

ON  
**CHARITY,**

**Faith,**

AND

**GOOD WORKS.**

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BY THE REV. J. CLOWES, A. M.

Minister of St. John's, Manchester; and late Fellow of Trinity College,  
Cambridge.

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# ON CHARITY.

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MUCH has been said by spiritual writers, in every period of the Christian Church, and said well, on the subject of *Charity*; but then their views of what charity really is, and means, though correct in some particular points, have heretofore been defective as to the grand assemblage of all those distinct characters and qualities which enter into its composition. For Charity, like all other graces and virtues, is a *compound*, not only as to its three degrees, which may be called *first, middle, and last*, or *internal, interior, and external*, but also as to the innumerable component parts of each degree; and it is for want of viewing Charity in this light, that the common definitions of it, as given by ancient, as well as modern writers, are so very imperfect. Thus some, looking at this virtue only as it exists in its *first* or *inmost* degree, but not extending their view to its *lower* degrees, draw their portrait *partially*, giving only the *head* of the original, but without the *body* and *feet*. Others again see nothing but the *body* and *feet* of Charity, and some only the *feet*; and the consequence is, that their delineations also are defective, consisting either of a *body* and *feet* without a *head*, or of *feet* alone without a *body*. Thus the figure of this heavenly grace is *mutilated*, so that nothing can be seen of it but *broken fragments*, scattered here and there, which convey indeed some faint idea of the perfection of its original form of beauty, but for want of being viewed in the *combination*, leave the spectator to lament his very inadequate conception of their *united* effect.

Nothing perhaps is more to be lamented, because nothing is more mischievous in the church, than the above exhibition of its virtues *in parts* only, whilst the *general symmetry* resulting from those parts is unseen, and thus even the parts themselves are de-

prived of a considerable share of their excellence, as arising from their adaptation to each other, and from the harmony produced by such adaptation: This case may be illustrated by that of the *cake*, or *meat-offering*, under the Jewish dispensation, which *cake* was composed, we learn, of *fine flour, of oil, and of frankincense*, [Levit. ii. 1.] and thus, as we are further taught by our enlightened author, was a representative and significative figure of *Charity*, or that neighbourly love which is the peculiar characteristic of the spiritual church. [See A. C. 2177.] How plain now is it to see, that no description of the *parts*, of which this cake was compounded, let it be ever so correct and full, can possibly give an adequate idea of the *cake itself*, and that consequently the intrinsic virtues of the cake, together with its peculiar qualities and uses, must remain for ever unknown, until the parts be viewed in their *combination* with each other! How plainly also may it be further seen, that the *fine flour, the oil, and the frankincense*, whatsoever excellencies each may possess *singly*, acquire new and increased perfection by their *assemblage*, and that thus to decide on the character and quality of any one of them, when in a state of separation from the rest, would be a very imperfect decision, and would of course suggest a very imperfect idea of the proper value and use of each, whether it be the *fine flour, the oil, or the frankincense!* Yet such is the decision which we make concerning the evangelical grace of Charity, whensoever we look only at its *component parts*, without viewing them in their *complex*, or in their *union* with each other.

But perhaps the best illustration of the above case may be found in the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem respecting the grace under consideration; and therefore, I shall proceed, without farther interruption, to state the distinct views exhibited in that doctrine, *first*, of the several degrees of Charity, called *internal, interior, and external*; and *secondly*, of their *combination*, or of that union of all in one, which form the evangelical excellence called *Charity*, or the love of our neighbour.

1. And *first*, in regard to the *internal* degree of Charity.

It is the continual edifying testimony of the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem, that this degree consists in an *internal affection to do the truth, thus that it consists in performing uses for the sake of uses*; and further, that it is an *image of GOD*, and that it contains in it love to the LORD, thus the LORD, although man is

*ignorant of it*; and further, that *the presence of the Lord with men and angels is always according to the state of their love and charity*. [See *Heavenly Doctrine*, &c. n. 106]. It is evident therefore from this testimony, that *Charity*, in its *internal* degree, is the Divine Life of the LORD in man, and is thus a heavenly affection of doing what is right and true, which affection man cannot procure for himself, only so far as he draws nigh unto the LORD, and prepares himself by repentance and faith for its reception. It is further evident, that *Charity*, in this degree, is in intimate connexion with the LORD, being His *image* in man, containing His love, and thus the Lord Himself; and that, consequently, wheresoever, or in whatsoever mind *Charity* is, there the LORD is, and there also are all the blessings of His eternal kingdom. The seat therefore, or abode of *Charity*, in this its *internal* degree, is manifestly in *the will* of man, because *the will*, according to the above heavenly doctrine, is *the receptacle and subject of all things of good, as the understanding is the receptacle and subject of all things of truth*. [See n. 29.]

But it is not sufficient, either for the glory of GOD, or for the happiness of man, that *Charity* should be confined within [the limited boundaries of its *internal* degree, since both the glory of God and the happiness of man require, that it should descend from that degree into its *interior* one, and from this again into its *external* degree, to the intent that it may thus come into its *fulness*, and from this fulness may not only replenish its possessor with increased and accumulated blessing, but may likewise, by its good works, add to the sum of human bliss in general, and thus promote the greater glory of its DIVINE PARENT.

When *Charity* then has kindled its holy and heavenly flame of love in its *internal degree*, or in the *human will*, it presently descends, according to the testimony of the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem, into its *interior degree*, or into the *human understanding*, where it acquires to itself all the brightness of that *light of truth*, which it sees to be so necessary for the accomplishment of its blessed purposes. For until this descent be effected, *Charity* is *blind*, and thus utterly incapable of finding its way to its desired end, the promotion of use and bliss, since it can neither discern the *proper objects* on which to exercise its good-will, nor yet the *proper means* by which these objects may be most benefited. But no sooner doth it enter into the region of *intelligence*, than it there

becomes enlightened with all those truths and knowledges, by which it is enabled to pursue its benevolent path even to the full gratification of all its desires. For lo! in this region it presently makes the grand discovery of what is implied in the term *neighbour*, or in those who have a demand both on its love and on its beneficence. Hence it is enlightened to discern, that *not only man in the singular is a neighbour, but also man in the plural, thus a society lesser and greater, a man's country, the church, the Lord's kingdom, and above all the Lord Himself*, [see *Heavenly Doctrine*, n. 91.] It is therefore now no longer imposed upon by *appearances*, or misled by the common idea, that *every man is alike a neighbour*, and consequently alike an object of its kindness, because according to this notion no distinction is made between a good man and a wicked man, and thus by doing good to the latter, wickedness may be encouraged. And as by the light of intelligence, Charity is enabled to see who are the *proper objects* of its beneficence, so by the same light it is enabled to discover also the *proper means* by which those objects may be best benefitted, until at length all its sacred energies and exertions are placed under the guidance of this radiant maxim of heavenly wisdom, that *Charity consists in acting, on all occasions, and in the discharge of every duty, under the influence of the love of justice with judgment, but under the influence of a love originating solely in the LORD GOD THE SAVIOUR*. [See *T. C. R.* 459.] Thus in its *interior* degree, Charity changes its name, and becomes *prudence*, yet still it is *Charity*, because its *prudence* is only its descent into a lower sphere, and thereby an accommodation of itself to general use and benefit, *first*, by the discrimination of its *proper objects*, and *secondly*, by the discernment of the *proper means* of executing its benevolent purposes.

But the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem still regards Charity as incomplete, notwithstanding the warmth with which it enlivens its *internal* degree of life, and the light with which it enlightens its *interior* degree. For as the life of man is *three-fold*, consisting of *will*, of *understanding*, and their *operation*, and as this three-fold life is imperfect, until the two former principles become fixed and fruitful in the last, so it is likewise in respect to Charity, and therefore the above doctrine continually inculcates the absolute necessity of the descent of this heavenly grace into its *external* or *lowest* degree, before its *internal* and *interior* de-

grees can possibly be productive of their manifold and intended blessings.

Charity then, in this its *external* degree, again changes its name and becomes *well-doing*, but still it is Charity, and in this its descent it only assumes another form or aspect, for the sake of accommodating itself to the accomplishment of its own benign purposes. This other form or aspect is indefinitely various, according to the indefinite variety of character, of station, and office of those, who are the blessed recipients of the grace which gives it birth. Thus with a *priest* it is the instruction of others in heavenly truth; with a *judge* it is the administration of justice; with a *magistrate* it is the preservation of civil order; with a *soldier* it is the defence of his country by arms; with a *merchant* it is the promotion of public blessing by an interchange of the commodities of one country for those of another; and so in all other cases, it is some exertion of mind and body, under the influence of universal good-will towards the human race, tending either to remove some evil, or to promote some blessing, and accomplishing its purpose by fulfilling diligently and conscientiously its duties in that station of life, be it high or low, in which the providence of the Most High hath been pleased to place it.

Agreeable then to the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem, the exercise of Charity doth not consist only in *almsgiving*, in the *building and endowment of hospitals*, in *clothing and maintaining the poor*, &c. &c. but it consists, as hath been stated, in acting uprightly and industriously on every occasion, and according to every relationship with society, whether as a *priest*, a *judge*, a *magistrate*, a *soldier*, a *merchant*, or in any other subordinate station and employment, which

*Though mean below, not so esteem'd above,  
Where all the grand of labour is the love.*

II. Having thus noted the *several degrees* of Charity, as described in the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem, it remains further to take a view of the *combination* of those degrees, or of that *union* of all in one, which forms the evangelical excellence called *Charity*, or *the love of our neighbour*, as further developed in the same doctrine.

And here we are forcibly struck with the delightful idea, which is continually suggested in the above doctrine, that Charity in its *complex*, or in the *full assemblage* of all its parts, constitutes a *com-*

*plete man*, which man is an image of heaven, or the GRAND MAN, and not only an *image*, but an *associate*, and this in such a sort, that the two men act reciprocally on each other, maintaining a spiritual intercourse or circulation of divine graces and blessings, of which the GRAND MAN, or heaven, is the *active soul*, whilst the man of charity here on earth is the *active body*.

In our contemplation of Charity, therefore, we are no longer disgusted at beholding a *head* without a *body*; or a *body* without *arms* and *feet*; or *arms* and *feet* without a *body* and a *head*; but we are transported at the sight of a *perfect human form*, exhibiting in its *external aspect* all the beauty of the most exact symmetry and proportions, and manifesting at the same time in its *internal life* all the charms and graces of its heavenly consociation.

In this human form too, there is nothing to be seen of division or disorder amongst its organs and members, but each knows its proper place; each keeps within the boundaries of its own office without encroaching on another; each is content to administer to the rest according to its faculty: thus the most perfect order and harmony prevail throughout the whole; the *head*, or *will*, ruling the *body*, or *understanding*; and the *body*, or *understanding*, in its turn, governing the *arms* and *feet*, or the *operative powers*; whilst these, in their turn, yield due obedience to the higher principles, from which they derive at once both their birth and their operation.

Another consideration equally wonderful, and equally exciting our adoration respecting the above form, is this, that in the assemblage of its parts or organs, each part or organ has a tendency to effect the purification, and thus add to the perfection of the rest; so that the purification and perfection of the *whole*, or of the *complex*, depends, in a great measure, on the parts of which it consists. For such, according to the testimony of the heavenly doctrine of the New Jerusalem, is the law of the Divine Providence, that inferior principles shall, in many cases, administer to the purification and perfection of superior ones, as superior ones do to inferior. Thus, therefore, in the instance of the grace of Charity, its *will*, or *love*, which constitutes its *internal* degree, when combined with its *understanding*, or *wisdom*, which constitutes its *interior* degree, not only contributes to the purification and perfection of the latter, but also receives back from the latter its own purification and perfection; and so likewise when both



these degrees descend into the *external* degree, which is their *operation*, they find again in their descent a similar advantage, by receiving back from the external degree their own life more thoroughly purified, and thus exalted to a higher state of perfection and of purity.

The above, is but a very rude and imperfect sketch of the sublime grace of Charity, nevertheless, rude and imperfect as it is, it may be sufficient to prove the superior excellence of that doctrine as to the bright views it presents, both of the *several distinct* degrees of Charity, and of their *combination*. It may serve at the same time (, what is of equal importance), to *remind us of our duties* in regard to that heavenly virtue, by suggesting the danger to which we are exposed, either of forming inadequate ideas of its constituent parts, or of separating the parts from each other. Thus it would conduct us, if we are attentive to its import, to the high wisdom of making that *meat offering*, which is acceptable to the GREAT AND HOLY GOD, by teaching us, in the *first* place, what its several ingredients are, and thereby enabling us to note the distinct qualities of the *fine flour*, the *oil*, and the *frankincense*, and in the *second* place, by enforcing the necessity of *joining these ingredients together*, since the grateful offering can never be made from any one of them *singly*, but from *all united*. Or, to speak without a figure, it would put us in possession of that blessed spirit of Charity, or brotherly love, which is essential life, by leading us to explore its constituent principles, as operative in our *wills*, in our *understandings*, and in our *works*, and to examine ourselves sincerely, and by the light of the ETERNAL TRUTH, not only how far we have attained to the possession of each of those principles *singly*, but likewise how far our lives are formed in agreement with them *conjointly*. It remains therefore only to offer up our devout prayers to the GOD of the Church, that His children may thus worship Him with acceptable worship and that for this purpose they may bring their *cake* to the altar, as *an offering made by fire of a sweet savour unto the LORD*, remembering at the same time that *what is left shall be Aaron's and his sons'*. [Levit. ii. 9, 10.] AMEN.

J. C.