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CHARITY AND ITS FRUITS

BY JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)

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This booklet is excerpted from *Charity and Its Fruits*. The messages were originally preached as a series of sermons by Jonathan Edwards from the pulpit of the Church of Northampton, Connecticut, in the year 1738.

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“Heaven, A World of Love,” the last chapter herein (and also the last chapter of the original book) includes only a few pages of the original. The complete message is available from *Chapel Library* as a large booklet.

The entire book of 368 pages is reprinted as a paperback by *The Banner of Truth Trust*, available through most Christian bookstores.

1. All True Grace Is Summed Up in Charity

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.
For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

In these words we observe that something is spoken of as of special importance, and as peculiarly essential in Christians, which the apostle calls *charity*. And this charity, we find, is abundantly insisted on in the New Testament by Christ and His apostles—more insisted on, indeed, than any other virtue.

But, then, the word "charity," as used in the New Testament, is of much more extensive signification than as it is used generally in common discourse. What persons very often mean by "charity," in their ordinary conversation, is a disposition to hope and think the best of others, and to put a good construction on their words and behavior. Sometimes the word is used for a disposition to give to the poor.

But these things are only certain particular branches or fruits of that great virtue of charity which is so much insisted on throughout the New Testament. The word properly signifies *love*, or *that disposition or affection whereby one is dear to another*; and the original *agape* which is here translated "charity," might better have been rendered "love," for that is the proper English of it. So that by charity in the New Testament is meant the very same thing as Christian love. Though it be more frequently used for love to men, yet sometimes it is used to signify not only love to men, but love to God.

Love will dispose our hearts to submission to the will of God, for we are more willing that the will of those we love should be done, than of others. We naturally desire that we should be agreeable to them. True love to God will dispose the heart to acknowledge God's right to govern, and that He is worthy to do it, and so will dispose to submission. Love to God will dispose us to walk humbly with Him, for he that loves God will be disposed to acknowledge the vast distance between God and himself. It will be agreeable to such a one to exalt God, and set Him on high above all and to lie low before Him. A true Christian delights to have God exalted on his own abasement, because he loves Him. He is willing to own that God is worthy of this and it is with delight that he casts himself in the dust before the Most High from his sincere love to Him.

A due consideration of the nature of love will show that it also disposes men to all duties towards their neighbors. If men have a sincere love to their neighbors it will dispose them to all acts of justice towards those neighbors—for real love and friendship always dispose us to give those we love their due and never to wrong them—"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor" (Rom 13:10). Love will dispose to walk humbly amongst men; for a real and true love will incline us to high thoughts of others and to think them better than ourselves. It will dispose men to honor one another, for all are naturally inclined to think highly of those they love, and to give them honor; so that by love are fulfilled these precepts, "Honor all men" (1Pe 2:17), and "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phi 2:3).

Love will dispose men to meekness and gentleness in their carriage toward their neighbors, and not to treat them with passion or violence or heat of spirit; but with moderation and calmness and kindness. It will check and restrain everything like a bitter spirit; for love has no bitterness in it, but is a gentle and sweet disposition and affection of the soul. It will prevent broils and quarrels, and will dispose men to peaceableness and to forgive injurious treatment received from others; as it is said in Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins."

Our subject exhorts us to seek a spirit of love, to grow in it more and more, and very much to abound in the works of love. If love is so great a thing in Christianity, so essential and distinguishing, yea, the very sum of all Christian virtue, then surely those that profess themselves Christians should live in love and abound in the works of love, for no works are so becoming as those of love. If you call yourself a Christian, where are your works of love? If this divine and holy principle is in you and reigns in you, will it not appear in your life in works of love? Consider what deeds of love have you done? Do you love God? What have you done for Him, for His glory, and for the advancement of His kingdom in the world? And how much have you denied yourself to promote the Redeemer's interest among men? Do you love your fellow men? What have you done for them? Consider your former defects in these respects and how becoming it is in you as a Christian hereafter to abound more in deeds of love.

Do not make an excuse that you have not opportunities to do anything for the glory of God, for the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and for the spiritual benefit of your neighbors. If your heart is full of love, it will find vent; you will find or make ways enough to express your love in deeds. When a fountain abounds in water it will send forth streams. Consider that as a principle of love is the main principle in the heart of a real Christian, so the labor of love is the main business of the Christian life.

Let every Christian consider these things. May the Lord give you understanding in all things and make you sensible what spirit it becomes you to be of. May He dispose you to such an excellent, amiable, and benevolent life, as is answerable to such a spirit, that you may not love only "in word and tongue, but in deed and truth."

2. The Spirit of Charity Is an Humble Spirit

"Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
doth not behave itself unseemly"—*1 Corinthians 13:4-5*.

In the words of the text, we may observe, that a spirit of Christian love is spoken of as the opposite of a proud behavior, and that two degrees of such a behavior are mentioned. The higher degree is expressed by a man's "vaunting himself," that is, by his so carrying himself as to show plainly that he glories in what he has, or is. The lower degree is expressed by his "behaving himself unseemly," that is, by his not conducting himself in a becoming and decent manner in the enjoyment of his prosperity, but so acting as to show that he thinks the mere fact of his being prosperous exalts him above others. And the spirit of charity or love is spoken of, as opposed not only to a proud behavior, but to a proud spirit, or pride in the heart, for charity "is not puffed up." The doctrine we are taught, then, in these words, is this: *the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is an humble spirit*.

In speaking to this doctrine, I would show:

- I. What humility is; and,
- II. How a Christian spirit, or the spirit of charity, is an humble spirit.

I. What Humility Is

Humility may be defined to be a habit of mind and heart 1) corresponding to our comparative unworthiness and vileness before God, or a sense of our own comparative meanness¹ in His sight, and 2) with the disposition to a behavior answerable thereto. The first thing in humility is,

1. A sense of our own comparative meanness

Humility is an excellence proper to all created intelligent beings, for they are all infinitely little and mean¹ before God, and most of them are in some way mean and low in comparison with some of their fellow creatures. Humility implies a compliance with that rule of the apostle, that we think not of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but that we think soberly, according as God hath dealt to everyone of us the measure, not only of faith, but of other things (Rom 12:3). And this humility, as a virtue in men, implies a sense of their own comparative meanness, both as compared with their fellow creatures and as compared with God.

As compared with God, a truly humble man is sensible of the small extent of his own knowledge, and the great extent of his ignorance, and the small extent of his understanding. He is sensible of his weakness. How little his strength is, and how little he is able to do. He is sensible of his natural distance from God: of his dependence on Him, of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom, and that it is by God's power that he is upheld and provided for. He is sensible that he needs God's wisdom to lead and guide him, and His might to enable him to do what he ought to do for Him. He is sensible of his subjection to God, and that God's greatness does properly consist in His authority, whereby He is the sovereign Lord and King over all. He is willing to be subject to that authority, as feeling that it becomes him to submit to the divine will, and yield in all things to God's authority. Man had this sort of comparative littleness before the fall. He was then infinitely little and mean in comparison with God. But his natural meanness has become much greater since the fall, for the moral ruin of his nature has greatly impaired his natural faculties, though it has not extinguished them.

The truly humble man, since the fall, is also sensible of his *moral* meanness and vileness. This consists in his sinfulness. His *natural* meanness is his *littleness as a creature*; his *moral* meanness is his *vileness and filthiness as a sinner*. Unfallen man was infinitely distant from God in his natural qualities or attributes. Fallen man is infinitely distant from him also as sinful, and thus filthy. And a truly humble person is in some measure sensible of his comparative meanness in this respect, that he sees how exceedingly polluted he is before an infinitely holy God, in whose sight the heavens are not clean.

As humility consists in a sense of our comparative meanness, so it implies,

¹ **meanness, mean** – lacking dignity of mind, destitute of honor, despicable, of little value.

2. A disposition to a corresponding behavior and conduct

Without this there is no true humility! *First*, consider some things *in our behavior toward God* to which humility will dispose us. As the first of these, humility disposes a person *heartily and freely to acknowledge his meanness or littleness before God*. He sees how fit and suitable it is that he should do this, and he does it willingly, and even with delight. He freely confesses his own nothingness and vileness, and owns himself unworthy of any mercy, and deserving of all misery. It is the disposition of the humble soul to lie low before God and to humble himself in the dust in His presence.

Humility also disposes one *to be distrustful of himself, and to depend only on God*. The proud man, that has a high opinion of his own wisdom, or strength, or righteousness, is self-confident. But the humble are not disposed² to trust in themselves, but are diffident³ of their own sufficiency. It is their disposition to rely on God, and with delight to cast themselves wholly on Him as their refuge, and righteousness, and strength.

