

Sunday after Ascension Day;

1 Peter 4:7-11

EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN LIVING.

(This sermon appeared as early as 1525 in pamphlet form.)

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

1. This text, too, is an admonition to Christian living, a discourse concerning the fruits of a good tree, a figure applied to the Christian; in other words, concerning the fruits of the one who, through faith, has obtained redemption from sin and death and has a place in the kingdom of grace and of eternal life. Such a one is exhorted to live henceforth in a manner indicative of the fact that he has apprehended the treasure of salvation and is become a new man.

EXHORTATION TO SOBERNESS.

2. Certain good works are also introduced, and in the first part of our text Peter makes an especially emphatic continuation of the admonition in the foregoing part of the chapter, warning Christians to abstain from gross vices - carnal lusts - which in the world lead to obscenity, and from the wild, disorderly, swinish lives of the heathen world, lives of gormandizing, guzzling and drunkenness. Peter admonishes Christians to endeavor to be "*sober unto prayer.*" The epistle was written chiefly to the Greeks, the masses of which people were very social, and inclined to carouse and gormandize. And we Germans are accused of the same excess; not without some reason either.

3. With intent to turn Christians from these vices unto temperance and sobriety, Peter reminds them, as all the apostles are wont to do, of the obligations particularly incident to the Christian calling, to the only true, divine service, the things for the sake of which they have become Christians and which distinguish them from the remainder of the world. His

meaning is: It is not for Christians to lead lives heathenish, profligate and riotous; to indulge in gormandizing, guzzling, carousing and demoralizing of themselves. They have something nobler to do. First, in that they are to become different beings, and be occupied with the Word of God wherefrom they derive their new birth and whereby they preserve it. Second, being born anew, they have enemies to fight; so long as they live on earth, they must combat the devil, also their own flesh, which is corrupted by the devil until it is full of evil lusts. Having, then, to assume the obligations of this calling and contest, they must not give way to drowsy indolence; much less may they become foolish, drunken sots, indifferent to all issues and heedless of their obligations. Rather, they have need to be watchful and sober, ever ready with the Word of God and with prayer.

4. These are the two kinds of armor, two weapons of defense, whereby the devil is vanquished and of which he is afraid: First, diligence in hearing, learning and practicing the Word of God, that instruction, comfort and strength may be received; second, sincere petitioning upon the authority of that Word, a crying and calling to God for help when temptations and conflicts arise. One or the other of these weapons of defense must continually be in active exercise, effecting perpetual intercourse between God and man - either God speaking to us while we quietly listen, or God hearing our utterances to him and our petitions concerning our needs. Whichever the weapon we wield, it is unendurable to the devil; he cannot abide it. Christians need both equipments, that their hearts may ever turn to God, cleave to his Word, and continually, with ceaseless longing, pray a perpetual Lord's Prayer. Truly, the Christian should learn from the temptations and straits wherewith the devil, the world and the flesh constantly oppress him, to be ever on his guard, watching for the enemy's point of attack; for the enemy sleeps not nor rests a single moment.

5. Here is applicable Peter's injunction for the Christian to keep within the bounds of physical temperance and sobriety; not to overload the body and injure it by excessive eating and drinking: so as to be watchful, intelligent, and in a mood, to pray. He who is not careful to discharge the obligations of his office or station with temperance and sobriety, but is daily in a sottish condition, is incapable of praying or performing any other Christian duty; he is unfit for any service.

6. Right here a special admonitory sermon might well be preached to us dissolute Germans, in warning for our excesses and drunkenness. But where would be forthcoming a sermon forcible enough to restrain the shameful sottishness and the drink devil among us? The evil of overindulgence has, alas, swept in upon us like a torrent, overwhelming as a flood all classes. It daily spreads further and further throughout the nation, embracing every station from the lowest to the highest. All preaching, all admonition, seem far too weak - not vain and impotent, but despised and scorned - to meet the emergency. But the apostles, and even Christ himself, declared that in the end of the world such a state of affairs should obtain. For that very reason did Christ (Lk 21, 34) admonish Christians to take heed to themselves lest at any time their hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon them unawares.

7. Now, God having in his infinite goodness so richly shed upon us Germans in these latter times the Gospel light, we ought, in honor and gratitude to him, to try to reform ourselves in the matter of intemperance. We should fear lest through this evil besides committing other sins we draw upon us the wrath and punishment of God. For naught else can result from the pernicious life of intemperance but false security, and contempt of God. Individuals continually dead in drunkenness, buried in excesses, living like swine, cannot fear God, cannot be occupied with divine things.

8. Had we no other incentive to abandon our intemperate living, the scandalous reputation we have among the nations ought to move us to reform. Other countries, particularly those bordering on Germany, regard us with extreme contempt, calling us drunken Germans. For they have virtue enough to abstain from excessive drinking. The Turks are real monks and saints in this respect; so far are they from the evil of intemperance that in obedience to the teaching of their Mohammed they prohibit the drinking of wine or any other intoxicant, and punish the offense as the greatest evil in their midst. For this very reason are they better soldiers than our drunken masses. They are always awake and vigilant, alert concerning their own interests, planning attacks upon us and continually extending their dominion, while we lie sleeping in our excesses as if we could withstand the Turks by drunkenness and carousing.

