

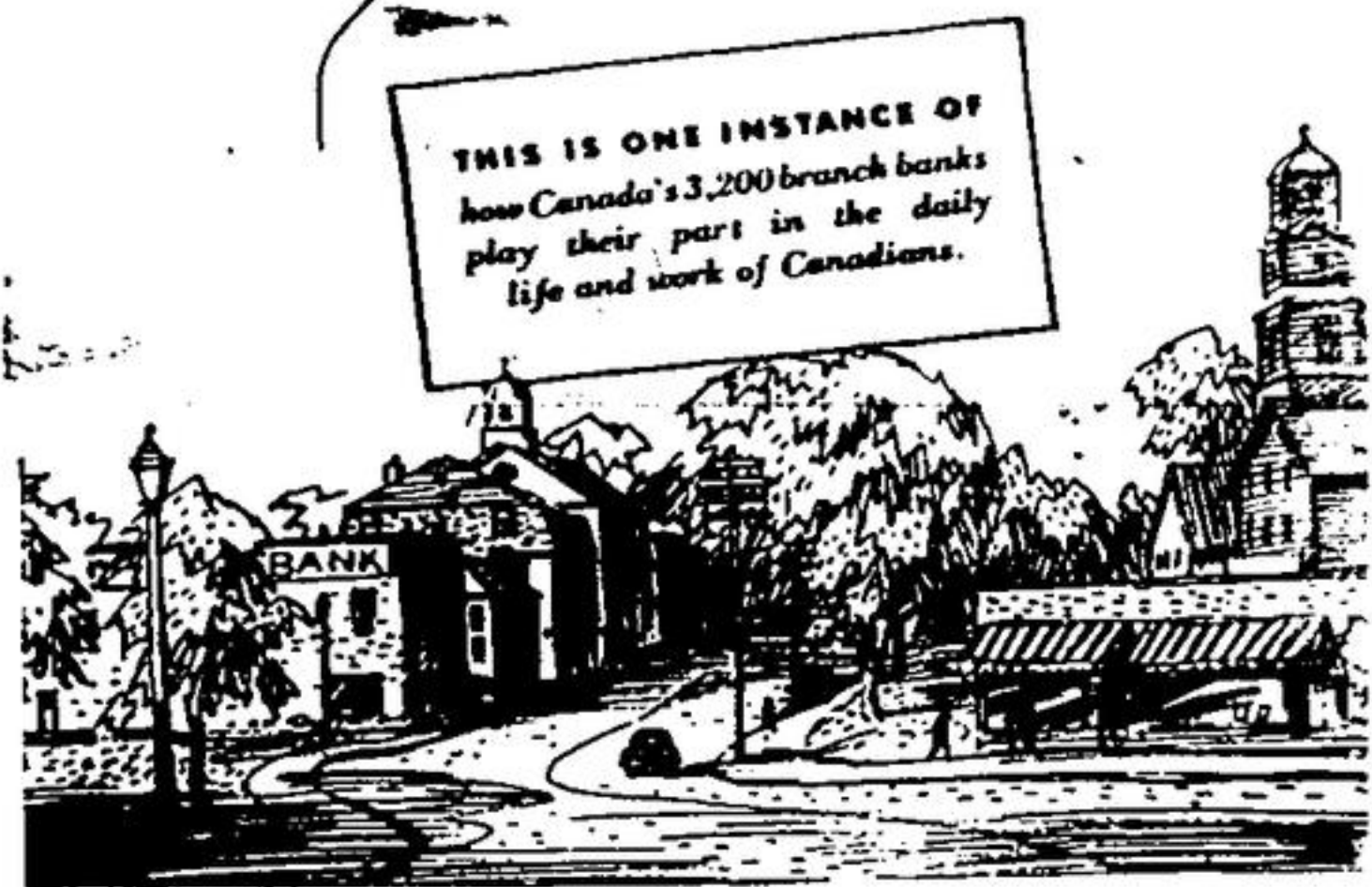


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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

by Rev. R. C. Todd
WITNESSES OF GOD

LESSON: 1 John, chaps. 4 and 5; 2 John.

