

"LOVE NEVER FAILETH"



There is within the lids of the Bible balm for every human ill. But to me the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is the medicine cabinet where the Great Physician has placed His one remedy for universal woe. In the classic myth, Pandora opened a box and out came, to try the heart of man, every kind of vexation and annoyance. Open this medicine chest and you will find the cure for them all. The prescription is written by the finger of God: "Love Never Faileth." Where else but in God's Word could we find the panacea that is equally good for every human ailment the world over? If there were a doctor in the house and if it were possible for him to perfect one all-reaching and unailing medicine for every malady, how long would it take for him to receive world-wide recognition? Not long. But, my friends, we have failed to take God's way out of the world's sickness.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

"And though I have the gift of prophesy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

"Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

"Rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth;

"Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

"Love never faileth . . ."

Love is the ceaseless grace. Someone has said, "Love is a flower whose petals never fall off, the fairest plant in the garden of God. Full of vigorous life, it allows insects and reptiles to feed upon its bark and leaves, but grows on in silence, and rears its head in beauty and majesty, and throws out its branches on all sides to the wind and the light, bright and fragrant with bloom and bending with abundant fruit."

We have a simple definition of love in the Scripture—"God is love." And in the Old Testament the very name Jehovah includes the idea of a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. It is as though He were to say: "I, who was and am, and am to be, the same yesterday and today, yea and forever, will be your God unfailingly." Moreover, it is God's purpose that love be the chief characteristic of the Christian life. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one for the other." Christ Himself summed up our whole duty in the word "Love" when he was asked to name the first and greatest commandment: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God

with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Love is the fulfilling of the law. Nay, even a Jew said with great earnestness, "Paul of Tarsus is one of the finest writers I have ever read. I wish the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians were written in letters of gold, and I wish every Jew were to carry it with him wherever he went." By this he judged, and rightly, that this single chapter contained the whole of true religion.

Christ was Himself God's love gift to the world. When love is preeminent, Christ is preeminent. "That in all things Love might have the preeminence," could well be another way of saying our class motto.

But speak of living a life of love to a man of the world, one who is not aware perhaps that he is an unbeliever, and he will think you are a dreamy idealist. A Brahman, on hearing this chapter read, exclaimed, "Who can live up to that?" The answer is, *Only the Spirit-filled Christian*—certainly not an unbeliever. It is true that one who is not a Christian may exhibit a certain charm and sweetness of character, but he has none of the divine love the missionary feels as he ministers in the name of Christ to the "untouchables" under conditions otherwise revolting. Rather, to such a one the love-life is an impossibility. The obstacle of the new birth distorts his vision. As well expect sweet water from a bitter fountain as to anticipate much of the fruit of the Spirit from the heart of the natural man. To the

unregenerate man, the life of love is interesting, unique, and desirable, but vague, remote, and intangible. It is a pity that we who possess the name of Christ do not show a greater resemblance to our Lord. Miss Ruth Paxson, who made a recent visit to us, asked this heart-searching question, "Are you more like the Lord Jesus now than when you first came to Him?" Likeness to Jesus Christ is the essence of Christianity. It is the only thing that impresses the unsaved. It is the only thing that makes them want to reach out toward God and claim Him for themselves.

The appointed task of those who name the name of Christ is to point others to Him as the bestower of an everlasting gift, the water of life. It is something to have at one's disposal a continual wellspring. The prophet Elijah did not have one. He lived near a brook which soon dried up. Our fountain does not fail, for its head is the Lord Jesus Christ and JESUS NEVER FAILS. Blessed motto! I wish we Christians would remember it.

