

07. CHRISTIAN LOVE

by Hugh Binning

A series of sermons exploring the nature and practice of Christian love from 1 John. Binning, a gifted young Scottish minister, presents the marks of genuine love for God and neighbor as evidence of true saving faith.

13 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.1. Christian Love
2. 00.3. TO THE READER
3. 01. CHRISTIAN LOVE
4. 02. CHAPTER II
5. 03. CHAPTER III
6. 04. CHAPTER IV
7. 05. CHAPTER V
8. 06. SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS OF PRACTICAL RELIGION
9. 07. SERMON I
10. 08. SERMON II
11. 09. SERMON III
12. 10. SERMON IV
13. 11. SERMON V

00.1. Christian Love

Christian Love by Hugh Binning

WHEREIN THE NATURE, PROPERTIES, EXCELLENCY, AND FRUITS OF THIS CHRISTIAN GRACE ARE DISTINCTLY EXPLAINED, AND THE CONSTANT EXERCISE OF IT ENFORCED FROM THE MOST POWERFUL MOTIVES; WITH A PARAPHRASE UPON THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, DIVIDED INTO FIVE CHAPTERS.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."—John 13:35.

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00.3. TO THE READER

TO THE READER This treatise concerning Christian Love, was composed by the pious and learned Mr. Hugh Binning, who was minister of the gospel at Govan, near to Glasgow. He was much celebrated and esteemed in this church, for several practical treatises, frequently printed for the benefit of the public; but this is not inferior to any of them.

Though there have been many excellent discourses in late years on this divine subject, yet, considering that there never was a time wherein a treatise of this kind was more seasonable and necessary than the present, when the love of many, of too, too many, is waxed cold, and this holy fire is almost extinguished, this cannot be thought to be superfluous. The author was a minister of a most pacific temper; and this amiable grace and virtue did illustriously shine forth in him: and in this discourse, he breathes with a spirit of love in the most affecting and gaining manner; so that, I dare say, that, though it be above ninety years since he composed it, it does not fall short of any performance of this kind that has since appeared in public. This treatise, with a great number of excellent sermons, preached by this able minister of the gospel, many of which have never been printed, in a manuscript in folio, was found in the late Rev. Robert Wodrow, minister of the gospel at Eastwood's library; and all care has been taken to publish it faithfully, without any alteration, either by adding or diminishing any thing from it. This divine subject of Christian love he lays a great stress upon; he shews, that there is a greater moment and weight in Christian charity, than in the most part of those things, for which some Christians bite and devour one another. It is the fundamental law of the gospel, to which all positive precepts and ordinances should stoop. Unity in judgment is very necessary for the well-being of Christians; and Christ's last words persuade this, "That unity in affection is most essential and fundamental;" this is the badge that he left to his disciples: if we cast away this upon every different apprehension of mind, we disown our Master, and disclaim his token and badge.

Mr. Binning treats of this subject in a most sublime and pathetic strain; he explains the nature of this grace, discourses of the excellent properties and blessed effects and fruits of it, in a ravishing and captivating manner. There is such a variety of beauties in this treatise, that they deserve to be noticed in this preface; and particularly, his admirable commentary on the 13th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, wherein he outstrips all that went before him: and, in fine, he enforces the exercise of this grace with the most convincing arguments, and the most powerful motives. And now, not to detain the reader from the perusal, it is earnestly wished, that the end of the publication may, by the blessing of God, be obtained; which is, that Christians in our days may be as the primitive ones,—of one mind and of one heart, and that they may love one another with a pure heart fervently.

01. CHRISTIAN LOVE

CHRISTIAN LOVE

CHAPTER I The beauty and excellency of this world consists, not only in the perfection and comeliness of each part in it, but especially in the wise and wonderful proportion and union of these so several parts. It is not the lineaments and colours that make the image, or complete the beauty; but the proportion and harmony of these, though different severally. And truly that is the wonder, that such repugnant natures, such different parts, and dissentient qualities, do conspire together in such an exact perfect unity and agreement; in which the wisdom of God doth most appear, by making all things in number, weight, and measure. His power appears in the making of all the materials of nothing; but his wisdom is manifested in the ordering and disposing so dissonant natures into one well agreeing and comely frame: so that, this orderly disposition of all things into one fabric, is that harmonious melody of the creation, made up, as it were, of dissonant sounds; and that comely beauty of the world, resulting from such a proportion and wise combination of divers lines and colours. To go no farther than the body of a man,—how, what various elements are combined into a well-ordered being, so as they may join in friendship and society, and make up one sweet temperament?

Now, it is most reasonable to suppose, that, by the law of creation, there was no less order and unity to be among men, the chiefest of the works of God. And so it was, indeed, as God had moulded the rest of the world into a beautiful frame by the first stamp of his finger, so he did engrave upon the hearts of men such a principle, as might be a perpetual bond and tie to unite the sons of men together. This was nothing else but the law of love, the principal fundamental law of our creation—love to God, founded on that essential dependence and subordination to God, and love to man, grounded upon that communion and interest in one image of God. All the commandments of the first and second table are but so many branches of these trees, or streams of these fountains: therefore, our Saviour gives a complete abridgment of the law of nature and moral law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all mind; this is the first and great commandment: the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," Matthew 22:37-39. "And therefore," as Paul says, "love is the fulfilling of the law," Romans 13:10. The universal debt we owe to God is love in the superlative degree; and the universal debt we owe one another, is love in an inferior degree, yet of no lower kind than that of ourselves: "owe no man any thing, but to love one another," Romans 13:8, and that collateral with himself, as Christ speaks. Unto these laws all other are subordinate, and one of them is subordinate to the other, but to nothing else. And so, as long as the love of God may go before, the love of man should follow; and whatever doth not untie the bond of divine affection, ought not to loose the knot of that love which is linked with it; when the uniting of souls together divides both from God, then, indeed, and only then, must this knot be untied, that the other may be kept fast. But this beautiful and comely frame of man is marred. Sin hath cut in pieces that divine love that knit man to God; and the dissolving of this hath loosed that link of human society,—love to our neighbour. And now all is rent to rage and distraction, because self-love hath usurped the throne.

The unity of the world of mankind is dissolved; one is distracted from another, following their own private inclination, and inordinate affection, which is the poison of enmity, and seed of all discord. If the love of God and of one another had kept the throne, there had been a co-ordination and co-working of all men in all their actions, for God's glory and the common good of man. But now self-love having enthroned itself, every man is for himself, and strives, by all means, to make a concurrence of all things to his own interest and designs. The first principles of love would have made all men's actions and courses flow into one ocean of divine glory and mutual edification; so that there could not have been any disturbance or jarring amongst them, all flowing into one common end. But self-love hath turned all the channels backward towards itself; and this is its wretched aim and endeavour, in which it wearies itself and discomposes the world,—to wind and turn in every thing, and to make in the end, a general affluence of the streams into its own bosom; this is the seed of all division and confusion which is among men, while every man makes himself the centre, it cannot choose but all the lines and draughts of men's courses must thwart and cross each other.

Now, the Lord Jesus having redeemed lost man, and repaired his ruins, he makes up this breach, especially restores this fundamental ordinance of our creation, and unites men again to God and to one another; therefore he is our peace, he hath removed the seeds of discord between God and man, and between man and man: and this is the subject of that divine epistle which the beloved apostle, full of that divine love, did pen. "God is love; and in this was the love of God manifested, that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, and he that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; but we love God, because he loved us first, and if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another," 1 John 4. This is the very substance of the gospel, a doctrine of God's love to man, and of man's love due to God, and to them who are begotten of God; the one declared, the other commanded: So that much of the gospel is but a new edition or publication of that old ancient fundamental law of creation. This is that paradox which John delivers, "I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which you had from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and you; because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth," 1 John 2:7-8. It is no new commandment, but that primitive command of love to God and men, which is the fulfilling of the law; and yet new it is, because there is a new obligation superadded. The bond of creation was great, but the tie of redemption is greater. God gave a being to man, that is enough; but God to become a miserable man for man, that is infinitely more. Fellow-creatures, that is sufficient for a bond of amity; but to be once fellow-captives, companions in misery, and then companions in mercy and blessedness, that is a new and stronger bond. Mutual love was the badge of reasonable creatures in innocency; but now Jesus Christ hath put a new stamp and signification on it, and made it the very differential character and token of his disciples, "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another;" and therefore when he is making his latter will, he gives this testamentary commandment to his children and heirs, "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." New indeed; for though it be the same command, yet there was never such a motive, inducement, and persuasive to it as this: God so loved that he gave me, and I so loved that I gave myself; that is an addition more than all that was before, John 13:34-35.

There is a special stamp of excellency put on this affection of love, that God delights to exhibit himself to us in such a notion, "God is love:" And so holds out himself as the pattern of this, "Be ye followers of God as dear children, and walk in love," Ephesians 5:1-2. This is the great virtue and property which we should imitate our Father in. As God hath a general love to all the creatures, from whence the river of his goodness flows out through the earth, and in that, is like the sun conveying his light and benign influence, without partiality or restraint, to the whole world; but his special favour runs in a more narrow channel towards those whom he hath chosen in Christ: So in this a Christian should be like his Father; and there is nothing in which he resembles him more than in this,—to walk in love towards all men, even our enemies; for in this he gives us a pattern, Matth. 5:44, 45, "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." To do good to all, and to be ready to forgive, is the glory of God; and certainly it is the glory of a child of God to be merciful as his Father is merciful, and good to all, and kind to the unthankful; and this is to be perfect as he is perfect; this perfection is charity and love to all. But the particular and special current of affection will run toward the household of faith; those who are of the same descent, and family, and love. This drawn into such a compass, is the badge and livery of his disciples. These two in a Christian are nothing but the reflex of the love of God, and streams issuing out from it. A Christian walking in love to all, blessing his enemies, praying for them; not reviling or cursing again, but blessing for cursing, and praying for reviling; forgiving all, and ready to give to the necessities of all; and more especially, uniting the force of his love and delight, to bestow it upon those who are the excellent ones, and delight of God. Such a one is his Father's picture, so to speak; he is partaker of that divine nature, and royal spirit of love. Galatians 6:10. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father; at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints."

It is foretold by our Lord Jesus Christ, "that in the last days the love of many shall wax cold," Matthew 24:12. And truly this is the symptom of a decaying and fading Christian and church. Love is the vital spirits of a Christian, which are the principles of all motion and lively operation: when there is a deliquium in these, the soul is in a decay. It is so comprehensive an evil, as alone is sufficient to make an evil time; and besides, it is the argument and evidence, as well as the root and fountain, of abounding iniquity, because this is the epidemical disease of the present time,—love cooled and passion heated; whence proceed all the feverish distempers, contentions, wars, and divisions, which have brought the church of God near to expiring. Therefore, being mindful of that of the apostle, Hebrews 10:24, I would think it pertinent to consider one another, and provoke again unto love and to good works. It was the great charge that Christ had against Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love." I shall therefore shew the excellency and necessity of this grace, that so we may remember from whence we have fallen, and repent, that we may do the first works, lest he come quickly and remove our candlestick; Revelation 2:4-5.

02. CHAPTER II

CHAPTER II

1. It might endear this Christian virtue unto us, that God propones himself as the pattern of it, that Christ holds out himself as the rare example of it for our imitation. It is what doth most endear God to creatures, and certainly it must likewise appreciate them one to another; 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." Matthew 5:44-45, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Ephesians 5:1-2, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Now, the following of so rare an example, and imitating of so noble and high a pattern, doth exalt the soul into a royalty and dignity, that it dwells in God and God in it, 1 John 4:16. This is the highest point of conformity with God, and the nearest resemblance of our Father. To be like him in wisdom, that wretched aim did cast men as low as hell; but to aspire unto a likeness in love, lifts up the soul as high as heaven, even to a mutual inhabitation.

2. It should add an exceeding weight unto it, that we have not only so high a pattern, but so excellent a motive. God so loved; and "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" therefore, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:9-11, "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us," Ephesians 5:2. Here are the topics of the most vehement persuasion. There is no invention can afford so constraining a motive,—Christ so loving us, that he gave himself a sacrifice for sin. O then! who should live to himself, when Christ died for others? And who should not love, when God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all? "God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 8:32; Romans 5:8.

3. Join to this so earnest and pressing a command, even the latter will of him to whom we owe that we are, and are redeemed; that is the burden he lays on us; this is all the recompence he seeks for his unparalleled love, "This is my command, that as I have loved you, ye love one another," John 13:34. Your goodness cannot extend to me, therefore I assign all the beneficence and bounty ye owe to me, I give it over to those whom I have loved, and have not loved my life for them; now, says he, whatsoever ye would count yourself obliged to do to me, if I were on the earth among you, do it to those poor ones whom I have left behind me, and this is all the testimony of gratitude I crave. Matthew 25:34-40, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in

prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me:" "These ye have always with you, but me ye have not always." It is strange, how earnestly, how solicitously, how pungently he expresses this exhortation,—John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to one another." John 15:12; John 15:17, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. These things I command you, that ye love one another." And his apostles after him, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Colossians 3:14, "And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." 1 Peter 4:8, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." But above all, that beloved disciple, who, being so intimate with Jesus Christ, we may lawfully conceive he was inured to that affectionate frame by his converse with Christ; and has been most mindful of Christ's testamentary injunctions; he cannot speak three sentences, but this is one of them. All which may convince us of this one thing, that there is a greater moment and weight of Christianity in charity than in the most part of those things for which Christians bite and devour one another. It is the fundamental law of the gospel, to which all positive precepts and ordinances should stoop. Unity in judgment is very needful for the well-being of Christians; but Christ's last words persuade this, that unity in affection is more essential and fundamental; this is the badge he left to his disciples; if we cast away this upon every different apprehension of mind, we disown our master, and disclaim his token and badge.

4. The apostle Paul puts a high note of commendation upon charity, when he styles it the bond of perfection; "above all things," says he, "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness," Colossians 3:14. I am sure it hath not so high a place in the minds and practice of Christians now, as it hath in the roll of the parts and members of the new man here set down. Here it is above all; with us it is below all, even below every apprehension of doubtful truths. An agreement in the conception of any poor petty controversial matter of the times, is made the badge of Christianity, and set in an eminent place above all that the apostle mentions in the 12th verse, bowels of mercy, kindness, gentleness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. Nay, charity itself is but a waiting-handmaid to this mistress. But let us consider the apostle's significant character he puts on it: It is a bond of perfection, as it were, a bundle of graces, and chain of virtues,—even the very cream and flower of many graces combined. It is the sweet result of the united force of all graces; it is the very head and heart of the new man, which we are invited to put on; "Above all, put on charity." All these fore-mentioned perfections are bound and tied together, by the girdle of charity and love, to the new man. When charity is born and brought forth, it may be styled *Gad*; for a troop cometh, *chorus virtutum*, a troop or company of virtues which it leads and commands. Charity hath a tender heart; for it hath bowels of mercies. Such a compassionate and melting temper of spirit, that the misery or calamity, whether bodily or spiritual, of other men, makes an impression upon it; and, therefore, it is the Christian sympathy which affects itself with others' afflictions. If others be moved, it moves itself through comfort and sympathy. This is not only extended to bodily and outward infirmities, but, most of all, to infirmities of mind and heart, error,

ignorance, darkness, falling and failing in temptation. We are made priests to God our Father, to have compassion on them who are ignorant and out of the way; for that we ourselves are also compassed with infirmity, Revelation 1:6; Hebrews 5:2. Then, love hath a humble mind, humbleness of mind, else it could not stoop and condescend to others of low degree; and, therefore, Christ exhorts above all to lowliness; "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." If a man be not lowly, to sit down below offences and infirmities, his love cannot rise above them. Self-love is the greatest enemy to true Christian love, and pride is the fountain of self-love. Because it is impossible that, in this life, there should be an exact correspondence between the thoughts and ways of Christians; therefore it is not possible to keep this bond of perfection unbroken, except there be a mutual condescendence. Self-love would have all conformed to it; and if that be not, there is the rent presently. But humbleness of mind can conform itself to all things, and this keeps the bond fast. Then charity, by the link of humility, hath meekness chained unto it, and kindness; love is of a sweet complexion, meek and kind. Pride is the mother of passion, humbleness the mother of meekness. The inward affection is composed by meekness, and the outward actions adorned by gentleness and kindness. O that sweet composure of spirit! The heart of the wicked is as the troubled sea; no rest, no quiet in it, continual tempests rising, continual waves of disquiet. An unmeek spirit is like a boiling pot: it troubles itself and annoys others. Then, at length, charity, by lowliness and meekness, is the most durable, enduring, long-suffering thing in the world; "with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;" these are the only principles of patience and longanimity. Anger and passion is expressed in Scripture under the name of haste; and it is a sudden, furious, hasty thing; a rash, inconsiderate, impatient thing; more hasty than speedy. Now the special exercises and operations of these graces are in the 13th verse, "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another," according to Christ's example. And, indeed, these are so high and sublime works, as charity must yoke all the fore-mentioned graces, unite them all in one troop, for the accomplishing of them. And the great and sweet fruit of all this is comprehended in the 15th verse; "The peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are called in one body." Peace with God is not here meant, but the peace which God hath made up between men. All were shattered and rent asunder; the Lord hath by his Son Jesus Christ gathered so many into one body,—the church; and by one spirit quickens all. Now, where love is predominant, there is a sweet peace and harmony between all the members of this one body; and this peace and tranquillity of affection rubs and predomines over all those lusts, which are the mineries of contentions, and strifes, and wars.

5. Add unto this another special mark of excellency, that this apostle puts on charity or Christian love; "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned," 1 Timothy 1:5. If this were duly pondered, I do believe it would fill all hearts with astonishment, and faces with confusion, that they neglected the weightier matters of the law, and overstretched some other particular duties, to fill up the place of this, which is the end, the fulfilling of the law. It appears by this that charity is a cream of graces; it is the spirit and quintessence extracted out of those cardinal graces,—unfeigned faith, a good conscience, a pure heart. It is true, the immediate end of the law, as it is now expounded unto us, is to draw us to believe in Jesus Christ, as it is expressed, Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." But this believing in Christ is not the last end of it: faith unfeigned in a Mediator is intentionally for this,—to give the answer of a good conscience in the blood of Christ, and to purify the heart by the water of the spirit; and so to bring about at length, by such a sweet

compass, the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled by love in us, which, by divine imputation, is fulfilled to us. Now, consider the context, and it shall yield much edification. Some teachers, 1 Timothy 1:4, exercised themselves and others in endless genealogies, which, though they contain some truth in them, yet they were perplexed, and brought no edification to souls. Curiosity might go round in such debates, and bewilder itself as in a labyrinth: but they did rather multiply disputes than bring true edification in the faith and love of God and man. "Now," says he, "they do wholly mistake the end of the law of the doctrine of the scripture;" the end and great purpose of it is love, which proceeds from faith in Christ, purifying the heart. This is the sum of all,—to worship God in faith and purity, and to love one another; and whatsoever debates and questions do tend to the breach of this bond, and have no eminent and remarkable advantage in them, suppose they be conceived to be about matters of conscience, yet the entertaining and prosecuting them to the prejudice of this, is a manifest violence offered to the law of God, which is the rule of conscience; it is a perverting of Scripture and conscience to a wrong end. I say, then, that charity and Christian love should be the moderatrix of all our actions toward men; from thence they should proceed, and according to this rule be formed. I am persuaded, if this rule were followed, the differences in judgment of godly men, about such matters as minister mere questions, would soon be buried in the gulph of Christian affection.

6. Now, to complete the account of the eminence of this grace, take that remarkable chapter of Paul's, 1 Corinthians 13, where he institutes the comparison between it and other graces; and in the end, pronounces on its behalf, "the greatest of these is charity." I wonder how we do please ourselves, as that we had attained already, when we do not so much as labour to be acquainted with this, in which the life of Christianity consists: without which, faith is dead, our profession vain, our other duties and endeavours for the truth unacceptable to God and man. Yet I shew you a more excellent way, says he, in the former chapter; and this is the more excellent way,—charity and love, more excellent than gifts, speaking with tongues, prophesying, &c. And is it not more excellent than the knowledge and acknowledgment of some present questionable matters, about governments, treaties, and such like, and far more than every punctilio of them? But he goes higher. Suppose a man could spend all his substance upon the maintenance of such an opinion, and give his life for the defence of it, though in itself it be commendable, yet, if he want charity and love to his brethren, if he overstretch that point of conscience to the breach of Christian affection, and duties flowing from it, it profits him nothing: then, certainly, charity must rule our external actions, and have the predominant hand in the use of all gifts, in the venting of all opinions. Whatsoever knowledge and ability a man hath, charity must employ it and use it: without this, duties and graces make a noise; but they are shallow and empty within. Now he shews the sweet properties of it, and good effects of it: how universal an influence it hath on all things, but especially, how necessary it is to keep the unity of the Church.

