

Charity

by William Cowper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of charity and love in promoting a just and equitable society, and highlights the need for divine guidance to reveal the truth and promote these virtues.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:9, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:22, 1 John 3:17

Topics: "Christian Love", "Selfless Giving"

Description

William Cowper preaches about the importance of true Charity, emphasizing that genuine love and compassion should be the driving force behind all actions. He contrasts superficial acts of kindness with the selfless and sacrificial nature of true Charity, pointing out that even the most virtuous deeds are meaningless without a sincere heart. Cowper highlights the transformative power of Charity, which stems from a deep connection with God and a genuine desire to help others. He urges believers to embody the spirit of Charity in all aspects of life, showing kindness, forgiveness, and generosity to those around them.

Transcript

CHARITY.

Qua nihil majus meliusve terris

Fata donavêre, bonique divi;

Nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum

Tempora priscum.

--Hor. Lib. iv. Ode 2.

Fairest and foremost of the train that wait

On man's most dignified and happiest state,

Whether we name thee Charity or Love,

Chief grace below, and all in all above,
Prosper (I press thee with a powerful plea)
A task I venture on, impell'd by thee:
Oh never seen but in thy blest effects,
Or felt but in the soul that Heaven selects;
Who seeks to praise thee, and to make thee known
To other hearts, must have thee in his own.
Come, prompt me with benevolent desires,
Teach me to kindle at thy gentle fires,
And, though disgraced and slighted, to redeem
A poet's name, by making thee the theme.
God, working ever on a social plan,
By various ties attaches man to man:
He made at first, though free and unconfined,
One man the common father of the kind;
That every tribe, though placed as he sees best,
Where seas or deserts part them from the rest,
Differing in language, manners, or in face,
Might feel themselves allied to all the race.
When Cook--lamented, and with tears as just
As ever mingled with heroic dust--
Steer'd Britain's oak into a world unknown,
And in his country's glory sought his own,
Wherever he found man to nature true,
The rights of man were sacred in his view;
He soothed with gifts, and greeted with a smile,
The simple native of the new-found isle;

He spurn'd the wretch that slighted or withstood
The tender argument of kindred blood;
Nor would endure that any should control
His freeborn brethren of the southern pole.
But, though some nobler minds a law respect,
That none shall with impunity neglect,
In baser souls unnumber'd evils meet,
To thwart its influence, and its end defeat.
While Cook is loved for savage lives he saved,
See Cortez odious for a world enslaved!
Where wast thou then, sweet Charity? where then,
Thou tutelary friend of helpless men?
Wast thou in monkish cells and nunneries found,
Or building hospitals on English ground?
No.--Mammon makes the world his legatee
Through fear, not love; and Heaven abhors the fee.
Wherever found (and all men need thy care),
Nor age, nor infancy could find thee there.
The hand that slew till it could slay no more,
Was glued to the sword-hilt with Indian gore.
Their prince, as justly seated on his throne
As vain imperial Philip on his own,
Trick'd out of all his royalty by art,
That stripp'd him bare, and broke his honest heart,
Died, by the sentence of a shaven priest,
For scorning what they taught him to detest.
How dark the veil that intercepts the blaze

Of Heaven's mysterious purposes and ways!
God stood not, though he seem'd to stand, aloof;
And at this hour the conqueror feels the proof:
The wreath he won drew down an instant curse,
The fretting plague is in the public purse,
The canker'd spoil corrodes the pining state,
Starved by that indolence their mines create.
Oh, could their ancient Incas rise again,
How would they take up Israel's taunting strain!
Art thou too fallen, Iberia? Do we see
The robber and the murderer weak as we?
Thou that hast wasted earth, and dared despise
Alike the wrath and mercy of the skies,
Thy pomp is in the grave, thy glory laid
Low in the pits thine avarice has made.
We come with joy from our eternal rest
To see the oppressor in his turn oppress'd.
Art thou the god, the thunder of whose hand
Roll'd over all our desolated land,
Shook principalities and kingdoms down,
And made the mountains tremble at his frown?
The sword shall light upon thy boasted powers,
And waste them, as thy sword has wasted ours.
'Tis thus Omnipotence his law fulfils,
And vengeance executes what justice wills.
Again--the band of commerce was design'd
To associate all the branches of mankind;

