

STEDFAST ADHERENCE  
TO THE  
PROFESSION OF OUR FAITH,  
RECOMMENDED IN SEVERAL SERMONS.

*By Robert Traill.*

SERMON XIII.

The Duty, Necessity, & Blessing  
of  
*Christian Fellowship.*

HEBREWS 10.24.

—*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love,  
and to good works.*

HAVING spoken so long upon the preceding verses, I thought fit, before I left this scripture, not to pass this that follows. The apostle, from these grounds that you have heard at great length, from the 19th, 20th, and 21st verses, draws three exhortations. The first is with respect to our duty, in the 22d verse, That we should draw near to him. The second exhortation is to a duty that respects ourselves, and our profession of faith, in the 23d verse, which I have stood long upon. The third exhortation is in the words read, and that is to a duty that respecteth others. This is indeed the right method, that conscience be made of what we owe to God, and care be taken of what concerneth ourselves, before we be in a case to discharge any Christian duty towards others.

This scripture I mean to speak but a little to, and was something doubtful in speaking to it at all, not from any doubt of its pertinency, but from a mighty doubt of its fruit; for the duty called to in this verse is so neglected, that it is not readily to be hoped people will much mind it, when they hear of it, till at least they begin to know faith, the spring of it: but when I considered that these two things, love and good works, are so very scarce, and that Christian fellowship is so worn out of use amongst them that are called Christians, I thought something should be said of

them, though I were never so afraid that little good would be done by it; and therefore for once I will speak a little to it.

In this verse therefore lying before us, there is an exhortation to a duty that is very remarkably expressed by the apostle. There is, 1. The matter of the duty in general, to *consider one another*. "Let us," would the apostle say, "that are brethren, and that know the way to the holiest of all, who have some faith, a sprinkled conscience, and clean conversation, and have made profession of our faith, *let us consider one another*." The original imports a narrow looking one to another.

2. There is the end that this duty is enjoined for; and that is, *to provoke us unto love, and to good works*, so we read it; but the word in the original is far more significant than our translation carrieth it: Consider one another in order to a *paroxysm*, or high hot fit of love and good works, to stir up mightily, thereto.

I would at this time speak a little to both these.

1. To the matter of the duty, *Considering one another*; then, 2. The end of it, *provoking unto love, and to good works*.

*First*, The duty, *Considering one another*. This implieth,

1. That there is a plurality of Christians. If so be there were but one Christian in one place, he would have nothing to do with such a place of scripture; he is only to walk wisely to them that are without, where the providence of God calls him; but this considering one another is no work for him.

2. It implies, that they are known one to another. When the apostle bids us consider one another, it necessarily implies, that we may know one another; and truly Christians are easily known one to another. I do not mean them that go with the herd, that call themselves Christians out of compliments or fashion, or are Christians by reason the place where they were born professeth Christianity; if this be all, it is no easy matter to know them: but such as have the power of the grace of God at work on their heart; and even here it is not so hard a matter for one Christian to know another.

3. Here is implied, and follows in the text, their meeting together; this is a part of their profession, *Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is*. This *considering*, that implies these things, is spoken with respect to our Lord the head, with respect to ourselves, and with respect to our brethren. The same apostle bids us *consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus*, chap. 3.1. That is a blessed consideration, with respect to patience in suffering: *Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds*, Heb. 12.3. As if the apostle would say, "If you would use to ponder how Christ was used in the world,

and how many foul tongues were employed against him, ye would think little of all the contradictions you meet with." For one sinner to contradict another sinner, is no great matter; for a sinner to contradict a saint, no great matter neither: but for wicked sinners to contradict the Saviour, is the wonder. We are bid to consider ourselves, that *if any see another overtaken in a fault, we might restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we be also tempted.*

Now particularly what this considering of others is, will you hear of it, and mind it a little more, what that Christian duty of considering Christians aright is. You know, that considering is a serious employment of the mind; this employment is about other folks, and this employment must be about every thing in them and about them that we can discern. These I would reduce to three heads, their good, their bad, and what is indifferent, neither good nor bad in itself, but as it is guided.

