

The Spirit of Love the Opposite of a Selfish Spirit

by

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"Charity . . . seeks not her own" -- 1 Corinthians 13:5

Having shown the nature of charity in respect to the good of others, in the two particulars, that it is kind to them, and envies not their enjoyments and blessings; and also in respect to our own good, that it is not proud, either in spirit or behavior — I pass to the next point presented by the apostle, viz. that charity "*seeketh not her own.*" The doctrine of these words plainly is,

THAT THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY, OR CHRISTIAN LOVE, IS THE OPPOSITE OF A SELFISH SPIRIT.

The ruin that the fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in his losing the nobler and more benevolent principles of his nature, and falling wholly under the power and government of self-love. Before, and as God created him, he was exalted, and noble, and generous; but now he is debased, and ignoble, and selfish. Immediately upon the fall, the mind of man shrank from its primitive greatness and expandedness, to an exceeding smallness and contractedness; and as in other respects, so especially in this. Before, his soul was under the government of that noble principle of divine love, whereby it was enlarged to the comprehension of all his fellow creatures and their welfare. And not only so, but it was not confined within such narrow limits as the bounds of the creation, but went forth in the exercise of holy love to the Creator, and abroad upon the infinite ocean of good, and was, as it were, swallowed up by it, and became one with it. But so soon as he had transgressed against God, these noble principles were immediately lost, and all this excellent enlargedness of man's soul was gone; and thenceforward he himself shrank, as it were, into a little space, circumscribed and closely shut up within itself to the exclusion of all things else. Sin, like some powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness; and God was forsaken, and fellow creatures forsaken, and man retired within himself, and became totally governed by narrow and selfish principles and feelings. Self-love became absolute master of his soul, and the more noble and spiritual principles of his being took wings and flew away. But God, in mercy to miserable man, entered on the work of redemption, and, by the glorious gospel of his Son, began the work of bringing the soul of man out of its confinement and contractedness, and back again to those noble and divine principles by which it was animated and governed at first. And it is through the cross of Christ that he is doing this; for our union with Christ gives us participation in his nature. And so Christianity restores an excellent enlargement, and

extensiveness, and liberality to the soul, and again possesses it with that divine love or charity that we read of in the text, whereby it again embraces its fellow creatures, and is devoted to and swallowed up in the Creator. And thus charity, which is the sum of the Christian spirit, so partakes of the glorious fullness of the divine nature, that she “seeketh not her own,” or is *contrary to selfish spirit*. In dwelling on this thought, I would, first, show the nature of that selfishness of which charity is the opposite; then how charity is opposed to it; and then some of the evidence in support of the doctrine stated.

I. *I would show the nature of that selfishness of which charity is the opposite.* — And here I would observe,

1. *Negatively, that charity, or the spirit of Christian love, is not contrary to all self-love.* — It is not a thing contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself, or, which is the same thing, should love his own happiness. If Christianity did indeed tend to destroy a man’s love to himself, and to his own happiness, it would therein tend to destroy the very spirit of humanity; but the very announcement of the gospel, as a system of peace on earth and goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14), shows that it is not only not destructive of humanity, but in the highest degree promotive of its spirit. That a man should love his own happiness, is as necessary to his nature as the faculty of the will is; and it is impossible that such a love should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being. The saints love their own happiness. Yea, those that are perfect in happiness, the saints and angels in heaven, love their own happiness; otherwise that happiness which God hath given them would be no happiness to them; for that which anyone does not love he cannot enjoy any happiness in.

That to love ourselves is not unlawful, is evident also from the fact, that the law of God makes self-love a rule and measure by which our love to others should be regulated. Thus Christ commands (Mat. 19:19), “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” which certainly supposes that we may, and must, love ourselves. It is not said *more* than thyself, but *as* thyself. But we are commanded to love our neighbor next to God; and therefore we are to love ourselves with a love next to that which we should exercise toward God himself. And the same appears also from the fact, that the Scriptures, from one end of the Bible to the other, are full of motives that are set forth for the very purpose of working on the principle of self-love. Such are all the promises and threatenings of the Word of God, its calls and invitations, its counsels to seek our own good, and its warnings to beware of misery. These things can have no influence on us in any other way than as they tend to work upon our hopes or fears. For to what purpose would it be to make any promise of happiness, or hold forth any threatening of misery, to him that has no love for the former or dread of the latter? Or what reason can there be in counseling him to seek the one, or warning him to avoid the other? Thus it is plain, negatively, that charity, or the spirit of Christian love, is not contrary to *all* self-love. But I remark still further,

