

L. A. S. D.
"Who is my Neighbor?"

A SERMON

REV. BYRON SUNDERLAND, D.D.,

DELIVERED IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,

Febr. 25, 1866.

Printed by Request.

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 25, 1856.

REV. SYDNEY SUNDERLAND, D.D.

DEAR SIR,—The undersigned, citizens of New York and Boston, being detained by business over the Sabbath in this city, listened with great pleasure to the sermon which you preached yesterday. We believe that the publication of the sermon at the present time will contribute to enlighten the public mind upon our duties in the circumstances in which the country is now placed, and therefore ask the favor of a copy for publication.

Very truly your friends,

GEORGE S. COE.

H. H. LOWMY.

J. D. VERMILYE.

SAMUEL H. WALLLEY.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27, 1856.

To Messrs. G. S. Coe, H. H. Lowmy, J. D. Vermilpe, and Samuel H. Wallley.

GENTLEMEN,—To say that I am not gratified by your unexpected note, asking a copy of my sermon of Sabbath morning for publication, would be simple affirmation. Though I have been a pastor for some years, I have never assumed to exercise a prophet's vocation,—that is, to attempt to teach a whole people like ours respecting our duties toward God and toward man,—simply because I never felt that I had the qualifications for such an office. But I do most deeply feel that the days in which we live demand, more than ever, a faithful and evangelical ministry; and if the servants of the Lord, in ancient times, were sent to "the chosen nation" to counsel, instruct, and warn them, it is not less needful, among ourselves, that the will of God should be made known and the law of God should be obeyed. If therefore you judge that any humble effort of mine would have this tendency, I herewith submit to you a copy of the sermon for publication.

With sentiments of great respect,

S. SUNDERLAND.

S E R M O N.

"LOVE WORKETH NO ILL TO HIS NEIGHBOR; THEREFORE LOVE IS THE
FULFILLING OF THE LAW."—ROM. XIII. 10.

THERE is a great principle in these words. We shall not be able fully to illustrate it in all its applications. But there are some views of the subject obviously suggested and clearly contained in the comprehensive scope of this divine proposition.

In the first place, we all understand, or may understand, what love is as a principle of spiritual power,—of life and conduct,—as it is revealed in the Bible. We know that its very nature and tendency are supremely and solely beneficial; that, being of the very semblance and nature of God himself, it cannot be other than pure and right, and productive of specific and general happiness.

But though, perhaps, there is no term, no idea, in human language, more familiar to the thoughts or more frequently on the lips of men, nevertheless there is probably none in reference to which, in its great spiritual applications, there is more ignorance, error, or neglect. And, again, there are modifications and connections of it which appear deeply mysterious, and sometimes, to

our purblind reason and faith, almost contradictory and absurd. Into these, however, we shall not inquire at present. In the text, the principle of love is put, by a strong figure, for the man loving, or one who is filled with this love. It evidently imports, that he who is controlled by love will do no wrong to his neighbor, — that just so far as any man is actuated by the spirit of this love, just so far will he abstain from doing injury to another.

That the declaration has this breadth of meaning is evident from the term "neighbor," which Christ, you remember, explained to one of the Jewish lawyers, in answer to this very question, "Who is my neighbor?" He had quoted the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, — and thy neighbor as thyself." Now, it became an important question, — Who is this my neighbor that I am to love as myself? Christ gave in reply the beautiful and affecting parable of the good Samaritan. It was a strong case; in fact, an extreme case, within which all the more ordinary instances are included. He took a Hebrew, going from Jerusalem to Jericho, a most dangerous route, falling among thieves and robbers by the way, — assaulted, rifled, and left half dead upon the ground. In this condition, two individuals of his own nation (and, to heighten the contrast, represented as belonging to the Priestly office) pass by him without one feeling of sympathy for his suffering, or one act of kindness to relieve his pain. At length, a Samaritan — a man of another country and another people, whose hereditary hatred and feuds had

