

EXPOSITORY TRACTS

BY

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PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY,

BEING

THOUGHTS ON LUKE VI. 27-38.

27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also.

30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.

31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

THE teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these verses, is confined to one great subject. That subject is Christian love and charity. Charity, which is the grand characteristic of the Gospel,—charity, which is the bond of perfectness,—charity, without which a man is nothing in God's sight,—charity is here fully expounded and strongly enforced. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ if its Master's precepts in this passage had been more carefully studied and more diligently observed!

In the first place, our Lord explains *the nature and extent of Christian charity*. The disciples might ask, Whom are we to love? He bids them "love

their enemies, do good to them that hate them, bless them that curse them, and pray for them that spitefully use them.” Their love was to be like His own towards sinners: unselfish, disinterested, and uninfluenced by any hope of return. What was to be the manner of this love? the disciples might ask. It was to be self-sacrificing and self-denying: “Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other.”—“Him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.” They were to give up much, and endure much, for the sake of showing kindness and avoiding strife. They were to forego even their rights, and submit to wrong, rather than awaken any angry passions and create quarrels. In this they were to be like their Master, long-suffering, meek, and lowly of heart.

In the second place, our Lord lays down *a golden principle for the settlement of doubtful cases*. He knew well that there will always be occasion when the line of duty towards our neighbour is not clearly defined. He knew how much self-interest and private feelings will sometimes dim our perceptions of right and wrong. He supplies us with a precept for our guidance in all such cases, of infinite wisdom; a precept which even infidels have been compelled to admire:— “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” To do to others as they do to us, and return evil for evil, is the standard of the heathen. To behave to others as we should like others to behave to us, whatever their actual behaviour may be,—this should be the mark at which the Christian should aim. This is to walk in the steps of our blessed Saviour. If He had dealt with the world as the world dealt with Him, we should all have been ruined for ever in hell.

In the third place, our Lord points out to His disciples *the necessity of their having a higher standard of duty to their neighbour than the children of this world*. He reminds them that to love those who love them, and do good to those who do good to them, and lend to those of whom they hope to receive, is to act no better than “the sinner” who knows nothing of the Gospel. The Christian must be altogether another style of man. His feelings of love, and his deeds of kindness, must be like his Master’s,—free and gratuitous. He must let men see that he loves others from higher principles than the ungodly do, and that his charity is not confined to those from whom he hopes to get something in return. Anybody can show kindness and charity, when he hopes to gain something by it. But such charity should never content a Christian. The man who is content with it, ought to remember that his practice does not rise an inch above the level of an old Roman or Greek idolater.

In the fourth place, our Lord shows His disciples *that in discharging their duty to their neighbours they should look to the example of God*. If they called themselves “children of the Highest,” they should consider that their Father is “kind to the unthankful and the evil,” and they should learn

from Him to be merciful, even as He is merciful. The extent of God's unacknowledged mercies to man can never be reckoned up. Every year He pours benefits on millions who do not honour the hand from which they come, or thank the Giver of them. Yet every year these benefits are continued. "Seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, never cease." His mercy endureth for ever. His loving-kindness is unwearied. His compassions fail not. So ought it to be with all who profess themselves to be His children. Thanklessness and ingratitude should not make them slack their hands from works of love and mercy. Like their Father in heaven, they should never be tired of doing good.

In the last place, our Lord assures His disciples that *the practice of the high standard of charity He recommends shall bring its own reward*. "Judge not," He says, "and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you." And He concludes with the broad assertion, "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." The general meaning of these words appears to be that no man shall ever be a loser, in the long run, by deeds of self-denying charity and patient long-suffering love. At times he may seem to get nothing by his conduct. He may appear to reap nothing but ridicule, contempt, and injury. His kindness may sometimes tempt men to impose on him. His patience and forbearance may be abused. But at the last he will always be found a gainer,—often, very often, a gainer in this life; certainly, most certainly, a gainer in the life to come. Such is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ about charity. Few of His sayings are so deeply heart-searching as those we have now been considering. Few passages in the Bible are so truly humbling as these eleven verses.

How little of the style of charity which our Lord recommends is to be seen, either in the world or in the Church! How common is an angry, passionate spirit, a morbid sensitiveness about what is called *honour*, and a readiness to quarrel on the least occasion! How seldom we see men and women who love their enemies, and do good hoping for nothing again, and bless those that curse them, and are kind to the unthankful and evil! Truly we are reminded hereof our Lord's words, "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. vii. 14.)

How happy the world would be if Christ's precepts were strictly obeyed! The chief causes of half the sorrows of mankind are selfishness, strife, unkindness, and want of charity. Never was there a greater mistake than to suppose that vital Christianity interferes with human happiness. It is not having too much religion, but too little, that makes people gloomy, wretched, and miserable. Wherever Christ is best known and obeyed, there will always be found most real joy and peace.

Would we know anything by experience of this blessed grace of charity? Then let us seek to be joined to Christ by faith, and to be taught and sanctified by His Spirit. We do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. We cannot have flowers without roots, or fruit without trees. We cannot have the fruit of the Spirit without vital union with Christ, and a new creation within. Such as are not born again can never really love in the manner that Christ enjoins.

LOOK thou with pity on a brother's fall,
But dwell not with stern anger on his fault;
The grace of God alone holds thee, holds all;—
Were that withdrawn, thou too wouldst swerve and halt.

Rebuke the sin, but yet in love rebuke;
Feel as one member in another's pain;
Win back the soul that His fair path forsook,
And mighty and eternal is the gain.

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