

Charity and Rebuke

by Catherine Booth

Catherine Booth's sermon emphasizes the necessity of rebuke within true Charity as a means of promoting righteousness and love among believers.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Matthew 18:15, Romans 9:3, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 2:11, James 3:17, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "True Charity", "Confronting Sin"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the importance of true divine charity, which necessitates reproof and rebuke when necessary for the good of others. She emphasizes the need for faithful love that dares to confront sin and wrongdoing, following the example of Paul rebuking Peter in public. Catherine Booth highlights the contrast between true charity that seeks the good of others and false charity that is concerned with self-image and avoids confronting sin. She urges believers to have a Charity that 'seeketh not her own' and rejoices not in iniquity, but rather seeks righteousness and purity in all actions.

Transcript

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13.--"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

THE second main point of difference between a true and a false Charity, we want to remark, is, that DIVINE CHARITY IS NOT ONLY CONSISTENT WITH, BUT VERY OFTEN NECESSITATES, REPROOF AND REBUKE ON THE PART OF ITS POSSESSOR. It renders it incumbent on those who possess it to reprove and rebuke whatever is evil--whatever does not tend to the highest interests of its object.

This Charity conforms in this, as in everything else, to its Divine model--"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"--when necessary for the good of its object, for He doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, any more than a father willingly chastises a disobedient child; but, if he be a wise father, he will do it, because he loves it. Just so the possessor of this Divine Charity can afford to rebuke and reprove sin wherever he finds it. He will not suffer sin upon his neighbour, but will in any wise reprove him, and strive to win him to the right. We will just turn to a beautiful illustration (there are many, if we had time to go into them) of the working of this Divine Charity in the heart and life of the very Apostle who wrote this 13th of Corinthians. We cannot get wrong, because it is Paul himself. (Galatians 2:11-15.)

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew

and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all."

Well done Paul!--noble, gloriously courageous--Charity that! He did not go and mutter behind Peter's back and stab him in the dark.

"I said unto Peter BEFORE THEM ALL, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles."

You want a characteristic of true Charity. Now, listen to it. It would be exceedingly painful to Paul thus publicly to rebuke Peter. They loved one another, for we find Peter, long after this, in one of his Epistles, calling Paul "our beloved brother, Paul." They loved one another. Paul understood the claims of true Charity, for he wrote this thirteenth of Corinthians. If he loved Peter, and if he understood the claims of true Charity, why did he thus openly rebuke Peter, and why did he inflict upon himself the pain of doing it? Faithfulness to Peter himself, faithfulness to the truth, faithfulness to Jesus Christ, demanded it; therefore, he sacrificed his own personal feelings, and inflicted this pain upon himself, rather than allow Peter to go wrong, the Christians at Antioch to be misled, and the Jews to be carried away with a shifty worldly policy. Paul set himself to rebuke Peter in the presence of all, for truth lay, as it very often does, with the minority; nearly all the influence was on the side of the circumcision. They were the most influential of the brethren, and Paul set Himself against all this influence in his rebuke of Peter. Why? Because faithfulness to the truth demanded it, and Divine Charity is FIRST PURE.

There is a greater example still in our Lord Himself, in the Master whose whole soul was love, whose life was one sacrifice for the good of His creatures; and yet how faithfully He reprov'd even His own when they erred from the truth, and how fearlessly He exposed and denounced the shallowness and hypocrisy of those who professed to love God, and yet contradicted this profession in their lives. How fearlessly He reprov'd sin everywhere. He said to His disciples on one occasion, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." As if He had said, 'you ought to have learned this before now.'