The humble man is further disposed *to renounce all the glory of the good he has or does, and to give it all to God*. If there be anything that is good in him, or any good done by him, it is not his disposition to glory or vaunt himself in it before God, but to ascribe all to God, and in the language of the Psalmist to say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth’s sake” (Psa 115:1).

It is the disposition, again, of the humble person, *wholly to subject himself to God*. His heart is not opposed to a full and absolute subjection to the divine will, but inclined to it. He is disposed to be subject to the commands and laws of God, for he sees it to be right and best that he who is so infinitely inferior to God, should be thus subject; and that it is an honor that belongs to God, to reign over and give laws to him. And he is equally disposed to be subject to the providence and daily disposal of God, and to submit cheerfully to His will as manifested in what He orders for him. Though God orders affliction, and low and depressed circumstances, as his lot in the world, he does not murmur, but feeling his meanness and unworthiness, he is sensible that afflictions and trying dispensations⁴ are what he deserves, and that his circumstances are actually better than he merits. And however dark the divine dealings, with the faith which we so often see manifested in those who are eminent in grace, he is ready to say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). And as humility implies a disposition to such a behavior toward God, so,

Secondly, it disposes *to a behavior toward men* answerable to our comparative meanness. And this I shall show by pointing out what kind of behavior humility tends to prevent. It tends, in the first place, to prevent *an aspiring and ambitious behavior* amongst men. The man that is under the influence of an humble spirit, is content with such a situation amongst men as God is pleased to allot to him, and is not greedy of honor, and does not affect to appear uppermost and exalted above his neighbors. He acts on the principle of that saying of the prophet, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not” (Jer 45:5); and also of that injunction of the apostle, “Mind not high things” (Rom 12:16).

Humility tends also *to prevent an ostentatious behavior*. If the truly humble man has any advantage or benefit of any kind, either temporal or spiritual, above his neighbors, he will not affect to make a show of it. If he has greater natural abilities than others, he will not be forward to parade and display them, or be careful that others shall know his superiority in this respect. If he has a remarkable spiritual experience, he will not be solicitous that men should know it for the sake of the honor he may obtain by it; nor does he affect to be esteemed of men as an eminent saint and a faithful servant of heaven, for it is a small thing with him what men may think of him. If he does anything well, or does his duty in any respect with difficulty and self-denial, he does not affect that men should take notice of it, nor is he careful lest they should not observe it. He is not of the behavior of the Pharisees, who did all their works to be seen of men (Mat 23:5); but if he has done anything in sincerity, he is content that the great Being (who sees in secret) beholds and will approve it.

Humility tends also to prevent *an arrogant and assuming behavior*. He that is under the influence of an humble spirit is not forward⁵ to take too much upon him, and when he is amongst others, he does not carry it toward them as if he expected and insisted that a great deal of regard should be shown to himself. His behavior does not carry with it the idea that he is the best amongst those about him, and that he is the one to whom the chief regard should be shown, and whose judgment is most to be sought and followed. He does not carry it as if he expected that everybody should bow and truckle to him, and give place to him, as if no one was of as much consequence as himself. He does not put on assuming airs in his common conversation, nor in the management of his business, nor in the duties of religion. He is not forward to take upon himself that which does not belong to him, as though he had power where indeed he has not, as if the earth ought to be subject to his bidding, and must comply with his inclination and purposes.

On the contrary, he gives all due deference to the judgment and inclinations of others, and his behavior carries with it the impression that he sincerely receives and acts on that teaching of the apostle, “Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phi 2:3). In talking of the things of religion, he has not the air, either in his speech or behavior, of one that esteems himself one of the best saints in the whole company, but he rather carries himself as if he thought, in the expression of the apostle, that he was “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8).

² **dispose** – to set the mind in a particular frame, to incline to act or think a certain way.

³ **diffident** – distrustful, doubting.

⁴ **dispensations** – the dealing of God with His creatures.

⁵ **forward** – strongly inclined, bold, eager, too ready.

Humility tends also *to prevent a scornful behavior*. Treating others with scorn and contempt is one of the worst and most offensive manifestations of pride toward them. But they that are under the influence of an humble spirit are far from such a behavior. They do not despise or look down on those that are below them with a haughty supercilious⁶ air, as though they were scarce worthy to come nigh them or to have any regard from them. They are sensible that there is *no* such vast difference between themselves and their fellowmen as warrants such a behavior. They are not found treating with scorn and contempt what others say, or speaking of what they do with ridicule and sneering reflections, or sitting and relating what others may have spoken or done, only to make sport of it. On the contrary, humility disposes a person to a condescending behavior to the meekest and lowest, and to treat inferiors with courtesy and affability, as being sensible of his own weakness and despicableness before God, and that it is God alone that makes him in any respect to differ from others, or gives him the advantage over them. The truly humble will always have the spirit to “condescend to men of low estate” (Rom 12:16). Even if they are great men, and in places of public trust and honor, humility will dispose them to treat their inferiors in such a manner as has been spoken of, and not in a haughty and scornful manner, as vaunting themselves on their greatness.

Humility tends also *to prevent a willful and stubborn behavior*. They that are under the influence of an humble spirit will not set up their own will either in public or private affairs. They will not be stiff and inflexible, and insist that everything must go according to what they happen first to propose, and manifest a disposition by no means to be easy, but to make all the difficulty they can, and to make others uneasy as well as themselves, and to prevent anything being done with any quietness, if it be not according to their own mind and will. They are not as some that the apostle Peter describes (2 Pet. 2:10), presumptuous and self-willed, always bent on carrying their own points, and, if this cannot be done, then bent on opposing and annoying others.

On the contrary, humility disposes men to be of a yielding spirit to others, ready, for the sake of peace and to gratify others, to comply in many things with their inclinations, and to yield to their judgments wherein they are not inconsistent with truth and holiness. A truly humble man is inflexible in nothing but in the cause of his Lord and Master, which is the cause of truth and virtue. In this he is inflexible, because God and conscience require it. But in things of lesser moment, and which do not involve his principles as a follower of Christ, and in things that only concern his own private interests, he is apt to yield to others. And if he sees that others are stubborn and unreasonable in their willfulness, he does not allow that to provoke him to be stubborn and willful in his opposition to them, but he rather acts on the principles taught in the Scriptures: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath” (Rom 12:19), “Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1Co 6:7), “If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Mat 5:40,41).

Humility will further tend *to prevent a leveling behavior*. Some persons are always ready to level those above them down to themselves, while they are never willing to level those below them up to their own position. But he that is under the influence of humility will avoid both these extremes. On the one hand, he will be willing that all should rise just so far as their diligence and worth of character entitle them to, and on the other hand, he will be willing that his superiors should be known and acknowledged in their place, and have rendered to them all the honors that are their due. He will not desire that all should stand upon the same level, for he knows it is best that there should be gradations in society: that some should be above others, and should be honored and submitted to as such. And therefore he is willing to be content with this divine arrangement, and, agreeably to it, to conform both his spirit and behavior to such precepts as the following: “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom 13:7); “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Ti 3:1).

Humility also tends, once more, *to prevent a self-justifying behavior*. He that is under the influence of an humble spirit, if he has fallen into a fault, as all are liable at some time to fall, or if in anything he has injured another, or dishonored the Christian name and character, will be willing to acknowledge his fault, and take the shame of it to himself. He will not be hard to be brought to a sense of his fault, nor to testify that sense by a suitable acknowledgment of his error. He will be inwardly humbled for it, and ready to show his humility in the manner which the apostle points out, when he says, “Confess your faults one to another” (Jam 5:16).

It is pride that makes men so exceedingly backward⁷ to confess their fault when they have fallen into one, and that makes them think that to be their shame which is in truth their highest honor. But humility in the behavior makes men prompt to their duty in this respect, and if it prevails as it should, will lead them to do it with alacrity⁸ and even delight. And when anyone shall give such a person a Christian admonition⁹ or reproof for any fault, humility will dispose him to take it kindly, and even thankfully. It is pride that makes men to be so uneasy when they are reproofed by any of their neighbors, so that oftentimes they will not bear it, but become angry, and manifest great bitterness of spirit. Humility, on the contrary, will dispose them not only to tolerate such reproofs, but to esteem and prize them as marks of kindness and friendship. “Let

⁶ **supercilious** – haughty, overbearing, lofty with pride.

⁷ **backward** – unwilling, averse, reluctant.

⁸ **alacrity** – cheerful willingness, readiness.

⁹ **admonition** – gentle reproof, counsel to correct a fault.

the righteous smite me,” says the Psalmist, “it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa 141:5).

