

CHARITY AND ITS FRUITS;
OR, CHRISTIAN LOVE AS MANIFESTED IN THE
HEART AND LIFE,

BY

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LECTURE V.

CHARITY DISPOSES US TO DO GOOD.

“Charity suffereth long and is kind.”—1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 4.

IN the last lecture from these words, it was shown, that charity or Christian love is longsuffering, or that it disposes us meekly to bear the injuries received from others. And now it is proposed to show that it is kind, or in other words,

THAT CHARITY, OR A TRULY CHRISTIAN SPIRIT, WILL DISPOSE US FREELY TO DO GOOD TO OTHERS. In dwelling on this point, I would, 1, briefly open the nature of the duty of doing good to others, and 2, show that a Christian spirit will dispose us to it.

I. would briefly open the nature of the duty of doing good to others. And here, three things are to be considered, viz.: the act, doing good; the objects, or those to whom we should do good; and the manner in which it should be done, freely. And,

1. The act which is the matter of the duty, which is, doing good to others.—There are many ways in which persons may do good to others, and in which they are obliged so to do, as they have opportunity. And,

First, Persons may do good to the souls of others, which is the most excellent way of doing good. Men may be, and oftentimes are the instruments of spiritual and eternal good to others; and wherein any are so, they are the instruments of greater good to them than if they had given them the riches of the universe. And we may do good to the souls of others, by taking pains to instruct the ignorant, and to lead them to the knowledge of the great things of religion; and by counselling and warning others, and stirring them up to their duty, and to a seasonable and thorough care for their soul's welfare; and so again, by Christian reproof of those that may be out of the way of duty; and by setting them good examples, which is a thing the most needful of all, and commonly the most effectual of all for the promotion of the good of their souls. Such an example must accompany the other means of doing good to the souls of men, such as instructing, counselling, warning and. reproof, and is needful to give force to such means, and to make them take effect; and it is more likely to render them effectual, than anything else whatsoever; and without it, they will be likely to be in vain.

Men may do good to the souls of vicious persons, by being the means of reclaiming them from their vicious courses; or to the souls of neglecters of the sanctuary, by persuading them to go to the house of God; or to the souls of secure and careless sinners, by putting them in mind of their misery and danger; and so may be the instruments of awakening them, and the means of their conversion, and of bringing them home to Christ. Thus they may be of the number of those, of whom we read (Daniel xii. 3), “that turn many to righteousness,” and who “shall shine as stars forever and ever.” Saints, too, may be the instruments of comforting and establishing one another, and of strengthening one another in faith and obedience; of quickening, and animating, and edifying one another; of raising one another out of dull and dead frames, and helping one another out of temptations, and onwards in the divine life; of directing one another in doubtful and difficult eases; of encouraging one another

under darkness or in trial; and generally, of promoting each other's spiritual joy and strength, and thus being mutually fellow-helpers on their way to glory.

Second, Persons may do good to others in outward things, and for this world. They may help others in their external difficulties and calamities; for there are innumerable kinds of temporal calamities to which mankind are liable, and in which they stand much in need of the help of their neighbors and friends. Many are hungry, or thirsty, or strangers, or naked, or sick, or in prison (Matthew xxv. 35, 36), or in suffering of some other kind; and to all such we may minister. We may do good to others, by furthering their outward estate or substance; or in aiding their good name, and thus promoting their esteem and acceptance among men; or by anything that may truly add to their comfort and happiness in the world, whether it be in the kind word, or the considerate and benevolent deed. And by endeavoring thus to do good to them externally, we are under the greater advantage to do good to their souls; for when our instructions, counsels, warnings, and good examples are accompanied with such outward kindness, the latter tends to open the way for the better effect of the former, and to give them their full force, and to lead such persons to appreciate our efforts when we seek their spiritual good. And we may thus contribute to the good of others, in three ways: by giving to them, of those things that they need and we possess; by doing for them, and taking pains to help them and promote their welfare; and by suffering for them, and aiding them to bear their burdens, and doing all in our power to make those burdens light. In each of these ways, Christianity requires us to do good to others. It requires us to give to others, Luke vi. 38, "Give and it shall be given unto you." It requires us to do for others, and to labor for them, Thess. ii. 9: "For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail; for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God;" and Hebrews vi. 10: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, &c." And it requires us, if need be, to suffer for others, Galatians vi. 2: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ;" and 1 John iii. 16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." So that in all these ways the Scriptures require us to do good to all. I pass, then, to speak, 2. Of the objects of this act, or of those to whom we should do good. These are often spoken of in the Scriptures, by the expression, "our neighbor;" for the duty before us, is implied in the command, that we love our neighbor as ourselves. But here, perhaps, we may be ready with the young lawyer that came to Christ (Luke x. 29, &c.), to ask, "who is our neighbor?" And as Christ's answer taught him that the Samaritan was neighbor to the Jew, though the Samaritans and Jews were each esteemed by the other vile, and accursed, and as bitter enemies, so we may be taught who those are to whom we are to do good, in three respects:—

