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SERMON

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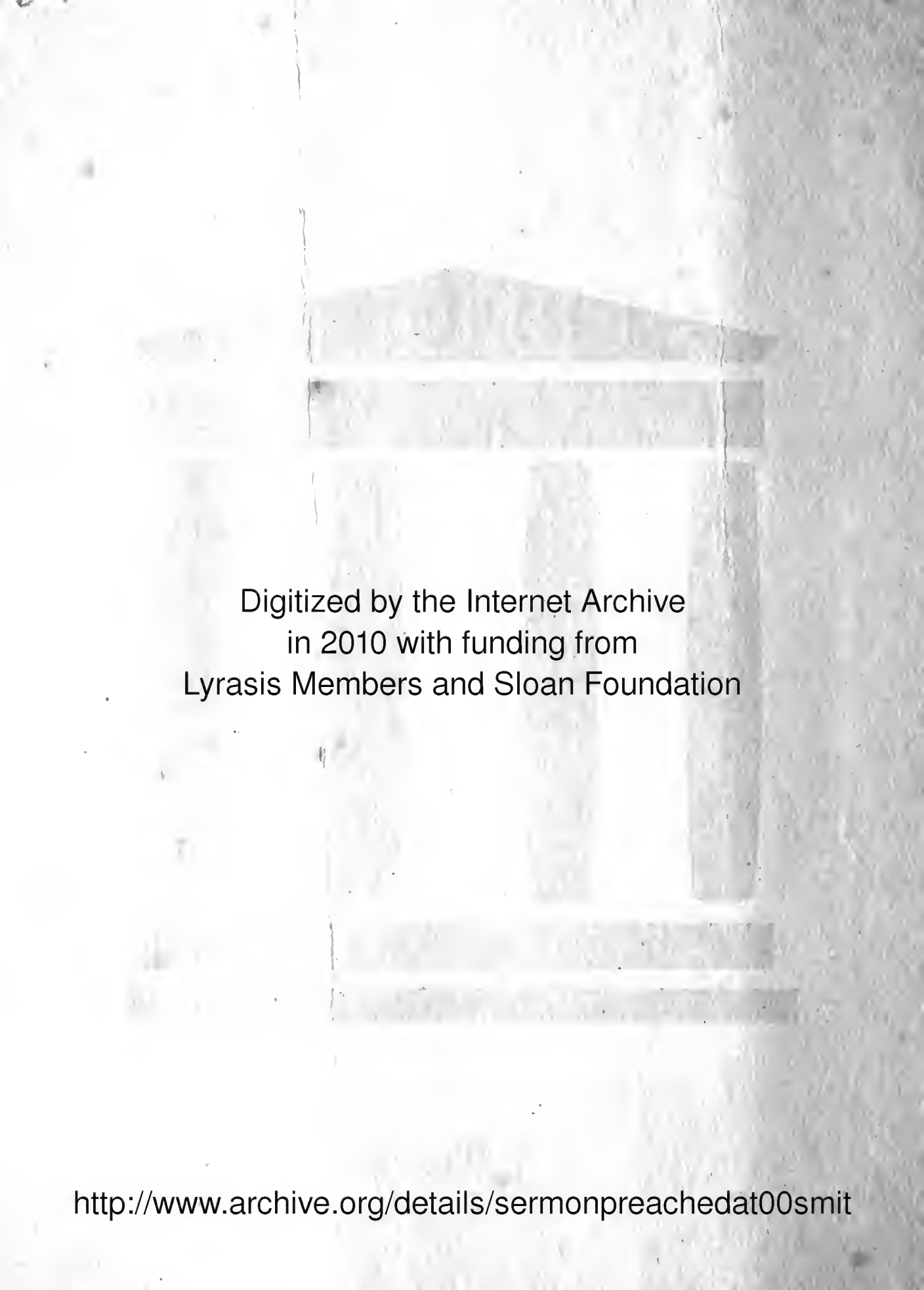
BY

REV. N. KEFF SMITH, D. D.

MATT. 5; 43-48.

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“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, etc.” Matt. 5; 43-48.

If it requires much grace in order to love someone, with whom we are supposed to be in sympathy, surely much more grace is necessary that we may obey the command as to loving and working and praying for those who are purposely at enmity against us in the world. Yet this perfection of character must be obtained, however much it may cut across the grain of the natural heart, and it can only be obtained in loving, doing good to and praying for enemies—even though they, in return, show their hatred by slander and persecution in every conceivable way.