Having thus shown what humility is in its nature, and to what it will lead us both in spirit and behavior, in respect both to God and to our fellowmen, I proceed, as proposed, to show,

II. How the Spirit of Charity Is an Humble Spirit

In the application of this subject we may see,

1. The excellency of a Christian spirit

“The righteous,” it is said, “is more excellent than his neighbor” (Pro 12:26). And much of this excellence in the true Christian consists in his meek and lowly spirit, which makes him so like his Savior. This spirit the apostle speaks of as the richest of all ornaments, “even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1Pe 3:4). The subject should lead us,

2. To examine ourselves, and see if we are indeed of an humble spirit

“His soul,” says the prophet, “which is lifted up, is not upright in him” (Hab 2:4); and the fact that “God resisteth the proud” (Jam 4:6), or, as in the original, “sets Himself in battle array against him,” shows how He abhors a proud spirit. And it is not every show and appearance of humility that will stand the test of the gospel. There are various imitations of it that fall short of the reality. Some put on an affected humility. Others have a natural low-spiritedness, and are wanting¹⁰ in manliness of character. Others are melancholy or despondent, [while] others, under the convictions of conscience, by which, for the time, they are depressed, seem broken in spirit. Others seem greatly abased while in adversity and affliction, or have a natural melting of the heart under the common illuminations of the truth. In others, there is a counterfeit kind of humility, wrought by the delusions of Satan: and all of these may be mistaken for true humility.

Examine yourself, then, and see what is the nature of your humility, whether it be of these superficial kinds, or whether it be indeed wrought by the Holy Spirit in your hearts. Do not rest satisfied, till you find that the spirit and behavior of those whom the gospel accounts humble, are yours.

3. The subject exhorts those who are strangers to the grace of God, to seek that grace, that they may thus attain to this spirit of humility.

If such be your character, you are now destitute of a Christian spirit, which is a spirit of grace, and so wholly destitute of humility. Your spirit is a proud spirit, and though you may not seem to carry yourself very proudly amongst men, yet you are lifting yourself up against God, in refusing to submit your heart and life to Him. And in doing this, you are disregarding or defying God’s sovereignty, and daring to contend with your Maker, though He dreadfully threatens those who do this. You are proudly casting contempt on God’s authority, in refusing to obey it and continuing to live in disobedience, in refusing to be conformed to His will and to comply with the humbling conditions and way of salvation by Christ, and in trusting to your own strength and righteousness, instead of that which Christ so freely offers. Now, as to such a spirit, consider that this is, in an especial sense, the sin of devils. “Not a novice,” says the apostle, “lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1Ti 3:6). And consider, too, how odious and abominable such a spirit is to God, and how terribly he has threatened it; declaring that, “every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Pro 16:5). And again, “These things doth the Lord hate: a proud look” etc. (Pro 6:16). And again, that “a man’s pride shall bring him low” (Pro 29:23). And that the eyes of the Lord are upon the haughty, that he may bring them down (2Sa 22:28). And still again, that “the Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth” (Isa 23:9). Consider, too, how Pharaoh, and Korah, and Haman, and Belshazzar, and Herod, were awfully punished for their pride of heart and conduct. Be admonished, by their example, to cherish an humble spirit, and to walk humbly with God, and toward men. Finally,

4. Let all be exhorted earnestly to seek much of an humble spirit, and to endeavor to be humble in all their behavior toward God and men.

Seek for a deep and abiding sense of your comparative meanness before God and man. Know God. Confess your nothingness and ill-desert before Him. Distrust yourself. Rely only on God. Renounce all glory except from Him. Yield yourself heartily to His will and service. Avoid an aspiring, ambitious, ostentatious, assuming, arrogant, scornful, stubborn, willful, leveling, self-justifying behavior. And strive for more and more of the humble spirit that Christ manifested while He was on earth.

Consider the many motives to such a spirit. Humility is a most essential and distinguishing trait in all true piety. It is the attendant of every grace, and in a peculiar manner tends to the purity of Christian feeling. It is the ornament of the spirit, the source of some of the sweetest exercises of Christian experience, the most acceptable sacrifice we can offer to

¹⁰ wanting – lacking, needing, deficient.

God, the subject of the richest of His promises, the spirit with which He will dwell on earth, and which He will crown with glory in heaven hereafter.

Earnestly seek, then, and diligently and prayerfully cherish, an humble spirit, and God shall walk with you here below, and when a few more days shall have passed, He will receive you to the honors bestowed on His people at Christ's right hand.

3. The Spirit of Charity Is the Opposite of a Selfish Spirit

“Charity...seeketh not her own”—*1 Corinthians 13:5.*

Having shown the nature of charity, that it is not proud, either in spirit or behavior—I pass to the next point presented by the apostle, viz. that charity “*seeketh not her own.*” The doctrine of these words plainly is, that, *the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of a selfish spirit.*

1. *Charity and selfishness are opposed to one another.*

The ruin that the fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in his losing the nobler and more benevolent principles of his nature, and falling wholly under the power and government of self-love. Before, and as God created him, he was exalted, and noble, and generous; but now he is debased, and ignoble, and selfish. Immediately upon the fall, the mind of man shrank from its primitive greatness and expandedness, to an exceeding smallness and contractedness; and as in other respects, so especially in this. Before, his soul was under the government of that noble principle of divine love, whereby it was enlarged to the comprehension of all his fellow creatures and their welfare. And not only so, but it was not confined within such narrow limits as the bounds of the creation, but went forth in the exercise of holy love to the Creator, and abroad upon the infinite ocean of good, and was, as it were, swallowed up by it, and became one with it.

But so soon as he had transgressed against God, these noble principles were immediately lost, and all this excellent enlargedness of man's soul was gone; and thenceforward he himself shrank, as it were, into a little space, circumscribed and closely shut up within itself to the exclusion of all things else. Sin, like some powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness; and God was forsaken, and fellow creatures forsaken, and man retired within himself, and became totally governed by narrow and selfish principles and feelings. Self-love became absolute master of his soul, and the more noble and spiritual principles of his being took wings and flew away.

But God, in mercy to miserable man, entered on the work of redemption, and, by the glorious gospel of his Son, began the work of bringing the soul of man out of its confinement and contractedness, and back again to those noble and divine principles by which it was animated and governed at first. And it is through the cross of Christ that he is doing this; for our union with Christ gives us participation in his nature. And so Christianity restores an excellent enlargement, and extensiveness, and liberality to the soul, and again possesses it with that divine love or charity that we read of in the text, whereby it again embraces its fellow creatures, and is devoted to and swallowed up in the Creator. And thus charity, which is the sum of the Christian spirit, so partakes of the glorious fullness of the divine nature, that she “*seeketh not her own,*” or is *contrary to a selfish spirit.*

In dwelling on this thought, I would, first, show the nature of that selfishness of which charity is the opposite; and then some of the evidence in support of the doctrine stated.

2. *The nature of that selfishness of which charity is the opposite*

It is true that self-love, or a man's love to his own happiness, may be inordinate, *in placing that happiness in things that are confined to himself.* In this case, the error is not so much in the degree of his love to himself as it is in the channel in which it flows. It is not in the degree in which he loves his own happiness, but in his placing his happiness where he ought not, and in limiting and confining his love. Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good—in that which is the good of others, or in the good to be enjoyed in and by others. A man's love of his own happiness, when it runs in this last channel, is not what is called selfishness, but is the very opposite of it. But there are others who, in their love to their own happiness, place that happiness in good things that are confined or limited to themselves, to the exclusion of others. And this is selfishness. This is the thing most clearly and directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns.

And when it is said that charity seeketh not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good—good limited to herself. The expression, “her own,” is a phrase of appropriation, and properly carries in its signification the idea of limitation to self. And so the like phrase that “all seek their own” (Phi 2:21) carries the idea of confined and self-appropriated good, or the good that a man has singly and to himself, and in which he has no communion or partnership with another, but which he has so circumscribed and limited to himself as to exclude others. And so the expression is to be understood in “For men

shall be lovers of their own selves" (2Ti 3:2), for the phrase is of the most confined signification, limited to self alone, and excluding all others.

Having thus stated what that selfishness is that a Christian spirit is contrary to, I pass to notice,

3. Some of the evidence sustaining the doctrine which has been stated

And the truth of the doctrine, that the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of a selfish spirit, will appear, if we consider the nature of Christian love to God. We find that the Scriptures teach that those who truly love God, love Him so as wholly to devote themselves to Him and His service. This we are taught in the sum of the ten commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mar 12:30). In these words is contained a description of a right love to God; and they teach us that those who love Him aright do devote themselves wholly to Him. They devote all to Him: all their heart, and all their soul, and all their mind, and all their strength, and all their powers and faculties. Surely a man who gives all this wholly to God keeps nothing back, but devotes himself wholly and entirely to Him, making no reserve; and all who have true love to God have a spirit to do this.

