

CHARITY
AND ITS FRUITS;

OR,

CHRISTIAN LOVE AS MANIFESTED IN THE
HEART AND LIFE.

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LECTURE III

THE GREATEST PERFORMANCES OR SUFFERINGS IN VAIN WITHOUT CHARITY.

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”—1 Cor. xiii. 3.

IN the previous verses of this chapter, the necessity and excellence of charity are set forth, as we have seen, by its preference to the greatest privileges, and the utter vanity and insignificance of these privileges without it. The privileges particularly mentioned are those that consist in the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit of God. In this verse, things of another kind are mentioned, viz. those that are of a *moral* nature; and it is declared that none of these avail anything without charity. And, particularly,

First. That our performances are in vain without it. Here is one of the highest kinds of external performances mentioned, viz. giving all our goods to feed the poor. Giving to the poor is a duty very much insisted on in the word of God, and particularly under the Christian dispensation. And in the primitive times of Christianity, the circumstances of the church were such that persons were sometimes called to part with all they had, and give it away to others. This was partly because of the extreme necessities of those who were persecuted and in distress, and partly because the difficulties that attended being a follower of Christ and doing the work of the gospel were such, as to call for the disciples disentangling themselves from the care and burden of their worldly possessions, and going forth, as it were, without gold, or silver, or scrip, or their purses, or even two coats apiece. The Apostle Paul tells us, that he had suffered the loss of all things for Christ, and the primitive Christians, in the church at Jerusalem, sold all that they had, and gave it into a common fund, and “none said that aught that he had was his own,” Acts iv. 32. The duty of giving to the poor, was a duty that the Christian Corinthians at this time had particular occasion to consider, not only because of the many troubles of the times, but by reason, also, of a great dearth or famine that sorely distressed the brethren in Judea; in view of which, the Apostle had already urged it on the Corinthians, as their duty, to send relief to them, speaking of it particularly in this Epistle, in the sixteenth chapter, and also in his second Epistle to the same church, in the eighth and ninth chapters. And yet, though he says so much in both these Epistles, to stir them up to the duty of giving to the poor, still he is very careful to inform them, that though they should go ever so far in it, yea, though they should bestow all their goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it would profit them nothing.

Secondly. The Apostle teaches, that not only our performances, but also *our sufferings* are of no avail without charity. Men are ready to make much of what they *do*, but more of what they *suffer*. They are ready to think it a great thing when they put themselves out of their way, or are at great expense or suffering for their religion. The Apostle here mentions a suffering of the most extreme kind, suffering even to death, and that one of the most terrible forms of death, and says that even this is nothing without charity. When a man has given away all his goods, he has nothing else remaining that he can give, but himself. And the Apostle teaches, that when a man has given all his possessions, if he then goes on to give his own body, and that to be utterly consumed in the flames, it will avail nothing if it is not done from sincere love in the heart. The time when the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians, was a time when Christians were often called not only to give their goods, but their bodies, also, for Christ's sake; for the church then was generally under persecution, and multitudes were then or soon after put to very cruel deaths for the gospel's sake. But though they suffered in life, or endured the most agonizing death, it would be in vain without charity. What is meant by this charity, has already been explained in the former lectures on these verses, in which it has been shown that charity is the sum of all that is distinguishing in the religion of the heart. And therefore the doctrine that I would derive from these words is this, **THAT ALL THAT MEN CAN DO, AND ALL THAT THEY CAN SUFFER, CAN NEVER MAKE UP FOR THE WANT OF SINCERE CHRISTIAN LOVE IN THE HEART.**

I. There may be great performances, and so there may be great sufferings without sincere Christian love in the heart. And,