Charity is kind and suffereth long μακροθυμε■, it is longanimous or magnanimous: and there is, indeed, no great, truly great mind, but it is patient and long-suffering. It is a great weakness and pusillanimity to be soon angry: such a spirit hath not the rule of itself, but is in bondage to its own lust; "but he that ruleth his spirit, is greater than he that taketh a city." Now, it is much of this affection of love that over-rules passion: there is a greatness and height in it, to love them that deserve not well of us, to be kind to the unfaithful, not be easily provoked, and not soon disoblige. A fool's wrath is presently known; it is a folly and weakness of spirit, which love, much love, cures

and amends. It suffers much unkindness, and long suffers it, and yet can be kind.

"Charity envieth not." Envy is the seed of all contention, and self-love brings it forth. When every man desires to be esteemed, and would have pre-eminence among others, their ways and courses must interfere one with another. It is that makes discord: every man would abate from another's estimation, that he may add to his own; none lives content with his own lot or station, and it is aspiring beyond that which puts all the wheels out of course. I believe this is the root of many contentions among Christians,—the apprehension of slighting, the conceit of disrespect, and such like, kindles the flame of difference, and heightens the least offence to an unpardonable injury. But charity envieth not where it may lie quietly low; though it be under feet of others, and beneath its own due place, yet it envieth not, it can lie contentedly so: suppose it be slighted and despised, yet it takes it not highly, because it is lowly in mind.

"Charity is not puffed up, and vaunteth not itself." If charity have gifts and graces beyond others, it restrains itself with the bridle of modesty and humility, from vaunting or boasting, or any thing in its carriage that may savour of conceit. Pride is a self-admirer, and despises others, and to please itself it cares not to displease others. There is nothing so uncomfortable in human or Christian society, so apt to alienate others' affections: for the more we take of our own affection to ourselves, we shall have the less from others. O those golden rules of Christian walking! Romans 12:10; Romans 12:16, "Be kindly affectionate one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. O but that were a comely strife among Christians! each to prefer another in unfeigned love; and in lowliness of mind, each to esteem another better than himself, Php 2:3. "Knowledge puffeth up," says this apostle, 1 Corinthians 8:1, "but charity edifieth;" it is but a swelling and a tumour of mind, but love is solid piety and real religion.

Then, charity doth nothing unseemly, "behaveth not itself unseemly," 1 Corinthians 13:5. Vanity and swelling of mind will certainly break forth into some unseemly carriage, as vain estimation, and such like; but charity keeps a sweet decorum in all its carriage, so as not to provoke and irritate others, nor yet to expose itself to contempt or mockery. Or the word may be taken thus,—it is not fastidious; it accounts not itself disgraced and abused to condescend to men of low estate; it can, with its master, bow down to wash a disciple's feet, and not think it unseemly: whatsoever it submit to in doing or suffering, it is not ashamed of it, as that it were not suitable or comely.

"Charity seeketh not her own things." Self-denial and true love are inseparable: self-love makes a monopoly of all things to its own interest; and this is most opposite to Christian affection and communion, which puts all in one bank. If every one of the members should seek its own things, and not the good of the whole body, what a miserable distemper would it cause in the body? We are called into one body in Christ, and therefore, we should look not on our own things only, but every man also on the things of others, Php 2:4. There is a public interest of saints' mutual edification in faith and love, which charity will prefer to its private interest. Addictedness to our own apprehension, and too much self-overweening and self-pleasing, is the grand enemy of that peace to which we are called into one body. Since one spirit informs and enlivens all the members, what a monstrosity is it for one member to seek its own things, and attend its own private interest only, as if it were a distinct body.

"Charity is not easily provoked." This is the straight and solid firmness of it, that it is not soon moved with external impressions. It is long-suffering, it suffers long and much; it will not be shaken by violent and weighty pressures of injuries; where there is much provocation given, yet it is not provoked: Now, to complete it, it is not easily provoked at light offences. It is strange, how little a spark of injuries puts all in a flame, because our spirits are as gunpowder, so capable of combustion through corruption. How ridiculous, for the most part, are the causes of our wrath? For light things we are heavily moved, and for ridiculous things sadly; even as children who fall out among themselves for toys and trifles, or as beasts that are provoked upon the mere shew of a colour, as red, or such like. We would save ourselves much labour, if we could judge before we suffer ourselves to be provoked: but now we follow the first appearance of wrong; and being once moved from without, we continue our commotion within, lest we should seem to be angry without a cause. But charity hath a more solid foundation,—it dwells in God, for God is love; and so is truly great, truly high, and looks down with a stedfast countenance upon these lower things. The upper world is continually calm and serene; no clouds, no tempests there,—no winds, nothing to disturb the harmonious and uniform motion: but it is this lower world that is troubled and tossed with tempests, and obscured with clouds. So, a soul dwelling in God by love, is exalted above the cloudy region; he is calm, quiet, serene, and is not disturbed or interrupted in his motion of love to God or men.

"Charity thinketh no evil." Charity is apt to take all things in the best sense: If a thing may be subject to divers acceptations, it can put the best construction on it: It is so benign and good in its own nature, that it is not inclinable to suspect others. It desires to condemn no man, but would gladly, as far as reason and conscience will permit, absolve every man. It is so far from desire of revenge, that it is not provoked or troubled with an injury; for that were nothing else but to wrong itself because others have wronged it already; and it is so far from wronging others, that it will not willingly so much as think evil of them. Yet if need require, charity can execute justice, and inflict chastisement, not out of desire of another's misery, but out of love and compassion to mankind. *Charitas non punit quia peccatum est sed ne peccetur*; it looks more to prevention of future sin, than to revenge of a by-past fault; and can do all without any discomposure of spirit, as a physician cuts a vein without anger. *Quis enim cui medetur irascitur?* Who is angry at his own patient?

"Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity." Charity is not defiled in itself, though it condescend to all. Though it can love and wish well to evil men, yet it rejoiceth not in iniquity. It is like the sun's light that shines on a dunghill, and is not defiled, receives no tincture from it. Some base and wicked spirits make a sport to do mischief themselves, and take pleasure in others that do it. But charity rejoices in no iniquity or injustice, though it were done to its own enemy. It cannot take pleasure in the unjust sufferings of any who hate it; because it hath no enemy but sin and iniquity, and hates nothing else with a perfect hatred. Therefore, whatever advantage should redound to itself by other men's iniquities, it cannot rejoice that iniquity, its capital enemy, should reign and prevail. But it rejoiceth in the truth; the advancement and progress of others in the way of truth and holiness is its pleasure; though that should eclipse its own glory, yet it looks not on it with an evil eye. If it can find out any good in them that are enemies to it, it is not grieved to find it and know it, but can rejoice at any thing which may give ground of good construction of them. There is nothing more beautiful in its eyes than to see every one get their own due, though it alone should come behind.

"Charity beareth all things." By nature we are undaunted heifers, cannot bear any thing patiently: But charity is accustomed to the yoke, to the yoke of reproaches and injuries from others, to a burden of other men's infirmities and failings. We would all be borne upon others' shoulders, but we cannot put our own shoulders under other men's burden; according to that royal law of Christ, Romans 15:1, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves:" And Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ;" that is the law of love, no question.

"Charity believeth all things." Our nature is malignant and wicked, and therefore most suspicious and jealous, and apt to take all in the worst part: But charity hath much candour and humanity in it, and can believe well of every man, and believe all things as far as truth will permit. It knows that grace can be beside a man's sins; it knows that itself is subject to such like infirmities: therefore it is not a rigid and censorious judge; it allows as much latitude to others as it would desire of others. It is true it is not blind and ignorant, it is judicious, and hath eyes that can discern between colours: credit Omnia credenda, sperat omnia speranda,—it hopes all things that are hopeful, and believes all things that are believable. If love have not sufficient evidences, yet she believes if there be some probabilities to the contrary as well as for it; the weight of charity inclines to the better part, and so casts the balance of hope and persuasion; yet being sometimes deceived, she hath reason to be watchful and wise; for she believeth every word. If charity cannot have ground of believing any good, yet it hopes still: Qui non est hodie cras magis aptus erit, says charity; and therefore it is patient and gentle, waiting on all, if peradventure God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, 2 Timothy 2:25. Charity would account it both sin and blasphemy, to say such a man cannot, will not, find mercy. But to pronounce of such as have been often approved in the conscience of all, and sealed into many hearts, that they will never find mercy, that they have no grace, because of some failings in practice and differences from us, it were not insobriety but madness. It is certainly love and indulgence to ourselves, that makes us aggravate other men's faults to such a height. Self-love looks on other men's failings through a multiplying or magnifying glass; but she puts her own faults behind her back, Non videt quod in mantica quæ a tergo est; therefore she can suffer much in herself but nothing in others; and certainly much self-forgiveness and indulgence can spare little for others. But charity is just contrary,—she is most rigid on her own behalf, will not pardon herself easily; knows no revenge but what is spoken of 2 Corinthians 7:11,—self-revenge; and hath no indignation but against herself. Thus she can spare much candour and forgiveness for others, and hath little or nothing of indignation left behind to consume on others.

"Charity never faileth." This is the last note of commendation. Things have their excellency from their use and from their continuance; both are here. Nothing so useful, no such friend of human or Christian society as charity,—the advantage of it reacheth all things. But then, it is most permanent and durable: When all shall go, it shall remain; when ordinances and knowledge attained by means and ordinances, shall vanish, charity shall abide, and then receive its consummation. Faith of things inevident and obscure shall be drowned in the vision of seeing God's face clearly; hope of things to come shall be exhausted in the possession and fruition of them: but love only remains in its own nature and notion; only it is perfected by the addition of so many degrees as may suit that blessed estate. Therefore, methinks it should be the study of all saints who believe immortality, and hope for eternal life, to put on that garment of charity, which is the livery of all the

inhabitants above. We might have heaven upon earth, as far as is possible, if we dwelt in love, and love dwelt and possessed our hearts. What an unsuitable thing might a believer think it, to hate Him in this world, whom he must love eternally; and to contend and strive with these, even for matters of small moment, with bitterness and rigidity, with whom he shall have an eternal, uninterrupted unity and fellowship. Should we not be assaying here, how that glorious garment suits us? And truly there is nothing makes a man so heaven-like or godly as this,—much love and charity.

Now there is one consideration might persuade us the more unto it,—that here we know but darkly and in part, and, therefore, our knowledge at best, is but obscure and inevident; oftentimes subject to many mistakes and misapprehensions of truth, according as mediums represent them. And, therefore, there must be some latitude of love allowed one to another in this state of imperfection, else it is impossible to keep unity; and we must conflict often with our own shadows, and bite and devour one another for some deceiving appearances. The imperfection and obscurity of knowledge should make all men jealous of themselves, especially in matters of a doubtful nature, and not so clearly determined by Scripture. Because our knowledge is weak, shall our love be none? Nay, rather let charity grow stronger, and aspire unto perfection; because knowledge is imperfect. What is wanting in knowledge, let us make up in affection; and let the gap of difference in judgment be swallowed up with the bowels of mercies, and love, and humbleness of mind. And then we shall have hid our infirmity of understanding as much as may be. Thus we may go hand in hand together to our Father's house, where, at length, we must be together.

03. CHAPTER III

CHAPTER III

I may briefly reduce the chief persuading motive to this so needful and so much desiderated grace into some three or four heads. All things within and without persuade to it; but especially the right consideration of the love of God in Christ,—the wise and the impartial reflection on ourselves,—the consideration of our brethren whom we are commanded to love,—and the thorough inspection into the nature and use of the grace itself. In consideration of the first, a soul might argue itself into a complacency with it, and thus persuade itself; "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love," 1 John 4:8. And since he that hath known and believed the love that God hath to us, must certainly dwell in love; since these two have such a strait indissoluble connection, then, as I would not declare to all my atheism and my ignorance of God, I will study to love my brethren; and that I may love them, I will give myself to the search of God's love, which is the place, locus inventionis, whence I may find out the strongest and most effectual medium to persuade my mind, and to constrain my heart to Christian affection.

First, then, When I consider that so glorious and so great a majesty, so high and holy a one, self-sufficient and all-sufficient, who needs not go abroad to seek delight, because all happiness and delight is inclosed within his own bosom; yet that he can love a creature, yea, and be reconciled to so sinful a creature, which he might crush as easily as speak a word; that he can place his delight on so unworthy and base an object; O how much more should I, a poor wretched creature, love my fellow-creature, oftentimes better than myself, and, for the most part, not much worse! There is an infinite distance and disproportion betwixt God and man; yet he came over all that to love man. What difficulty should I have, then, to place my affection on my equal at worst, and often better? There cannot be any proportionable distance between the highest and lowest, between the richest and poorest, between the most wise and the most ignorant, between the most gracious and the most ungodly, as there is between the infinite God and a finite angel. Should, then, the mutual infirmities and failings of Christians, be an insuperable and impassable gulph, as between heaven and hell, that none can pass over by a bridge of love to either? If God so loved us, should not we then love one another? 1 John 4:11. And besides, when I consider that God hath not only loved me, but my brethren, who were worthy of hatred, with an everlasting love, and passed over all that was in them, and hath spread his skirt over their nakedness, and made it a time of love, which was a time of loathing; how can I withhold my affection where God hath bestowed his? Are they not infinitely more unworthy of his than mine? Since infinite wrongs hath not changed his, shall poor, petty, and light offences hinder mine? That my love concentrates with God's on the same persons, is it not enough?

Next, That Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, who was the Father's delight from eternity, and in whom he delighted; yet, notwithstanding, could rejoice in the habitable places of the earth, and so love poor wretched men, yet enemies, that he gave himself a sacrifice for sin, both for me and others. O who should not, or will not be constrained, in beholding

this mirror of incomparable and spotless love, to love others? 1 John 4:9-11, "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Ephesians 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour;" especially when he seems to require no other thing, and imposes no more grievous command upon us for recompence of all his labour of love. John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." If all that was in me did not alienate his love from me, how should any thing in others estrange our love to them? If God be so kind to his enemies, and Christ so loving, that he gives his life for his enemies to make them friends, what should we do to our enemies, what to our friends? This one example may make all created love to blush and be ashamed; how narrow, how limited, how selfish is it?

Thirdly, If God hath forgiven me so many grievous offences, if he hath pardoned so heinous and innumerable injuries, that amount to a kind of infiniteness in number and quality, O how much more am I bound to forgive my brethren a few light and trivial offences! Colossians 3:13, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." With what face can I pray, "Lord, forgive me my sins," when I may meet with such a retortion, "Thou cannot forgive thy brethren's sins, infinitely less both in number and degree." Matthew 6:15, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." What unparalleled ingratitude were it, what monstrous wickedness, that after he hath forgiven all our debt, because we desired him, yet we should not have compassion on our fellow-servants, even as he had pity on us! O what a dreadful sound will that be in the ears of many Christians! "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all thy debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses," Matthew 18:32-35. When we cannot dispense with our pence, how should he dispense with his talents? And when we cannot pardon ten, how should he forgive ten thousand? When he hath forgiven my brother all his iniquity, may not I pardon one? Shall I impute that which God will not impute; or discover that which God hath covered? How should I expect he should be merciful to me, when I cannot shew mercy to my brother. Psal. 18:25, "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful." Shall I, for one or few offences, hate, bite, and devour him for whom Christ died, and loved not his life to save him? Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11. In the next place, If a Christian do but take an impartial view of himself, he cannot but thus reason himself to a meek, composed and affectionate temper towards other brethren. What is it in another that offends me, which, if I do search within, I will not either find the same, or worse, or as evil in myself? Is there a mote in my brother's eye? Perhaps there may be a beam in my own; and why then should I look to the mote that is in my brother's eye? Matthew 7:3. When I look inwardly, I find a desperately wicked heart, which lodges all that iniquity I behold in others. And if I be not so sensible of it, it is because it is also deceitful above all things, and would flatter me in mine own eyes, Jeremiah 17:9.

If my brother offend me in some things, how do these vanish out of sight in the view of my own guiltiness before God, and of the abominations of my own heart, known to his holiness and to my conscience? Sure I cannot see so much evil in my brother as I find in myself: I see but his outside, but I know my own heart; and whenever I retire within this, I find the sea of corruption so great, that I wonder not at the streams which break forth in others. But all my wonder is, that God hath set bounds to it in me or in any. Whenever I find my spirit rising against the infirmities of others, and my mind swelling over them, I repress myself with this thought, "I myself also am a man," as Peter said to Cornelius when he would have worshipped him. As he restrained another's idolizing of him, I may cure my own self-idolizing heart. Is it any thing strange that weak men fail, and sinful men fall? Is not all flesh grass, and all the perfection and goodness of it as the flower of the field? Isaiah 40:6. Is not every man at his best estate altogether vanity? Psal. 39:5. Is not man's breath in his nostrils? Isaiah 2:22. And am not I myself a man? Therefore I will not be high-minded but fear; Romans 11:2. I will not be moved to indignation, but provoked to compassion, knowing that I myself am compassed with infirmities, Hebrews 5:2.

Secondly, As a man may persuade himself to charity by the examination of his own heart and way; so he may enforce upon his spirit a meek and compassionate stamp, by the consideration of his own frailty, what he may fall into. This is the apostle's rule, Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, and pretend to it, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Do not please yourselves with a false notion of zeal, thinking to cover your impertinent rigidity by it; do as you would do if your own arm were disjunct: set it in, restore it tenderly and meekly, considering yourselves that ye also may be tempted. Some are more given to reproaching and insulting than mindful of restoring. Therefore, their reproofs are not tempered with oil, that they may not break the head; but mixed with gall and vinegar to set on edge the teeth. But whenever thou lookest upon the infirmities of others, then consider thyself first, before you pronounce sentence on them, and thou shalt be constrained to bestow that charity to others which thou hast need of thyself: *Veniam damus petimusque vicissim*. If a man have need of charity from his brother, let him not be hard in giving it; if he knows his own weakness and frailty, sure he may suppose such a thing may likely fall out, that he may be tempted and succumb in it; for there needs nothing for the bringing forth of sin in any but occasion and temptation, as the bringing of fire near gunpowder. And truly, he who hath no allowance of love to give to an infirm and weak brother, he will be in *mala fide*, in an evil capacity, to seek what he would not give. Now the fountain of uncharitableness and harsh dealing is imported in the 3d verse, "If any man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Since all mortal men are nothing, vanity, altogether vanity, and less than vanity; he that would seem something, and seems so to himself, he deludes himself. Hence is our insulting fierceness, hence our supercilious rigour: every man apprehends some excellency in himself beyond another. Take away pride, and charity shall enter, and modesty shall be its companion. But now we mock ourselves, and deceive ourselves, by building the weight of our pretended zeal upon such a vain and rotten foundation, as a gross practical fundamental lie of self-conceit, of a conceit of nothing. Now the apostle furnishes us with an excellent remedy against this in the 4th verse, "Let a man prove himself and his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." A word worthy to be fastened by the master of assemblies in the heart of all Christians; and, indeed, this nail driven in would drive out all conceit. Hence is our ruin, that we compare ourselves among ourselves, and in so doing we are not wise, 2 Corinthians 10:12. For we know not our own true value, only we raise

the price according to the market, so to speak; we measure ourselves by another man's measure, and build up our estimation upon the disesteem of others; and how much others displease, so much we please ourselves. "But," says the apostle, "let every man prove his own work, search his own conscience, compare himself to the perfect rule; and then, if he find all well, he may indeed glory of himself." But that which thou hast by comparison with others, is not thine own; thou must come down from all such advantages of ground, if thou wouldst have thy just measure. And, indeed, if thou prove thyself and thy work after this manner, thou wilt be the first to reprove thyself, thou shalt have that glory due to thee, that is, none at all; for every man shall bear his own burden, when he appears before the judgment-seat of God. There is no place for such imaginations and comparisons in the Lord's judgment.

Thirdly, When a Christian looks within his own heart, he finds an inclination and desire to have the love of others, even though his conscience witness that he deserves it not; he finds an approbation of that good and righteous command of God, that others should love him. Now, hence he may persuade himself, is it so sweet and pleasant to me to be loved of others, even though I am conscious that I have wronged them? Hath it such a beauty in my eye, while I am the object of it? Why, then, should it be a hard and grievous burden to me to love others, though they have wronged me, and deserve it no more than I did? Why hath it not the same amiable aspect, when my brother is the object of it? Certainly no reason for it, but because I am yet carnal, and have not that fundamental law of nature yet distinctly written again upon my heart, "What ye would that others should do to you, do it to them," Matthew 7:12. If I be convinced that there is any equity and beauty in that command, which charges others to love me, forgive me, and forbear me, and restore me in meekness; why, then, should it be a grievous command that I should pay that debt of love and tenderness to others? 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." In the third place. Consider to whom this affection should be extended; more generally to all men, as fellow-creatures: but particularly and especially to all who are begotten of God, as fellow-Christians. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him," 1 John 4:21; 1 John 5:1. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," Galatians 6:10. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord; my goodness extendeth not to thee: but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight," Psal. 16:2, 3. And this consideration the Holy Ghost suggests to make us maintain love and unity. Love towards these runs in a purer channel,— "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto the unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another, with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever," 1 Peter 1:22-23. To be begotten of one Father, and that by a divine birth, that they have such a high descent and royal generation; there are so many other bonds of unity between us, it is absurd that this one more should not join all. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body, one spirit, called to one hope, one God and Father of all, Ephesians 4:2-6. All these being one, it is strange if we be not in love. If so many relations beget not a strong and warm affection, we are worse than infidels, as the apostle speaks, 1 Timothy 5:8, "If a man care not for his own house, his worldly interests, he is worse than an infidel;" for they have a natural affection. Sure, then, this more excellent nature, a divine nature, we are partakers of, cannot want affection suitable to its nature.