1<sup>st</sup>, In considering of other Christians, ye should consider their good. I will not say, that always it is the wisest work for a man, in considering himself, to begin with considering his good; but I dare say, it is the wisest work in considering others, to do so. Our Lord, in the seven letters he wrote to the seven churches in Asia, begins always with their good, if there were any good in them, and commends them, before he takes notice of, and reproveth for their faults. A Christian is very ill considered, if all his good and the best things in him is forgot. Amongst those good things that are to be considered, in order to *provoke unto love, and to good works,*

(1.) We should consider the grace of God that is in them, when it becomes visible, and visible it will be, if of the right kind. Barnabas saw the grace of God among them at Antioch, Acts 11.23. The apostles saw the grace of God that was given to Paul, Gal. 2.8,9. Sirs, communion of saints is one of the articles of our creed, as we call it; and there is so much spoken of it in the word, and it is so great a blessing, that it is a thing impossible, that grace in saints should not be knowable by saints. If no man could know the grace of God in any other but himself, that man indeed might have communion with God, but he could have no communion with the saints. The main thing that we are to regard and to consider in Christians, is the truth of the grace of God in them, their shining in the image of their heavenly Father, and their partaking of the Spirit of Jesus. Wherever these characters and signatures are, a spiritual eye can discern them.

(2.) We should consider the station they have in the body of Jesus Christ, and that also is discernible; I mean, what state, what place, what room, the Lord hath called them to, or placed them in; not with respect to their office in the church, that is a thing of another consideration; but with respect to honourable service. The Lord gives his grace in various measures to his people, and in some it is a matter very remarkable, that quickly after the Lord hath begun to communicate of his grace to them, he intends to prove them in a higher sphere than ordinary; we must consider, what marks the Lord hath put on them that we know to be Christians of a more than

ordinary stature, and usefulness, and service in the body of Christ, of which the apostle speaks so much, 1 Cor. 12, almost throughout.

*2dly*, We are to consider Christians in their bad things. Can there be any provoking unto love and good works, in seeing of their bad things? Yes, a great deal. Amongst the bad things in Christians, I reckon,

(1.) Their sins and their infirmities; these are to be tenderly regarded, and looked upon, their weakness, their stumbling; the apostle calls much for a spirit of meekness towards such; a great deal of tenderness must be used. Happy are they that can represent and express the tender heart of Jesus Christ towards sinners in a Christian-like tenderness, towards sinning and stumbling believers. See what tenderness the apostle requires as to this, 1 Cor. 8. There is a poor weak Christian, it may be, stumbled, when he saw people making use of what was ordinarily bought in the market; it may be a great deal of the meat that was sold there, had first been shown before their idols, and presented in their temples, and the poor weak Christian scrupled this, and thought it a sad thing for a Christian to make use of his liberty this way: says the apostle, *Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?* verse 11. *For my part*, says he, *I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend*, verse 13.

(2.) We should consider folks temptations and afflictions, we should look on them so as *to provoke unto love, and to good works*. The more tempted and afflicted they are, the more need have they of pity from the Lord their head, and of compassion from all their brethren. The apostle Paul expressed this tenderness of spirit, and oh for some measure of it among us! 2 Cor. 11.29. Besides all his own sufferings, of which he names a great many, as perils by sea and land, and from his own countrymen, as well as heathens, nay, all sorts of distresses, besides all these things, he had the care of all the churches devolved upon him. What sort of care was this think you? Was this like the Pope's care that he pretends to have over the face of the earth, wherever the name of a Christian is? This was not thought of by the apostle; the care of all the churches was only a care of tenderness and sympathy, like the care of a mother to her children, when any of them are sick: *Who is weak*, says he, *and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?* What a brave spirit is here! Did not a distress come upon any Christian, the apostle knew of, but his heart felt the smart of it?

*3dly*, There are some things that we are to consider in Christians, that are in themselves neither good nor bad, but are of an indifferent nature, yet are to be considered, and are of great use to *provoke to love, and to good works*.