First, We are to do good both to the good and to the bad. This we are to do, as we would imitate our heavenly Father, for "he (Matthew v. 45) maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The world is full of various kind of persons; some good, and some evil; and we should do good to all. We should, indeed, especially, "do good to them that are of the household of faith," or that we have reason, in the exercise of charity, to regard as saints. But though we should most abound in beneficence to them, yet our doing good should not be confined to them, but we

should do good to all men as we have opportunity. While we live in the world, we must expect to meet with some men of very evil properties, and hateful dispositions and practices. Some are proud, some immoral, some covetous, some profane, some unjust or severe, and some despisers of God. But any or all these bad qualities should not hinder our beneficence, or prevent our doing them good as we have opportunity. On this very account we should the rather be diligent to benefit them, that we may win them to Christ; and especially should we be diligent to benefit them in spiritual things.

Second, we should do good both to friends and enemies. We are obliged to do good to our friends, not only from the obligation we are under to do good to them as our fellowcreatures, and those that are made in the image of God, but from the obligations of friendship, and gratitude, and the affection we bear them. And we are also obliged to do good to our enemies; for our Saviour says (Matthew v. 44): “But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you,” To do good to those that do ill to us, is the only retaliation that becomes us as Christians; for we are taught (Romans xii. 17, 21) to “recompense to no man evil for evil,” but on the contrary to “overcome evil with good;” and again it is written (1 Thessalonians v. 15): “See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men; and still again (1 Peter iii. 9): “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” And,

Third, We should do good both to the thankful and the unthankful. This we are obliged to do by the example of our heavenly Father, for he (Luke vi. 35) “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil;” and the command is, that we “be merciful as he also is merciful.” Many make an objection against doing good to others, saying, “If I do, they will never thank me for it; and for my kindness, they will return abuse and injury:” and thus they are ready to excuse themselves from the exercise of kindness, especially to those who may have shown themselves ungrateful. But such persons do not sufficiently look at Christ; and they either show their want of acquaintance with the rules of Christianity, or their unwillingness to cherish its spirit. Having thus spoken of the duty of doing good, and the persons to whom we are to do it, I pass, as proposed, to speak,

3. Of the manner in which, we should do good to others. This is expressed in the single word “freely.” This seems implied in the words of the text; for to be kind, is to have a disposition freely to do good. Whatever good is done, there is no proper kindness in the doer of it, unless it be done freely. And this doing good freely, implies three things:—

First, That our doing good be not in a mercenary spirit. We are not to do it for the sake of any reward received or expected from the one to whom we do the good. The command is (Luke vi. 35): “Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again.” Oftentimes men will do good to others, expecting to receive as much again; but we should do good to the poor and needy from whom we can expect nothing in return. The command of Christ is (Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14.): “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recom-

pense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." That our doing good be free, and not mercenary, it is necessary that what we do, be done, not for the sake of any temporal good, or to promote our temporal interest, or honor, or profit, but from the spirit of love.

Second, That our doing good be free, it is requisite that we do it cheerfully or heartily, and with real good-will to the one we would benefit. What is done heartily, is done from love; and what is done from love, is done with delight, and not grudgingly or with backwardness and reluctance of spirit. "Use hospitality," says the Apostle (1 Peter iv. 9): "one to another, without grudging;" and says Paul (2 Corinthians ix. 7): "Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." This requisite or qualification for our doing good, is much insisted on in the Scriptures. "He that giveth," says the Apostle (Romans xii. 8) "let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." And God gives a strict charge (Deuteronomy xv. 10): "that we shall not be grieved in our heart when we give to our neighbor." And in a word, the very idea of giving acceptably, is presented throughout the Bible, as implying that we give with a cordial and cheerful spirit. Doing good freely also implies,

Third, That we do it liberally and bountifully. We are not to be scant and sparing in our gifts or efforts, but to be open-hearted and open-handed. We are to "abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians ix. 8, 11), "being enriched in everything, to all bountifulness." Thus God requires that when we give to the poor, we should "open our hand wide unto him" (Deuteronomy xv. 8); and we are told (Proverbs xi. 25), that "the liberal soul shall be made fat;" and the Apostle would have the Corinthians be bountiful in their contributions for the poor saints in Judea, assuring them (2 Corinthians ix. 6) that "he that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully." Having thus explained the nature of this duty of freely doing good to others, I now proceed, to show,

