the damage of his neighbor. They that seek only their own advantage, forgetting their neighbors, they



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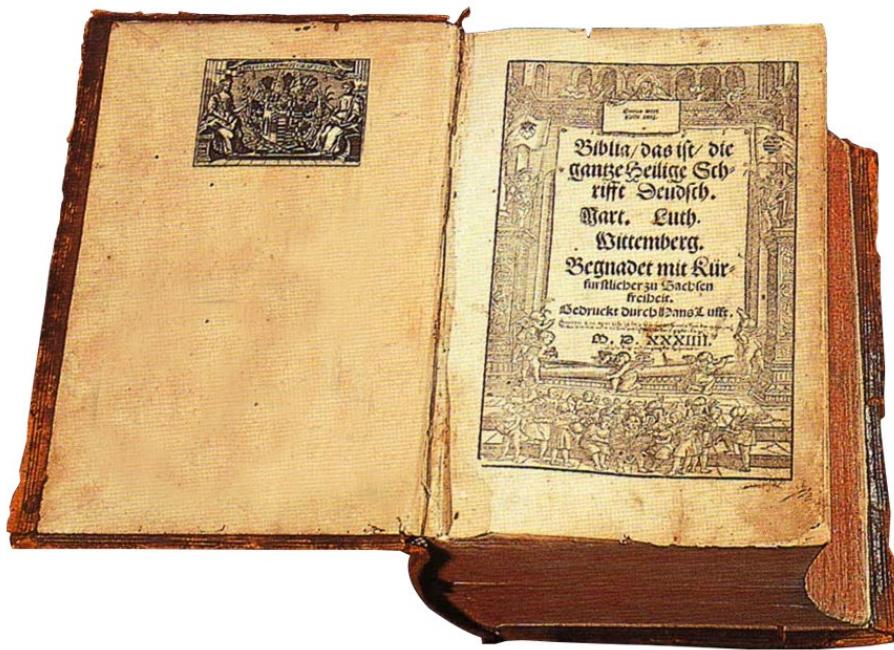
are not of God, they have not His livery. Further, “Charity is not provoked to anger; she thinketh not evil.” We ought not to think evil of our neighbor, as long as we see not open wickedness; for it is written, “You shall not judge”; we should not take upon us to condemn our neighbor. And surely the condemners of other men’s works are not in the livery of Christ. Christ hateth them.

“She rejoiceth not in iniquity”; she loveth equity and godliness. And again, she is sorry to hear of falsehood, of stealing, or such like, which wickedness is now at this time commonly used. There never was such falsehood among Christian men as there is now, at this time; truly I think, and they that have experience report it so, that among the very infidels and Turks there is more fidelity and uprightness than among Christian men. For no man setteth anything by his promise, yea, and writings will not serve with some; they are so shameless that they dare deny their own handwriting; but, I pray you, are those false fellows in the livery of Christ? Have they His cognizance? No, no; they have the badge of the devil, with whom they shall be damned world without end, except they amend and leave their wickedness.

“She suffereth all things; she believeth all things.” It is a great matter that should make us to be grieved with our neighbor; we should be patient when our neighbor doth wrong, we should admonish him of his folly, earnestly desiring him to leave his wickedness, showing the danger that follows, everlasting damnation. In such wise we should study to amend our neighbor, and not to hate him or do him a foul turn again, but rather charitably study to amend him: whosoever now does so, he has the livery and cognizance of Christ, he shall be known at the last day for his servant.

“Love believeth all things”; it appears daily that they who are charitable and friendly are most deceived; because they think well of every man, they believe every man, they trust their words, and therefore are most deceived in this world, among the children of

And now to make an end: mark here who gave this precept of love – Christ our Savior Himself. When and at what time? At His departing, when He should suffer death. Therefore these words ought the more to be regarded, seeing He Himself spake them at His last departing from us.





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the devil. These and such like things are the tokens of the right and godly love; therefore they that have this love are soon known, for this love can not be hid in corners, she has her operation: therefore all that have her are well enough, tho they have no other gifts besides her. Again, they that lack her, tho they have many other gifts besides, yet is it to no other purpose, it does then no good: for when we shall come at the great day before him, not having this livery (that is love) with us, then we are lost; he will not take us for His servants, because we have not His cognizance. But if we have this livery, if we wear His cognizance here in this world; that is, if we love our neighbor, help him in his distress, are charitable, loving, and friendly unto him, then we shall be known at the last day: but if we be uncharitable toward our neighbor, hate him, seek our own advantage with His damage, then we shall be rejected of Christ and so damned world without end.

