

## THE PRAYER.

O thou that resistest the proud, and givest grace to the humble, give us the grace of *humility*: and make us so lowly in our own eyes, that we may be accepted in thy sight. Make us, Lord, of the number of those *poor in spirit*, of those *humble and contrite ones*, to whom thou wilt look with favour, and with whom thou wilt dwell. Enable us to "walk humbly with thee," to be clothed with humility, and so to follow the example of the great humility of our Saviour, that we may be made partakers of his resurrection, through his merits and mediation.

## SERMON XVIII.

## THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

MATT. xxii. 39.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

THE great foundation of all the duties between man and man is *love*. The love of our neighbour, accordingly, is one of the most important subjects that can engage our attention. In treating of this duty, I mean,

First, to say a few words upon its importance, nature, and extent;

Secondly, to point out the manner in which it ought to show itself—some of its various acts and offices;

And, thirdly, to lay before you some additional motives for cultivating this lovely feature of the Christian character, together with a few hints of advice on the means of acquiring it.

I. By the term *neighbour*, as used in the New Testament, we are to understand, not merely those who happen to reside near to us, but all men who come within our reach, all to whom we can do either good or harm, and most especially, all our fellow Christians.

The divine Author of our religion represents the love of our neighbour as being the distinguishing

mark—the *badge* or *characteristic*—of his true followers. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another:”<sup>a</sup> and in the same spirit his beloved disciple St. John says, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”<sup>b</sup> *The love of the brethren* he lays down as the sign or token by which we may know that we are in a Christian state;—that “we have passed from death unto life.” And on the other hand he affirms, that “he that loveth not his brother abideth in death,”—is in a state of condemnation, of alienation from God. Our Lord, in his public ministry, represents the precept, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” as second in authority and rank only to that first great commandment which requires the love of God; and tells us, that these two precepts comprise the sum and substance of the moral law; “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” In like manner St. Paul repeatedly asserts, that “love is the fulfilling of the law;”<sup>c</sup> and, after particularly mentioning the principal laws of the second table—those laws which relate to our duty towards our neighbour—says, that each of these, “and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” So again, in the first Epistle to Timothy, he speaks of *love* as being the great object and end of all the moral precepts of religion. Now the end of the commandment is *charity*—(which is merely another word for love,)—“the end of the commandment is *charity*, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”<sup>d</sup> And thus, in that beautiful and well-known chapter in the first Epistle of the

<sup>a</sup> John xiii. 35. <sup>b</sup> 1 John iii. 14. <sup>c</sup> Rom. xiii. 8, 10. <sup>d</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.

Corinthians,<sup>e</sup> he tells us, that, without charity or love, the most splendid gifts and endowments, and the most noble actions, are, with respect to salvation, absolutely profitless, absolutely good for nothing.

Such in the Christian religion is the importance of *love*, of a principle of real good will or benevolence. And this good will we are to feel towards *men in general*. Not that we are required to love all persons in the same degree. It is strictly in the order of nature and of Providence, that those who are connected with us by relationship, or by any similar tie, should possess more of our attachment than others. And common consent requires, not without reason, that we should feel a greater interest in our own countrymen than in foreigners; and in those who dwell near us,—who are our neighbours in the common sense of the term,—than in those who reside at a distance. Those also who are most distinguished for goodness and amiable qualities, are proper objects of *higher* degrees of our regard. But still, our love must be extended to *all* mankind without exception; we must bear good will to *all*, and wish and strive to promote the comfort and well-being of *all*, as opportunity is offered to us. Even those at variance with us are not excepted. Our Saviour expressly commands us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.<sup>f</sup> Those also who have disgraced themselves by their vices, have a claim to our regard. While we hate and abhor the *sin*, we may and must feel kindness for the *sinner*. His sin, indeed, renders him a fit object for the sincerest pity and compassion. And this good will towards mankind we must feel in the

<sup>e</sup> 1 Cor. xiii.