Christianity is a fraternity, a brotherhood, that should overpower all relations, bring down him of high degree, and exalt him of low degree: it should level all ranks, in this one respect, unto the rule of charity and love. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile; there all differences of tongues and nations are drowned in this interest of Christ, Colossians 3:11. "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes," Luke 10:21. And God hath chosen the weak and foolish to confound the mighty and wise, 1 Corinthians 1:27. Behold all these outward privileges buried in the depths and riches of God's grace and mercy. Are we not all called to one high calling? Our common station is to war under Christ's banner against sin and Satan. Why, then, do we leave our station, forget our callings, and neglect that employment which concerns us all; and fall at odds with our fellow-soldiers, and bite and devour one another? Doth not this give advantage to our common enemies? While we consume the edge of our zeal and strength of our spirits one upon another, they must needs be blunted and weakened towards our deadly enemies. If our brother be represented unto us under the covering of many faults, failings, and such like; if we can behold nothing but spots on his outside, while we judge after some outward appearance, then, I say, we ought to consider him again under another notion and relation, as he stands in Christ's account; as he is radically and virtually of that seed, which hath more real worth in it than all worldly privileges and dignities. Consider him as he once shall be, when mortality shall be put off; learn to strip him naked of all infirmities in thy consideration, and imagine him to be clothed with immortality and glory; think how thou wouldest then love him. If either thou unclothe him of his infirmities, and consider him as vested now with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and all glorious within, or adorned with immortality and incorruption a little hence; or else if thou clothe thyself with such infirmities as thou seest in him, and consider that thou art not less subject to failing, and compassed with infirmity; then thou shalt put on, and keep on, that bond of perfection,—charity.

Lastly, Let us consider the excellent nature of charity, and how it is interested in, and interwoven with all the royal and divine gifts and privileges of a Christian; all of them are not ashamed of kindred and cognation with charity. Is not the calling and profession of a Christian honourable? Sure to any believing soul, it is above a monarchy; for it includes an anointing both to a royal and priestly office, and carries a title to a kingdom incorruptible and undefiled. Well, then, charity is the symbol and badge of this profession—John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Then, what is comparable to communion with God, and dwelling in him? Shall God, indeed, dwell with men? said Solomon. That exalts the soul to a royalty, and elevates it above mortality: *Quam contempta res est homo si supra humana se non exerat*; how base and contemptible a thing is man, except he lift up his head above human things to heavenly and divine. And, then, is the soul truly magnified while it is ascending up to its own element, a divine nature? What more gracious than this, for a soul to dwell in God, and what more gracious than this, God to dwell in the soul? *Charitas te domum Domini facit, et Dominum domum tibi*; *felix artifex charitas quae conditori sui domum fabricare potest*; love makes the soul a house for the Lord, and makes the Lord a house to the soul; happy artificer that can build an house for its master. Love bringeth Him who is the chief of ten thousand, into the chambers of the heart, it lays him all night between its breasts; and is still emptying itself of all superfluity of naughtiness, and purging out all vanity and filthiness, that there may be more room for his Majesty. And then, love dwells in God, in his love and grace, in his goodness and greatness, the secret of his presence it delights in. Now, this mutual inhabitation, in which it is hard to say, whether the majesty of God does most descend, or the soul most ascend, whether he be more humbled or it exalted; this

brotherly love, I say, is the evidence and assurance of it. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us: "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him," 1 John 4:12; 1 John 4:16. For the love of the image of God in his children, is indeed the love of God, whose image it is; and then is the love of God perfected, when it reacheth and extends from God to all that is God's, to all that hath interest in God. His commandment, 1 John 5:3, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. 1 John 4:21, "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also:" His children; 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him that is begotten of him:" His creatures; Malachi 2:10, "Hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" The love of God being the formal, the special motive of love to our brethren, it elevates the nature of it, and makes it divine love; he that hath true Christian love, doth not only love and compassionate its brother, either because of its own inclination towards him, or his misery and necessity, or his goodness and excellency. These motives and grounds do not transcend mere morality, and so, cannot beget a love which is the symptom of Christianity; if there be no other motives than these, we do not love so much for God as for ourselves: for compassion interesting itself with another's misery, finds a kind of relief in relieving it. Therefore, the will and good pleasure of God must be the rule of this motion, and the love of God must begin in it, and continue it. And, truly, charity is nothing else but divine love in a state of condescent, so to speak, or the love of a soul to God manifested in the flesh; it is that love moving in a circle from God towards his creatures, and unto God again; as his love to the creatures begins in himself, and ends in himself, 1 John 3:17. Is it not a high thing to know God aright? "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," John 17:3. That is a high note of excellency put on it, this makes the face of the soul to shine; now, brotherly love evinceth this,—that we know God. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love," 1 John 4:7-8. "When your fathers did execute judgment, and relieve the oppressed, &c. was not this to know me?" saith the Lord, Jeremiah 22:15-16. The practice of the most common things, out of the love of God, and respect to his commands, is more real and true religion than the most profound and abstracted speculations of knowledge; then only is God known, when knowledge stamps the heart with fear and reverence of his Majesty, and love to his name; because, then, he is only known as he is a true and living God.

Love is real light and life. Is it not a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun? Light is sweet, and life is precious,—these are two of the rarest jewels given to man. "Now he that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now, and knoweth not whither he goeth; because darkness hath blinded his eyes: but he that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him," 1 John 2:9-11. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death," 1 John 3:14. The light of Jesus Christ cannot shine into the heart, but begets love, even as intense light begets heat: and where this impression is not made on the heart, it is an evidence, that the beams of that sun of righteousness have not pierced it. O how suitable is it for a child of light to walk in love! And, wherefore is it made day-light to the soul, but that it may rise up and go forth to labour, and exercise itself in the works of the day,—duties of love to God and men? Now, in such a soul there is no cause of stumbling, no scandal, no offence in its way to fall over; when the light

and knowledge of Christ possesses the heart in love, there is no stumbling-block of transgression in the way. It doth not fall and stumble at the commandments of righteousness and mercy as grievous; "therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law," Romans 13:10. And so, the way of charity is the most easy, plain, expedient, and safe way; in this way, there is light shining all alongst it, and there is no stumbling-block in it: for the love of God and of our brethren hath polished and made it all plain, hath taken away the asperities and tumours of our affections and lusts; complanavit affectus, great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them. Love makes an equable and constant motion; it moves swiftly and sweetly; it can loose many knots without difficulty, which other more violent principles cannot act; it can melt away mountains before it, which cannot be hurled away. Albeit, there be many stumbling-blocks without in the world, yet there is none in charity, or in a charitable soul: none can enter into that soul to hinder it to possess itself in meekness and patience; nothing can discompose it within, or hinder it to live peaceably with others; though all men's hands be against it, yet charity is against none, it defends itself with innocence and patience. On the other hand, "He that hateth his brother is in darkness, even until now:" for if Christ's light had entered, then the love of Christ had come with it, and that is the law of love and charity. If Jesus Christ had come into the soul, he had restored the ancient commandment of love, and made it new again: as much of the want of love and charity, as much of the old ignorance and darkness remains. Whatsoever a man may fancy of himself, that he is in the light, that he is so much advanced in the light; yet, certainly, this is a stronger evidence of remaining darkness: for it is a work of the darkest darkness, and murdering affection, suitable only for the night of darkness. And such a man he knows not whither he goes, and must needs incur and fall upon many stumbling-blocks within and without. It is want of love and charity that blinds the mind and darkens the heart, that it cannot see how to eschew and pass by scandals in others, but it must needs dash and break its neck upon them. Love is a light which may lead us by offences inoffensively, and without stumbling. In darkness men mistake the way, know not the end of it, take pits for plain ways, and stumble in them; uncharitableness casts a mist over the actions and courses of others, and our own too, that we cannot carry on either without transgression. And this is the misery of it,—that it cannot discern any fault in itself, it knows not whither it goeth, calls light darkness, and darkness light; it is partial in judgment,—pronounces always on its own behalf, cares not whom it condemn, that it may absolve itself. Is there any privilege so precious as this, to be the sons of God? 1 John 3:2. What are all relations, or states, or conditions to this one,—to be the children of the Highest? It was David's question, "Should I be the king's son-in-law?" Alas! what a petty and poor dignity in regard of this,—to be the sons of God, partakers of a divine nature! all the difference of birth, all the distinction of degrees and qualities amongst persons, beside this one, are but such as have no being, no worth but in the fancy, they really are nothing, and can do nothing; this only is a substantial and fundamental difference: a divine birth carries alongst with it a divine nature; a change of principles, from the worst to the best, from darkness to light, from death to life. Now, imagine then, what excellency is in this grace; which is made the character of a son of God, of one begotten of the Father, and passed from death to life. 1 John 3:10; 1 John 3:14, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." 1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." And truly, it is most natural if it be so, that

the children of our Father love other dearly; it is monstrous and unnatural to see it otherwise. But, besides, there is in this a great deal of resemblance of their Father, whose eminent and signal propriety it is, to be good to all, and kind even to the unthankful; and whose incomparable glory it is to pardon iniquity, and suffer long patiently: a Christian cannot resemble his Father more nearly than this. Why do we account that baseness in us which is glory to God? Are we ashamed of our birth, or dare we not own our Father? Shall we be ashamed to love them as brethren, whom he hath not been ashamed to adopt as sons, and whom Christ is not ashamed to call brethren?

04. CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV

We shall not be curious in the ranking of the duties in which Christian love should exercise itself: all the commandments of the second table are but branches of it; they might be reduced all to the works of righteousness and of mercy. But, truly, these are interwoven through other. Though mercy uses to be restricted to the shewing of compassion upon men in misery, yet there is a righteousness in that mercy; and there is mercy in the most part of the acts of righteousness, as in not judging rashly, in forgiving, &c.; therefore, we shall consider the most eminent and difficult duties of love, which the word of God solemnly and frequently charges upon us in relation to others, especially those of the household of faith.

I conceive we would labour to enforce upon our hearts, and persuade our souls to a love of all men, by often ruminating upon the words of the apostle, which enjoin us to abound in love towards all men, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, and this is so concerning, that he prays earnestly, that the Lord would make them increase in it; and this we should pray for too. An affectionate disposition towards our common nature is not a common thing; Christianity enjoins it, and its only true humanity, Luke 6:36-37, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." Now, in relation to all men, charity hath an engagement upon it to pray for all sorts of men, from that apostolic command, 1 Timothy 1:1, "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men." Prayers and supplications, earnest prayers out of affection should be poured out, even for them that cannot, or do not pray for themselves. Wherefore are we taught to pray, but that we may be the mouth of others? And since an intercessor is given to us above, how are we bound to be intercessors for others below; and so to be affected with the common mercies of the multitude, as to give thanks too? If man, by the law of creation, is the mouth of the stones, trees, birds, beasts, of heaven and earth, sun, moon, and stars, how much more ought a Christian, a redeemed man, be the mouth of mankind, to praise God for the abounding of his goodness, even towards those who are left yet in that misery and bondage that he is delivered from?

Next, charity by all means will avoid scandal, and live honestly in the sight of all men; "Give none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God," 1 Corinthians 10:32. And he adds his own example: "even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved," verse 33. Charity is not self-addicted; it hath no humour to please, it can displease itself to profit others. I do verily think there is no point of Christianity less regarded. Others we acknowledge, but we fail in practice; this scarce hath the approbation of the mind; few do conceive an obligation lying on them to it. But O how is Christianity, the most of it, humanity. Christ makes us men as well as Christians; he makes us reasonable men when believers. Sin transformed our nature into a wild, beastly, viperous selfish thing: grace restores reason and natural affection in the purest and highest strain. And this is

reason and humanity elevated and purified, to condescend to all men in all things for their profit and edification, to deny itself to save others. Whatsoever is not necessary in itself, we ought not to impose a necessity upon it by our imagination and fancy, to the prejudice of a greater necessity,—another's edification. Indeed, charity will not, dare not sin to please men; that were to hate God, and to hate ourselves, and to hate our brethren under a base pretended notion of love. But, I believe, addictedness to our own humours in things not necessary, which have no worth but from our disposition, doth oftener transport us beyond the bounds of charity than the apprehension of duty and conscience of sin. Some will grant they should be tender of offending the saints; but they do not conceive it is much matter what they do in relation to others, as if it were lawful to murder a Gentile more than a Christian. That is a bloody imagination opposite to that innocent Christian, Paul, *Php 2:15*, we should "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we should shine as lights." And truly it is humanity, elevated by Christianity, or reason purified by religion, that is the light that shines most brightly in this dark world: *Colossians 4:5*, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without;" and *1 Thessalonians 4:12*, "Walk honestly toward them that are without;" avoiding all things, in our profession and carriage, which may alienate them from the love of the truth and godliness: walking so, as we may insinuate into their hearts some apprehensions of the beauty of religion. Many conceive, if they do good all is well; if it be a duty, it matters nothing: but remember that caution, "Let not, then, your good be evil spoken of," *Romans 14:16*. We would have our eyes upon that too, so to circumstantiate all our duties, as they may have least offence in them, and be exposed to least obloquy of men. *1 Peter 2:12*, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Then, thirdly, Charity follows peace with all men, as much as is possible, *Hebrews 12:14*. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men," *Romans 12:18*. Many spirits are framed for contention; if peace follow them, they will flee from it. But a Christian having made peace with God, the sweet fruit of that upon his spirit is to dispose him to a peaceable and quiet condescendency to others; and if peace flee from him, to follow after it, not only to entertain it when it is offered, but to seek it when it is away, and to pursue it when it runs away, *Psal. 34:14*; which Peter urges upon Christians, *1 Peter 3:8-11*, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it." I think, since we obtained the mercy to get a peace-maker between us and God, we should henceforth count ourselves bound to be peace-makers among men. And, truly, such have a blessing pronounced upon them, *Matthew 5:9*, "Blessed are the peace makers." The Prince of Peace pronounced it; and this is the blessedness, "They shall be called the children of God:" because he is the God of peace; and to resemble him in these, first in purity, then in peace, is a character of his image. It is true, peace will sometimes flee so fast, and so far away, as a Christian cannot follow it without sin, and that is a breach of a higher peace. But charity, when it cannot live in peace without, it doth then live in peace within; because it hath that sweet testimony of conscience, that, as far as did lie in it, peace was followed without. Divine wisdom, *James 3:17*, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without

wrangling, and without hypocrisy. If wisdom be peaceable and not pure, it is but a carnal conspiracy in iniquity, earthly and sensual. But if it be pure, it must be peaceable; for the wisdom descending from above, it hath a purity of truth, and a purity of love, and a purity of the mind and of the affection too. Where there is a purity of truth, but accompanied with envying, bitter strife, rigid judging, wrangling, and such like; then it is defiled, and corrupted by the intermixture of vile and base affections, ascending out of the dunghill of the flesh. The vapours of our lusts arising up to the mind, do incrustate pure truth, they put on an earthly, sensual, and devilish visage on it.

Charity, its conversation and discourse is without judging, without censuring, Matthew 7:1. of which chapter, because it contains much edification, I shall speak more hereafter. James 3:17, "Without partiality, without hypocrisy." The words in the original are ἀδιακριτος και ανυποκριτος, without judging and wrangling, and without hypocrisy; importing, that great censurers are often the greatest hypocrites, and sincerity has always much charity. Truly, there is much idle time spent this way in discourses of one another, and venting our judgments of others. As it were enough of commendation for us to condemn others; and much piety to charge another with impiety. We would even be sparing in judging them that are without, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. Reflecting upon them or their ways, hath more provocation than edification in it. A censorious humour is certainly most partial to itself, and self indulgent; it can sooner endure a great beam in its own eye, than a little mote in its neighbour's; and this shows evidently that it is not the hatred of sin, or the love of virtue, which is the single and simple principle of it; but self-love, shrouded under the vail of displeasure at sin, and delight in virtue. I would think one great help to amend this, were to abate much from the superfluity and multitude of discourses upon others; in the multitude of words there wants not sin, and in multitude of discourses upon other men there cannot miss the sin of rash judging. I find the saints and fearers of God commended for speaking often one to another, but not at all for speaking of one another. The subject of their discourse, Malachi 3:16, certainly was of another strain, how good it was to serve the Lord, &c., opposite to the evil communication of others there registered.

Charity is no tale-bearer; it goeth not about as a slanderer to reveal a secret, though true, Proverbs 20:19. It is of a faithful spirit to conceal the matter, Proverbs 11:13. Another man's good name is as a pledge laid down in our hand, which every man would faithfully restore, and take heed how he lose it, or alienate it by backbiting. Some would have nothing to say, if they had not others' frailties to declaim upon; but it were better that such kept always silent, that either they had no ears to hear of them, or know them, or had no tongues to vent them. If they do not lie grossly in it, they think they do no wrong. But let them judge it in reference to themselves: "A good name is better than precious ointment," Ecclesiastes 7:1, and "rather to be chosen than great riches," Proverbs 22:1. And is that no wrong, to defile that precious ointment, and to rob or steal away that jewel more precious than great riches? There is a strange connection between these; "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer, nor stand against the blood of thy neighbour," Leviticus 19:16. It is a kind of murder, because it kills that which is as precious as life to an ingenuous heart. "The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds, and they go down to the innermost parts of the belly," Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 26:22. They strike a wound to any man's heart, that can hardly be cured; and there is nothing that is such a seminary of contention and strife among brethren as this. It is the oil to feed the flame of alienation; take away a talebearer, and strife ceaseth, Proverbs 26:20. Let there be but any (as there want not such who have no other trade or occupation) to whisper

into the ears of brethren, and suggest evil apprehensions of them, they will separate chief friends, as we see it daily in experience, Proverbs 16:28. Revilers are amongst those who are excluded out of the kingdom of God, 1 Corinthians 6:10. And therefore, as the Holy Ghost gives general precepts for the profitable and edifying improvement of the tongue, that so it may indeed be the glory of a man, (which truly is no small point of religion, as James expresses, chap. 3:2, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man"); so that same Spirit gives us particular directions about this, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law," James 4:11; because he puts himself in the place of the Lawgiver, and his own judgment and fancy in the room of the law, and so judges the law; and therefore, the apostle Peter makes a wise and significant connection, 1 Peter 2:1, "Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings." Truly, evil speaking of our brethren, though it may be true, yet it proceeds out of the abundance of these in the heart,—of guile, hypocrisy, and envy. While we catch at a name of piety from censuring others, and build our own estimation upon the ruins of another's good name, hypocrisy and envy are too predominant. If we would indeed grow in grace by the word, and taste more how gracious the Lord is, we must lay these aside, and become as little children, without guile and without gall. Many account it excuse enough, that they did not invent evil tales, or were not the first broachers of them; but the Scripture joins both together,—the man that shall abide in his tabernacle must neither vent nor invent them, neither cast them down nor take them up; "He backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour;" Psal. 15:3, or receives not, or endures not, as in the margin; he neither gives it nor receives he it; hath not a tongue to speak of others' faults, nor an ear to hear them; indeed, he hath a tongue to confess his own, and an ear open to hear another confess his faults, according to that precept, "Confess your faults one to another." We are forbidden to have much society or fellowship with tale-bearers; and it is added, Proverbs 20:19, "And meddle not with such as flatter with their mouth," as indeed commonly they who reproach the absent, flatter the present; a backbiter is a face-flatterer, and therefore, we should not only not meddle with them, but drive them away as enemies to human society. Charity would in such a case protect itself, if I may so say, by an angry countenance, an appearance of anger and real dislike; as the north wind drives away rain, so that entertainment would drive away a backbiting tongue, Proverbs 25:23. If we do discountenance it, backbiters will be discouraged to open their pack of news and reports; and, indeed, the receiving readily of evil reports of brethren, is a partaking with the unfruitful works of darkness, which we should rather reprove, Ephesians 5:11. To join with the teller is to complete the evil report; for if there were no receiver, there would be no teller, no tale-bearer. "Charity covers a multitude of sins," 1 Peter 4:8; and, therefore, "above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves," says he. What is above prayer and watching unto the end,—above sobriety? Indeed, in reference to fellowship with God, these are above all; but, in relation to comfortable fellowship one with another in this world, this is above all, and the crown or cream of other graces. He whose sins are covered by God's free love, cannot think it hard to spread the garment of his love over his brother's sins. Hatred stirreth up strife, all uncharitable affections, as envy, wrath; it stirreth up contentions, and blazeth abroad man's infirmities. But love covereth all sins, concealeth them from all to whom the knowledge of them doth not belong, Proverbs 10:12. Love in a manner suffers not itself to know what it knoweth, or at least to remember it much; it will sometimes hood-wink itself to a favourable construction; it will pass by an infirmity, and misken it, but many stand still and commune with it; but he that

covereth a transgression seeks love to bury offences in. Silence is a notable mean to preserve concord, and beget true amity and friendship. The keeping of faults long above ground unburied, doth make them cast forth such an evil savour that will ever part friends. Therefore, says the wise man, "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends," Proverbs 17:9. Covering faults Christianly will make a stranger a friend, but repeating and blazing of them, will make a friend not only a stranger but an enemy. Yet this is nothing to the prejudice of that Christian duty of reproving and admonishing one another. Ephesians 5:11, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Love commands to reprove "in the spirit of meekness," Galatians 6:1. As a man would restore an arm out of joint. "And, therefore, thou shalt not hate him in thy heart, but shall in any wise reprove him, and not suffer sin upon him," Leviticus 19:17. And he that reproves his brother after this manner from love, and in meekness and wisdom, shall afterward find more favour of him than he that flatters with his tongue, Proverbs 28:23. To cover grudges and jealousies in our hearts, were to nourish a flame in our bosom, which doth but wait for a vent, and will at one occasion or other burst out. But to look too narrowly to every step, and to write up a register of men's mere frailties, especially so as to publish them to the world; that is inconsistent with the rule of love. And truly, it is a token of one destitute of wisdom to despise his neighbour; but a man of understanding will hold his peace. He that has most defects himself will find maniest in others, and strive to vilify them one way or other; but a wise man can pass by frailties, yea, offences done to him, and be silent, Proverbs 11:12.