2. *Affirmatively, that the selfishness which charity, or a Christian spirit, is contrary to, is only an inordinate self-love.* — Here, however, the question arises, In what does this inordinateness consist? This is a point that needs to be well stated and clearly settled; for the refutation of many

scruples and doubts that persons often have, depends upon it. And therefore I answer,

First, that the inordinateness of self-love does not consist in our love of our own happiness being, absolutely considered, too great in degree. — I do not suppose it can be said of any, that their love to their own happiness, if we consider that love absolutely and not comparatively, *can* be in too high a degree, or that it is a thing that is liable either to increase or diminution. For I apprehend that self-love, in this sense, is not a result of the fall, but is necessary, and what belongs to the nature of all intelligent beings, and that God has made it alike in all; and that saints, and sinners, and all alike, love happiness, and have the same unalterable and instinctive inclination to desire and seek it. The change that takes place in a man, when he is converted and sanctified, is not that his love for happiness is diminished, but only that it is regulated with respect to its exercises and influence, and the courses and objects it leads to. Who will say that the happy souls in heaven do not love happiness as truly as the miserable spirits in hell? If their *love* of happiness is diminished by their being made holy, then that will diminish their *happiness* itself; for the less anyone loves happiness, the less he relishes it, and, consequently, is the less happy.

When God brings a soul out of a miserable state and condition into a happy state, by conversion, he gives him happiness that before he had not, but he does not at the same time take away any of his love of happiness. And so, when a saint increases in grace, he is made still more happy than he was before; but his love of happiness, and his relish of it, do not grow less as his happiness itself increases, for that would be to increase his happiness one way, and to diminish it another. But in every case in which God makes a miserable soul happy, or a happy soul still more happy, he continues the same love of happiness that existed before. And so, doubtless, the saints ought to have as much of a principle of love to their own happiness, or love to themselves, which is the same thing, as the wicked have. So that, if we consider men's love of themselves or of their own happiness absolutely, it is plain that the inordinateness of self-love does not consist in its being in too great a degree, because it is alike in all. But I remark,

Secondly, that the inordinateness of self-love, wherein a corrupt selfishness does consist, lies in two things: — in its being too great comparatively; and in placing our happiness in that which is confined to self. In the first place, the degree of self-love may be too great *comparatively*, and so the degree of its influence be inordinate. Though the degree of men's love of their own happiness, taken absolutely, may in all be the same, yet the proportion that their love of self bears to their love for others may not be the same. If we compare a man's love of himself with his love for others, it may be said that he loves himself too much — that is, in proportion too much. And though this may be owing to a defect of love to others, rather than to an excess of love to himself, yet self-love, by this excess in its proportion, itself becomes inordinate in this respect, viz. that it becomes inordinate in its influence and government of the man. For though the principle of self-love, in itself considered, is not at all greater than if there is a due proportion of love to God and to fellow creatures with it, yet, the proportion being greater, its influence and government of the man become greater; and so its influence becomes inordinate by reason of the weakness or absence of other love that should restrain or regulate that influence.

To illustrate this, we may suppose the case of a servant in a family, who was formerly kept in the place of a servant, and whose influence in family affairs was not inordinate while his master's

strength was greater than his; and yet, if afterward the master grows weaker and loses his strength, and the rest of the family lose their former power, though the servant's strength be not at all increased, yet, the proportion of his strength being increased, his influence may become inordinate, and, from being in subjection and a servant, he may become master in that house. And so self-love becomes inordinate. Before the fall, man loved himself, or his own happiness, as much as after the fall; but then, a superior principle of divine love had the throne, and was of such strength, that it wholly regulated and directed self-love. But since the fall, the principle of divine love has lost its strength, or rather is dead; so that self-love, continuing in its former strength, and having no superior principle to regulate it, becomes inordinate in its influence, and governs where it should be subject, and only a servant. Self-love, then, may become inordinate in its influence by being comparatively too great, either by love to God and to fellow creatures being too small, as it is in the saints, who in this world have great remaining corruption, or by its being none at all, as is the case with those who have no divine love in their hearts. Thus the inordinateness of self-love, with respect to the degree of it, is not as it is considered absolutely, but comparatively, or with respect to the degree of its influence. In some respects wicked men do not love themselves enough — not so much as the godly do; for they do not love the way of their own welfare and happiness; and in this sense it is sometimes said of the wicked that they hate themselves, though, in another sense, they love self too much.