And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.
Wise to promote whatever end he means,
God opens fruitful Nature's various scenes:
Each climate needs what other climes produce,
And offers something to the general use;
No land but listens to the common call,
And in return receives supply from all.
This genial intercourse, and mutual aid,
Cheers what were else a universal shade,
Calls nature from her ivy-mantled den,
And softens human rock-work into men.
Ingenious Art, with her expressive face,
Steps forth to fashion and refine the race;
Not only fills necessity's demand,
But overcharges her capacious hand:
Capricious taste itself can crave no more
Than she supplies from her abounding store:
She strikes out all that luxury can ask,
And gains new vigour at her endless task.
Hers is the spacious arch, the shapely spire,
The painter's pencil, and the poet's lyre;
From her the canvas borrows light and shade,
And verse, more lasting, hues that never fade.
She guides the finger o'er the dancing keys,
Gives difficulty all the grace of ease,
And pours a torrent of sweet notes around

Fast as the thirsting ear can drink the sound.
These are the gifts of art; and art thrives most
Where Commerce has enrich'd the busy coast;
He catches all improvements in his flight,
Spreads foreign wonders in his country's sight,
Imports what others have invented well,
And stirs his own to match them, or excel.
'Tis thus, reciprocating each with each,
Alternately the nations learn and teach;
While Providence enjoins to ev'ry soul
A union with the vast terraqueous whole.
Heaven speed the canvas gallantly unfurl'd
To furnish and accommodate a world,
To give the pole the produce of the sun,
And knit the unsocial climates into one.
Soft airs and gentle heavings of the wave
Impel the fleet, whose errand is to save,
To succour wasted regions, and replace
The smile of opulence in sorrow's face.
Let nothing adverse, nothing unforeseen,
Impede the bark that ploughs the deep serene,
Charged with a freight transcending in its worth
The gems of India, Nature's rarest birth,
That flies, like Gabriel on his Lord's commands,
A herald of God's love to pagan lands!
But ah! what wish can prosper, or what prayer,
For merchants rich in cargoes of despair,

Who drive a loathsome traffic, gauge, and span,
And buy the muscles and the bones of man?
The tender ties of father, husband, friend,
All bonds of nature in that moment end;
And each endures, while yet he draws his breath,
A stroke as fatal as the scythe of death.
The sable warrior, frantic with regret
Of her he loves, and never can forget,
Loses in tears the far-receding shore,
But not the thought that they must meet no more;
Deprived of her and freedom at a blow,
What has he left that he can yet forego?
Yes, to deep sadness sullenly resign'd,
He feels his body's bondage in his mind;
Puts off his generous nature, and to suit
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.
Oh most degrading of all ills that wait
On man, a mourner in his best estate!
All other sorrows virtue may endure,
And find submission more than half a cure;
Grief is itself a medicine, and bestow'd
To improve the fortitude that bears the load;
To teach the wanderer, as his woes increase,
The path of wisdom, all whose paths are peace;
But slavery!--Virtue dreads it as her grave:
Patience itself is meanness in a slave;
Or, if the will and sovereignty of God

Bid suffer it a while, and kiss the rod,
Wait for the dawning of a brighter day,
And snap the chain the moment when you may.
Nature imprints upon whate'er we see,
That has a heart and life in it, Be free!
The beasts are charter'd--neither age nor force
Can quell the love of freedom in a horse:
He breaks the cord that held him at the rack;
And, conscious of an unencumber'd back,
Snuffs up the morning air, forgets the rein;
Loose fly his forelock and his ample mane;
Responsive to the distant neigh, he neighs;
Nor stops, till, overleaping all delays,
He finds the pasture where his fellows graze.
Canst thou, and honour'd with a Christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead
Expedience as a warrant for the deed?
So may the wolf, whom famine has made bold
To quit the forest and invade the fold:
So may the ruffian, who with ghostly glide,
Dagger in hand, steals close to your bedside;
Not he, but his emergence forced the door,
He found it inconvenient to be poor.
Has God then given its sweetness to the cane,
Unless his laws be trampled on--in vain?
Built a brave world, which cannot yet subsist,