1. There may be great performances without it. The Apostle Paul, in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, tells us what things he did before his conversion, and while he remained a Pharisee. In the fourth verse, he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." Many of the Pharisees did great things, and abounded in religious performances. The Pharisee mentioned in Luke xviii. 11, 12, boasted of the great things he had done, both towards God and men, and thanked God, that he so exceeded other men in his doings. And many of the heathen have been eminent for their great performances; some for their integrity, or for their justice, and others for their great deeds done for the public good. Many men without any sincerity of love in their hearts, have been exceeding magnificent in their gifts for pious and charitable uses, and have thus gotten to themselves great fame, and had their names handed down in history to posterity with great glory. Many have done great things from fear of hell, hoping thereby to appease the Deity and make atonement for their sins, and many have done great things from pride, and from a desire for reputation and honor among men. And though these motives are not wont to influence men to a constant and universal observance of God's commands, and to go on with a course of Christian performances, and with the practice of all duties towards God and man

through life, yet it is hard to say how far such natural principles may carry men in particular duties and performances. And so,

2. *There may be great sufferings for religion, and yet no sincerity of love in the heart.* Persons may undergo great sufferings in life, just as some of the Pharisees used themselves to great severities, and to penances and voluntary inflictions. Many have undertaken wearisome pilgrimages, and have shut themselves out from the benefits and pleasures of the society of mankind, or have spent their lives in deserts and solitudes, and some have suffered death, of whom we have no reason to think that they had any sincere love to God in their hearts. Multitudes among the Papists, have voluntarily gone and ventured their lives in bloody wars, in hopes of meriting heaven by it. In the wars carried on with the Turks and Saracens, called the Holy Wars, or Crusades, thousands went voluntarily to all the dangers of the conflict, in the hope of thus securing the pardon of their sins, and the rewards of glory hereafter; and many thousands, yea, some millions, in this way lost their lives, even to the depopulation, in a considerable measure, of many parts of Europe. And the Turks were many of them enraged by this exceedingly, so as to venture their lives, and rush, as it were, upon the very points of the swords of their enemies, because Mahomet has promised that all that die in war, in defence of the Mahometan faith, shall go at once to Paradise. And history tells us of some, that have yielded themselves to voluntary death, out of mere obstinacy and sturdiness of spirit, rather than yield to the demand of others, when they might, without dishonor, have saved their lives. Many among the heathen have died for their country; and many, as martyrs for a false faith, though not in any wise in such numbers, nor in such a manner, as those that have died as martyrs for the true religion. And in all these cases, many doubtless have endured their sufferings, or met death, without having any sincere divine love in their hearts. But,

II. *Whatever men may do or suffer, they cannot by all their performances and sufferings, make up for the want of sincere love in the heart.*—If they lay themselves out ever so much in the things of religion, and are ever so much engaged in acts of justice and kindness and devotion; and if their prayers and fastings are ever so much multiplied; or if they should spend their time ever so much in the forms of religious worship, giving days and nights to it, and denying sleep to their eyes and slumber to their eyelids, that they might be the more laborious in religious exercises; and if the things that they should do in religion were such as to get them a name throughout the world, and make them famous to all future generations, it would all be in vain without sincere love to God in the heart. And so if a man should give most bounteously to religious or charitable uses; and if possessing the riches of a kingdom he should give it all, and from the splendor of an earthly prince should reduce himself to the level of beggars; and if he should not stop there, but when he has done all this, should yield himself to undergo the fiercest sufferings, giving up not only all his possessions, but also giving his body to be clothed in rags, or to be man-

gled and burned and tormented as much as the wit of man could conceive, all, even all this, would not make up for the want of sincere love to God in the heart. And it is plain that it would not for the following reasons:—