This shows how much a principle of true love to God is above the selfish principle. For if self be devoted wholly to God, then there is something, above self, that overcomes it; something superior to self, that takes self and makes an offering of it to God. A selfish principle never devotes itself to another. The nature of it is, to devote all others to self. They that have true love to God love Him as God and as the Supreme Good; whereas it is the nature of selfishness to set up self in the place of God, and to make an idol of self. That being whom men regard supremely, they devote all to. They that idolize self, devote all to self; but they that love God as God, devote all to Him.

If you are Christians, as many of you profess to be, then, in a peculiar sense, "ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1Co 6:19,20), even "with the precious blood of Christ" (1Pe 1:19). And this is urged as an argument why Christians should not seek themselves, but the glory of God; for the apostle adds, "Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." By nature you were in a miserable, lost condition, a captive in the hands of divine justice, and a miserable slave in the bondage of sin. And Christ has redeemed you, and so you are His by purchase. By a most just title you belong to Him, and not to yourself. And, therefore, you must not henceforth treat yourself as your own, by seeking your own interests or pleasure only, or even chiefly; for if you do so you will be guilty of robbing Christ. And as you are not your own, so nothing that you have is your own. Your...

- abilities of body and mind
- outward possessions
- time
- talents
- influence
- comforts

—none of them are your own.

Nor have you any right to use them as if you had an absolute property in them, as you will be likely to do if you imagine them only for your own private benefit and not for the honor of Christ and for the good of your fellowmen.

Let these things, then, incline us all to be less selfish than we are, and to seek more of the contrary most excellent spirit. Selfishness is a principle native to us, and, indeed, all the corruption of our nature does radically consist in it. But considering the knowledge that we have of Christianity, and how numerous and powerful the motives it presents, we ought to be far less selfish than we are, and less ready to seek our own interests and these only. How much there is of this evil spirit and how little of that excellent, noble diffusive spirit which has now been set before us! Whatever the cause be, let us strive to overcome it that we may grow in the grace of an unselfish spirit, and thus glorify God, and do good to men.

4. The Spirit of Charity Is the Opposite of an Angry Spirit

"Charity...is not easily provoked"—1 Corinthians 13:5.

Having declared that charity is contrary to the two great cardinal vices of pride and selfishness, those deep and ever-flowing fountains of sin and wickedness in the heart, the apostle next proceeds to show that it is also contrary to two things that are commonly the fruits of this pride and selfishness, viz. an angry spirit, and a censorious spirit. To the first of these points I would now turn your attention, viz. that charity "*is not easily provoked.*" The doctrine here set before us is, that, *the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of an angry or wrathful spirit.*

In speaking to this doctrine, I would inquire, first, in what consists that angry spirit or temper to which a Christian spirit is contrary; and, next, give the reason why a Christian spirit is contrary to it.

I. What Is That Angry Spirit to which Charity Is Contrary?

It is not all manner of anger that Christianity is opposite and contrary to. It is said, “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Eph 4:26); which seems to suppose that there is such a thing as anger without sin, or that it is possible to be angry in some cases, and yet not offend God. And therefore it may be answered, in a single word, that a Christian spirit, or the spirit of charity, is opposite to all undue and unsuitable anger. But anger may be undue or unsuitable in several respects: in its nature, its occasion, its end, and its measure.

1. *Anger may be undue and unsuitable in respect to its nature.*

Anger may be defined to be an earnest and more or less violent opposition of spirit against any real or supposed evil, or in view of any fault or offense of another. All anger is opposition of the mind against real or supposed evil; but it is not all opposition of the mind against evil that is properly called anger. There is an opposition of the judgment that is not anger; for anger is the opposition, not of the cool judgment, but of the spirit of the man, that is, of his disposition or heart.

But here, again, it is not all opposition of the spirit against evil that can be called anger. There is an opposition of the spirit against *natural* evil that we suffer, as in grief and sorrow, for instance, which is a very different thing from anger; and in distinction from this, anger is opposition to *moral* evil. Moral evil is evil (real or supposed) in voluntary agents, or at least in agents that are conceived to be voluntary, or acting by their own will, and against such evil as is supposed to be their fault. But yet again, it is not all opposition of spirit against evil, or faultiness in voluntary agents, that is anger; for there may be a dislike, without the spirit being excited and angry; and such dislike is an opposition of the will and judgment, and not always of the feelings—and in order to anger, the latter must be moved. In all anger there must be earnestness and opposition of feeling, and the spirit must be moved and stirred within us. Anger is one of the passions or affections of the soul, though, when called an affection, it is, for the most part, to be regarded as an evil affection.

Such being the nature of anger in general, it may now be shown wherein anger is undue or unsuitable in its nature. And this is the case with all anger that contains ill-will, or a desire of revenge. Some have defined anger to be a desire of revenge. But this cannot be considered a just definition of anger in general; for if so, there would be no anger that would not imply ill-will, and the desire that some other might be injured. But doubtless there is such a thing as anger that is consistent with goodwill; for a father may be angry with his child, that is, he may find in himself an earnestness and opposition of spirit to the bad conduct of his child, and his spirit may be engaged and stirred in opposition to that conduct, and to his child while continuing in it; and yet, at the same time, he will not have any proper ill-will to the child, but on the contrary, a real goodwill. So far from desiring its injury, he may have the very highest desire for its true welfare, and his very anger be but his opposition to that which he thinks will be of injury to it. And this shows that anger, in its general nature, rather consists in the opposition of the spirit to evil than in a desire of revenge.

If the nature of anger in general consisted in ill-will and a desire of revenge, no anger would be lawful in any case whatever; for we are not allowed to entertain ill-will toward others in any case, but are to have goodwill to all. We are required by Christ to wish well to and pray for the prosperity of all, even our enemies, and those that spitefully use us and persecute us (Mat 5:44); and the rule given by the apostle is, “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not” (Rom 12:14); that is, we are only to wish good and pray for good to others, and in no case to wish evil.

And so all revenge is forbidden, if we except the vengeance which public justice takes on the transgressor, in inflicting which men act not for themselves, but for God. The rule is, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord” (Lev 19:18). And says the apostle, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord’” (Rom 12:19). So that all the anger that contains ill-will or a desire of revenge, is what Christianity is contrary to, and by the most fearful sanctions forbids. Sometimes anger, as it is spoken of in the Scripture, is meant only in the worst sense, or in that sense of it which implies ill-will and the desire of revenge; and in this sense all anger is forbidden, as in Eph. 4:31, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice;” and again, in Col. 3:8, “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” Thus anger may be irregular and sinful with respect to its nature. And so,

2. *Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in respect to its occasion.*

And such unsuitableness consists in its being without any just cause. Of this Christ speaks when he says, “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Mat. 5:22). And this may be the case in two ways.

First, when the occasion of anger is that which *is no fault at all in the person that is its object*. This is not infrequently the case. Many persons are of such a proud and peevish disposition, that they will be angry at anything that is in any respect against them, or troublesome to them, or contrary to their wishes, whether anybody be to blame for it or not. And so sometimes men are angry with others for those things that are not from their fault, but which happen merely through their involuntary ignorance, or through their impotence. They are angry that they have not done better, when the only cause was, that the circumstances were such that they could not do otherwise than they did. And oftentimes persons are angry with others, not only for that which is no fault in them, but for that which is really good, and for which they ought to be

praised. So it always is when men are angry at God, and fret at His providence and its dispensations toward them. Thus to be fretful and impatient, and to murmur against God's dealings, is a most horribly wicked kind of anger.

And yet this very often is the case in this wicked world. This is what the wicked Israelites were so often guilty of, and for which so many of them were overthrown in the wilderness. This was what Jonah, though a good man, was guilty of when he was angry with God without a cause, angry for that for which he should have praised God, viz. his great mercy to the Ninevites. Oftentimes, also, persons' spirits are kept very much in a fret by reason of things going contrary to them, and their meeting with crosses and disappointments and entanglements in their business, when they will not own that it is God they fret at and are angry with, and do not even seem to be convinced of it themselves. But, indeed, such fretfulness can be interpreted no other way; and whatever they may pretend, it is ultimately aimed against the Author of providence—against the God who orders these cross events, so that it is a murmuring and fretting against Him.