Unless his right to rule it be dismiss'd?
Impudent blasphemy! So folly pleads,
And, avarice being judge, with ease succeeds.
But grant the plea, and let it stand for just,
That man make man his prey, because he must;
Still there is room for pity to abate
And soothe the sorrows of so sad a state.
A Briton knows, or if he knows it not,
The Scripture placed within his reach, he ought,
That souls have no discriminating hue,
Alike important in their Maker's view;
That none are free from blemish since the fall,
And love divine has paid one price for all.
The wretch that works and weeps without relief
Has One that notices his silent grief.
He, from whose hand alone all power proceeds,
Ranks its abuse among the foulest deeds,
Considers all injustice with a frown;
But marks the man that treads his fellow down.
Begone!--the whip and bell in that hard hand
Are hateful ensigns of usurp'd command.
Not Mexico could purchase kings a claim
To scourge him, weariness his only blame.
Remember, Heaven has an avenging rod,
To smite the poor is treason against God!
Trouble is grudgingly and hardly brook'd,
While life's sublimest joys are overlook'd:

We wander o'er a sunburnt thirsty soil,
Murmuring and weary of our daily toil,
Forget to enjoy the palm-tree's offer'd shade,
Or taste the fountain in the neighbouring glade:
Else who would lose, that had the power to improve
The occasion of transmuting fear to love?
Oh, 'tis a godlike privilege to save!
And he that scorns it is himself a slave.
Inform his mind; one flash of heavenly day
Would heal his heart, and melt his chains away.
"Beauty for ashes" is a gift indeed,
And slaves, by truth enlarged, are doubly freed.
Then would he say, submissive at thy feet,
While gratitude and love made service sweet,
My dear deliverer out of hopeless night,
Whose bounty bought me but to give me light,
I was a bondman on my native plain,
Sin forged, and ignorance made fast, the chain;
Thy lips have shed instruction as the dew,
Taught me what path to shun, and what pursue;
Farewell my former joys! I sigh no more
For Africa's once loved, benighted shore;
Serving a benefactor, I am free;
At my best home, if not exiled from thee.
Some men make gain a fountain whence proceeds
A stream of liberal and heroic deeds;
The swell of pity, not to be confined

Within the scanty limits of the mind,
Disdains the bank, and throws the golden sands,
A rich deposit, on the bordering lands:
These have an ear for his paternal call,
Who make some rich for the supply of all;
God's gift with pleasure in his praise employ;
And Thornton is familiar with the joy.
Oh, could I worship aught beneath the skies
That earth has seen, or fancy can devise,
Thine altar, sacred Liberty, should stand,
Built by no mercenary vulgar hand,
With fragrant turf, and flowers as wild and fair
As ever dress'd a bank, or scented summer air.
Duly, as ever on the mountain's height
The peep of morning shed a dawning light,
Again, when evening in her sober vest
Drew the grey curtain of the fading west,
My soul should yield thee willing thanks and praise
For the chief blessings of my fairest days;
But that were sacrilege--praise is not thine,
But his who gave thee, and preserves thee mine:
Else I would say, and as I spake bid fly
A captive bird into the boundless sky,
This triple realm adores thee--thou art come
From Sparta hither, and art here at home.
We feel thy force still active, at this hour
Enjoy immunity from priestly power,

While conscience, happier than in ancient years,
Owns no superior but the God she fears.
Propitious spirit! yet expunge a wrong
Thy rights have suffer'd, and our land, too long.
Teach mercy to ten thousand hearts, that share
The fears and hopes of a commercial care.
Prisons expect the wicked, and were built
To bind the lawless, and to punish guilt;
But shipwreck, earthquake, battle, fire, and flood,
Are mighty mischiefs, not to be withstood;
And honest merit stands on slippery ground,
Where covert guile and artifice abound.
Let just restraint, for public peace design'd,
Chain up the wolves and tigers of mankind;
The foe of virtue has no claim to thee,
But let insolvent innocence go free.
Patron of else the most despised of men,
Accept the tribute of a stranger's pen;
Verse, like the laurel, its immortal meed,
Should be the guerdon of a noble deed;
I may alarm thee, but I fear the shame
(Charity chosen as my theme and aim)
I must incur, forgetting Howard's name.
Blest with all wealth can give thee, to resign
Joys doubly sweet to feelings quick as thine,
To quit the bliss thy rural scenes bestow,
To seek a nobler amidst scenes of woe,