9. But what is the use of multiplying words on the subject when the evil prevails to such extent as to be common custom in the land? No longer confined to the rude, illiterate rabble, to country villages and public taverns, it has penetrated all cities and entered nearly every house, being particularly prevalent among the nobility - in the courts of princes. I recall that when I was young drunkenness was regarded an inexpressibly shameful thing among the peerage, and that the dear lords and princes restrained it with serious prohibitions and punishments. But now it is more alarmingly prevalent among them than among farmers. It is generally the case that when the great and good begin to go down, they sink to a lower level than others. Yes, intemperance has attained such prevalence that even princes and lords have learned the habit from their young noblemen and are no longer ashamed of it. Rather, they call it honorable, making it a civil virtue befitting princes and noblemen. Whosoever will not consent to be a drunken sot with them, must be discountenanced; while the knights who stand for beer and wine obtain high honors, and great favors and privileges, on account of their drinking. They desire fame in this respect, as if they had secured their nobility, their shield and helmet, by the very fact that they exceed others in the shamelessness of their tippling.

10. Yes, and have we not further reason for checking the evil when even the young practice it without fear or shame? They learn it from the aged, and unrestrained they disgracefully and wantonly injure themselves in the very bloom of life, destroying themselves as corn is cut down by hail and tempest. The majority of the finest, most promising young people, particularly the nobility, they of court circles, ruin their health, body and life, before arriving at maturity. How can it be otherwise when they who should restrain and punish commit the same sins themselves?

11. Hence Germany has always been a wretched country, chastised and plagued by the drink devil, and completely immersed in this vice, until the bodies and lives of her people, as well as their property and honor, are shamefully consumed and only a sordid existence remains. He who would paint the conditions must portray something swinish. Indeed, but a small proportion of the inhabitants of Germany are undebased by this evil. These are children, girls and women. Some sense of propriety in the matter remains to them, though occasionally we find even under the veil some intemperance; however, it is with restraint. Enough modesty remains to inspire the universal sentiment that so disgraceful a thing is it for a woman to be drunk, such a one deserves to be trampled upon in the streets.

12. In the light of their example, let us men learn to see our own shame and to blush for it. While noting how disgraceful is drunkenness for women, let us remember it is much more so for ourselves. We ought to be saner and more virtuous; for, according to Peter, the woman is the weaker vessel. Because of the weakness of women, we ought to have more patience with them. Man being endowed with a broader mind, stronger faculties and firmer nature, he should be the saner being, the farther removed from the brute. It stands to reason that it is a much greater disgrace for him to indulge in the vice of drunkenness. In proportion to the nobility of his creation and the exalted nature wherewith God has endowed him, should be the disgrace of such unreasoning, brutish conduct on his part.

13. What can be said for us? So complete is the perversion of all manly virtue and honor in our conduct in this respect that it cannot be surpassed by any other possible degradation of manhood. There remains to us but an atom of good reputation, and that is to be found among the women. The occasional instance of drunkenness among them but emphasizes our own disgrace. All countries look upon us with scorn and contempt, regarding us as shameful and sordid creatures, day and night bent upon making ourselves surfeited and stupid, possessing neither reason nor intelligence. The evil would be more tolerable, more excusable, if drinking and carousing had any limit, if intoxication were but an occasional thing - the case of a person inadvertently taking one drink too much, or of taking a stimulant when tired from excessive labor and worry. We excuse it in women who may chance to drink a little more at wedding parties than they are accustomed to at home. But this excessive guzzling kept up unceasingly day and night, emitting only to be filled again, is wholly inconsistent with the character of a prince, a nobleman, a citizen, yes, of a human being, not to mention the life of a Christian; it is really more in keeping with the nature and work of swine.

14. Now, when God and all mankind permit you to eat and to drink, to enjoy good things, not merely what is necessary for actual subsistence, but in a measure calculated to afford gratification and pleasure, and you are yet not satisfied with that privilege - when such is the case, your sordid and gluttonous tendencies are worthy one born solely to consume beer and wine. But such are the excesses now to be seen in the courts of princes - the banqueting and the drinking - that one would think they meant to devour the resources of the country in a single hour. Lords, princes, noblemen - the entire country, in fact - are

ruined, reduced to beggary, for the particular reason that God's gifts are so inhumanly wasted and destroyed.

15. As I said before, the evil of drunkenness has, alas, gained such ascendancy as to be past restraint unless the Word of God may exert some controlling influence among the few, the individuals who are still human and who would be Christians. The masses will remain as they are, particularly as the civil government makes no effort to restrain the evil. It is my opinion that if God does not sometime check the vice by a special judgment - and until he does it will never be punished and restrained - even women and children will become inebriate, and when the last day arrives no Christian will be found but all souls will descend drunken into the abyss of hell.

