

# Homily 8 1 John 4:12-16

by St. Augustine

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of selfless love and charity, and warns against the dangers of pride and selfishness.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 16:2, Matthew 9:12, Luke 15:4, Romans 5:5, Hebrews 12:6, 1 John 4:12-16

**Topics:** "Gods Love", "Christian Charity"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of love, emphasizing that loving one another is a powerful way for God to abide in us and for His love to be perfected in us. He highlights the significance of confessing Jesus as the Son of God, which leads to God dwelling in us and us in God. Augustine urges believers to practice charity and mercy, not for the praise of men but for the glory of God, as true love is rooted in wishing well for others. He contrasts the works of pride, driven by self-glory, with the works of charity that are motivated by a genuine desire to help and uplift others. Augustine encourages the congregation to love their enemies, as in doing so, they are loving their brethren and imitating Christ's example of forgiveness and transformation.

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## Transcript

If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love will be perfected in us. In this know we that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and are witnesses that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1. Love is a sweet word, but sweeter the deed. To be always speaking of it, is not in our power: for we have many things to do, and various businesses draw us different ways, so that our tongue has not leisure to be always speaking of love: as indeed our tongue could have nothing better to do. But though we may not always be speaking of it, we may always keep it. Just as it is with the Alleluia which we sing at this present time, are we always doing this? Not one hour, I do not say for the whole space of it, do we sing Alleluia, but barely during a few moments of one hour, and then give ourselves to something else. Now Alleluia, as you already know, means, Praise ye the Lord. He that praises God with his tongue, cannot be always doing this: he that by his life and conduct praises God, can be doing it always. Works of mercy, affections of charity, sanctity of piety, incorruptness of chastity, modesty of sobriety, these things are always to be practiced: whether we are in public, or at home; whether before men, or in our chamber;

whether speaking, or holding our peace; whether occupied upon something, or free from occupation: these are always to be kept, because all these virtues which I have named are within. But who is sufficient to name them all? There is as it were the army of an emperor seated within in your mind. For as an emperor by his army does what he will, so the Lord Jesus Christ, once beginning to dwell in our inner man, (i.e. in the mind through faith), uses these virtues as His ministers. And by these virtues which cannot be seen with eyes, and yet when they are named are praised-- and they would not be praised except they were loved, not loved except they were seen; and if not loved except seen, they are seen with another eye, that is, with the inward beholding of the heart-- by these invisible virtues, the members are visibly put in motion: the feet to walk, but whither? Whither they are moved by the good will which as a soldier serves the good emperor: the hands to work; but what? That which is bidden by charity which is inspired within by the Holy Ghost. The members then are seen when they are put in motion; He that orders them within is not seen: and who He is that orders them within is known almost alone to Him that orders, and to him who within is ordered.

2. For, brethren, you heard just now when the Gospel was read, at least if you had for it the ear not only of the body but also of the heart. What said it? Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them. Matthew 6:1 Did He mean to say this, that whatever good things we do, we should hide them from the eyes of men, and fear to be seen? If you fear spectators you will not have imitators: you ought therefore to be seen. But you must not do it to the end you may be seen.

Not there should be the end of your joy, not there the goal of your rejoicing, that you should account yourself to have gotten the whole fruit of your good work, when you are seen and praised. This is nothing. Despise yourself when you are praised, let Him be praised in you who works by you. Therefore do not for your own praise work the good you do, but to the praise of Him from whom you have the power to do good. From your self you have the ill doing, from God you have the well doing.

On the other hand, see perverse men, how preposterous they are. What they do well, they will needs ascribe to themselves; if they do ill, they will needs accuse God. Reverse this distorted and preposterous proceeding, which puts the thing, as one may say, head downwards, which makes that undermost which is uppermost, and that upwards which is downwards. Do you want to make God undermost and yourself uppermost? You go headlong, not elevatest yourself; for He is always above. What then?

You well, and God ill? Nay rather, say this, if you would speak more truly, I ill, He well; and what I do well from Him is the well-doing: for from myself whatever I do is ill. This confession strengthens the heart, and makes a firm foundation of love. For if we ought to hide our good works lest they be seen of men, what becomes of that sentence of the Lord in the sermon which He delivered on the mount? Where He said this, there He also said a little before, Let your good works shine before men.

