

Live in Philadelphia

✠ **Kind** (vv.1-3)

✠ **Content** (vv.4,5)

✠ **Confident** (vv.6-8)

In the name of Jesus, our unchanging Lord and Savior, dearly redeemed believers:

A visitor might see this sermon theme on our website and think, “You gotta be kidding! **Live in Philadelphia?** I like it in Minnesota!” or wherever they might be. But **Live in Philadelphia?** Residents of that city probably wouldn’t see the sense of our sermon parts. The last one, maybe: **Confident**. But I don’t know that living in the city of **Philadelphia** makes anyone **Kind** or **Content**. If this Midwesterner had a New York accent, I could almost hear: “Fuhget a bought it!” Or as we say, “Forget you!”

But we’re not talking about an America city. **Philadelphia**, you know, means “brotherly love.” More than a state of mind, the Holy Spirit brings believers into the circle of God’s grace to “Live in Brotherly Love.” Here we not only experience God’s kindness in Christ, but also become **Kind**, **Content** and **Confident**. It’s like filling a garbage truck with everything that’s not and driving off in God’s SUV loaded down with awesome blessings. Own a piece of God’s real estate: **Live in Philadelphia!**

✠ **Kind** (vv.1-3)

Could you choose between friendship and brotherly love? Years ago a newly confirmed member was surprised when the pastor hesitated that he greeted him as “my friend.” The pastor explained: “I’m afraid I don’t make a very good ‘friend’ because I can’t always spend the time on fun things friends do together. That troubles me. But I can surely be your brother in Christ, and then His love will carry us above any lack of personality on my part.” Ever since, the man’s greeting is always, “My brother.”

“Brotherly love” guards God’s kindness in Christ for sisters and brothers to **Live in Philadelphia**. It helps to understand the Bible if you ask, “Why is God telling me this today? What’s wrong in me that needs changing?” These questions are especially important for each of us to ask ourselves on this “Every Member Worship and Study Sunday.” It seems men tend to miss brotherly love when their emails get too pointed to communicate kindness and concern for each other’s work and responsibility. Women, I haven’t figured out yet. In my graduating high school class some of the girls could remember four years earlier something someone said or did to hurt their feelings. How quickly we forget that remembering yesterday’s hurts puts us miles away from the cross. We need to go back today for forgiveness for every unkind word and deed. **In Philadelphia** it’s not, “Forget you!” but your sins: “Forget about it!”

Only God’s grace separates us from the helpless homeless who still do not **Live in Philadelphia**. We get so wrapped up in our little cardboard boxes we “*forget to entertain strangers*,” i.e., practice hospitality especially with those who cannot pay us back. What an unkind attitude to only give gifts to those who remember you with gifts. Abraham led Sarah and his servants to welcome and feed the three strangers who may have been more than angels, possibly even the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in human form. And hanging on the cursed tree for you and me, Jesus did not hesitate to welcome the repentant criminal to paradise. If you **Live in Philadelphia** today, maybe it’s time to check out the WELS Prison Ministry website (www.wels.net) and remember prisoners as if their cell were right next to yours. Giving of our time and energy to help others shows we’re inside the city limits to walk with Christ...

✠ **Content** (vv.4, 5)

According to the Greek grammar of verse 4 and the context of Scripture, leave out the NIV “should” and understand more literally than the King James Version: “*Marriage is honorable in everything, and the marriage bed is pure; single, however, and married fornicators God will judge.*”

Most translators focus so hard on the warning in the second part, they miss the encouragement of the first. It baffles me how anyone who went through a Wisconsin Synod Catechism class could have missed this, but just in case anyone here did, let me be blunt. If you enjoy the pleasures of sex outside of marriage, you make yourself a prime target for God's judgment. Even if your Confirmation certificate or family name were made of asbestos, it wouldn't help. In the verse just before our text the Holy Spirit melts everyone's pink sunglasses with this truth: ***"Our God is a consuming fire."*** (12:29)

It's too hot to **Live in** "brotherly love" or ever be **Content** until you repent of every sinful thought, word and deed. Since none of us can remember even a fraction of our sins, we confess them all – known and unknown – together in worship. Today again we have received the Lord's gracious forgiveness for all our sins at once. Again today we see how God's ***"mercy triumphs over judgment!"*** (James 2:13 NIV)

Now we can appreciate God's amazing gift of sexual intimacy in marriage: ***"Marriage is honorable in everything, and the marriage bed is pure."*** Only once did God say, ***"Not good,"*** in His six days of creating, when it was ***"not good for the man to be alone."*** (Genesis 2:18) But after the LORD God also created the female in His holy image, to be ***"a helper suitable"*** for her man, God established marriage for them to enjoy as newlyweds in paradise. Then God ***"looked at everything he had made and it was very good."*** (1:31) God's divine design for marriage makes husband and wife **content** in each others arms as a bright and beautiful reflection of God's goodness, pure and holy. Our mission counselor twenty years ago said, "Not just God's threats in the Sixth Commandment make me want to be faithful to my wife. I want to protect our wonderful life together." Intimate trust is like unfired ceramic. It needs to be cradled and nurtured, because once it's shattered by adultery, how can it be glued back together again?

To **Live in Philadelphia:** ***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

✠ **Confident (vv.6-8)**

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" "And take they our life, Goods, fame, child and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth." (TLH 262:4) With God as your ***"Helper"*** you can be a true ***"help meet"*** for your husband. And every man can respect women as God's gift, keeping brotherly love alive and well in relationships which we value far above money as we walk with God – **Confident**.

One God-fearing mother told her sons after their father abandoned the family, "Look for faithful men who love and respect their wives. Let them be your role models to treat your wife the same way." Serving as a pastor has enriched my life with many fine role models over the years. And this concept fits well for every **Confident** resident of "brotherly love." The Lord Himself says through His holy writer: ***"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."***

Have you ever thought of leadership this way? "He that thinketh he leadeth, yet hath no one following, only taketh a walk." "A leader has a compass in his head and a magnet in his heart." Or as Margaret Thatcher said, "A leader is like a lady. If you have to tell someone you are, you aren't."

It pleases God to draw us with leaders faithful to His Word. Faith's confidence can only grow with the blessing of good role models whose lives reflect the power of God's Word. Faith's confidence mimics those who put God's Word into practice all the way out this life and home to heaven. Ultimately, that's what it means to **Live in Philadelphia**. It's like no place on earth. Instead of non-nice Norwegians, or obnoxious "cheese heads" and sandwich spreads, if you **Live in Philadelphia**, you're the real deal in Christ: **Kind, Content, Confident**. His forgiving love alone makes life worth living and death worth dying. Since Jesus Christ never changes, the grass is always greener on His side of the fence. All God's parks and waterfalls are here. Come live with God in Christ today. Keep "brotherly love" alive. **Live in Philadelphia!** Amen.