Corrupt teachers in the time of our Lord wickedly concluded and consequently taught that as the law commanded love to neighbors then those who are not neighbors but heathen must be hated. This was a perversion of God's law. Here in the midst of the sublime teachings of the sermon on the Mount, in no uncertain terms, He declares not only how we must act but, also, feel toward those who secretly hate us, or openly oppose and persecute. Now our Lord's teachings are distinctly directly in conflict with the world's notion of what constitutes human courage and nobility. Not only the text but the whole sermon on the Mount is as much higher and superior to mere earthly ideas of true manhood or courage as

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heaven is higher than the earth, as superior as God, the all-loving, is superior to the devil. Compared with the most perfect laws of society, or schools of morals, these divine truths, by their superior principles will force any honest seeker for truth and religion to confess that they only spring, as they claim, from the mind and heart of God.

Shall our lives, therefore, be moulded and our character formed by God's plan, or shall we yield to our selfish hearts and natural enmity, allowing them to dictate what we shall be toward those who are called "enemies?" If we want to be condemned at last, let us yield, but if we would have our Lord's approbation, and, then, the companionship and glory of God let us bow to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and so this matter stands thus. Christ says, "Love;" the world says: "Hate your enemies." He commands us: "Bless;" the world, along with the old Adam in us says, "Curse them that curse you." He says, "Do good;" the world and our naturally depraved hearts say, "Do evil to them that hate you." He says, "Pray for," the world and worldly Christians say, "Curse them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Thus sharply is the line drawn. On which side do we stand? So there is no intermediate ground here. Hate is hate, and love is love, and the line cannot be crossed partly by one or the other. We cannot partly love and partly hate, partly bless and partly curse men, as we cannot partly love and partly hate the Lord. We cannot pray for, and at the same time fight against those who fight against us.

As to this relationship toward men we are with or against Christ. But if this Baal-god of vengeance and murder be right let us serve him out and out, give him his due and as a consequence take the doom that is waiting. If this Christ of love and patience be right let us take His service and the consequent approbation and smiles, and, then, gain the glory

of God, for the Divine Giver of the law of love tells us that by so being and doing we "may be children of our Father which is heaven." It is so difficult to possess this spirit of forbearance and forgiveness toward even Christians some times? I admit it. It is still more difficult to be so toward those who, may be publically or privately at enmity with us? Yes. Then indeed we fail, hopelessly fail, unless we sit at the Master's feet, and not only be learners today but evermore, for you and I cannot afford to be denied the smiles of God, and His conscious favor, or risk losing heaven. Shall I indulge in hatred toward any mortal man, whose natural breath like mine, is in his nostrils, and though he may be demon-like in his opposition to me, and by so doing cut myself out of an inheritance yonder as eternal as God? May the Lord prevent it by His sanctifying grace.

Observe again: That as long as sin is opposed to holiness it will engender opposition and hatred. It is said, at times, of someone after his death, "He had not a known enemy." I doubt exceedingly that such could be said of any mortal being, unless it be the little babe going back to God after only a brief stay in the mother's arms. However spotless and pure, however philanthropic and unselfish one may have been yet in some way, by some one he was hated, even though that hatred may never have shown itself in evil words and deeds. The Son of God said of Himself: "They hated me without a cause;" and it may be that many have been hated though no cause was given for such. The holier the man, and do what he may to prove it, yet the more, he may be hated; and his character is shown in that he does not pay back the hater in his own coin. Our Lord said to His disciples: "If ye were of the world, then the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen ye out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.".. Has it not been the case

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often when a man passes out of the world-life, into a spiritual life and to work for God that bosom friends of other and sinful days will in some way pour out their vials of wrath upon his head, or attempt to seduce him back to the old life? I have known it to be so. Of course there are many noble exceptions. But even some will say, "Well, Brown, old fellow, I am glad you are trying to do right." But how is that gladness manifested? By letting him severely alone. Such men are content to occupy a merely negative position, and that never means helpfulness; for how can they help one in striving to attain a higher plain of godliness when they not only have no desire to live for God but no power to give you a helping hand? He who does not help me up takes his stand with those who are desperately in earnest in trying to keep me down. If some one is beating you black and blue with gloves of brass, and I simply stand an onlooker, you would think precious little of my friendship. Of the two, I suppose, you would consider me the more contemptible for in a little while I, arm in arm with the fighter, may say: "Well, you gave it to him didn't you, Puglisto?" And he would reply, nerved by my smart remark, "Yes, and I can do it again." And then tomorrow, taking you by the arm, I say, "Well, old fellow, I was sorry for you." Then if you are a Christian you can only afford to pity and pray for such a little, mean soul. Let a young man come out on God's side and for heaven, then some of his so called friends will say, "So glad you are doing better," but they do not always mean it. Do you happen to fall to your knees in the fight against sin and their temptations, then they will laugh in their sleeves and uncharitably criticise. If doing better is the best thing why not themselves practice what they preach? Why not make peace for their souls through the Savior? Ah! the world is always at enmity against God, and that means despising His law, rejecting