Matthew 5:16 And He did not stop there, did not there make an end, but added, And glorify your Father which is in Heaven. And what says the apostle? And I was unknown by face unto the Churches of Judea which were in Christ: but they heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past, now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And in me they glorified God. Galatians 1:22-24 See how he also, in regard that he became so widely known did not set the good in his own praise, but in the praise of God.

And as for him, in his own person, that he was one who laid waste the Church, a persecutor, envious, malignant, it is himself that confesses this, not we that reproach him therewith. Paul loves to have his sins spoken of by us, that He may be glorified who healed such a disease. For it was the hand of the Physician

that cut and healed the greatness of the sore. That voice from heaven prostrated the persecutor, and raised up the preacher; killed Saul, and quickened Paul. For Saul was the persecutor of a holy man; thence had this man his name, when he persecuted the Christians: 1 Samuel xix afterward of Saul he became Paul.

What does the name Paulus mean? Little. Therefore when he was Saul, he was proud, lifted up; when he was Paul, he was lowly, little. Thus we say, I will see you paulo post, i.e. after a little while. Hear that he was made little: For I am the least of the apostles; and, To me the least of all saints, he says in another place. So was he among the apostles as the hem of the garment: but the Church of the Gentiles touched it, as did the woman which had the flux, and was made whole. Matthew 9:20-22

3. Then, brethren, this I would say, this I do say, this if I might I would not leave unsaid: Let there be in you now these works, now those, according to the time, according to the hours, according to the days. Are you always to be speaking? Always to keep silence? Always to be refreshing the body? Always to be fasting? Always to be giving bread to the needy? Always to be clothing the naked? Always to be visiting the sick? Always to be bringing into agreement them that disagree? Always to be burying the dead? No: but now this, now that. These things are taken in hand, and they stop: but that which as emperor commands all the forces within neither has beginning nor ought to stop. Let charity within have no intermission: let the offices of charity be exhibited according to the time. Let brotherly love then, as it is written, let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13:1

4. But perchance it will have struck some of you all along, while we have been expounding to you this epistle of blessed John, why it is only brotherly love that he so emphatically commends. He that loves his brother, says he: and, a commandment is given us that we love one another. Again and again it is of brotherly love that he speaks: but the love of God, i.e. the love with which we ought to love God, he has not so constantly named; howbeit, he has not altogether left it unspoken. But concerning love of an enemy, almost throughout the epistle, he has said nothing. Although he vehemently preaches up and commends charity to us, he does not tell us to love our enemies, but tells us to love our brethren. But just now, when the Gospel was read, we heard, For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? Matthew 5:46 How is it then that John the apostle, as the thing of great concern to us in order to a certain perfection, commends brotherly love; whereas the Lord says it is not enough that we love our brethren, but that we ought to extend that love so that we may reach even to enemies? He that reaches even unto enemies does not overleap the brethren. It must needs, like fire, first seize upon what is nearest, and so extend to what is further off. A brother is nearer to you than any chance person. Again, that person has more hold upon you whom you know not, who yet is not against you, than an enemy who is also against you. Extend your love to them that are nearest, yet do not call this an extending: for it is almost loving yourself, to love them that are close to you. Extend it to the unknown, who have done you no ill. Pass even them: reach on to love your enemies. This at least the Lord commands. Why has the apostle here said nothing about loving an enemy.

5. All love, whether that which is called carnal, which is wont to be called not dilectio but amor: (for the word dilectio is wont to be used of better objects, and to be understood of better objects:) yet all love, dear brethren, has in it a wishing well to those who are loved. For we ought not so to love, nor are we able so to love, (whether diligere or amare: for this latter word the Lord used when He said, Petra, amas me? Peter, do you love me?) we ought not so to love men, as we hear gluttons say, I love thrushes. Thou ask why he loves them? That he may kill, that he may consume. He says he loves, and to this end loves he them, that they may cease to be; to this end loves he them, that he may make away with them. And whatever we