On another occasion, He said, "Are ye also yet without understanding?" And again, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God;" that was Divine Charity, that was faithful love, that dared to rebuke, rather than let the object of it do wrong, and sin against God. And again, when He goes to the hypocrites and Pharisees, He says, "Ye say ye are the children of Abraham"--(it was as difficult for Jesus Christ to confute the professors of His day, as it is for His ambassadors to confute the professors of this day, who are living inconsistently with their professions)--He said, 'Ye say that ye are the children of Abraham; if ye were the children of Abraham, ye would listen to me; or, if ye were the children of God, ye would believe in me, for I came out from God. No! ye are the children of your father, the Devil, and his works ye do.' And yet His Divine heart was full to breaking of love, and broke itself on the cross for them, and prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Oh, that your Charity and mine might not lack this lineament of the Divine likeness. Would to God there were more of this faithful, loving Charity that dares to reprove sin, and to rebuke its brother, instead of the false Charity that fawns on a man to his face, and goes behind him and stabs him in the back.

Do you suppose that the great mass of the professors of this generation think one another to be right? Take almost any given church. Do you suppose that the great mass of the members of that church suppose in their hearts that their fellow members, brothers and sisters in church communion, are living consistently--I don't mean in things only, but in heart--that they are living really godly lives? Alas! witness what they say behind each other's backs. They believe no such thing; they know perfectly well it is not so, and they take care to tell other people so; and yet there is not one in a thousand of them ever went privately to his brother, and took lovingly hold of his hand, and reprov'd him for his sinful and backsliding conduct.

What would be thought of any woman who were to go, after being at church the day before, and ask for a private interview with Mrs. So-and-So, and, when alone with her, with tears in her eyes, and deep earnestness in her voice, were to say, 'Dear Mrs. So-and-So, I have come to see you on a very painful errand, but will you suffer a word of exhortation from one so unworthy and weak as I feel myself to be, and yet, I trust, one who has the Spirit of God, which urges me to come to you? Will you allow me to say that I was much pained with your attitude at church, or chapel, yesterday. It seemed to me that your mind was not at all occupied with the solemnity of the service, but your mind seemed to be occupied in criticising the person's dress in the seat opposite to you, and I could not help noticing that when you got outside the doors you began to laugh and talk in a way quite incompatible with the service you had been attending?' If she were to add, 'Dear Mrs. So-and-So, I have not mentioned this to a soul, not even to my husband, but I have come to tell it to you let us go down before the Lord and ask Him for the Holy Spirit, that He may show you how wrong you are, and how you are sliding away from the love of God'--what would be said, of such conduct?

If everybody who sees sin upon his neighbour would do that--if he would take the Lord's counsel and go and see his brother alone, and tell him his fault--how many would be saved from backsliding, and how many a disgraceful split and controversy in churches might be saved.

But where are the people who will do it? I don't mean there are not any--God forbid--I know there are; but I am speaking comparatively. Where is the man who will inflict pain upon himself? For that is the point. If it were a pleasant duty, he would do it easily enough; but it is a painful duty, he does not like to screw+ himself up to it. Where is the man who will do it, rather than suffer his brother to go to sleep in his sin, and rather than the precious cause of Christ shall be disgraced and injured? Where are the saints who will go in meekness and in love to try to reclaim the one who has erred? I hope you know a great many. I am sorry, to say I know only a few. If you know many, I am very glad, and the more you know the better I am pleased. If you are one of these, that is one, at all events. If every Christian would have this sort of Charity, what a change would soon come about. That is what the Church wants--people who can afford to rebuke and reprove, because they don't care what men think of THEM--who are set only on pleasing their Lord and Master, and doing His will.

Have you got this Charity that "seeketh not her own?" What a contrast between Saul and Paul. Did you ever think about it? What does he say? "I went about to establish my own righteousness." That was his inspiring motive; that was the spring of his action before he got true Charity; not that he cared for the kingdom of God, but he cared for his own honour, glory, and exaltation, and wanted to stand well with his nation. Then contrast him when he becomes Paul. What does he, say? "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." There is Charity, if you like. These were the very people with whom he had been so anxious to stand well, and whose good word he wanted; but, when the Holy Ghost had come, and Paul had got the Divine Charity, and got his eyes

opened to see their devilish and lost condition, he so weeps over them that he says, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