long suspended intercourse between them and the Jews — sets forth in the same direction. On overtaking the unfortunate traveller, immediately the compassion of his nature asserts itself above all factitious relations, all outward or national prejudices; and the spirit of divine neighborhood rises stronger than every distinction or consideration of race or country. Love has triumphed over all the pleas and arguments of selfishness and indifference; and the wounded man, by the kind offices of a Samaritan stranger, is restored. Now, Christ, after putting the case in this most affecting light, inquires of the lawyer, "Which of the three was neighbor?" — that is, which of the three acted the part, and recognized the principle, of that neighborhood which the divine law imposes and enjoins. Of course, there could be but one answer to this question. The alien by race and country proved to be the real neighbor, by virtue of the spirit of the divine law reigning in his heart and conduct. The Priest and the Levite, although by country and nation neighbor to the unfortunate man, still showed by their indifference and neglect that they were not neighbors at heart, and bore in them nothing of that noble, that divine spirit which makes man God-like, and becomes at once the fulfilling of the law.

We are to understand from this example, that every human being is our neighbor, in the contemplation of God's law, — not only they of our own household, kindred, community, church, or nation; but the men of all tongues and tribes, wherever we meet them, and whatever their condition or relations. The fact that one is a human being, a rational creature of God, an accountable subject of his government, and a candidate

with ourselves for eternity, and for an immortality of glory or of shame,—this fact alone, under the law of God, makes such a one our neighbor. In this high, Christian view, there is not a human being on earth whom we should esteem a stranger, an alien, a foreigner, or even as an enemy. We are bound in one common brotherhood as members of one family, to love and prosper, each and all, according to our measure.

And this is further evident from the principle so positively asserted, that "love worketh no ill to his neighbor." "Worketh no ill,"—this is exceedingly comprehensive. In another place, the apostle defines the nature and operation of this love or charity more accurately and minutely. He says, that it "*thinketh* no evil." We can hardly appreciate, without long and serious reflection, the truth and bearing of this statement. "*No ill*,"—no evil. We, that are so full of evil, so beset with ills, scarcely can comprehend the fact that there is a great, sublime, God-like principle of human love and brotherhood, which worketh *no ill* to his neighbor. We find men working us ill in every direction; and we no doubt find ourselves working them ill back again, in a spirit of wantonness or retaliation. And this is so common everywhere, that we seem to accept and walk about in it as in the air and very atmosphere of our nature. So that it is startling to be told that there is a principle which worketh *no ill* to any man,—to human beings in any conditions of life whatsoever. Yet this is the great declaration of the gospel; and, because it is a truth so marvellous, the apostle adds, "Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

We are, indeed, the creatures of law,—not in our animal and intellectual being only, but in our moral and spiritual; and it becomes a question of vast consequence, how we may discharge our obligations, and fulfil our duties under it. The law, which is the divine authoritative expression of God's character, and the measure of the interests of all creatures in all the universe, must be fulfilled and maintained, or must vindicate its claims upon every creature that God has made rational and accountable. The law, as we see, gauges and secures the same objects and the same spirit which divine law dictates. Love, in becoming a correspondence to the law, in coalescing with the merits and subjects of the law, fulfils it; and this is the only perfect fulfilment of the law. It is this love which, through the forms of faith, avails us of the superlative righteousness of God in Christ Jesus; and this love alone that becomes in the soul of man, not a dead letter, a mere formal and fettering rule, but the very life and joy of God to man. It is the greatest liberty into which the soul can possibly emerge. Thus comprehending the scope of the text in general terms, the main point I wish most to urge is that which respects the modes of operation by which men work ill to one another, and which the principle of love, were it regnant in mankind, would of course interdict.

Now, probably, upon this subject the views of multitudes are exceedingly superficial and imperfect. When we talk of not working ill to our neighbor, we generally imagine that we answer the requisition of divine charity, if we do not grossly wrong, insult, defraud, or oppress

our neighbor. If we do not thwart him or cheat him or kill him, we imagine our beneficence to be of a superior kind and quality, and that we are in a condition to fulfil the utmost rigor of the law concerning him. But I believe there are views of obligation involved in the principle of the text lying back of, and deeply under, all these grosser, outside, superficial estimates of human duty and responsibility; and which rarely ever come to the sight of multitudes of men, or ever arrest their notice, and fix their serious attention.