love in the way of food, to this end love we it, that it may be consumed and we recruited. Are men to be so loved as to be consumed? But there is a certain friendliness of well wishing, by which we desire at some time or other to do good to those whom we love. How if there be no good that we can do? The benevolence, the wishing well, of itself suffices him that loves. For we ought not to wish men to be wretched, that we may be enabled to practise works of mercy. You give bread to the hungry: but better it were that none hungered, and you had none to give to. Thou clothest the naked: oh that all were clothed, and this need existed not! Thou buriest the dead: oh that it had come at last, that life where none shall die! Thou reconcilest the quarrelling: oh that it were here at last, that eternal peace of Jerusalem, where none shall disagree! For all these are offices done to necessities. Take away the wretched; there will be an end to works of mercy. The works of mercy will be at an end: shall the ardor of charity be quenched? With a truer touch of love you love the happy man, to whom there is no good office you can do; purer will that love be, and far more unalloyed. For if you have done a kindness to the wretched, perchance you desire to lift up yourself over against him, and wishest him to be subject to you, who hast done the kindness to him. He was in need, you bestowed; you seem to yourself greater because you bestowed, than he upon whom it was bestowed. Wish him your equal, that you both may be under the One Lord, on whom nothing can be bestowed.

6. For in this the proud soul has passed bounds, and, in a manner, become avaricious. For, The root of all evils is avarice; 1 Timothy 6:10 and again it is said, The beginning of all sin is pride. Sirach 10:15 And we ask, it may be, how these two sentences agree: The root of all evils is avarice; and, The beginning of all sin is pride. If pride is the beginning of all sin, then is pride the root of all evils. Now certainly, the root of all evils is avarice. We find that in pride there is also avarice, (or grasping;) for man has passed bounds: and what is it to be avaricious to go beyond that which suffices. Adam fell by pride: the beginning of all sin is pride, says it: did he fall by grasping? What more grasping, than he whom God could not suffice? In fact, my brethren, we read how man was made after the image and likeness of God: and what said God of him? And let him have power over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the heaven, and over all cattle which move upon the earth. Genesis 1:26 Said He, Have power over men? Have power, says He: He has given him natural power: have power over what? over the fishes of the sea, the fowl of the heaven, and all moving things which move upon the earth. Why is this power over these things a natural power? Because man has the power from this; that he was made after the image of God. And in what was he made after God's image? In the intellect, in the mind, in the inner man; in that he understands truth, distinguishes between right and wrong, knows by whom he was made, is able to understand his Creator, to praise his Creator: he has this intelligence, who has prudence. Therefore when many by evil lusts wore out in themselves the image of God, and by perversity of their manners extinguished the very flame, so to say, of intelligence, the Scripture cried aloud to them, Become not ye as the horse and mule which have no understanding. That is to say, I have set you above the horse and mule; you, I made after my image, I have given you power over these. Why? Because they have not the rational mind: but you by the rational mind art capable of truth, understandest what is above you: be subject to Him that is above you, and beneath you shall those things be over which you were set. But because by sin man deserted Him whom he ought to be under, he is made subject to the things which he ought to be above.

7. Mark what I say: God, man, beasts: to wit, above you, God; beneath you, the beasts. Acknowledge Him that is above you, that those that are beneath you may acknowledge you. Daniel 6:22 Thus, because Daniel acknowledged God above him, the lions acknowledged him above them. But if you acknowledge not Him that is above you, you despise your superior, you become subject to your inferior. Accordingly, how was the pride of the Egyptians quelled? By the means of frogs and flies. Exodus viii God might have

sent lions: but a great man may be scared by a lion. The prouder they were, the more by the means of things contemptible and feeble was their wicked neck broken. But Daniel, lions acknowledge, because he was subject to God. What the martyrs who were cast to the wild beasts to fight with them, and were torn by the teeth of savage creatures, were they not under God? Or were those three men servants of God, and the Maccabees not servants of God? The fire acknowledged as God's servants the three men, whom it burned not, neither hurt their garments; Daniel 3:50 and did it not acknowledge the Maccabees? 2 Maccabees vii It acknowledged the Maccabees; it did, my brethren, acknowledge them also. But there was need of a scourge, by the Lord's permission: He has said in Scripture, He scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 For think ye, my brethren, the iron would have pierced into the vitals of the Lord unless He had permitted it, or that He would have hung fastened to the tree, unless it had been His will? Did not His own creature acknowledge Him? Or did He set an ensample of patience to His faithful ones? You see then, God delivered some visibly, some He delivered not visibly: yet all He spiritually delivered, spiritually deserted none. Visibly He seemed to have deserted some, some He seemed to have rescued. Therefore rescued He some, that you may not think that He had not power to rescue. He has given proof that He has the power, to the end that where he does it not, you may understand a more secret will, not surmise difficulty of doing. But what, brethren? When we shall have come out of all these snares of mortality, when the times of temptation shall have passed away, when the river of this world shall have fledged by, and we shall have received again that first robe, that immortality which by sinning we have lost, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, that is, this flesh shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality; 1 Corinthians 15:44-49 the now perfected sons of God, in whom is no more need to be tempted, neither to be scourged, shall all creatures acknowledge: subjected to us shall all things be, if we here be subjected to God.

