

LECTURE IX.

**THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY THE OPPOSITE OF AN
ANGRY OR WRATHFUL SPIRIT.**

“Is not easily provoked.”—1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 5.

HAVING declared that charity is contrary to the two great cardinal vices of pride and selfishness, those deep and ever-flowing fountains of sin and wickedness in the heart, the Apostle next proceeds to show, that it is also contrary to two things that are commonly the fruits of this pride and selfishness, viz. : an angry spirit, and a censorious spirit. To the first of these points, I would now turn your attention, viz. : that charity “*is not easily provoked.*” The doctrine here set before us, is,

THAT THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY, OR CHRISTIAN LOVE, IS THE OPPOSITE OF AN ANGRY OR WRATHFUL SPIRIT OR DISPOSITION.—In speaking to this

doctrine, I would inquire, first, in what consists that angry spirit or temper to which a Christian spirit is contrary; and next, give the reason why a Christian spirit is contrary to it.

I. *What is that angry or wrathful spirit, to which charity, or a Christian spirit, is contrary.*—It is not all manner of anger that Christianity is opposite and contrary to. It is said in Ephesians iv. 26, “Be ye angry, and sin not,” which seems to suppose that there is such a thing as anger without sin, or that it is possible to be angry in some cases, and yet not offend God. And therefore it may be answered, in a single word, that a Christian spirit, or the spirit of charity, is opposite to all undue and unsuitable anger. But anger may be undue or unsuitable in four respects; in its nature, its occasion, its end, and its measure. And,

1. *Anger maybe undue and unsuitable in respect to its nature.*—Anger may be defined to be, an earnest, and more or less violent opposition of spirit against any real or supposed evil, or in view of any fault or offence of another. All anger is opposition of the mind against real or supposed evil; but it is not all opposition of the mind against evil, that is properly

called anger. There is an opposition of the judgment, that is not anger; for anger is the opposition, not of the cool judgment, but of the spirit of the man, that is, of his disposition or heart. But here, again, it is not all opposition of the spirit against evil, that can be called anger. There is an opposition of the spirit against *natural* evil that we suffer, as in grief and sorrow for instance, which is a very different thing from anger; and in distinction from this, anger is opposition to *moral* evil, or evil real or supposed in voluntary agents, or at least in agents that are conceived to be voluntary, or acting by their own will, and against such evil as is supposed to be their fault. But yet again, it is not all opposition of spirit against evil or faultiness in voluntary agents, that is anger; for there may be a dislike, without the spirit being excited and angry; and such dislike is an opposition of the will and judgment, and not always of the feelings, and in order to anger, the latter must be moved. In all anger there must be earnestness and opposition of feeling, and the spirit must be moved and stirred within us. Anger is one of the passions or affections of the soul, though when called an affection, it

is, for the most part, to be regarded as an evil affection.

Such being the nature of anger in general, it may now be shown wherein anger is undue or unsuitable in its nature. And this is the case with all anger that contains ill-will, or a desire of revenge. Some have defined anger to be a desire of revenge. But this cannot be considered a just definition of anger in general; for if so, there would be no anger that would not imply ill-will, and the desire that some other might be injured. But doubtless there is such a thing as anger that is consistent with good-will; for a father may be angry with his child, that is, he may find in himself an earnestness and opposition of spirit to the bad conduct of his child, and his spirit may be engaged and stirred in opposition to that conduct, and to his child while continuing in it; and yet, at the same time, he will not have any proper ill-will to the child, but on the contrary, a real good-will; and so far from desiring its injury, he may have the very highest desire for its true welfare, and his very anger be but his opposition to that which he thinks will be of injury to it. And this shows, that anger, in its general nature,

rather consists in the opposition of the spirit to evil, than in a desire of revenge.

If the nature of anger in general consisted in ill-will and a desire of revenge, no anger would be lawful in any case whatever; for we are not allowed to entertain ill-will toward others in any case, but are to have good-will to all. We are required by Christ to wish well to, and pray for the prosperity of all, even our enemies, and those that spitefully use us and persecute us, Matt. v. 44; and the rule given by the Apostle is, "Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not," Rom. xii. 14; that is, we are only to wish good, and pray for good to others, and in no case to wish evil. And so all revenge is forbidden, if we except the vengeance which public justice takes on the transgressor, in inflicting which men act not for themselves, but for God. The rule is, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord," Leviticus xix. 18; and says the Apostle, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," Romans

xii. 19. So that all the anger that contains ill-will or a desire of revenge, is what Christianity is contrary to, and by the most fearful sanctions forbids. Sometimes anger, as it is spoken of in the Scripture, is meant only in the worst sense, or in that sense of it which implies ill-will, and the desire of revenge; and in this sense, all anger is forbidden, as in Ephesians iv. 31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice;" and again in Colossians iii. 8, "But now ye, also, put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." Thus anger may be irregular and sinful with respect to its nature. And so,

2. *Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in respect to its occasion.*—And such unsuitableness consists in its being without any just cause. Of this Christ speaks when he says, "Whosoever is angry with his brother, without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment," Matt. v. 22. And this may be the case in three ways:—

First, When the occasion of anger is that, which is *no fault at all in the person that is its object*. This is not unfrequently the case.