1. In the first place, the principle carries us to this extent, that we are not to work ill to any human being by estimating him, even in our thoughts, as any less or any other than a human being, and, as such, a rational and accountable creature, with all the prerogatives of an heir of immortality, and all the responsibilities of a candidate for eternal judgment. Now, as each man stands in the scale of human gradations, we may suppose, for the sake of convenience, that there are two classes of his fellow-beings constantly in his view,—his superiors and his inferiors; those who have allotments above, and those who have allotments beneath, him. To injure those of the one class by thinking of them with an estimation of envy, or to injure those of the other by thinking of them with an estimation of contempt, is equally a violation of the law of love. To play the sycophant in one direction and the tyrant in another, to conspire against superiors and to oppress inferiors, are both incompatible with the spirit of love; "for love worketh no ill to his neighbor."

2. So, again, to think of our fellow-men with a spirit of cold indifference; to regard them with an eye of re-

morseless and inexorable selfishness; to withhold from them our sympathy and our justice; to treat them as merely the instruments of our ambition, or the objects of our cruelty, — all such carriage or conduct is at war with the principle here declared to be "the fulfilling of the law." We have no right to depress the manhood of other men, or to trample on their facilities of advancement and exaltation, for the sordid purpose of our own arrogance and assumption. We have as little right to keep men in ignorance, or to curtail their aspirations for all that is useful, noble, or honorable in their individual career. And, whenever we do this, or by what means soever, we are to that extent criminal in the light of the principle which is here declared to be "the fulfilling of the law."

3. So, again, to think of our fellow-men with such an estimation as to separate them from the benefits and blessings of Christianity, and to make it impossible for them to assume the relations it imposes, to perform the duties it enjoins, is a violation of the principle of that divine love which worketh no ill to his neighbor, and in direct contravention of the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, — "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." None have a right to hinder this; and whoever attempts to hinder it proves himself wanting in the first element of love. We cannot go to work, and deliberately shut out the light of the glorious gospel of the Son of God from the most darkened, obscure, and menial mind on earth. To do this is to obstruct and impede the very beneficence of Heaven, and to cause men to perish who might, but for our guilty intervention, have come to the knowledge of

the light of life. In such a spirit there can be dwelling none of that love which is "the fulfilling of the law."

4. So, again, to think of our fellow-men with such an estimate of their character, and such a laxness of purpose, as to indulge them in the most flagrant acts of outrage upon all the principles of law and justice, is just as positively a violation of the spirit of this divine beneficence as any other form of its violation can be. If love "worketh no ill to his neighbor," neither can love sanction the evil which one human being perpetrates upon another. When wrongs have been done; when society has been assailed by combinations of stupendous wrong; when the Church of God has been defamed and desecrated by unjust and unholy prejudices; when the religion of Jesus has been polluted and dishonored in the very fountain of its purity, and in the very house of its friends, by the manifold mischiefs of Antichrist,—it would be a monstrous absurdity to suppose, that this divine love, which, in order to work out the gracious designs of Heaven toward our guilty and ruined race, spared not even the mighty sacrifice of God's only-begotten and well-beloved Son, will now dismiss with impunity the disturbers of the world's peace,—the authors of a misery so vast, so enormous, so unspeakable. If love "thinketh no evil," neither does it permit others to think that evil. Or, if evil must come, then, speaking by the mouth of Him who was the only perfect example of charity on earth, it says, "Woe unto the man by whom the offence cometh!" This love is not blind nor weak; it is fair and clear as an angel of God, and bolder and stronger than any hero among the sons of men.

Such are some of the views which, although fundamental to any just consideration of this great subject, yet seldom claim or secure the serious consideration of mankind. And what are the practical conclusions which they warrant? Why, that, if we are controlled by that spirit of love which worketh no ill to our neighbor, we can neither wrong him by our thoughts, traduce him by our speech, corrupt him by our example, ignore him by our neglect, or distress him by our power. The "working no ill to our neighbor" embraces two modes of operation in all our conduct towards him, in all our influence over him,—the one, by abstaining from all positive injury; the other, by promoting all positive beneficence. Neither can we reach the full measure of our obligation and duty under the law of God by any performance short of this.