To traverse seas, range kingdoms, and bring home,
Not the proud monuments of Greece or Rome,
But knowledge such as only dungeons teach,
And only sympathy like thine could reach;
That grief, sequester'd from the public stage,
Might smooth her feathers, and enjoy her cage;
Speaks a divine ambition, and a zeal,
The boldest patriot might be proud to feel.
Oh that the voice of clamour and debate,
That pleads for peace till it disturbs the state,
Were hush'd in favour of thy generous plea,
The poor thy clients, and Heaven's smile thy fee!
Philosophy, that does not dream or stray,
Walks arm in arm with nature all his way;
Compasses earth, dives into it, ascends
Whatever steep inquiry recommends,
Sees planetary wonders smoothly roll
Round other systems under her control,
Drinks wisdom at the milky stream of light,
That cheers the silent journey of the night,
And brings at his return a bosom charged
With rich instruction, and a soul enlarged.
The treasured sweets of the capacious plan,
That Heaven spreads wide before the view of man.
All prompt his pleased pursuit, and to pursue
Still prompt him, with a pleasure always new;
He too has a connecting power, and draws

Man to the centre of the common cause,
Aiding a dubious and deficient sight
With a new medium and a purer light.
All truth is precious, if not all divine;
And what dilates the powers must needs refine.
He reads the skies, and, watching every change,
Provides the faculties an ampler range;
And wins mankind, as his attempts prevail,
A prouder station on the general scale.
But reason still, unless divinely taught,
Whate'er she learns, learns nothing as she ought;
The lamp of revelation only shews,
What human wisdom cannot but oppose,
That man, in nature's richest mantle clad,
And graced with all philosophy can add,
Though fair without, and luminous within,
Is still the progeny and heir of sin.
Thus taught, down falls the plumage of his pride;
He feels his need of an unerring guide,
And knows that falling he shall rise no more,
Unless the power that bade him stand restore.
This is indeed philosophy; this known
Makes wisdom, worthy of the name, his own;
And without this, whatever he discuss;
Whether the space between the stars and us;
Whether he measure earth, compute the sea,
Weigh sunbeams, carve a fly, or spit a flea;

The solemn trifler with his boasted skill
Toils much, and is a solemn trifler still:
Blind was he born, and his misguided eyes
Grown dim in trifling studies, blind he dies.
Self-knowledge truly learn'd of course implies
The rich possession of a nobler prize;
For self to self, and God to man, reveal'd
(Two themes to nature's eye for ever seal'd),
Are taught by rays, that fly with equal pace
From the same centre of enlightening grace.
Here stay thy foot; how copious, and how clear,
The o'erflowing well of Charity springs here!
Hark! 'tis the music of a thousand rills,
Some through the groves, some down the sloping hills,
Winding a secret or an open course,
And all supplied from an eternal source.
The ties of nature do but feebly bind,
And commerce partially reclaims mankind;
Philosophy, without his heavenly guide,
May blow up self-conceit, and nourish pride;
But, while his province is the reasoning part,
Has still a veil of midnight on his heart:
'Tis truth divine, exhibited on earth,
Gives Charity her being and her birth.
Suppose (when thought is warm, and fancy flows,
What will not argument sometimes suppose?)
An isle possess'd by creatures of our kind,

Endued with reason, yet by nature blind.
Let supposition lend her aid once more,
And land some grave optician on the shore:
He claps his lens, if haply they may see,
Close to the part where vision ought to be;
But finds that, though his tubes assist the sight,
They cannot give it, or make darkness light.
He reads wise lectures, and describes aloud
A sense they know not to the wondering crowd;
He talks of light and the prismatic hues,
As men of depth in erudition use;
But all he gains for his harangue is--Well,--
What monstrous lies some travellers will tell!
The soul, whose sight all-quickenning grace renews,
Takes the resemblance of the good she views,
As diamonds, stripp'd of their opaque disguise,
Reflect the noonday glory of the skies.
She speaks of Him, her author, guardian, friend,
Whose love knew no beginning, knows no end,
In language warm as all that love inspires;
And, in the glow of her intense desires,
Pants to communicate her noble fires.
She sees a world stark blind to what employs
Her eager thought, and feeds her flowing joys;
Though wisdom hail them, heedless of her call,
Flies to save some, and feels a pang for all:
Herself as weak as her support is strong,

