

**A**

# **SERMON,**

**DELIVERED**

**AT THE**

**Installation of St. John's Lodge**

**OF**

**FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS,**

**IN THETFORD, VERMONT,**

**JULY 4, 1816.**

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# Sermon.

ROMANS XIII. 10.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.

BEING invited to preach to a society of Free and Accepted Masons, it is a happy circumstance to know, that they consider the Bible to be the word of God ; also profess to be governed by its sacred rules and requirements. For now a text may consistently be chosen from the Sacred Oracles, to be the foundation of a discourse ; and from the same source every truth may be supported. There is also reason to hope, that divine truths will be seriously regarded, and make a suitable impression on every mind.

By the word of God we are assured, that the end of all things is at hand ; and that but a few things will survive the final dissolution of this world. The things, which will remain after the last shaking of the heavens and earth, are the only things, which can then be possessed and enjoyed. Among the durable unshaken things, which will remain, love is one. *Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, (or love,) and the greatest of these is charity.* And among the several species of love exercised by men, there is but one, which will be a source of everlasting felicity. This is the love mentioned in the text, which worketh no ill to

mankind. This cannot be affirmed of any other kind of love. It exceeds every other affection in excellency and glory. It is the foundation of all happiness, the source of all good, the only firm basis of every society, and the only tie of everlasting friendship. What theme then, on an occasion like this, can be more profitable?

My design is to describe this love, as far as my limits will admit; and show, that it cannot produce any evil.

Every affection has an object. Where there is love, there is something which is loved. And that which is loved, is the object of love. The only way to ascertain clearly the *nature* of any affection, and to distinguish between one and another, is, by attending carefully to its object. The object of that love, which the law requires, is *happiness*. If any inquire, what is love, what are its exercises? the answer is, *delight* and *desire*. This is true of every kind of love.

A love of property is a delight in it, and a desire for the increase of it. To those, who have this delight and desire, property is a source of pleasure. And a love of honor is the same. All who have this affection, are pleased when honored; and have a desire for honors to be multiplied to them. And, by a particular analysis, we should find that conjugal, parental, and filial affections, and love of every species, is a delight

and pleasedness with the object, and a desire for its increase and prosperity.

Of course, as every kind of love is composed of the same ingredients, the only way to distinguish between their different natures is, by attending to the thing loved.

Water, spirits of various kinds, the spirits of vitriol, and many other substances, are all of them liquids. When inspected by the eye, we can see no difference among them, except in color. The difference in their nature we learn by the different effects they produce. In like manner, though every kind of love is a delight in its object, and a desire for its good; yet by attending to their several objects and operations, we find their natures are very different, and produce very different effects. This will readily be seen by the following remarks.

Happiness is the object of the love intended in the text. Not our *own*, but the happiness of *others*. In the happiness of others this love delights. It is a source of refined pleasure to those, whose hearts are warmed with this affection. They rejoice in it, whenever they behold it. They have also strong desires for the increase and diffusion of happiness. Mankind always desire the increase of *that*, which is the source of their greatest delight. Such are the ingredients of this love; a delight in the happiness of others, and a

desire for the increase and diffusion of it. Let it be remembered also, that there are as many species of pleasure, as there are sources of pleasure. Accordingly some kinds of pleasure are more refined, more satisfying, and more durable, than others. And those pleasures are the most refined, the most dignified, satisfying, and durable, which arise from a contemplation of the glorious character of Jehovah, of his Son Christ Jesus, of the holy kingdom of grace, which he is erecting, with its glories.