16. Let all who desire to be Christians know that it is incumbent upon them to manifest the virtue of temperance; that drunken sots have no place among Christians, and cannot be saved until they amend their ways, until they reform from their evil habits. Concerning them Paul says plainly (Gal 5, 19-21): "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Here you see that he who lies day and night in drunkenness has no more inheritance in the kingdom of God than the whoremonger, adulterer, and such like. Know then, just as idolatry, adultery and so on, are sins excluding you from heaven, so too, drunkenness is a sin which bars you from the blessings of baptism, and from remission of sins, faith in Christ and your personal salvation. Hence, if you would be a Christian and saved, you must be careful to lead a sober and temperate life. But if you disregard this admonition and yet hope to be saved - well, then continue to be an infidel and a brute so long as God permits.

17. Were you a Christian, even if you could permit yourself to be unmoved by the physical injury wherein, by drunkenness, you plunge yourself, not only wasting your money and property, but injuring your health and shortening your life; and if you could permit yourself to be unmoved by the stigma justly recognized by men and angels as attaching to you, a filthy sot - even then you ought to be moved by God's command, by the peril of incurring eternal damnation - of losing God's grace and eternal salvation - to refrain from such unchristian conduct. O God, how shameless and ungrateful we are, we so highly blessed of God in having his Word and in being liberated from the tyranny of the Pope, who desired our sweat and blood and tortured our consciences with his laws - how ungrateful we are in the face of these things not to amend our lives in some measure in honor to the Gospel, and in praise and gratitude to God!

18. Where peradventure there are still pious parents or godfearing Christian rulers, they ought, for the sake of lessening the evil of intemperance, to restrain their children and domestics with serious chastisements. Pastors and preachers are under obligation to admonish the people frequently and faithfully, holding up to them God's displeasure and

wrath and the injuries to soul, body and property resultant from this evil, to the intent that at least some might be moved and profited. And they who wantonly and openly persist in the vice, being not disposed to amend their conduct but at the same time boast of the Gospel, should not be allowed to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper nor to act as sponsors at baptism. Preachers and pastors should hold such as openly antichristian, and should make a distinction against them the same as with manifest adulterers, extortioners and idolaters. Such is Paul's command (I Cor 5, 11): *"I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat."*

NECESSITY FOR PRAYER.

19. But we will not now remark further upon this subject. To return to Peter: He admonishes us to be sober so that we may give ourselves to prayer, as becometh those who are Christians and have turned from the vile, heathenish conduct of the world. just preceding our text, in verse 3, he says: "For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries." He admonishes us as being now called and ordained to contend against the devil by faith and prayer. Later on (ch. 5, 8) he brings in the same warning in clearer phrase, exhorting Christians to be sober and watchful. Do you ask, What is the great necessity therefore? he says: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion [in the midst of a flock of sheep], walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Peter's meaning is this: Since you are a people called to contend with this powerful spirit which is more intent on seizing your souls than is the wolf on seizing the sheep, it is essential you should take thought how to withstand him. Resistance is effected only through faith and prayer. But soberness and vigilance are necessary to enable one to pray. With gormandizers and drunkards, reason is dethroned and they are rendered incapable of respecting anything, or of performing any good work. Therefore, the ability to pray and call upon God has been taken from them and the devil overcomes and devours them at his will.

20. The diligence in prayer which characterized Christians of the primitive Church, even while undergoing great persecution, is apparent to us. They were more than willing to assemble daily for prayer together, not only morning and evening, but also at certain other appointed hours; and frequently they watched and prayed entire nights. Some of them, according to St. Augustine, carried their vigils to such extent as at times to abstain from food for four days. True, this was going to somewhat of an extreme, particularly when later the practice came to be an example and a commandment. Yet their habit of perfect sobriety morning, evening and at all times is commendable. With the cessation of this practice in the congregations, there succeeded the wretched order of monks, who pretend to do the praying for others. They, it is true, observed the same appointed hours, the same seasons of prayer, in their matins, vespers, and so on, but they did not really pray; they merely kept up

an incessant sound, muttering and howling. We still retain from the ancient custom the observance of morning and evening prayers in schools for children. But the same practice should obtain in every Christian family. Every father is under obligation to train up his children to pray at least at the beginning and the close of day, commending to God every exigency of this earthly life, that God's wrath may be averted, and deserved punishment withheld.

21. Under such conditions, we would be properly instructed and not have to be subjected to intolerable oppression and to prohibitions relative to eating, drinking and dressing, being guided by nature's demands and our own honor and pleasure. Yet we would not be inordinate and brutish in these things nor shamefully dethrone reason. Drunkenness is a sin and a shame to any man, and would be even were there neither God nor commandment; much less can it be tolerated among Christians. There is more virtue in this respect among the very heathen and Turks. They put us to shame, while it is our place to set an example shaming them. Our characters ought to be so noble as to give no chance for offense at our conduct, that the name of God be not defamed but glorified, as Peter admonishes in the conclusion of this epistle lesson.

TEMPERANCE IN ALL THINGS.

22. What we have said in regard to sobriety, we must also say relative to that other virtue - temperance,* [ed. *The German text uses the two words "maszig" and "nichtern," which may be rendered "temperate" and "sober."] to which Peter gives first place. They are mutually related, but temperance respects not only eating and drinking, but is opposed to all immoderation in outward life - in clothing, ornament, and so on; to whatever is superfluous, or excessive; to any extravagant attempt to be greater and better than others. To such extent has immoderation gained the upper hand in the world, there is nowhere any limit to expense in the way of household demands, dress, wedding parties and banquets, in the way of architecture, and so on, whereby citizens, rulers and the country itself are impoverished, because no individual longer keeps within proper bounds. Almost invariably the farmer aspires to equal the nobleman, while the nobleman would excel the prince. As with sobriety, so with the virtue of temperance - there is scarce to be found an example of it in our midst, so completely has self-control, sincerity and discipline given way.