(1.) There is a consideration to be had of a Christian's education, of the place of his conversation, and of the means and helps that he hath or wants. There is a great matter in this. I do not say, that always such Christians are of the best complexion, as to their inner man, that are born again under the greatest advantages of the gospel means; only this is that I drive at, that the truth of the grace of God may be planted in the heart of a poor creature, where the means of grace have been but

small, and his helps and advantages but few. Now, a great deal of tenderness is to be exercised towards such a one. The apostle takes frequent notice of it, as to himself, though indeed the grace of God to him was extraordinary, Acts 22. I do not mean, that the apostle does think to extenuate his sin before God by the mentioning it, but rather he mentions it to enhance the grace of God that took hold of him; that it was a sufficient ground for abating the severity of censure from other Christians, when they reflected upon his former conversation.

(2.) We should in things indifferent consider their natural temper. Tempers of mind vary as much as features of the face. We commonly observe it with great wonder, that there are not to be seen in a whole kingdom two faces so exactly alike, but that we discern some difference; and there is as great a difference in the natural tempers of folks minds. Where the grace of God is grafted upon a good natural temper, it does set it off, I acknowledge, very beautifully; abundance of grace sown in them that have an equal temper of minds makes a Christian appear very amiable: but the grace of God does not ordinarily fall there; the Lord commonly sows his grace in the worst soil. The heart of every man by nature is bad enough, but there are some worse than ordinary, and God plants his grace frequently there. Now, when the grace of God comes, it is appointed to change our natural state, as we are sinners, and to make us believers, of sinners to make us saints; but it was never appointed to change our natural temper. He that is born, as it were, with a hasty, hot, warm temper, the grace of God may guide that, and put it into a right channel; but rarely, if ever, does remove it. Now, it is to be observed, that a great many of the offences that Christians take one at another, are upon the account of the breakings out of their natural tempers; but we should give an allowance to these things. It is very likely, that our Lord, in calling his disciples, had regard unto this, and names them accordingly. Peter seems to be a forward, zealous, bold man; James and John seem to have been warm hot men; they are called sons of thunder; would our Lord say, "I will graft my grace upon these men, and I will make use of their natural temper for the setting forth some piece of work, that such and such are fittest for." We see then the wonderful wisdom of God, in guiding the corruptions of his people; and should we wonder at this, that the same wisdom should guide the natural infirmities of his people, and make them serviceable so much the more in their time? We must consider, I say, one another's natural temper, and give some grains of allowance thereto.

(3.) Among the things indifferent, I reckon people's outward estate in the world: *Not many wise after the flesh, not many noble, not many rich, and not many mighty are called;* but now and then some be. And it is very observable, that through want of a due consideration of this, a Christian that is very high, and rich, and wise in this world, and a poor low weak Christian as to his condition and natural parts, are usually very bad company; they are very apt not duly to consider one another, with respect to this; the poor are apt to envy them that are above them, and they that are high, to despise them that are below them. The word of God warns against both.

(4.) People's age and standing in Christ's house, is to be considered by us. When we consider one another, we are not, we must not expect those experiences and attainments in a novice, and one that is newly come to the faith, that we may look for, and expect in them that are of long standing in the house of the Lord. The apostle takes notice of this, and he checks them that had this standing. *For when for the time, says he, ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.* See how the Spirit of God by Paul directs Timothy to his carriage, 1 Epist. 5.1. *Rebuke not an elder, says he, but entreat him as a father and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity.* How distinctly does the apostle direct his discourse unto fathers, and young men, and children!

*Lastly,* Christians' different light about smaller matters should be considered, in order to provoking *unto love and to good works*. If people lay aside the duty of love till they be all of one mind in all things, they may leave love till they come to heaven, and truly they look unlike them, that ever will be in heaven, that are strangers to love when they be on earth. How tenderly does the apostle apply himself unto this! Rom. 14.1-5. Rom. 15.1-4. *Him that is weak in the faith, says he, receive you, but not to doubtful disputations.* What were those doubtful disputations? These were not whether we are justified by Christ, or by good works, or by both together; they were about small little things; they were about food, some would eat nothing but herbs, and had no liberty to eat flesh; there were others that were strong, and they could eat freely anything. But, says the apostle, *Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not; that is his weakness; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth, for the man walks according to his sight, and indeed according to truth.* One observes a day, and another not; his non-observing is an act of worship to the Lord. How excellently does the apostle comment upon these things! The meaning was this, In the beginning of Christianity, there was some of the Christians, that had been Jews, and were not yet altogether so far reformed from what they had professed before, but that they still retained, and were fond of their old ceremonies and customs; wherefore the apostle exhorts them to bear, with love and tenderness, with all such persons. The apostle therefore in some places did tolerate their weakness; yet, notwithstanding, when these small things are brought in upon an high account, how does he thunder against them! He speaks so tenderly to the Romans, to doubtful believers, yet to some that would observe days, and abstain from meats, he is as severe, *Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, &c.* Ye are men that are parting from Christ, says he! why so? Because they did place a piece of their worship therein, and thought they would render them acceptable to God, and therefore brought in these Jewish rites and ceremonies into the matter of justification before God. The Lord hath not given all his people the same light; we are to be fully persuaded in our own minds about our own light: *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,* Rom. 14.5. But that is but an ill sort of being persuaded in our own minds that brings this persuasion also,