1. *It is not the external work done, or the suffering endured, that is, in itself, worth anything in the sight of God.* The motions and exercise of the body, or anything that maybe done by it, if considered separately from the heart, the inward part of the man, is of no more consequence or worth in the sight of God, than the motions of anything without life. If anything be offered or given, though it be silver, or gold, or the cattle on a thousand hills, though it be a thousand rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil, there is nothing of value in it, as an external thing, in God's sight. If God were in need of these things, they might be of value to him in themselves considered, independently of the motives of the heart that led to their being offered. We often stand in need of external good things, and therefore such things offered or given to us, may and do have a value to us, in themselves considered. That God stands in need of nothing. He is all-sufficient in himself. He is not fed by the sacrifices of beasts, nor enriched by the gift of silver, or gold, or pearls, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof," Psalm i. 10, 12. "All things come of thee, and of thine own, have we given thee. O Lord, our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name, cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own," 1 Chronicles xxix. 14, 16. And as there is nothing profitable to God in any of our services or performances, so there can be nothing acceptable in his sight in a mere external action without sincere love in the heart, "for the Lord seeth not as men seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." The heart is just as naked and open to him as the external actions. And therefore he sees our actions, and all our conduct, not merely as the external motions of a machine, but as the actions of rational, intelligent creatures, and voluntary free agents, and therefore there can be, in his estimation, no excellence or amiableness in anything we can do, if the heart be not right with him.

And so God takes no pleasure in any sufferings that we may endure, in themselves considered. He is not profited by the torments men may undergo, nor does he delight to see them putting themselves to suffering, unless it be from some good motive, or to some good purpose and end. We sometimes may need that our fellow-men, our friends and neighbors should suffer for us, and should help us bear our burdens, and put themselves to inconvenience for our sake. But God stands in no such need of us, and therefore our sufferings are not acceptable to him, considered merely as sufferings endured by us; and are of no account apart from the motive that leads us to endure them. No matter what may be done or suffered, neither doings nor sufferings will make up for the want of love to God in the soul. They are not profitable to God, or lovely for their own sake in his sight; nor can they ever make up for the ab-

sence of that love to God and love to men, which is the sum of all that God requires of his moral creatures.

2. *Whatever is done or steered, yet if the heart is withheld from God, there is nothing really given to him.*—The act of the individual, in what he does or suffers, is in every case, looked upon not as the act of a lifeless engine or machine, but as the act of an intelligent, voluntary, moral being. For surely a machine is not properly capable of giving anything: and if any such machine, that is without life, being moved by springs, or weights, places anything before us, it cannot properly be said to give it to us. Harps, and cymbals, and other instruments of music, were of old made use of in praising God in the temple and elsewhere. But these lifeless instruments could not be said to give praise to God, because they had no thought, nor understanding, or will, or heart, to give value to their pleasant sounds. And so though a man has a heart, and an understanding, and a will, yet if when he gives anything to God, he gives it without his heart, there is no more truly given to God, than is given by the instrument of music.

He that has no sincerity in his heart, has no real respect to God in what he seems to give, or in all his performances or sufferings; and therefore God is not his great end in what he does or gives. What is given, is given to that which the individual makes his great end in giving. If his end be only himself, then it is given only to himself, and not to God; and if his aim be his own honor or ease, or worldly profit, then the gift is but an offering to these things. The gift is an offering to him to whom the giver's heart devotes, and for whom he designs it. It is the aim of the heart that makes the reality of the gift; and if the sincere aim of the heart be not to God, then there is in reality nothing given to him, no matter what is performed or suffered. So that it would be a great absurdity to suppose, that anything that can be offered or given to God, can make up for the absence of love in the heart to him; for without this, nothing is truly given, and the seeming gift is but mockery of the Most High. This further appears,

3. *From the fact, that this love or charity is the sum of all that God requires of us.*—And it is absurd to suppose that anything can make up for the want of that which is the sum of *all* that God requires. Charity or love is something that has its seat in the heart, and in which, as we have seen, consists all that is saving and distinguishing in Christian character. This love it is, of which our Saviour speaks as the sum of all required in the two tables of the law; and which the Apostle declares is the fulfilling of the law; and how can we make up for the defect, when by withholding it, we do, in effect, withhold the sum total of all that God requires of us. It would be absurd to suppose that we can make up for one thing that is required by offering another that is required, that we can make up for one debt by paying another. But it is still more absurd to suppose, that we can make up for the whole debt without paying anything, but by continuing still to withhold all that is required. As to external things without the heart, God speaks of them as not being the things that he

has required (Isaiah i. 12), and demands that the heart be given to him, if we would have the external offering accepted.