23. At the same time the apostle does not forbid appropriate and respectable recognition of the things of physical well-being, in keeping with each individual's station in life, even including things ministering pleasure and joy. For Peter would not have filthy, rusty, greasy monks nor sourfaced saints, with the hypocrisy and show of their simulated austere and peculiar lives, wherein they honor not their bodies, as Paul says (Col 2, 23), but are ever ready to judge and condemn other people - the maiden, for instance, who chances to join in a dance or wears a red dress. If you are a Christian in other respects, God will easily allow you to dress and to adorn yourself, and to live with comfort, even to enjoy honor and considerable pleasure, so long as you keep within proper bounds; you should, however, not

go beyond the limits of temperance and moderation. In other words, do not overreach propriety and self-restraint, regardless of real pleasure, in the endeavor to show off in excessive and unprofitable squandering. Such conduct results in confusion and trouble - chastisement sent of God; in taxes, extortion, robbing and stealing, until finally lords and subjects are ruined together. *"Above all things being fervent in your love [have fervent charity] among yourselves; for love [charity] covereth a multitude of sins."*

24. In the foregoing part of the text, Peter admonishes Christians concerning their obligations to themselves; here he tells what is to be their conduct toward others. He embraces all the good works named in the second table of the commandments as obligations we owe to our neighbor, in the little but forcible and comprehensive phrase - "fervent in your love." This virtue, too, is incumbent on the Christian who must contend against the devil and pray. For prayer is hindered where love and harmony are displaced by wrath and ill-will. The Lord's Prayer teaches: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." How can they pray one for another who feel no interest in a neighbor's wants, who rather are enemies, entertaining no good will toward one another? Where hearts are inflamed with hatred toward men, prayer has ceased; it is extinguished. Hence, antichristians and all popedom, however holy their appearance, cannot pray while enemies to the Word of God and persecutors of Christians. He who repeats the Lord's Prayer while indulging wrath, envy and hatred, censures his own lips; he condemns his own prayer when he seeks forgiveness from God but does not think of forgiving his neighbor.

25. With Christians there must be, not merely natural human affection such as exists even among heathen, but ardent, fervent love; not the mere appearance of love, the smoke-false, hypocritical love, as Paul calls it (Rom 12, 9) - but real fervor and fire, which consent not to be easily extinguished, but which endure like the love between husband and wife, or the love of parents for children. True conjugal and parental love is not easily quenched, even though the object of its affection be weak, diseased or dangerously ill. Rather the greater the need and the danger of one individual, the more is the heart of the other moved and the brighter does love burn.

26. Such sincere love, as the apostle elsewhere styles it, must exist among Christians who are all children of one Father in heaven and brothers and sisters. Indeed, they are under obligation to love even their enemies - who are human beings of the same flesh and blood - and to wish no one evil but rather to serve all wherever possible. This love is the beautiful red robe for the adornment of Christians, supplementing the pure white garment of faith received in baptism. It is to be worn in obedience to the example of Christ, who for us, even while we were enemies, wore the same red garment of love when he was sprinkled with his own blood. It was then he burned with the intense fire of ineffable and most exalted love.

27. The apostles were moved to admonitions of this character because they clearly perceived the great weakness and imperfection bound to exist among Christians even in

their outward lives. They knew that no one could, in his everyday life among men, live so discreetly as not at some time or other, by word, gesture or act, to give offense to someone, moving him to anger. Such perfection of life is found in no family, not even with husband and wife. The case is the same as in the human body: one member frequently comes in conflict with another; a man may inadvertently bite his tongue or scratch his face. He who would be a saint so stern and selfish as to endure no evil words or acts, and to excuse no imperfections, is unfit to dwell among men. He knows nothing of Christian love, and can neither believe nor put into practice the article of the Creed concerning the forgiveness of sins.

28. So the Christian's fire of love must be characterized, not by a dull, cold red, but by a warm scarlet - according to the Scriptures (Ex 26, 1), "Coccurn bis tinctam" (rose-red). This love retains its fire and is really true, having which the Christian is not easily disheartened and overcome by wrath, impatience and revenge, but to a certain extent is able to endure and tolerate attacks upon himself calculated to distress. It manifests itself more strongly in suffering and enduring than in action.

29. Therefore, Peter extols such love, declaring it to be a virtue potent not only to bear but to cover "a multitude of sins." This statement he introduces from the Proverbs of Solomon (ch 10, 12). The Papists, however, pervert its meaning, explaining it in a way at variance with the doctrine of faith; they make of love to one's neighbor a work or virtue having merit with God. It is their desire to draw the conclusion that for the sake of our love our sins are covered; that is, forgiven and exterminated. But we shall not notice the dolts. It is clear enough from the text that reference is to hatred and love received from men; our own sins are not intended here, but the transgressions of others. To cover our sins in the sight of God, yet other love is requisite - the love of the Son of God, who alone is the bearer of sins in God's sight, and who, as John the Baptist says, takes away, bearing them upon his own shoulders, the sins of the whole world, including our own. And the example of his love teaches that we, too, should in love cheerfully bear and freely forgive the sins of others against us.