It is further true, in the second place, that self-love, or a man's love to his own happiness, may be inordinate, *in placing that happiness in things that are confined to himself*. In this case, the error is not so much in the degree of his love to himself as it is in the channel in which it flows. It is not in the degree in which he loves his own happiness, but in his placing his happiness where he ought not, and in limiting and confining his love. Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good — in that which is the good of others, or in the good to be enjoyed in and by others. A man's love of his own happiness, when it runs in this last channel, is not what is called selfishness, but is the very opposite of it. But there are others who, in their love to their own happiness, place that happiness in good things that are confined or limited to themselves, to the exclusion of others. And this is selfishness. This is the thing most clearly and directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns. And when it is said that charity seeketh not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good — good limited to herself. The expression, “her own,” is a phrase of appropriation, and properly carries in its signification the idea of limitation to self. And so the like phrase in Phil. 2:21, that “all seek their own,” carries the idea of confined and self-appropriated good, or the good that a man has singly and to himself, and in which he has no communion or partnership with another, but which he has so circumscribed and limited to himself as to exclude others. And so the expression is to be understood in 2 Tim. 3:2, “For men shall be lovers of their own selves;” for the phrase is of the most confined signification, limited to self alone, and excluding all others.

A man may love himself as much as one can, and may be, in the exercise of a high degree of love to his own happiness, ceaselessly longing for it, and yet he may so place that happiness, that, in the very act of seeking it, he may be in the high exercise of love to God; as, for example, when the happiness that he longs for, is to enjoy God, or to behold his glory, or to hold communion with

him. Or a man may place his happiness in glorifying God. It may seem to him the greatest happiness that he can conceive of, to give God glory, as he may do; and he may long for this happiness. And in longing for it, he loves that which he looks on as his happiness; for if he did not love what in this case he esteemed his happiness, he would not long for it; and to love his happiness is to love himself. And yet, in the same act, he loves God, because he places his happiness in God; for nothing can more properly be called love to any being or thing, than to place our happiness in it. And so persons may place their happiness considerably in the good of others — their neighbors, for instance — and, desiring the happiness that consists in seeking their good, they may, in seeking it, love themselves and their own happiness. And yet this is not selfishness, because it is not a confined self-love; but the individual's self-love flows out in such a channel as to take in others with himself. The self that he loves is, as it were, enlarged and multiplied, so that, in the very acts in which he loves himself, he loves others also. And this is the Christian spirit, the excellent and noble spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the nature of that divine love, or Christian charity, that is spoken of in the text. And a Christian spirit is contrary to that selfish spirit which consists in the self-love that goes out after such objects as are confined and limited — such as a man's worldly wealth, or the honor that consists in a man's being set up higher in the world than his neighbors, or his own worldly ease and convenience, or his pleasing and gratifying his own bodily appetites and lusts.

Having thus stated what that selfishness is that a Christian spirit is contrary to, I pass, as proposed, to show,

II. *How the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is contrary to such a spirit.* — And this may be shown in these two particulars: that the spirit of charity, or Christian love, leads us to seek not only our own things, but those of others; and that it disposes us, in many cases, to forego or part with our own things for the sake of others. And,

1. *The spirit of charity, or love, leads those who possess it to seek not only their own things, but the things of others.*

First, such a spirit seeks to *please and glorify God*. The things that are well-pleasing to God and Christ, and that tend to the divine glory, are called the things of Christ, in opposition to our own things; as where it is said (Phil. 2:21), “All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.” Christianity requires that we should make God and Christ our main end; and all Christians, so far as they live like Christians, live so that “for them to live is Christ.” Christians are required to live so as to please God, and so as to “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). We should be such servants of Christ as do in all things seek to please our Master, as says the apostle (Eph. 6:6) — “Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” And so we are required in all things (1 Cor. 10:31), whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God. And this, surely, is a spirit which is the opposite of self-seeking.

Secondly, they that have the spirit of charity, or Christian love, have a spirit to seek *the good of their fellow creatures*. Thus the apostle commands (Phil. 2:4), “Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others.” We ought to seek the spiritual good of others; and if we have a Christian spirit, we shall desire and seek their spiritual welfare and happiness, their salvation from hell, and that they may glorify and enjoy God forever. And the same spirit will dispose us to desire and seek the temporal prosperity of others, as says the apostle (1 Cor. 10:24), “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” And we should so seek their pleasure, that therein we can, at the same time, seek their profit, as again it is said by the apostle (1 Cor. 10:33), “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved;” and again Rom. 15:2), “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.”

