

CHARITY
AND ITS FRUITS;

OR,

CHRISTIAN LOVE AS MANIFESTED IN THE
HEART AND LIFE.

BY

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LECTURE VI.

CHARITY INCONSISTENT WITH AN ENVIOUS SPIRIT.

“Charity envieth not.”—1 COR. xiii. 4.

HAVING already seen the nature and tendency of Christian charity, or divine love, with respect to the evil received from others, that it “suffers long,” and also with respect to doing good to others, that it “is kind,” we now come to the feelings and conduct to which the same charity will lead us in respect to the good possessed by others, and that possessed by ourselves. And in reference to the good possessed by others, the Apostle declares it to be the nature and tendency of charity, or true Christian love, not to envy them the possession of any good whatever which is theirs. “Charity envieth not.” The teaching of these words plainly is,

THAT CHARITY OR A TRULY CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IS THE VERY OPPOSITE OF AN ENVIOUS SPIRITS.

In dwelling on this thought, I would show, 1, What is the nature of an envious spirit; 2, Wherein a Christian spirit is the opposite of such a spirit; 3, The reason and evidence of the doctrine. And,

I. The nature of envy.—Envy may be defined to be a spirit of dissatisfaction with and opposition to the prosperity and happiness of others as compared with our own. The thing that the envious person is opposed to and dislikes, is, the comparative superiority of the state of honor, or prosperity or happiness, that another may enjoy, over that which he possesses. And this spirit is especially called envy, when we dislike and are opposed to another’s honor or prosperity, because, in general, it is greater than our own, or because, in particular, they have some honor or enjoyment that we have not. It is a disposition natural in men, that they love to be uppermost; and this disposition is directly crossed, when they see others above them. And it is from this spirit, that men dislike and are opposed to the prosperity of others, because they think it makes those who possess it, superior, in some respect, to themselves. And from this same disposition, a person may dislike another’s being equal to himself in honor or happiness, or in having the same sources of enjoyments that he has; for as men very commonly are, they cannot bear a rival, much, if any better than a superior, for they love to be singular and alone in their eminence and advancement. Such a spirit is called envy in the Scriptures. Thus Moses speaks of Joshua’s envying for his sake when Eldad and Medad were admitted to the same privilege with himself in having the spirit of prophecy given them, saying (Numbers xi. 29), “Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the

Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them." And Joseph's brethren, we are told (Genesis xxvii. 11), envied him when they had heard his dream, which implied that his parents and brethren were yet to bow down before him, and that he was to have power over them. From such a spirit, persons are not only unwilling that others should be above them or equal to them, but that they should be near them; for the desire to be distinguished in prosperity and honor, is the more gratified just in proportion as they are elevated and others are below them, so that their comparative eminence may be marked and visible to all. And this disposition may be exercised, either in reference to the prosperity that others may obtain and of which they are capable, or in reference to that which they actually have obtained. In the latter form, which is the most common, the feeling of envy will be manifest in two respects, first, in respect to their prosperity, and next in respect to themselves. And,

1. It will be manifest in an uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the prosperity of others. Instead of rejoicing in the prosperity of others, the envious man will be troubled with it. It will be a grievance to his spirit to see them rise so high, and come to such honors and advancement. It is no comfortable feeling to him to hear of their having obtained such and such advantages and honors and preferments, but on the contrary very uncomfortable. He is very much of the spirit of Haman, who in view of all "the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him," still could say (Esther v. 13), "yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate." From such a spirit, the envious person stands ready to rejoice at anything that happens to diminish the honor and comfort of others. He is glad to see them brought down, and will even study how to lower their estate, as Haman did—how to humble and bring down Mordecai. And often, like Haman, he will show his uneasiness, not only by planning and scheming, but by actual endeavors of one kind or another, to bring them down; and the very first opportunity of pulling them down that offers, he will gladly embrace. And it is from this disposition, that the sight even of others' prosperity, often sets the envious on talking against them and speaking evil of them, even when perhaps they do not know them. Envyng them the prominence they have obtained, they hope, by speaking evil of them, in some measure to diminish their honors, and lower them in the esteem of men. This suggests, again,