30. Solomon contrasts the two opposing principles of envious hatred and love, and shows the effect of each. "Hatred," he says, "stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgressions." Where hatred and enmity dwell in the heart, they must inevitably stir up strife and bring misfortune. Animosity cannot restrain itself. It either bursts out in pernicious language clandestinely uttered against the object of enmity, or it openly demeans itself in a manner indicating its ill will. Hence follow reveling, cursing, quarreling and fighting, and, when wholly unrestrained, cruelty and murder. These things are due to the fact that the eyes of Younger Hate are so blinded by scorn and venom that he can see only evil in every man with whom he comes in contact; and when he actually finds it he will not let it alone, but stirs it, roots and frets in it, as the hog roots with defiled snout in offensive filth. "You must have viewed your neighbor from behind," we say when one can speak and think only the worst of a neighbor though he may have many good traits. Hate really desires only that everyone be an enemy to his neighbor and speak the worst about him, and if he hears aught in his neighbor's favor, he puts upon it the very worst

construction, with the result that the other party is embittered and in turn comes to hate, curse and revile. Thus the fire burns until only discord and mischief can obtain.

31. But on the other hand, as Solomon tells us, Love is a virtue pure and precious. It neither utters nor thinks any evil of its neighbor. Rather, it covers sin; not one sin, nor two, but "a multitude of sins" - great masses of them, forests and seas of sin, as it were. That is, love has no desire to reflect itself in a neighbor's sins and maliciously rejoice in them. It conducts itself as having neither seen nor heard them. Or, if they cannot be overlooked, it readily forgives, and so far as possible mends matters. Where nothing else can be done, it endures the sins of a neighbor without stirring up strife and making a bad matter worse.

32. The apostle, upon authority of observation and experience, acknowledges that where people dwell together there must be mutual transgressions; it cannot be otherwise. No one will always do what is pleasing to others, and each is liable to commit open wrong. Peter would teach that since men must live together in their respective stations in life - for the Scriptures make no recognition of singular and intolerant saints who would promptly run out of the world when some little thing takes place at variance with their opinions - he who would live peaceably must so control himself as to be able to bear with others, to overlook their imperfections, and to cover their transgressions and thus avert further resulting evil. Where no toleration is exercised, where no wrong is forgiven and forgotten, hate and envy must find place. The sole office of these is to stir up strife and contention. No peace and rest is to be had where they exist; wrangling and fighting, oppression and bitterness, must obtain. The unbounded ill-will, the innumerable strifes and wars, having place on earth, all result from the abominable evil of the lack of love among us and from the prevalence of pernicious hate, which leads to anger and revenge when opposition offers. Thus we become enemies to one another instead of to evil, when it is our duty to love our fellow-men.

33. Now, if you would live as a Christian and enjoy peace in the world, you must make every effort to restrain your anger and not to give way to revenge as do others. Rather you must suppress these passions, subduing your hatred by love, and be able to overlook and bear, even though you have to suffer great pain and injustice. So doing you will develop a noble character fitted to accomplish much good through patience and humility, to allay and abolish enmity, and strife, and thereby to reform and convert others. If you are unwilling to be patient under injustice, then go on hating and envying, impatiently blustering about and seeking revenge. But from such a proceeding only strife and disquietude can be your portion, though your complaints be long and your lamentations loud. You may run hither and thither, and still you will not find the truth otherwise than as I have stated. This text would have to be done away with first, and the Scriptures falsified.

34. Paul, having in mind Solomon's saying about love, in extolling the same virtue amplifies the latter's statement with various expressions, in the thirteenth of First Corinthians. Among other things he says there (verses 5-8): "Love seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth

with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth," etc. This, mark you, is "being fervent in love," as Peter calls it. Here is the heat, the fire, effective to consume all evil and to replace it with only good. This fire will not permit itself to be quenched; it surmounts all checking. Whatever of evil is heaped upon it, it remains in itself good, and works only good.

35. The essential property, the "differentia essentialis," of genuine love, as its nature requires fervency, is the fact that it cannot be embittered. He who has it, will not cease to love, to do good and to endure evil. In a word love cannot hate; it cannot be at enmity with anyone. No evil can be wrought too great for love to endure. No one can commit against it more sins than it can cover. It cannot be enraged to the point of refusing to forgive. Its attitude is not unlike that of the mother toward her child. The child may be imperfect and impure, even filthy, but the mother notes it not, even if she sees it. Her love blinds her. The eyes wherewith she looks upon her child as the beautiful and God-given fruit of her own body are so pure that she overlooks all imperfections, regarding them as nothing. Indeed, she excuses, even glorifies, them. Although the child squints, it must not be called squint-eyed, but love-eyed, and even a wart must be thought to become it.