But more particularly, under this head, I would remark, that a spirit of charity, or Christian love, as exercised toward our fellow creatures, is opposite to a selfish spirit, *as it is a sympathizing and merciful spirit*. It disposes persons to consider not only their own difficulties, but also the burdens and afflictions of others, and the difficulties of their circumstances, and to esteem the case of those who are in straits and necessities as their own. A person of selfish spirit is ready to make much of the afflictions that he himself is under, as if his privations or sufferings were greater than those of anybody else; and if he is not in suffering, he is ready to think he is not called to spare what he has in possession, for the sake of helping others. A selfish man is not apt to discern the wants of others, but rather to overlook them, and can hardly be persuaded to see or feel them. But a man of charitable spirit is apt to see the afflictions of others, and to take notice of their aggravation, and to be filled with concern for them, as he would be for himself if under difficulties. And he is ready, also, to help them, and take delight in supplying their necessities, and relieving their difficulties. He rejoices to obey that injunction of the apostle (Col. 3:12), “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness;” and to cherish the spirit of “wisdom (Jam. 3:17) that is from above,” which is “full of mercy;” and, like the good man spoken of by the Psalmist (Psa. 37:26), to be “merciful,” that is, full of mercy.

And as it is a sympathizing and merciful spirit, so the spirit of charity, as exercised toward our fellow creatures, is the opposite of a selfish, inasmuch *as it is a liberal spirit*. It not only seeks the good of others that are in affliction, but it is ready to communicate to all, and forward to promote their good, as there may be opportunity. To do good, and to communicate, it forgets not (Heb. 13:16); but obeys the exhortation (Gal. 6:10), “As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men.” But on this point I need not enlarge, having already dwelt upon it at length in the lecture on “Charity is kind.”

And as the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is opposed to a selfish spirit, in that it is merciful and liberal so it is in this, also, that it *disposes a person to be public-spirited*. A man of a right spirit is not a man of narrow and private views, but is greatly interested and concerned for the good of the community to which he belongs, and particularly of the city or village in which he resides, and for the true welfare of the society of which he is a member. God commanded the Jews that were carried away captive to Babylon, to seek the good of that city, though it was not their native place, but only the city of their captivity. His injunction was (Jer. 29:7), “Seek the peace of the city

whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it.” And a man of truly Christian spirit will be earnest for the good of his country, and of the place of his residence, and will be disposed to lay himself out for its improvement. A man was recommended to Christ by the Jews (Luke 7:5), as one that loved their nation and had built them a synagogue; and it is spoken of as a very provoking thing to God, with respect to some in Israel (Amos 6:6), that they were “not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” And it is recorded, to the everlasting honor of Esther (Est. 4:16), that she herself fasted and prayed, and stirred up others to fast and pray, for the welfare of her people. And the apostle Paul (Rom. 9:1-3) expresses the deepest concern for the welfare of his countrymen. And those that are possessed of the spirit of Christian charity are of a more enlarged spirit still; for they are concerned, not only for the thrift of the community, but for the welfare of the Church of God, and of all the people of God individually. Of such a spirit was Moses, the man of God, and therefore he earnestly interceded for God’s visible people, and declared himself ready to die that they might be spared (Exo. 32:11, 32). And of such a spirit was Paul, who was so concerned for the welfare of all, both Jews and Gentiles, that he was willing to become as they were (1 Cor. 9:19-23), if possibly he might save some of them.

Especially will the spirit of Christian love dispose those that stand in a public capacity, such as that of ministers, and magistrates, and all public officers, to seek the public good. It will dispose magistrates to act as the fathers of the commonwealth, with that care and concern for the public good which the father of a family has for his household. It will make them watchful against public dangers, and forward to use their powers for the promotion of the public benefit; not being governed by selfish motives in their administration; not seeking only, or mainly, to enrich themselves, or to become great, and to advance themselves on the spoils of others, as wicked rulers very often do; but striving to act for the true welfare of all to whom their authority extends. And the same spirit will dispose ministers not to seek their own, and endeavor to get all they can out of their people to enrich themselves and their families, but to seek the good of the flock over which the great Shepherd has placed them; to feed, and watch over them, and lead them to good pastures, and defend them from wolves and wild beasts that would devour them. And so, whatever the post of honor or influence we may be placed in, we should show that, in it, we are solicitous for the good of the public, so that the world may be better for our living in it, and that, when we are gone, it may be said of us, as it was so nobly said of David (Acts 13:36), that we “served our generation by the will of God.” But,