8. So then ought the Christian to be, that he glory not over other men. For God has given it you to be over the beasts, i.e. to be better than the beasts. This have you by nature; you shall always be better than a beast. If you wish to be better than another man, you will begrudge him when you shall see him to be your equal. You ought to wish all men to be your equals; and if by wisdom you surpass any, you ought to wish that he also may be wise. As long as he is slow, he learns from you; as long as he is untaught, he has need of you; and you are seen to be the teacher, he the learner; therefore you seem to be the superior, because you are the teacher; he the inferior, because the learner. Except you wish him your equal, you wish to have him always a learner. But if you wish to have him always a learner, you will be an envious teacher. If an envious teacher, how will you be a teacher? I pray you, do not teach him your enviousness. Hear the apostle speaking of the bowels of charity: I would that all were even as I. 1 Corinthians 7:7 In what sense did he wish all to be his equals? In this was he superior to all, that by charity he wished all to be his equals. I say then, man has past bounds; he would needs be greedy of more than his due, would be above men, he that was made above the beasts: and this is pride.

9. And see what great works pride does. Lay it up in your hearts, how much alike, how much as it were upon a par, are the works it does, and the works of charity. Charity feeds the hungry, and so does pride: charity, that God may be praised; pride, that itself may be praised. Charity clothes the naked, so does pride: charity fasts, so does pride: charity buries the dead, so does pride. All good works which charity wishes to do, and does; pride, on the other hand, drives at the same, and, so to say, keeps her horses up to the mark.

But charity is between her and it, and leaves not place for ill-driven pride; not ill-driving, but ill-driven. Woe to the man whose charioteer is pride, for he must needs go headlong! But that, in the good that is done, it

may not be pride that sets us on, who knows? Who sees it? Where is it? The works we see: mercy feeds, pride also feeds; mercy takes in the stranger, pride also takes in the stranger; mercy intercedes for the poor, pride also intercedes. How is this? In the works we see no difference.

I dare to say somewhat, but not I; Paul has said it: charity dies, that is, a man having charity confesses the name of Christ, suffers martyrdom: pride also confesses, suffers also martyrdom. The one has charity, the other has not charity. But let him that has not charity hear from the apostle: If I distribute all my goods to the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 So then the divine Scripture calls us off from the display of the face outwardly to that which is within; from this surface which is vaunted before men, it calls us off to that which is within.

Return to your own conscience, question it. Do not consider what blossoms outwardly, but what root there is in the ground. Is lust rooted there? A show there may be of good deeds, truly good works there cannot be. Is charity rooted there? Have no fear: nothing evil can come of that. The proud caresses, love is severe. The one clothes, the other smites. For the one clothes in order to please men, the other smites in order to correct by discipline. More accepted is the blow of charity than the alms of pride.

Come then within, brethren; and in all things, whatsoever ye do, look unto God your witness. See, if He sees, with what mind ye do it. If your heart accuse you not that you do it for the sake of display, it is well: fear ye not. But when you do good, fear not lest another see you. Fear lest you do it to the end that you may be praised: let the other see it, that God may be praised. For if you hide it from the eyes of man, you hide it from the imitation of man, you withdraw from God His praise.

Two are there to whom you do the alms: two hunger; one for bread, the other for righteousness. Between these two famishing souls:-- as it is written, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled: Matthew 5:6 -- between these two famishing persons you the doer of the good work art set; if charity does the work by occasion of the one, therein it has pity on both, it would succor both. For the one craves what he may eat, the other craves what he may imitate.

You feed the one, give yourself as a pattern to the other; so have you given alms to both: the one you have caused to thank you for killing his hunger, the other you have made to imitate you by setting him an example.