<sup>f</sup> Matt. v. 44.

highest degree possible. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as *thyself*." That we should love other men strictly in the same *degree* in which we love ourselves, is certainly not to be expected; but we must ever labour to make nearer and nearer approaches to it: and in this instance, as well as with respect to the love of God, we shall always have reason humbly to acknowledge our deficiencies, shall always find cause to feel our need of atonement for our past failures, and of the aids of God's grace to excite and strengthen in our hearts that divine spirit of good will, without which we are nothing.

II. But if we cannot love our neighbour in the same *degree* in which we love ourselves, we must strive to love him in the same *manner*; to feel the same sort of interest,—if not as great an interest, yet still the *same sort* of interest, in his welfare, that we feel in our own. At all events, let us be attentive to all the outward expressions and acts of good will. Our benevolence indeed should be seated in the heart. "Let us not," says St. John, "love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."<sup>8</sup> Still, the habit of doing kind actions, and of abstaining from those of a contrary description, is not only right in itself, but has a direct tendency to produce a habit of genuine internal benevolence, both in ourselves and others.

The great rule which has been laid down to regulate our *practice* is, that we should in all cases *do as we would be done by*. As the precept in the text enjoins the inward principle of love, so the rule just mentioned points out the manner in which that principle should influence the outward conduct. For instance, the love which we bear to ourselves makes us unwilling to be injured in our pro-

<sup>8</sup> 1 John iii. 18.

perty, our persons, or our good name. We should be equally unwilling in any of these instances to injure another. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour," says the Apostle: "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."<sup>h</sup> And this extends not only to those greater instances of injustice mentioned by St. Paul from the laws of the second table, such as murder, adultery, theft, and false witness, but to all others of whatever description. As we do not love pain ourselves, so we shall be careful never in any way to give *needless* pain to another. As, when speaking of him to a third person, we shall be on our guard against injuring his character, except when the claims of justice clearly require it; so in our intercourse with him, we must be careful not to say or do any thing which may uselessly hurt his feelings—especially, we shall be watchful against any appearance of treating him with *contempt*. If ever, in our intercourse with those whom, in compliance with the habits of society, we consider as beneath us, we are tempted by the corrupt pride of our heart to behave as if we slighted and despised them, we should correct ourselves in the words of Job: "Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?"<sup>i</sup> There are few things which we feel more acutely and painfully ourselves, than any expression of contempt; and there is nothing to which even the poorest among men are more alive. Let us reflect how we behave when in the presence of a superior, of a man whom we wish to please, for the sake of some interest of our own, or merely for the sake of his countenance. How careful are we to do nothing which may offend or displease him! How strictly—to adopt a common expression—are we *upon our good behaviour*! If we are

<sup>h</sup> Rom. xiii. 10.

<sup>i</sup> Job xxxi. 15.

influenced by Christian charity and Christian humility, we shall not be less upon our good behaviour, less fearful of giving unnecessary pain, when in the presence of the least and lowest of our fellow-men.

But the love of our neighbour will not only restrain us from injuring him, or giving him needless pain; it will also induce us to do him all the good in our power; to promote his welfare and comfort, and, as far as we can, to relieve his wants both of body and soul. As the interests of the latter are of expressibly the greatest importance, we should be most anxious for *them*: and should show such anxiety, when we have any prospect of being of use by so doing. His temporal necessities we must relieve as far as our means fairly extend; but must endeavour *so* to relieve them, as not to encourage any evil habits of improvidence, or of undue dependance on the aid of others. And especially, we must seek for opportunities of making the relief imparted to the wants of the *body*, the means of doing spiritual good to the *soul*, the necessities of which are the more dangerous, in proportion as they are less sensibly felt. Perhaps no duty is inculcated in the Scriptures more earnestly, than the duty of ministering to the wants of our fellow-creatures. The passages relating to it are numberless, and will readily occur to you. That in St. John's first Epistle is very strong: "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"<sup>k</sup> If we can give nothing else, we must at least give them our sympathy and our prayers.