05. CHAPTER V

CHAPTER V

Humility is the root of charity, and meekness the fruit of both. There is no solid and pure ground of love to others, except the rubbish of self-love be first cast out of the soul; and when that superfluity of naughtiness is cast out, then charity hath a solid and deep foundation. "The end of the command is charity out of a pure heart," 1 Timothy 1:5. It is only such a purified heart, cleansed from that poison and contagion of pride and self-estimation, that can send out such a sweet and wholesome stream, to the refreshing of the spirits and bowels of the church of God. If self-glory and pride have deep roots fastened into the soul, they draw all the sap and virtue downward, and send little or nothing up to the tree of charity, which makes it barren and unfruitful in the works of righteousness, and fruits of mercy and meekness. There are obstructions in the way of that communication, which only can be removed by the plucking up these roots of pride and self-estimation, which preys upon all, and incorporates all in itself; and yet, like the lean kine that had devoured the fat, are never the fatter or more well-favoured.

It is no wonder then that these are the first principles that we must learn in Christ's school, the very A B C of Christianity; "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls," Matthew 11:29. This is the great Prophet sent of the Father into the world to teach us, whom he hath, with a voice from heaven, commanded us to hear, "This is my well-beloved Son, hear him." Should not the fame and report of such a teacher move us? He was testified very honourably long before he came, that he had the Spirit above measure, that he had the tongue of the learned, Isaiah 1:4.; that he was a greater prophet than Moses, Deuteronomy 18:15; Deuteronomy 18:18; that is, the wonderful Counsellor of heaven and earth, Isaiah 9:6.; the witness to the people, a teacher and leader to the people. And then, when he came, he had the most glorious testimony from the most glorious persons, the Father, and the Holy Ghost, in the most solemn manner that ever the world heard of, Matthew 17:5, "Behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Now, this is our Master, our Rabbi, Matthew 23:8. This is "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," Hebrews 3:1. "The light of the world and life of men," John 8:12; John 6:33; John 6:51. Having then such a Teacher and Master, sent us from heaven may we not glory in our Master? But some may suppose, that he who came down from heaven, filled with all the riches and treasures of heavenly wisdom, should reveal in his school unto his disciples, all the mysteries and profound secrets of nature and art; about which the world hath plodded since the first taste of the tree of knowledge, and beaten out their brains to the vexation of all their spirits, without any fruit, but the discovery of the impossibility of knowing, and the increase of sorrow by searching. Who would not expect, when the wisdom of God descends among men, but that he should shew unto the world that wisdom in the understanding of all the works of God, which all men have been pursuing in vain; that he by whom all things were created, and so could unbowel and manifest all their hidden causes and virtues, all their admirable and wonderful qualities and operations, as easily by a word, as he made them by a word; who would not expect, I say, but that he should have made this world,

and the mysteries of it, the subject of all his lessons, the more to illustrate his own glorious power and wisdom? And yet behold, they who had come into his school and heard this Master and Doctor teach his scholars, they who had been invited to come, through the fame and report of his name, would have stood astonished and surprised to hear the subject of his doctrine; one come from on high to teach so low things as these: "Learn of me, I am meek and lowly." Other men that are the masters of professions, and authors of sects or orders, do aspire unto some singularity in doctrine, to make them famous. But, behold our Lord and Master, this is the doctrine he vents, it hath nothing in it that sounds high, and looks big in the estimation of the world. In regard of the wisdom of the world—it is foolishness. A doctrine of humility from the Most High! a lesson of lowliness and meekness from the Lord and Maker of all! there seems, at first, nothing in it to allure any to follow it. Who would travel so far as the college of Christianity to learn no more but this, when every man pretends to be a teacher of it?

But, truly, there is a majesty in this lowliness, and there is a singularity in this commonness. If we would stay and hear a little longer, and enter into a deep search of this doctrine; we would be soon charged and overcome with wonder. It seems shallow till ye enter, but it has no bottom: Christianity makes no great noise, but it runs the deeper: it is a light and overly knowledge of it, a small smattering of the doctrine of it, that makes men despise it and prefer other things; but the deep and solid apprehension of it will make us adore and admire, and drive us to an, ah altitudo! O the depth! As the superficial knowledge of nature makes men atheists, but the profound understanding of it makes men pious; so all other things, vilesunt scientia, grow more contemptible by the knowledge of them; it is ignorance of them which is the mother of that devout admiration we bear to them, but Christianity only vilescit ignorantia clarescit scientia, it is common and base, because not known; and that is no disparagement at all unto it, that there is none despises it, but he that knoweth it not, and none can do any thing, but despise all besides it that once knows it; that is the proper excellency and glory of it.

All arts and sciences have their principles and common axioms of unquestionable authority, all kinds of professions have some fundamental doctrines and points which are the character of them; Christianity hath its principles too, and principles must be plain and uncontroverted, they must be evident by their own light, and apt to give light to other things; all the rest of the conclusions of the art are but conclusions and deductions from them. Our master and doctor follows the same method: he lays down some common principles, some fundamental points of this profession, upon which all the building of Christianity hangs; "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." This was the high lesson that his life preached so exemplarily, and his doctrine pressed so earnestly; and in this he is very unlike other teachers, who impose burdens on others, and themselves do not so much as touch them. But he first practises his doctrine, and then preaches it; he first casts a pattern in himself, and then presses to follow it: examples teach better than rules, but both together are most effectual and sure. The rarest example and noblest rule that ever were given to men, are here met together. The rule is about a thing that has a low name, but a high nature. Lowliness and meekness in reputation and outward form, they are like servants; yet they account it no robbery to be equal with the highest and most princely graces. The vein of gold and silver lies very low in the bowels of the earth, but it is not, therefore, base, but the more precious. Other virtues may come with more observation; but these, like the Master that teaches them, come with more reality; if they have less pomp, they have more power and virtue. Humility, how suitable is it to humanity? They

are as near to him one to another, as homo et humus; and therefore, except a man cast off humanity, and forget his original—the ground—the dust from whence he was taken, I do not see how he can shake off humility: self-knowledge is the mother of it, the knowledge of that humus would make us humiles; look to the hole of the pit from whence thou art hewn; a man could not look high that looked so low as the pit from whence we were taken by nature, even the dust; and the pit from whence we are hewn by grace, even man's lost and ruined state: such a low look would make a lowly mind. Therefore, pride must be nothing else but an empty and vain tumour, a puffing up. Knowledge puffeth up; not self-knowledge, that casts down, and brings down all superstructures, razes out all vain confidence to the very foundation, and then begins to build on a solid ground: but knowledge of other things without, joined with ignorance of ourselves within, is but a swelling, not a growing; it is a bladder or skin full of wind: a blast or breath of an airy applause or commendation, will extend it and fill it full. And what is this else but a monster in humanity; the skin of a man stuffed or blown up with wind and vanity, to the shadow and resemblance of a man, but no bones or sinews, nor real substance within? Pride is an excrescence; it is nature swelled beyond the intrinsic terms or limits of magnitude, the spirit of a mouse in a mountain. And now, if any thing be gone without the just bounds of the magnitude set to it, it is imperfect, disabled in its operations, vain and unprofitable, yea, prodigious like. If there be not so much real excellency as may fill up the circle of our self-estimation, then, surely, it must be full of emptiness and vanity; fancy and imagination must supply the vacant room, where solid worth cannot extend so far. Now, I believe, if any man could but impartially and seriously reflect upon himself, he would see nothing of that kind, no true solid and real dignity to provoke love; but real baseness and misery to procure loathing. There is a lie in every sin; but the greatest and grossest lie is committed in pride, and attribution of that excellency to ourselves which is not. And upon what erroneous fancy, which is a sandy and vain foundation, is built the tower of self-estimation, vain gloriation, and such like? Pride, which is the mother of these, says most presumptuously, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent," Isaiah 10:13. "I am, and none else besides me," Isaiah 47:10. It is such a false imagination, "I am of perfect beauty," "I am and none else," "I am a god," Ezekiel 27:3; Ezekiel 28:2, which swells and lifts up the heart. Now, what a vain thing is it, an inordinate elevation of the heart upon a false misapprehension of the mind: "The soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him," Habakkuk 2:4. It must be a tottering building that is founded on such a gross mistake.

Some cover their pride with the pretence of high spiritedness, and please themselves in the apprehension of some magnanimity and generosity. But the truth is, it is not true magnitude, but a swelling out of a superabundance of pestilent humours. True greatness of spirit is inwardly and throughout solid, firm from the bottom, and the foundation of it is truth. Which of the two do ye think hath the better spirit, he that calls dust, dust, and accounts of dung as dung; or he that, upon a false imagination, thinks dust and dung is gold and silver, esteems himself a rich man, and raises up himself above others? Humility is only true magnanimity; for it digs down low, that it may set and establish the foundation of true worth. It is true, it is lowly, and bows down low; but as the water that comes from a height, the lower it comes down the higher it ascends up again; so, the humble spirit, the lower it fall in its own estimation, the higher it is raised in real worth and in God's estimation. "He that humbles himself shall be exalted, and he that exalts himself shall be abased," Matthew 23:12. He is like a growing tree, the deeper the roots go down in the earth; the higher the tree grows above ground; as Jacob's ladder, the foot of it is fastened in the earth, but the top of it

reaches the heavens. And this is the sure way to ascend to heaven. Pride would fly up upon its own wings; but the humble man will enter at the lowest step, and so goes up by degrees, and in the end it is made manifest. Pride catches a fall, and humility is raised on high; it descended that it might ascend. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit," Proverbs 29:23. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall: but before honour is humility," Proverbs 16:18; Proverbs 18:12. The first week of creation, as it were, afforded two signal examples of this wise permutation of divine justice: angels cast out of heaven, and man out of paradise; a high and wretched aim at wisdom brought both as low as hell; the pride of angels and men was but the rising up to a height, or climbing up a step to the pinnacle of glory, that they might catch the lower fall. But the last week of the creation, so to speak, shall afford us rare and eminent demonstrations of the other: poor, wretched, and miserable sinners lift up to heaven by humility, when angels were thrown down from heaven for pride. What a strange sight! an angel, once so glorious, so low; and a sinner, once so wretched and miserable, so high! Truly, may a man conclude within himself, "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud," Proverbs 16:19. Happy lowliness, that is the foundation of true highness; but miserable highness, that is the beginning of eternal baseness. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:3. Blessedness begins low in poverty of spirit: and Christ's sermon upon blessedness begins at it, but it arises in the end to the riches of a kingdom, a heavenly kingdom. Grace is the seed of glory; and poverty of spirit is the seed, first dead before it be quickened to grow up in the fruits: And, indeed, "the grain is not quickened except it die," 1 Corinthians 15:30, and then it gets a body, "and bringeth forth much fruit," John 12:24. Even so, grace is sown into the heart, but it is not quickened except it die in humility, and then God gives it a body, when it springs up in other beautiful graces,—of meekness, patience, love, &c. But those are never ripe till the day that the soul get the warm beams of heaven; being separated from the body, and then is the harvest,—a rich crop of blessedness. Holiness is the ladder to go up to happiness by; or rather, our Lord Jesus Christ is adorned with all these graces. Now, these are the steps of it mentioned, Matthew 5; and the lowest step that a soul first ascends up to him by, is poverty of spirit, or humility. And truly, the spirit cannot meet with Jesus Christ, till he first bring it down low: because he hath come so low himself, as that no soul can ascend up to heaven by him, except they bow down to his lowliness, and rise upon that step.

Now, a man being thus humbled in spirit before God, and under his mighty hand, he is only fit to obey the apostolic precept, "be ye all of you subject one to another," 1 Peter 5:5. Humility towards men depends upon that poverty and self-emptying under God's mighty hand, ver. 6. It is only a lowly heart that can make the back to bow, and submit to others of whatsoever quality, "and condescend to them of low degree," Romans 12:16; Ephesians 5:21. But the fear of the Lord humbling the spirit, will easily set it as low as any other can put it. This is the only basis and foundation of Christian submission and moderation. It is not a complimentary condescendence; it consists not in an external shew of gesture and voice; that is but an apish imitation. And, indeed, often pride will palliate itself under voluntary shews of humility, and can demit itself to undecent and unseemly submissions to persons far inferior; but it is the more deformed and hateful, that it lurks under some shadows of humility. As an ape is the more ugly and ill-favoured, that it is liker a man, because it is not a man; so vices have more deformity in them, when they put on the garb and vizard of virtue; only it may appear how beautiful a garment true humility is, when pride desires often to be covered with appearance of it, to hide its nakedness. O how rich a clothing is

the mean-like garment of humility and poverty of spirit! "Be ye clothed with humility," 1 Peter 5:5. It is the ornament of all graces; it covers a man's nakedness by uncovering of it. If a man had all other endowments, this one dead fly would make all the ointment unsavoury,—pride; but humility is condimentum virtutum, as well as vestimentum; it seasons all graces, and covers all infirmities. Garments are for ornament and necessity both; truly this clothing is alike fit for both, to adorn and beautify whatsoever is excellent, and to hide or supply whatsoever is deficient, ornamentum et operimentum. The apostle Paul gives a solemn charge to the Romans, Romans 12:3, "that no man should think high of himself, but soberly, according to the measure of faith given." That extreme undervaluing and denial of all worth in ourselves, though it be suitable before God, Luke 7:6-7; Proverbs 30:2-3; Job 42:6; 1 Corinthians 4:7; yet it is uncomely and incongruous before men. Humility doth not exclude all knowledge of any excellency in itself, or defect in another it can discern; but this is the worth of it, that it thinks soberly of the one, and despises not the other. The humble man knows any advantage he has beyond another, but he is not wise in his own conceit. He looks not so much upon that side of things, his own perfections and others' imperfections, that is very dangerous; but he casts his eyes most on the other side, his own infirmities and others' virtues, his worst part and their best part, and this makes up an equality or proportion. Where there is inequality, there is a different measure of gifts and graces, there are diverse failings, and infirmity, and degrees of them. Now, how shall so unequal members make up one body, and join unto one harmonious being, except this proportion be kept, that the defects of one be made up by the humility of another? The difference and inequality is taken away this way,—by fixing my eye most upon my own disadvantages and my brother's advantages. If I be higher in any respect, yet, certainly, I am lower in some, and therefore the unity of the body may be preserved by humility. I will consider in what I come short, and in what another excels, and so I can condescend to them of low degree. This is the substance of that which is subjoined, Romans 12:16, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." And this makes us meet in honour to prefer one another; taking ourselves up in the notion of what evil is in us, and another up in the notion of what good is in him,—Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." Thus there may be an equality of mutual respect and love, where there is an inequality of gifts and graces; there may be one measure of charity, where there are different measures of faith: because both neglect that difference, and pitch upon their own evils and another's good.

It is our custom to compare ourselves among ourselves, and the result of that secret comparison is estimation of ourselves, and despising others. We take our measure, not by our own real and intrinsic qualifications, but by the stature of other men's; and if we find any disadvantage in others, or any pre-eminency in ourselves, in such a partial application and collation of ourselves with others, (as readily self-love, if it find it not, will fancy it) then we have a tacit gloriation within ourselves, and a secret complacency in ourselves. But the humble Christian dares not make himself of that number, nor boast of things without his measure; he dare not think himself good, because, *deterioribus melior*, better than others who are worse. But he judges himself by that intrinsic measure which God hath distributed unto him, and so finds reason of sobriety and humility; and therefore, he dare not stretch himself beyond his measure, or go without his station and degree, 2 Corinthians 10:12-14. Humility makes a man compare himself with the best, that he may find how bad he himself is, but pride measures by the worst, that it may hide from a man his own imperfections. The one takes a perfect rule, and finds itself nothing; the other takes a crooked

rule, and imagines itself something. But this is the way that unity may be kept in the body, if all the members keep this method and order, the lowest to measure by him that is higher, and the higher to judge himself by him that is yet above him; and he that is above all the rest to compare with the rule of perfection, and find himself further short of the rule, than the lowest is below him. If our comparisons did thus ascend, we would descend in humility, and all the different degrees of persons would meet in one centre of lowliness of mind. But while our rule descends, our pride ascends. The Scripture holds out pride and self-estimation as the root of many evils, and humility as the root of many good fruits among men. Only through pride comes contention, Proverbs 13:10. There is pride at least in one of the parties, and often in both; it makes one man careless of another, and out of contempt not to study equity and righteousness towards him; and it makes another man impatient of receiving and bearing an injury or disrespect. While every man seeks to please himself, the contention arises. Pride in both parties makes both stiff and inflexible to peace and equity; and in this there is a great deal of folly; for, by this means, both procure more real displeasure and dissatisfaction to their own spirits. But with the well-advised is wisdom; they who have discretion and judgment will not be so wedded to their own conceits, but that in humility they can forbear and forgive for peace's sake. And though this seem harsh and bitter at first, to a passionate and distempered mind, yet, O how sweet is it after! There is a greater sweetness and refreshment in the peaceable condescendence of a man's spirit, and in the quiet passing by any injury, than the highest satisfaction that ever revenge or contention gave to any man. "When pride comes, then comes shame: but with the lowly is wisdom," Proverbs 11:2. Pride growing to maturity and ripeness, shame is near hand it, almost as near as the harvest; if pride come up, shame is in the next rank behind it. But there is a great wisdom in lowliness, and that is the honourable society that it walks in. There may be a secret connection between this and the former verse,—divers and false balances are abomination to the Lord; but a just balance is his delight. Now if it be so in such low things as merchandise, how much more abominable is a false spiritual balance in the weighing of ourselves? Pride hath a false balance in its hand,—the weight of self-love carries down the one scale by far.

Lowliness of mind is the strongest bond of peace and charity; it banishes away strife and vain-glory, and makes each man to esteem another better than himself, Phil, 2:3, because the humble man knows his own inside, and only another's outside. Now, certainly the outside is always better and more specious than the inside; and therefore, a humble man seeing nothing but his neighbour's outside, and being acquainted thoroughly with his own inside, he esteems another better than himself. Humility, as it makes a man to think well of another, so it hinders him to speak evil of his brother. James 4:10. He lays down the ground-work in the 10th verse, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." He raises his superstructure, ver. 11, 12, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. 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. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" For truly, the very ground of evil-speaking of that nature, is some advantage, we conceive, that may redound to our own reputation, by the diminution of another's fame; or, because we are so short-sighted in ourselves, therefore, are we sharp-sighted towards others; and because we think little of our own faults, we are ready to aggravate other men's to an extremity. But in so doing, we take the place of the judge and law upon us, which judges others, and is judged by none. So we judge others, and not ourselves, neither will we suffer ourselves to

be judged by others; this is to make ourselves the infallible rule,—to judge the law.

