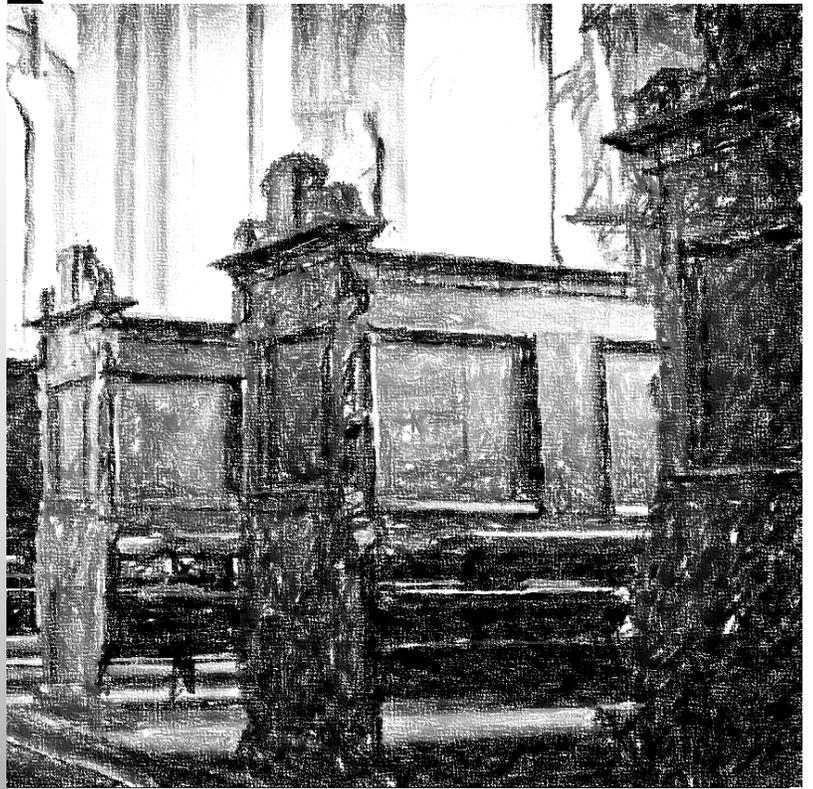




St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 3:13-24

The Apostle John returns to a binary again with highlighting hate versus love. As a way of reminder, consider the previous binaries that John has laid forth:

Life – Death	Know God – Don't Know God
Love – Hate	Child of God – Child of Devil
Truth – Lies	Good Works – Evil Works
Abel – Cain	Confess Sins – No Sin
Light – Dark	No Walk-in Sin – Walks in Sin

With respect to hate and love, hate leads forth to threats, destruction, and scorn. Thinking of Cain, his hate led to the destruction of his brother Abel. However, contrasting his hate with love, you find Jesus doing the opposite of Cain. We know love not by the taking of a life, but by the giving of a life for another.

And so, love is not necessarily a feeling. Love is not a fluffy-vacuous-sentiment. Love is a verb. Love is Christ willingly giving His life as a sacrificing atonement for humankind. As an old professor once said, *"For God so loved the world that He did not have a fluffy – no – He 'gave' His only unique Son..."*

Now, with respect to love and hate, John tells the reader not to be astonished that the world hates Christians. In other words, John tells the reader not to marvel or be astonished by the fact that the world hates, detests, and is loveless to those in the Light. Not only does this reality of the world's hatred prevent Christians from being naïve to the reality of life, but it also has huge implications on the ways in which the church does evangelism and outreach.

Let's think of it this way. Too often, the church does evangelism to a world that they imagine neutral with respect to the Gospel. For example, we think that the world is like a stick-shift that is in neutral. And so, all one has to do is nudge a pagan from neutral to forward. However, the world is not neutral to the Light – as indicated by John. The world is hostile to Light. The world is in 'reverse.'

Another way to consider this idea is that mankind is not a motionless stone or block of wood. Mankind (pagans) are actually much worse. Our Lutheran

Confessions comment on mankind saying the following:

"And in this respect, it may well be said that man is not a stone or block. For a stone or block does not resist the person who moves it, nor does it understand and is sensible of what is being done with it, as man with his will so long resists God the Lord until he is [has been] converted. ...in this respect [mankind is] much worse than a stone and block; for he resists the Word and will of God, until God awakens him from the death of sin, enlightens and renews him."

Thus, the world is not just an earthly and ordinary everyday life, but one lived in a dark vale of tears. The world is dark. The world is in reverse. The world is not neutral. And people? They are not blocks of wood or neutral stones. They are opposed to the Light –hostile to the message of the Gospel. They don't run to the Light but run into darkness.

And so, it is important to reiterate that Christians should be sober-minded about two things. First, this life is lived in a world of corruption and threats. The world hated Jesus; it will hate Christians – it hates the Light. Second, the people are not neutral or 'open and friendly' to the Light. People love darkness because they are sinners. Therefore, we should not be alarmed when the world persecutes the church. And furthermore, we should not be so naïve to use bait-and-switch tactics to try and convert or nudge people into the church. NO! The Word of God MUST invade people, and they MUST be converted by the Holy Spirit through the Word. If people are not converted by the Holy Spirit through the Word, they will only be in the church as long as their old Adam is entertained and satisfied.

Finally, it is worth taking note of verse 20. What do we – as Christians – do when our hearts condemn us? An old Lutheran theologian named, Kretzmann, has some wonderful thoughts for us to consider:

"As the Christian grows in sanctification, he will often find that his heart is dissatisfied with the progress made, and therefore proceeds to accuse him of lack of love. . . . We are far from perfection. . . . God is greater, a more reliable Judge than our heart, and He has given us the definite assurance in His Word that all our shortcomings in the matter of perfect righteousness will be made up through the perfect righteousness of our Savior, as it was imputed to us by faith."

Yes, indeed, we do not love perfectly as Christians. Thus, we do not live in the condemnation of our hearts (because our hearts often condemn us). But instead, we rest in the external Gospel – what God says to us on account of Christ.