But in our desert pilgrimage we are so often attracted to the mirage of this world's glory beckoning in the distance. Those who turn aside to catch some of the dazzle and glitter of it can never return to testify that the end thereof is death, while all the time the oasis nearby with its never-failing artesian flow seems to be saying, "Ye have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters. Why will ye die? Who-soever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

I speak in behalf of beloved classmates assembled here this morning. Each of us has heard His voice, a voice as the sound of many waters, low and sweet, "Sit still, my daughter, and rest awhile." I did sit, and did rest, and am resting. In my Lord I have rest of soul forever. You, too, may have it. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The things of earth are for a moment, but Jesus Christ is for eternity. Abandon your broken cisterns which ye have hewn out for yourselves, I beseech you, O friends, if you are thirsty of soul. Ho! everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." He never fails. "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise." Love never faileth. This is a personal testimony. It is wonderful to have a never-failing source of satisfaction! God's love in Christ is inexhaustible.

Another thing about God's love is this: It is always available. Paul was most emphatic when he asserted, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But how about the sinner? God has made Christ accessible also to the sinner. "And let

him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." A king's castle may be inaccessible except by a narrow, winding footpath, but the throne of God has a new and living way opened up by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Morover, the love of God is never ineffectual. It never lacks power, and it is never disappointing. It is always availing as well as available. This is why the love of God is superior to any other kind of love. Men and women alike, because they are unacquainted with the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, sometimes resort even to dumb animals for companionship. A lick on the hand from a dog is better than nothing. When I first came to Chicago I used to wonder how so many dogs ever got into one city. Every stroller seemed to have one. Particularly along the lake front one can see canines of every description—wee mites of leashed fluff and fur that walk as though they owned the sidewalk, and great lively ones that vault and romp about like boys at recess. But now in part I know the explanation: The human heart cries out for someone who loves and understands. Our own Mark Twain, returning from Italy with the body of his beloved wife, being himself broken in health and empty of soul, for he had rejected the only way of life, wrote to a friend, "I am tired and old. I wish I were with her. Shall I ever laugh again? If I could

only see a dog that I knew in the old times, and could put my arms around his neck and tell him all, everything, and ease my heart!" To such depths of folly and despair do even famous men go when they will have none of Him who promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," when they turn their backs upon Him of whom the Scriptures testify, "He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

What was Paul's reason for singling out love as the supreme possession? I believe this may be answered in a single word—because it lasts. "Love Never Faileth"—no never, but, even when all around is falling and in motion, remains steadfast and unmoved. Love, being imperishable, shall amid the shaking of the things that are shaken, alone abide unshaken. Witness the chaotic condition of the nations today. War revolutionizes and makes changes inevitable. But Love is as imperishable as God. It is not designed or adapted, as the other gifts under consideration, merely to this present state of existence, but to our future and immortal state of being. It is the permanent and perpetual grace, lasting as eternity.

Love also works. Anything as practical and successful as love will never go out of style. Let us watch love at work in the home, in the classroom, and in the church. Charity begins at home. Happy the family where this sweetest and wholesomest of influences reigns supreme. Paul admonished Timothy to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." This, Timothy would have found most difficult had he not had a grandmother like Lois

and a mother like Eunice, whose unfeigned faith and knowledge of the Scriptures the great apostle well remembered.

As for the Sunday school, the testimony of many children is as follows: "First, I learned to love my teacher, then I learned to love my teacher's Bible, and then I learned to love my teacher's Saviour." Those of us who have worked among the children of Chicago have found that the key to their hearts is the love of Jesus Christ shed abroad in us. We learn much from children. One little girl prayed, "Oh Lord, make all the bad people good and all the good people nice."

Could it be that many church-going people are not nice, that is, lovable? Maybe this accounts for the petty quarrels which have split many a church and dubbed many "a heretic." How much better the way of Priscilla and Aquila, who took the eloquent young Apollos aside into their home and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. The Jesus way of loving those with whom you do not always agree and thereby winning them has been well expressed in the little poem:

"He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in."

Yes, love will strike a chord in every heart, setting it quiver with new hope and courage. Christ gives us the method of winning young people when we see Him speaking so earnestly with the rich young ruler. It is written, "And Jesus, beholding Him, loved him."

Once in class one of our teachers was about to tell us of the most effective way to win a

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