Second, anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in its occasion, *when our spirits are stirred at the faults of others chiefly as they affect ourselves, and not as they are against God*. We should never be angry but at sin, and this should always be that which we oppose in our anger. And when our spirits are stirred to oppose this evil, it should be *as sin*, or chiefly as it is against God. If there be no sin and no fault, then we have no cause to be angry; and if there be a fault or sin, then it is infinitely worse as against God than it is as against us, and therefore it requires the most opposition on that account.

Persons sin in their anger when they are selfish in it; for we are not to act as if we were our own, or for ourselves simply, since we belong to God, and not to ourselves. When a fault is committed wherein God is sinned against, and persons are injured by it, they should be chiefly concerned, and their spirits chiefly moved against it, because it is against God; for they should be more solicitous for God's honor than for their own temporal interests. All anger, as to occasion, is either a virtue or a vice, for there is no middle sort that is neither good nor bad. There is no virtue or goodness in opposing sin, unless it be opposed *as sin*. The anger that is virtuous is the same thing which, in one form, is called zeal. Our anger should be like Christ's anger. He was like a lamb under the greatest personal injuries, and we never read of his being angry but in the cause of God against sin as sin. And this should be the case with us.

And as anger may, in these ways, be unsuitable and unchristian with respect to the occasion or cause of it, so,

3. Anger may be unchristian with respect to its measure.

And this, again, in two particulars, as to the measure of its degree, and the measure of its continuance.

First, when it is immoderate *in degree*. Anger may be far beyond what the case requires. And often it is so great as to put persons beyond the control of themselves; their passions being so violent that, for the time, they know not what they do, and seem to be unable to direct and regulate either their feelings or conduct. Sometimes men's passions rise so high that they are, as it were, drunk with them, so that their reason is gone, and they act as if beside themselves. But the degree of anger ought always to be regulated by the end of it, and it should never be suffered to rise any higher than so far as tends to the obtaining of the good ends which reason has proposed. And anger is also beyond measure, and thus sinful,

Second, when it is immoderate *in its continuance*. It is a very sinful thing for persons to be long angry. The wise man not only gives us the injunction, "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry," but he adds, that "anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Ecc 7:9); and, says the apostle, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph 4:26). If anger be long continued, it soon degenerates into malice, for the leaven of evil spreads faster than the leaven of good. If a person allows himself long to hold anger towards another, he will quickly come to hate him. And so we find that it actually is among those that retain a grudge in their hearts against others for week after week, and month after month, and year after year. They do, in the end, truly hate the persons against whom they thus lay up anger, whether they own it or not. And this is a most dreadful sin in the sight of God. All, therefore, should be exceedingly careful how they suffer anger long to continue in their hearts.

Having thus shown what is that angry or wrathful spirit to which charity or a Christian spirit is contrary, I pass, as proposed, to show,

II. How Charity Is Contrary to It

And this I would do by showing, first, that charity or love, which is the sum of the Christian spirit, is directly, and in itself, contrary to the anger that is sinful; and, secondly, that the fruits of charity which are mentioned in the context, are all contrary to it.

1. Christian charity, or love, is directly contrary to all undue anger.

Christian love is contrary to anger which is undue in its nature and that tends to revenge, and so implies ill-will; for the nature of love is goodwill. It tends to prevent persons from being angry without just cause, and will be far from disposing anyone to be angry for little faults. Love is backward to anger, and will not yield to it on trivial occasions, much less where there is no cause for being angry. It is a malignant and evil, and not a loving spirit, that disposes persons to be angry without cause. Love to God is opposite to a disposition in men to be angry at others' faults chiefly as they themselves are offended and injured by them: it rather disposes them to look at them chiefly as committed against God. If love be in exer-

cise, it will tend to keep down the irascible passions, and hold them in subjection, so that reason and the spirit of love may regulate them and keep them from being immoderate in degree, or of long continuance.

And not only is charity, or Christian love, directly and in itself contrary to all undue anger, but,

2. All the fruits of this charity which are mentioned in the context are also contrary to it.

And I shall mention only two of these fruits, as they may stand for all, viz. those virtues that are contrary to pride and selfishness.

First, love, or charity, is contrary to all undue and sinful anger, as in its fruits, *it is contrary to pride*. Pride is one chief cause of undue anger. It is because men are proud, and exalt themselves in their own hearts, that they are revengeful, and are apt to be excited, and to make great things out of little ones that may be against themselves. Yea, they even treat as vices things that are in themselves virtues, when they think their honor is touched, or when their will is crossed. And it is pride that makes men so unreasonable and rash in their anger, and raises it to such a high degree, and continues it so long, and often keeps it up in the form of habitual malice. But, as we have already seen, love, or Christian charity, is utterly opposed to pride. And so,

Secondly, love, or charity, is contrary to all sinful anger, as in its fruits, *it is contrary to selfishness*. It is because men are selfish and seek their own, that they are malicious and revengeful against all that oppose or interfere with their own interests. If men sought not chiefly their own private and selfish interests, but the glory of God and the common good, then their spirit would be a great deal more stirred up in God's cause than in their own; and they would not be prone to hasty, rash, inconsiderate, immoderate, and long-continued wrath, with any who might have injured or provoked them; but they would in a great measure forget themselves for God's sake, and from their zeal for the honor of Christ. The end they would aim at would be, not making themselves great, or getting their own will, but the glory of God and the good of their fellow-beings. But love, as we have seen, is opposed to all selfishness. Now we turn to,

III. The Application of This Doctrine

In the application of this subject, let us use it,

1. In the way of self-examination

Our own consciences, if faithfully searched and imperatively inquired of, can best tell us whether we are, or have been persons of such an angry spirit and wrathful disposition as has been described; whether we are frequently angry, or indulge in ill-will, or allow the continuance of anger. Have we not often been angry? And if so, is there not reason to think that that anger has been undue, and without just cause, and thus sinful? God does not call Christians into His kingdom that they may indulge greatly in fretfulness, and have their minds commonly stirred up and ruffled with anger. And has not most of the anger you have cherished been chiefly, if not entirely, on your own account?

Are there not some here present that are sitting before God with anger laid up in their hearts, and burning there? Or, if their anger is for a time concealed from human eyes, is it not like an old sore not thoroughly healed, but so that the least touch renews the smart; or like a smothered fire in the heaps of autumn leaves, which the least breeze will kindle into a flame?

And how is it in your families? Families are societies the most closely united of all; and their members are in the nearest relation, and under the greatest obligations to peace, and harmony, and love. And yet what has been your spirit in the family? Many a time have you not been fretful, and angry, and impatient, and peevish, and unkind to those whom God has made in so great a measure dependent on you, and who are so easily made happy or unhappy by what you do or say—by your kindness or unkindness? And what kind of anger have you indulged in the family? Has it not often been unreasonable and sinful, not only in its nature, but in its occasions, where those with whom you were angry were not in fault, or when the fault was trifling or unintended, or where, perhaps, you were yourself in part to blame for it? and even where there might have been just cause, has not your wrath been continued, and led you to be sullen, or severe, to an extent that your own conscience disapproved?

And have you not been angry with your neighbors who live by you, and with whom you have to do daily? and on trifling occasions, and for little things, have you not allowed yourself in anger toward them? In all these points it becomes us to examine ourselves, and know what manner of spirit we are of, and wherein we come short of the spirit of Christ.

2. The subject dissuades from, and warns against, all sinful anger.

The heart of man is exceeding prone to undue and sinful anger, being naturally full of pride and selfishness. We live in a world that is full of occasions that tend to stir up this corruption that is within us, so that we cannot expect to live in any tolerable measure as Christians would do, in this respect, without constant watchfulness and prayer. And we should not only watch against the exercises, but fight against the principle of anger, and seek earnestly to have that mortified in our hearts, by the establishment and increase of the spirit of divine love and humility in our souls.

And to this end, several things may be considered.

First, consider frequently *your own failings, by which you have given both God and man occasion to be displeased with you*. All your lifetime you have come short of God's requirements, and thus justly incurred his dreadful wrath; and constantly you have occasion to pray God that He will not be angry with you, but will show you mercy. And your failings have also been numerous toward your fellowmen, and have often given them occasion to be angry with you. Your faults are as great, perhaps, as theirs: and this thought should lead you not to spend so much of your time in fretting at the motes in their eyes, but rather to occupy it in pulling the beams out of your own. Very often those that are most ready to be angry with others, and to carry their resentments highest for their faults, are equally or still more guilty of the same faults. And so those that are most apt to be angry with others for speaking evil of them, are often most frequent in speaking evil of others, and even in their anger to vilify and abuse them.