She feels that frailty she denied so long;
And, from a knowledge of her own disease,
Learns to compassionate the sick she sees.
Here see, acquitted of all vain pretence,
The reign of genuine Charity commence.
Though scorn repay her sympathetic tears,
She still is kind, and still she perseveres;
The truth she loves a sightless world blaspheme,
'Tis childish dotage, a delirious dream!
The danger they discern not they deny;
Laugh at their only remedy, and die.
But still a soul thus touch'd can never cease,
Whoever threatens war, to speak of peace.
Pure in her aim, and in her temper mild,
Her wisdom seems the weakness of a child:
She makes excuses where she might condemn,
Reviled by those that hate her, prays for them;
Suspicion lurks not in her artless breast,
The worst suggested, she believes the best;
Not soon provoked, however stung and teased,
And, if perhaps made angry, soon appeased;
She rather waives than will dispute her right;
And, injured, makes forgiveness her delight.
Such was the portrait an apostle drew,
The bright original was one he knew;
Heaven held his hand, the likeness must be true.
When one, that holds communion with the skies,

Has fill'd his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.
So when a ship, well freighted with the stores
The sun matures on India's spicy shores,
Has dropp'd her anchor, and her canvas furl'd,
In some safe haven of our western world,
'Twere vain inquiry to what port she went,
The gale informs us, laden with the scent.
Some seek, when queasy conscience has its qualms,
To lull the painful malady with alms;
But charity not feign'd intends alone
Another's good--theirs centres in their own;
And, too short-lived to reach the realms of peace,
Must cease for ever when the poor shall cease.
Flavia, most tender of her own good name,
Is rather careless of her sister's fame:
Her superfluity the poor supplies,
But, if she touch a character, it dies.
The seeming virtue weigh'd against the vice,
She deems all safe, for she has paid the price:
No charity but alms aught values she,
Except in porcelain on her mantel-tree.
How many deeds, with which the world has rung,
From pride, in league with ignorance, have sprung!

But God o'errules all human follies still,
And bends the tough materials to his will.
A conflagration, or a wintry flood,
Has left some hundreds without home or food:
Extravagance and avarice shall subscribe,
While fame and self-complacence are the bribe.
The brief proclaim'd, it visits every pew,
But first the squire's, a compliment but due:
With slow deliberation he unties
His glittering purse, that envy of all eyes!
And, while the clerk just puzzles out the psalm,
Slides guinea behind guinea in his palm;
Till finding, what he might have found before,
A smaller piece amidst the precious store,
Pinch'd close between his finger and his thumb,
He half exhibits, and then drops the sum.
Gold, to be sure!--Throughout the town 'tis told
How the good squire gives never less than gold.
From motives such as his, though not the best,
Springs in due time supply for the distress'd;
Not less effectual than what love bestows,
Except that office clips it as it goes.
But lest I seem to sin against a friend,
And wound the grace I mean to recommend
(Though vice derided with a just design
Implies no trespass against love divine),
Once more I would adopt the graver style,

A teacher should be sparing of his smile.
Unless a love of virtue light the flame,
Satire is, more than those he brands, to blame:
He hides behind a magisterial air
His own offences, and strips others bare;
Affects indeed a most humane concern,
That men, if gently tutor'd, will not learn;
That mulish folly, not to be reclaim'd
By softer methods, must be made ashamed;
But (I might instance in St. Patrick's dean)
Too often rails to gratify his spleen.
Most satirists are indeed a public scourge;
Their mildest physic is a farrier's purge;
Their acrid temper turns, as soon as stirr'd,
The milk of their good purpose all to curd.
Their zeal begotten, as their works rehearse,
By lean despair upon an empty purse,
The wild assassins start into the street,
Prepared to poniard whomsoe'er they meet,
No skill in swordmanship, however just,
Can be secure against a madman's thrust;
And even virtue, so unfairly match'd,
Although immortal, may be prick'd or scratch'd.
When scandal has new minted an old lie,
Or tax'd invention for a fresh supply,
'Tis call'd a satire, and the world appears
Gathering around it with erected ears:

A thousand names are toss'd into the crowd;
Some whisper'd softly, and some twang'd aloud,
Just as the sapience of an author's brain
Suggests it safe or dangerous to be plain.
Strange! how the frequent interjected dash
Quickens a market, and helps off the trash;
The important letters that include the rest,
Serve as key to those that are suppress'd;
Conjecture gripes the victims in his paw,
The world is charm'd, and Scrib escapes the law.
So, when the cold damp shades of night prevail,
Worms may be caught by either head or tail;
Forcibly drawn from many a close recess,
They meet with little pity, no redress;
Plunged in the stream, they lodge upon the mud,
Food for the famish'd rovers of the flood.
All zeal for a reform, that gives offence
To peace and charity, is mere pretence:
A bold remark; but which, if well applied,
Would humble many a towering poet's pride.
Perhaps the man was in a sportive fit,
And had no other play-place for his wit;
Perhaps, enchanted with the love of fame,
He sought the jewel in his neighbour's shame;
Perhaps--whatever end he might pursue,
The cause of virtue could not be his view.
At every stroke wit flashes in our eyes;

The turns are quick, the polish'd points surprise,
But shine with cruel and tremendous charms,
That, while they please, possess us with alarms;
So have I seen (and hasten'd to the sight
On all the wings of holiday delight),
Where stands that monument of ancient power,
Named with emphatic dignity, the Tower,
Guns, halberts, swords, and pistols, great and small,
In starry forms disposed upon the wall:
We wonder, as we gazing stand below,
That brass and steel should make so fine a show;
But, though we praise the exact designer's skill,
Account them implements of mischief still.
No works shall find acceptance in that day,
When all disguises shall be rent away,
That square not truly with the Scripture plan,
Nor spring from love to God, or love to man.
As he ordains things sordid in their birth
To be resolved into their parent earth;
And, though the soul shall seek superior orbs,
Whate'er this world produces, it absorbs;
So self starts nothing, but what tends apace
Home to the goal, where it began the race.
Such as our motive is our aim must be;
If this be servile, that can ne'er be free:
If self employ us, whatsoe'er is wrought,
We glorify that self, not Him we ought;

Such virtues had need prove their own reward,
The Judge of all men owes them no regard.
True Charity, a plant divinely nursed,
Fed by the love from which it rose at first,
Thrives against hope, and, in the rudest scene,
Storms but enliven its unfading green;
Exuberant is the shadow it supplies,
Its fruit on earth, its growth above the skies.
To look at Him, who form'd us and redeem'd,
So glorious now, though once so disesteem'd;
To see a God stretch forth his human hand,
To uphold the boundless scenes of his command:
To recollect that, in a form like ours,
He bruised beneath his feet the infernal powers,
Captivity led captive, rose to claim
The wreath he won so dearly in our name;
That, throned above all height, he condescends
To call the few that trust in him his friends;
That, in the heaven of heavens, that space he deems
Too scanty for the exertion of his beams,
And shines, as if impatient to bestow
Life and a kingdom upon worms below;
That sight imparts a never-dying flame,
Though feeble in degree, in kind the same.
Like him the soul, thus kindled from above,
Spreads wide her arms of universal love;
And, still enlarged as she receives the grace,

Includes creation in her close embrace.
Behold a Christian!--and without the fires
The Founder of that name alone inspires,
Though all accomplishment, all knowledge meet;
To make the shining prodigy complete,
Whoever boast that name--behold a cheat!
Were love, in these the world's last doting years,
As frequent as the want of it appears,
The churches warm'd, they would no longer hold
Such frozen figures, stiff as they are cold;
Relenting forms would lose their power, or cease;
And e'en the dipp'd and sprinkled live in peace:
Each heart would quit its prison in the breast,
And flow in free communion with the rest.
And statesman, skill'd in projects dark and deep,
Might burn his useless Machiavel, and sleep:
His budget, often fill'd, yet always poor,
Might swing at ease behind his study door,
No longer prey upon our annual rents,
Or scare the nation with its big contents:
Disbanded legions freely might depart,
And slaying man would cease to be an art.
No learned disputants would take the field,
Sure not to conquer, and sure not to yield;
Both sides deceived, if rightly understood,
Pelting each other for the public good.
Did Charity prevail, the press would prove

A vehicle of virtue, truth, and love;
And I might spare myself the pains to shew
What few can learn, and all suppose they know.
Thus have I sought to grace a serious lay
With many a wild, indeed, but flowery spray,
In hopes to gain, what else I must have lost,
The attention pleasure has so much engross'd.
But if unhappily deceived I dream,
And prove too weak for so divine a theme,
Let Charity forgive me a mistake,
That zeal, not vanity, has chanced to make,
And spare the poet for his subject's sake.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-cowper/charity/>

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