

LUTHER'S  
EPISTLE SERMONS

TRINITY SUNDAY TO ADVENT.

TRANSLATED WITH THE HELP OF OTHERS

BY

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## EXHORTATION TO BROTHERLY LOVE.

1 John 3:13-18.

<sup>13</sup> Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. <sup>15</sup> Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup> But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him? <sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth.

1. The Epistles and Gospels selected for the Pentecost cycle of Sundays have love as their general theme. They deal not only with the love we owe to Christ and God, which is only to be thankful for the unspeakable blessing of forgiveness of sins and salvation through Christ's blood and death, but also of the love we owe our neighbor; not a love in return for favors, but one that unceasingly gives, forgives and works all good even when unrequited.

2. John here admonishes the Christian to exercise the virtue of love. Considering the evident rarity of love among men, this admonition is necessary. He particularly warns Christians not to wonder at the world's hatred and desire for their death. Such was the hate of Cain for his brother, of which the apostle has just spoken. The world's hate, it must be admitted, repels love and powerfully obstructs its exercise.

3. Is it not surpassing strange that one can hate those who love him and from whom he has received only kindness? Such wickedness is almost inconceivable, we say. What incentive is there for any to render the world service when in ingratitude it rewards love with hatred? But let us examine ourselves, who are baptized and have received the Gospel, and confess how we requite the supreme love of God in giving us his Son. What a beautiful example of glad gratitude we display! For the shame of it we ought to despise ourselves before God and his angels.

And what shall we say of those who will not endure the preaching of the glorious message of God's grace and blessing, but condemn it as heresy? to whom they who seek to serve, to benefit and save the world by declaring the good news, must be, as Paul says, "as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things," 1 Cor. 4:13. Indeed, no criminal receives more wretched and ignominious treatment and execution, of which the Pope and his followers are a case in point.

4. While experience has proven this otherwise incredible fact, John vouchsafes the admonition notwithstanding: “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you.” If we are not to wonder at this, is there anything in the world to incite wonder? I should truly think the hearing of a single sermon, on the grace of Christ, would suffice to bring the world to receive the Gospel with intense joy and never to forget the divine mercy and blessing. It would be no wonder should the earth suddenly open and engulf mankind because of its ingratitude to God, who has given his Son to become man for the purpose of redeeming us condemned mortals from sin and death, and restoring us to life and salvation. Is it not a horrible thing that any man should shun and oppose such a Savior and his doctrine even more than he does the devil himself?

5. But what is God’s attitude toward such conduct? Well does he say to the Jews through the prophet: “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, devised; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him; remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteous acts of Jehovah.” Mic. 6:3-5. And well does Christ say to his ungrateful people: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Mt. 23:37. As if he would say, “I surely did not come to effect your death and condemnation by my message. I am about to suffer death and God’s wrath for your sins. I bring you God’s endless grace and blessing for time and eternity. Then why this bitter hatred against me and my message?”

6. “Since the world hates even God for his kindness,” argues John, “marvel not, my beloved, that you suffer the same fate. What does it signify that I show my love by hazarding life and limb to sustain this doctrine of the Gospel and help my neighbor? Mine is but a poor, mean, uncouth, offensive love in comparison with the love that led Christ to die for me and to redeem me from eternal death. If God’s supreme, unfathomable love fails to awaken the gratitude of the world, what wonder if the world hates you for all your kindness? Why will you bring down your fist and stamp your foot in anger at such ingratitude? You are yourselves of that race for whom the Son of God had to die. And even were you to die for the Gospel, your sacrifice would be as nothing in comparison to the fact that God, for the sake of the world, spared not his own Son but permitted the world to put him to death.”

7. But whence arises the world’s hatred? John tells us in verse twelve when he mentions the incident of Cain, who, he says, “was of the evil one,

and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." An excellent reason, indeed, for hating—the hater and murderer is evil and the benefactor good! In civil and domestic affairs it is the evil-doers and disobedient who incur displeasure and receive punishment; and such reward is just. But whenever God has dealings with the world, it shows what a rotten fruit it is by hating, persecuting, and putting to death as evil-doers and impostors its very benefactors. This trait it inherits, John tells us, from its ancestor Cain, the great fratricide saint. He is a true picture of the world of all times, and ever its spirit and fashion is patterned after him.