Humility levels men to a holy subjection and submission to one another, without the confusion of their different degrees and stations. It teaches men to give that respect and regard to every one that is due to his place or worth; and to signify it in such a way as may testify the simplicity of their estimation, and sincerity of their respect. Ephesians 5:21, "Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God." 1 Peter 5:5, "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." Now, if humility can put a man below others, certainly it will make him endure patiently and willingly to be placed in that same rank by others. When others give him that place to sit into, that he had chosen for himself, will he conceive himself wronged and affronted, though others about him think so? Nay, it is hard to persuade him of an injury of that kind; because the apprehension of such an affront hath for its foundation the imagination of some excellency beyond others, which lowliness hath razed out. He hath placed himself so low for every man's edification and instruction, that others can put him no lower; and there he sits quietly and peaceably, *bene qui latuit bene vixit*. Affronts and injuries fly over him, and light upon the taller cedars, while the shrubs are safe.

Qui cadit in plano, vix hoc tamen evenit ipsum.

Sic cadit ut tacta surgere possit humo.

He sits so low that he cannot fall lower; so a humble man's fall upon the ground is no fall indeed, but in the apprehension of others: but it is a heavy and bruising fall from off the tower of self-conceit.

Now the example that is given us, "learn of me," is certainly of greater force to persuade a man to this humble, composed, and quiet temper of spirit, than all the rules in the world: that the Son of God should come down and act it before our eyes, and cast us a pattern of humility and meekness. If this do not prevail to humble the heart, I know not what can. Indeed, this root of bitterness, which is in all men's hearts by nature, is very hard to pluck up; yea, when other weeds of corruption are extirpated, this poisonable one, pride, groweth the faster, and roots the deeper. Suppose a man should be stript naked of all the garments of the old man, this would be certainly nearest his skin, and last to put off. It is so pestilent an evil, that it grows in the glass window as well as on the dunghill; and, which is strange, it can spring out of the heart, and take moisture and aliment from humility, as well as from other graces. A man is in hazard to wax proud, that he is not proud, and to be high-minded, because he is lowly; therefore, it is not good to reflect much upon our own graces, no more than for a man to eat much honey.

I know not any antidote so sovereign, as the example of Jesus Christ to cure this evil; and he himself often proposes this receipt to his disciples, John 13:13-17. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Matthew 11:29-30, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 20:27-28, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Might not that sound

always in our ears,—the servant is not above his lord, the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister? O, whose spirit would not that compose! What apprehension of wrong would it not recompense? What flame of contention about worth and respect would it not quench? What noise of tumultuous passions would it not silence? Therefore, the apostle of the Gentiles prescribes this medicine, Philip. 2:5–8, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." If he did humble himself out of charity, who was so high; how should we humble ourselves, both out of charity and necessity, who are so low? If we knew ourselves, it were no strange thing, that we were humble; the evidence of truth would extort it from us. But here is the wonder, that he who knew himself to be equal to God, should notwithstanding become lower than men; that the Lord of all should become the servant of all, and the King of Glory make himself of no reputation; that he pleased to come down lowest, who knew himself to be the highest of all; no necessity could persuade it, but charity and love hath done it. Now, then, ho monstrous and ugly a thing must pride be after this? That the dust should raise itself, and a worm swell; that wretched miserable man should be proud, when it pleased the glorious God to be humble; that absolute necessity shall not constrain to this, that simple love persuaded him to! How doth this heighten and elevate humility, that such a One gives out himself, not only as the Teacher, but as the pattern of it; "Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

06. SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS OF PRACTICAL RELIGION

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS OF PRACTICAL RELIGION

First Published in 1760. From the preface appended to the original edition of the following Sermons it appears that they were transcribed by the editor, who only mentions his place of residence, Brousterland in Lanarkshire, from a much larger collection of manuscript discourses in his possession. He states that they were found "in a folio and quarto volume, bound up with the greatest part of his (Binning's) printed works," that they appeared "not to be any way inferior to the discourses which the world have been favoured with," that "a good number of them are copied from his own papers by Mr. Robert M'Ward, his friend, with marginal notes, as an index or contents of the heads of his discourses," and that "the sermons written in another hand are corrected by him with the same useful marginal indexes." He mentions the texts and titles of a considerable number of other discourses and expositions which he had carefully transcribed; and adds, that these "volumes were many years concealed in the library of John Graham, a pious and learned man, much abstracted from the world, who was a near relation of Mr. M'Ward's. In a Life of Mr. Binning, written by the late Rev. John Brown of Whitburn, and published first in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor of July 1823, and afterwards, in 1828, as a preface to a small volume of selections from his writings, the possessor of the above manuscripts was invited to declare himself, in order that steps might be taken for securing their publication. It does not appear, however, that they were in consequence brought to light.

07. SERMON I

SERMON I 1 John 3:23—And this is his commandment, that ye believe in the name of Christ, and love one another

It is a common doctrine often declared unto you, that the most part of those who hear the gospel, do run in their pretended course to heaven, either upon a rock of dashing discouragement, or the sands of sinking presumption. These are in all men's mouths, and no question they are very dangerous,—so hazardous, that many fools make shipwreck either of the faith, or a good conscience; of the faith, by running upon, and dashing upon the rock—of a good conscience by sitting down upon the quicksand. But I fear that which is commonly confessed by all is cordially believed by few, and so little regarded in our course and conversation. All Christians pretend to be making a voyage heaven-ward, and that is only homeward. Now the gospel is given us to direct our course, and teach us how to steer between these two hazards, both safely and surely. This is the shore that shall guide us, and conduct to our intended haven, that is heaven, if we set our compass by it, and steer our course accordingly. Yet strange it is to behold the infinite wanderings and errors of men on the one hand or the other, some presuming upon the news of mercy, and the sound of God's grace, to walk after the imagination of their own hearts, and to live and continue in sin for which Christ died, that he might redeem us from it, fancying a possibility of living in sin and escaping wrath, and so abusing the tender of grace to promote licentiousness. Others again apprehending the wrath of God, and their just deservings; abusing the notion of God's justice, and the perfection of his holiness, to the prejudice of the glory of his grace and mercy, and their own salvation. This is certainly the cunning sleight of Satan, with the deceitfulness and ignorance of our own hearts, that leads men, and sometimes one and the same man at divers times, to contrary misapprehensions of divine truths. The wind of temptation gets fires to one corner of the house and then to another, and sometimes overpersuades the notion of mercy, and another time overstretches the apprehension of his justice, and yet in effect there is no true persuasion of any of them, but a cloud or shadow is apprehended instead of them.

Now, I say, there is one cure for both these—the right apprehension of the gospel in its entire and whole sum—the right uptaking of the light which shines in a dark place, and is given to lead us to our place of rest; to have a complete model and a short summary of the gospel always in our heart and eye: for truly it is the apprehending of parcels of divine truth, which leads men into such opposite mistakes and courses. To remedy this, we have some brief comprehensive models of the gospel, set down by the Holy Ghost, and none in better terms than this here,—“This is his commandment that ye believe in the name of Christ, and love one another.” You have it in two words, faith and love. This is the form of sound words which we should hold fast, 2 Timothy 1:13. This is the mould of doctrine delivered by Christ and his apostles. It is the separation of these two in some men's fancy, that leads too many in such paths of destruction. Truly, they can as little be divided as the sun's light and heat; but the motions and shadows of them may, and it is the following the shadows of some of them which shipwrecks souls. Now not only the common multitude of the hearers of the gospel are in hazard of this, but even God's own children who have

believed in him. The taking up of these things apart, creates the heart much trouble, and perplexity, and occasioneth much sin and stumbling. I do think it is the ignorance and inadvertency of this conjunction, that makes our case both more sad, and sinful, than otherwise it would be. And these two indeed have a mutual influence upon one another, loosing reins to sin more freely, for it unquestionably disturbs the soul's peace, and procures it much bitterness. And again, the quitting hold of the promise of grace in Christ Jesus, and the indulging our own sad and sullen apprehensions, cannot but in the issue disable the soul from the duties of love, and expose it unto the violence of every temptation. As these two do mutually strengthen one another; the faith of Jesus Christ, and the lively apprehension of his grace and goodness, so they are the most noble and effectual persuasives to live unto him, and to walk in love. Besides, faith is the mean and way which God hath appointed to convey his influence unto the soul; and then again love carrying itself actively in duties to God and men, bestirring itself for God, and those who are beloved of God, it brings in a supply to faith, and returns by a straight compass to the spring from whence it first issued, and increases it still more. Believing on the name of the Son sends forth the stream of holy affection to him, and all begotten of the Father, and this returns again by the circuit of obedience to his commands, and submission to his easy yoke, to unbosom itself in the fountain from whence it first issued; and whereas faith was at first one simple soul-adherence to a Saviour, and a hearty embracing of him, this accession of the fruits of it exalts it unto that height of assurance, and gives it that evidence which it wanted; and faith being thus strengthened, and rooted, and built up to the top of assurance of God's grace, love, and salvation, it becomes more able to bear the yoke of his commands, which are not grievous. The spring of believing thus swelled by the concurrence of so many streams, it breaks forth the more, and sends out more love and delight in God, and more charity, compassion, and meekness towards men. And this is the circle and round Christianity runs, until that day come that the head-spring of faith shall be obscured and shrivelled up in the great sea of the love of God, which shall overflow all the saints' graces in due time, when we shall see God face to face. This is a true Christian, which this apostle so beloved of God describes. He is one under a commandment, and not above it, as some fondly conceive: He is a keeper of his commands, and a doer of those things which are pleasant in God's sight. This is no legal notion, if it be right taken.

It is not the bondage of the creature, to be under the command of God; truly it is the beauty and liberty of a reasonable soul. Some speak of all subjection unto a law as slavery; but is it not an infinitely greater slavery to be at liberty to sin, and serve our own lusts? O wretched and base liberty! The Son indeed makes us truly free, and that from sin; and he is truly a Redeemer who redeems us from all iniquity, John 8:32; Psal. 130 ult. Titus 2:14. But this commandment here spoken of, would not indeed be gospel, unless there was a prior command, a brighter precept given by the Father to the Son. I find two commands given by the Father, and received by the Son, which two you may conjoin and make one of, as here faith and love are one commandment. The first is, John 10:18. "I lay down my life of myself; no man taketh it from me. This commandment have I received from my Father," and no other. John 12:49-50, "The Father gave me a commandment, what I should say, and speak, and I know that his commandment is life everlasting." This is more expressly and clearly set down, John 6:39-40, "This is the Father's will that sent me, that of all that he gave me I should lose none, but raise them up at the last day. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have everlasting life." Here then, beloved in the Lord, is the foundation of our hope, and that which

makes all commandments given by God to us, to come under a gospel-notion, that which makes Christ's yoke easy, and his burden light, and his commands not grievous. The great commandment was imposed upon our Saviour; the great weight of that wrath due to our sins, was put upon his shoulders. This was the Father's will that he should lay down his life for his sheep; this command he received willingly, and obeyed faithfully and fully. And by his obedience to this, that great obligation to satisfy God's justice and pay a ransom for our souls is taken off us; in as much as he died, justice cannot come and demand it at our hand. Now, therefore, there is another commandment given to Christ, which directly concerns us; and it is this in substance, "I will and command that thou who hast come in the place of sinners, and resolvest to die for them, that thou give eternal life to whom thou wilt, even to as many as believe in thy name. I give to thee the absolute disposal of life and death; I command thee to preach life everlasting to all pious souls, that shall flee unto thee upon the apprehension of the danger of death, and that thou bestow that life upon them, and raise them up at the last day to be partakers of it." This is the commission the Father gave to the Son; a sweet commission for poor sinners, and the charter of our salvation. And for this errand he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and sent into the world; nay, the commission extends further than grace, even to eternal glory also. Christ has received commandment of the Father, to give repentance and remission of sin, both to give faith, and love, and all other graces, else it were defective. Thus Christ comes instructed to the world, he lays open his commission in preaching the gospel, he obeys the first commandment in his own person, by offering up himself upon the cross a sacrifice for sins, and he is about the fulfilling the next commandment, that is, the giving life to them that believe: and that he may accomplish it, having ascended himself unto heaven to intercede for us, he also sent his ambassadors into the world, to whom he hath committed the word of reconciliation, and he gives them commission to publish and proclaim this commandment in his own name; this is his command, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. And this we do proclaim in his name, since he has gotten a commandment to give life everlasting to believers. Then this is his charge to you, to come and receive it from him; come and embrace him, and ye shall have life and all in him; this is the hardest and heaviest burden he imposes upon you, the weight of your life and salvation he hath taken upon himself. But oh now come and lay hold on him, who is thus offered unto you. Know that you are lost and undone in yourselves; consider the impossibilities you lie under to escape his wrath. Behold the anger of God hanging over your head, ready to be revealed in flaming fire and a tempestuous cloud of eternal misery. Will ye consider that ye are born heirs of wrath, your natural inheritance is in the lake of fire; and whatsoever your endowments by nature, or your privileges by birth be, nothing shall exeeem thee from this. Shall not then this Saviour be welcome to thee? For truly faith is but a cordial salutation and embracement of our blessed Redeemer; the soul brings him into the house, and makes him welcome, and he is standing ready to come in to your heart, and to bring in salvation with him.

Now whatever soul hath obeyed this commandment by belief of the truth, and receiving of Christ into the heart, there is but one commandment behind, and it is not grievous, viz. Love me, and love one another; love me and live unto me. This is an easy yoke, and there is good reason for it, though it had never been required to love him, and live to him, who loved not his life unto the death for us. There is mention made only of brotherly love here, but certainly the other love to God, flowing from the sense of his love, is the right wing of the soul, and brotherly-love the left; and by these the pious soul mounts up to heaven with the wings of an eagle. The love of our brother is but

the fruit and consequent of this love, but it is set down, as a probation and clear evidence of the love of God in our souls.

Love is commanded as the very sum and substance of the whole law, as the fountain of all other duties; things are compacted in their causes, and lie hid within the virtue of them. Truly this is the way to persuade and constrain you to all the duties of godliness and righteousness, of piety towards God, and charity towards men, if once we could fasten this chain of affection upon your hearts, and engage your souls by love to God and man. We cannot but beat the air, while we seek to persuade you to the serious practice of religious duties, of prayer in secret, and in your families, of reading and meditation upon the word, of sanctifying the sabbath, of dealing justly and moderately with all men, of sobriety and temperance in your conversation; of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, of walking humbly with God, and towards men, of restraining and subduing your inordinate lusts and passions; I say, it is almost in vain to press these things upon you, or expect them from you, till once the Spirit of power and love enter into your hearts. And indeed the Spirit of love is a powerful Spirit; the love of God, possessing the heart within, cannot but conform all within and without to his love and good pleasure. Love only can do those things which are pleasant in his sight, for it doth them pleasantly, heartily, and cheerfully, and God loves a cheerful giver, and a cheerful worshipper. Brotherly love is rather expressed, because little or not at all studied by the most part; other duties to God, if men come not up in practice to them, yet they approve them in their soul and mind. But there is scarce a notion of the obligation of charity and love towards our brethren, yea not so much as in the minds of Christians, let be in their practice. It is the special command which Christ left to his disciples when he was going away, John 13:35. but alas we have forgotten it, it is so long since.

08. SERMON II

SERMON II 1 John 3:23—This is his commandment, that ye believe in the name of his Son, &c.

We commonly make many rules in religion, and turn it into a laborious art, full of intricate questions, precepts, and contentions. As there hath been a great deal of vanity in the conception of speculative divinity, by a multitude of vain and unedifying questions which have no profit in them, or are beneficial to them that are occupied therein, but have only stirred up strife and envy, and boiled the flame of contention in the Christian world; so I fear that practical divinity is no less vitiated and spoiled in this age amongst true Christians (by many perplexed cases relating to every condition) than the other among the school-men. Hereby it seems to me, that Christ and his apostles did not suppose it to be so perplexed a business as we now do make it; neither did the hearers weary themselves or others with so many various objections against the practice of the fundamental commandment of the gospel, believing in Jesus Christ. The plain nature of the gospel being holden forth and received, I am persuaded was and is able (like the sun arising in brightness) to dispel and scatter all these mists and clouds which do arise both in the one and the other, from ignorance at first, and are elevated to a greater height, by the custom of the times. The matter, my brethren, is not so dark as you make it; here it is plainly and simply expressed: "This is his commandment that ye believe in the name of his Son, and then love one another." Ye all know that we had commandments given us by God, which were by nature impressed on the heart of man; but by his fall into sin, the tables of the law (which I may say were in Adam's mind and heart, understanding and affection) those two tables were broken in the fall, and since there could be no obedience, because of ignorance and perversion, the tables breaking in pieces, their ruptures have produced these two opposite principles. The fall of man hath broken his mind, and so darkened his understanding, and broken his will, and put it in a wrong set. This appointed it, set it in a posture of enmity against God. However, we are by this fall utterly disabled to stand up before God, in acceptable obedience; there is no man breathing, how blameless soever he be before the world, but he must fall down as guilty before God, in many things, yea in all things. But the law being thus obliterated out of men's consciences, as he lost ability to obey, so he lost almost all conscience of sin and disobedience; he not knowing his charge and obligation, could not accuse himself for falling in rebellion; therefore it pleased the Lord to cause the law to be written in tables of stone in mount Sinai; he transcribes the commandments over again that all the world may see their obligation, and how infinitely short they have come in their subjection, and how just their condemnation may be. For this purpose the Lord causes proclaim the old bond in the ears of men with great majesty and authority as it became the lawgiver, that all may become guilty and stop their mouth before God, Romans 3:19. He would once have all men, knowing that they are under infinite breaches of his commandments, that they may see themselves also subject to his judgment. Now what do you think of a soul that stands at the foot of this mountain, and hears a dreadful accusation read against it, all which the conscience within must subscribe unto, and both together pronounce the person guilty and liable to eternal punishment? I say, what can such a soul do, which has with trembling heard his voice? Satisfaction there cannot be given for an infinite

offence against an infinite nature; the curse and sentence which was the sanction and confirmation of this commandment, that is just; and there appears no way how, without violation of God's justice, it can be repealed. Obedience to these commandments is now both impossible and unprofitable; impossible I say, because of the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, that has no ability nor willingness but to offend and disobey; and unprofitable, because it cannot at all relax the former sentence of condemnation. Now, obedience being a present duty, cannot pay old debts, or satisfy for our former rebellions, and so it must leave a man to seen condemnation. I fear this is a puzzle that all consciences must come unto here, or elsewhere: Here is a strait indeed. But yet there is an enlargement; there is a way found out of bringing the soul out of the miry clay, and deep pit of misery; and it is this: God hath found out a ransom for himself, without our procurement, or consent, or knowledge: he hath provided a satisfaction to his justice in his Son Jesus Christ; having laid upon him our iniquities, he exacts of him our deserved punishment, and makes him a curse who knew no sin. Now this being done, the Lord sends forth to all poor sinners who are trembling at mount Sinai this proclamation, This is my last and most peremptory command, that ye believe in the name of my Son Jesus Christ. This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him. Have ye heard me, the lawgiver, condemning you? now go and hear him the Mediator and Saviour absolving you; for I have committed all judgment unto him; though I pronounce the sentence in this world against you, yet I have committed all the execution of it to him; and if you come to him you may prevent it. You have broken all my former commandments, and I have pronounced a sentence against you for that. But now I give a new commandment instead of all the former, which, if you obey, then the sentence of death is relaxed. You who cannot obey the law and give satisfaction in your own persons, I charge you to flee unto my son Christ, who hath given me full satisfaction, both to the curse by suffering, and to the command by obedience, and lay hold on his righteousness as your own, and in him ye are justified, and delivered from all those sentences and hard writings against you. I give a new commandment as the cure and remedy of all broken commandments: Believe on this name, in which is salvation, take his obedience and suffering for your cure, and present me with that, I shall be as well satisfied as with your own personal satisfaction. This now is a very plain business; all commands are broken, there is yet one published in the gospel to help all, and it is in substance, to embrace and welcome Jesus Christ for all, to seek our life and salvation in him, to take him as a priest to offer sacrifice for us, and expiate our sins; and to come to him as a prophet to seek wisdom and illumination, and all grace from him; to choose him as our king henceforth, to submit to his easy yoke of government. Now I say there will be no more debates about this: will ye yet dispute whether ye may believe or not, will ye enquire after this whether you have a warrant or not? truly such a question would occasion much jealousy and provocation among men. If a man had signified as much willingness by command, by invitation, by request, by frequent repetition of these, yet to call in question or dispute whether or not I may go to such a person, will he make me welcome? were it not the greatest affront I could put upon him, would it not alienate his affection more than any thing, to be jealous of his real kindness to me?

I would desire to hold out unto you the sin, the danger, and the vanity of such a way. I say the sin is great; it is no less than the highest and most heinous disobedience to the gospel, which, of all others, is of the deepest dye; you have disobeyed the law and broken all the ten commandments, and will ye therefore disobey the gospel too, and break this fundamental commandment? Is it not enough that ye have broken the rest, and will ye break this also, which was given for the cure of

all?