Jesus Christ, and opposing His people. While we are to love yet we cannot prevent men opposing us in some way or other. They may set themselves up to measure and determine what you are by their own standard. "A pig once made its way," as the fable goes, "into the courtyard of a lordly mansion, sauntered * * * * * around the stables and the kitchen, wallowed in filth, crammed itself full of pig wash, and then returned home from its visit, a pig of the most piggish order." 'Well, Kavron,' asked its master, 'what have you seen? Is it true that such houses are full of pearls and diamonds and everything is the finest style?' 'What nonsense, to be sure,' grunted the pig, 'I saw no splendor at all, nothing but dirt and offal, and yet I didn't spare my snout, but rummaged the whole of the backyard.' " Yet, I suppose, the good man loved the pig still, while the pearls and diamonds still sparkled as ever in beauty for the delight of the owner. The pig saw and got what he wanted, so it is with some men. They are just as piggish, rooting up and bringing to the surface everything that is unsavory in one's life or work. If nothing of the kind exists in fact, yet they are ready to produce out of a depraved imagination any thing possible to gratify their opposition—if not their hatred. Such persons are the worst kind of enemies, still the law of love is "Bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not." It does not matter in what way man may be our enemies, our religion leaves no place for us to say, "If I can I will love." If it were an impossibility, in any case, then Christ, who gives the law, would have made exceptions for special cases. The doctrine, so plainly and emphatically declared, is that if we love our enemies, secretly hateful, or openly violent, we are God's children; if we do not, then we are not His, but are yet dead in our sins. If this is not the teaching of this chapter then there is nothing taught. If we are unwilling to obey then our admission

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and unwillingness prove that we are cut off from God and heaven.

Observe again: We must possess this love toward enemies, if we follow the Lord's example. Did He wait until they loved before He loved men? Nay, for He made proof of His love in that while we were yet sinners He gave His Son to die for us. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." If He should act, as men are prone to act toward one another, then the ungodly farmer might sow his grain and God might forbid the sun to shine upon the field, or prevent the genial rays and the copious showers from quickening into life the corn, wheat and cotton; and so blast the field and starve the sower while the good man sows the adjoining field and the same sun and rain would produce for him an abundant harvest. But in the government of the natural world His goodness is enjoyed alike by the good and the bad. Should there come a drought and the fields are parched, or should the flood sweep over and destroy the grain, the ungodly farmer looks up at the heavens of brass, or the rolling clouds and curses God, yet the New Year rolls around his fields, as well as those of the good man, which also has suffered, would again, and just alike, groan with the burden of rich, ripe grain. God's goodness is over all His works, whether such be in the hands of friends or enemies. If God thus permits His sun to shine and His rain to fall for His enemies, as well as for His people, thus displaying the wonders of His great providential love and goodness He means to show us that we are to manifest our love in sympathy and good deeds towards those who may be just as ungrateful and unloving towards us as they are towards Him, who is constantly bestowing in some way, the bounties of His providence. He deals thus with millions who love Him not, and shall not we, in our narrow

circumscribed sphere; show our love to the few who may possibly be enemies? Like begets like, the child possesses the traits and characteristics of the father.

If we are children of our Heavenly Father we must possess the character derived from our Divine parentage. It is ours to show forth our likeness to God, it matters not, if in or out of the church, we gain sorrow, scandal and taunts in return for all our kindness and work towards the unloving. God grant that it may be thus with us all, as expressed by the poet:

“No sorrow for the loss of fame,
No dread of scandal on our name,
No terror for the world’s sharp scorn,
No wish that taunting to return,
No hatred can our hatred move
And enmity but kindles love.”

Observe again: We are to love men because of Christ’s example. He died for us as enemies. If God so loved us while enemies of His, should not we love enemies? If for us as enemies, Christ laid down His life should we not be willing to do the same? The apostle says: “Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Oh, how wonderful, how inexhaustible, how continuous the love of God!

On the wall of a lunatic’s cell was found inscribed—after his death—these words:

“Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole

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Though stretched from sky to sky."