II. That a Christian spirit will dispose us thus to do good to others. And this appears from two considerations:—

1. The main thing in that love which is the sum of the Christian spirit, is benevolence or good will to others. We have already seen what Christian love is, and how it is variously denominated according to its various objects and exercises; and particularly how as it respects the good enjoyed, or to be enjoyed by the beloved object, it is called the love of benevolence, and as it respects the good to be enjoyed in the beloved object, it is called the love of complacence. Love of benevolence is that disposition which leads us to have a desire for, or delight in the good of another; and that is the main thing in Christian love, yea the most essential thing in it, and that whereby our love is most of an imitation of the eternal love and grace of God, and of the dying love of Christ which consists in benevolence or goodwill to men, as was sung by the angels at his birth, Luke ii. 14. So that the main thing in Christian love, is good-will, or a spirit to delight in, and seek the good of those who are the objects of that love.

2. The most proper and conclusive evidence that such a principle is real and sincere, is, its being effectual.—The proper and conclusive evidence of our wishing or willing to do good to another, is, to do it. In every case, nothing can be plainer, than that the proper and conclusive evidence of the will, is the

act; and the act always follows the will, where there is power to act. The proper and conclusive evidence of a man's sincerely desiring the good of another, is his seeking it in his practice for whatever we truly desire, we do thus seek. The Scriptures, therefore, speak of doing good as the proper and full evidence of love; and they often speak of loving in the deed or practice, as being the same thing as loving in truth and reality, John iii. 18, 19: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth:" "hereby we know that we are of the truth;" i.e. know that we are sincere. And again (James ii. 15, 16): "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and any of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" There is no profit to them; and so there is no evidence of sincerity on your part, and that you really desire that they should be clothed and fed. Sincerity of desire would lead not merely to words, but to the deeds of benevolence. In the application of this subject, in conclusion, we may use it,

1. In the way of reproof if a truly Christian spirit disposes persons freely to do good to others, then all those that are of a contrary spirit and practice, may by it be reproved. A malignant and malicious spirit is the very contrary of the former, for it disposes men to do evil to others, and not good; and so, also, is a close and selfish spirit, whereby men are wholly bent on their own interests, and unwilling in anything to forego their own ends for the sake of others. And they, also, are of a spirit and practice the very opposite of a spirit of love, who show an exorbitantly grasping and avaricious spirit, and who take every opportunity to get all they possibly can from their neighbors in their dealings with them; asking them more for what they do for, or sell to them, than it is truly worth, and extorting to the utmost from them by unreasonable demands; having no regard to value of the thing to their neighbor, but, as it were, forcing out of him all they can get for it. And they who do these things, are generally very selfish, also, in buying from their neighbors, grinding and pinching them down to the lowest prices, and being very backward to give what the thing purchased is really worth. Such a spirit and practice, are the very opposite of a Christian spirit, and are severely reproved by the great law of love, viz.: that we do to others, as we would have them do to us. The subject we have been considering, also, 2. Exhorts all to the duty of freely doing good to others. Seeing that this is a Christian duty, and a virtue becoming the gospel, and to which, a Christian spirit, if we possess it, will dispose us, let us seek, as we have opportunity, to do good to the souls and bodies of others, endeavoring to be a blessing to them for time and eternity. Let us, to this end, be willing to do, or give, or suffer, that we may do good alike to friends and enemies, to the evil and the good, to the thankful and the unthankful. Let our benevolence and beneficence be universal, constant, free, habitual, and according to our opportunities and ability; for this is essential to true piety, and required by the commands of God ! And here several things are to be considered

First, What a great honor it is, to be made an instrument of good in the world. When we fill up our lives with doing good, God puts the high honor upon us, of making us a blessing to the world; an honor like that which he put upon Abraham, when he said (Genesis xii. 2), "I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing." The very light of nature teaches, that this is a great honor; and therefore the Eastern kings and governors used to

assume to themselves the title of benefactors, that is “doers of good,” as the most honorable they could think of (Luke xxii. 25); and it was a common thing in heathen lands, when those that had done a great deal of good in their life-time were dead, for the people, among whom they dwelt, to reckon them as gods, and build temples to their honor and for their worship. So far as God makes men the instruments of doing good to others, he makes them like the heavenly bodies, the sun and moon and stars, that bless the world by shedding down their light: he makes them like the angels, who are ministering spirits to others for their good: yea, he makes them like himself, the great fountain of all good, who is forever pouring down his blessings on mankind.