Consider, I say, this is his commandment; now commandments should be obeyed, and not disputed, coming from an infallible and uncontrollable authority. Would ye not silence all the rebellions of your hearts against the commands of praying, hearing, reading, dealing justly, and walking soberly, with this one word, It is his command, it is his sovereign will; and why do ye not see the stamp of that same authority upon this? Now if you consider it aright, it hath more authority upon it than upon others, because it is his last command, and so would be taken as most pungent and weighty. When your hearts rise up to question and dispute this matter, I pray you cut all these knotty objections with the sword of his commandment. You use to go about to loose them by particular answers, and untie them at leisure with art and skill; but truly it would be a readier and wiser course to cut them in pieces at one stroke, by this piercing and pungent precept. If your reasons and scruples be weighty, and you cannot get answers to overbalance them, I pray you put this weighty seal of divine authority into the balance, and sure I am it will weigh down all. Consider then the danger of it, it is the last and most peremptory command, after which you may expect no other but the execution of justice. How sad and severe is the certification, "He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him." There needs no new sentence to be pronounced against you; why, because if you believe not, that prior sentence of the law is yet standing above your heads to condemn you; that wrath abides on you; this is the only way to remove it, to come to him who hath taken it on himself. After the breach of all commands, ye have this retreat, this refuge to flee unto, a new command to come unto the Son and have life. But after this disobedience of the Son, you have none; there is nothing after unbelief, but ye are turned over, or rather left over in the hand of the law and divine justice; therefore it is the most dangerous and damnable thing to disobey this,—it is to refuse the very remedy of sin. Consider also what vanity and uselessness is in these debates; what an unreasonable and senseless thing is it to dispute against our own soul, and against our own happiness? all is wrapt up here, and we do no less than the highest act of self-murder that can be. He that hateth me, wrongs his own soul; what an unreasonable thing then is it, because ye are miserable, to refuse mercy; because ye are unclean, therefore to maintain that ye are not to come to the blessed fountain of cleansing; because ye have broken the rest of the commands, therefore ye may not obey this! Is there any sense or reason in such things, because I am a sinner, therefore I will not come to a Saviour? Alas! to what purpose was the Son sent and given, and for what end came he? was it not to seek and to save such as are lost and undone, and to deliver them from misery? What do you gain by such questions? for at length you must turn and enter in at the door of a naked command; and promise, when you have wearied yourselves to find that in your hearts which is not in them, to seek waters in the wilderness and springs in the desert; qualifications and graces in your own hearts to warrant your boldness in coming to the promise: I say, when you have sought and all in vain, you must at length come to this fountain in which is all grace and happiness. If you had what you seek, yet if ye would indeed believe in Christ, you must deny them and look upon yourselves as ungodly, to be justified by faith. Why then do you grasp after that which can do you no good, (though you had it), I mean, in point of your acceptation. Consider it, my beloved, that the honour of God and your own happiness lies most in this, nay, not only that, but your holiness too, which you pretend to seek after, lies in it; till you come to Christ, it is in vain to seek it elsewhere.

09. SERMON III

SERMON III 1 John 3:23—And this is his commandment, &c.

There are different tempers of mind among men, some more smooth and pliable, others more refractory and froward; some may be persuaded by love, who cannot be constrained by fear; with some a request will more prevail than a command, others again of a harsher disposition, love and condescension doth rather embolden them; and therefore, they must be restrained with the bridle of authority. It would seem that the Lord hath some regard to this in the administration of the gospel; he accommodates himself to the diverse dispositions of men, and (if we may say with respect to him which yet can be no disrespect, seeing he hath humbled himself lower) he doth become all things to all men, that he may gain some. Ye see the gospel sometimes running in the channel of love and kindness, sometimes in the channel of authority and majesty. God sometimes stoopeth down to invite, and affectionately to beseech sinners to come unto his Son for life. He hath prepared a marriage and banquet for us in Christ: he hath made all things ready for the receiving, for the eating, and he sends forth his servants to intreat and invite all such who have no bread and clothing, who are poor and lame, to this wedding. He gives an hearty invitation to all that stand at an infinite distance from God, and so are feeding upon empty vanities without him, to come and enjoy the riches of his grace, which runs as a river in Christ between these two golden banks,—the pardon of sin, and the purification of our souls from its pollution. You have a hearty invitation, Isaiah 55:1-3. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters." But he comes yet lower, to request and obtest poor sinners, as if he could have advantage by it; he will not stand to be a supplicant at any man's door, to beseech him to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:14; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20. As if we could do him a favour and benefit, he requests us most earnestly. Truly it is strange, that this doth not melt the heart, and make it fall down into the belief and obedience of the truth. Affection is the most insinuating and prevailing thing with an ingenuous spirit, most of all when it is accompanied with majesty in the person that hath it, and humility in the carriage and disposition; for a great personage to descend out of love, to affectionate and humble requests and solicitations, this cannot but have a mighty influence on any spirit that is not wild and savage: but because the heart of man is desperately wicked, and hath lost that true ingenuity and nobleness of spirit, and is now become stubborn and froward, as a wild ass, or as a swift dromedary traversing her ways, therefore, the Lord takes another way of dealing with men suitable to their froward natures; he gives out his royal statute backed with majesty and authority; "This is his command," &c.; that when fair means could not prevail, other means more terrible might reduce lost rebellious men. He hedges in our way with threatenings and promises annexed to the commandment, "He that believeth hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not is condemned already, and shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." He declares all men traitors if they come not into his Son, to be reconciled to God, before the decree of wrath pass forth.

Truly, it is a wonder that there should be any need either of an invitation, or a request, or a command, or a threatening; that we should need to be invited, or requested, or commanded, or threatened to our own happiness. Might not a bare and simple offer, or proposal of Jesus Christ,

his nature, and offices, of the redemption and salvation purchased by him, suffice? What needed more, but to declare unto us that we are lost and utterly undone by nature, and that there is a refuge and remedy provided in Christ? Surely in any other thing of little importance, we needed no intreaty; were it not a good enough invitation to a man that is like to starve for hunger, to cast meat freely before him; or to a man that is in hazard of drowning, to cast a cord to him? We would seek no other persuasion to go and dig for a treasure of gold, than to shew us where it is hid: but strange is the rebellious and perverse disposition of man's heart; what an enmity is in it to the ways of God! What strange inclination to self-murder, ever since man destroyed himself! we cannot express it unto you; but you may perceive it well enough, both by the Lord's frequent obtesting and protesting to us in his word, and the experience of the great barrenness of all such means. Whence is it, I pray you, that there should need so many means to persuade you to that which is your own advantage, and to call you to shun the ways of destruction? And whence is it that notwithstanding of all those invitations, intreaties, commandments, promises, and threatenings often sounded in your ears, yet the most part are not reduced to obedience, nor reclaimed from the ways of death, and do not take hold of the path of life? Truly it may plainly point out to you, the desperate wickedness of the heart, the stubbornness and rebelliousness of our disposition; and if once we could persuade you of this, we had gained a great point which few do seriously consider, and so do not abhor themselves. The commandments mentioned in the text are these two, To believe in Christ, and to love our brother. It is no wonder they are recommended with so much seriousness and earnestness; for they are both the most comprehensive, and the most pleasing commandments. They are most comprehensive; for it appears that all the commands spoken of in the preceding verse, are summed up in this one precept, "and this is his commandment," &c. And that they are most pleasant in God's sight is evident, for the true Christian being described from this, that he does those things which are pleasing in God's sight, that he is one that studies to conform himself to his good pleasure. This is subjoined as the two most pleasing exercises of Christianity, "This is his commandment," that is, his pleasing commandment, that ye should believe in Christ and love one another. This command of believing in Jesus, is comprehensive, because it takes in all precepts, and that under a threefold consideration. It takes them all in as broken and transgressed by men, as fulfilled by Christ, and also takes them all in as a rule of righteousness according to which the believer ought henceforth to walk. The command of believing in Christ doth first of all import this, that a sinner should examine himself according to the law of God, that he should lay his whole life and course, his heart and ways, down before the perfect and holy commandments, that he may stop his own mouth with shame and silence, and find himself guilty before God. Mercy uses to speak of humiliation preparatory to believing, and the work of the law preparatory to the gospel: but truly I conceive it would be more fitly expressed, if it were holden out thus, that it is one of the essential ingredients in the bosom of believing, and one of the first articles of the gospel-law, to charge all sinners to acknowledge their sin and misery, to discern their own abounding iniquity, and danger of perishing by it, how guilty they are before God, and how subject to his judgment, that so finding themselves undone, they may have recourse to a Saviour.

Truly the Spirit's work is to convince of sin, and then of righteousness; and when we are commanded to believe, the first part of our believing is crediting and subscribing to the law, to the justice and righteousness of God against us; and then the believing and acknowledging the gospel, is the end and purpose to that. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me;" this takes in

completely the two books of saving faith towards God as a Law-giver and Judge, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, as a Saviour and Redeemer; and it doth but beget misapprehensions in many, when the one is looked upon as a condition without which we shall not be welcome to the other. Truly I think both are proposed as essentials of saving faith, none of them in such a way as to procure right and warrant to the other, but only in such an order as is suitable to any reasonable nature to be wrought upon, and that is all. It is only required of you, upon that account, because fleeing unto a Saviour for refuge, is a rational and deliberate action which necessarily includes the sense of misery without him. But the sense of sin and misery is not urged as one thing which ye should go about, to prepare and fit yourselves for more welcome at Christ's hand, as commonly it is taken. Here it is easy to understand, how the command of believing belongs unto all who hear it, even to the vilest and grossest sinners who are yet stout, hard-hearted, and far from righteousness, Isaiah 46:12, those who are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not; and those whose hearts are uncircumcised, and their lives profane: and yet the commandment of coming to the Son and believing on him for life, is extended unto them all; all are invited, requested, commanded, and threatened to this duty. There is no bar of exclusion set down in the gospel to hold out one, and let in another, as many suppose; those promises that sound condition-wise, are not limitations and restrictions of the right and warrant to persons to believing. Indeed, it is true all are not exhorted at the first hand to assurance of God's love, and an interest in Christ. There is no question that none have right to this seal, but them who have believed and set to their own seal to the character or truth of the word: but all are charged to believe in Christ, that is, out of a sense of their own lost estate to embrace a Saviour for righteousness and strength. Neither is there any fear that men can come too soon to Christ. We need not set down exclusions or extractions, for if they be not sensible of sin and misery, they will not certainly come to him at all; and therefore, the command that enjoins them to believe on the Son, charges them also to believe that they are lost without him: and if the most presumptuous sinners would once give obedience to this commandment, really there would be no fear of presumption in coming too soon unto Jesus. A sense of sin is not set as a porter, to keep out any who are willing to come in; but rather to open the door, and constrain them that were unwilling to enter in; so that if the least measure of that can do this, we are not to stand till we have more, but to come to the prince exalted to get remission of sins, and more true gospel sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation from dead works. You would not therefore understand any promises in the Scriptures, so as if there were any conditions set down to seclude any from coming, who are willing to come; for they do but declare the nature and manner of what they are invited to, that no man mistake believing, and take his own empty presumptions or fancies which embolden him to sin more, for that true faith which is full of good fruits.

Now in the text the pious soul having once subscribed to the guilt and curse of all the commandments, by believing the law, looks also upon the Son, Jesus Christ, and finds the law fulfilled, the curse removed, all satisfied in him. He finds all the commandments obeyed in his person, all the wrath due for the breach of them pacified and quenched by his sufferings. And he gives a cheerful and cordial approbation of all this; he receives Christ as the end of the law for righteousness, which Christ made up by obedience and suffering to supply our disobedience. We should stay or rest upon this, as that which pacifies the Father's wrath to the full. This is what gives the answer of a good conscience, and pacifies every penitent soul, and secures his title to heaven. Now this presents God with a full atonement and obedience to all the law, which he accepts from a

believer as if it were his own. This is the large comprehension of believing, it takes in its arms, as it were, in one bundle all the precepts and curses, and devolves them over on Christ, puts them in an able hand, and then takes them all as satisfied and fulfilled by him, and holds them up in one bundle to the Father. And hence it proceeds, in the third place, that believing on the Son takes in all again, to be the rule of walking, and the mark to aim at. Finding such a perfect exoneration of by-gones in Christ, and standing in such favour with God, the soul is sweetly constrained to love and delight in the divine laws; and truly this is the natural result of faith. I wish you may rightly observe this conjunction, that this is inseparably knit with it; love to God and men, delight to do his will, to love him, and live unto him. Do not deceive yourselves with vain words; if you find not the smartness of the gospel, and the doctrine of grace laying this restraint upon the heart, ye are yet in your sins. This is the reasoning of a believing soul, Shall I who am dead unto sin, live any longer therein? Shall I not delight in those commandments, when Christ hath delivered me from the curse of the law? Though such a one fall, and come short, yet the pressure of the heart is that way. But then attend unto the order; ye must first believe on the Son, and then love him, and live unto him. Ye must first flee unto his righteousness, and then the righteousness of the law shall be wrought in you. Therefore do not weary yourselves to no purpose; do not wrong your own souls by seeking to prevent this order, which was established for your joy, and salvation. Know that you must first meet with satisfaction in all the commands of Christ, before obedience to any of them be accepted; and having met with that, know that the sincere endeavour of thy soul, and the affectionate bent [i.e. bent or inclination] of thy heart to thy duty, is accepted. And if ye find yourselves thereafter surcharged with guilt and unanswerable walking, yet ye know the way is to begin at this again, to believe in the Son. This is the round you must walk, as long as ye are in the body; when you are defiled run into the fountain, and when you are washed, study to keep your garments clean; but if defiled again, get your hearts washed from wickedness. These things, says John, "I write to you, that you sin not, who believe, but if any sin," who desire not to transgress, "you have a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Now love is a very comprehensive command; it is the fulfilling of the whole law, Romans 13:10; Matthew 22:37-38.; it is indeed the true principle and pure fountain of our obedience unto God and men. All fruits of the Spirit are moral virtues that grow out of the believer; whether pleasant unto God, or refreshing unto men, they are all virtually in this root of love, all the streams are compacted in this fountain, therefore he names one for all, viz. brotherly-love, which is the bond of perfection, Colossians 3:14. It is a bundle of many divine graces, a company or society of many Christian virtues combined together. They are named bowels of mercies, long-suffering, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, all which are tied to the believer's girdle by charity; so that where love is, every good comes: after it a troop of so many sweet endowments and ornaments also come; and where this is wanting, (as truly it is the epidemical disease of the time) there are many sins abounding; for when "iniquity abounds the love of many shall wax cold," Matth. 24:12. O that is our temper, or rather our distempered nature,—love cold, and passion hot. When charity goes away, these wild and savage beasts of darkness come forth, viz. bitter envying and strife, rigid censuring and judging, unmercifulness and implacableness of spirit, upon others' failings and offences, self-love that keeps the throne, and all the rest are her attendants: for where self-love and pride is, there is contention, strife, envy, and every evil work, and all manner of confusion; thus they lead one another as in a chain of darkness, Proverbs 13:10; James 3:16. Think not that love is a complimentary word, and an idle motion of loving, it is a more

real thing, a more vital thing,—it hath bowels of mercy; they move themselves when others are moved, and they bring their neighbour's misery into the inmost seat of the heart, and make the spirit a solemn companion in misery; and it is also exercised in forbearing and forgiving. "Charity is not easily provoked," therefore it can forbear, is easily appeased; therefore it can forgive, it is not soon displeased, or hard to be pleased, forbearing and forgiving one another in love. Study then, this grace more, see it to be the fulfilling of the law; for the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. The end of the law is not strife and debate, nor such intricate and perplexed matters, as minister endless questions, and no edification; though men pretend conscience and Scripture, yet the great end of both is violated, that is, charity, which mainly studies edification in truth and love. And therefore it is a violent perversion of the commandment, or word, to overstretch every point of conscience or difference, so far as to the renting of Christian peace and unity. What hath kindled all these flames of bloody war, what hath increased all these fiery contentions among us, but the want of this? As James says of the tongue, so I may speak of uncharitableness and self-love,—they set on fire the course of nature, and they are set on fire of hell. The true zeal and love of God is like that elementary fire of which they speak, that in its own place hath a temperate heat, and doth not burn or consume what is about it. But our zeal is like the fire that is mixed with some gross matter, a preying, devouring, and consuming thing. Zeal down in the lower region of man's heart, is mixed with many gross corruptions, which are as oil and fuel to it, and give it an extreme intemperate destroying nature. But then consider, that this commandment of love is our Lord and Saviour's last testamentary injunction to his disciples, John 13:34-36. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." It is Christ's latter-will, and given us as a token and badge of discipleship. Every profession hath its own signs and rules: every order their own symbol, every rank their own character; here is the differential or peculiar character and livery of a Christian,—brotherly-love, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," &c. I remember a story of a dying father, who called his sons to him on his death-bed, and having sent for a bundle of arrows, he tried them one by one, if they could break them; and when they had all tried this in vain, he caused loose the bundle, and take the arrows one by one, and so they were easily broken; by which he gave them to understand, that their stability and strength would consist in unity and concord; but if love and charity were broken, they were exposed to great hazard. I think our Lord and Saviour gives such a precept unto his disciples at his departure out of this world,—"a new command I give unto you," &c. John 13:34—to shew them that the perfection of the body, into which they were all called as members, consisted in that bond of charity. And indeed love is not only a bond or bundle of perfection in respect of graces, but in regard of the church too; it is that bond or tie which knits all the members into one perfect body, Colossians 3:14-16. Without this bond all must needs be rents, rags, and distractions.

Now I shall add but one word of the other, that these commands are pleasing in God's sight; and truly believing in the Son must be grateful to him, not only from the general nature of obedience to his will, but also because this doth most honour both to the Father and to the Son. The Father counts himself much honoured when we honour the Son; and there is no honour the creature can be in a capacity to give unto him like this,—to cast all our hope, and hang all our happiness upon him, John 5:23-24; to set to our seal that he is true and faithful, John 3:33, which is done by believing. But most of all this is pleasing in his sight, because the Father's good pleasure

concentres in the same point with the soul's good pleasure, that is, on the well beloved Son Christ, therefore faith must needs be well-pleasing to the Father; for what is faith else but the soul's complacency and satisfaction in the Son? As the Father is already well-pleased with his death and sufferings, so he propones and holds him out in the gospel, that you may be as well-pleased with him as he is. This is believing indeed, to be pleased with him, as the Father is pleased; and this pleases the Father too. O! that you could understand this; the gospel is not brought unto you, that you may reconcile God, and procure a change in his affection, but for this end—to beseech you to be reconciled unto God, to take away all hostile affections out of your heart; and this is the business we have to do,—to persuade you that the Father holds him abundantly contented with his Son, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And to move you to be as well contented with him as he is, hear him: I hear him for you, hear ye him for me; I hear him interceding for you, hear ye him beseeching you. Now this may take down all ground of jealousy concerning our welcome and acceptance, it cannot but be an acceptable and pleasing thing to God, that the affection and desire of the soul fall in and embosom itself with his good pleasure upon Christ his Son. And then, in the next place, it is well-pleasing to God that ye love one another, not only because he shall see his own image and likeness in your love,—for there is nothing in which a Christian more eminently resembles his Father, or more evidently appears to be a child of the Highest, than in free loving all, especially the household of faith, and forbearing and forgiving one another, and so he cannot choose but like it well,—but especially because your love concentrates too, and meets upon the same object with his love: those, whom the Father so loved, that he gave his only-begotten Son, and the Son so loved them, that he gave himself for them. If these be thy delight, and thou forbear them as the Father and the Son hath done, that conspiracy of affections into one point cannot but be pleasing unto him. Now if these please him so well, whom should they not please?

10. SERMON IV

SERMON IV James 3:14—But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, &c.

It is a common evil of those who hear the gospel, that they are not delivered up to the mould and frame of religion that is holden out in it, but rather they bring religion into a mould of their own invention. It was the special commendation of the Romans, "that they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine into which they were delivered," Romans 6:17. That they who were once servants, or slaves of sin, had now become voluntary captives of truth, and had given themselves up to the gospel, to be modelled and fashioned by it; and if so then, certainly, the most substantial points of religion would be most deeply engraven upon them. Every thing would have its own due place with us, if we were cast in the primitive mould of godliness; but when we cast godliness in a mould of our own apprehension, they cannot choose but a miserable confusion and disorder will follow in the duties of religion; for according as our fancy and inclination imposes a necessity upon things, so we do pursue them, and not according to the real weight that is in them. I find the Scripture laying most weight upon the most common things, placing most religion in the most obvious and known things; and for other things more remote from common capacity, I find them set far below in the point of worth and moment, even those things that seem least. But I find that order quite perverted in the course of Christians: some particular points that are not so obvious to every understanding, are put in the first place, and made the distinguished character of a Christian; and others again, in which true and undefiled religion doth more consist, are despised and set in a low place, because of their ceremonies. I think this apostle hath observed this confusion, and hath applied himself to remove it, by correcting the misapprehensions of Christians, and reducing their thoughts and ways to the frame of true Christianity. Even as Christ dealt with the Pharisees, who brought in such a confusion in religion, by imposing a necessity upon ceremonies, and an indifferency upon the very substance itself; truly I think it may be said unto us, "You tithe mint, anise, and cummin, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these things ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Ye neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, faith and truth; and in the room of these ye have misplaced things that are higher in God's esteem from an apprehension of their necessity. Thus by your traditions and opinions of things so remote from the kingdom of God, ye have made the unquestionable commandments of God of none effect," Matthew 15:6.