8. When mother Eve, the dear, godly woman, bore her first son, she declared in her joy and her hope of God's promise of the future seed that should bruise the serpent's head: "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah" (Gen. 4:1); and she named him Cain, which means "obtained," as if she would say, "I have obtained the true treasure." For she had not before seen a human being born; this was the first, precious fruit of man. Over Cain she rejoiced, pronouncing herself blessed. This son was trained in the hope that he should be a savior of the future race, a comfort to his brothers and sisters with all their offspring. Nor was he unaware of these proud hopes. Proudly he lorded it over his brother, who in contrast had to bear the ignominious name of Abel, meaning "nothing," or "vanity," as if voicing the thought of the parents' hearts: "Alas! this one has no future. Cain is the rightful heir to the blessing God has promised man; he is lord and master of his brethren."

9. It is likely that the godly father and mother for many years drew their solace from the hope placed in their firstborn son, as they looked forward with intensest longing to the redemption from their deplorable fall. Doubtless they trained both sons very carefully and instructed them concerning their own sin and fall and the promise God had given them, until they were fully grown and had entered into the priestly office. Cain the first-born was particularly zealous in that respect, desiring to be first inasmuch as he offered his first fruits of the earth, given by God and obtained by his own labor, as he no doubt had seen his father offer. Abel, however, the inferior, the poor shepherd, offered the firstlings of his sheep, given him of God and obtained without effort and toil of his own. Now, God in a wonderful way manifested his preference concerning the gifts upon the altar. Fire descended from heaven and consumed Abel's offering, but Cain's remained. The fire was the sign of God's favor. The text says: "And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Gen. 4:4-5.

10. Thereupon Adam and Eve saw that the hope and solace centering in their first-born son, were a delusion. They began to learn the wonderful judgments of God, who gave precedence to Abel, the male counterpart of

Cinderella—which is all he was in his own sight when he compared himself with his brother. Now Cain, with full confidence in his position, spoiled by the delusion of his parents that as the first-born he was God's preference, felt himself outraged. His hypocrisy, hitherto masked, comes to the surface. He burns with secret hate against God, with hate and anger against his brother, which he takes no trouble whatever to disguise. The parents rebuke him, but effect nothing. The flame of his resentment rises higher, and meeting him alone upon the field, he fells him to the ground. Far from contemplating amendment of life or seeking grace from God, he has no mercy upon the only brother he has on earth, who has done him no harm whatever. He cannot forgive him and leave him in unenvied possession of the grace of God.

11. Such was the solace and joy poor Adam and Eve lived to experience in their first children! From this time on their earthly life was fraught with gloom and sorrow, particularly since they could not but see the source of these in their own fall and they would have pined to death had not God comforted them with another son. For when it became evident that the hope they had placed in Cain was a delusion, and that they were deprived of the son who, beyond a doubt, possessed the grace of God, they, without another son, would not have known where to look for the solace of the promised seed.

12. Note, in this man Cain is pictured the world in its true, characteristic colors; in him its true spirit stands reflected. Certainly his equal has never been. In him are unquestionably prefigured the very flower, the very quintessence, of holiness on earth—the most pious servants of God. On the other hand, that poor, wretched, abject male counterpart of Cinderella, Abel, well represents the obscure little brotherhood, the Church of Christ. She must yield to Cain the lord the distinction of being everything before God, of being the recipient of every gift of God, of being entitled to all honor and every privilege. He feels important in his imagined dignity, permits this spirit to pervade his sacrifices and his worships, and thinks that God cannot but favor and accept his offering rather than that of his brother.

Meanwhile, the pious Abel goes his way, meekly suffering his brother's contempt. He willingly yields Cain the honor, esteems himself vastly inferior and beholds no consolation for himself aside from the pure mercy and goodness of God. He believes in God and hopes for the promised future seed. In such faith he performs his sacrifice as a confession, a sign, of his gratitude.