If others, then, provoke us, instead of being angry with them, let our first thoughts be turned to ourselves, and let it put us on self-reflection, and lead us to inquire whether we have not been guilty of the very same things that excite our anger, or even of worse. Thus, thinking of our own failings and errors would tend to keep us from undue anger with others. And consider, also,

Second, how such undue anger *destroys the comfort of him that indulges it*. It troubles the soul in which it is, as a storm troubles the ocean. Such anger is inconsistent with a man's enjoying himself, or having any true peace or self-respect in his own spirit. Men of an angry and wrathful temper, whose minds are always in a fret, are the most miserable sort of men, and live a most miserable life; so that a regard to our own happiness should lead us to shun all undue and sinful anger. Consider, again,

Third, how much such a spirit *unfits persons for the duties of religion*. All undue anger indisposes us for the pious exercises and the active duties of religion. It puts the soul far from that sweet and excellent frame of spirit in which we most enjoy communion with God, and which makes truth and ordinances most profitable to us. And hence it is that God commands us not to approach His altars while we are at enmity with others, but "first to be reconciled to our brother, and then come and offer our gift" (Mat 5:24); and that by the apostle it is said, "I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1Ti 2:8). And, once more, consider,

Fourth, that *angry men are spoken of in the Bible as unfit for human society*. The express direction of God is, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Pro 22:24,25). Such a man is accursed as a pest of society, who disturbs and disquiets it, and puts everything into confusion. "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (Pro 29:22). Every one is uncomfortable about him; his example is evil, and his conduct disapproved alike by God and men.

Let these considerations, then, prevail with all, and lead them to avoid an angry spirit and temper, and to cultivate the spirit of gentleness, and kindness, and love, which is the spirit of heaven.

5. The Spirit of Charity Is the Opposite of a Censorious Spirit

"Charity...thinketh no evil"—1 Corinthians 13:5.

Having remarked how charity, or Christian love, is opposed not only to pride and selfishness, but to the ordinary fruits of these evil dispositions, viz. an angry spirit and a censorious spirit, and having already spoken as to the former, I come now to the latter. And in respect to this, the apostle declares, that charity "*thinketh no evil*." The doctrine set forth in these words is clearly this: that *the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of a censorious spirit*; or, in other words, it is contrary to a disposition to think or judge uncharitably of others.

Charity, in one of the common uses of the expression, signifies a disposition to think the best of others that the case will allow. This, however, as I have shown before, is not the Scriptural meaning of the word *charity*, but only one way of its exercise, or one of its many and rich fruits. Charity is of vastly larger extent than this. It signifies, as we have already seen, the same as Christian or divine love, and so is the same as the Christian spirit.

In accordance with this view, we here find the spirit of charitable judging mentioned among many other good fruits of charity, and here expressed, as the other fruits of charity are in the context, *negatively*, or by denying the contrary fruit, viz. censoriousness, or a disposition uncharitably to judge or censure others.

In speaking to this point, I would, first, show the nature of censoriousness, or wherein it consists; and then mention some things wherein it appears to be contrary to a Christian spirit. I would show,

I. The Nature of Censoriousness

The nature of a censorious spirit, a disposition uncharitably to judge others, consists in a disposition to think evil of others, or to judge evil of them, with respect to three things: their state, their qualities, their actions.

1. A forwardness¹¹ to judge evil of the state of others.

It often shows itself in a disposition to think the worst of those about us, whether they are men of the world or professing Christians. In respect to the latter class, it often leads persons to pass censure on those who are professors of religion, and to condemn them as being hypocrites. Here, however, extremes are to be avoided. Some persons are very apt to be positive, from little things that they observe in others, in determining that they are godly men; and others are forward, from just as little things, to be positive in condemning others as not having the least degree of grace in their hearts, and as being strangers to vital and experimental religion. But all positiveness in an affair of this nature seems to be without warrant from the Word of God. God seems there to have reserved the positive determination of men's state to Himself, as a thing to be kept in His own hands, as the great and only searcher of the hearts of the children of men.

Persons are guilty of censoriousness in condemning the state of others, when they will do it from things that are no evidence of their being in a bad estate, or when they will condemn others as hypocrites because of God's providential dealings with them, as Job's three friends condemned him as a hypocrite on account of his uncommon and severe afflictions. And the same is true when they condemn them for the failings they may see in them, and which are no greater than are often incident to God's children, and it may be no greater, or not so great as their own, though, notwithstanding just such things, they think well of themselves as Christians. And so persons are censorious when they condemn others as being unconverted and carnal men because they differ from them in opinion on some points that are not fundamental, or when they judge ill of their state from what they observe in them, for want of making due allowances for their natural temperament, or for their manner or want of education, or other peculiar disadvantages under which they labor. Persons are censorious when they are ready to reject all as irreligious and unconverted men, because their experiences do not in everything quadrate¹² with their own; setting up themselves, and their own experience, as a standard and rule to all others; not being sensible of that vast variety and liberty which the Spirit of God permits and uses in His saving work on the hearts of men, and how mysterious and inscrutable His ways often are, and especially in this great work of making men new creatures in Christ Jesus. In all these ways, men often act, not only censoriously, but as unreasonably (in not allowing any to be Christians who have not their own experiences) as if they would not allow any to be men who had not just their own stature, and the same strength, or temperament of body, and the very same features of countenance with themselves.

2. A forwardness to judge evil of the qualities of others.

It appears in a disposition to overlook their good qualities, or to think them destitute of such qualities when they are not, or to make very little of them; or to magnify their ill qualities, and make more of them than is just; or to charge them with those ill qualities that they have not. Some are very apt to charge others with ignorance and folly, and other contemptible qualities, when they in no sense deserve to be esteemed thus by them. Some seem very apt to entertain a very low and despicable opinion of others, and so to represent them to their associates and friends, when a charitable disposition would discern many good things in them, to balance or more than balance the evil, and would frankly own them to be persons not to be despised. And some are ready to charge others with those morally evil qualities that they are free from, or to charge them with such qualities in a much higher degree than they at all deserve.

Thus some have such a prejudice against some of their neighbors, that they regard them as a great deal more proud sort of persons, more selfish, or spiteful, or malicious, than they really are. Through some deep prejudice they have imbibed against them, they are ready to conceive that they have all manner of bad qualities, and no good ones. They seem to them to be an exceeding proud, or covetous, or selfish, or in some way bad, sort of men, when it may be that to others they appear well. Others see their many good qualities, and see, perhaps, many palliations of the qualities that are not good; but the censorious see only that which is evil, and speak only that which is unjust and disparaging as to the qualities of others.

3. A forwardness to judge evil of the actions of others.

By actions, here, I would be understood to mean all the external voluntary acts of men, whether consisting in words or deeds. And a censorious spirit in judging evil of others' actions discovers itself in two things.

First, in judging them to be guilty of evil actions *without any evidence that constrains them to such a judgment*. A suspicious spirit, which leads persons to be jealous of others, and ready to suspect them of being guilty of evil things when they have no evidence of it whatever, is an uncharitable spirit, and contrary to Christianity. Some persons are very free in passing their censures on others with respect to those things that they suppose they do out of their sight. They are ready to believe that they commit this, and that, and the other evil deed, in secret, and away from the eyes of men, or that they have done or said thus and so among their associates, and in the circle of their friends, and that, from some design or motive, they keep these things hid from others that are not in the same interest with themselves. These are the persons chargeable with the "evil surmisings" spoken of and condemned by the apostle, and which are connected with "envy, strife, and railings" (1Ti 6:4).

¹¹ **forwardness** – strong inclination, boldness, eagerness, too high a degree of readiness.

¹² **quadrate** – to agree with; to square with.

Very often, again, persons show an uncharitable and censorious spirit with respect to the actions of others, by being forward to take up and circulate evil reports about them. Merely hearing a flying and evil rumor about an individual, in such a thoughtless and lying world as this is, is far from being sufficient evidence against anyone, to make us believe he has been guilty of that which is reported; for the devil, who is called “the god of this world,” is said to be “a liar, and the father of it,” and too many, alas! of his children are like him in their speaking of falsehoods. And yet it is a very common thing for persons to pass a judgment on others, on no better ground or foundation than that they have heard that somebody has said this, or that, or the other thing, though they have no evidence that what is said is true. When they hear that another has done or said so and so, they seem at once to conclude that it is so, without making any further inquiry, though nothing is more uncertain, or more likely to prove false, than the mutterings or whispers of common fame. And some are always so ready to catch up an ill report, that it seems to be pleasing to them to hear evil of others. Their spirit seems greedy of it; and it is, as it were, food to the hunger of their depraved hearts, and they feed on it, as carrion birds do on the worst of flesh. They easily and greedily take it in as true, without examination, thus showing how contrary they are in character and conduct to him of whom the Psalmist speaks as dwelling in God’s tabernacle, and abiding in his holy hill, and of whom he declares, that “he taketh not up a reproach against his neighbor” (Psa 15:1-3); and showing, also, that they are rather like “the wicked doer,” that “giveth heed to false lips,” and as the “liar,” who “giveth ear to a naughty tongue” (Pro 17:4).