You think possibly, if this apostle was coming out to preach unto you this day, that he would certainly resolve you in many controverted points, and would bring some farther light to the debates of the time. But truly I think, if he knew the temper of our spirits, he would preach over this sermon to us again—"My brethren, be not many masters," &c. I suppose he would bring that old primitive light of pure and undefiled religion, the splendour of which our present ways and courses could not endure, but would be constrained to hide themselves in darkness. What would you think of such a sermon as this? "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." James 1:26. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man," James 3:2. This is accounted a common and trivial purpose, but believe it, sirs, the

Christian practice of the most common things hath more religion in it than the knowledge of the profoundest things; and till you learn to do what you know, it is a mockery to study to know further what to do. There is a strange stirring of mind after more light and knowledge in some particulars of the time, but I would fain know, if there be as much ardour and endeavour to practise that which we have already: To him that hath shall be given,—to him that makes use of his knowledge for the honour of God, and the good of mankind, and their edification, more shall be given; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath, and yet really and cordially he hath not, because he hath no use of it, therefore, he may by inquiry find more darkness; but his old light shall rather be put out. Do you not all know, that ye should bridle your tongues, that it is a great point of that Christian victory over the world, to tame and daunt that undaunted wild beast, to quench that fire-brand of hell? Do ye not all know, that we should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath: and as the apostle Paul speaks on another subject, "Doth not even nature itself teach you," when you have but one tongue, and two ears, that ye should hear much, and speak little? Are not our ears open, and our tongue inclosed and shut up, to teach us to be more ready to hear than to speak. Now, I say, till Christians learn to practise those things that are without all controversy, you may make it your account never to want controversy, and never to get clearness; for to what purpose should more light be revealed, when that which is revealed is to no purpose? But it is in vain to think to reform the tongue, till you have the heart first reformed; they say the belly hath no ears; truly the tongue is all tongue, and has no ears to take an admonition or instruction; we must then, with the apostle, retire unto the heart, and abate from the abundance of the superfluity and naughtiness that is within; and therefore our apostle descends to the cure of pride, envy, and strife in the heart, that are fountains of all that pestiferous flood which flows out of every man's mouth. "Is there any wise man among you?" &c. And indeed this is the orderly proceeding both of nature and grace; nature begins within to probe among the superfluous and noisome humours which abound in the body, and desolate the members, and doth not think it sufficient to apply external plasters. Grace must begin within too, to purge the heart, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, the eye looks, and the feet walk. If there be no destroyer in the members or outward man, it is not the prescribing of rules and cautions that will suffice to restrain, to abate, or to cure, but the disease must be ripped up to the bottom—the cause found within, as our apostle doth here; hence, says he, proceed all these feverish distempers among you—your hot and passionate words—your evil speakings and reproachings—your contentions and wars about matters either civil or religious; whence are all these?—from a vain persuasion of wisdom—from a foolish imagination of some excellency in yourselves, and some inward affection to be accounted something of among men. "Who is a wise man?" &c.; you would be accounted wise, and so you do account yourselves; and this begets strife and envy in the heart, and predisposeth the mind to strife and contention with others. And therefore he takes the mask off, by deciphering the very nature of such a wisdom; he embowels that pretended wisdom in religion, and gives it its own name; and because things are best known and most livelily comprehended in their opposition and comparison with one another, he shews wherein true wisdom and religion consists, and sets the one against the other, that the deformity of the one and the beauty of the other may appear. We shall then speak a word of this that is supposed; and then of that which is expressed—the descriptions of true wisdom, and pretended wisdom. I conceive this interrogation, "Is there a wise man among you?" imports chiefly these two; one is, That it is the natural disease of all men to esteem themselves something, and desire to be esteemed such by

others; another is, That the misapprehension of that wherein true wisdom and excellency doth especially consist, is the ground of many miscarriages in the seeking or venting of that.

It was an ancient remark, "That vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt." Empty man is wise in his own eyes, and would be so in other men's too; he hath no reality nor solidity, but is like those light things which the wind carries away, or the waters bear above, and toss hither and thither; yet he apprehends some solid and real worth in himself, and would impose that apprehension upon others. And truly this is a drunkenness of mind, which makes a man light and vain, to stagger to and fro; it is a giddiness of spirit that makes him inconstant and reeling, but insensible of it. Though he be born as stupid and void of any real wisdom and excellency as a wild ass's colt, yet he hath this madness and folly superadded to all that natural stupidity, that he seems to be wise and understanding; and truly it was a more ancient disease than Job's days: we may trace the steps of its antiquity to be from the very beginning, and there we shall find the true original of it. What was it, I pray you, did cast the angels out of heaven down to the lowest hell, to be reserved in chains for everlasting darkness? I do not conceive what their natures, so abstracted from all sensual lusts, could be capable of, but this spiritual darkness and madness of self-conceit, and an ambitious aspiring after more wisdom; whence did flow that malcontent and envious humour in maligning the happiness of man. And this was the poison that Satan, the chief of these angels, did drop into man's nature, by temptations and suggestions of an imaginary wisdom and happiness,—*"You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."* And truly this poison is so strong and pestilent, that having once entered into the body, it spreads through all the members; it infects all the posterity that were in Adam's loins. Being once distilled into the lump it diffuses itself through the whole,—such a strange contagion is it; that wretched aim at a higher wisdom hath thrown us all down into this brutish and stupid condition, to be like wild ass's colts. Yet this false and fond imagination of wisdom and excellence remains within us, which is so much the nearer madness, that now there is no apparent ground left for such a fairly [i.e. fancy, infatuation, or unreal subject of wonder]. And if one of a cubit's height should imagine himself as tall as a mountain, and accordingly labour to stretch out himself, we would seek no other sign of madness; truly this malignant and poisonable humour is so subtle, that it hath insinuated itself into all the parts and powers of the soul, and steals in, without observation, into all our thoughts, purposes, affections, ways, and courses; it is of so infectious and pestiferous a nature, that it defiles all that is in the man, and all that comes out of the man. The apostle speaks of covetousness, that it is the root of all evil; truly I think that comprehends many inordinate affections in it. Now, both self-love and earth-love, which arises from some false imagination of that which is not; whether it be an imagination of some excellency in ourselves, or some worth in these worldly and earthly things, man first makes a god of it, and then worships it. Therefore covetousness is called idolatry, self-idolatry, and earth-idolatry. We first attribute some divinity to ourselves, like those people, Isaiah 44:17, to their idols: we then fall down and worship ourselves; but we do not consider in our heart that we are but dust: and then we ascribe some divinity to the perishing things of the world, and then worship them; but do not consider that they are earthly and perishing vanities. Thus we feed upon ashes; a deceived heart hath turned us aside, and we cannot deliver our own souls by discovering the lie that is in our right hand. We feed partly on the element of the air, by seeking that of others that we have of ourselves; and partly upon the element of the earth, by the love of this world; and these two degenerated evils are the root of all evils, self-estimation, and creature-affection.

I think this apostle, in this one word, "Is there any wise man among you," or any endowed with knowledge? and that word, "glory not," strikes at the root of all the forementioned and aftermentioned evils: from whence, I say, doth that promptitude and bensal [i.e. propensity] to speak, that slowness and difficulty to hear, that readiness and inclination to pride reprov'd, James 1:19-20, proceed? Is it not from an overweening conceit of our own wisdom, that we are so swift to speak, and so slow to hear, and that we would teach others, and yet be taught of none? We are so much in love with our own apprehensions, that we imagine they shall find as much esteem and affection among men; and so being like barrels full of liquor in our own conceit, we are like to burst, if we vent not, and are as incapable of taking from others, as of retaining what is within. The word of God was a fire in Jeremiah's heart, that would have consumed him, if he had not given it vent. Truly self-love is a fire that must vent one way or other, or it would burn up all within, by displeasure; and then it is the over-apprehension of some excellency in ourselves, which so disposes us to anger, that makes us combustible matter, like the spirit of gunpowder; for the least spark of injury or offence will set all in a flame. It is certainly the fond imagination of some great worth in ourselves, that is the very immediate predisposition to the apprehension of an injury. Humility cannot be be affronted, it is hard to persuade of an injury; why? because there is no excellency to be hurt or wronged; therefore Christ conjoins these, "Meek and lowly in heart," Matthew 11:29, lays poverty of spirit down as the foundation of meekness, Matthew 5:3-5. Whence is it that we accept of men's persons by judging according to the outward appearance, and are so ready to displease our brethren, especially those who are inferior to us in body, or mind, or estate? is it not from this root, self-admiration? This makes us elevate ourselves above others, and to intrude ourselves among those who are chiefest in account. Whence doth our unmercifulness and rigidity towards other men proceed, but from this fountain? That we allow so much licence and indulgence to ourselves, that we can have none to spare for others; and that we do not consider that we ourselves stand in need of more mercy from God, and cannot endure a mixture of judgment in it; therefore we have judgment to others without mercy, James 2:13. And is not this self-pleasing humour the fountain of that contentious plea after the pre-eminence, and censorious liberty of judging others, and usurping authority over them? James 3:1, "My brethren, be not ye many masters." Truly this is the root of all contentions and strifes; it is this which rents all human and Christian society; this looses all the pins of concord and unity; this sets all by the ears, and makes all the wheels reel through other. The conceit of some worth beyond others, and the imagination of some preeminence over them, even in the best creatures,—he best, and he best, that is the plea; he greatest, and he greatest, that is the controversy; as bladders puffed up with wind, they cannot be kept in little room, but every one presses another; but if the wind were out, they would compact in less room, and comply better together. The apostle implies this, when he puts every man in mind of his own failing, "in many things we offend all;" and if this were considered, it would abate our security, and cool our heat and fervour, and moderate our rigour towards others. There would not be such strife about places of power and trust, if we were not swelled in our own apprehensions to some eminency. And is not this the very fountain which sends out all those bitter streams of the tongue, those evil-speakings one of another, those sharp and immoderate censures of our neighbours? truly this is it,—every man accounts himself to be wiser, and more religious than his brother, to have more knowledge, and so he cannot endure any difference in opinion; to have more holiness, and so he cannot bear any infirmity in practice. But the way to help this would be to humble ourselves before God, James 4:10,—lowliness and

meekness are the ground stones of those Christian virtues which preserve Christian society, Ephesians 4:2-3. And is not this, I pray you, the foundation of wars, strifes, contentions, and jealousies? "From whence come wars and fightings among you;" is it not from those imperious lusts which war in our members? "Only from pride cometh contention," Proverbs 13:10; the head-spring of all envy also issues out from pride, and this divides into many streams and waters all our courses and ways with putrified and pestilent corruptions, while every man hath this opinion of himself; all is done in strife, no condescendence, no submission one to another, Php 2:3. While all make themselves the centre, it cannot otherwise happen, but designs, courses, thoughts, and ways, must interfere and jar among themselves; self-seeking puts all by the ears, as you see children among themselves, if an apple be cast to them. Any bait or advantage of the times yokes them in that childish contention, who shall have it; all come, strive, and fight about it, and it is but a few can have it, and those that get it cannot keep it long, others will catch it from them. Now what vain things are these, which can neither be gotten nor kept but by strife? O that we could seek better things, which may be both sought and kept without emulation or strife!

Now the other thing is, that the misapprehension of that wherein true excellence consists is the ground of many evils. "Who is a wise man?" &c. You all affect the title, and ye seek the thing, as ye suppose, but alas, ye mistake that wherein it consists; truly there is in all men (ever since we tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) a strange innate desire of knowledge, and affectation of wisdom, and desire of excellence; but since the first endeavour in paradise succeeded ill, there hath nothing gone well since: we weary ourselves to catch vanities, shadows, and lies." "How long, O ye sons of men, will ye love vanity, and follow after lies?" That divinely taught prophet could not but pity the children of men; and as Paul speaks to the Athenians of another purpose—"Him whom ye ignorantly worship, we declare unto you;" so he declares unto men that which they ignorantly and vainly seek elsewhere. This, I assure you, consists in this,—that ye shew out of a good conversation your works with meekness and wisdom.

All our mischief proceeds from this, that we misapprehend and mistake that which we would gladly have, and so once being in the wrong way, that cannot lead to our purposed end, so the faster we run, the further we go from it; the more we move in affection and diligence, the less we indeed promote in reality to the attaining what we seek. How greatly have we fallen! I might instance this in many things, but I shall be content with these two. There is a desire in all men after happiness, but there is a fundamental error in the imagination, supposing it to consist in the enjoyment of temporal pleasure, honour, advantage, or the satisfaction of our own natural inclinations. Now this leads all mankind to a pursuit after these things; but how base a scent is it! and how vain a pursuit is it! For the faster they move in that way, the further they are from all solid and true contentment. Again, in all godly men, there is something of this rectified, and they suppose religion to be the only true wisdom, and this wisdom the only true happiness; but oftentimes there are even mistakes in that too. As many of the world call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet, because of the vitiated and corrupted palate, so the godly, being in some measure distempered, call that which is not so sweet sweetest, and that which is not so bitter, bitterest; they change the value of things, and misplace them out of that order in which God hath set them. One great mistake is this—we impose a great deal of weight and moment upon those things in religion, which are but the hay and stubble, or pins in the building; and we esteem less that wherein the foundation and substance of true religion consists. We have an over-apprehension of a profession, and an undervaluing thought of practice;

we overstretch some points of knowledge and truth of the least value; and have less value for the fundamental statutes of the gospel,—faith and love, mercy and judgment. This our Saviour reproved in the Pharisees. "I will have mercy," says God, "and not sacrifice;" a ceremony of opinion in some particulars of the time, hath more necessity with us than the practice of true godliness: and this is the root of the most part of those vain janglings, strifes of words, and perverse disputings of men, whereof cometh envy, strife, malice, evil surmisings, and no edification in faith and love, which were so frequent in the primitive times, and so often hammered down by Paul. This is it,—a misapprehension of the value of them. Fancy imposes a worth and necessity upon them; but Paul doth always oppose unto them true godliness, 1 Timothy 6:3; chap. 4:7; and prescribes that as the cure, that true godliness in practice of what we know, and charity towards our brethren, may be bigger in our apprehension and higher in our affection. Would ye then know, my brethren, wherein true religion consists, and wherein genuine Christianity stands? it is "in shewing out of a good conversation, our works with meekness and wisdom." I reduce it to these two words, in joining practice to knowledge, and meekness to both; and this makes our religion to shine before men, and glorify our heavenly Father.

Wherein, then, do ye think this mystery of wisdom which the gospel reveals consists? Not in the profound and abstracted speculations of God, or the secrets of nature—a work about which learned men have racked their inventions, and beaten their brains to no other purpose than the discovery of the greatness of man's ignorance. It doth not consist in the sounding of the depths of divinity, and loosing all those perplexed knots of questions and doubts, which are moved upon the Scripture, in all which men really betray their own ignorance and misery.

"The world by wisdom knew not God." Living right is the first point of true wisdom, which costs many men great expences to learn,—to know their own folly,—to become fools, that they may become wise, 1 Corinthians 3:18. Man became a fool by seeking to become wiser than God made him; and that is all the result of our endeavours after wisdom since, Romans 1:22. But here is the great instruction of Christianity,—to bring men down low from the height of presumption and self estimation, and make him see himself just as he is by nature, a fool, and a wild ass's colt. Nebuchadnezzar had much ado to learn this lesson; it cost him some years' brutality to learn to know his brutishness, and when that was known then his understanding returned to him.

Now this is the first and hardest point of wisdom. When it is once learned and imprinted on the heart, O what a docility is in the mind to more! what readiness to receive what follows! It makes a man a weaned child, a little simple child, tractable and flexible as Christ would have all his disciples. A man thus emptied and vacuated of self-conceit; those lines of natural pride being blotted out, the soul is as a tabula rasa, an unwritten table, to receive any impression of the law of God that he pleases to put on it; and then his words are all "plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge," Proverbs 8:9. Then, I say, it is not difficult to understand, and "to prove what is the good and acceptable will of God," Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:10-17. It is not up unto heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall ascend to bring it down? neither is it far down in the depth, that thou shouldest say, who shall descend and bring it up from hence? But it is near thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, &c. Romans 10:6-8. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what is required of thee; to do justly, to show mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God," Micah 6:8. There is the plain sign of Christian wisdom; the abridgment of all that is taught in the school of Christ: here is the course of moral philosophy—"the grace of God hath appeared to

teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world." And when the scholar is brought along by these degrees, he is at length laureated in that great day of our Saviour's appearance; then he hath the degree of glory and immortality conferred upon him. He is a candidate of immortality and felicity, Titus 2:12-13.

We are in the Christian school like many scholars who labour to know so many things, that indeed they know nothing well; as the stomach that devours much meat, but digests little, and turns it not into food and aliment, incorporates it not into the body. We catch at many great points of truth, and we really drink in none of them; we let none sink into the heart, and turn into affection and practice. This is the grand disease of the time,—a study to know many things, and no study to love what we know, or practise any thing. The Christian world is all in a flame, and the church is rent asunder by the eager pursuit and prosecution of some points of truth; and this is the clamour of all men, Who will shew us our light? who will discover some new thing unto us? But, in the meantime, we do not prove the unquestionable acceptable will of our God, like a fastidious squeamish stomach that loathes what it receives, and always longs for something else. Thus the evil is vented here, Who is a wise man, do ye think? Not he who knows many things, who hath still a will to controversy, who hath attained some further light than others of them; not so, brethren, but he that "shews out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom; he that proves and practiseth as well as knows the good-will of God." "For hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John 2:3-4. This proves that knowledge is not in the head, but in the heart, and that it is not captivated and shut up in the mind, but that a man is delivered up as a captive to the truth, Romans 6:16.