13. This illustration is intended by God as solace for his little throng; for the incident is not written for Abel's sake but for the sake of the humble children of God, whose condition is like that of Abel. God has not forgotten them, though they are haughtily ignored by proud Cain, who regards them

as nothing in his presence. God graciously looks upon them and rejects proud Cain with his birthright and offering.

14. Innocent Abel becomes the object of anger and hatred when the Word of God lays hold of Cain revealing God's displeasure where he had fancied himself worthy, and God's unwillingness to regard his offering and devotion as superior to this of his brother and more meritorious. Cain begins bitterly to hate and persecute his brother. He finds no rest until Abel is laid low and cut off from the earth. Now you have the cause of the world's hatred and anger against Christians; simply this, as John says of Cain: "Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

15. What offense had godly Abel committed against his brother to be so hated? He had even regarded that brother as the first-born, as vastly superior to himself, and had done him all honor and loved him as became a brother. He was easily satisfied, desiring simply the grace of God. He prayed for the future seed, that is, for the salvation and happiness of his parents, his brother and the entire human race. How could Cain be unmerciful and inhuman enough in his frenzy to murder his own flesh and blood?

The answer is found in the fact that the devil had filled Cain's heart with pride and vanity over his birthright. He considered himself a man of distinction, with every claim upon God's favor and sinless, whilst his brother was nothing whatever. Cain's heart is devoid of true brotherly love; he has only contempt for Abel. He cannot endure God's manifest favor toward his brother, and will not be moved by the injunction to humble himself and seek God's grace. Anger and envy possess him to the extent that he cannot tolerate his brother alive. In violation of God's commandment and his own conscience, he becomes a murderer, and then goes his way as if he had done right.

16. This is what John means when he says that Cain had no other cause for his crime than that his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. Similarly, that obedient daughter of Saint Cain, the world, hates the Christians; and for no other reason than the latter's love and goodness of heart. Witness the examples of the holy patriarchs, the prophets and, most of all, of Christ himself.

17. What sin against the world did the beloved apostles commit? They desired the injury of none, but went about in extreme poverty and toil, teaching mankind how, through faith in Christ, to be saved from the devil's kingdom and from eternal death. This the world will not hear and suffer; hence the hue and cry: "Kill, kill these people? Away with them from off the earth! Show them no mercy!" Why this hostility? Because the apostles sought to relieve the world of its idolatry and damnable doings. Such good works the world could not tolerate. What it desires is nothing but praise and commendation for its own evil doings, expecting from God the impossible endorsement, "Your deeds are good and well-pleasing to me. Pious chil-

dren of mine are you. Just keep on cheerfully killing all who believe and preach my Word.”

18. In the same way does the world conduct itself today with reference to our Gospel. For no other reason are we hated and persecuted than because we have, through God’s grace, proclaimed his Word that recovered us from the blindness and idolatry in which we were sunken as deeply as the world, and because we desire to rescue others. That is the unpardonable sin by which we have incurred the world’s irreconcilable anger and its inextinguishable hatred. It cannot permit us to live.

We preach no other doctrine than faith in Christ, which our children pray and they themselves confess in words. We differ only in our claim that Christ having been crucified for us and having shed his blood to redeem us from sin and death, our salvation is not effected by our own works, or holiness or devotion. The fact that we do not regard their faithless worship equal to Christ himself, but teach men to trust in the grace of God and not their own worthiness, and to render him gratitude for his grace—this fact is intolerable to the world. It would be well for our adversaries if they would receive such teaching, since it would render them more than ever what they profess to be: our superiors in wisdom, knowledge and reputation—a claim we are willing to concede. But Cain’s works are evil and Abel’s righteous. The world simply cannot tolerate the Gospel, and no unity or harmony is ever to be hoped for. The world will not forsake its idolatry nor receive the faith. It would force us to renounce the Word of God and praise its Cain-like worship, or take death at their hands.

