

February 6, 1966
John 7:1-9 (Phillips)

WE VACILLATE 'TWTXT LOVE AND HATE

"I provoke hatred because I show the world how evil
its deeds really are."

Reflecting on the modern philosophy which has come to be known as the God is dead theology, I have come to the conclusion that this is, on the part of a good many people, nothing more than wishful thinking. Why do some people wish God were dead? Because if God were dead, their lives and the actions of all mankind would not appear to be as evil as is now the case. The God is dead theology may well be an escape mechanism on the part of loveless men who cannot believe that God could be real when man is so depraved. Eliminate God and man's nature will not appear to be as evil as it now does appear to be.

The situation, if this analysis has any merit, is analagous to that faced by Jesus. He was too good for the world. The world hated him because by his life he demonstrated to the world how evil the world really was. His life was a constant judgment upon mankind, so he had to be put out of the way, got rid of. Men could not stand to see themselves through his eyes. Jesus' very historical existence is still a judgment upon men, upon their pride, their vanity and their sin. As a result we must declare that he never really existed, or that the God who inspired and empowered him is now dead.

II

Man, queer creature that he is, is indeed capable of a great love. He will lay down his life for a friend. He will often sacrifice himself for a principle. Think of the martyrs burned at the stake. Think of the sacrifices made by so many parents for their children. Love is one of the distinguishing marks of a human being. No other creature possesses such a capacity for it.

The Bible impresses it upon us; God loves the men he created in his own image:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that
whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting
life."

Jesus loved all men and gave himself for all men out of his great love. It is written:

"He loved us and gave himself for us."

We are admonished continually to love one another:

"Brethren, if God so loved us then we ought also to love
one another."

"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and his love is
perfected in us."

But unfortunately, it is not difficult for man's love to be turned suddenly into hate. Two people deeply in love get married. For awhile all is beautiful and idyllic. Then as time passes, love dims and hatred and bitterness take its place and the two who were meant to be one are driven apart.

Men are social creatures. They are driven to share. They atrophy and die inside without fellowship. But they are also driven by the will to survive, manifested by their greed, their selfishness, their pride and envy.

III

The cause of this vacillation between love and hate is man's failure to understand that he is a creature of two worlds, and therefore a creature with a dual nature. If he ever becomes convinced that life is eternal, that his physical existence in this materialistic world is but the prelude to a larger, spiritual existence for which he is now preparing, he will master his hatred and let love dominate his life. He will have lost his constant sense of fear and insecurity.

This incident took place just 10 years ago in Chicago. Into Children's Memorial Hospital one day came a 6-month old baby named Charlie. At the age of 6 months he weighed something less than 7 pounds. The diagnosis was uncertain. Charlie did nothing. He was absolutely quiet all day. Day after day he would not laugh, he would not coo, he would not cry. He responded to nothing. He was at first thought to be a spastic, possibly deaf, probably blind. His case was indeed tragic.

But Children's Memorial Hospital had just started a new experiment. They had originated a mother's bank consisting of a group of volunteer women of middle age whose duties were to take full charge of babies from the time the baby entered the hospital until it went home. One of the first volunteer mothers was a grandmother who at once demanded a rocking chair. She it was who was assigned to Charlie's case.

No one knew what was wrong with Charlie. His volunteer mother did not know. Her only task was to do for him what she had always done for her own children. She talked to him, sang to him, rocked him. Ten days later a remarkable truth became apparent. There was nothing wrong with Charlie, save for one thing--Charlie lacked love. He had been neglected. His mother had had no time for him. He had been left in charge of an eight-year-old sister. Once he began to feel the love, the care, the concern of his volunteer mother, his eyes began to follow her. His arms reached out to her. He responded to what was said to him. He began to eat and soon went home weighing 19 pounds, a transformed personality, all because of love.

Are you one of those skeptics who denies the miracles of the Bible? Here is a miracle as great as any ever recorded in holy writ, the complete transformation of a human life because of love. Just as that little six-month-old baby needed love to realize its full potential as a human being, so you need it and I need it. We need to be channels of love. We have to receive it and we have to give it or we are not real human beings. We are sick.

I ask you this morning this question. If you were absolutely certain beyond any shadow of a doubt that God loved you, that in his love he would always sustain and care for you and your loved ones, and would keep you in his care eternally, would that not make a tremendous difference in your life? Would it perhaps modify some of your goals? Would power, popularity and prestige have quite the same attraction they now have? Would you not begin to devote yourself with a new intensity to the development of your spiritual potential?

Is it not because we are uncertain of God's love and the love of our family and our friends that we live in a kind of constant insecurity and continually try to prove to ourselves and to others that we are worth something?

Such an attitude misconceives the real nature of life and of love. Do you suppose God loves us because we are worth loving? Did Christ love and forgive his executioners because he found them worthy of love? Not at all. Certainly not as they were. The only thing in them worth loving was their potential. That is the only thing worth loving in any of us, our potential. It is only love that can develop that potential.

Have you not experienced this yourself? Expect nothing of a person, criticize and belittle him and he cannot possibly produce up to his capacity. Expect something good of him, encourage him, love him, and he will grow and develop beyond your wildest expectations or his own. This is what love is; expecting the best, praying for the best, hoping for the best, and encouraging each person to bring out of himself the potential that God has put within him.

How much easier it is to hate than it is to love. How much easier to criticize, judge and condemn than to understand, appreciate and forgive. It is more difficult to love than to hate because love always demands that we give something of ourselves. That is why those who understand the love of God can love the most. You cannot give until you have received into your own mind and heart the love of God.

IV

"I provoke hatred because I show the world how evil its deeds really are." As a result many who heard Jesus did hate him and reject him. What they really needed to do, and what you and I need to do, is to come to know him better day by day. It is only as we know him, and the God who sent him, that we can grow in the understanding that will enable us to love at our best.

During the past several weeks, because I am a minister, I have shared the tragedies, the sorrows, the loneliness of many people. I have been in a mental institution, summoned by a young woman who longs to know God and cannot find him. I have been in several homes where death has claimed a loved one and left sorrow and sadness in its wake. I have had to do what many of you have done and talked with me about--move my mother out of the home in which she lived for so many years and loved so well, into an institution where she may get the care she now needs. It was one of the hardest things I ever did. The only thing that can sustain us and enable us to bear these losses and difficulties is the certain faith that

The love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

If you lack that faith and confidence, I feel terribly sorry for you, and I urge you to begin today to give to the search for it all your time and effort. Nothing is more essential and necessary to your well-being. Without it you cannot gain the love that will feed your mind and spirit and lift our world out of final despair and tragedy.

Paul said it all:

"Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends...Make love your aim."