All men complain of the want of light and knowledge, though perhaps none think they have much: But is the will of God so dark and intricate? Is it so hard to understand? Truly it is plain,—he hath shewed thee what is good, he hath shewed thee what to do; but that thou neglectest to do, and therefore men know not what to do further: Do ye not all know that ye should walk soberly, righteously, and piously, and humble yourselves to walk with God, and in lowliness of mind each should esteem another better than himself? ye should forbear and forgive one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you; ye should not seek great things for yourselves, especially when God is plucking up what he hath planted, and casting down what was built: ye should mind your country above more, and live as sojourners here. Are not these words of wisdom all plain and obvious to the meanest capacity? Now, my beloved, with what face can ye seek more knowledge of God, or enquire for more light into his mind, when you do not prove that known and perfect will of his; when you do not occupy your present talent, why do ye seek more? "To him that hath shall be given." Truly it is the man that fears and obeys, as far as is revealed, to whom God shews his secret, and teaches the way he should choose, Psal. 25:12. I know not a readier way to be resolved in doubtful things, than to study obedience in those things that are beyond all doubt. To walk in the light received, is the high way to more light. But what hope is there of any more light from the Lord, when our ways, and courses, and dispositions, and practices, even in our endeavours after more knowledge, cannot endure the light of that shining will of God that is already revealed. In ordering our conversation, we catch at the shadow of our points of truth, and lose the substance that was in our hands,—lowliness, meekness, charity, long-suffering, sobriety of mind and actions, and heavenly mindedness; all these substantials we let go, that we may get

hold of some empty unedifying notions; we put out our candle that is already enlightened, that is, the knowledge of good conversation, that we may seek more light, and that is the way to find darkness and delusion: "because they received not the truth in love, that they might be saved, God gave them up to strong delusions and the belief of lies," 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11. There is the ground of delusions,—truth received, but not loved or obeyed; many things known, but the stamp and seal not impressed on the heart, we express in the conversation; therefore God is provoked to put out that useless light of truth, and deliver that man captive to delusions, who would not deliver his soul a captive to truth. And is not this righteousness, that he who detained the known truth in unrighteousness of affection and conversation, he himself detained and incarcerated by strong delusions of mind and imagination. As a good conversation and good works should be joined to knowledge, and meekness must be the ornament of both; this meekness of wisdom is the great lesson, that the Wisdom of the Father came down to teach man, "Learn of me, for I am meek;" and truly the meekness of that substantial Wisdom of God Jesus Christ, is the exact pattern and copy, and the most powerful motive and constraint to this kindness of Christian wisdom. Our Saviour did "not cry nor lift up his voice in the streets," he made little noise, nor cried with pomp, he was not rigorous, nor rigid upon sinners; though he "was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; being reviled, he reviled not again; being cursed, he blessed;" though he could have legions of angels at his command, yet he would shew rather an example of patience and meekness to his followers, than overcome his enemies. If many of us, who pretend to be his disciples, had the winds, rains, heavens, and elements at our commandment, I fear we would have burned up the world; we would presently have called for fire from heaven to devour all whom we conceived enemies to him or ourselves, and that under the notion of zeal. Zeal it is indeed, but such as is spoken of in the next verse, "If ye have bitter envying (the word is bitter zeal) in your hearts, glory not, nor lie against the truth." Christ's zeal was sweet zeal; it might well consume or eat him up within, but it did not devour others without: "The zeal of thy house," says he, "hath eaten me up." But our zeal is like the Babylonian furnace that burnt and consumed those that went to throw the pious children into it; at the first approaching it gets without the chimney, and devours all around it. If the meekness or gentleness of a person who received the greatest injuries that ever any received, and to whom the greatest indignities were done, and who endured the greatest contradiction of sinners; if his calm composed temper do not soften our spirits, mitigate our sharpness, and allay our bitterness, I know not what can do it. I do not think but if any man considered how much long-suffering God exercises towards him, how gentle and patient he is after so many provocations; how Jesus Christ doth still forgive infinite numbers of infinite wrongs done to his grace; how slow he is to wrath, and easy to be entreated; surely such a man would abate much of his severity towards others: he would pursue peace with all men, and esteem little of wrongs done unto him, and not think them worthy of remembrance; he would not be easily provoked, but he would be easily pacified. In a word, he could not but exercise something of that gentleness and meekness in forbearing and forgiving, as Christ also forgave him: and truly there is no ornament of a man like that of a meek and quiet spirit, 1 Peter 3:4; it is both comely and precious; it is of great price in God's sight; it is a spirit all composed and settled; all peace and harmony within; it is like the heavens in a clear day, all serene and beautiful: whereas an unmeek spirit is for the most part like the troubled sea, tossed with tempests, winds, and dashed with rains; even at the best it is but troubled with itself; when there is no external provocation, it hath an inward unrest in its bosom, and casts out mire and dirt. Meekness is so befitting every man,

that it is even humanity itself. It is the very nature of a man restored, and those brutish, wild, and savage dispositions put off. Meekness is a man in the true likeness of God; but passion, and the evils which accompany it, is a man metamorphosed and transformed into the nature of a beast, and that of a wild beast too. It hath been always reckoned that anger is nothing different from madness, but in the continuance of it,—it is a short madness; but what is wanting in the continuance is made up in the frequency; when spirits are inclined to it, there is a habitual fury and madness in such spirits. It is no wonder then, these are conjoined,—meekness and wisdom, for truly they are inseparable; meekness dwells in the bosom of wisdom: it is nothing else but wisdom, reason, and religion ruling all within, and composing all the distempered lusts and affections; "but anger rests in the bosoms of fools," it cannot get rest but in a fool's bosom; for where it enters, wisdom and reason must go out, Ecclesiastes 7:9. "A fool's wrath is presently known," Proverbs 12:16. For if there were so much true and solid wisdom as to examine the matter first, and to consider before we suffer ourselves to be provoked, we would certainly quench anger in the very first smoking of an apprehension of a wrong, we would immediately cast it out; for there is nothing so much blinds and dimmeth the eye of our understanding; and when this gross vapour rises out of the dunghill of our lusts, nothing so much uncovers our shame and nakedness. "A prudent man covereth shame," but hastiness and bitterness takes the garment off our infirmity, and exposes us to mockery and contempt, Proverbs 12:16. There is not a greater evidence of a strong solid spirit than this,—to be able to govern this unruly passion, whereas it is taken far otherwise; meekness is construed by some to be simplicity and weakness; and many imagine some greatness and height of spirit in the hotter natures; but truly it is far otherwise: "For he that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his own spirit, that he than takes a city." Wrath is an impotency and weakness; it hath no strength in it, but such as ye would find in madmen: but this is true magnanimity,—to overcome thyself, and "overcome evil with good." As there is nothing which is a greater evidence of wisdom, so there is nothing a better help to true wisdom than this; for a meek spirit is like a clear running fountain, that ye see the bottom of; but a passionate spirit is like a troubled fountain,—the shadow of truth cannot be seen in it: a glass that is pure and cleanly renders the image lively; but if it be besmeared with dust, you can see nothing: so is a composed mild spirit apt to discern the truth without prejudice; and indeed it is the meek whom God engages to teach his ways, Psal. 25:8, 9. He that receives with meekness the ingrafted word, is in the readiest capacity to receive more; when the superfluity of naughtiness is cast out, and all the faculties of the soul composed to quietness and calmness, there his voice will best be heard, and himself readiest to receive it. Our affection keeps a continual hurry within the tumultuous noise of our disordered lusts, that are always raging and controlling the voice of God, so that we cannot hear his teaching. A passionate temper of spirit is very indocile,—there are so many loud sounds of prejudices within, that the truth cannot be heard; but a meek spirit hath all quietness and silence, as Cornelius and his house had waiting for the mind of the Lord. And such he delights to converse with most, and reveal most unto; for it gets readiest entertainment. Let me tell you, beloved in the Lord, you disoblige the Lord, if I may speak so, and hinder him to reveal any more of his mind to you; ye disengage him to teach you his way in those dark and untrodden paths, because ye do not study this meekness in the wisdom and knowledge ye have already, nor his meekness and moderation in seeking further knowledge: and it is no wonder he be provoked by it, to choose your delusions, because it is certainly those graces of meekness, charity, patience, gentleness, long-suffering, humbleness of mind, and such like, which go always in a chain

together; these are an ornament of grace upon the head, and a crown of glory, and that chain about the neck Solomon mentions, Proverbs 4:9. Now when you cast off your crown of glory, your noblest ornament, your chain of dignity, should he give such precious pearls to swine? When you trample under foot the greater commandments of mercy, judgment, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, should he reveal lesser commandments, or discover his will in lesser matters? Consider the manner of expression here, "Let him shew forth out of a good conversation," &c. Truly it is good works with meekness of wisdom; it is a good conversation, with a true profession, that shews forth a Christian, and shews him most before men. "Let your light," says Christ, "so shine before men." What is the shining beauty of Christian light? It is the works of piety, charity, equity, and sobriety,—these glorify the Father, and beautify all his children. You may easily conceive what that is, that chiefly commends religion to the ignorant world,—is it not the meekness of Christian wisdom? Is it not this harmless simplicity, that divine-like candour, that shines in every true Christian? Will rigidity, severity, passion, blood, violence, persecution, and such like, ever conciliate the hearts of men. Have such passions any beauty, any light in them, except a scorching consuming light? The light of a good Christian is like the light of the sun, of a sweet, gentle and refreshing nature, conveying influence to all, doing good to the household of faith. Peter will tell you what that is, that will most engage the hearts of the world, to a reverend esteem of true religion, 1 Peter 2:12—it is a "conversation, honest, and void of offence, giving to every one their own due, honouring all men, loving the brotherhood, not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness," and not overstretching it, to the loosing of other natural or civil bands. When men see Christianity making us do that really and cheerfully, which even nature itself teacheth all to do, that makes the light of it shining and beautiful. Are not these higher mysteries of faith, than some conceive? It is not other points of truth and profession, that are either above natural reason, or seem something opposite to it, that can engage natural beholders; and far less the prosecution of a temporal worldly interest of the people of God, to the destruction of all opposite to it, at least to the diminishing of all other men's gain and advantage, the engrossing of all earthly privileges into the hands of saints; that is such a thing that never entered into the heart of the shining lights of the primitive times. O how doth the stream of their exhortations run cross to this notion! I am sure there is nothing in its own nature, such a stumbling-block to the world, or represents religion so odious and abominable to other men, as when it stands in the way, and intercepts all those natural immunities or privileges of life or estate. This makes natural men to hate it, even at a distance, and become irreconcilable enemies unto it; since it will not let them live by it, they are engaged not to let it live by them. I wish, indeed, all the places of power and trust in every nation were in the hands of godly men, not so much for the interest of the godly, as for the public interest; because "men fearing God, and hating covetousness," can only rule justly and comfortably; but to monopolize all power and trust to such a particular judgment and way as it is now given out, is truly, I think, inhuman and unchristian. Those deserve not power and trust who would seek it, and engross it wholly to themselves. But there is another thing which savours greatly of the flesh, at least of that spirit which Christ reprov'd in his disciples, to take away men's lives, liberty, and livelihood given by their Creator, upon every foot of opposition, and enmity to our way and interest. Is this to love our enemies, blessing them that curse us, or praying for them that despitefully use us, or persecute us? Let us remember we are Christians, and this is the rule of Christianity, that stops even the mouth of adversaries. But some still find an evasion for this, they will say they are God's enemies, and not my particular enemies only. But I pray you, were not the enemies of

Christians in those days, more properly enemies to Christ than now? For they had nothing then to persecute them for, but the very profession of that name: and truly I confess in our days, we make more particular enemies, by particular injuries and disobligements, than either our profession or practice of religion make; but to put it out of all doubt, we learn they are persecutors, and do all manner of evil against us, for Christ's name sake. I have said this, because I know nothing that more darkeneth and obscures religion, than such worldly and temporal interests so eagerly pursued; and nothing makes it more to shine among men, than a good conversation with meekness of wisdom.

11. SERMON V

SERMON V James 3:14—But if ye have bitter envying, &c. The cunning of Satan, and the deceitfulness of our own hearts, is such, that when a grosser temptation will not prevail with conscience in some measure enlightened, then they transform themselves into angels of light, and deal more subtilly with us; and there is no greater subtilty of Satan, nor any stronger self-deceit, than this—to palliate and cover vices with the shadow of virtue, and to present corruptions under the similitude of graces. It is common unto all temptations to sin, to have a hook under their bait, to be masked over with some pleasure or advantage, or credit; but when such earthly and carnal pretences do not insinuate themselves strongly into a believing heart that has discovered the vanity of all that which is in the world, so that it dare not venture upon sin for all the pleasures which attend it, then he winds about, and tames and changes his likeness unto light, conscience, and duty, and presents many works of darkness and corruption under the notion of duty and honesty, according as he finds the temper of a man's spirit to be. I can give no instance more pregnant, and even common, than this which is given here, viz. contentions and strivings among brethren. Bitter envying, maligning and censuring one another, are very manifest works of the flesh, and works of darkness, fitter for the night than the day, and for the time of ignorance, than the time after the clear light hath shined. Now, if Satan were about to persuade a church, or a Christian of this, how do you think he would go about it? Would he present some carnal advantage to be gained by it, some more profit or preferment from it? May be that might be very taking with some more unconscientious self-seeking spirits, and I fear it would be too much taken with many; but sure it will not relish with every man: it will not entice him that hath the fear of God, and the love of Jesus stirring within him. Therefore, he must seek about, and find some false prophet, that may come out in the name of the Lord, and disguise himself, and by such means he will do it. Let a point of truth or conscience come in debate, let a notion of religion and one far off from an interest in Christ, be in the business, and then he can take advantage to make a man overreach himself in it. He will present the truth as a thing of so great weight and consequence, that he must contend for it, and empty all his wit and power and parts for it. This good intention being established, he raises up men's passions under a notion of zeal, and these being promoved under that pretence for such an end; whatsoever mean may be sought profitable for that end, all is chosen and followed without discretion or knowledge of what is good or evil: it is apprehended that the good principle of conscience, of duty, and the good intention may justify all. And by that means he hath persuaded the churches of Christ, and the Christian world, unto more rigidity, severity, cruelty, strife, contention, blood, violence, and such works of darkness, than readily have been found in the times of ignorance. Is Christendom a field of blood, rather than any other part of the world? Truly this is the reproach of Christianity; by this God's name is daily blasphemed. Here our Apostle sets himself to unmask this angel of light, and to decypher him in his own proper nature and notion. He takes off the vizard of religion and wisdom, and lets you see the very image of hell under it; "But if ye have bitter envying and strife, glory not;" ye glory as if ye had the truth; you glory in your zeal for it, you boast that ye are the wise men, the religious men; and so you take liberty, upon the account of envy, to malign, despise and contend with others: glory not, if you cherish

such strifes and contentions, to the breach of Christian peace and concord. You are liars against the truth which you profess,—do not think these proceed from true zeal; nay, nay, it is but bitter envy, and bitter zeal—do not flatter yourselves with an apprehension of wisdom, or knowledge, or religion, that is wisdom indeed; but mark of what nature it is—earthy, sensual, and devilish; and indeed that is a foolish wisdom, to say no worse of it.

You see then what need we have of the exhortation of the Apostle, Ephesians 6:11. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Truly we may stand against his darts, and violent open thrusts at our conscience, when we being ignorant of his devices, and not acquainted with his depth, 2 Corinthians 2:11; Revelation 2:24, will not be able to stand against his ways; for we have a great and subtle party to wrestle with, "principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places," or heavenly things (as some render the word); he exercises much wickedness, spiritual, invisible wickedness in heavenly and religious things, in which it is hard to wrestle, unless we be endowed with faith, knowledge, and righteousness, and shod with the gospel of peace, the peaceable gospel reducing our spirits to a peaceable temper. I conceive there is nothing the world hath been more abused with, than the notion of zeal, justice, and such like; and there is nothing wherein a Christian is more ready to deceive himself than this. Therefore I conceive the Holy Ghost has undeceived us in this, and hath of purpose used the word zeal as often in a bad sense, as in a good one, and usually chooses to express envy and malice by it, though another word might suit as well, and be more proper; so here bitter zeal, ζήλος πικρός, is reckoned among the works of the flesh, Galatians 5:20. And we are exhorted to walk honestly as in the day, not in strife and envy, or zeal; and therefore the Apostle rebukes sharply the Corinthians, "Are ye not carnal, and walk as men, whereas there is among you, envying," or zeal, "and strife," 1 Corinthians 3:3. Zeal is a vehemency of affection in any earnest pursuit, or opposition of a thing; and to make it good, it must not only be fixed upon a commendable and good object, but must run in the right channel, between the banks of moderation, charity, and sobriety. If it overflows these, certainly that excess proceeds not simply and purely from the love of God, or the truth, but from some latent corruption or lust in our members, which takes occasion to swell up with it. I find in Scripture the true zeal of God hath much self-denial in it; it is not exercised so much concerning a man's own matters, as concerning the matters that are purely and merely concerning God's glory; it is the most flexible, condescending, and forbearing thing in those things that relate to ourselves, and our own interests. Thus Moses is commended as the meekest man, when Aaron and Miriam raise sedition against him, Numb. 12:3.; he had not affections to be commoved upon that account; but how much is he stirred and provoked upon the apprehension of the manifest dishonour of God, by the people's idolatry! How many are lions in their own cause, and in God's as simple and blunt as lambs! And how much will our spirits be commoved when our own interest lies in the business, and hath some conjunction with God's interest; that if these were parted our fervour abates, and our heat cools! I lay down this, then, as the fundamental principle of true zeal,—it is like charity, that seeketh not its own things. But to make the nature of it clear, I give you three characters of it—Verity, charity, and impartiality. I say, it hath truth in it, a good thing for the object, and knowledge of that good thing in the subject, for the principle of it; "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing," Galatians 4:18. Zeal in an evil thing hath something of the impatient and restless nature of the devil in it; there is nothing we would be more deliberate and circumspect in, than what to employ or bestow our affections upon. We should have a certain persuasion of the unquestionable goodness of that which we are ardent and vehement to obtain,

else the more ardour and vehemency, the more wickedness is in it. The Jews had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, and that is a blind self-will; for if a man take a race at his full speed in the dark, he cannot but catch a fall. The eager and hot pursuits of men are founded upon some gross misapprehensions.

Secondly, There must not only be a goodness supposed in the object, but some correspondence between the worth and weight of that goodness and the measure of our desires and affections; else there wants that conformity between the soul and truth, which makes a true zeal of God. I mean this—the soul's most vehement desires should be employed about the chiefest good, and our zeal move in relation to things unquestionably good, and not about things of small moment, or of little edification. This is the apostolic rule, that not only we consider that there be some truth in the thing, but that we especially take notice, if there be so much truth and goodness as requires such a measure of vehemency and affection. Therefore, in lesser things we should have lesser commotion, and in greater things greater, suitable to them; otherwise the Pharisees, who exercised their zeal about trifles, and neglected the weightier matters of the law, Matth. 23:23, would not have been reprov'd by Christ. And indeed this is the zeal to which we are redeemed by Christ, Titus 2:1, "be ye zealous of good works," of works that are unquestionably good, such as piety, equity, and sobriety. There is nothing more incongruous than to strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel, to spend the vital spirits upon things of small concernment to our own or others edification, and to have nothing to spare for the weightier matters of true godliness. It is as if a man should strike a feather or the air with all his might,—he must needs wrest his arms; even so to strike with the spiritual sword of our affections, with such vehemency, at the lighter and emptier matters of religion, cannot choose but to disjoint the spirit, and put it out of course; as there is a falsehood in that zeal that is so vehement about a light matter, though it have some good in it; for there is no suitable proportion between the worth of the thing and the vehemency of the spirit. Imagination acts in both; in the one it supposes a goodness, and it follows it; and in the other it imposes a necessity and a worth far beyond that which it really is, and so raises up the spirit to that height of necessity and worth that hath no being but in a man's imagination. I think there is no particular that the Apostle doth so much caveat; for I find in 1 Timothy 1:4., he takes off those endless matters that minister questioning rather than godly edifying, and gives us a better subject to employ our zeal upon, ver. 5., the great end and sum of all religion,—love to God and man, proceeding from "a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned," from which we must needs swerve, when we turn aside to such empty and vain janglings, ver. 6. For truly we have but narrow and limited spirits; and it must needs follow, when we give them very much to one thing, that they cannot attend another thing seriously, as Christ declares, Matthew 6:24, "no man can serve two masters," &c. And therefore, there is much need of Christian wisdom to single out and choose the most proper and necessary object; for as much as we give other things that have not so much connexion with that, we take from it as much; and the apostle counsels us, 1 Timothy 4:7, "rather to exercise ourselves unto true godliness," and to the most substantial things in it, rather than vain things, and opposition of science, chap. 6:3, 4, 5, 20. There he opposes the wholesome words of Christ, and the doctrine that is according to godliness, unto questions and "strifes of words, whereof comes envy, railings, evil-surmisings, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." And it is very observable that he is pressing the duties of believing servants towards their masters, whether believers or infidels, "that the name of God be not blasphemed, nor the gospel evil spoken of;" for there is nothing so much exposes it to misconstruction, as when it is stretched

and abused unto the prejudice of natural and civil duties. And doubtless there would be many doubts and questions about it in these days, some contending for worldly pre-eminence over the pagans, and some for the levelling of all Christians; but, says he, "If any man teach otherwise," or contend about this, "he is proud, knowing nothing," &c. He hath forsaken the substance of true godliness, which consists in good works shining before men, and abuses the notion of Christian liberty to the dishonour of Christ, and hath supposed gain, a worldly carnal interest of the godly, to be piety, and so pursues that fancy of his own. He renews this in the second epistle, chap. 2:14, 15, 16, shewing that these strifes about words, albeit they seem to be upon grounds of conscience at the beginning, yet they increase unto more ungodliness, ver. 23. And unto Titus he gives the same charge very solemnly, Titus 3:8-9, "I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who believe in God should be careful to maintain good works. But avoid foolish and unlearned questions," &c. "For this is a faithful saying." But again,

Thirdly, Zeal must have charity with it; and this all the Scriptures cited prove. It must be so tempered with love, that it vents not to the breach of Christian peace and concord; "Charity envieth not," or is not zealous; when zeal wants charity, it is not zeal, but envy. And hence it is that there are so frequent and fervent exhortations to avoid such questions as may gender strifes, and contentions, and malice. Now, certainly, there was some truth in them, and something of conscience also in them; yet he dissuades entirely the prosecution of them to the rigour, as men are apt to do, but wills us rather to have faith in ourselves. And truly, I think the questions that did then engender strifes, and rent the church, were as much if not more momentous, then the most part of those about which we bite and devour one another. The questions of the law, the circumcision, and eating of things sacrificed to idols, of things indifferent, lawful, or not lawful; yet all these he would have subordinated unto the higher end of the commandment, charity, 1 Timothy 1:4-5. And when he exhorts the Corinthians to be zealous for spiritual gifts, yet he would have them excel in those things which edify the church, 1 Corinthians 14:1-12, "Covet earnestly the best gifts;" and yet he shews them a more excellent way, and that is charity, 1 Corinthians 13:1, to do all these things for the good and edification of the church, rather than of our own opinion, 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 14:12. I find where the word zeal is taken in a bad sense, it hath these works of darkness attending it, wrath, strife, malice, &c., Galatians 5:20; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Romans 13:13. It is accompanied with such a hellish crowd of noisome lusts. Let me add a differential character of it; it is uncharitable, contentious and malicious; it can do nothing, condescend to nothing, and is conversant about nothing, but what pleases our own humour, for the peace and unity of the church; it is a self-willed impetuous thing, like a torrent that carries all down before it. But truly right zeal runs calmly and constantly within the banks; it will rather consume its own bowels within with grief than devour others without.

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