36. Behold, this is covering sins with love - a virtue peculiar to Christians. The world does not possess that virtue. Such love is impossible to it, whatever its pretensions and ostentations in that respect. However precious the world's love may be, it is subject to delusion, vanity and hypocrisy; for the world is false in appearance and pretension. No worldling likes to be regarded hateful and envious toward his neighbor, but succeeds in conducting himself, so far as word and gesture are concerned, in an affable manner to all. This attitude he maintains so long as we show him favors and obey his pleasure. But when our love for him becomes a little disaffected and we happen to offer a word he regards insulting, he promptly withdraws his affections and begins to complain and to rage as if he had been done a great wrong. He makes out he is under no obligation to endure the injustice; and he boastingly plumes himself on having shown great faithfulness and love to the offender, such fidelity as would have led him readily to share with that one the very heart in his body, and now he is so ill repaid that henceforth he will leave such people to be served by the devil. Such is the world's love. The world loves not "in deed," but "in word," as John expresses it. 1 Jn 3, 18. It has no sincerity of heart. Its love is a mere ignis-fatuus, shining but having no fire; a love which endures not, but is blown out by a breath - extinguished with a word. The reason of it all is, the world seeks only its own. It would be served, would receive from others, and not make any return, particularly if response must entail any suffering and forbearance on its part.

37. "But," you may say, "shall evil go unpunished? What would be the result were all evil to be tolerated and covered up? Would not that be giving the wicked opportunity to carry out their evil designs? Would it not encourage them in their wickedness until life would not be safe to anyone?" I reply: We have often stated what individuals properly merit our anger, and the extent and manner of punishment to be awarded them. It is truly the office of civil government and also of the father of every family to visit anger upon evil, and to

punish and restrain it. Again, every pastor and preacher is commissioned - yes, every godly Christian - to admonish and censure when he sees a neighbor committing sin, just as one brother in a family admonishes another. But to be angry with evil and to inflict official punishment - punishment by virtue of office - is a different thing from being filled with hatred and revenge, or holding ill-will and being unforgiving.

38. It is not inconsistent with the character of love to be angry and to reprove when a neighbor is observed to sin. But true love feels no inclination to behold the sin and disgrace of a neighbor; rather, much rather, it desires his improvement. Just as parents correct with a rod a disobedient and obstinate child but do not cast it out and become enemies to it because of that disobedience, their object being only to reform the child, while the rod is cast away after chastisement; so, too, according to Christ's words (Mt 18, 15-17), you may censure your brother when he sins, and manifest your displeasure and indignation, that he may perceive and confess his wrong-doing, and if he does not then amend his conduct, you may inform the congregation. At the same time, his obstinacy does not justify you in becoming his enemy, or in entertaining ill-will toward him. As said before, love to be true must not be dull and cold, too indifferent to perceive a neighbor's sins; it must endeavor to relieve him thereof. It must have the red fire of fervor. He who truly loves will be distressed that a beloved neighbor wickedly trespasses against God and himself. Again, true love does not pale with hatred and revenge. It continues to glow red when the possessor's heart is moved with sympathy, is filled with compassion, for its neighbor. True, when fervor and admonition fail to effect any reform, the sincere-hearted Christian must separate himself from his obstinate neighbor and regard him as a heathen; nevertheless, he must not become his neighbor's enemy nor wish him evil.

39. Anger and censure prompted by sincere love are very different from the wrath, hatred and revengefulness of the world, which seeks only its own interests and is unwilling to tolerate any opposition to its pleasure. True love is moved to anger only when a neighbor's good demands. Though not insensible to evil and not approving evil, it is yet able to tolerate, to forgive and cover, all wrongs against itself, and it leaves untried no expedient that may make a neighbor better. Sincere love makes a clear distinction between the evil and the person; it is unfriendly to the former, but kind to the latter.

"Using hospitality one to another without murmuring: according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

40. Having admonished all Christians to love one another generally, Peter mentions various instances where love should be externally manifested among Christians, and speaks particularly of those who have been favored above others with special gifts and special offices in the Church whereby they are able to serve their fellows. Thus he teaches that the Christian's whole external conduct should be regulated by that love which seeks not its own advantage, which aims not at profiting itself, but lives to serve its neighbor.

41. First, Peter says, "Using hospitality one to another." The reference is to works of love relative to the various physical needs of a neighbor. Christians are to serve one another by ministering temporal blessings. Especially are the poor and the wretched to be remembered, they who are strangers or pilgrims among us, or come to us houseless and homeless. These should receive the willing ministrations of Christians, and none be allowed to suffer want.

42. In the apostles' time, the primitive days of the Church, Christians were everywhere persecuted, driven from their possessions and forced to wander hither and thither in poverty and exile. It was necessary then to admonish Christians in general, and particularly those who had something of their own, not to permit these destitute ones to suffer want, but to provide for them. So, too, is it today incumbent upon Christians to provide for the really poor - not lazy beggars, or vagabonds - the outdoor pensioners, so called; and to maintain those who, because of old age or other infirmity, are unable to support themselves. The churches should establish common treasuries for the purpose of providing alms for cases of this kind. It was so ordained of the apostles in Acts 6, 3. Paul, also, in many places admonishes to such works of love; for instance (Rom 12, 13): "*Communicating to the necessities of the saints.*"