Second, Thus freely to do good to others, is but to do to them as we would have them do to us. If others have a hearty good-will to us, and show us a great deal of kindness, and are ready to help us when we stand in need, and for that end are free to do, or give, or suffer for us, and to bear our burdens, and feel for us in our calamities, and are warm-hearted and liberal in all this, we most highly approve of their spirit and conduct. And we not only approve, but we highly commend, and perhaps make occasions to speak well of such persons; never thinking, however, that they exceed their duty, but that they act as it becomes them to do. Let us, then, remember, that if this is so noble and so much to be commended in others when we are its objects, then we ought to do the same to them, and to all about us. What we thus approve, we should exemplify in our own conduct.

Third, Let us consider how kind God and Christ have been to us, and how much good we have received from them. Their kindness in things pertaining to this world has been very great. The divine mercies are new to us every morning, and fresh every evening: they are as ceaseless as our being. And still greater good things has God bestowed for our spiritual and eternal good. He has given us what is of more value than all the kingdoms of the earth. He has given his only-begotten and well-beloved son, the greatest gift he could bestow. And Christ has not only done, but he has suffered great things, and given himself to die for us; and all freely, and without grudging, or hope of reward. “Though he was rich,” with all the riches of the universe, “yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians viii. 9). And what great things hath God done for those of us who are converted, and have been brought home to Christ; delivering us from sin, justifying and sanctifying us, making us kings and priests unto God, and giving us a title “to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Peter i. 4), And all this, when we were not good, but evil, and unthankful, and in ourselves deserving only of wrath. And,

Fourth, Let us consider what great rewards are promised to those that freely do good to others. God hath promised that to “the merciful he will show himself merciful” (Psalm xviii. 25); and there is scarcely any duty spoken of throughout the Bible, that has so many promises of reward as this, whether for this world, or the world to come. For this world, as our Saviour declares (Acts xx. 35), “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” He that gives bountifully, is more blessed in the bountiful gifts that he parts with, than he that receives the bounty. What is bestowed in doing good to others, is not lost, as if it were thrown into the ocean. It is rather, as Solomon tells us (Ecclesiastes xi. 1), like the seed which the Orientals plant by scattering it on the waters when the floods are up, and which sinking to the bottom, there takes root, and springing

up, is found again in the abundant harvest after many days. What is so given, is loaned to the Lord (Proverbs xix. 17); and what we have thus lent him, he will pay us again. And he will not only repay it, but will greatly increase its amount; for if we give, it is declared (Luke vi. 38), that it shall be “given to us again, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.” Indeed this is the very way to increase; for it is said (Proverbs xi. 24), “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty;” and again (Isaiah xxxii. 8), “The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand.” What even unregenerate men do give in this way, God often seems to reward with great temporal blessings. His own declaration is (Proverbs xxviii. 27) that “he that giveth to the poor shall not lack,” and the promise is not restricted to the saints: and our observation of providence shows, that men's gifts to the poor are almost as surely prospered of God to themselves, as the seed which they sow in the field. It is easy for God to make up, and more than make up to us all that we thus give for the good of others. It is of this very kind of giving, that the Apostle tells the Corinthians (2 Corinthians ix. 6-8) that “he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully;” adding that “God loveth the cheerful giver,” and that he “is able to make all grace abound toward them;” that is, to make all their gifts abound to themselves. Many persons do but little consider how much their prosperity depends on Providence. And yet, even for this world, “it is the blessing of God that that maketh rich” (Proverbs x. 22); and of him that considereth the poor, it is written (Psalm xli. 1) that “the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” And if we give in the way and with the spirit of Christian charity, we shall thus lay up treasure in heaven, and receive at last the rewards of eternity. This is that laying up of treasures that fail not, of which Christ speaks (Luke xii. 33), and as to which he declares (Luke xiv. 13, 14, 15), that though the poor whom we benefit cannot recompense us, “we shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” This, then, is the best way of laying up for time or for eternity. It is the best way of laying up for ourselves, and the best way of laying up for our posterity; for of the good man, who showeth favor and lendeth, it is written (Psalm cxii.) that “his horn shall be exalted with honor,” and that “his seed shall be mighty upon earth, and wealth and riches shall be in his house, and his righteousness endureth forever.” And when Christ shall come to judgment, and all people shall be gathered before him, then to those who were kind and benevolent, in the true spirit of Christian love, to the suffering and the poor, he shall say (Matthew xxv. 34, 35, 36, 40), “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.” “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!”