2. *The spirit of charity, or love, also disposes us, in many cases, to forego and part with our own things, for the sake of others.* — It disposes us to part with our own private temporal interest, and totally and freely to renounce it, for the sake of the honor of God, and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. Such was the spirit of the apostle Paul when he exclaimed (Acts 21:13), “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” And the same spirit will dispose us often to forego or part with our own private interest for the good of our neighbors. It will make us ready on every occasion to aid or help them, leading us willingly to part with a lesser good of our own, for the sake of a greater good to them. And the case may even be such (1 John 3:16), that “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” But I will not dwell longer on this point now, as I shall probably have occasion to speak more to it under some other part of the context. I pass, then, as proposed,

III. *To notice some of the evidence sustaining the doctrine which has been stated.* — And the truth of the doctrine, that the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of a selfish spirit, will appear, if we consider the nature of love in general, the peculiar nature of Christian or divine love, and the nature of Christian love to God and to man in particular. And,

1. *The nature of love in general.* — This, so far as it is really and truly sincere, is of a diffusive nature, and espouses the interests of others. It is so with the love of natural affection, and earthly friendship. So far as there is any real affection or friendship, the parties between which it subsists do not seek only their own particular interests, but do espouse and seek the interests of each other. They seek not only their own things, but the things of their friends. Selfishness is a principle that contracts the heart, and confines it to self, while love enlarges it, and extends it to others. By love, a man's self is so extended and enlarged, that others, so far as they are beloved, do, as it were, become parts of himself so that, wherein their interest is promoted, he believes his own is promoted, and wherein theirs is injured, his also is injured. And still further will this appear, if we consider,

2. *The peculiar nature of Christian or divine love.* — Of charity, or Christian love, it is peculiarly true, that it is above the selfish principle. Though all real love to others seeks the good and espouses the interests of those who are beloved, yet all other love, excepting this, has its foundation, in one sense, in the selfish principle. So it is with the natural affection which parents feel for their children, and with the love which relatives have one to another. If we except the impulses of instinct, self-love is the mainspring of it. It is because men love themselves, that they love those persons and things that are their own, or that they are nearly related to, and which they look upon as belonging to themselves, and which, by the constitution of society, have their interest and honor linked with their own. And so it is in the closest friendships that exist among men. Self-love is the spring whence they proceed. Sometimes natural gratitude, for good turns that have been done them by others, or for benefits received from them, disposes men, through self-love, to a similar respect to those that have shown them kindness, or by whom their self-interest has been promoted. And sometimes natural men are led into a friendship to others, from qualifications that they see or find in them, whence they hope for the promotion of their own temporal good. If they see that others are disposed to be respectful to them, and to give them honor, then love to their own honor will lead them to friendship with such; or if they see them generously disposed to them, then love to their own profit will dispose them to friendship to them on this account; or if they find in them a great agreement with themselves in disposition and manners, self-love may dispose them to amity with them on account of the enjoyment they have in their society, or because this agreement with them in their temper and ways carries with it the approbation of their own temper and ways. And so there are many other ways in which self-love is the source of that love and friendship that often arises between natural men. Most of the love that there is in the world arises from this principle, and therefore it does not go beyond nature. And nature cannot go beyond self-love, but all that men do, is, some way or other, from this root.

But divine love, or the charity that is spoken of in the text, is something above self-love, as it is something supernatural, or above and beyond all that is natural. It is not a branch that springs out of the root of self-love, as natural affection, and worldly friendships, and the love that men may have to one another, as such, do. But as self-love is the offspring of natural principles, so divine love is the offspring of supernatural principles. The latter is something of a higher and nobler kind than any plant that grows naturally in such a soil as the heart of man. It is a plant transplanted into the soul out of the garden of heaven, by the holy and blessed Spirit of God, and so has its life in God, and not in self. And therefore there is no other love so much above the selfish principle as Christian love is; no love that is so free and disinterested, and in the exercise of which God is so loved for himself and his own sake, and men are loved, not because of their relation to self, but because of their relation to God as his children, and as those who are the creatures of his power, or under the influence of his Spirit. And therefore divine love, or charity, above all love in the world, is contrary to a selfish spirit. Other, or natural love, may in some respects be contrary to selfishness, inasmuch as it may, and often does, move men to much liberality and generosity to those they love; and yet, in other respects, it agrees with a selfish spirit, because, if we follow it up to its original, it arises from the same root, viz. a principle of self-love. But divine love has its spring where its root is — in Jesus Christ; and so it is not of this world, but of a higher; and it tends thither, whence it came. And as it does not spring out of self, so neither does it tend to self. It delights in the honor and glory of God, for his own sake, and not merely for the sake of self; and it seeks and delights in the good of men, for their sake, and for God's sake. And that divine love is, indeed, a principle far above and contrary to a selfish spirit, appears further from this, viz. that it goes out even to enemies; and that it is its nature and tendency to go out to the unthankful and evil, and to those that injure and hate us — which is directly contrary to the tendency of a selfish principle, and entirely above nature — less man-like than God-like. That Christian love, or charity, is contrary to a selfish spirit, is further plain,