43. Moreover, as Peter says, hospitality is to be extended "without murmuring" - not with reluctance and aversion, as the way of the world is. The world is particularly reluctant when called upon to give to Christ the Lord, in other words to his poor servants the pastors and preachers, or to their children, into whose mouths they must count every bit of bread. It regards oppressive and burdensome the contributing of even a dime for that purpose. At the same time, it lavishly bestows its gifts upon the devil; as, for instance, under popedom it gave liberally and willingly to indolent, useless monks and shameless, wicked knaves, impostors and seducers. Such is the inconsistency of the world; and it is a just punishment from God that it is made unworthy to contribute where it well might toward the preservation of God's Word and his poor Church; and that it must give to other and ungrateful purposes. Christian love must be sincere enough to do good "*without murmuring.*" Paul says (Rom 12, 8) to "*let him that showeth mercy do so with cheerfulness,*" or willingly, without restraint. Again (2 Cor 9, 7), "*God loveth a cheerful giver,*" etc.

STEWARDS OF GOD'S GIFTS.

44. Peter speaks also of love's work in relation to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are bestowed for the good of the entire Church and particularly for its spiritual offices or government. He would have the Spirit's gifts used in the service of others, and admonishes Christians to consider all they have as given of God. The heathen have no such thought, but live as if life and all they possess were of their own attaining. But let Christians know they are under obligation to serve God with their gifts; and God is served when they employ them for the advantage and service of the people - reforming them, bringing them

to a knowledge of God, and thus building up, strengthening and perpetuating the Church. Of such love the world knows nothing at all.

45. So then, Peter says, we are to use the gifts called spiritual - gifts of the Holy Spirit - in the Christian Church "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." He would have us know they are conferred upon us of grace. They are not given us to exalt ourselves therewith, but to make us stewards of the house of God - of his Church. They are manifold and variously distributed; for no one may possess all. Some may have certain gifts and offices, and other individuals certain others. But the mutual way in which these gifts are united and related makes one individual serve another.

46. Peter would remind especially each individual to take heed to the duties of his particular office. In the pursuance of his own occupation, each is to attend faithfully to whatever is committed to his charge; to do whatever he is commanded to do. As the Scriptures teach in many places, there is no work nobler than being obedient to the particular calling and work assigned of God, and satisfied therein; faithfully serving one's neighbor and not gazing after what is committed to, or enjoined upon, another, nor presuming to transcend the limits of one's own commission. Many fickle, unstable spirits, however, especially the presumptuous, proud and self-sufficient, imagine themselves to have such measure of the Spirit and of skill that their own calling is not sufficient for them; they must control all things, must superintend and criticise the work of others. They are malignant souls, doing nothing but to stir up mischief, and having not the grace to perform any good work, even though they have noble gifts. For they do not make use of the gifts of their office to serve their neighbors; they only minister therewith to their own glory and advantage.

47. The apostle goes on to show how God distributes his gifts in various ways; he speaks of "manifold gifts." Paul likewise (1 Cor 12, 4-5) teaches that each one is given a special gift, and a particular office wherein he is to exercise his gift, continuing in his own sphere until called to another. Again, Paul says (Rom 12, 6-7): "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy. . . . or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry." It is not enough to have numerous special gifts; grace is also requisite - "manifold grace of God," Peter says. We must so use our gifts that God may be pleased to add his blessing, if we would successfully and profitably serve the Church and accomplish good. God's grace will not be given to those who do not, in faith and in obedience to his command, fulfill the obligations of their calling. Now Peter proceeds to illustrate, giving a rule of how we are to use our individual gifts. He says: *"If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth."*

48. It is highly essential that the Church observe this doctrine. Had it been regarded heretofore, the world would not have been filled with anti-christian errors and deceptions. For it fixes the bounds, it sets the mark, for all aspiring church members, however exalted their office and gifts; the limits of these they must not transcend.

49. The apostle classifies Church government in two divisions: teaching, or "ministering" the Word; and holding office and fulfilling its duties in accordance with the teachings of the Word. In both cases, he tells us, we are to take heed that we are not actuated by our own ideas and pleasures; our teaching and ruling must ever be God's Word and work or office.

50. The workings of the Christian Church are not the same as the processes of civil government. They are unlike the operations that have to do with outward things, with temporal possessions. In the latter case men are guided by their own understanding. At the dictates of their Own reason do they rule, instituting laws and regulations, and prohibiting, receiving and distributing according to those regulations. In the Christian Church we have a spiritual government of the conscience, an effecting of obedience in God's sight. Whatever is spoken or taught, promised or done, we may be assured, will avail and stand before God; indeed, we may know it has origin with him, whereby we are justified in declaring: *"God himself uttered the command or performed the work; for in us, his tabernacles where he lives and rules, essentially he, as rightful Master in the house, commands and performs all, though employing the instrumentality of men's lips and hands."*

ASSURANCE OF PURE DOCTRINE ESSENTIAL.