Second, a censorious spirit in judging evil of the actions of others also discovers itself in a disposition *to put the worst constructions on their actions*. The censorious are not only apt to judge others guilty of evil actions without sufficient evidence, but they are also prone to put a bad construction on their actions, when they will just as well, and perhaps better, admit of a good construction. Very often, the moving design and end in the action is secret, confined to the recesses of the actor’s own bosom; and yet persons are commonly very forward to pass their censure upon the act, without reference to these: and this is a kind of censoriousness and uncharitable judging, as common, or more common, than any other. Thus, it is very common with men, when they are prejudiced against others, to put bad constructions on their actions or words that are seemingly good, as though they were performed in hypocrisy; and this is especially true in reference to public offices and affairs. If anything be said or done by persons wherein there is a show of concern for the public good, or the good of a neighbor, or the honor of God, or the interest of religion, some will always be ready to say that all this is in hypocrisy, and that the design really is, only to promote their own interest, and to advance themselves; and that they are only flattering and deluding others, having all the time some evil design in their hearts.

4. Wherein lies the evil in judging ill of others?

But here it may be inquired, “Wherein lies the evil of judging ill of others, since it is not true that all judging ill of others is unlawful? And where are the lines to be drawn?” To this I reply,

First, there are some persons *that are appointed on purpose to be judges*, in civil societies, and in churches, who are impartially to judge of others that properly fall under their cognizance, whether good or bad, and to pass sentence according to what they are; to approve the good, and condemn the bad, according to the evidence, and the nature of the act done, and its agreement or disagreement with the law which is the judges’ rule.

Second, particular persons, in their private judgments of others; *are not obliged to divest themselves of reason*, that they may thus judge well of all. This would be plainly against reason; for Christian charity is not a thing founded on the ruins of reason, but there is the most sweet harmony between reason and charity. And therefore we are not forbidden to judge all persons when there is plain and clear evidence that they are justly chargeable with evil. We are not to blame, when we judge those to be wicked men, and poor Christless wretches, who give flagrant proof that they are so by a course of wicked action. “Some men’s sins,” says the apostle, “are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after” (1Ti 5:24). That is, some men’s sins are such plain testimony against them, that they are sufficient to condemn them as wicked men in full sight of the world, even before the coming of that final day of judgment that shall disclose the secrets of the heart to all. And so some men’s actions give such clear evidence of the evil of their intentions, that it is no judging the secrets of the heart, to judge that their designs and ends are wicked.

And therefore it is plain, that all judging as to others’ state, or qualifications, or actions, is not an uncharitable censoriousness. But the evil of that judging wherein censoriousness consists, lies in two things.

First, it lies in judging evil of others *when evidence does not oblige to it*, or in thinking ill of them when the case very well allows of thinking well of them; when those things that seem to be in their favor are overlooked, and only those that are against them are regarded, and when the latter are magnified, and too great stress laid on them. And the same is the case when persons are hasty and rash in judging and condemning others, though both prudence and charity oblige them to suspend their judgment till they know more of the matter, and all the circumstances are plain before them. Persons may often show a great deal of uncharitableness and rashness, in freely censuring others before they have heard what they have to say in their defense. And hence it is said, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Pro 18:13).

Second, the evil of that judging which is censorious lies in a *well-pleasedness* in judging ill of others. Persons may judge ill of others, from clear and plain evidence that compels them to it, and yet it may be to their grief that they are obliged to judge as they do; just as when a tender parent hears of some great crime of a child with such evidence that he cannot but think it true. But very often judgment is passed against others, in such a manner as shows that the individual is

well pleased in passing it. He is so forward in judging evil, and judges on such slight evidence, and carries his judgment to such extremes, as shows that his inclination is in it, and that he loves to think the worst of others. Such a well-pleasedness in judging ill of others is also manifested in our being forward to declare our judgment, and to speak as well as think evil of others. It may be in speaking of them with ridicule, or an air of contempt, or in bitterness or maliciousness of spirit, or with manifest pleasure in their deficiencies or errors. When to judge ill of others is against the inclination of persons, they will be very cautious in doing it, and will go no further in it than evidence obliges them, and will think the best that the nature of the case will admit, and will put the best possible construction on the words and actions of others. And when they are obliged, against their inclination, to think evil of another, it will be no pleasure to declare it, but they will be backward to speak of it to any, and will do so only when a sense of duty leads them to it.

Having thus shown the nature of censoriousness, I pass, as proposed, to show how,

II. A Censorious Spirit Is Contrary to the Spirit of Charity, or Christian Love.

1. A censorious spirit is contrary to love to our neighbor.

And this appears by three things.

First, we see that persons are *very backward to judge evil of themselves*. They are very ready to think well of their own qualifications; and so they are forward to think the best of their own state. If there be anything in them that resembles grace, they are exceeding apt to think that their state is good; and so they are ready to think well of their own words and deeds, and very backward to think evil of themselves in any of these respects. And the reason is, that they have a great love to themselves. And, therefore, if they loved their neighbor as themselves, love would have the same tendency with respect to him.

Second, we see that persons *are very backward to judge evil of those they love*. Thus we see it is in men toward those that are their personal friends, and thus it is in parents toward their children. They are very ready to think well of them, and to think the best of their qualifications, whether natural or moral. They are much more backward than others to take up evil reports of them, and slow to believe what is said against them. They are forward to put the most favorable constructions on their actions. And the reason is, because they love them.

Third, we see, also, that it is universally the case, *that where hatred and ill-will toward others most prevail, there a censorious spirit does most prevail also*. When persons fall out, and there is a difficulty between them, and anger and prejudice arise, and ill-will is contracted, there is always a forwardness to judge the worst of each other; an aptness to think meanly of each other's qualifications, and to imagine they discover in each other a great many evil qualities, and some that are very evil indeed. And each is apt to entertain jealousies of what the other may do when absent and out of sight; and is forward to listen to evil reports respecting him, and to believe every word of them, and apt to put the worst construction on all that he may say or do. And very commonly there is a forwardness to think ill of the condition he is in, and to censure him as a graceless person. And as it is in cases like this, of difficulty between particular persons, so it is apt to be the like in cases of difference between two parties. And these things show plainly that it is want¹³ of Christian love to our neighbor, and the indulgence of a contrary spirit, from which censoriousness arises. I will only add,

2. A censorious spirit manifests a proud spirit.

And this, the context declares, is contrary to the spirit of charity, or Christian love. A forwardness to judge and censure others shows a proud disposition, as though the censorious person thought himself free from such faults and blemishes, and therefore felt justified in being busy and bitter in charging others with them, and censuring and condemning them for them. This is implied in the language of the Savior, "Judge not, that ye be not judged...And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? *Thou hypocrite!*" (Mat 7:1-5). And the same is implied in the declaration of the apostle, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom 2:1). If men were humbly sensible of their own failings, they would not be very forward or pleased in judging others, for the censure passed upon others would but rest on themselves. There are the same kinds of corruption in one man's heart as in another's; and if those persons that are most busy in censuring others would but look within, and seriously examine their own hearts and lives, they might generally see the same dispositions and behavior in themselves, at one time or another, which they see and judge in others, or at least something as much deserving of censure.

And a disposition to judge and condemn shows a conceited and arrogant disposition. It has the appearance of a person's setting himself up above others, as though he were fit to be the lord and judge of his fellow-servants, and he supposed they were to stand or fall according to his sentence. This seems implied in the language of the apostle, "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge" (Jam 4:11). That is, you do not act as a fellow-servant to him that you judge, or as one that is

¹³ want – lack.

under the same law with him, but as the giver of the law, and the judge whose province it is to pass sentence under it. And therefore it is added, in the next verse, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another?" And so also Scripture says, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" (Rom 14:4). God is the only rightful judge, and the thought of His sovereignty and dominion should hold us back from daring to judge or censure our fellow-beings.