There is a contrast. He does not care now what they think of HIM; he is going about trying to open their eyes and make them see that they are not the children of Abraham, but the children of the Devil, that they are going to the bottomless pit, and that, unless they turn round and seek the God of their fathers, they must perish. Self is lost sight of altogether now: Paul's heart and soul and efforts are set on the salvation of men. If they choose to praise him, he takes it as a matter of course; if they choose to condemn him, he takes that as a matter of course, too. He is seeking the kingdom, and, however men treat him, the kingdom he seeks right on to martyrdom. He runs the gauntlet of their direst hate and malice, that he may open their eyes and turn them from Satan to God, and from sin to righteousness. Self is lost sight of; it is not Paul now--it is Christ and his kingdom.

False Charity is the opposite of this. Its possessor is most concerned about what people think of HIM; not how they treat his professed Lord. The possessor of false Charity cannot afford to reprove anybody. Oh, dear no! he would faint at the very idea; and he calls people hard and legal and censorious who dare to do it--poor, sneaking coward!--but he will not be afraid to stab a man behind his back. The speech of this false Charity betrayeth it, it flattereth with its lips; honey is on its tongue, but the poison of asps is underneath; beware of it! Even when it professes to commend a brother, or neighbour, it rolls up its sanctimonious eyes, and always puts in a "but"--one of the Devil's "buts." "Oh, he is a good man, but--" "Yes, I have a great esteem for him, only there is such and such a thing." Oh, it looks very Divine. The Devil can put on a garb of light when it answers his purpose. Oh, the fair reputations that this slime of the Serpent has trailed over! Oh, the influence for good that this venom of the Devil has poisoned and ruined, for it has been truly said, "There is no virtue so white that back-wounding calumny will not strike" even in God's perfect man, those who are watching and seeking to betray can find something on which to ground their accusations.

I say, mind which Charity you have got. True Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity. Are you conscious in your soul of a feeling of triumph when anybody that you don't like happens to fall on some evil thing? If you have, look out--the Devil has got hold of you. Do you rejoice in iniquity when it happens to an enemy? If so, woe be to you, unless you get that venom out. God won't have it in Heaven. One man with that venom in him would damn Paradise. "Love your enemies"--love them; "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." Now, my brother, my sister, try yourself. We shall meet again, and you will that these are no imaginary vagaries that I have been telling of; they are realities--though these great realities of our Christianity are seldom preached in these days; but they are HERE, and there is no truth in you if you have not got the Charity which hates evil as evil, and which will reprove it, and root it out, and have it CURED!

Here, again, false Charity is the very antipodes of the Divine. It does not care much about righteousness. Quietness is its beau ideal of all that is lovely and excellent. It says, 'Let us be quiet; you must not disturb the peace of the Church.' It cries, "Peace, peace! when there is no peace." It says, 'We cannot help these evils. Every man must look after himself; we are not responsible for our neighbour.' It knows very often that there are continents of dirt underneath "things," and "systems," and men--which it chooses to patronize; but then, it is covered up, and so it says, 'Let it alone; we cannot have a smudge. Let it alone. Peace! Peace! Never mind righteousness. The Church must be supported, if the money does come out of

the dried-up vitals of drunkards and harlots; never mind, we must have it. Never mind if our songs are mixed with the shrieks of widows and orphans, of the dying and damned! Sing away, sing away, and drown their voices. Never mind; we cannot have it looked into, and rooted out, and pulled up. Peace; we must have peace!' And they call you, as Ahab did Elijah, the troubler of Israel, if you dare to touch the sore place and exhibit their putrefying wounds and bruises; and when you say to them, 'the law of life is, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you," they impudently turn upon you and say, 'But we are not expected to be perfect in this life,' and so they throw a thicker covering over the filth, and on it goes.

That is the Devil's Charity; and the more the better for his purpose. But the Charity and the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, and then peaceable! I would rather be in everlasting warfare in company with that which is fair, and true, and good, than I would walk in harmony with that which is hollow and rotten, and vile, and destined to the bottomless pit. The Lord help you to make the same choice!

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