Our Savior saith here in this gospel, "I command you these things"; He speaketh in the plural number, and lappeth it up in one thing, which is that we should love one another, much like St. Paul's saying in the 13th to the Romans, "Owe nothing to any man, but to love one another." Here St. Paul lappeth up all things together, signifying unto us that love is the consummation of the law; for this commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is contained in this law of love: for he that loveth God will not break wedlock, because wedlock-breaking is a dishonoring of God and a serving of the devil. "Thou shalt not kill"; he that loveth will not kill, he will do no harm. "Thou shalt not steal"; he that loveth his neighbor as himself will not take away his goods. I had of late occasion to speak of picking and stealing, where I showed unto you the danger wherein they are that steal their neighbor's goods from them, but I hear nothing yet of restitution. Sirs, I tell you, except restitution is made, look for no salvation. And it is a miserable and heinous thing to consider that we are so blinded with this world that, rather than we would make restitution, we will sell unto the devil our souls



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which are bought with the blood of our Savior Christ. What can be done more to the dishonoring of Christ than to cast our souls away to the devil for the value of a little money? -- the soul which He has bought with His painful passion and death. But I tell you those that will do so, and that will not make restitution when they have done wrong, or taken away their neighbor's goods, they are not in the livery of Christ, they are not his servants; let them go as they will in this world, yet for all that they are foul and filthy enough before God; they stink before His face; and therefore they shall be cast from His presence into everlasting fire; this shall be all their good cheer that they shall have, because they have not the livery of Christ, nor His cognizance, which is love. They remember not that Christ commanded us, saying, "This I command you, that ye love one another." This is Christ's commandment. Moses, the great prophet of God, gave many laws, but he gave not the spirit to fulfil the same laws: but Christ gave this law, and promised unto us, that when we call upon Him He will give us His Holy Ghost, who shall make us able to fulfil His laws, tho not so perfectly as the law requires; but yet to the contention of God, and to the protection of our faith; for as long as we are in this world, we can do nothing as we ought to do, because our flesh leadeth us, which is ever bent against the law of God; yet our works which we do are well taken for Christ's sake, and God will reward them in heaven.

Therefore our Savior saith, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," because He helpeth to bear them; else indeed we should not be able to bear them. And in another place He saith, "His commandments are not heavy"; they are heavy to our flesh, but being qualified with the Spirit of God, to the faithful which believe in Christ, to them, I say, they are not heavy; for tho their doings are not perfect, yet they are well taken for Christ's sake.

You must not be offended because the Scripture commends love so highly, for he that commends the daughter commends the mother; for love is the daughter, and faith is the mother: love



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floweth out of faith; where faith is, there is love; but yet we must consider their offices, faith is the hand wherewith we take hold on everlasting life.

Now let us enter into ourselves, and examine our own hearts, whether we are in the livery of God, or not: and when we find ourselves to be out of this livery, let us repent and amend our lives, so that we may come again to the favor of God, and spend our time in this world to His honor and glory, forgiving our neighbors all such things as they have done against us.

And now to make an end: mark here who gave this precept of love – Christ our Savior Himself. When and at what time? At His departing, when He should suffer death. Therefore these words ought the more to be regarded, seeing He Himself spake them at His last departing from us. May God of His mercy give us grace so to walk here in this world, charitably and friendly one with another, that we may attain the joy which God hath prepared for all those that love Him. Amen. ■

NOTES

The World's Greatest Sermons: Volume 1. Compiled by Grenville Kleiser. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. 1908, pp. 147-158.



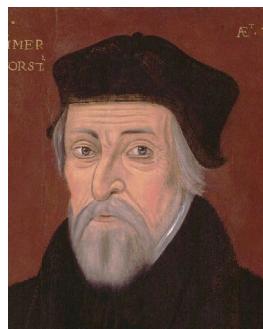
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Hugh Latimer was an English reformer and martyr. He was born in Leicestershire, England, in 1485. He was a graduate of Cambridge and then took holy orders and preached fervently in favor of the views of Martin Luther and the other Reformers.

He served as Bishop of Worcester from 1535–1539 and continued to preach the doctrines of the Reformation. Latimer lived in peaceful retirement under King Edward VI, but under the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ("Bloody Mary"), he was arrested along with other Reformers and thrown into the Tower of London. He was then sent to Oxford for examination by the Roman Catholic Church where he refused to recant on his beliefs in Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide and the other doctrines of the Reformation. Thus, he was confined for a year in prison, and on October 16, 1555, burned at the stake, along with Bishop Ridley, at a place opposite Balliol College, in Oxford.