19. Therefore, John says, “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you,” for it is compelled to act according to the nature inherited from its father Cain. It would have all merits and concede to Abel none. The world comprises the exalted, the wise, the learned, the mighty. The Scriptures represent these as under necessity to hate and persecute the poor throng of the Church of Christ by reason of the good works done by them. They can under no consideration tolerate the idea of being taught by this despised and humble throng the doctrine of salvation through the grace and mercy of God alone, not through man’s own merits. They cannot endure the teaching that their offering—the mass, regarded by the Papists as a work of superlative merit and holiness—avails nothing before God.

20. In the text the nature of the world is portrayed for our recognition. So to understand the world as to know what may be expected from it is essential and valuable knowledge for the Christian. Thus armed he will not be dismayed and become impatient of suffering, nor permit its malice and ingratitude to mislead him to hate and desire for revenge. He will keep his faith and love, suffering the world to go its way if it refuse to hear his message. The Christian should expect nothing better from the world than its bitter persecution in return for his good works and love. The Church of

Christ on earth, let him remember, is never to have an easier lot. He is not to judge according to show and appearance, thinking: “They are the great throng, the wisest and cleverest people on earth; how is it possible that they should all be in error and under condemnation?”

21. It is necessarily true that discipline and peace are impossible without the most excellent, exalted, erudite, clever people—royal, princely, noble in achievement and honor. Cain is never plain and lowly. He is always eminently clever, wise, holy and in every way vastly Abel’s superior. In fact, he must in himself represent all desirable things, as his name indicates. And the same characteristic is manifest in his children, who are ingenious in the invention of every variety of art. Deplorable the fact that a man of Cain’s qualifications, born of godly parents and signally honored of God, should display such hatred and inhumanity toward poor Abel merely because of God’s Word and Abel’s faith.

22. Such knowledge is comforting to the godly little company of Christians, who are confident they have God’s favor and know it to be the occasion of their persecution. They have no protection and succor but are exposed to the same fate as Abel. If they fare better, they may thank God for it. But they are ever to abide in love toward God, whose love they have received and felt, and likewise toward men, their enemies not excepted. This was Abel’s way; could he have lived again, he would have kept his brotherly love for his murderer, forgiving him and even imploring God’s forgiveness for him.

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

23. To abide in love should be the motive for us Christians. John contrasts it with the motive of the world in hating us—its wickedness. The world’s hatred of you, as John words imply, is not strange. The contrast between you and the world is exceedingly great. Through its own evil works, unbelief, pride, contempt for the Word and grace of God, and the persecution of the godly, the world has become by this time the victim of Satan and eternal death. It spurns all counsel and aid directed toward its rescue. Stiff-necked and hardened, under evident condemnation by its own conscience, it has chosen to persist in its doom. But we believers in Christ, God be praised! are different people. We have come forth from death; we have passed through death and entered into life through the knowledge and faith of the Son of God, who has loved us and given himself for us.

24. Such grace and goodness of God, says the apostle, should prompt you not to be offended and vanquished by the world’s ingratitude, hate and malice, and thus to cease from holy endeavor and become likewise, evil, which course will result in the loss of your treasure. It is yours, not by your own effort, but by grace alone; for at one time you as well as they lan-



guished in the kingdom and power of death, in evil works, far from faith and love.

Remember to comfort yourselves, therefore, with the thought of this great blessing, an advantage you enjoy above the others. What if the world, abiding in death, does hate and persecute you who abide in life? Whom can its hatred injure? It cannot take from you the life which it lacks while you possess it, nor deliver you to death, from which you have passed, through Christ. When it does its worst it may perhaps falsely slander you, or deprive you of your property, or destroy your corrupt body—the final home of maggots and in any event doomed to corruption—and thus through the death of the body help you gain true life. Thus vengeance will be yours rather than its own. Yours will be the joy of being transplanted from death into life, whereas the world must abide in death. While they of the world think to deny you both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, they themselves lose body and soul. What more terrible retribution could their hatred and envy receive? For the sake of denying gratification to the devil and the world, and much more for your own welfare, you must not allow your persecutions to rob you of your peace and salvation, nor to lead you to lose your faith through impatience and desire for revenge. Rather, pity their wretchedness and doom. You lose nothing by their oppression; yours is the gain, theirs the loss. For the slight grief inflicted upon you with reference to body and time, it shall dearly pay both here and hereafter.