In eternity past God looked down upon a race of cruel, heartless men, ruined by sin, hateful of one another, vile in their beastly lusts, bold and reckless against all purity, without God and without hope (Rom. Chp. 1.), and yet in due time moved by His fatherly love, sends the son of His bosom, Himself love, and loving the lost; and though that heartless world laid hands of violence on Him and stretched Him on the cross of horror and shame, yet God's love not only does not destroy for their crime, but in the death of that Son finds an atonement for the sins of that murderous mob, and with His dying breath, knowing that they were so blinded as not to see the enormity of their hatred, yet His love cries out: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Standing with you contemplating again that scene, hearing that dying speech, may God forgive us, if we are ever unwilling to love the worst of foes. Can we follow that Lord in His life and see His tenderness, patience under insults, forbearance, bleeding back, crown pierced brow, bloody sweat gushing from His body in the Garden, all telling, as no human language can describe, how He loved sinners, even those who lead Him as a culprit to the cross, I say, with such a life and death before us, can we fail to obey Him, saying to us: "Bless them that curse you; bless and curse not." One has said, "Not to love is to hate; and to hate is to murder." So, if we would know how not to hate, and, not only so, how to do good, and save rather than destroy life then Christ's love must be in our hearts to control our lives.

That so called Christian who is always ready to pose on his so called dignity, ready to be nettled, so quick in resent, fancied or real insult, partly to gratify the old Adam and partly to have the world write him down as "plucky, brave, daring," such a man has not learned the A. B. C. of

true Christian courage and fidelity to his God. He is a blockhead, and should don the dunce cap, even if he is allowed to stay in the school of Jesus Christ. Here in our text is the unchanging law of Jesus, and our place and position before God now and hereafter by that law are decided. Listen: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." What becomes then of the hope of heaven by men, in or out of the church, who do not submit to this divine law? Our prayers are no more than the mummeries of Hindoo priests, in asking God to forgive our sins, if we are not willing, from the heart to say, "I forgive as I am forgiven."

Now it is true that we are to hate the sinner's sin, hate an enemy's cruel words and slanders, but not the enemy whose soul may be made spotless and pure, and perhaps, outrank us in glory. Suppose that we have an enemy who is trying to blot, or destroy our character, and we have nothing to lose comparable with character, we are to hate the malice prompting him because it is bred in his soul by the devil, but we are to ask God to subdue that sin, forgive and save that soul. However, our character cannot be destroyed, that is God given and God protected.

Let men be never impertinent, envious, hateful, yet as the sons of God are we to fight them with such weapons? To say nothing of the consequences at His hand yet we shall be at a disadvantage with such carnal weapons, and so be worsted in the battle. Our victory is ever assured if we wield with the arm of faith the sword of love. Faith is the victory that overcometh. A Christian said to a rude, swaggering youth: "There was a time, sir, when I should have resented this impertinence; but I have long since learned to forgive injuries and to overlook insults." Shall the gentle dove sailing in a higher and purer atmosphere even deign to appear nettled by

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the crawling, slimy worm? Or the proud eagle, while holding companionship with the sun be disturbed by the hooting owls of the swamp? Or an angel risk soiling his pure robes of white for the mere pleasure of contending with a demon? This story told by another is striking: "An officer of distinction and tried valor, refused a challenge sent by a young officer, but returned the following answer: "I fear not your sword, but the sword of my God's anger. I dare venture my life in a good cause, but cannot hazard my soul in a bad one. I will charge up to the cannon's mouth for the good of my country; but I want courage to storm hell.'"

Our country is very prolific in a brood of men, not brave enough to venture where human lives are imperilled by fire or floods or fever, and doubtless would hesitate to look for a moment into a loaded cannon, but are so brave, save the mark, on every little pretext to assert their manhood in the protection of self, and by so doing imagine that they scare all opposers into silence. That so called "Code of Honor," once so popular in our Southland was utterly opposed to that Divine Code, recorded in Matt. 18 chapter, and he who passed by the Code of God and followed the other was in danger of hell fire.

Observe lastly: Our Lord shows the superiority of that love for enemies over natural affections. If we love only those who love us (verse 46) we are not superior to the Publicans, who were tax collectors for the Roman government, and were despised by the Jews because they were renegades from their nation, yet Publicans loved one another. It is nothing wonderful that like should love like. It is but natural and so not praiseworthy. So what reward or benefit of superiority do we have if we only love those who love us? "The worst man will do this." Can we as Christians be satisfied with such a standard? "If ye only salute those who salute you (verse 47)

wherein do ye differ from others?" Politeness teaches this, especially the Chinese. Shall the children of God go no further than that? Ah, yes, for it is written, "Be ye perfect." Perfect in that love that reaches out and touches and melts the coldness and hatred and opposition of others. Oh, that all of us may be united to pray that God's kingdom of peace and goodness may speedily come, when war and enmity and hatred shall be displaced by love and then all shall be like God, for "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God."

(The End)

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