When we see others filled with the happiness, which is derived from these glorious and eternal objects, this happiness affords those, who have this love, far greater and purer delight, than any of those kinds of pleasure, which are derived from worldly and temporal sources. All other kinds of happiness, but this, will have an end. When this world, with all things in it, shall have an end and be consumed, as we are assured will be the case; then all the happiness, derived from temporal sources, will also have an end. But the felicity, arising from the contemplation of divine objects, will continue, increase, and be durable as eternity. This then is the happiness of *others*, in which the benevolent soul will take the most refined, satisfying and exalted delight. While he rejoices to see others enjoying other kinds of pleasure, pleasure arising from worldly possessions;

he will rejoice *more abundantly*, with more pure and exalting delight, in beholding others possessing that kind of happiness, which is derived from divine and eternal objects. This is that kind of happiness in which the benevolent soul will especially delight; and the increase and diffusion of which he will ardently desire.

Now you have distinctly before you the object of that love, which the law of God requires. I pray you, keep it in view, lose not the sight of it. Those who desire that others may enjoy this happiness, love their neighbor as they do themselves.

Let us now attend to the operations of this love; remembering, that love is an operative governing principle in the heart.

If you delight in the happiness of others, especially in beholding them enjoying divine happiness; it will be your desire, that your fellow mortals may possess it. It will be your desire, that their happiness may increase more and more forever. As mankind always seek the good of the object loved, you will exert yourselves to diffuse happiness through the world. Whatsoever might lessen or destroy the happiness of others, you will avoid. As it is the tendency of sin to destroy all happiness, you will hate it, avoid it, fight against it, and account it your greatest misery; because it militates against your wishes, and the pursuits of your hearts.

Every thing which is necessary to the increase and diffusion of happiness, you will love. You will therefore love holiness in all its various and numerous operations; because they all tend to diffuse the happiness, in which your souls delight. Whenever you see others possessing the love now described, it will be a source of delight to you. For such are united with you in promoting the object of your supreme affection. Thus this love is an enemy to all moral evil. It is a friend to every thing which is good, excellent, and holy, to every thing which facilitates the diffusion of happiness.

This love is diffusive in its nature. Its object is the diffusion and universal spread of divine happiness. It leads persons to spend their time, improve their talents, and use all the means in their power, with persevering exertion, in promoting the increase and diffusion of happiness through the world.

Suppose all men possessed, were actuated, and governed by this love. Then they would mutually seek and promote each other's happiness with united exertions. They would unitedly fight against all evil, and promote all good. They would never render evil for evil. They would no more slaughter and destroy each other with the sword. Instead of cursing, they would bless each other; instead of retaliating, they would return

good for evil. Moral evil, in all its direful operations, would be banished from the world; and every thing, which is excellent and praise-worthy, would be practised through the earth. Peace and righteousness would fill the earth. This world would be a paradise; and Satan would be confined to his prison, and deceive the nations no more.

Such are the operations, effects, and fruits of this love—the love, which the law of God requires all to possess. This love, we see, worketh no ill to his neighbor; its fruit is the universal diffusion of happiness. The fruits of this love are not yet universally experienced; because but few are yet governed by it.—But, according to Scripture prophecy, a day will come, when all men will be governed by it. And we have many reasons to hope, that the morning of this joyful day begins to dawn upon us. Its dawning rays ought to animate us all to exert ourselves to increase its rising brightness.

No other love operates like this. Every other kind of love is pregnant with innumerable evils to our world. To be convinced of this, let us only look at the operations of a love of property.—To those, who love property, it is an object of delight and desire. It stimulates them to seek the accumulation of property. It is their wish to be rich: and no bounds can be set to its opera-



tions. If any person were to possess as much property as any kingdom in Europe contains, instead of satisfying his thirst for more, it would only be increased : and nothing short of being the lord of the whole world would satisfy him. This love of property leads men to defraud one another, to lie, to oppress, to overreach, to deceive, to steal, and even to murder ; all for the sake of accumulating more, and of increasing their treasures.— What sin can be named, which it has not, and would not lead men to commit for the sake of increasing the object loved ? Its nature is to monopolize, to engross every thing to itself. It does not lead people to diffuse, but to monopolize good. And the more one has, the less another must have. For two persons cannot possess the same property at the same time, unless they are in partnership. And the reason it operates thus, is very obvious. Because it has no regard or feeling for the happiness of others. It desires nothing but its own gratification. It is therefore in its nature selfish. It never leads any person to seek the good of others ; it aims only at the good of the person who possesses it, and the good of his children, and perhaps a few connexions. Hence its tendency is to evil only ; and innumerable sins are its fruits.