3. *From the nature of this love to God and to man in particular.* And,

First, from the nature of this love to *God*. If we consider what the Scriptures tell us of the nature of love to God, we find that they teach that those who truly love God, love him so as wholly to devote themselves to him and his service. This we are taught in the sum of the ten commandments, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30). In these words is contained a description of a right love to God; and they teach us, that those who love him aright do devote themselves wholly to him. They devote all to him: all their heart, and all their soul, and all their mind, and all their strength, or all their powers and faculties. Surely a man who gives all this wholly to God, keeps nothing back, but devotes himself wholly and entirely to him, making no reserve; and all who have true love to God have a spirit to do this. This shows how much a principle of true love to God is above the selfish principle. For if self be devoted wholly to God, then there is something, above self, that overcomes it; something superior to self, that takes self, and makes an offering of it to God. A selfish principle never devotes itself to another. The nature of it is, to devote all others to self. They that have true love to God, love him as God, and as the Supreme Good; whereas it is the nature of selfishness to set up self in the place of God, and to make an idol of self. That being whom men regard supremely, they devote all to. They that idolize

self, devote all to self; but they that love God as God, devote all to him.

That Christian love, or charity, is contrary to a selfish spirit, will further appear, if we consider what the Scriptures teach,

Secondly, of the nature of this love *to man*. And there are two chief and most remarkable descriptions that the Bible gives us of a truly gracious love to our neighbors, each of which should be noticed.

The *first* of these is the requirement that we love our neighbor as ourselves. This we have in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18) — “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;” and this Christ cites (Mat. 22:39), as the sum of all the duties of the second table of the law. Now this is contrary to selfishness, for love is not of such a nature as confines the heart to self, but leads it forth to others as well as self, and in like manner as to self. It disposes us to look upon our neighbors as being, as it were, one with ourselves; and not only to consider our own circumstances and interests, but to consider the wants of our neighbors, as we do our own; not only to have regard to our own desires, but to the desires of others, and to do to them as we would have them do to us.

And the *second* remarkable description which the Scriptures give us of Christian charity, which shows how contrary it is to selfishness, is, that of loving others as Christ hath loved us. “A new commandment,” says Christ (John 13:34), “I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” It is called a new commandment, as contradistinguished from that old one (Lev. 19:18), “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Not that the duty of love to others, which is the matter of the commandment, was new, for the same kind of love was required of old, under the Old Testament, which is required now. But it is called a new commandment, in this respect, that the rule and motive annexed, which we are now more especially to have an eye to, in these days of the gospel, are new. The rule and motive more especially set in view of old, was, our love to ourselves — that we should love our neighbor *as ourselves*. But the motive and rule more especially set in view now, in these days of the gospel, and since the love of Christ has been so wonderfully manifested, is the love of Christ to us — that we should love our neighbor *as Christ hath loved us*. It is here called a new commandment; and so in John 15:12, Christ calls it *his* commandment, saying emphatically, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” That we should love one another as we love ourselves, is Moses’ commandment; but that we should love one another as Christ hath loved us, is the commandment of God our Savior. It is the same commandment, as to the substance of it, that was given of old, but with new light shining upon it from the love of Jesus Christ, and a new enforcement annexed to it, by him, beyond what Moses annexed. So that this rule, of loving others as Christ has loved us, does more clearly, and in a further degree, show us our duty and obligation with respect to loving our neighbors, than as Moses stated it.