2. That the opposition of the envious to the prosperity of others will be manifest in a dislike of their persons for it. Seeing how others prosper, and what honors they attain, the envious dislike, and even hate them, on account of their honor and prosperity. They entertain and cherish an evil spirit toward them, for no other reason but that they are prospered. They are embittered against them in spirit, only because they are eminent in name or fortune. Thus Haman, it is said (Esther v. 9), "Was full of indignation against Mordecai," because he saw him "in the king's gate," and because "he stood not up, nor

moved for him;" and Joseph's brethren (Genesis xxxvii. 4, 5) "hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him," because his father loved him; and when he had dreamed a dream implying their inferiority, "they hated him yet the more." And so the envious generally resent the prosperity of others and their coming to honor, as if in it they were guilty of some injury to themselves. Sometimes there is a settled hatred toward others upon this account, leading as in the case of Joseph's brethren (Genesis xxxvii. 19--28), to acts of the greatest cruelty and wickedness. But this may suffice for the nature of this envy; and I proceed to show,

II. Wherein a Christian spirit is the opposite of such a spirit of envy. And,

1. A Christian spirit disallows of the exercise and expressions of such a spirit. He that is influenced in the course of his life and actions by Christian principles, though he may have envy as well as other corrupt feelings in his heart, yet abhors its spirit as unbecoming in himself as a Christian, and contrary to the nature and will and spirit of God. He sees it to be a most odious and hateful spirit, and he sees its odiousness not only in others, but also and equally in himself. And therefore whenever he perceives its emotions rising within him on any occasion, or toward any person, so far as he is influenced by a Christian spirit he will be alarmed at it, and will fight against, and will not allow its exercise for a moment. He will not suffer it to break forth and show itself in words or actions; and he will be grieved at whatever he sees of its movements in his heart, and will crucify within him the hateful disposition, and do all in his power to go contrary to it in his outward actions.

2. A Christian spirit not only opposes the exercise and outward expressions of an envious spirit, but it tends to mortify its principle and disposition in the heart. So far as a Christian spirit prevails, it not only checks the outward acting's of envy, but it tends to mortify and subdue the very principle itself in the heart; so that just in proportion to the power of the former, the individual will cease to feel any inclination to be grieved at the prosperity of others, and still more will cease to dislike them, or entertain any ill-will toward them on account of it. A Christian spirit disposes us to feel contentment with our own condition, and with the state which God has given us among men, and to a quietness and satisfaction of spirit with regard to the allotments and distributions of stations and possessions which God in his wise and kind providence has made to ourselves and others. Whether our rank be as high as that of the angels, or as low as that of the beggar at the rich man's gate (Luke xvi. 20), we shall equally be satisfied with it as the post in which God hath placed us, and shall equally respect ourselves if we are endeavoring faithfully to serve him in it. Like the Apostle (Philippians iv. 11), we shall learn, if we do but have a Christian spirit, "in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content." But,

3. A Christian spirit not only disallows the exercise and expression of envy, and tends to mortify its principle and disposition in the heart, but it disposes us to rejoice in the prosperity of others. It disposes us to a cheerful and habitual compliance with that rule given by the Apostle (Romans xii. 10) that we "re-

joyce with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep;" i.e. that we sympathize with their estate and condition, in the spirit we should feel if it were our own. Such a spirit of benevolence and good-will, will cast out the evil spirit of envy, and enable us to find happiness in seeing our neighbor prospered.

Now proceed as proposed, to show,

III. The reason and evidence of the doctrine stated; or to show that it is so, and why it is so, that a Christian spirit is thus the opposite of a spirit of envy. And this will appear if we consider three things: first, how much a spirit and practice contrary to an envious spirit, is insisted on in the precepts that Christ has given; second, how much the history and doctrines of the gospel hold forth to enforce these precepts; and, third, how much a spirit of Christian love will dispose us to yield to the authority of these precepts, and the influence of the motives enforcing them. And,