In his Epistles, John takes the position that a Christian belief in God is an attitude to life which expresses itself in behaviour. "He that saith, 'I know him (God) and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar..." (1 John 2:4) And the most fundamental mark of a Christian belief in God is the attitude of love expressed in action; for "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

It is easy, of course, for a little word like "love" to remain abstract and vague and have little real bearing on actual life. John avoids this error by asking that we think and speak of love always in relation to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In him there is an interpretation of the meaning of love in terms of life and personality, which can be applied to any situation. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16) Dr. Moffatt's translation of this verse is even more significant: "We know what love is by this, that he laid down his life for us." What could be a better definition of the word "love," than Jesus Christ Himself?

He who accepts this definition and lives by it, is a believer in God, whatever his profession may be. He who does not live by it, is an atheist, no matter what he may profess to be. (1 John 4:15) The perfect expression of this "love," casts out fear. Fear is a mark of unbelief. One of the characteristics of the Capitalistic free-enterprise way of life, is that it leads a man to fear and self-centredness. He adopts a defensive attitude towards life and his fellow-men, feeling that he alone is responsible for what happens to him and to others for whom he thinks he is responsible. Perfect love casts out fear, for it leads a man to an attitude of faith and trust in a Higher Power which is guiding his destiny and the destiny of the world around him. (1 John 4:17-18).

Love is the root principle of community. It is that which unites men and binds them to each other in community! It may be the little community established when a man and a woman come together in marriage and form a home. It may be the community established in a nation.

Or it may be the community established in a society of nations. Without love, no home, village, nation or society of nations can be a community. For love is the root principle of community. "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). The man who established community between himself and other men, is giving expression to a fundamental belief in God.

For love is the root principle of community. "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). The man who establishes community between himself and other men, is giving expression to a fundamental belief in God. Jesus illustrated this truth with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the levite, professed believers, were of the same race as the wounded man whom they passed by. But they did not establish community with him. The Samaritan, however, a member of another race, and an atheist according to the standards of the priest and the levite, bound up his wounds, showing mercy and love, and thereby established community with him. Although of different races, they belonged to the same community. They were "neighbours". The Samaritan exhibited the fact that he

was the true believer in God.

Herein is revealed the contradiction between Christianity and the political organization of the modern world, a contradiction which must create that tension between the Christian and the world, of which we spoke in a former lesson. In practise our world consists of a number of large tribal groups each independent of the other and usually acting as if it were the chosen of God so that others do not count or even exist as members of society. Fundamentally, organizations such as the U.N.O. are outward expressions of that attitude which is a mark of belief, for they aim at the establishment of community between nations and the individuals within those nations. And the attitude we take towards the United Nations Organization may mark us as believers or unbelievers. The real Christian society or Church is the group of men and women who already, in anticipation, think and live in terms of that common humanity which under the God revealed in Jesus Christ, is the basis of the unification of mankind in a single community. Such a community must be inherently missionary. It must always be seeking to break down the exclusiveness which tries to limit actual community to groups which are less than the whole of mankind. And its enemies must always be those national religions, those limited and exclusive communions which refuse to give place to the universal community, and which resist the integration of humanity into a single community with a world government, in which God, who is love—rules.

The same principle applies in the home. It applies likewise in the nation, to those exclusive classes or groups or organizations which are less than the whole, and resist the integration of the members of the nation into a single community. This is true whether those groups be churches, or trade unions, or organizations of employers and business men, racial groups or the four hundred of society smarter than anyone else.

"If ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the sinners the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the sinners the same? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (III:5:46-48) And how is the Father perfect? In this, that He so loved the World that He gave"

(John 3:16). He so loved the WORLD, not a part of it, not a certain group here or a nation there. We find it comparatively easy, — comparatively — to love those who live with us in the same town, or are associated with us in the same religious denomination, or the same social class or club. In doing so we do only what the world does naturally. But belief in God demands a more inclusive love than this, being as it is the love of a God who "... so loved the WORLD..."

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). As Jesus said to the lawyer who asked him, "Who is my neighbour?" "This do, and thou shalt live." This do, — "walk after his commandments". (2 John 6). — and you exhibit to the world, the fact that you believe in God. Most of us in the western democracies, have become so bedevilled with the commercialism and "free-enterprise" emanating from the United States, that we can't make up our minds whether we believe in God or merely believe in believing in God. Soon we shall have to choose between a shortage of belief in God and a shortage of the United States dollars. God grant us boldness in that day of judgment.

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