


Key Bible Verse: John 15:13

⁹As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. ¹⁰If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. ¹¹These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. ¹²This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. ¹³**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.** ¹⁴Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. ¹⁵Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. ¹⁶Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. ¹⁷These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Dr. Van Dyke's Spiritual Consolation to the Survivors of the Titanic

[a preface to *Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters: A Detailed and Accurate Account of the Most Awful Marine Disaster in History, Constructed from the Real Facts as Obtained from Those on Board Who Survived*]

he Titanic, greatest of ships, has gone to her ocean grave. What has she left behind her? Think clearly.

She has left debts. Vast sums of money have been lost. Some of them are covered by insurance which will be paid. The rest is gone. All wealth is insecure.

She has left lessons. The risk of running the northern course when it is menaced by icebergs is revealed. The cruelty of sending a ship to sea without enough life-boats and life-rafts to hold her company is exhibited and underlined in black.

She has left sorrows. Hundreds of human hearts and homes are in

mourning for the loss of dear companions and friends. The universal sympathy which is written in every face and heard in every voice proves that man is more than the beasts that perish. It is an evidence of the divine in humanity. Why should we care? There is no reason in the world, unless there is something in us that is different from lime and carbon and phosphorus, something that makes us mortals able to suffer together --

"For we have all of us an human heart."

But there is more than this harvest of debts, and lessons, and sorrows, in the tragedy of the sinking of the Titanic. There is a

great ideal. It is clearly outlined and set before the mind and heart of the modern world, to approve and follow, or to despise and reject.

It is, "Women and children first!"

Whatever happened on that dreadful April night among the arctic ice, certainly that was the order given by the brave and steadfast captain; certainly that was the law obeyed by the men on the doomed ship. But why? There is no statute or enactment of any nation to enforce such an order. There is no trace of such a rule to be found in the history of ancient civilizations. There is no authority for it among the heathen races to-day. On a Chinese ship, if we may believe the report of an official representative, the rule would have been "Men First, children next, and women last."

There is certainly no argument against this barbaric rule on physical or material grounds. On the average, a man is stronger than a woman, he is worth more than a woman, he has a longer prospect of life than a woman. There is no reason in all the range of physical and economic science, no reason in all the philosophy of the Superman, why he should give his place in the life-boat to a woman.

Where, then, does this rule which prevailed in the sinking Titanic come from? It comes from God, through the faith of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is the ideal of self-sacrifice. It is the rule that "the strong ought to bear the infirmities of those that are weak."

It is the divine revelation which is summed up in the words: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

It needs a tragic catastrophe like the wreck of the Titanic to bring out the absolute contradiction between this ideal and all the counsels of materialism and selfish expediency.

I do not say that the germ of this ideal may not be found in other religions. I do not say that they are against it. I do not ask any man to accept my theology (which grows shorter and simpler as I grow older), unless his heart leads him to it. But this I say: The ideal that the strength of the strong is given them to protect and save the weak, the ideal which animates the rule of "Women and children first," is in essential harmony with the spirit of Christ.

If what He said about our Father in Heaven is true, this ideal is supremely reasonable. Otherwise it is hard to find arguments for it. The tragedy of facts sets the question clearly before us. Think about it. Is this ideal to survive and prevail in our civilization or not?

Without it, no doubt, we may have riches and power and dominion. But what a world to live in!

Only through the belief that the strong are bound to protect and save the weak because God wills it so, can we hope to keep self-sacrifice, and love, and heroism, and all the things that make us glad to live and not afraid to die.

-- HENRY VAN DYKE.
PRINCETON, N. J., April 18, 1912