25. How do we know we have passed from death unto life? John says, because we love the brethren. Just what does he mean? Is it not our doctrine that Christ first loved us, as John elsewhere says? that before we ever loved him he died and rose again for us? When we fully believe in our Savior's love, then our own hearts respond with perfect love to God and our neighbor. Why, then, does John say, "We have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren"?

26. The explanation is found in the words "We know." John says plainly, "From the fact that we love the brethren, we know we have passed out of death into life." Love of the brethren is the test whereby we may ascertain who are the true believers. The apostle directed this epistle especially against false Christians; many there are who extol Christ, as did unbelieving Cain, and yet fail to bear the fruit of faith. John's reference is not to the means whereby we pass from sin and death to life, but to the proof whereby we may know the fact—not to the cause, but to the effect.

27. It is not sufficient to boast of having passed from death into life; there must be evidence of the fact. Faith is not an inactive and lifeless thing. When there is faith in the heart, its power will be manifest. Where power is not in evidence, all boasting is false and vain. When the human heart, in its confidence in divine mercy and love, is thrilled with spiritual comfort, and also warmed into kindness, friendliness, humility and patience

towards the neighbor, envying and despising none but cheerfully serving all and ministering unto necessity even to hazarding body and life—when this is the case, then the fruits of faith are manifest.

Such fruits are proof that the believer has truly passed from death into life. Had he not true faith, but doubted God's grace and love, his heart would not prompt him, by reason of his love and gratitude to God, to manifest love for his neighbor. Where man has faith, and where he realizes God's infinite mercy and goodness in raising him from death to life, love is enkindled in his heart, and he is prompted to do all manner of good, even to his enemies, as God has done to him.

28. Such is the right interpretation and understanding of John's expression: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." It leaves in its integrity the foundation, Justification, or deliverance from death, through faith alone. This is the first element of Christian doctrine. Granting that faith does justify, the next question is whether the faith is real or simulated, being merely a deceptive show and unsupported claim. The clear information imparted by the apostles is, that love, indeed, does not deliver from death, but that deliverance from death and the presence of life becomes a matter of sight and knowledge in that love has been wrought. With true faith we must have come to the point where we no longer, like Cain, in our pride and conceit, despise our neighbor; where we are not filled with envy, hatred and bitterness; where we desire, and to the extent of our power, promote the interests of our neighbor and work him all good.

29. John draws to a close by showing the opposite side of the picture, in that he addresses earnest words that re-echo like peals of thunder to those who make the carnal boast of being Christians while destitute of love. He cites several facts as evidence that where love is lacking, necessarily faith and deliverance from death are absent, likewise. Thus no opportunity is given for self-deception or a frivolous excuse based upon wordy boasting of one's faith. The reality of the inner life is known by the presence of love, which in turn attests the presence of faith in the heart.

I. "He that loveth not abideth in death."

30. Here, in clear, decisive words, the conclusion is expressed that no man may boast of life unless he has love. If it is true that faith must be active, it is conversely true that the absence of fruitage demonstrates one's continuance in the old Cain-like manner of existence, torpid and dead, bereft of solace and the experience of God's grace and life. Let no one presume to think he has passed into life so long as he is devoid of love and the fruits of faith. Let him become serious, and in alarm make ready to become a true believer, lest he remain in eternal death and under greater condemnation than those who have never heard the Gospel.

II. “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

31. Still clearer and stronger becomes the argument that lack of love means continuance in death. The stern and frightful judgment is here expressed that the unloving person is no better than Cain the fratricide. His heart is under the influence of deadly hate and murderous malice against the brother who refuses to be subservient to his desires. Kindling rage will prove its existence by appropriate works unless restrained by the fear of disgrace and punishment. He wishes his brother nothing good, but rejoices in his misfortune.