that they who are not of our mind, are not right before God. So much for the *first* thing, the matter of the duty, *considering one another*.

The *second* thing to be spoken to, is what the end of this is, *To provoke unto love, and to good works*.

1. The first thing I note in this end is, You find love and good works joined together. Good works, or holiness, will never thrive amongst Christians, where love is under a decay. *Where envying and strife is, says the apostle James, there is confusion, and every evil work, chap. 3.16. not only there is an evil work, but there is every evil work.* The edifying and building up of the church by their mutual communion, as well as by communications from the head, Eph. 4.16, is expressly determined to be in this, *edifying of itself in love. From whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love:* as if the apostle had expressly pointed forth, that the general spirit of love is as it were the cement, and nutriment of the whole body of Jesus Christ; grace from the head, and spiritual love of the members one to another, is as the spring to their growth.

2. We find that the increase of love and holiness, is the proper and right end of Christian communion. For this end churches are appointed by Jesus Christ, that they may be societies for building up a company that he calls out of the world in love to God and to one another in holiness, till he transplant them to the church above.

3. The making this the end, speaks forth this, that the best of Christians stand in need of being mightily stirred up unto love, and to good works, or why stood the Hebrews in need of being so stirred up? We have the same word in the original, in 2 Cor. 9.2. *Your zeal hath provoked very many.* The grace of God, and the Spirit of holiness is ingrafted in the hearts of every Christian; but notwithstanding, every one should make conscience to water this, to stir it up, to blow upon this little fire, and to increase it.

---

## APPLICATION.

---

APPLICATION. The first word shall be a word of reproof or lamentation. How sadly is it to be bewailed, that love and good works are so rare, and the means for them so neglected? that there is so little considering one another, *to provoke unto love, and to good works*? If it were not for the name of churches that is amongst us, one would hardly understand, that there is such a company of Christians amongst us; that considering one another *to provoke unto love, and to good works*, the Lord knows how few mind. How many are there of our Christians, that are not a bit the

better for their fellow Christians, since the day God gave grace to them? Is there no Christian of your acquaintance, that you can labour to do good to? I never expect that person is fit to get good from others, that is not ready to do good to others. The spirit of humility, that makes us ready to receive good from others, will work a spirit of love in readiness to do good to others. Now, that this matter is neglected, is not all we have to complain of; but the contrary thereto is that which I would bewail and reprove, and the Lord make reproof light where it is most justly deserved.

1. There are a great many people, that consider one another's infirmities to blaze them abroad; instead of considering one another *to provoke unto love, and to good works*, they consider their infirmities to take notice of them, and to blow a trumpet upon their failings. I have often seen, and you may observe it, and may have found, that very often such professors as have been given much to the observing of the infirmities of saints, and then publishing of them, have been left of God to be apostates from the truth of the gospel themselves. It is a greater transgression than you are aware of, to observe the infirmities of saints, on purpose as it were to crow over the profession, because of the faults of them that make it. Let us always be tender of the name of Jesus Christ. If men that are not Christians are yet called so, and fall, let them get their just shame; the way of the Lord is not a whit the worse because a transgressor falls therein; the fault is not in the way, but in the walker. *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein,* Hosea 14.9.