1. A spirit and practice entirely contrary to an envious spirit, is much insisted on in the precepts of Christ. The New Testament is full of precepts of good-will to others, and of precepts enjoining the principles of meekness, humility, and beneficence, all of which are opposed to a spirit of envy; and in addition to these, we have many particular warnings against envy itself. The Apostle exhorts (Romans xiii. 13) that we "walk honestly, as in the day, not in strife and envying;" and again (1 Corinthians iii. 3), he blames the Corinthians as being yet carnal, because there was envying among them; and still again (2 Corinthians xii. 20), he mentions his fears concerning them, lest he should find among them envyings, and that too coupled, as envyings too often are, with "wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults;" and again (Galatians v. 21), envy is ranked among the abominable works of the flesh, such as "murders, drunkenness, revellings, &c.," and again (1 Timothy vi. 4), it is condemned as implying great wickedness; and again (Titus iii. 3), it is mentioned as one of the hateful sins that Christians had lived in before their conversion, but which they are now redeemed from, and therefore should confess and forsake. And in the same spirit, the Apostle James (iii. 14-16), speaks of envy as exceedingly contrary to Christianity, and as connected with every evil work, being earthly, sensual, devilish; and he warns us against it (v. 9) saying, "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold the judge standeth at the door;" and to quote but one more instance, the Apostle Peter (1 Peter ii. 1 and 2) warns us against all envies, as connected with various other evils, and as preventing our growth in divine things. Thus we see that the New Testament is full of precepts which Christ has left us, which enjoin the very opposite of the spirit of envy. And these precepts,

2. Are strongly enforced by the doctrines and history of the gospel. If we consider the Christian scheme of doctrine, we shall find that it tends strongly to enforce the precepts we have considered; for all of it, from beginning to end, strongly tends to the contrary of an envious spirit. In all its bearings and teachings, the Christian form of doctrine militates against a spirit of envy. The

things it teaches as to God are exceeding contrary to it; for there we are told how far God was from begrudging us the most exceeding honor and blessedness, and how he has withheld nothing as too much to be done for us, or as too great or good to be given us. He has not begrudged us his only-begotten and well-beloved son, who was dearer to him than everything beside; nor hath he begrudged us the highest honor and blessedness in and through him. The doctrines of the gospel also teach us, how far Christ was from begrudging us anything that he could do for, or give us. He did not begrudge us a life spent in labor and suffering, or his own precious blood which he shed for us on the cross; nor will he begrudge us a throne of glory with him in the heavens, where we shall live and reign with him forever. The Christian scheme of doctrine teaches us how Christ came into the world to deliver us from the power of Satan's envy toward us; for the devil, with miserable baseness, envied mankind the happiness that they at first had, and could not bear to see them in their happy state in Eden, and therefore exerted himself to the utmost for their ruin, which he accomplished. And the gospel also teaches, how Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and deliver us from that misery into which his envy hath brought us, and to purify our natures; from every trace of the same spirit, that we may be fitted for heaven.

And if in addition to the doctrine of the gospel, we consider its history, we shall find that it also tends greatly to enforce those precepts that forbid envy. And particularly is this true of the history of the life of Christ, and the example he has set us. How far was he from a spirit of envy! How contented in the low and afflictive circumstances in which he voluntarily placed himself for our sakes! And how far was he from envying those that were of worldly wealth and honor, or coveting their condition! He rather chose to continue in his own low estate; and when the multitude, filled with admiration of his teaching and his miracles, on one occasion stood ready to make him a king, he refused the high honor they intended to put upon him, and withdrew himself to be out of their way (John vi. 15), and went away into a mountain alone. And when John the Baptist was so greatly honored by the people as a distinguished prophet, and all Judea and Jerusalem went out to hear him and to be baptized of him, Christ envied him not, but himself went out to be baptized of him in Jordan, though he was John's Lord and master; and John, as he himself testified, had need to be baptized of him. And so far was he from begrudging to his disciples any honors or privileges as too great for them, that he told and promised them (John xiv. 12), that after his death and ascension, they should do greater works than he had done while he remained with them. And, as we find in the Acts of the Apostles, all that he foretold, in a little while came true. And,

3. The true spirit of Christian love will dispose us to yield to the authority of these precepts, and to the influence of the motives enforcing them. And the spirit of love will dispose us to this, directly, or by its immediate tendency; and indirectly, as it teaches and leads us to humility.