The same remarks are true with respect to a love of honor, a love of power and fame, a love

of pleasures, and every other kind of love. As the happiness of others is not the object of any kind of love, but the one described; no other kind ever leads men to seek the happiness of others. They are all limited in their nature; they seek only the good of the persons, who are governed by them. They are not diffusive, but selfish; aiming at the monopolization of riches, of honors, of power, fame, and dominion. They are productive of innumerable evils. This, facts and woful experience have proved from the beginning of the world to this day. For, except a few individuals, all men have been governed, in every age, by a love of riches, of honor, of power, fame and dominion. And we know by experience, what woful fruits they have produced. All the evils, which have filled our world with misery, these kinds of love have produced.

It is now evident, that every kind of love, but that intended in the text, *worketh ill to his neighbor*. But this love, which the law requires, and which is a fulfilling of it, *worketh no ill to his neighbor*; it is productive of universal good.

## Improvement.

The love, which the law requires, and which has been described, is the most excellent and glorious principle that exists in the universe. The law then, which requires it, is holy, just, and good. It is natural then, according to this discourse, to remark,

I. That this kind of love is the original and eternal source of *all good*.

All effects have a cause ; and the created good, which does exist, must have a first eternal cause. This love is the cause. The word says, God is love. His heart is love itself. Accordingly he loved the happiness of other beings. And as the Holy Trinity enjoyed an infinite sum of happiness, and possessed an infinite sufficiency to diffuse it to the highest possible degree, this love moved them to make such a diffusion. This highest possible diffusion of happiness is the ultimate end of all the divine operations. But in order to the existence and diffusion of created happiness, a race of beings capable of it must be produced. And if such a race of beings exist, a world must be created to be the place of their abode, furnished with every thing necessary to their subsistence and comfort. And when they had sinned and rebelled, as man has, a Savior must be given to die to redeem them ; the Holy Spirit must come to renew and sanctify their hearts, and prepare them

for a world of perfect felicity. A heavenly world must also be prepared to be the place of their everlasting abode. And one object of Christ's ascension was to prepare a place for them. As he said, I go to prepare a place for you. As the whole work of redemption is beyond the power of reason to invent, a revelation was necessary, such as the word of God is, to give to men a knowledge of it. All the stupendous works of providence were requisite to the redemption of man, and the highest measure of happiness. And all things will finally terminate in the existence, in heaven, of a society, who will enjoy the greatest possible happiness.

Thus all things, the existence of men and angels, of the world, the work of redemption, a divine revelation, and all the works of providence, proved as effects from the eternal source of love in God; from a disposition in him to make the greatest possible diffusion of happiness. This love moved him to employ his wisdom and power in forming and executing that plan, which all his works exhibit and unfold to our view. Thus it is evident, that this love is the original, eternal, and productive source of all good.

Who can adequately describe or comprehend the glory of this love, which is the cause of all good? What else, in point of excellency, utility,

and glory, can be compared with it? How glorious then, is that heart, which is filled with it!

2. This love is not found in any natural heart. It is a fruit of regeneration. Indeed regeneration consists in giving us a disposition to be pleased with, and to seek, the happiness of others. None, till born again, possess it. And in that heart, where this love dwells, all the sister graces live. Those who have this love, are penitent under a sense of their sinfulness, and humble under a sense of their littleness and unworthiness. They have faith in Christ, and are united to him as branches to a vine. They are meek and lowly, hunger and thirst after righteousness, are watchful and prayerful;—indeed they are adorned with every divine grace.