4. *If we make a great show of respect and love to God, in the outward actions, while there is no sincerity in the heart, it is but hypocrisy and practical lying unto the Holy One.*—To pretend to such respect and love, when it is not felt in the heart, is to act as if we thought we could deceive God. It is to do as Israel did in the desert, after they had been delivered from Egypt, when they are said to have “lied unto God with their mouth, and to have flattered him with their tongues,” Ps. lxxviii. 36. But surely it is as absurd to suppose that we can make up for the want of sincere respect by flattery and guile, as to suppose we can make up for the want of truth by falsehood and lying.

5. *Whatever may be done or suffered, if there be no sincerity in the heart, it is all but an offering to some idol.* As observed before, there is nothing, in the case supposed, really offered to God, and therefore it will follow, that it is offered to some other being or object or end; and, whatever that may be, it is what the Scriptures call an idol. In all such offerings, something is virtually worshipped, and whatever it is, be it self, or our fellow-men, or the world, that is allowed to usurp the place that should be given to God, and to receive the offerings that should be made to him. And how absurd to suppose we can make up for withholding from God that which is his due, by offering something to our idol. It is as absurd as it is to suppose that the wife can make up for want of love to her husband, by giving that affection which is due to him, to another man who is a stranger; or that she can make up for her want of faithfulness to him, by the guilt of adultery,

In the application of this subject, it becomes us to use it,

1. *In the way of self-examination.*—If it be indeed so, that all that we can do or suffer is in vain, if we have not sincere love to God in the heart, then it should put us upon searching ourselves whether or no we have this love in sincerity in our hearts. There are many that make a profession and show of religion, and some that do many of the outward things which it requires; and possibly they may think that they have done and suffered much for God and his service. But the great inquiry is, has the heart been sincere in it all, and has all been suffered or done from a regard to the divine glory. Doubtless if we examine ourselves we may see much of hypocrisy. But is there any sincerity? God abominates the greatest things without sincerity, but he accepts of and delights in little things when they spring from sincere love to himself. A cup of cold water given to a disciple in sincere love, is worth more in God’s sight, than all one’s goods given to feed the poor, yea, than the wealth of a kingdom given away, or a body offered up in the flames without love. And God accepts of even a little sincere love. Though there be a great deal of imperfection, yet if there be any true sincerity in our love, that little shall not be rejected because there is some hypocrisy with it. And here it may be profitable to observe, that there are these four things that belong to the nature of sincerity, viz, truth, freedom, integrity and purity. And,

First, *truth*. That is, that there be that truly in the heart, of which there is the appearance and show in the outward action. Where there is, indeed, true respect to God, the love that honors him will be felt in the heart, just as extensively as there is a show made of it in the words and actions. In this sense it is said in the fifty-first psalm, “Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts.” And in this view, it is, that sincerity is spoken of in the Scriptures as the opposite of hypocrisy, and that a sincere Christian is said to be one that is such indeed as he appears to be—one “without guile,” John i. 47. Examine yourself, therefore, with respect to this matter. If in your outward actions, there is an appearance or show of respect to God, inquire if it be only external, or if it be sincerely felt in your heart; for without real love or charity you are nothing. The

Second thing, in the nature of sincerity, is *freedom*. On this account, especially, the obedience of Christians is called filial, or the obedience of children, because it is an ingenuous, free obedience, and not legal, slavish, and forced, but that which is performed from love and with delight. God is chosen for his own sake; and holiness for its sake, and for God’s sake. Christ is chosen and followed because he is loved, and religion because it is loved, and the soul rejoices in it, finding in its duties its highest happiness and delight. Examine yourself faithfully on this point, whether or no this spirit is yours. The