III. Application of This Doctrine

In the application of this subject I remark,

1. It sternly reproves those who commonly take to themselves the liberty of speaking evil of others.

If to think evil be so much to be condemned, surely they are still more to be condemned who not only allow themselves in thinking, but also in speaking evil of others, and backbiting them with their tongues. The evil-speaking that is against neighbors behind their backs does very much consist in censuring them, or in the expression of uncharitable thoughts and judgments of their persons and behavior. And, therefore, speaking evil of others, and judging others, are sometimes put for the same thing in the Bible, as in the passage just quoted from the apostle James.

How often does the Scripture condemn backbiting and evil-speaking! The Psalmist declares of the wicked, "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son" (Psa 50:19,20). And, says the apostle, to Titus, "Put them in mind... to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men" (Tit 3:1,2); and again, it is written, "Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings" (1Pe 2:1). And it is mentioned, as part of the character of everyone that is a citizen of Zion, and that shall stand on God's holy hill, that he "backbiteth not with his tongue" (Psa 15:3).

Inquire, therefore, whether you have not been often guilty of this; whether you have not frequently censured others, and expressed your hard thoughts of them, especially of those with whom you may have had some difficulty, or that have been of a different party from yourself. And is it not a practice in which you more or less allow yourself now, from day to day? And if so, consider how contrary it is to the spirit of Christianity, and to the solemn profession which, it may be, you have made as Christians; and be admonished entirely and at once to forsake it.

2. The subject also warns all against censoriousness, either by thinking or speaking evil of others, as they would be worthy of the name of Christians.

And here, in addition to the thoughts already suggested, let three things be considered.

First, how often, when the truth comes fully out, do things appear far better concerning others than at first we were ready to judge. There are many instances in the Scriptures to this point. When the children of Reuben, and of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had built an altar by Jordan, the rest of Israel heard of it, and presently concluded that they had turned away from the Lord, and rashly resolved to go to war against them. But when the truth came to light, it appeared, on the contrary, that they had erected their altar for a good end, even for the worship of God, as may be seen in the twenty-second chapter of Joshua. Eli thought Hannah was drunk, when she came up to the temple; but when the truth came to light, he was satisfied that she was full of grief, and was praying and pouring out her soul before God (1Sa 1:12-16). David concluded, from what Ziba told him, that Mephibosheth had manifested a rebellious and treasonable spirit against his crown, and so acted on his censorious judgment, greatly to the injury of the latter; but when the truth came to appear, he saw it was quite otherwise. Elijah judged ill of the state of Israel, that none were true worshippers of God but himself; but when God told him the truth, it appeared that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

And how commonly are things very much the same now-a-days! How often, on thorough examination, have we found things better of others than we have heard, and than at first we were ready to judge! There are always two sides to every story, and it is generally wise, and safe, and charitable to take the best; and yet there is probably no one way in which persons are so liable to be wrong, as in presuming the worst is true, and in forming and expressing their judgment of others, and of their actions, without waiting till all the truth is known.

Second, how little occasion is there for us to pass our sentence on others with respect to their state, qualification or actions that do not concern us. Our great concern is with ourselves. It is of infinite consequence to us that we have a good estate before God; that we are possessed of good qualities and principles; and that we behave ourselves well, and act with right aims, and for right ends. But it is a minor matter to us how it is with others. And there is little need of our censure being passed, even if it were deserved, which we cannot be sure of; for the business is in the hands of God, who is infinitely more fit to see to it than we can be. And there is a day appointed for His decision. So that, if we assume to judge others, we shall not only take upon ourselves a work that does not belong to us, but we shall be doing it before the time. "Therefore," says the apostle, "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor 4:5).

Third, God has threatened, that if we are found censoriously judging and condemning others, we shall be condemned ourselves. "Judge not," he says, "that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Mat 7:1). And again, the apostle asks, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that

thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (Rom 2:3). These are awful threatenings from the lips of that great Being who is to be our judge at the final day, by whom it infinitely concerns us to be acquitted, and from whom a sentence of condemnation will be unspeakably dreadful to us, if at last we sink forever under it. Therefore, as we would not ourselves receive condemnation from Him, let us not mete out such measure to others.

6. Heaven Is a World of Charity, or Love

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away"—*1 Corinthians 13:8-10*.

The doctrine that I would draw from the text is, that *heaven is a world of charity, or love*.

The apostle speaks, in the text, of a state of the church when it is perfect in heaven, and therefore a state in which the Holy Spirit shall be more perfectly and abundantly given to the church than it is now on earth. But the way in which it shall be given when it is so abundantly poured forth, will be in that great fruit of the Spirit, holy and divine love, in the hearts of all the blessed inhabitants of that world. So that the heavenly state of the church is a state that is distinguished from its earthly state, as it is that state which God has designed especially for such a communication of His Holy Spirit, and in which it shall be given perfectly; whereas, in the present state of the church, it is given with great imperfection. And it is also a state in which this holy love or charity shall be, as it were, the only gift or fruit of the Spirit, as being the most perfect and glorious of all, and which, being brought to perfection, renders all other gifts that God was wont to bestow on his church on earth, needless.

The CAUSE and FOUNTAIN of love in heaven is in...that the God of love Himself dwells in heaven. Heaven is the palace or presence-chamber of the high and holy One, whose name is love, and who is both the cause and source of all holy love. God, considered with respect to His essence, is everywhere—He fills both heaven and earth. But yet He is said, in some respects, to be more especially in some places than in others. He was said of old to dwell in the land of Israel, above all other lands; and in Jerusalem, above all other cities of that land; and in the temple, above all other buildings in the city; and in the holy of holies, above all other apartments of the temple; and on the mercy seat, over the ark of the covenant, above all other places in the holy of holies. But heaven is His dwelling-place above all other places in the universe; and all those places in which He was said to dwell of old, were but types of this. Heaven is a part of creation that God has built for this end, to be the place of His glorious presence, and it is His abode forever; and here will He dwell, and gloriously manifest Himself to all eternity.

And this renders heaven a world of love; for God is the fountain of love, as the sun is the fountain of light. And therefore the glorious presence of God in heaven, fills heaven with love, as the sun, placed in the midst of the visible heavens in a clear day, fills the world with light. The apostle tells us that "God is love" (1Jo 4:8); and therefore, seeing He is an infinite being, it follows that He is an infinite fountain of love. Seeing He is an all-sufficient being, it follows that He is a full and over-flowing, and inexhaustible fountain of love. And in that He is an unchangeable and eternal being, He is an unchangeable and eternal fountain of love.

There, even in heaven, dwells the God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is, or ever was, proceeds. There dwells God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, united as one, in infinitely dear, and incomprehensible, and mutual, and eternal love. There dwells God the Father, who is the father of mercies, and so the father of love, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son to die for it. There dwells Christ, the Lamb of God, the prince of peace and of love, who so loved the world that He shed His blood, and poured out His soul unto death for men. There dwells the great Mediator, through whom all the divine love is expressed toward men, and by whom the fruits of that love have been purchased, and through whom they are communicated, and through whom love is imparted to the hearts of all God's people. There dwells Christ in both His natures, the human and the divine, sitting on the same throne with the Father. And there dwells the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, flows out, and is breathed forth in love, and by whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven. There, in heaven, this infinite fountain of love—this eternal Three in One—is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it, as it flows forever. There this glorious God is manifested, and shines forth, in full glory, in beams of love. And there this glorious fountain forever flows forth in streams, yea, in rivers of love and delight, and these rivers swell, as it were, to an ocean of love, in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe with the sweetest enjoyment, and their hearts, as it were, be deluged with love!

If you would be in the way to the world of love, see that you live a life of love—of love to God, and love to men. All of us hope to have part in the world of love hereafter, and therefore we should cherish the spirit of love, and live a life of holy love here on earth. This is the way to be like the inhabitants of heaven, who are now confirmed in love forever. Only in this way can you be like them in excellence and loveliness, and like them, too, in happiness, and rest, and joy. By living in love in this world you may be like them, too, in sweet and holy peace, and thus have, on earth, the foretastes of heavenly pleasures and delights.

Thus, also, you may have a sense of the glory of heavenly things, as of God, and Christ, and holiness; and your heart be disposed and opened by holy love to God, and by the spirit of peace and love to men, to a sense of the excellence and sweetness of all that is to be found in heaven. Thus shall the windows of heaven be as it were opened, so that its glorious light shall shine in upon your soul. Thus you may have the evidence of your fitness for that blessed world, and that you are actually on the way to its possession.

And being thus made ready, through grace, for the inheritance of the saints in light, when a few more days shall have passed away, you shall be with them in their blessedness forever. Happy, thrice happy those, who shall thus be found faithful to the end, and then shall be welcomed to the joy of their Lord! There,

“they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”—*Revelation 7:16-17*.