First, Christian love disposes us to hearken to the precepts that forbid envy, and to the gospel motives against it, by its own immediate tendency. The nature of charity or Christian love to men is directly contrary to envy; for love does not grudge, but rejoices at the good of those who are loved. And surely love to our neighbor does not dispose us to hate him for his prosperity, or be unhappy at his good. And love to God, also, has a direct tendency to influence us to obey his commands. The natural, genuine, uniform fruit of love to God, is, obedience; and therefore it will tend to obedience to those commands wherein he forbids envy, as much as others, yea, to them more especially, because love delights to obey no commands so much as those that require love. And so love to God will dispose us to follow his example, in that he has not begrudged us our manifold blessings, but has rejoiced in our enjoyment; and it will dispose us to imitate the example of Christ in not begrudging his life for our sakes, and to imitate the example he set us in the whole course of his life on earth. And,

Second, A spirit of Christian love disposes to the same, also, indirectly, by inclining us to humility. It is pride that is the great root and source of envy. It is because of the pride of men's hearts, that they have such a burning desire to be distinguished, and to be superior to all others in honor and prosperity, and which makes them so uneasy and dissatisfied in seeing others above them. But a spirit of love tends to mortify pride, and to work humility in the heart. Love to God tends to this, as it implies a sense of God's infinite excellence, and therefore tends to a sense of our comparative nothingness and unworthiness. And love to men tends to an humble behavior among men, as it disposes us to acknowledge the excellencies of others, and that the honors bestowed on them are their due, and to esteem them better than ourselves, and thus more deserving of distinction than we are. But I will not now dwell more particularly on this point, as in a future lecture I shall have occasion more fully to show how Christian love tends to humility. Passing then, in conclusion, to the application of the subject, I remark,

It should lead us to examine ourselves, whether we are in any degree under the influence of an envious Spirit. Let us examine ourselves as to time past and look over our past behavior among men. Many of us have long been members of human society, having lived by others, and having had to do with them in very many ways, and being connected with them on many occasions both in public and private affairs. And we have seen others in prosperity, and it may be prospering in their affairs more than ourselves, They have had more of the world, and have been possessed of greater riches, and have lived in greater ease, and in much more honorable circumstances than we have enjoyed. And perhaps some that heretofore we used to look upon as our equals, or even as inferiors, we may have seen growing in wealth, or advancing in honor and prosperity while we have been left behind, until now they have reached a station far superior to our own. It may be that we have seen such changes, and been called to bear such trials through a great part of the course of our life; and

certainly we have often seen others abounding in all that the world esteems of value, while we have been comparatively destitute of these things. And now let us inquire how these things have affected us, and how have our hearts stood, and what has been our behavior in these circumstances? Has there not been a great deal of uneasiness, dissatisfaction, and uncomfortable feeling, and of a desire to see those who were prosperous brought down? Have we not been glad to hear of anything to their disadvantage; and in the forebodings we have expressed about them, have we not in reality spoken out our wishes; and in word or deed, have we not been ready to do that which might in some respect lessen their prosperity or honor? Have we ever cherished a bitter or unkind spirit toward another because of his prosperity, or been ready on account of it to look upon him with an evil eye, or to oppose him in public affairs, or from an envious spirit to act with the party that might be against him? As we look back on the past, do we not see that in these and many other kindred things we have often exercised and allowed an envious spirit, and many times have not our hearts burned with it toward others?

And turning from the past to the present, what spirit do you now find as you search your heart? Do you carry any old grudge in your heart against this or that man that you see sitting with you from Sabbath to Sabbath in the house of God, and from time to time sitting with you at the Lord's table? Is not the prosperity of one and another, an eye-sore to you; and does it not make your life uncomfortable that they are higher than you; and would it not be truly a comfort to you to see them brought down, so that their losses and depression would be a source of inward joy and gladness to your heart? And does not this same spirit lead you often to think evil, or to speak with contempt, or unkindness, or severity of such to those about you? And let those who are above others in prosperity, inquire, whether they do not allow and exercise a spirit of opposition to the comparative happiness of those below them? Is there not a disposition in you to pride yourself on being above them, and a desire that they should not rise higher, lest they come to be equal or superior to you: and from this are you not willing to see them down, and even to help them down to the utmost, lest at some time they may get above you? And does not all this show, that you are very much under the influence of an envious spirit? But it may be that in all this you may justify yourself, not giving it the name of envy, but some other name, and having various excuses for your envious spirit by which you account yourself justified in its exercise. Some are ready to say of others that they are not worthy of the honor and prosperity they have; that they have not half the fitness or worthiness of the honor and advancement they have, as many others of their neighbors who are below them. And where, I ask, is the man in the world who envies another for his honor or prosperity, but is ready to think or say, that that other is not worthy of his prosperity and honors? Did Joseph's brethren esteem him worthy of the peculiar love of his father? Did Haman think Mordecai worthy of the honor the king conferred on him? Or did the Jews think the Gentiles worthy of the privileges extended to them

