

## “By-Laws”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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6<sup>th</sup> Sun. of Easter  
1 John 5:1-6  
John 15:9-17

*[According to the Apostle John,]*

*If we believe that Jesus is truly Christ, we are God’s children.*

*Everyone who loves the [Abba] Father will also love [God’s] children.*

*If we love and obey God, we know that we will love [God’s] children.*

1 John 5:1-2

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to believe that you are with us on this journey of life.

Help us to know and follow your commandments to live a good life.

Help us to show love and forgiveness to others as we grow in Christ-likeness...

Amen

Our lesson from 1<sup>st</sup> John 5 has sparked a memory from a Bible study  
about 35 years ago – when I was stationed in South Korea.

In October of 1981, I reported in as the new Battalion Maintenance Officer  
for the 304<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion at Camp Colbern  
for a one year tour in the Republic of Korea.

The post itself had a fenced perimeter for barracks and motor pools  
set on the side of a mountain with a beautiful valley beyond,  
with rice-fields that were a luminous green in the Spring.

We were the tactical back-up for US Army fixed station communications  
on the Korean peninsula.

There was still a curfew, then – which meant that everyone in the country  
had to be off the streets by 10:00 pm, unless otherwise authorized.  
‘Be happy, be authorized...’

Just a week before I landed in Korea, I had been in Japan  
where I met with an American missionary family who were  
friends of a friend from back home.

During my time with them, I recommitted my life to Christ,  
and now that I was at my duty station, I was anxious to be in a Bible study.

I was introduced to one of the sergeants who was a Christian  
and knowledgeable of the Bible, but he was leaving to ‘go back to the States’.

Even so, he got a couple of us started on the Three Epistles of John –  
letters to the early Church attributed to the Apostle John.

After he left, the new chaplain took over,  
and though he was not especially charismatic – he was a decent fellow,  
and provided us with an important insight about these epistles or letters.

After we had been reading a couple chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> John,  
the chaplain said he noticed that three words were being repeated:  
‘believe’, ‘know’, ‘love’...

Willard, p.2

Sure enough, we can find them in the opening verses of our reading today from 1 John 5:1-2...

*If we **believe** that Jesus is truly Christ, we are God's children.*

*Everyone who loves the [Abba] Father will also love [God's] children.*

*If we love and obey God, we **know** that we will **love** [God's] children.*

Another insight came from a young Korean man named Rhee Seong-ha – a civilian working in our post community center.

He had joined in on the Bible study, and I remember him pointing out that the Ten Commandments can be condensed to just two:

*“Love God” and “Love one another as oneself”.*

Then, he said that the Bible itself could be condensed down to one word: *Love.*

This was a new way of talking about what I had already figured was true from my experience at a high school church camp ten years before: that *love* is the central truth of Christianity.

The Apostle Paul has given us a profound description of this love of God in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 – which for many of you may be familiar as the “Love Chapter” which is frequently read at weddings;

It begins with:

*<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of [humankind] and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

and it ends with:

*Now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.*

*Now, I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.*

*<sup>13</sup> So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

There they are again: ‘faith’ is to ‘believe’, ‘hope’ is what you come to ‘know’, and ‘love’ is ‘love’.

I have come to believe and know that this kind of love characterizes the activity of the Holy Spirit – which is the *love of God* in action.

Another resource that has helped provide me with a working definition for this kind of ‘love’ is from the book by Erich Fromm called, The Art of Loving.

In it, he describes love as ‘the active concern’ for someone or something.

Dr. Fromm also explored the dangers of the opposite of love which is sadism and masochism – fear-based relationships, quite literally a “marriage made in hell”.

Sadism suppresses others’ freedom as a threat;

Masochism surrenders one’s freedom out of uncertainty.

Willard, p.3

Dr. Martin Luther King in his early writings and speeches

has provided us with a vision for a 'beloved community' that is possible  
as a social reality 'on Earth as it is in Heaven'.

He himself was inspired by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount,

as well as the words & deeds of Mahatma Gandhi, whose successful  
nonviolent struggle to free India from British rule, is an historical fact.

Dr. King also carried with him,

a copy of Howard Thurman's Jesus & The Disinherited,

the third chapter of which is dedicated to  
the theoretical applications of love as a spiritual strategy for social change.

These days, we are seeing an emerging 'love ethic' –

which I believe is the activity of the Holy Spirit,

demonstrating a spiritual authority

not unlike those non-violent social movements of the past –

which are also provoking a fierce push-back.

Reactionary animosity is nothing new, as it sadly motivates well-meaning people,

who get bamboozled by sado-masochistic narratives

meant to divide people and keep 'stirring the pot' of strife...

To *believe in something* is to project a vision ahead to strive for –

it doesn't even have to be practical at the outset.

You just have to have faith, like 'praying for peace'.

To *know something* is to achieve a level of confidence on which to base a hope –

this is where engineers, cooks, and marketing experts come into play.

To *love* is to put it all together, with people working in concert for a common goal,

a frictionless engine of perpetual motion...

Well... maybe that is still in the 'believing' stage!

If we were to look at the Biblical commandments as our 'constitution' –

especially "To love God" and "To love others as oneself",

we need some "by-laws" to help implement

the orderly practice of our faith, hope, and love as Christians.

Two "by-laws" seem to be emerging – whether we like it or not...

The first is "Cause & Effect" and the second is "The Golden Rule"...