But to return from this digression, let us consider how this description that Christ gives of Christian love to others shows it to be the contrary of selfishness, by considering in what manner Christ has expressed love to us, and how much there is in the example of his love to enforce the contrary of a selfish spirit. And this we may see in *four* things: —

First, Christ has set his love on *those that were his enemies*. There was not only no love to himself in those on whom he set his love, but they were full of enmity and of a principle of actual hatred to him. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,” or, as in the next verse but one, “enemies,” “Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Second, such was Christ’s love to us, that he was pleased, *in some respects, to look on us as himself*. By his love to us, if we will but accept his love, he has so espoused us, and united his heart to us, that he is pleased to speak of us and regard us as himself. His elect were, from all eternity, dear to him as the apple of his eye. He looked upon them so much as himself, that he regarded their concerns as his, and their interests as his own; and he has even made their guilt as his, by a gracious assumption of it to himself, that it might be looked upon as his own, through that divine imputation in virtue of which they are treated as innocent, while he suffers for them. And his love has sought to unite them to himself, so as to make them, as it were, members of his body, so that they are his flesh and his bones, as he himself seems to say in Mat. 25:40, when he declares, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Third, such was the love of Christ to us, that he did, as it were, *spend himself for our sakes*. His love did not rest in mere feeling, nor in light efforts and small sacrifices, but though we were enemies, yet he so loved us, that he had a heart to deny himself, and undertake the greatest efforts, and undergo the greatest sufferings, for our sakes. He gave up his own ease, and comfort, and interest, and honor, and wealth; and became poor, and outcast, and despised, and had not where to lay his head, and all for us! And not only so, but he shed his own blood for us, and offered himself a sacrifice to God’s justice, that we might be forgiven, and accepted, and saved! And,

Fourth, Christ thus loved us, *without any expectation of ever being requited by us for his love*. He did not stand in need of anything we could do for him, and well knew that we should never be able to requite him for his kindness to us, or even to do anything toward it. He knew that we were poor, miserable, and empty-handed outcasts, who might receive from him, but could render nothing to him in return. He knew that we had no money or price with which to purchase anything, and that he must freely give us all things that we needed, or else we should be eternally without them. And shall not we be far from a selfish spirit, and utterly contrary to it, if we love one another after such a manner as this, or if we have the same spirit of love toward others that was in Christ toward ourselves? If this is our spirit, our love to others will not depend on their love to us, but we shall do as Christ did to us love them even though they are enemies. We shall not only seek our own things, but we shall in our hearts be so united to others, that we shall look on their things as our own. We shall endeavor to be interested in their good, as Christ was in ours; and shall be ready to forego and part with our own things, in many cases, for the things of others, as Christ did toward us. And these things we shall be willing and ready to do for others, without any expectation of being repaid by them, as Christ did such great things for us without any expectation of requital or return. If such be our spirit, we shall not be under the influence of a selfish spirit, but shall be unselfish in principle, and heart, and life.

In the application of this subject, the great use I would make of it is, *to dissuade all from a selfish spirit and practice, and to exhort all to seek that spirit and live that life which shall be contrary to it.* Seek that by divine love your heart may be devoted to God and to his glory, and to loving your neighbor as yourself, or rather as Christ has loved you. Do not seek everyone your own things, but everyone also the things of others. And, that you may be stirred up to this, in addition to the motives already presented, consider three things: —

First, that you are not your own. — As you have not made yourself, so you were not made for yourself. You are neither the *author* nor the *end* of your own being. Nor is it you that uphold yourself in being, or that provide for yourself, or that are dependent on yourself. There is another that hath made you, and preserves you, and provides for you, and on whom you are dependent: and He hath made you for himself, and for the good of your fellow creatures, and not only for yourself. He has placed before you higher and nobler ends than self, even the welfare of your fellowmen, and of society, and the interests of his kingdom; and for these you ought to labor and live, not only in time, but for eternity.

And if you are Christians, as many of you profess to be, then, in a peculiar sense, “ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price,” even “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 1 Pet. 1:19). And this is urged as an argument why Christians should not seek themselves, but the glory of God; for the apostle adds, “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” By nature you were in a miserable, lost condition, a captive in the hands of divine justice, and a miserable slave in the bondage of sin and Satan. And Christ has redeemed you, and so you are his by purchase. By a most just title you belong to him, and not to yourself. And, therefore, you must not henceforth treat yourself as your own, by seeking your own interests or pleasure only, or even chiefly; for if you do so, you will be guilty of robbing Christ. And as you are not your own, so nothing that you have is your own. Your abilities of body and mind, your outward possessions, your time, talents, influence, comforts — none of them are your own; nor have you any right to use them as if you had an absolute property in them, as you will be likely to do if you imagine them only for your own private benefit, and not for the honor of Christ and for the good of your fellowmen. Consider,