3. This love is necessary to eternal felicity. It is the only grace, which renders us, in a moral sense, like God. This is the grace, which adorns and dignifies human nature. Those only, who have it, love God and holiness; such only rejoice in the happiness of others, and delight in the service of Jehovah.

Those who have it not, are fit only to dwell with those beings, who are enemies to all good, and, by their wickedness, are striving to destroy it. Hence this truth ought to be engraven on every heart, that, unless he have this love, which

worketh no ill to his neighbor, he must be eternally miserable.

4. This love will survive the dissolution of worlds. God has often shook the heavens and the earth. He informs us, that there will be a final shaking; when the things, which can be shaken, will have an end, and the things, which cannot be shaken, will remain and continue forever. The kingdom of Christ is the thing, which cannot be shaken, and is to remain forever. Heb. xii. 26, 27, 28. Accordingly the time is coming, and is nigh, when God will shake the heavens and earth. Then this world will have an end, the planetary system will be destroyed; all the works of men, their elegant buildings, and works of magnificence and fame, will be burnt up; kingdoms and empires will have a final end; societies of every name, whether they be called Missionary, Bible, Tract, Peace, or Masonic Societies, will be dissolved.

And who will survive this general dissolution of all things, this ruin of worlds and all things in them? Those whose hearts are warmed and adorned with this love, when the elements are melting with fervent heat, will lift up their heads, and begin the anthem of eternal praise for redeeming grace. They will come from different kingdoms and nations; from different societies, which are now no more; from the east and west,

from the north and south, and meet in heaven. They will form one eternal society. Though on earth they belonged to different nations and societies, they will be brethren, and will be governed by the same love. This love will unite them to the Triune God, to holy angels, and to one another, by ties of everlasting friendship.

There will be no difference, no distinction of names among them ; but millions of millions, perfectly one, will unitedly take from their heads those crowns, with which Christ has crowned them, lay them at his feet in token of submission to him, as the Supreme King of the universe ; and begin to sing, Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive dominion and praise, for he hath redeemed us by his blood from every nation, kindred, and tongue under heaven.

This song will begin, but it will never end. This society will sing with transports of joy, when they see every enemy and all evil put under their feet ; and know, that they shall progress in knowledge, in love, in felicity, through an endless duration. O, glorious ! O, blessed society ! who would not wish to be a member of it ? This society is the glorious temple, which God has been erecting ever since the fall, and he will finish it in heaven. The foundation there was laid by grace, and the last stone will be laid with cryings—*Grace, Grace* unto it. And every one, who has

this love in his heart, will be a living polished stone in the temple of God's glory. This temple will increase in glory and magnificence forever ; and it will be the wonder of the universe, displaying all the perfections of God with infinite brightness. And every one, who wishes to be eternally glorious and happy, will suffer nothing to prevent his being a pillar in the temple of God's glory.

Permit me to address myself, in a few words, to the Free and Accepted Masons present.

**GENTLEMEN,**

The constitution and rules of your Society, so far as I am acquainted with them, harmonize with the word of God. The great principle of your Society, you say, is benevolent. The love, which I have described to-day, is real benevolence. No other kind of love but this, deserves this name. Hence the grand principle of your association is the most honorable and glorious in the universe. It is heavenly and divine ; and its object must be the diffusion of happiness. It has been shown, that no felicity but that, which is founded in benevolence, will be lasting and eternal.



Permit me to entreat you, as a friend to your souls, to remember what you now know, that no professions, without the reality of the thing professed, will finally profit you. There will be a judgment day, when every character will be known. Then, if it appear, that your hearts are adorned and warmed with the benevolence you profess, you will be blessed. But if destitute of it, a mere profession will not answer, and you will be accursed. Then never rest satisfied with a profession ; see to it, that your hearts are really adorned with benevolence. Then you may not only call each other brethren ; but you will be the sons of God, and he will be your Father, and give you an inheritance among the blessed in heaven. Suffer not any exterior show, or any of the glittering ornaments of this world, any forms, names, or any thing whatever, to prevent your earnest cries to the Source of all love, to beget and increase in your hearts, that benevolence, which is the principle of your Society.