Third thing, belonging to the nature of this sincerity, is *integrity*. The word signifies *wholeness*, intimating that where this sincerity exists, God is sought, and religion is chosen and embraced with the whole heart, and adhered to with the whole soul. Holiness is chosen with the whole heart. The whole of duty is embraced, and entered upon most cordially, whether it have respect to God or to man, whether it be easy or difficult, whether it have reference to little things or great. There is a proportion and fulness in the character. The whole man is renewed. The whole body, and soul, and spirit are sanctified. Every member is yielded to the obedience of Christ. All the parts of the new creature are brought into subjection to his will. The seeds of all holy dispositions are implanted in the soul, and they will more and more bear fruit in the performance of duty and for the glory of God. The

Fourth thing, that belongs to the nature of sincerity, is *purity*. The word sincere often signifies pure. So in 1 Peter ii. 2, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;” i.e. pure, unmixed, undiluted. This appears in the opposition of virtue to sin. The one is spoken of as defilement, and impurity, and uncleanness: the other, as that which is free from these things. The apostle compares sin to a body of death, or a dead body, which of all things is most polluting and defiling, while holiness is spoken of as purity and holy pleasures as pure pleasures, and the saints in heaven as without spot before the throne of God. Inquire then, whether this purity is yours, and whether in its possession you find the evidence that you sincerely love God. This subject may, also,

2. *Convince those who are still in an unregenerate state, of their lost condition.* —If it be indeed so, that by all you can either do or suffer, you cannot make up for the want of a holy, sincere principle of love in your heart, then it will follow that you are in an undone condition till you have obtained God's regenerating grace to renew a right spirit within you; and that do what you will, or undergo and suffer what you will, you cannot be delivered from your wickedness without the converting grace of God. If you make ever so many prayers, that will not make your case less miserable, unless God, by his mighty power, is pleased to give you a new heart. If you take ever so much pains in religion, and cross and deny yourself, and do or suffer ever so much, all will not avail without this. Therefore whatever you have done, though you can look back upon a great many prayers offered, and much time spent in reading and meditation, you have no reason to think that these things have made any atonement for your sins, or rendered your case any the less deplorable, or left you any other than, a wretched, lost, miserable, guilty and ruined creature.

Natural, unrenewed men would be glad to have something to make up for the want of sincere love and real grace in their hearts; and many do great things to make up for the want of it, while others are willing to suffer great things. But alas! how little does it all signify! No matter what they may do or suffer, it does not change their character; and if they build their hopes upon it, they do but delude themselves, and feed upon the East wind. If such be your case, consider how miserable you will be while you live without hope in the only true source of hope, and how miserable when you come to die, when the sight of the king of terrors will show the nothingness and vanity of all your doings! How miserable when you see Christ coming to judgment in the clouds of heaven! Then you will be willing to do and suffer anything, that you may be accepted by him. But doings or sufferings will not avail. They will not atone for your sins, or give you God's favor, or save you from the overwhelming storms of his wrath. Best, then, on nothing that you have done or suffered, or that you can do or suffer; but rest on Christ. Let your heart be filled with sincere love to him; and then, at the last great day, he will own you as his follower and as his friend. The subject,

3. *Exhorts all, earnestly to cherish sincere Christian love in their hearts.* If it be so, that this is of such great and absolute necessity, then let it be the one great thing that you seek. Seek it with diligence and prayer; and seek it of God, and not of yourself. He only can bestow it. It is something far above the unassisted power of nature; for though there may be great performances, and great sufferings, too, yet without sincere love they are all in vain. Such doings and sufferings may, indeed, be required of us, as the followers of Christ, and in the way of duty; but we are not to rest in them, or feel that they have any merit or worthiness in themselves. At best they are but the outward evidence and the outflowing of a right spirit in the heart. Be exhorted, then, as the great thing, to cherish sincere love, or Christian charity in the heart. It is that which you must have; and there is nothing that will help your case without it. Without it, all

will, in some respect, but tend to deepen your condemnation, and to sink you to but lower depths in the world of despair!