10. Show mercy then, as men of merciful hearts; because in loving enemies also, you love brethren. Think not that John has given no precept concerning love of our enemy, because he has not ceased to speak of brotherly love. You love brethren. How, do you say, do we love brethren? I ask wherefore you love an enemy. Wherefore do you love him? That he may be whole in this life? What if it be not expedient for him? That he may be rich? What if by his very riches he shall be blinded?

That he may marry a wife? What if he shall have a bitter life of it? That he may have children? What if they shall be bad? Uncertain therefore are these things which you seem to wish for your enemy, in that you love him; they are uncertain. Wish for him that he may have with you eternal life; wish for him that he may be your brother: when you love him, you love a brother. For you love in him not what he is, but what you wish that he may be. I once said to you, my beloved, if I mistake not: There is a log of timber lying in sight; a good workman has seen the log, not yet planed, just as it was hewn from the forest, he has taken a liking to it, he would make something out of it.

For indeed he did not love it to this end that it should always remain thus. In his art he has seen what it shall be, not in his liking what it is; and his liking is for the thing he will make of it, not for the thing it is. So God loved us sinners. We say that God loved sinners: for He says, They that are whole need not the Physician, but they that are sick. Matthew 9:12 Did He love us sinners to the end we should still remain sinners? As timber from the wood our Carpenter saw us, and had in His thoughts the building He would make thereof, not the unwrought timber that it was.

So too you see your enemy striving against you, raging, biting with words, exasperating with contumelies, harassing with hatred: you have regard to this in him, that he is a man. You see all these things that are against you, that they were done by man; and you see in him that he was made by God. Now that he was made man, was God's doing: but that he hates you, is his doing; that he has ill-will at you, is his doing. And what do you say in your mind? Lord, be merciful to him, forgive him his sins, strike terror into him, change him.

You love not in him what he is, but what you wish him to be. Consequently, when you love an enemy, you love a brother. Wherefore, perfect love is the loving an enemy: which perfect love is in brotherly love. And let no man say that John the apostle has admonished us somewhat less, and the Lord Christ somewhat more. John has admonished us to love the brethren; Christ has admonished us to love even enemies. Mark to what end Christ has bidden you to love your enemies. That they may remain always enemies?

If He bade it for this end, that they should remain enemies, you hate, not lovest. Mark how He Himself loved, i.e. because He would not that they should be still the persecutors they were, He said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 Whom He willed to be forgiven, them He willed to be changed: whom He willed to be changed, of enemies He deigned to make brethren, and did in truth make them so. He was killed, was buried, rose again, ascended into heaven: sent the Holy Ghost to His disciples: they began with boldness to preach His name, they did miracles in the name of Him that was crucified and slain: those slayers of the Lord saw them; and they who in rage had shed His blood, by believing drank it.

11. These things have I said, brethren, and somewhat at length: yet because charity was to be more earnestly commended to you, beloved, in this way was it to be commended. For if there be no charity in you, we have said nothing. But if it be in you, we have as it were cast oil upon the flames. And in whom it was not, perchance by words it has been kindled. In one; that which was there has grown; in another, that has begun to be, which was not. To this end therefore have we said these things, that you be not slow to love your enemies. Does any man rage against you? He rages, you pray; he hates, you pity. It is the fever of his soul that hates you: he will be whole, and will thank you. How do physicians love them that are sick? Is it the sick that they love? If they love them as sick, they wish them to be always sick. To this end love they the sick; not that they should still be sick, but that from being sick they should be made whole. And how much have they very often to suffer from the frenzied! What contumelious language! Very often they are even struck by them. He attacks the fever, forgives the man. And what shall I say, brethren? Does he love his enemy? Nay, he hates his enemy, the disease; for it is this that he hates, and loves the man by whom he is struck: he hates the fever. For by whom or by what is he struck? By the disease, by the sickness, by the fever. He takes away that which strives against him, that there may remain that from which he shall have thanks. So do thou. If your enemy hate you, and unjustly hate you; know that the lust of the world reigns in him, therefore he hates you. If you also hate him, you on the other hand render evil for evil. What does it, to render evil for evil? I wept for one sick man who hated you; now bewail I you, if you also hate. But he attacks your property; he takes from you I know not what things which you have on

earth: therefore do you hate him, because he puts you to straits on earth. Be not straitened, remove to heaven above; there shall you have your heart where there is wide room, so that you may not be straitened in the hope of life eternal. Consider what the things are that he takes from you: not even them would he take from you, but by permission of Him who scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 He, this same enemy of yours, is in a manner the instrument in the hands of God, by which you may be healed. If God knows it to be good for you that he should despoil you, He permits him; if He knows it to be good for you that you should receive blows, He permits him to smite you: by the means of Him He cares for you: wish that he may be made whole.

