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GODLINESS

## CHAPTER 2: THE NATURE OF CHARITY

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 – *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."*

IT must be a precious thing to be greater than FAITH, and greater than HOPE—it must, indeed, be precious! And just in proportion as things are valuable and precious amongst men, so much trouble and risk will human speculators take to counterfeit them. I suppose that in no department of roguery in this roguish world has there been more time and ingenuity expended than in making counterfeit money, especially bank notes. Just as wicked men have tried to imitate the most valuable of human productions for their own profit, so the Devil has been trying to counterfeit God's most precious things from the beginning, and to produce something so like them that mankind at large should not see the difference, and, perhaps, in no direction has he been so successful as in producing a SPURIOUS CHARITY. I almost think he has got it to perfection in these days. I don't think he can very well improve on the present copy. This Charity—this love—is God's most precious treasure; it is dearer to His heart than all the vast domains of His universe—dearer than all the glorious beings He has created. So much so, that when some of the highest spirits amongst the angelic bands violated this love, He hurled them from the highest heaven to the nethermost Hell! Why? Not because He did not value those wonderful beings, but because He valued this LOVE MORE. Because He saw that it was more important to the well-being of His universe to maintain the harmony of love in Heaven than to save those spirits who had allowed selfishness to interfere with it. So our Lord says, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven."

The day is coming when He will behold all the dire progeny of this first rebellion fall also. Haste, happy day!

But, let us look for a few minutes at this precious, beautiful Charity. Let us try, first, to define it. What is it?

First.—IT IS DIVINE. It must be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

In vain do we look for, this heavenly plant amongst the unrenewed children of men—it grows not on the corrupt soil of fallen nature; it springs only where the plough share of true repentance has



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broken up the fallow ground of the heart, and where faith in a crucified Saviour has purified it, and where the blessed Holy Spirit has taken permanent possession. It is the love of God—not only love to God, but like God, from God, and fixed on the same objects and ends which He loves. It is a Divine implantation by the Holy Ghost. Perhaps some of you are saying, 'Then it is useless for me to try to cultivate it, because I have not got it.'—exactly! You may cut and prune and water for ever, but you can never cultivate that which is not planted; your first work is to Get this love shed abroad in your heart. It is one of the delusions of this age that human nature only wants pruning, improving, developing, and it will come out right. No, no! Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. If you want this Divine love, you must break up the fallow ground of your hearts, and invite the Heavenly Husbandman to come and sow it—shed it abroad in your soul.

I want you to note, secondly, that this love is a Divine principle, in contradistinction to the mere love of instinct. All men have love as an instinct; mere natural love towards those whom they like, or who do well for them. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" Wicked men love one another from mere natural affinity, as the tiger loves its cubs. There is great confusion amongst professors of religion on this subject. They feel sentiments of pity and generosity towards their fellow men, and they may even give their goods to feed the poor, and yet not have a spark of Divine Charity in their hearts. Saul, after God had departed from him, was not wholly destitute of generous feeling respecting his family and kingdom. Dives in Hell had some pity for his brethren! But neither of them had a spark of this Divine Charity. Mind you are not deceived; millions are!

Let us note one or two points wherein a spurious and a Divine Charity utterly and for ever diverge—disagree in their nature.

First.—Spurious Charity is selfish—is never exercised but to gratify some selfish principle in human nature. Thousands of motives inspire it—too many to enumerate; but we will glance at two or three. We read in the context that a man might give his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and yet be destitute of true Charity.

Now, what an anomaly. But we have wonderful illustrations that such a thing is possible. How is it? Well, we will just specify two or three motives under which this might be done. First, a man may do this to support and carry out a favourite system of intellectual belief of which he has become enamoured, just as men become absorbed in politics, or in what they consider the good of their



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nation, so that they will even go to the cannon's mouth to promote it.

Further, a man may do it in order to merit eternal life. Paul did this when he went about to establish his own righteousness. He tells us afterwards that self was the mainspring of all his zeal. It was all his own exaltation; there was no Divine love; he was an utterly unrenewed, Christless, and selfish man at the very time he was doing this.

Or, it may be, in the third place, to gratify a naturally generous disposition. I used to say to a generous friend of mine, when he was talking in a confidential way about his giving, and the delight it gave him, attributing it to Divine grace—I used to put my hand on his, and say, 'Hold! my friend; I am not so sure it is all grace. You like giving better than other people do receiving. Look out that you don't lose your reward through not taking the trouble to see what you give to; don't give your money to every scheme that comes across you. Remember that you are answerable to God for your wealth, and that God will demand of you HOW you have bestowed your goods.' That is true Charity that takes the trouble to investigate relative claims, and tries to find out the best channels in which to give for God's glory and the salvation of men. Don't you put down your generosity to the Holy Ghost if it is not of that kind, for you will never see a bit of interest for it, here or hereafter—not a fraction!

A false Charity begins in self, and ends on earth. Here is a mark for you to distinguish between it and God's Charity. The Devil's Charity always contemplates the earthy part of man in a superior degree to the spiritual part; and here it exactly crosses and contradicts the Divine Charity, which always contemplates man in the entirety of his being, and always gives the first importance to the soul.

We have plenty of spurious Charity in these days. The other day, when I took up a certain so-called "religious print," and saw some fulsome things it had been saying about a certain individual, lately dead, I thought, really, would one ever imagine this to be a Christian paper, in a Christian country? There is not the slightest recognition of a soul, no reference to the man's spiritual condition or his future state. Here are one or two of the most ordinary human qualifications seized on, and made the most of, to make it out that he was something beyond his fellows; but, as to any recognition of a soul, or of a God who will judge him, of a Heaven or Hell, nothing!

Oh, people say, when speaking of Godless, and even wicked men "You must be charitable, you must not judge." Satan does not care how much of this one-sided charity there is; the more the better for his purpose; it will make people all the more comfortable in their sins, and get them all the more



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easily down to Hell.

My friends, are you more concerned about relieving temporal distress than you are about feeding famished souls? If you are, you may know where your Charity comes from! Don't misrepresent me, and say that I teach all of one and none of the other. God forbid, for, if any man "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?" But, on the other side, if he sees him spiritually famishing—dying for want of the bread of life—how dwelleth the love of Christ in him, if he does not minister to this spiritual destitution? I know that real Christianity cares for body and soul. Bless God, it does; but, always mind that it sets the soul FIRST. I know the Master fed the multitude; but, before that, He had them with him three days, trying to save their souls, and when they got hungry in the process, then He made them sit down and fed their bodies. He always looked after the soul first, and so does every one possessed of Divine Charity.

Why? Because Divine Charity has opened his eyes. He realises the value of souls. He sees them famishing. He sees them being damned, and he cannot help himself. His desire to save them rushes out of him like a torrent; he beholds them, and he has compassion on them. Try your Charity by this mark: Do you contemplate the dying, famishing, half-damned souls of your fellow-men? Do you look abroad on the state of the world, and the state of the Church? Do you think about it? Do you go into your closet and spread it before the Lord, as Hezekiah and Jeremiah and Hosea did? Do you look at it, and turn it over, and weep over it, and pray and cry, as Daniel and Paul did? Try yourselves, my brethren, my sisters, by this mark.

Divine Charity is always revolving round that great problem of infinite love. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Oh, I can never get it out of my ears or away from my heart. Oh, how I see the emptiness and vanity of everything compared with the salvation of the soul! What does it matter, if a man dies in the workhouse—if he dies on a doorstep, covered with wounds, like Lazarus—what does it matter, if his soul is saved? It is your creed as much as mine, that the soul is immortal, and that the death of the body is only its introduction, if it be saved, to a glorious future of everlasting felicity, progress, and holiness. Does the child remember how he used to cry over his lessons, when he becomes a man? Does he remember all the little difficulties of his school days, when he is inheriting the fruits of them? Just so, ten thousand times less important will be all our sufferings, trials, and griefs here, if we save our souls, and somebody else's.



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This Divine Charity makes everything else subservient to the salvation of souls; it uses everything else to save and bless the inner and spiritual man. Do you remember on one occasion, when the Master had fed the multitudes, and when they came to Him again to be fed, He said, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." You would have said, 'Quite right; the people want to be fed; they are hungry.' But do you hear the Divine lament that comes out in these words, that they were so spiritually obtuse that they valued the earthly bread more than the heavenly! Give them as much temporal bread as you like, but mind you give them the spiritual bread first, for this is the characteristic of true Charity.

Have you got this Charity? Every soul knows whether it has or not. People are so unphilosophical in religion; they talk about not knowing; but you can find out in two minutes whether you love God or yourself best. Tell me that woman does not know whether she loves her husband or herself best! Nonsense! What is the proof? She seeks to please him, and is willing to sacrifice herself for him—in fact, merges her interests altogether in his. Do you love God best? Are you willing to forego your interests, and to seek His? Have you this Divine Charity, born of Heaven, tending to Heaven? If not, my friend, resolve you will have it this afternoon. Begin to cry mightily to God for the Holy Spirit to shed it abroad in your heart; give up your quibblings and reasonings, and go down at the foot of the cross and ask Him, 'Come, Lord, and break up this poor, wicked heart of mine, and shed this beautiful, pure Divine Charity abroad in it, and then you will not, henceforth, seek your own, but the things that are Jesus Christ's.

From a series of papers by Catherine Booth published in 1881.