under the gospel, when they were so filled with envy on this account, as is related in the Acts of the Apostles, xiii. 45, and xvii., 5? It is generally the case, that when others are promoted to honor, or in any respect come to remarkable prosperity, some are always ready to improve the occasion to tell of their faults, and set forth their unworthiness, and rake up all possible evil about them. Whereas it is not so much that they have faults, for these would often be unnoticed if they were in obscurity, as it is that they are prospered, and those who talk about their faults are envious of their prosperity, and therefore speak against them. And I would desire such persons as think that they are to be justified in their opposition to others because they are not worthy of their prosperity, diligently to inquire which it is that pains and troubles them most, their neighbor's faults, or his prosperity, If it be their faults, then you would be grieved on account of them whether the persons were prospered or not; and if truly grieved with their faults, then you would be very slow to speak of them except to themselves, and then in the true spirit of Christian compassion and friendship. But you may say, they make a hard use of their prosperity and honor; that they are lifted up by it, and cannot bear, or do not know how to manage it; that they are insufferable, and scornful, and there is no doing anything with them in their prosperity; and it is best they should be brought down; that this will tend to humble them, and that the best thing for their own good, is, to bring them down to the place where they belong, and, which is fittest for them. But here let me urge you strictly to inquire whether you do in truth lament the injury their prosperity does them, and whether you mourn it for their sakes, and because you love them? Do your lamentations spring from pity, or from envy? If you dislike their prosperity because it is not best for them, but does them hurt, then you will grieve for their calamity, and not at their prosperity. You will sincerely love them; and out of this love, will be heartily sorry for their calamity, and feel a true compassion of heart for them that the disadvantages of their prosperous state are so much greater than its advantages. But is this in truth your real feeling? Do not deceive yourself. Is it their calamity that you are grieved at, or is it merely that they are prospered? Is it that you are grieved for them, that their prosperity injures them, or for yourself, that their prosperity is not yours? And here also let every one inquire, whether they do not sometimes envy others for their spiritual prosperity? You remember what was the spirit of Cain toward Abel, of the seed of the serpent toward the seed of the woman, of Ishmael toward Isaac, of the Jews toward Christ, of the elder brother toward the prodigal. Beware that you cherish not their spirit; but rather rejoice in the good estate of others, as much as if it were your own.

2. The subject also exhorts us to disallow and put away everything approaching to an envious spirit. So contrary is the spirit of envy to a Christian spirit, so evil in itself, and so injurious to others, that it should be disallowed, and put away by all, and especially by those who profess to be Christians. Great numbers cherish the hope that this is their character, and that they have been endued with a new spirit, even the spirit of Christ. Let it then be evident

to all that such is your spirit by the exercise of that charity that envieth not. In the language of the Apostle James iii. 13, 14, 15, 16, "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil 'work?'" The spirit of envy is the very contrary of the spirit of heaven, where all rejoice in the happiness of others; and it is the very spirit of hell itself, which is a most hateful spirit, and one that feeds itself on the ruin of the prosperity and happiness of others, on which account some have compared envious persons to caterpillars, which delight most in devouring the most flourishing trees and plants. And as an envious disposition is most hateful in itself, so it is most uncomfortable and uneasy to its possessor. As it is the disposition of the devil, and partakes of his likeness, so it is the disposition of hell, and partakes of its misery. In the strong language of Solomon (Proverbs xiv. 30): "A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy is the rottenness of the bones." It is like a powerful eating cancer, preying on the vitals, offensive and full of corruption. And it is the most foolish kind of self-injury; for the envious make themselves trouble most needlessly, being uncomfortable only because of others' prosperity, when that prosperity does not injure themselves, or diminish their enjoyments and blessings. But they are not willing to enjoy what they have, because others are enjoying also. Let, then, the consideration of the foolishness, the baseness, the infamy of so wicked a spirit, cause us to abhor it, and to shun its excuses, and earnestly to seek the spirit of Christian love, that excellent spirit of divine charity which will lead us always to rejoice in the welfare of others, and which will fill our own hearts with happiness. This love "is of God" (1 John iv. 7); and he that dwelleth in it, "dwelleth in God, and God in him," 1 John iv. 16.