12. No man has seen God at any time. See, beloved: If we love one another, God will dwell in us, and His love will be perfected in us. 1 John 4:12 Begin to love; you shall be perfected. Have you begun to love? God has begun to dwell in you: love Him that has begun to dwell in you, that by more perfect indwelling He may make you perfect. In this we know that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 1 John 4:13 It is well: thanks be to God! We come to know that He dwells in us. And whence come we to know this very thing, to wit, that we do know that He dwells in us? Because John himself has said this: Because He has given us of His Spirit. Whence know we that He has given us of His Spirit? This very thing, that He has given you of His Spirit, whence do you come to know it? Ask your own bowels: if they are full of charity, you have the Spirit of God. Whence know we that by this you know that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. Romans 5:5

13. And we have seen, and are witnesses, that God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. 1 John 4:14 Set your minds at rest, you that are sick: such a Physician has come, and do ye despair? Great were the diseases, incurable were the wounds, desperate was the sickness. Do you note the greatness of your ill, and not note the omnipotence of the Physician? You are desperate, but He is omnipotent; Whose witnesses are these that first were healed, and that announce the Physician: yet even they are made whole in hope rather than in the reality. For so says the apostle: For by hope we are saved. hope, not the reality. But he that rejoices in hope shall hold the reality also: whereas he that has not the hope, shall not be able to attain unto the reality.

14. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God. Now we may say it in not many words; Whosoever shall confess; not in word but in deed, not with tongue but with the life. For many confess in words, but in deeds deny: And we have known and believed the love which God has in us. 1 John 4:16 And again, by what have you come to know this? Love is God. He has already said it above, behold he says it again. Love could not be more exceedingly commended to you than that it should be called God .

Haply you were ready to despise a gift of God. And do you despise God? Love is God: and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God dwells in him. Each mutually inhabites the other; He that holds, and he that is holden. You dwell in God, but that you may be holden: God inhabites you, but that He may hold you, lest you fall. Lest haply you imagine that you become an house of God in such sort as your house supports your flesh: if the house in which you are withdraw itself from under you, you fall, but if you withdraw yourself, God falls not.

When you forsake Him, He is none the less; when you have returned unto Him, He is none the greater. You are healed, on Him you will bestow nothing; you are made clean, you are new-made, you are set right: He is a medicine to the unhealthy, is a rule for the crooked, is light for the bedarkened, is an

habitation for the deserted. All therefore is conferred on you: see that you imagine not that ought is conferred upon God by your coming unto Him: no, not so much as a slave. Shall God, forsooth, not have servants if you like not, if all like not?

God needs not the servants, but the servants need God: therefore says the Psalm, I have said unto the Lord, you are my God. He is the true Lord. And what says it? For of my goods You have no need. Thou needest the good you have by your servant. Your servant needs the good he has by you, that you may feed him; you also need the good you have by your servant, that he may help you. You can not draw water for yourself, canst not cook for yourself, canst not run before your horse, canst not tend your beast.

You see that you need the good you have by your servant, you need his attendance. Therefore you are not a true lord, while you have need of an inferior. He is the true Lord, who seeks nothing from us; and woe to us if we seek not Him! He seeks nothing from us: yet He sought us, when we sought not Him. One sheep had strayed; He found it, He brought it back on His shoulders rejoicing. Luke 15:4-5 And was the sheep necessary for the Shepherd, and not rather the Shepherd necessary for the sheep?-- The more I love to speak of charity, the less willing am I that this epistle should be finished.

None is more ardent in the commending of charity. Nothing more sweet is preached to you, nothing more wholesome drunk by you: but only thus if by godly living ye confirm in you the gift of God. Be not ungrateful for His so great grace, who, though He had one Only Son, would not that He should be alone a Son; but, that He might have brethren, adopted unto Him those who should with Him possess life eternal.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-augustine/homily-8-1-john-412-16/>

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