2. Some consider one another's infirmities to imitate them, and to excuse themselves in the like practice. This is just contrary to what is in my text. Instead of considering one another *to provoke unto love, and to good works*, they consider others in their failings and infirmities, they take notice of a great many infirmities in the people of God; they think with themselves, Why may not I do so too? Such a minister or Christian has done so and so; why may not I? This is a most dangerous practice, for people to take notice of the infirmities and failings of saints, to imitate them, and never take notice of their virtues to imitate them: therefore the apostle warns them in this manner, *Whose faith follow*, says he, *considering the end of their conversation*; regard their doctrine, regard their practice, imitate their faith. The wisest observing of one another, is to spy out one another's good, and labour to imitate it immediately. Wherever you see faith, and repentance, and believing, and holy walking with God, set about the imitating that. May I speak of the lowest, of the meanest, and of the most foolish practice amongst us, a practice that, I am afraid, is a great deal too common in this place? Instead of considering one another *to provoke unto love, and to good works*, many consider one another to provoke to vanity and to superfluity. Instead of taking notice of the virtue of believers, it may be people take notice of their way of living, of their garb; it is well if a great many be not hardened thereby: If one wear such a garb, why may not I? The righteous judgment of God will ever follow, where one Christian makes not



conscience to observe and imitate the virtues of another, they shall be left of God, to observe and imitate the corruptions of one another. Let me therefore press it with these few, that you would mind well the plain words of the text, *to consider one another*, &c. all the Christians ye know, consider in such a manner, as that you may stir them up to love and holiness.

1st, Is not this commanded by God? There is none that can read the New Testament, and not find this commanded frequently, as Col. 3.16,17; 1 Cor. 1.5-7, and a great many other places.

2dly, Hath not this been practised by the saints of God in all ages? There was never a generation of believers that lived in any time of the world, but if they could converse together, they would. There were a company of them long since in the Old Testament, that *feared the Lord, and thought on his name, that talked often one to another*. There were a company when Christ was born, and yet it was as dark a day as ever came upon the church, there was a company for all that, Luke 2.30, that were *waiting for the consolation of Israel*; and Anna, the old prophetess, knew them, and went to speak to all of them; like enough, she knew where to find them that waited for redemption in Jerusalem. This is a duty now to be practised, and there was never more need of it. What our Lord said as a prophecy, hath been plentifully fulfilled in our day: *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*, Matth. 24.12,13. It is a duty the Lord hath always put a special remark upon, and hath taken great notice of, and for which *a book of remembrance was written*, Malachi 3.16. For those that had sighed and cried, because of all the abominations done in Jerusalem, these are men marked, set apart for special mercy. I shall leave this matter with three or four notes.

(1.) Never did the grace of God reach a poor creature's heart, but with it there came an instinct after converse with them of its own nature. Whenever one is made a new creature, they begin to look upon them that are new creatures in another manner, and a warmer way, than they did before.

(2.) Where-ever the power of godliness is spreading, Christian communion always is. Never did the power of godliness flourish, where this was neglected. Therefore I look upon it as one of the sad signs that the power of Christianity, and the efficacy of the gospel is greatly withdrawn from us, because Christian fellowship is so greatly neglected. I shall not tell you whence it comes particularly, and how it may be mended; much may be done to the mending of it. The Lord incline their hearts in whose hand it lies.

(3.) Where love and holiness is not, the single end of Christian fellowship, the fellowship of Christians, is a most dangerous snare. The communion of Christians one with another is the most dangerous company one can be in, if so be that this be not the grand design, to promote love and holiness. There have been such meetings amongst us, among them that are called Christians, and it may be are truly so; many

people of different persuasions have met together for disputation; a most vain sinful practice, that always flows from corruption, and always issues in destruction; so far from good works, that it was never found to fail to provoke to hatred and ill works. It were far better that Christians should soberly retain their particular sentiments.

*Lastly*, Where Christians are a plague to one another, it is a sad sign that God hath a mind to plague them all together. Where people neglect to do good to one another, where Christians are hindrances one to another in the righteous ways of God, it portends that God will plague them all together. That is a sad threatening, Ezek. 22.18, *Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross; what shall I do to them? says the Lord, as they gather silver, and brass, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger, and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you, good and bad in the same furnace, the silver and brass, and tin and iron.* It is a fatal signification, when the institutions of Christ's appointment are not only forgot, but when they are perverted to contrary ends, than he hath appointed them for; it is a sad signification what the issue may be.

The Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Church