51. In the first place, therefore, it is necessary that both preachers and hearers take heed to doctrine and have clear, unmistakable evidence that what they embrace is really the true Word of God revealed from heaven; the doctrine given to the holy and primitive fathers, prophets and apostles; the doctrine Christ himself confirmed and commanded to be taught. We are not permitted to employ the teaching dictated by any man's pleasure or fancy. We may not adapt the Word to mere human knowledge and reason. We are not to trifle with the Scriptures, to juggle with the Word of God, as if it would admit of being explained to suit the people; of being twisted, distended and patched to effect peace and agreement among men. Otherwise, there would be no sure, permanent foundation whereon the conscience might rely.

52. Nor is it any more admissible for one who chances to have an office of greater influence than others, who is peculiarly holy, or who is of exalted spirit and intellect - even though he were an apostle - to presume upon his gifts and the office and take authority to teach according to his own inclinations, requiring his hearers to accept unquestioningly his word and rely upon it because what he teaches must be right. But thus the Pope in time past persuaded the world that because he occupied the seat of the apostles, the highest office, and assembled the councils, the latter could not err, and that therefore all men are obliged to believe and obey what they resolve and confirm.

53. This theory is opposed by Peter's teaching, and all the Scriptures forbid men, at the peril of losing eternal salvation, to rely on or respect anyone or anyone's gifts, in the things pertaining to faith. The Scriptures teach rather that we are to prove and judge all doctrine

by the clear and sure Word of God given us from heaven and supported by the reliable, concurrent testimony of the apostles and the Church from the beginning. Paul, by way of denouncing the false teachers who boasted of being disciples of eminent apostles and relied upon the latter and their reputation, pronounced this sentence (Gal 1, 8): *"Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."*

54. Similarly, in the offices or government of the Church, there must first be convincing evidence that command and office are instituted of God. No one may be permitted to institute, promise or do anything of his own power or pleasure and compel men to regard it as divine authority or as essential to salvation, simply because of his appointment to office. Nevertheless, the Pope, by virtue of his ecclesiastical office, undertook to domineer over all men, to issue commands and institute laws and religious services binding upon everyone. He who holds and would exercise office in the Church must first give clear Scripture proof of having derived his office from the authority of God. He must be able to say: "I did not institute such and such a proceeding; it is of God." Then they who comply may be assured they are obeying, not the individual, but God.

55. For instance, if in obedience to Christ's command I, as a carer of souls, or servant of the Church, administer the holy sacrament or pronounce absolution; if I admonish, comfort, reprove; I can say: "That which I do, I do not; Christ performs it." For I act not of my own design, but in obedience to the command of Christ - to his injunction. The Pope and his adherents cannot make the above assertion. For they pervert the order and commandment of Christ the Lord when, in the sacrament, they withhold the cup from the laity, and when they change the use of the sacrament or mass, making it a sacrifice for the living and the dead. And thus they do also by innumerable other abominations in their false worship, things established without God's command, indeed contrary thereto; for instance, the invocation of dead saints, and similar idolatries, introduced by the Pope under cover of his office, as if he had the power from Christ to institute and command such things.

ASSURANCE OF DIVINE EFFICIENCY ESSENTIAL.

56. In the second place, it is not enough that office and commandment be God-appointed. We his ministers should be conscious - and the people should so be taught - that efficacy of office is not of human effort, but is God's power and work. In other words, that which the office was designed to accomplish is not effective by virtue of our speech or action, but by virtue of God's commandment and appointment. He it is who orders; and himself will effectively operate through that office which is obedient to God's command. For instance, in baptism, the Lord's Supper and absolution, we are not to be concerned about the person administering the sacraments or pronouncing absolution - who he is, how righteous, how holy, how worthy. Worthiness or unworthiness of either administering or receiving hand effects nothing; all the virtue lies in God's command and ordinance.

57. This is the explanation of Peter's phrase, "the strength or ability which God supplieth." Effect is produced, not through man's power, not in obedience to man's will; but through the "strength" of God and because of his ordering. No man has a right presumptuously to boast his own power and ability effective, as the Pope does in his pretensions about keys and ecclesiastical power. Know that it is necessary to the efficacy of your office and the salutary character of your work or authority in the Church that God himself give and exert the influence. And that influence is exerted when, as before said, God's Word and testimony are present that the ministry in question is commanded, or authorized, of God.

58. Therefore it is earnestly enjoined that in the Church no attempt should be made by any individual to institute any order or perform any work, much or little, great or small, merely at the prompting of his own inclinations or in obedience to the advice of any man. Let him who would teach and work be sure that his words and acts are really of God - commanded by him. Until he is certain in this respect, let him abandon his office - suspend his ministry; let him engage in something else for a time. Nor should we hear or believe anything presented to us that does not bear indisputable evidence of being the divine Word, or command. For God will not permit mockery of himself in the things of his own prerogative and on which depends the salvation of souls; for souls will be led to eternal ruin where this rule and command are disregarded. *"That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."*

59. Here is named the motive for all effort in the Christian community. No one may seek for nor ascribe to himself power and honor because of his office and gifts. Power and glory belong only to God. He himself calls his Church, and rules, sanctifies and preserves it through his Word and his Spirit. To this end he bestows upon us his gifts. And all is done purely of grace, wholly for the sake of his beloved Son, Christ the Lord. Therefore, in return for the favor and ineffable goodness bestowed upon us regardless of our merits, we ought to thank and praise God, directing all our efforts to the recognition and glory of his name.

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