All this, however, is impossible for one who believes that he has been delivered from death. One who knows the wretchedness and misery of death from experience, but has entered upon life with its solace and joy, blessings he seeks to maintain—such a person will desire for others the same blessing; he cannot rejoice in another’s death. Therefore it is true conversely: “We know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

32. Thus we see the nature of the human heart without faith and the knowledge of Christ. At bottom it is but the heart of a Cain, murderous toward its neighbor. Nor can anything better be expected from him who is not a Christian. The Scriptures repeatedly denounce such faithless hypocrites as bloodthirsty and deceitful. “Jehovah abhorreth the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.” Ps. 5:6. “For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.” Prov. 1:16. See also verse 11. All mankind are by nature the children of the murderer Cain. They are, of course, no better than their father. While Cain was a man most magnificent, intelligent and wise, being the first fruit born of those holy parents Adam and Eve, and in his superior endowment with natural virtues infinitely superior to all who come after him, he was nevertheless an unbeliever before God. Hence he became the murderer of his brother.

III. “Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?”

33. These words delineate true Christian love and hold up the sublime example, or pattern, of God’s love manifest in Christ. Christ’s blood and death is God’s own blood and death. Paul in Acts 20:28, speaks of God having purchased the Church “with his own blood.” The heart of man by faith receives and apprehends this sacrifice. Under its transforming influence he is disposed to work good to his neighbor as he has himself received good. He even jeopardizes his life to that end, being conscious of his redemption from eternal death, and knowing physical death powerless to af-

fect his eternal life. But the heart that fails to appropriate Christ's sacrifice is without faith and insensible to God's love and eternal life.

34. John uses an illustration plain enough for anyone to understand, and from which we may judge that the soul found wanting in small duties will be deficient in great ones. According to the apostle, if one possesses this world's goods and sees his neighbor want, he being able to render assistance without injury to himself, and yet closes his heart against that neighbor, not assisting him with even the slightest work of love, how can the love of God dwell in him since he appreciates it so little that he will not spare his needy brother a penny? How can he be expected, then, to render a greater service—to even lay down his life for his brother? What right has such a soul to boast—how can he know—that Christ has laid down his life for him and delivered him from death?

35. How frequently are such people to be found! Having this world's goods and being able to help the needy, they close their hearts against the unfortunate, as did the rich glutton toward poor Lazarus. Where shall we find in imperial courts, among kings, princes and lords, any who extend a helping hand to the needy Church, or give her so much as a crust of bread toward the maintenance of the poor, of the ministry and of schools, or for other of her necessities? How would they measure up in the greater duty of laying down their lives for the brethren, and especially for the Christian Church? Note the terrible judgment that they who are devoid of brotherly love are in God's sight murderers and cannot have eternal life.

36. But the merely selfish may well escape our censure in comparison with those who not only close their purses to the poor but shamelessly and forcibly deprive and rob their needy neighbor of his own by overreaching, by fraud, oppression and extortion; who take from the Church the property rightfully hers and especially reserved for her, snatching the bread from her mouth, so to speak. Not only is the papistical rabble today guilty of such sin, but many who would be known as evangelical practice the same fraud with reference to the parochial estates and general property of the Church, and, in addition, tyrannically harass and torment the poor ministers. But oh, how heavy and terrible the impending judgment for those who have denied to Christ the Lord in his thirst even the cup of cold water!

IV. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."

37. The world and the false Christians in word pretend great love, but in practice, when love should manifest itself in deeds, it is found to be insincere. So John admonishes that where our love is not ardent enough to lead us to lay down our lives for our brethren, however much we may profess Christ, that love is assuredly only a vain show, a false pretense, wherewith we deceive ourselves and remain in infidelity and death, and in a more deplorable condition than those who are wholly ignorant of the Gospel.

Therefore, let him who would proceed safely and prove himself a Christian remember to prove himself such by his deeds and works. Then men will know that he does not, a murderer and liar, like others, follow the devil. They will know, on the contrary, that he truly and with the heart clings to the Word of God, having passed from death to life.