The whole of our responsibility, therefore, is contained in *this*,—a spirit of love which works no ill to any other, manifested or made active, made demonstrative and effective up to the full scope and measure of our varied capabilities and opportunities. Consider, then, my fellow-men, if this principle were only in universal operation, what a state of things it should produce in human society,—how it would change the present condition of mankind,—how it would transform the very heart of the world. Before it, all that is base, corrupt, false, unjust, impure, violent, and cruel would be driven out. Humanity everywhere, instead of being trampled down, would be lifted up. Confidence would replace suspicion, and sympathy distrust; justice and truth would be enthroned. The spirit of the first hater and the first murderer and the first liar and the first

transgressor, which spirit has since so darkly and so fearfully ruled the world, would be exterminated. The degeneracy of man would disappear from the face of the earth; discord and distraction would be no longer known; fraud and violence would become strange terms; and one delightful brotherhood would enwrap the globe. Were this result to be secured, all relations of society, all forms of government, all symbols of authority and power, would coalesce and mingle into the one great sovereignty of God; and these would be felt no constraint, no stress, no burden bowing any single human being into the dust of the earth. The law of love would give us emancipation and perfect liberty from all that can enslave. The very subjection to Jesus Christ, the fealty of every soul to him, would become the social and governmental condition of the world, and would prove to be the most transcendent freedom which men or angels ever knew. A divine harmony would flow from this universal subordination to the will, the wisdom, the law, the authority, and the discipline of God. Concord would grow apace over the now-jarring territories, and through the now tumultuous and fevered heart of the nations of the earth; and one worship and one song employ all tongues, as the great hallelujah should be lifted up: so that speedily the day of prophecy should come, when "in Christ Jesus there should be neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all should be one in him."

This is truly a great hope, a wonderful consummation: and yet how difficult of attainment does it appear to him who knows any thing of the present condition of the world and of the human heart! Let any man take

his own case, and begin with that. Can he say that he has ever reached the perfection of this love? Can he say it constrains him always from "working ill to his neighbor"? Can he say he has wronged none in thought, word, or deed? Can he say that this divine love has kept him in its liberty for a single day or a single hour? Can he find it dwelling purely and without alloy in the best of his purposes, and in the clearest of his conduct? Or does not the opposite principle of corruption impair and stain his most generous thoughts, his most magnanimous demeanor? And is not each day marked, not only with *commissions* in violation of this great principle, but also with *omissions* scarcely less malign or culpable? Have we injured no one in our thoughts, have we wronged no one in the imaginations of our hearts, even now? Then, indeed, have we a joy that is not of earth; then have we already entered into the rewards and fruitions of divine love; then do we feel a blessing which no pomp or greatness or temporal success can confer.

Yet such is our weakness in our apostasy and subversion, and such our derelictions and departures from the requisitions of the law, that we ordinarily know but little of the fruits of this love. All, at the best, is fragmentary and imperfect. A mist of darkness and confusion gathers upon our eyes, and the chill of earthly terrors creeps through our shuddering hearts; and we feel that we are poisoned by our human sins, and paralyzed by our human infirmities: and, before we are aware, the demons which we thought expelled have regained their abode, and added to them, it may be, a company seven-fold unclean. Oh, it is a shame that

our nature should be so fallen!—a shame that we should continue so perverse as to remain insensible alike to the lesson and the life of this God-like principle of love. Why should it not be kindled in all hearts? Why should the fierce and fiery passions of our gross and brutalized nature still have their sway, and humanity, beaten down in her lofty aspiration, lie bleeding and torn and distracted in the dust?

To these questions we hear God, in his gospel, replying, "There is now no reason but that mystery of creature mind which the light of eternity only can resolve." In the solution of this problem, we see God going forth; and the promise of his word is, that he will accomplish that for man which man himself has no power to bring to pass. He will kindle this love in human souls. He will yet fill the world with it, and make a spectacle so great and glad as to overwhelm the universe with a sense of adoring wonder. And, oh! will it not be something to purge this world of evil,—to re-illumine it with that light of God so long gone out,—to beautify it with that innocence which has been so long banished from among men,—to heal its maladies,—to sweeten its embittered and corrupt currents? Will it not be something to remove the curse which has smoked so long over its fields, and the palsy of death which has reigned so long around its habitations? Will it not be something to re-establish the splendors of the everlasting kingdom, and to enlarge the substance of the life of men till they indeed become the heirs of a glorious immortality?