It is my wish that this love may govern you this day, in the solemn Installation of your Lodge. May the spirit of John the Baptist, who was the Precursor of our Lord Jesus Christ, and whose nativity you this day celebrate, animate your hearts, and govern you in all your ceremonies.

Then you will not hereafter be separated from, but united with him in heaven, in songs of divine praise.

The day in which we live, is an era of great events. The light of the glorious Millennium seems to be dawning on the world. Unheard of exertions are made by Bible and Missionary Societies to spread the light of the glorious Gospel through the whole earth. And some Lodges of your extensive brotherhood, have done honor to themselves, by contributing generously to Bible Societies.

It will be natural for you to reflect, that the true ministers of Christ are engaged in promoting the happiness of the human race, by preaching the everlasting Gospel. You cannot, therefore, but wish them great success, since, in their work, they harmonize with you in your professions of benevolence. And when you consider how many more laborers are needed in God's vineyard, than those we now have, and that, in order to have a greater supply, indigent, pious young men must be educated for the ministry, you will at once see a door opened to advance the cause of benevolence by contributing, as far as you are able, to those Societies, now engaged in educating such young men for the ministry. A word to the be-

nevolent to show in what ways they may do good, is always sufficient. How will your hearts exult with joy to hear one and another hereafter cry, The glorious day, and our salvation, have been promoted by Masonic Lodges.

Only act according to the love you profess, and bring forth the fruits of it; you will then be one in sentiment, one in affection, and one in pursuit. You will rest on Christ, the Rock of Ages, and remain firm and unshaken as the pillars of heaven. But if the principles of a depraved world govern you, dissensions will prevail in your body, tarnish your glory, and terminate in your everlasting dissolution. Benevolence exalts and dignifies human nature, and renders persons and societies beautiful and glorious. But selfish affections degrade and sink our race almost to a level with the brute creation. Wherefore, let brotherly love continue; then, when your bodies moulder in the dust, your spirits will sing and rejoice around the Throne of God; and your bodies will finally arise and be glorious, like Christ's body, and, in union with the soul, partake of all the glories of the heavenly world.

A few words to the present assembly shall conclude.

Was our nation on this day declared independent ; and do we enjoy all the liberties and privileges, with which a people can be blessed ? What then is wanting to exalt our nation to the highest summit of earthly glory ? Nothing, but to have rulers and ruled governed in all their actions by this divine principle of love. Then divisions would cease ; and all the evils, which disturb the peace of societies, would disappear, as the dew is evaporated before the rising sun. Peace and righteousness would bless our land. By our exertions, the light and blessings of the Gospel might be diffused through the world.

How glorious will be that day, when kings and queens will nurse the church ; when they will see, that the only certain way to promote the prosperity of nations, will be to extend and build up the kingdom of Christ ; when the immense sums, now expended in filling the world with misery by bloody wars, will be devoted to the church, that her walls be praise, and her gates salvation ; when weapons of slaughter will be turned into implements of husbandry ; when savage men shall become innocent as doves, and

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the lion and the lamb shall feed together : Then the anniversary of our Independence will be spent in solemn prayer and devout praise ; and Masonic Lodges, if any should then exist, and societies of every name, would re-echo the sound through the earth, and the hearts of all men, with refined joy, would unite in ascriptions of glory to that God, who is love. Now let us hail the day, the dawning light of which begins to scatter the mists and clouds of darkness. Let us bend the knee before the Throne of Grace, and pray that every heart may be warmed with this love. Then, when worlds are no more, we shall meet all the benevolent in heaven, and rejoice in God, and in each other's happiness, forever. Amen.