And not only on greater emergencies, but in all the common intercourse of life, the same spirit of

<sup>k</sup> 1 John iii. 17.

good will, will make a man *kind* and *obliging* to all about him, in words, in look, and in manner. He will strive to promote their ease and comfort, and will be ready to perform many little offices of attention, of small value in themselves, but important, as showing the spirit from which they proceed. We are enjoined by St. Peter to be *courteous*;<sup>l</sup> that is, in other words, to be *civil*. None of you will venture to say that any injunction of holy Scripture can be of slight importance. Remember, then, that we have the authority of St. Peter for considering *courtesy*, or *civility*, as a *Christian duty*. Certainly civility is a necessary fruit of the love of our neighbour; and the neglect of civility proceeds generally from pride and uncharitableness, and often leads on to much heart-burning, and bitterness of spirit. A man duly influenced by the Christian temper will, consequently, be *courteous* or *civil* to all with whom he has any intercourse. At the same time, however, he must be cautious not to suffer his courtesy, or unwillingness, to offend, to induce him to *flatter* any man in his faults, or in the slightest degree to be unmindful of the interests of religion and truth. The Christian rule, as laid down by St. Paul, is this: "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."<sup>m</sup> *Please his neighbour for his good*. We are always to have in view his spiritual good and his *edification*, his advancement in holiness. If at any time we so please men, as to encourage them in their vices, so as to be negligent of our duty to God, we are no longer the servants of Christ.<sup>n</sup> But, if we occasionally have to blame some parts of their conduct, —plainly "to set before them the things that they have done," still we must never forget the rules of *Christian courtesy*. Consider how you feel and

<sup>l</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 8.

<sup>m</sup> Rom. xv. 2.

<sup>n</sup> Gal. i. 10.

act with respect to your *friends*—how careful you are of their reputation when absent—how anxious not to pain or offend them—not to hurt their feelings—when present. And ought we not, if we are Christians, to feel and to act, in some degree at least, in the same manner towards men in general? So again, with respect to our *friends*, we enter into all their joys and sorrows, increasing the former, and softening the latter, by our sympathy. And ought we not, in a similar manner, to sympathize with all who come within our reach and notice? ought we not, according to the apostolical rule, to “rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep?”<sup>o</sup>

III. I readily acknowledge that the acquiring of this spirit of constant and universal benevolence, and the habit of continually practising all its various acts and offices, is a work of no little difficulty. The great step in order to it is to conquer the *selfishness* of our nature. All men are too apt “to seek their own”<sup>p</sup> exclusively; to be so occupied with themselves and their own concerns, as to have no room left in their hearts for others. But charity is not *selfish*. A well regulated attention to our own interests is not only allowable, but necessary—necessary even as a part of charity. We must not, however, so attend to ourselves, as to be inattentive to the interests and wishes of others.

There is, perhaps, no lesson which it is more important to learn, than the lesson of subduing our own *wills*; the lesson of making our own humours, and inclinations, and even our interests, give place, on fit occasions, to those of other men. Children cannot learn the art of giving up to others too early; and grey-headed old men have generally room for improvement in it. Nothing is of more

<sup>o</sup> Rom. xii. 15.

<sup>p</sup> Phil. ii. 21.

consequence to our own happiness, and to the preservation of the principle of benevolence. We must strive also to eradicate—to root out—the evil pride of our corrupted nature. “Only of pride cometh contention,” and where pride is subdued, the great occasion of quarrels and soreness of spirit is entirely removed. Envy, hatred, and malice, must also be banished from the bosom which means to be governed by Christian charity. And every one who knows what uneasy and painful inmates of the breast these malevolent affections are, and how they embitter life, will feel that this alone is a most powerful argument for endeavouring to acquire the spirit of benevolence.