Greater frequency of super storms and unusual seasonal temperatures

are forcing humanity to ask how and why this is happening.

The Scientific method does provide a way to do this by observing, questioning,

theorizing, experimenting, analyzing, and summarizing.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific\\_method#/media/File:The\\_Scientific\\_Method\\_\(simple\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method#/media/File:The_Scientific_Method_(simple).png)

The underlying principle that makes this process work –

whether we are talking about the weather, psychology, or murder mysteries,

is that for every outcome there's a reason, or Cause & Effect.

Willard, p.4

You would think that if that was all we learned in grammar school science class, that would be enough as one of the most important life skill lessons.

Actions have consequences – Cause & Effect.

This is how Nature works – No magic... and no mercy, but it is a rule that makes sense.

The second ‘by-law’ that appears to be emerging is,

‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’

It is the Golden Rule which is the third point of Jesus’ Sermon on The Mount, which I summarize in this way:

*You have heard that it was said, ‘One Way’,  
but I say to you, ‘God is still speaking’.*

*So don’t pray, donate serve just for show,  
because God is with you wherever you go.*

*Therefore, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ –  
or else.*

Cause & effect comes into play here, too,

in that Jesus said that there would be consequences

for failing to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger,

to shelter the vulnerable, to visit the sick and free the prisoner.

Yet this law also allows for the illogical option of mercy –

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”.

As people who believe in a “beloved community” that is possible,

we know from our own pain, the need for healing and forgiveness that

we must “Do unto others as we would have them do unto us” –

or else we will continue to have fear, disunity, and chaos.

Rational loving-kindness – which means: It makes sense to be kind,

is found in all the great religions and I would venture to say that

this applies to what is virtuous about science, too.

As scientists theorize and experience the joy of discovery,

they also know the responsibility to give credit where credit is due

for each other’s discoveries.

The Spirit of love is at work even among scientists.

Christianity is a faith that makes sense and works,

aligning us with the other great faiths,

but Christianity has its own unique message, too.

The United Church of Christ is likewise aligned with the great traditions

of our sister churches of other denominations,

and yet we have our own unique message, too.

Willard, p.5

One of the catchphrases going around from the “God Is Still Speaking” initiative is,  
“Our faith is 2,000 years old, our thinking is not.”

We know we are connected to what our tradition has handed down to us,  
but we also believe that there are new ways to share the love of Christ.

We have a faith that makes sense, because we know that the power of love  
has worked and will work in our lives as individuals, as a church,  
as a community, as a state and as a nation among nations –  
even for North & South Korea, and for all of the world that ‘God [has] so loved’.

A South Korean friend, CPT Park Hun-ha, an officer in the ROK Army, once told me  
about something he saw while stationed at the Demilitarized Zone:

A bird flew from his side over the barbed wire and guns of friend and foe –  
and back again; And he wondered, “Why can’t I do that...”

Let us believe in the hope that someday the love of Christ will prevail  
and the beloved community of God will come into power, even there...

I invite you to listen as I read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 adapted from the RSV...

*<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of [humankind] and of angels,  
but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*<sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers,  
and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,  
and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,  
but have not love, I am nothing.*

*<sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned,  
but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind;  
love is not jealous or boastful; <sup>5</sup> it is not arrogant or rude.  
Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;  
<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.*

*<sup>7</sup>Love bears all things,  
believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup>Love never ends;  
as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease;  
as for knowledge, it will pass away.*

*<sup>9</sup>For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;  
<sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.*

*<sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child;  
when I became [an adult], I gave up childish ways.*

*Now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.  
Now, I know in part; then [someday] I shall understand fully,  
even as I have been fully understood.*

*<sup>13</sup>So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Amen

*Our lesson from 1 John 5:1-6 as found in the Contemporary English Version,  
emphasizes the theme of love as proper conduct for Christians,  
but also the significance of “believing” and “knowing”*

- <sup>1</sup>If we believe that Jesus is truly Christ, we are God’s children.  
Everyone who loves the [Abba] Father will also love [God’s] children.
- <sup>2</sup>If we love and obey God,  
we know that we will love [God’s] children.
- <sup>3</sup>We show our love for God by obeying [God’s] commandments,  
and they are not hard to follow.
- <sup>4</sup>Every child of God can defeat the world,  
and our faith is what gives us this victory.
- <sup>5</sup>No one can defeat the world  
without having faith in Jesus as the Son of God.
- <sup>6</sup>Water and blood came out from the side of Jesus Christ.  
It wasn’t just water, but water and blood.  
The Spirit tells about this, because the Spirit is truthful.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

John 15:9-17

[Jesus said,]

<sup>9</sup> As the [Abba] Father has loved me, so have I loved you;  
abide in my love.

<sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,  
just as I have kept my [Abba] Father's commandments  
and abide in [God's] love.

<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you,  
and that your joy may be full.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment,  
that you love one another as I have loved you.

<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no [one] than this,  
that a [person] lay down [their] life for [their] friends.

<sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you.

<sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants,  
for the servant does not know what [their] master is doing;  
but I have called you friends,  
for all that I have heard from my [Abba] Father  
I have made known to you.

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me,  
but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit  
and that your fruit should abide;  
so that whatever you ask the [Abba] Father in my name,  
[God] may give it to you.

<sup>17</sup> This I command you,  
to love one another.