Now, God has promised to do all this. Let us stand, therefore, not groping amid the blindness, the confusion,

and the turmoil of time, where the dark surges of earthly passion are sweeping in their fury; but stand looking up, and high above these thick and dismal clouds of mortal seeming, to Him in whose hand this whole globe, with all its times and generations, is but an atom, and by whose power and pleasure the whole of it can be transformed. Let us remember that God is working more intensely in human history than even the most assiduous of his instruments; and let us be assured that he will show us the amazing result in his own good time and way. It may be now a day of storm and blackness,—a day to try the soul,—a day of affliction and suspense, which only the enduring patience of Christian faith and hope can wear out; yet, after all, the clouds must shrivel before the breath of the Lord, and a morning flood of radiance be poured upon the world. "It will come, finally, in the spirit of this divine principle which "worketh no ill," and which, therefore, "fulfils the law." It will come in that celestial disposition of mind which destroys the three cardinal defections of humanity,—foul ambition, dishonesty, and hatred. It will come in the sweet-scented gales of a regenerated and salubrious atmosphere, on which no profane sound shall be wafted, and which no taint of impiety shall poison. It will come in the effusion of all the graces which God can pour from the full horn of his own spirituality, to enrich and adorn the nature of men. It will come in the relief and emancipation of society from the shackles of corruption that have bound it on every hand. It will come with the illustrious retinue of truth and purity and virtue,—that

mighty and majestic train of God, before which all that disgusts and all that terrifies, in the now-subverted condition of man, will be swept from the bosom of the earth. It will come over the ruins of all that can defile or degrade the nature of men; and will cause to grow, full-blown, the flowering and the fruitage of a redeemed and glorified existence.

Oh, then, upon such a prospect and such an assurance as this, may we not appeal to our own souls, may we not appeal to our fellow-men everywhere, to see to it that we *personally* have a part in this great transformation; that we grasp, while we may, the living doctrines of our divine religion, and appropriate their faith to our personal salvation? Because, if men will not or cannot "seek first the kingdom of God" in the midst of such appliances as God is now using with the nations, — if men will not and cannot be arrested, and moulded and impressed to lay hold on the righteousness brought to light in the gospel, and to be animated by that divine law of love which crowns with perfection all human obedience toward God; *now*, while they are walking in the furnace of affliction, while the Almighty is testing their qualities in the crucible of his judgments, — when and where and how, indeed, will they or can they ever rise to the inheritance of the sanctified, — to the blessedness of a consecrated immortality?

If we would realize the power of this principle of divine love as a life-giving and life-controlling power of our being, there is no such way as through the gospel of the grace of God; there is no way but in prayer and importunity before the throne of God; there

is no way but by submission and profession in the sight of all men; there is no way but to become the living and open witnesses to men of that celestial fire which we feel burning in the soul. And the events of every day are pushing us up to this. God's pressure weighs on each one of us, at this moment, as it never did before; the whole meaning of our individual and public afflictions is precisely this,—God's hand urging the people over upon the life and the exaltation of the substantive principle and estate which is here declared. Clouds big with mercy are hanging over us while the earthly tempests are raging. God will pour the fatness of his favor upon every soul that is ready to receive it. While there may be wrath on earth, there is peace and joy in the heaven above us. All we have to do is to look aloft, to spread out our hands and uncover our hearts to Him who watches upon all our goings, and diligently marks all our changes. Beaten back from reposing in any earthly harbor, driven and pelted about upon the earth, with no rest and no refreshment, there is a haven in the presence and bosom of God; and there is a life which we may even now possess in the conscious indwelling of the principle of that love which fulfils all the law, and which nothing, of all the confusions of time, can disorder or destroy. Oh, then, let me plead with you to seek it, to put yourselves right upon this great question, to assume and undertake the responsibility of this position; and to do it now and always, and without delay. The spirit of this love "which worketh no ill" is the spirit of religion,—the spirit of Christ and of God. He that hath this spirit may live for ever. He cannot

be smitten down. He cannot be disquieted. He is anchored upon the Rock of Ages: all the billows of distraction will break beneath him; but his feet shall stand secure, and his head will be lifted upward into the light of Heaven. Amen.