Another argument for cultivating this general spirit of good will, may be drawn from the consideration, that we are all the work of the same Creator, that we all descend from the loins of the same earthly father, and are all partakers of the same common nature. “Hath not one God created us?”<sup>q</sup> says the Scripture; or, as it is in the passage of Job which I before quoted, “did not he that made me in the womb make him? did not one fashion us in the womb?” Yes, verily; and God “hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”<sup>r</sup> Consequently, we are all *relations*; “all we are brethren;” and should look on each other as another self.

But we not only partake of the same nature, but of the same *sinful* nature; and are consequently exposed by nature to one common condemnation. The circumstance of being *fellow-sufferers*, of being companions in danger, or distress, or misery, is generally found to be a strong bond of union, a great promoter of kind and friendly feelings. Let

<sup>q</sup> Mal. ii. 10.

<sup>r</sup> Acts xvii. 26.

the thought that we are by nature the fellow-heirs of sin, and suffering, and death, have the effect of filling us with sentiments of kindness towards each other. But, as we have been partners in guilt and condemnation, so, God be praised! are we partakers also of one common redemption. As God formed of one blood all the men that dwell on the earth, so by the blood of *one* were all men redeemed. Christ "tasted death for every man;" *every man*, therefore, may have an interest in the blood of Christ; and as such, has the strongest claim to our kindness and regard. If we hope ourselves to be benefited by the sufferings of our Redeemer, let us take heed how we withhold either the feeling or the expression of good will from a brother—however poor or weak—"for whom Christ died."<sup>s</sup> Remember, that our Lord himself proposes the love which he showed to us, as a pattern for us to follow—"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you!"<sup>t</sup> What was the instance that he gave of his love? *He died for our sakes*. Certainly, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."<sup>u</sup> He laid down his life for us, when we were not friends, but enemies; enemies through wicked works. And does it not follow, that if Christ so loved us, we also ought to love one another? Does it not follow, as St. John argues, if Christ so loved us, as to lay down his life for us, we also ought to be prepared, if necessary, "to lay down our lives for the brethren?"<sup>x</sup>

God is the centre of all perfection, and we are humbly to try to imitate such of his perfections as are imitable by us: "Be ye holy, as God is holy:" "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in

<sup>s</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 11.

<sup>u</sup> John xv. 13.

<sup>t</sup> John xiii. 34.

<sup>x</sup> 1 John iii. 16.

"heaven is perfect."<sup>y</sup> But he particularly requires us to imitate him in his *love to mankind*. The Lord is good to every man, and "his mercies are over all his works." He is kind even "to the unthankful and to the evil,"<sup>z</sup> "and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."<sup>a</sup> Let his example induce us to bear good will to all men, even to those who least deserve it at our hands. It is thus that we shall, through the merits of Christ, become "the children of the Highest."<sup>b</sup>

My friends, let these and the like considerations prevail with us to do all that we can to cultivate in our bosoms a general spirit of love and good will towards men in general; more especially towards those with whom we have most intercourse. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."<sup>c</sup> Endeavour, above all things, to "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness;"<sup>d</sup> to "have fervent charity among yourselves;"<sup>e</sup> and strive unceasingly to "love one another with a pure heart fervently,"<sup>f</sup> and with "love unfeigned."<sup>g</sup> And since in this great work we cannot hope to succeed without divine aid, let us implore God by his Spirit to pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before him.<sup>h</sup>

<sup>y</sup> Matt. v. 48.

<sup>b</sup> Luke vi. 35.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Peter iv. 8.

<sup>d</sup> Ephes. iv. 31, 32.

<sup>e</sup> 1 Peter i. 22.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Peter i. 22.

<sup>g</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 6.

<sup>z</sup> Luke vi. 35.

<sup>a</sup> Matt. v. 45.

<sup>b</sup> Col. iii. 14.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 6.

<sup>d</sup> See Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday.