

CHRISTIAN CHARITY



JONATHAN EDWARDS
(1703-1758)

CHRISTIAN CHARITY

*or the Duty of Charity to the Poor
Explained and Enforced*

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CHRISTIAN CHARITY

or the Duty of Charity¹ to the Poor Explained and Enforced

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.² Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

—Deuteronomy 15:7-11

1. The words explained

The duty here enjoined³ is giving to the poor: “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren...thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor

¹ Edwards uses the word *charity* in this book in a different way than he does in his book *Charity and Its Fruits*, which refers to charity as Christian love, following 1 Corinthians 13. In this book, *charity* means liberality or generosity to the poor.

² **wanteth** – needs.

³ **enjoined** – commanded.

shut thine hand from thy poor brother...Thou shalt surely give him." Here by "thy poor brother" is to be understood the same as in other places is meant by "neighbor." It is explained in Leviticus 25:35 to mean not only those of their own nation, but even strangers and sojourners: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner." The Pharisees indeed interpreted it to signify only one of their own nation; but Christ condemns this interpretation (Luk 10:29) and teaches, in contradiction to their opinion, that the rules of charity in the Law of Moses are to be extended to the Samaritans, who were not of their nation, and between whom and the Jews there was the most bitter enmity, and who were a people very troublesome to the Jews.

God gives us direction how we are to give in such a case, viz.,⁴ bountifully and willingly. We should give bountifully and sufficiently for the supply of the poor's need: "Thou shalt not...shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and...lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (vv. 7-8). And again, in verse 11: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." Again, we should give willingly and without grudging: "Thou shalt not harden thine heart...from thy poor brother...And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him" (vv. 7, 10).

We may also observe how peremptorily⁵ this duty is here enjoined and how much it is insisted on. It is repeated over and over again and enjoined in the strongest terms. "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother...But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him...Thou shalt surely give him...I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy" (vv. 7, 8, 10-11).

Moreover, God strictly warns against objections. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee" (v. 9). The matter concerning the seventh year, or year of release, was thus: God had given Israel a law that every seventh year should be a year of release; that if any man had lent anything to any of his poor neighbors, if the latter had not been able to repay it before that year, the former should release it, and should not exact it of his neighbor

⁴ viz. – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

⁵ peremptorily – absolutely; positively.

but give it to him. Therefore, God warns the children of Israel against making of this an objection to helping their poor neighbors, that the year of release was near at hand and it was not likely that they would be able to refund it again before that time, and then they should lose it wholly, because then they would be obliged to release it. God foresaw that the wickedness of their hearts would be very ready to make such an objection, but very strictly warns them against it, that they should not be the more backward to supply the wants of the needy for that, but should be willing to give him. "Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again" (Luk 6:35).

Men are exceedingly apt to make objections against such duties, which God speaks of here as a manifestation of the wickedness of their hearts: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart," etc. The warning is very strict. God doth not only say, Beware that thou do not actually refuse to give him, but, Beware that thou have not one objecting thought against it, arising from a backwardness to liberality. God warns against the beginnings of uncharitableness in the heart, and against whatever tends to a forbearance to give. "And thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee." God warns them from the guilt which they would be liable to bring upon themselves hereby.

We may observe here several enforcements of this duty. There is a reason of this duty implied in God's calling him that is needy our "brother": "Thou shalt not...shut thine hand from thy poor brother...Beware that...thine eye be [not] evil against thy poor brother...Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother" (vv. 7, 9, 11). We are to look upon ourselves as related to all mankind, but especially to those who are of the visible people of God. We are to look upon them as brethren, and to treat them accordingly. We shall be base indeed if we be not willing to help a brother in want. Another enforcement of this duty is the promise of God, that for this thing He will bless us in all our works, and in all that we put our hands unto, a promise that we shall not lose but gain by it (v. 10). Another is that we shall never lack proper objects of our charity and bounty: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land" (v. 11). This God says to the Jewish church; and the like Christ says to the Christian church: "Ye have the poor always with you" (Mat 26:11). This is to cut off an excuse that uncharitable persons would be ready to make for not giving, that they could find nobody to give to, that they saw none who needed. God cuts off such an excuse by telling us that He would so order it in His providence that His people everywhere and in all ages shall have occasion for the exercise of that virtue.

From this account, the doctrine is obvious that it is the absolute and indispensable duty of the people of God to give bountifully and willingly for supplying the necessities of the needy. But more particularly,

a. Bountifully

It is the duty of the people of God to give bountifully for the aforesaid purpose. It is commanded once and again in the text: “Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy [poor] brother” (vv. 8, 11). Merely to give something is not sufficient. It answers not the rule, nor comes up to the holy command of God; but we must open our hand wide. What we give, considering our neighbor’s needs and our ability, should be such as may be called a liberal gift. What is meant in the text by opening the hand wide, with respect to those that are able, is explained in verse 8: “Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.” By lending here, as is evident by the two following verses, and as we have just now shown, is not only meant lending to receive again. The word *lend* in Scripture is sometimes used for giving; as in Luke 6:35: “Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again.”

We are commanded, therefore, to give our poor neighbor what is sufficient for his need. There ought to be none suffered⁶ to live in pinching want among a visible people of God who are able, unless in case of idleness or prodigality or some such case which the Word of God excepts. It is said that the children of Israel should lend to the poor and in the year of release should release what they had lent, save when there should be no poor among them. It is rendered in the margin: “to the end there be no poor among you”; i.e.,⁷ you should so supply the wants of the needy that there may be none among you in pinching want. This translation seems the more likely to be the true one because God says that there shall be no such time when there shall be no poor who shall be proper objects of charity (v. 11). When persons give very sparingly, it is no manifestation of charity, but of a contrary spirit. “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness” (2Co 9:5). The apostle here calls a very sparing contribution “matter...of covetousness.”

⁶ **suffered** – allowed.

⁷ i.e. – from Latin *id est*: that is; in other words.

b. Willingly

It is the duty of the visible people of God to give for the supply of the needy freely and without grudging. It doth not at all answer the rule in the sight of God if it be done with an inward grudging or if the heart be grieved and it inwardly hurt the man to give what he gives. "Thou shalt surely give," says God, "and thine heart shall not be grieved." God looks at the heart, and the hand is not accepted without it. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2Co 9:7).

This is a duty to which God's people are under very strict obligations. It is not merely a commendable thing for a man to be kind and bountiful to the poor, but our bounden duty, as much a duty as it is to pray, or to attend public worship, or anything else whatever; and the neglect of it brings great guilt upon any person.

2. The obligation of Christians

This duty is absolutely commanded and much insisted on in the Word of God. Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more peremptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor? We have the same law in a positive manner laid down in Leviticus 25:35: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee." And in verse 38, God enforces it with saying, "I am the LORD your God."

It is mentioned in Scripture, not only as a duty, but a great duty. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged to be a duty to be kind to the needy; but by many it seems not to be looked upon as a duty of great importance. However, it is mentioned in Scripture as one of the greater and more essential duties of religion: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic 6:8). Here to love mercy is mentioned as one of the three great things that are the sum of all religion. So it is mentioned by the Apostle James as one of the two things wherein pure and undefiled religion consists: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jam 1:27).

So Christ tells us it is one of the weightier matters of the law: "Ye...have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy,

and faith” (Mat 23:23). The Scriptures again and again teach us that it is a more weighty and essential thing than the attendance on the outward ordinances of worship: “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6; Mat 9:13; 12:7). I know of scarce any duty which is so much insisted on, so pressed and urged upon us, both in the Old Testament and New, as this duty of charity to the poor.

The reason of the thing strongly obliges to it. It is not only very positively and frequently insisted on by God, but it is most reasonable in itself; and so, on this account, there is reason why God should much insist upon it.

a. Considering the general state of mankind

It is most reasonable, considering the general state and nature of mankind. This is such as renders it most reasonable that we should love our neighbor as ourselves; for men are made in the image of our God, and on this account are worthy of our love. Besides, we are all closely allied one to another by nature. We have all the same nature, like faculties, like dispositions, like desires of good, like needs, like aversion to misery, and are made of one blood; and we are made to subsist by society and union one with another. God hath made us with such a nature that we cannot subsist without the help of one another. Mankind in this respect are as the members of the natural body. One cannot subsist alone without a union with, and the help of, the rest.

Now, this state of mankind shows how reasonable and suitable it is that men should love their neighbors, and that we should not look everyone at “his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phi 2:4). A selfish spirit is very unsuitable to the nature and state of mankind. He who is all for himself and none for his neighbors deserves to be cut off from the benefit of human society and to be turned out among wild beasts to subsist by himself as well as he can. A withdrawn covetous spirit is more suitable for wolves and other beasts of prey than for human beings.

To love our neighbor as ourselves is the sum of the moral law respecting our fellow-creatures; and to help them and to contribute to their relief is the most natural expression of this love. It is vain to pretend to a spirit of love to our neighbors when it is grievous to us to part with anything for their help when under calamity. They who love only in word and in tongue, and not in deed, have no love in truth. Any profession without it is a vain pretense. To refuse to give to the needy is unreasonable because we therein do to others contrary to what we would

have others to do to us in like circumstances. We are very sensible of our own calamities; and, when we suffer, are ready enough to think that our state requires the compassion and help of others; and are ready enough to think it hard if others will not deny themselves in order to help us when in difficulties.

b. Considering our circumstances under the gospel

It is especially reasonable, considering our circumstances, under such a dispensation of grace as that of the gospel. Consider how much God hath done for us, how greatly He hath loved us, what He hath given us when we were so unworthy and when He could have no addition to His happiness by us. Consider that silver and gold and earthly crowns were in His esteem but mean⁸ things to give us, and He hath therefore given us His own Son. Christ loved and pitied us when we were poor, and He laid out Himself to help, and even did shed His own blood for us without grudging. He did not think much to deny Himself and to be at great cost for us vile wretches in order to make us rich and to clothe us with kingly robes when we were naked; to feast us at His own table with dainties infinitely costly when we were starving; to advance us from the dunghill and set us among princes and make us to inherit the throne of His glory, and so to give us the enjoyment of the greatest wealth and plenty to all eternity. This is agreeable to 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Considering all these things, what a poor business will it be that those who hope to share these benefits yet cannot give something for the relief of a poor neighbor without grudging! That it should grieve them to part with a small matter to help a fellow-servant in calamity, when Christ did not grudge to shed His own blood for them!

How unsuitable is it for us, who live only by kindness, to be unkind! What would have become of us if Christ had been so saving of His blood and unwilling to bestow it as many men are of their money or goods? Or if He had been as ready to excuse Himself from dying for us, as men commonly are to excuse themselves from charity to their neighbor? If Christ would have made objections of such things, as men commonly object to performing deeds of charity to their neighbor, He would have found enough of them.

Besides, Christ, by His redemption, has brought us into a more near relation one to another, has made us children of God, children in the

⁸ **mean** – lowly; common.

same family. We are all brethren, having God for our common Father, which is much more than to be brethren in any other family. He has made us all one body; therefore, we ought to be united and subserve one another's good and bear one another's burdens, as is the case with the members of the same natural body. If one of the members suffer, all the other members bear the burden with it (1Co 12:26). If one member be diseased or wounded, the other members of the body will minister to it and help it. So surely it should be in the body of Christ. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

Apply these things to yourselves and inquire whether you do not lie under guilt on account of the neglect of this duty, in withholding that charity which God requires of you towards the needy? You have often been put upon examining yourselves whether you do not live in some way displeasing to God. Perhaps at such times it never came into your minds whether you do not lie under guilt on this account. But this neglect certainly brings guilt upon the soul in the sight of God, as is evident by the text: "Beware that...thine eye be [not] evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee" (Deu 15:9). This is often mentioned as one of the sins of Judah and Jerusalem for which God was about to bring such terrible judgments upon them; and it was one of the sins of Sodom for which that city was destroyed that she did not give to supply the poor and needy. "This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Eze 16:49).

And have we not reason to fear that much guilt lies upon this land on this very account? We have a high conceit of ourselves for religion; but do not many other countries shame us? Do not the papists shame us in this respect? So far as I can understand the tenor of the Christian religion and the rules of the Word of God, the same are in no measure in this respect answered by the general practice of most people in this land. There are many who make a high profession of religion; but do not many of them need to be informed by the Apostle James what true religion is?

Let everyone examine himself whether he do not lie under guilt in this matter. Have you not forborne to give when you have seen your brother in want? Have you not shut up the bowels of your compassion towards him and forborne to deny yourselves a little for his relief? Or when you have given, have you not done it grudgingly? And has it not inwardly hurt and grieved you? You have looked upon what you have given as lost, so that what you have given has been, as the apostle expresses it, a matter of covetousness rather than of bounty (2Co 9:5).

Have not occasions of giving been unwelcome to you? Have you not been uneasy under them? Have you not felt a considerable backwardness to give? Have you not, from a grudging, backward spirit, been apt to raise objections against giving and to excuse yourselves? Such things as these bring guilt upon the soul and often bring down the curse of God upon the persons in whom these things are found, as we may show more fully hereafter.

3. An exhortation to this duty

We are professors of Christianity; we pretend to be the followers of Jesus and to make the gospel our rule. We have the Bible in our houses. Let us not behave ourselves in this particular as if we had never seen the Bible, as if we were ignorant of Christianity and knew not what kind of religion it is. What will it signify to pretend to be Christians and at the same time to live in the neglect of those rules of Christianity which are mainly insisted on in it? But there are several things which I would here propose to your consideration.

a. What you have is not your own.

Consider that what you have is not your own; i.e., you have only a subordinate right. Your goods are only lent to you of God to be improved by you in such ways as He directs. You yourselves are not your own. “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price...Your body, and...your spirit...are God’s” (1Co 6:20). And if you yourselves are not your own, so then neither are your possessions your own. Many of you have by covenant given up yourselves and all you have to God. You have disowned and renounced any right in yourselves or in anything that you have and have given to God all the absolute right; and if you be true Christians, you have done it from the heart.

Your money and your goods are not your own; they are only committed to you as stewards, to be used for Him Who committed them to you. “Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1Pe 4:9-10). A steward has no business with his master’s goods to use them any otherwise than for the benefit of his master and his family or according to his master’s direction. He hath no business to use them as if he were the owner of them; he hath nothing to do with them, only as he is to use them for his master. He is to give every one of his master’s family “their portion of meat in due season” (Luk 12:42).

But if instead of that he hoards up his master's goods for himself and withholds them from those of the household so that some of the family are pinched for want of food and clothing, he is therein guilty of robbing his master and embezzling his substance. And would any householder endure such a steward? If he discovered him in such a practice, would he not take his goods out of his hands and commit them to the care of some other steward, who should give every one of his family his "portion of meat in due season"? Remember that all of us must give account of our stewardship and how we have disposed of those goods which our Master has put into our hands. And if, when our Master comes to reckon with us, it be found that we have denied some of His family their proper provision while we have hoarded up for ourselves as if we had been the owners of our Master's goods, what account shall we give of this?

b. Giving to others is giving to the Lord.

God tells us that He shall look upon what is done in charity to our neighbors in want as done unto Him; and what is denied unto them as denied unto Him. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD" (Pro 19:17). God has been pleased to make our needy neighbors His receivers. He in His infinite mercy has so interested Himself in their case that He looks upon what is given in charity to them as given to Himself; and when we deny them what their circumstances require of us, He looks upon it that we therein rob Him of His right.

Christ teaches us that we are to look upon our fellow-Christians in this case as Himself, and that our giving or withholding from them shall be taken as if we so behaved ourselves towards Him. Christ says to the righteous on His right hand, who had supplied the wants of the needy, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mat 25:40). In like manner, He says to the wicked who had not shown mercy to the poor, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (v. 45). Now, what stronger enforcement of this duty can be conceived, or is possible, than this, that Jesus Christ looks upon our kind and bountiful, or unkind and uncharitable, treatment of our needy neighbors as such a treatment of Himself?

If Christ Himself were upon earth, and dwelt among us in a frail body as He once did, and were in calamitous and needy circumstances, should we not be willing to supply Him? Should we be apt to excuse ourselves from helping Him? Should we not be willing to supply Him so that He might live free from distressing poverty? And if we did otherwise, should

we not bring great guilt upon ourselves? And might not our conduct justly be very highly resented by God? Christ was once here in a frail body, stood in need of the charity, and was maintained by it. “And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance” (Luk 8:2-3). So He still, in many of His members, needs the charity of others.

c. We must comply with difficult duties in the Christian life.

Consider that there is an absolute necessity of our complying with the difficult duties of religion. To give to the poor in the manner and measure that the gospel prescribes is a difficult duty, i.e., it is very contrary to corrupt nature, to that covetousness and selfishness of which there is so much in the wicked heart of man. Man is naturally governed only by a principle of self-love; and it is a difficult thing to corrupt nature for men to deny themselves of their present interest, trusting in God to make it up to them hereafter. But how often has Christ told us the necessity of doing difficult duties of religion if we will be His disciples, that we must sell all, take up our cross daily, deny ourselves, renounce our worldly profits and interests, etc. And if this duty seems hard and difficult to you, let not that be an objection with you against doing it; for you have taken up quite a wrong notion of things if you expect to go to heaven without performing difficult duties; if you expect any other than to find the way to life a narrow way.

d. This duty is necessary.

The Scripture teaches us that this very particular duty is necessary. Particularly,

1. Only the merciful shall obtain mercy.

The Scripture teaches that God will deal with us as we deal with our fellow-creatures in this particular, and that with what measure we mete to others in this respect God will measure to us again. This the Scripture asserts both ways. It asserts that if we be of a merciful spirit God will be merciful to us. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mat 5:7). “With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful” (Psa 18:25). On the other hand, it tells us that if we be not merciful God will not be merciful to us; and that all our pretenses to faith and a work of conversion will not avail us to obtain mercy unless we be merciful to them that are in want. “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed

no mercy...What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (Jam 2:13-16).

2. Charity is an essential part of a godly man's character.

This very thing is often mentioned in Scripture as an essential part of the character of a godly man. "The righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth...He is ever merciful, and lendeth...A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth...He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor...He that honoureth [God] hath mercy on the poor" (Psa 37:21, 26; 112:5, 9; Pro 14:31; Pro 21:26). A righteous man and a merciful man are used as synonymous terms: "The righteous perisheth...and merciful men are taken away," etc. (Isa 57:1).

It is mentioned in the New Testament as a thing so essential that the contrary cannot consist with a sincere love to God. "But 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? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (1Jo 3:17-19). So the Apostle Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians and proposes their contributing for the supply of the poor saints, tells them what he doth it for, viz., a trial of their sincerity. "I speak...to prove the sincerity of your love" (2Co 8:8).

3. Christ will judge in respect to this work.

Christ teaches that judgment will be passed at the Great Day according to men's works in this respect. This is taught us by Christ in the most particular account of the proceedings of that Day that we have in the whole Bible (see Mat 25:34ff). It is evident that Christ thus represented the proceedings and determinations of this Great Day as turning upon this one point, on purpose and on design to lead us into this notion and to fix it in us that a charitable spirit and practice towards our brethren is necessary to salvation.

e. Charity ends in reward rather than loss.

Consider what abundant encouragement the Word of God gives that you shall be no losers by your charity and bounty to them who are in want. As there is scarce any duty prescribed in the Word of God which is so much insisted on as this, so there is scarce any to which there are so many promises of reward made. This virtue especially has the promises

of this life and that which is to come. If we believe the Scriptures, when a man charitably gives to his neighbor in want, the giver has the greatest advantage by it, even greater than the receiver. “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Act 20:35). He that gives bountifully is a happier man than he that receives bountifully. “He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he” (Pro 14:21).

Many persons are ready to look upon what is bestowed for charitable uses as lost. But we ought not to look upon it as lost because it benefits those whom we ought to love as ourselves. And not only so, but it is not lost to us if we give any credit to the Scriptures. See the advice that Solomon gives in Ecclesiastes 11:1: “Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days.” By casting our bread upon the waters, Solomon means giving it to the poor, as appears by the next words: “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight.” Waters are sometimes put for people and multitudes.

What strange advice would this seem to many, to cast their bread upon the waters, which would seem to them like throwing it away! What more direct method to lose our bread than to go and throw it into the sea? But the wise man tells us, No, it is not lost; you shall find it again after many days. It is not sunk, but you commit it to Providence. You commit it to the winds and waves: however, it will come about⁹ to you, and you shall find it again after many days. Though it should be many days first, yet you shall find it at last, at a time when you most need it. He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord; and God is not one of those who will not pay again what is lent to Him. If you lend anything to God, you commit it into faithful hands. “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (Pro 19:17). God will not only pay you again, but He will pay you with great increase. “Give, and it shall be given unto you,” that is, in “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over” (Luk 6:38).

Men do not account that lost that is let¹⁰ out to use; but what is bestowed in charity is lent to the Lord, and He repays with great increase. “The liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand” (Isa 32:8). Here I would particularly observe,

⁹ **about** – around.

¹⁰ **let** – loaned.

a. Eternal riches in heaven

That if you give with a spirit of true charity, you shall be rewarded in what is infinitely more valuable than what you give, even eternal riches in heaven. “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Mat 10:42).

Giving to our needy brethren is in Scripture called laying up treasure in heaven, in bags that wax not old. “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth” (Luk 12:33). Men, when they have laid up their money in their chests, do not suppose that they have thrown it away, but, on the contrary, that it is laid up safe. Much less is treasure thrown away when it is laid up in heaven. What is laid up there is much safer than what is laid up in chests or cabinets.

You cannot lay up treasure on earth, but that it is liable to be stolen or otherwise to fail. But there no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth. It is committed to God’s care, and He will keep it safely for you; and when you die, you shall receive it with infinite increase. Instead of a part of your earthly substance thus bestowed, you shall receive heavenly riches, on which you may live in the greatest fulness, honor, and happiness to all eternity, and shall never be in want of anything. After feeding with some of your bread those who cannot recompense you, you shall be rewarded at the resurrection and eat bread in the kingdom of God. “When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Luk 14:13-15).

b. Temporal benefits

If you give to the needy though but in the exercise of moral virtue, you will be in the way greatly to gain by it in your temporal¹¹ interest. They who give in the exercise of a gracious charity are in the way to be gainers both here and hereafter; and those that give in the exercise of a moral bounty and liberality have many temporal promises made to them. We learn by the Word of God that they are in the way to be prospered in their outward affairs. Ordinarily such do not lose by it, but such a blessing attends their concerns that they are paid doubly for it. “There is that

¹¹ **temporal** – pertaining to this life or this world.

scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself...He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack" (Pro 11:24-25; 28:27).

c. Sowing seed

When men give to the needy, they do as it were sow seed for a crop. When men sow their seed, they seem to throw it away; yet they do not look upon it as thrown away, because, though they expect not the same again, yet they expect much more as the fruit of it. And if it be not certain that they shall have a crop, yet they are willing to run the venture of it; for that is the ordinary way wherein men obtain increase. So it is when persons give to the poor; though the promises of gaining thereby, in our outward circumstances, perhaps are not absolute; yet it is as much the ordinary consequence of it as increase is of sowing seed. Giving to the poor is in this respect compared to sowing seed in Ecclesiastes 11:6: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." By withholding the hand, the wise man means not giving to the poor (see vv. 1-2). It intimates that giving to the poor is as likely a way to obtain prosperity and increase as sowing seed in a field.

The husbandman does not look upon his seed as lost but is glad that he has opportunity to sow it. It grieves him not that he has land to be sown, but he rejoices in it. For the like reason, we should not be grieved that we find needy people to bestow our charity upon; for this is as much an opportunity to obtain increase as the other.

Some may think this is strange doctrine; and it is to be feared that not many will so far believe it as to give to the poor with as much cheerfulness as they sow their ground. However, it is the very doctrine of the Word of God. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2Co 9:6-8).¹²

¹² In this section Edwards emphasizes God's general pattern of blessing the giver in temporal (earthly) ways. In our day we must emphasize that God is sovereign in bestowing all His gracious gifts, physical and spiritual, and also that we must not give selfishly in order to receive. We give for the glory of God and because

d. Easy with God

It is easy with God to make up to men what they give in charity. Many but little consider how their prosperity or ill success in their outward affairs depends upon Providence. There are a thousand turns of Providence, to which their affairs are liable, whereby God may either add to their outward substance or diminish from it a great deal more than they are ordinarily called to give to their neighbors. How easy is it with God to diminish what they possess by sickness in their families, by drought, or frost, or mildew, or vermin; by unfortunate accidents, by entanglements in their affairs, or disappointments in their business! And how easy is it with God to increase their substance by suitable seasons, or by health and strength; by giving them fair opportunities for promoting their interest in their dealings with men; by conducting them in His providence so that they attain their designs; and by innumerable other ways which might be mentioned! How often is it that only one act of providence in a man's affairs either adds to his estate or diminishes from it more than he would need to give to the poor in a whole year.

e. God's way of blessing

God has told us that this is the way to have His blessing attending our affairs. "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (Deu 15:10). "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed" (Pro 22:9). It is a remarkable evidence how little many men realize the things of religion, whatever they pretend—how little they realize that the Scripture is the Word of God, or if it be, that He speaks true—that notwithstanding all the promises made in the Scripture to bounty to the poor, yet they are so backward to this duty and are so afraid to trust God with a little of their estates. Observation may confirm the same thing which the Word of God teaches on this head. God, in His providence, generally smiles upon and prospers those men who are of a liberal, charitable, bountiful spirit.

f. God's curse to the uncharitable

God has threatened to follow with his curse those who are uncharitable to the poor. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Pro 28:27). It is said, "He that hideth his eyes," because this is the way of uncharitable men;

of the need of the poor. As Edwards states above briefly, the biblical principle of earthly reward for giving is not an absolute promise, but a general pattern of God's merciful dealing in this world.

they hide their eyes from seeing the wants of their neighbor. A charitable person, whose heart disposes him to bounty and liberality, will be quick-sighted to discern the needs of others. They will not be at any difficulty to find out who is in want; they will see objects enough of their charity, let them go whither they will.

But, on the contrary, he that is of a stingy spirit, so that it goes against the grain to give anything, he will be always at a loss for objects of his charity. Such men excuse themselves with this, that they find not anyone to give to. They hide their eyes and will not see their neighbor's wants. If a particular object is presented, they will not very readily see his circumstances; they are a long while in being convinced that he is an object of charity. They hide their eyes; and it is not an easy thing to make them sensible of the necessities and distresses of their neighbor, or at least to convince them that his necessities are such that they ought to give him any great matter.

Other men, who are of a bountiful spirit, can very easily see the objects of charity; but the uncharitable are very unapt both to see the proper objects of charity and to see their obligations to this duty. The reason is that they are of that sort spoken of here by the wise man: they hide their eyes. Men will readily see where they are willing to see; but where they hate to see, they will hide their eyes.

God says such as hides his eyes in this case shall have many a curse. Such an one is in the way to be cursed in soul and body, in both his spiritual and temporal affairs. We have shown already how those that are charitable to the poor are in the way of being blessed. There are so many promises of the divine blessing that we may look upon it as much the way to be blessed in our outward concerns as sowing seed in a field is the way to have increase. And to be covetous and uncharitable is as much the way to be followed with a curse as to be charitable is the way to be followed with a blessing. To withhold more than is meet tends as much to poverty as scattering tends to increase (Pro 11:24). Therefore, if you withhold more than is meet, you will cross your own disposition and will frustrate your own end. What you seek by withholding from your neighbor is your own temporal interest and outward estate; but if you believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, you must believe that you cannot take a more direct course to lose, to be crossed and cursed in your temporal interest, than this of withholding from your indigent neighbor.

g. Future calamities

Consider that you know not what calamitous and necessitous circumstances you yourselves or your children may be in. Perhaps you

are ready to bless yourselves in your hearts as though there were no danger of your being brought into calamitous and distressing circumstances. There is at present no prospect of it, and you hope you shall be able to provide well for your children. But you little consider what a shifting, changing, uncertain world you live in, and how often it has so happened that men have been reduced from the greatest prosperity to the greatest adversity, and how often the children of the rich have been reduced to pinching want.

Agreeable to this is the advice that the wise man gives us: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth” (Ecc 11:1-2). You do not know not what calamitous circumstances you may be in yourself in this changeable, uncertain world. You know not what circumstances you or your children may be brought into by captivity or other un-thought-of providences. Providence governs all things. Perhaps you may trust to your own wisdom to continue your prosperity; but you cannot alter what God determines and orders in providence, as in the words immediately following the forementioned text in Ecclesiastes: “If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be” (v. 3); i.e., you cannot alter the determinations of Providence. You may trust to your own wisdom for future prosperity; but if God have ordained adversity, it shall come. As the clouds when full of rain empty themselves upon the earth, so what is in the womb of Providence shall surely come to pass. And as Providence casts the tree, whether towards the south, or towards the north, whether for prosperity or adversity, there it shall be, for all that you can do to alter it—agreeably to what the wise man observes in chapter 7:13: “Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?”

This consideration, that you know not what calamity and necessity you may be in yourselves or your children, tends very powerfully to enforce this duty several ways.

1. This may put you upon considering how your hearts would be affected if it should so be. If it should happen that you or some of your children should be brought into such circumstances as those of your neighbors, how grievous would it be to you! Now perhaps you say of this and the other poor neighbor that they can do well enough; if they be pinched a little, they can live. Thus you can make light of their difficulties. But if Providence should so order it that you or your children should be brought into the same circumstances, would you make light of

them then? Would you not use another sort of language about it? Would you not think that your case was such as needed the kindness of your neighbors? Would you not think that they ought to be ready to help you? And would you not take it hardly if you saw a contrary spirit in them and saw that they made light of your difficulties?

If one of your children should be brought to poverty by captivity¹³ or otherwise, how would your hearts be affected in such a case? If you should hear that some persons had taken pity on your child and had been very bountiful to it, would you not think that they did well? Would you be at all apt to accuse them of folly or profuseness that they should give so much to it?

2. If ever there should be such a time, your kindness to others now will be but a laying up against such a time. If you yourselves should be brought into calamity and necessity, then would you find what you have given in charity to others lying ready in store for you. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days," says the wise man (Ecc 11:1). But when shall we find it? He tells us in the next verse: "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Then is the time when you shall find it: when the day of evil cometh. You shall again find your bread which you have cast upon the waters when you shall want it most and stand in greatest necessity of it. God will keep it for you against such a time. When other bread shall fail, then God will bring to you the bread which you formerly cast upon the waters, so that you shall not famish. He who gives to the poor shall not lack.

Giving to the needy is like laying up against winter or against a time of calamity. It is the best way of laying up for yourselves and for your children. Children in a time of need very often find their fathers' bread, that bread which their fathers had cast upon the waters. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psa 37:25). Why? What is the reason of it? It follows in the next verse: "He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed."

Whether the time will ever come or not that we or our children shall be in distressing want of bread, yet doubtless evil will be on the earth. We shall have our times of calamity wherein we shall stand in great need of

¹³ The author repeatedly brings in this idea, possibly because Northampton, the place where the author lived, was at that time a frontier town and suffered much by the incursions of the Indians from Canada, who slaughtered and captivated the people, as they found opportunity.

God's pity and help, if not of that of our fellow-creatures. And God has promised that at such a time he that has been of a charitable spirit and practice shall find help. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness" (Psa 41:1-3). Such as have been merciful and liberal to others in their distress, God will not forget it, but will so order it that they shall have help when they are in distress. Yea, their children shall reap the fruit of it in the day of trouble.

3. God has threatened uncharitable persons that if ever they come to be in calamity and distress they shall be left helpless. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Pro 21:13).

4. Objections to the exercise of charity answered

I proceed now to answer some objections which are sometimes made against this duty.

Objection I. *I am in a natural¹⁴ condition, and if I should give to the poor, I should not do it with a right spirit, and so should get nothing by it.* To this I answer,

1. We have shown already that a temporal blessing is promised to a moral bounty and liberality. This is the way to be prospered; this is the way to increase. We find in Scripture many promises of temporal blessings to moral virtues, as to diligence in our business, to justice in our dealings, to faithfulness, to temperance. So there are many blessings promised to bounty and liberality.

2. You may as well make the same objection against any other duty of religion. You may as well object against keeping the Sabbath, against prayer, or public worship, or against doing anything at all in religion; for while in a natural condition, you do not any of these duties with a right spirit. If you say you do these duties because God has commanded or required them of you and you shall sin greatly if you neglect them, you shall increase your guilt; and so expose yourselves to the greater damnation and punishment. The same may be said of the neglect of this duty; the neglect of it is as provoking to God.

¹⁴ **natural** – not born again by God's grace; unregenerate.

If you say that you read and pray and attend public worship because that is the appointed way for you to seek salvation, so is bounty to the poor as much as those. The appointed way for us to seek the favor of God and eternal life is the way of the performance of all known duties, of which giving to the poor is one as much known and as necessary as reading the Scriptures, praying, or any other. Showing mercy to the poor does as much belong to the appointed way of seeking salvation as any other duty whatever. Therefore, this is the way in which Daniel directed Nebuchadnezzar to seek mercy, in Daniel 4:27: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor."

Objection II. *If I be liberal and bountiful, I shall only make a righteousness of it, and so it will do me more hurt than good.* To this I say,

1. The same answer may be made to this as to the former objection, viz., that you may as well make the same objection against doing any religious or moral duty at all. If this be a sufficient objection against deeds of charity, then it is a sufficient objection to prayer; for nothing is more common than for persons to make a righteousness of their prayers. So it is a good objection against your keeping the Sabbath, or attending any public worship, or ever reading in the Bible; for of all these things you are in danger of making a righteousness. Yea, if the objection be good against deeds of charity, then it is as good against acts of justice; and you may neglect to speak the truth, may neglect to pay your debts, may neglect acts of common humanity; for of all those things you are in danger of making a righteousness. So that if your objection be good, you may throw up all religion, and live like heathens or atheists, and may be thieves, robbers, fornicators, adulterers, murderers, and commit all the sins that you can think of, lest if you should do otherwise, you should make a righteousness of your conduct.

2. Your objection carries it thus, that it is not best for you to do as God commands and counsels you to do. We find many commands in Scripture to be charitable to the poor. The Bible is full of them; and you are not excepted from those commands. God makes no exception of any particular kinds of persons that are especially in danger of making a righteousness of what they do; and God often directs and counsels persons to this duty. Now will you presume to say that God has not directed you to the best way? He has advised you to do thus; but you think it not best for you, but that it would do you more hurt than good if you should do it. You think there is other counsel better than God's, and that it is the best way for you to go contrary to God's commands.

Objection III. *I have in times past given to the poor but never found myself the better for it.* I have heard ministers preach that giving to the poor was the way to prosper, but I perceive not that I am more prosperous than I was before. Yea, I have met with many misfortunes, crosses, and disappointments in my affairs since. And it may be that some will say, That very year, or soon after the very time I had been giving to the poor, hoping to be blessed for it, I met with great losses, and things went hardly with me; and therefore I do not find what I hear preached about giving to the poor as being the way to be blessed and prosperous, agreeable to my experience.

To this objection I shall answer several things:

1. Perhaps you looked out for the fulfilment of the promise too soon, before you had fulfilled the condition; as particularly, perhaps you have been so sparing and grudging in your kindness to the poor that what you have done has been rather a discovery of a covetous, selfish spirit than of any bounty or liberality. The promises are not made to every man who gives anything at all to the poor, let it be ever so little, and after what manner soever given. You mistook the promises if you understood them so. A man may give something to the poor and yet be entitled to no promise, either temporal or spiritual. The promises are made to mercy and liberality. But a man may give something, and yet be so stingy and grudging in it, that what he gives may be, as the apostle calls it, a matter of covetousness. What he does may be more a manifestation of his covetousness than anything else. But there are no promises made to men's expressing their covetousness.

Perhaps what you gave was not freely given, but as it were of necessity. It was grudgingly; your hearts were grieved when you gave. And if you gave once or twice what was considerable, yet that does not answer the rule. It may be, for all that, that in the general course of your lives you have been far from being kind and liberal to your neighbors. Perhaps you thought that because you once or twice gave a few shillings to the poor, that then you stood entitled to the promises of being blessed in all your concerns, and of increasing and being established by liberal things, though in the general you have lived in a faulty neglect of the duty of charity. You raise objections from experience before you have made trial. To give once, or twice, or thrice is not to make trial, though you give considerably. You cannot make any trial unless you become a liberal person, or unless you become such that you may be truly said to be of a liberal and bountiful practice. Let one who is truly such and has been such in the general course of his life tell what he has found by experience.

2. If you have been liberal to the poor and have met with calamities since, yet how can you tell how much greater calamities and losses you might have met with if you had been otherwise? You say you have met with crosses and disappointments and frowns. If you expected to meet with no trouble in the world because you gave to the poor, you mistook the matter. Though there be many and great promises made to the liberal, yet God has nowhere promised that they shall not find this world a world of trouble. It will be so to all. Man is born to sorrow and must expect no other than to meet with sorrow here. But how can you tell how much greater sorrow you would have met with if you had been stingy and unmerciful to the poor? How can you tell how much greater losses you would have met with? How much more vexation and trouble would have followed you? Have none ever met with greater frowns in their outward affairs than you have?

3. How can you tell what blessings God has yet in reserve for you if you do but continue in well-doing? Although God has promised great blessings to liberality to the poor, yet He has not limited Himself as to the time of the bestowment. If you have not yet seen any evident fruit of your kindness to the poor, yet the time may come when you shall see it remarkably, and that at a time when you most stand in need of it. You cast your bread upon the waters, and looked for it, and expected to find it again presently. And sometimes it is so; but this is not promised. It is promised, "Thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecc 11:1). God knows how to choose a time for you better than you yourselves. You should therefore wait His time. If you go on in well-doing, God may bring it to you when you stand most in need.

It may be that there is some winter a-coming, some day of trouble; and God keeps your bread for you against that time; and then God will give you "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (Luk 6:38). We must trust in God's Word for the bestowment of the promised reward, whether we can see in what manner it is done or no. Pertinent to the present purpose are those words of the wise man in Ecclesiastes 11:4: "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." In this context, the wise man is speaking of charity to the poor and comparing it to sowing seed, and advises us to trust Providence for success in that, as we do in sowing seed. He who regards the winds and clouds, to predict prosperity to seed, and will not trust Providence with it, is not likely to sow nor to have bread-corn. So he that will not trust Providence for the reward of his charity to the poor is likely to go without the blessing. After the words now quoted, follows his advice: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening

withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (v. 6). Therefore, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal 6:9). You think you have not reaped yet. Whether you have or not, go on still in giving and doing good; and if you do so, you shall reap in due time. God only knows the due time, the best time, for you to reap.

Objection IV. *Some may object against charity to such or such particular persons that they are not obliged to give them anything; for though they be needy, yet they are not in extremity.* It is true they meet with difficulty, yet not so much but that they can live, though they suffer some hardships. But,

It does not answer the rules of Christian charity to relieve those only who are reduced to extremity, as might be abundantly shown. I shall at this time mention but two things as evidences of it.

1. We are commanded to love and treat one another as brethren. “Having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful” (1Pe 3:8). Now, is it the part of brethren to refuse to help one another and to do anything for each other’s comfort and for the relief of each other’s difficulties except when they are in extremity? Does it not become brothers and sisters to have a more friendly disposition one towards another than this comes to, and to be ready to compassionate one another under difficulties, though they be not extreme?

The rule of the gospel is that, when we see our brother under any difficulty or burden, we should be ready to bear the burden with him. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). So we are commanded, “by love [to] serve one another” (Gal 5:13). The Christian spirit will make us apt to sympathize with our neighbor when we see him under any difficulty. “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15). When our neighbor is in difficulty, he is afflicted; and we ought to have such a spirit of love to him as to be afflicted with him in his affliction. And if we ought to be afflicted with him, then it will follow that we ought to be ready to relieve him, because, if we are afflicted with him, in relieving him we relieve ourselves. His relief is so far our own relief as his affliction is our affliction. Christianity teaches us to be afflicted in our neighbor’s affliction; and nature teaches us to relieve ourselves when afflicted.

We should behave ourselves one towards another as brethren that are fellow-travelers; for we are pilgrims and strangers here on earth and are on a journey. Now, if brethren be on a journey together, and one meet

with difficulty in the way, does it not become the rest to help him, not only in the extremity of broken bones or the like, but as to provision for the journey if his own fall short? It becomes his fellow-travelers to afford him a supply out of their stores, and not to be overly scrupulous, exact, and fearful lest they give him too much; for it is but provision for a journey; and all are supplied when they get to their journey's end.

2. That we should relieve our neighbor only when in extremity is not agreeable to the rule of loving our neighbor as ourselves. That rule implies that our love towards our neighbor should work in the same manner and express itself in the same ways as our love towards ourselves. We are very sensible of our own difficulties; we should also be readily sensible of theirs. From love to ourselves when we are under difficulties and suffer hardships, we are concerned for our relief, are accustomed to seek relief and lay ourselves out for it. And as we would love our neighbor as ourselves, we ought in like manner to be concerned when our neighbor is under difficulty and to seek his relief. We tend to be much concerned about our own difficulties, though we be not reduced to extremity, and are willing in those cases to lay ourselves out for our own relief. So, as we would love our neighbor as ourselves, we should in like manner lay out ourselves to obtain relief for him, though his difficulties be not extreme.

Objection V. *Some may object against charity to a particular object because he is a bad sort of person; he deserves not that people should be kind to him; he is of a very bad temper, of an ungrateful spirit, and particularly, because he has not deserved well of them, but has treated them badly, has been injurious to them, and even now entertains an evil spirit against them.*

But we are obliged to relieve persons in need, notwithstanding these things, both by the general and particular rules of God's Word.

1. *We are obliged to do so by the general rules of Scripture.* I shall mention two.

(1.) That of *loving our neighbor as ourselves*. A man may be our neighbor though he be an evil sort of man and even our enemy, as Christ Himself teaches us by His discourse with the lawyer. A certain lawyer came to Christ and asked Him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Christ asked him how it was written in the law. He answers, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luk 10:27). Christ tells him that if he shall do thus he shall live. But then the lawyer asks him who is his neighbor, because it was a received doctrine among the Pharisees that no man was their neighbor but their friends

and those of the same people and religion. Christ answers him by a parable or story of a certain man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed from him, leaving him half dead. Soon after, there came a priest that way, who saw the poor man that had been thus cruelly treated by the thieves, but he passed by without affording him any relief. The same was done by a Levite. But a certain Samaritan coming that way, as soon as he saw the half-dead man, had compassion on him, took him up, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast, carried him to the inn, and took care of him, paying the innkeeper money for his past and future expense, and promising him still more if he should find it necessary to be at more expense on behalf of the man.

Then Christ asks the lawyer which of these three, the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan, was neighbor to the man that fell among the thieves. Christ proposed this in such a manner that the lawyer could not help owning that the Samaritan did well in relieving the Jew, that he did the duty of a neighbor to him. Now, there was an inveterate enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. They hated one another more than any other nation in the world; and the Samaritans were a people exceedingly troublesome to the Jews; yet we see that Christ teaches that the Jews ought to do the part of neighbors to the Samaritans, i.e., to love them as themselves; for it was that of which Christ was speaking.

And the consequence was plain. If the Samaritan was neighbor to the distressed Jew, then the Jews, by an equality of reason, were neighbors to the Samaritans. If the Samaritan did well in relieving a Jew that was his enemy, then the Jews would do well in relieving the Samaritans, their enemies. What I particularly observe is that Christ here plainly teaches that our enemies, those that abuse and injure us, are our neighbors and therefore come under the rule of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

(2.) Another general rule that obliges us to the same thing is that wherein we are commanded to *love one another as Christ has loved us*. We have it in John 13:34. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Christ calls it a new commandment with respect to that old commandment of loving our neighbor as ourselves. This command of loving our neighbor as Christ has loved us opens our duty to us in a new manner and in a further degree than that did. We must not only love our neighbor as ourselves, but as Christ has loved us. We have the same again in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."

Now, the meaning of this is not that we should love one another to the same degree that Christ loved us, though there ought to be a proportion, considering our nature and capacity; but that we should exercise our love one to another in like manner. As, for instance, Christ has loved us so as to be willing to deny Himself and to suffer greatly in order to help us, so should we be willing to deny ourselves in order to help one another. Christ loved us and showed us great kindness though we were far below Him; so should we show kindness to those of our fellowmen who are far below us. Christ denied Himself to help us, though we are not able to recompense Him; so should we be willing to lay out ourselves to help our neighbor, freely expecting nothing again. Christ loved us, was kind to us, and was willing to relieve us, though we were very evil and hateful, of an evil disposition, not deserving any good, but deserving only to be hated, and treated with indignation; so we should be willing to be kind to those who are of an evil disposition and are very undeserving. Christ loved us and laid Himself out to relieve us, though we were His enemies, and had treated Him in an evil way; so we, as we would love one another as Christ has loved us, should relieve those who are our enemies, hate us, have an evil spirit toward us, and have treated us badly.

2. *We are obliged to this duty by many particular rules.* We are particularly required to be kind to the unthankful and to the evil, and therein to follow the example of our heavenly Father, Who causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. We are obliged, not only to be kind to them that are so to us, but to them that hate and that despitefully use us. I need not mention the particular places which speak to this effect.

I grant that, when persons are virtuous and pious and of a grateful disposition and are friendly disposed towards us, they are more the objects of our charity for it, and our obligation to kindness to them is the greater. However, if things be otherwise, that does not render them not fit objects of our charity nor set us free from obligation to kindness towards them.

Objection VI. *Some may object from their own circumstances that they have nothing to spare; they have not more than enough for themselves.* I answer,

1. It must doubtless be allowed that in some cases persons, by reason of their own circumstances, are not obliged to give to others. For instance, if there be a contribution for the poor, they are not obliged to join in the contribution who are in as much need as those are for whom

the contribution is made. It savors of ridiculous arrogance in them to contribute with others for such as are not more needy than they. It savors of a proud desire to conceal their own circumstances and a pretense of having them accounted above what they in truth are.

2. There are scarcely any who may not make this objection, as they interpret it. There is no person who may not say he has not more than enough for himself, as he may mean by *enough*. He may intend that he has not more than he desires, or more than he can dispose of to his own advantage; or not so much, but that, if he had anything less, he should look upon himself in worse circumstances than he is in now. He will own that he could live if he had less; but then he will say he could not live so well. Rich men may say they have not more than enough for themselves, as they may mean by it. They need it all, they may say, to support their honor and dignity, as is proper for the place and degree in which they stand.

Those who are poor, to be sure, will say they have not too much for themselves. Those who are of the middle sort will say they have not too much for themselves; and the rich will say they have not too much for themselves. Thus, there will be none found to give to the poor.

3. In many cases, we may, by the rules of the gospel, be obliged to give to others when we cannot do it without suffering ourselves. An example of this would be if our neighbor's difficulties and necessities be much greater than our own, and we see that he is not likely to be otherwise relieved; in this case, we should be willing to suffer with him and to take part of his burden on ourselves. How else is that rule of bearing one another's burdens fulfilled? If we are never obliged to relieve others' burdens except when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens when we bear no burden at all? Though we may not have an excess, yet we may be obliged to afford relief to others who are in much greater necessity, as appears by that rule: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luk 3:11). Yea, they who are very poor may be obliged to give for the relief of others in much greater distress than they. If there be no other way of relief, those who have the lightest burden are obliged still to take some part of their neighbor's burden to make it the more supportable. A brother may be obliged to help a brother in extremity, though they are both very much in need. The apostle commends the Macedonian Christians that they were liberal¹⁵ to their brethren, though they themselves were in deep poverty. "Moreover,

¹⁵ **liberal** – generous.

brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2Co 8:1-2).

4. Those who have not too much for themselves are willing to spare seed to sow that they may have fruit hereafter. Perhaps they need that which they scatter in the field and seem to throw away. They may need it for bread for their families; yet they will spare seed to sow that they may provide for the future and may have increase. But we have already shown that giving to the poor is in Scripture compared to sowing seed and is as much the way to increase as the sowing of seed is. It does not tend to poverty, but the contrary. It is not the way to diminish our substance, but to increase it. All the difficulty in this matter is in trusting God with what we give, in trusting His promises. If men could but trust the faithfulness of God to His own promises, they would give freely.

Objection VII. *Some may object concerning a particular person that they do not certainly know whether he is an object of charity or not.* They are not perfectly acquainted with his circumstances; neither do they know what sort of man he is. They know not whether he is in need as he pretends. Or if they know this, they know not how he came to be in need, whether it was not by his own idleness or prodigality. Thus they argue that they cannot be obliged till they certainly know these things. I reply,

1. This is Nabal’s objection, for which he is greatly condemned in Scripture (see 1Sa 25). David in his exiled state came and begged relief of Nabal. Nabal objected: “Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?” (1Sa 25:10-11). His objection was that David was a stranger to him; he did not know who he was nor what his circumstances were. He did not know but that he was a runaway; and he was not obliged to support and harbor a runaway. He objected that he knew not that he was a proper object of charity; that he knew not but that he was very much the contrary.

But Abigail in no way defended his behavior herein, but greatly condemned it. She calls him a man of Belial and says that he was as his name was; Nabal was his name, and folly was with him. And her behavior was very contrary to his; and she is greatly commended for it. The Holy Ghost tells us that “she was a woman of a good understanding” (v. 3). At the same time, God exceedingly frowned on Nabal’s behavior on this

occasion, as we are informed that about ten days afterwards God “smote Nabal, that he died” (v. 38).

This story is doubtless told us partly for this end, to discountenance too great a scrupulosity as to the object on whom we bestow our charity, and the making of this merely an objection against charity to others, that we do not certainly know their circumstances. It is true, when we have opportunity to become certainly acquainted with their circumstances, it is well to embrace it: and to be influenced in a measure by probability in such cases is not to be condemned. Yet it is better to give to several that are not objects of charity than to send away empty one that is.

2. We are commanded to be kind to strangers whom we know not, nor their circumstances. This is commanded in many places; but I shall mention only one. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2). By strangers here, the apostle means one whom we know not and whose circumstances we know not, as is evident by these words: “For thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Those who entertained angels unawares did not know the persons whom they entertained nor their circumstances; or else how could it be unawares?

Objection VIII. *Some may say they are not obliged to give to the poor till they ask.* If any man is in necessity, let him come and make known his difficulties to me, and then it will be time enough for me to give him. Or if he needs a public contribution, let him come and ask. I do not know that the congregation or church is obliged to relieve till they ask relief. I answer,

1. It surely is the most charitable to relieve the needy in that way wherein we shall do them the greatest kindness. Now it is certain that we shall do them a greater kindness by inquiring into their circumstances and relieving them without putting them upon begging. There is none of us but who, if it were their case, would look upon it more kind in our neighbors to inquire into our circumstances and help us of their own accord. To put our neighbors upon begging in order to relief is painful. It is more charitable, more brotherly, more becoming Christians and the disciples of Jesus to do it without. I think this is self-evident and needs no proof.

2. This is not agreeable to the character of the liberal man given in Scripture; viz., that devises liberal things (Isa 32:8). It is not to devise liberal things if we neglect all liberality till the poor come begging to us. But to inquire who stands in need of our charity and to contrive to relieve

them in the way that shall do them the greatest kindness, that is to devise liberal things.

3. We should not commend a man for doing so to his own brother. Suppose a man had a brother or sister in great difficulties, and he were well able to supply them, but did not do it, under the pretense that if he or she needs anything, let them come and ask and I will give them. We should hardly think such an one behaved like a brother. Christians are commanded to love as brethren, to look upon one another as brethren in Christ, and to treat one another as such.

4. We should commend others for taking a method contrary to that which is proposed by the objector. If we should hear or read of a people who were so charitable, who took such care of the poor, and were so concerned that none among them should suffer who were proper objects of charity; that they were accustomed diligently to inquire into the circumstances of their neighbors to find out who were needy, and liberally supplied them of their own accord—I say, if we should hear or read of such a people, would it not appear well to us? Should not we have the better thought of that people on that account?

Objection IX. *He has brought himself to poverty by his own fault.* In reply, it must be considered what you mean by his fault.

1. If you mean a lack of a natural faculty to manage affairs to advantage, that is to be considered as his calamity. Such a faculty is a gift that God bestows on some, and not on others; and it is not owing to themselves. You ought to be thankful that God has given you such a gift, which He has denied to the person in question. And it will be a very suitable way for you to show your thankfulness to help those to whom that gift is denied and let them share the benefit of it with you. This is as reasonable as that he to whom Providence has imparted sight should be willing to help him to whom sight is denied, and that he should have the benefit of the sight of others who has none of his own, or as that he to whom God has given wisdom should be willing that the ignorant should have the benefit of his knowledge.

2. If they have been reduced to need by some oversight and are to be blamed that they did not consider for themselves better, yet that does not free us from all obligation to charity towards them. If we should forever refuse to help men because of that, it would be for us to make their inconsiderateness and imprudent act an unpardonable crime, quite contrary to the rules of the gospel, which insist so much upon forgiveness. We should not be disposed so highly to resent such an oversight in any for whom we have a dear affection, as our children, or

our friends. We should not refuse to help them in that necessity and distress, which they brought upon themselves by their own inconsiderateness. But we ought to have a dear affection and concern for the welfare of all our fellow Christians, whom we should love as brethren and as Christ has loved us.

3. If they are come to poverty by a wicked idleness and prodigality, yet we are not thereby excused from all obligation to relieve them, *unless they continue in those vices*. If they continue not in those vices, the rules of the gospel direct us to forgive them; and if their fault be forgiven, then it will not remain to be a bar in the way of our charitably relieving them. If we do otherwise, we shall act in a manner very contrary to the rule of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Now Christ has loved us, pitied us, and greatly laid out Himself to relieve us from that need and misery which we brought on ourselves by our own folly and wickedness. We foolishly and perversely threw away those riches with which we were provided, upon which we might have lived and been happy to all eternity.

4. If they continue in the same courses¹⁶ still, yet that does not excuse us from charity to their families that are innocent. If we cannot relieve those of their families without their having something of it, yet that ought not to be a bar in the way of our charity. This is because it is supposed that those of their families are proper objects of charity, and those that are so we are bound to relieve. The command is positive and absolute. If we look upon that which the heads of the families have of what we give to be entirely lost; yet we had better lose something of our estate than suffer those who are really proper objects of charity to remain without relief.

Objection X. *Some may object and say, Others do not their duty.* If others did their duty, the poor would be sufficiently supplied. If others did as much as we in proportion to their ability and obligation, the poor would have enough to help them out of their difficulties. Or some may say, It belongs to others more than it does to us. They have relations that ought to help them; or there are others to whom it more properly belongs than to us.

Answer. We ought to relieve those who are in need though brought to it through others' fault. If our neighbor be poor, though others be to blame that it is so, yet that excuses us not from helping him. If it belong to others more than to us, yet if those others will neglect their duty, and our neighbor therefore remains in want, we may be obliged to relieve

¹⁶ **same courses** – lifestyle of idleness and prodigality.

him. If a man be brought into difficulties through the injustice of others, suppose by thieves or robbers, as the poor Jew whom the Samaritan relieved, yet we may be obliged to relieve him, though it be not through our fault that he is in want, but through that of other men. And whether that fault be a commission or a neglect alters not the case.

As to the poor Jew that fell among thieves between Jerusalem and Jericho, it more properly belonged to those thieves who brought him into that distress to relieve him than to any other person. Yet seeing they would not do it, others were not excused; and the Samaritan did no more than his duty relieving him as he did, though it properly belonged to others. Thus if a man have children or other relations to whom it most properly belongs to relieve him, yet if they will not do it, the obligation to relieve him falls upon others. So for the same reason we should do the more for the relief of the poor because others neglect to do their proportion or what belongs to them; and that because by the neglect of others to do their proportion they need the more, their necessity is the greater.

Objection XI. *The law makes provision for the poor and obliges the respective towns in which they live to provide for them; therefore, some argue that there is no occasion for particular persons to exercise any charity this way.* They say, The case is not the same with us now as it was in the primitive church; for then Christians were under a heathen government; and although the charity of Christians in those times is much to be commended, yet now, by reason of our different circumstances, there is no occasion for private charity because, in the state in which Christians now are, provision is made for the poor otherwise. This objection is built upon these two suppositions, both which I suppose are false.

1. That the towns are obliged by law to relieve everyone who otherwise would be an object of charity. This I suppose to be false, unless it be supposed that none are proper objects of charity but those that have no estate left to live upon, which is very unreasonable and what I have already shown to be false in answer to the fourth objection, in showing that it does not answer the rules of Christian charity to relieve only those who are reduced to extremity.

Nor do I suppose it was ever the design of the law, requiring the various towns to support their own poor, to cut off all occasion for Christian charity; nor is it fit there should be such a law. It is fit that the law should make provision for those that have no estates of their own. It is not fit that persons who are reduced to that extremity should be left to

so precarious a source of supply as a voluntary charity. They are in extreme necessity of relief, and therefore it is fit that there should be something sure for them to depend on. But a voluntary charity in this corrupt world is an uncertain thing. Therefore, the wisdom of the legislature did not think fit to leave those who are so reduced upon such a precarious foundation for subsistence. But I suppose not that it was ever the design of the law to make such provision for all that are in need as to leave no room for Christian charity.

2. This objection is built upon another supposition, which is equally false, viz., that there are in fact none who are proper objects of charity except for those who are relieved by the town. Let the design of the law be what it will, yet if there are in fact persons who are so needy as to stand in need of our charity, then that law does not free us from obligation to relieve them by our charity. For as we have just now shown in answer to the last objection, if it more properly belongs to others to relieve them than us, yet if they do it not, we are not free. So that if it be true that it belongs to the town to relieve all who are proper objects of charity, yet if the town in fact do it not, we are not excused.

If one of our neighbors suffers through the fault of a particular person, of a thief or robber, or of a town, it alters not the case; but if he suffers and is without relief, it is an act of Christian charity in us to relieve him. Now it is too obvious to be denied that there are in fact persons in need like this, and that it would be a charitable act in us to help them, notwithstanding all that is done by the town. A man must hide his mental eyes to think otherwise.