Second, how you, by your very profession as a Christian, are united to Christ and to your fellow-Christians. — Christ and all Christians are so united together, that they all make but one body; and of this body Christ is the head, and Christians are the members. “We, being many,” says the apostle, “are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” Rom. 12:5); and again, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (1 Cor. 12:13). How unbecoming, then, is it in Christians to be selfish, and concerned only for their own private interests! In the natural body, the hand is ready to serve the head, and all the members are ready to serve one another. Is what the hands do, done only for their own advantage? Are they not continually employed as much for the other parts of the body as for themselves? Is not the work they are doing, from day to day, for the common good of the whole body? And so it may be said as to the eye, the teeth, the feet, that they are all employed, not for themselves or for their own limited and partial welfare, but for the common comfort and good of the whole body. And if the head be dishonored, are not all the members of the body at once

employed and active to remove the dishonor, and to put honor upon the head? And if any members of the body are wounded, and languishing, and in pain, are not all the members of the body at once engaged to screen that weak or suffering member? Are not the eyes employed in looking about for it, and the ears in attending to the directions of physicians, and the feet in going where relief is to be sought, and the hands in applying the remedies provided? So it should be with the Christian body. All its members should be helpers and comforts to each other, and thus promote their mutual welfare and happiness, and the glory of Christ the head. Once more, consider,

Third, that, in seeking the glory of God and the good of your fellow creatures, you take the surest way to have God seek your interests and promote your welfare. — If you will devote yourself to God, as making a sacrifice of all your own interests to him, you will not throw yourself away. Though you seem to neglect yourself, and to deny yourself, and to overlook self in imitating the divine benevolence, *God will take care of you;* and he will see to it that your interest is provided for, and your welfare made sure. You shall be no loser by all the sacrifices you have made for him. To his glory be it said, he will not be your debtor, but will requite you a hundred-fold even in this life, beside the eternal rewards that he will bestow upon you hereafter. His own declaration is, “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold” (the other evangelist adds, “in this present time”), “and shall inherit everlasting life” (Mat. 19:29); and the spirit of this declaration applies to all sacrifices made for Christ, or for our fellowmen for his sake. The greatness of the reward for this life Christ expresses by a definite number; but he does not God make use of numbers, however great, to set forth the reward promised them hereafter. He only says they shall receive everlasting life, because the reward is so great, and so much exceeds all the expense and self-denial persons can be at for Christ’s sake, that no numbers are sufficient to describe it.

If you are selfish, and make yourself and your own private interests your idol, God will leave you to yourself, and let you promote your own interests as well as you can. But if you do not selfishly seek your own, but do seek the things that are Jesus Christ’s, and the things of your fellow-beings, then God will make your interest and happiness his own charge, and he is infinitely more able to provide for and promote it than you are. The resources of the universe move at his bidding, and he can easily command them all to subserve your welfare. So that, not to seek your own, in the selfish sense, is the best way of seeking your own in a better sense. It is the directest course you can take to secure your highest happiness. When you are required not to be selfish, you are not required, as has been observed, not to love and seek your own happiness, but only not to seek mainly your own private and confined interests. But if you place your happiness in God, in glorifying him, and in serving him by doing good, — in this way, above all others, will you promote your wealth, and honor, and pleasure here below, and obtain hereafter a crown of unfading glory, and pleasures forevermore at God’s right hand. If you seek, in the spirit of selfishness, to grasp all as your own, you shall lose all, and be driven out of the world at last, naked and forlorn, to everlasting poverty and contempt. But if you seek not your own, but the things of Christ, and the good of your fellowmen, God himself will be yours, and Christ yours, and the Holy Spirit yours, and all things yours. Yes, “all things” shall be yours; “whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and

Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21, 22).

Let these things, then, incline us all to be less selfish than we are, and to seek more of the contrary most excellent spirit. Selfishness is a principle native to us, and, indeed, all the corruption of our nature does radically consist in it; but considering the knowledge that we have of Christianity, and how numerous and powerful the motives it presents, we ought to be far less selfish than we are, and less ready to seek our own interests and these only. How much is there of this evil spirit, and how little of that excellent, noble, diffusive spirit which has now been set before us! But whatever the cause of this, whether it arise from our having too narrow notions of Christianity, and from our not having learned Christ as we ought to have done, or from the habits of selfishness handed down to us from our fathers, — whatever the cause be, let us strive to overcome it, that we may grow in the grace of an unselfish spirit, and thus glorify God, and do good to men.

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