Many persons are of such a proud and peevish disposition, that they will be angry at anything that is in any respect against them, or troublesome to them, or contrary to their wishes, whether anybody be to blame for it or not. And so, sometimes, men are angry with others for those things that are not from their fault, but which happen merely through their involuntary ignorance, or through their impotence. They are angry that they have not done better, when the only cause was, that the circumstances were such that they could not do otherwise than they did. And oftentimes persons are angry with others, not only for that which is no fault in them, but for that which is really good, and for which they ought to be praised. So it always is when men are angry at God, and fret at his providence and its dispensations toward them. Thus to be fretful, and impatient, and to murmur against God's dealings, is a most horribly wicked kind of anger. And yet this very often is the case in this wicked world. This is what the wicked Israelites were so often guilty of, and for which so many of them were overthrown in the wilderness; and this was what Jonah, though a good man, was

guilty of when he was angry with God without a cause—angry for that for which he should have praised God, viz. : his great mercy to the Ninevites. Oftentimes, also, persons' spirits are kept very much in a fret, by reason of things going contrary to them, and their meeting with crosses, and disappointments, and entanglements in their business, when they will not own that it is God they fret at and are angry with, and do not even seem to be convinced of it themselves. But, indeed, such fretfulness can be interpreted no other way ; and whatever they may pretend, it is ultimately aimed against the author of providence—against the God who orders these cross events, so that it is a murmuring and fretting against Him.

And it is a common thing, again, for persons to be angry with others, for their doing well, and that which is only their duty. There never was so much bitterness and fierceness of anger among men, one to another, and so much hostility and malice, for any one thing, as there has been for well-doing. History gives no accounts of any such cruelties as those practised toward God's people on account of their profession and practice of re-

ligion. And how annoyed were the scribes and Pharisees with Christ, for doing the will of his Father in what he did and said while on earth! When men are angry with others, or with civil or ecclesiastical authorities, for proceeding regularly against them for their errors or sins, they are angry with them for well-doing. And this is the case when they are angry with their neighbors or brethren in the church for bearing a due testimony against them, and endeavoring to bring them to justice when the case requires it. Often men are angry with others not only for well-doing, but for doing those things that are acts of friendship to them, as when we are angry with others for administering Christian reproof for anything they observe in us that is wrong. This the Psalmist said he should accept as a kindness, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness;" but such as are angry with it, foolishly and sinfully take it as an injury. In all these things, our anger is undue and unreasonable with regard to its occasion, when that occasion is no fault of the one with whom we are angry. And so,

Second, Anger is unsuitable and unchristian as to its occasion, *when persons are angry*

upon small and trivial occasions, and when though there be something of blame, yet the fault is very small, and such as is not worth our being stirred and engaged about. God does not call us to have our spirits ceaselessly engaged in opposition, and stirred up in anger, unless it be on some important occasions. He that is angry at every little fault he may see in others, is certainly one with whom it is otherwise than is expressed in the text. Of him that is provoked at every little, trifling thing, it surely cannot be said, that he is "not easily provoked." Some are of such an angry, fretful spirit, that they are put out of humor by every little thing, and by things in others, in the family, or in society, or in business, that are no greater faults than they themselves are guilty of every day. Those that will thus be angry at every fault they see in others, will be sure to be always kept in a fret, and their minds will never be composed; for it cannot be expected in this world but that we shall continually be seeing faults in others, as there are continually faults in ourselves. And therefore it is, that Christians are directed to be "slow to speak and slow to wrath," James i. 19; and that it is said,

that "He that is soon angry, dealeth foolishly." He that diligently guards his own spirit, will not be very frequently or easily angry. He wisely keeps his mind in a calm, clear frame, and does not suffer it to be stirred with anger, except on extraordinary occasions, and those that do especially call for it. And again,

Third, Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in its occasion, *when our spirits are stirred at the faults of others chiefly as they affect ourselves, and not as they are against God.* We should never be angry but at sin, and this should always be that which we oppose in our anger. And when our spirits are stirred to oppose this evil, it should be *as sin*, or chiefly as it is against God. If there be no sin and no fault, then we have no cause to be angry; and if there be a fault or sin, then it is infinitely worse as against God, than it is as against us, and therefore it requires the most opposition on that account. Persons sin in their anger, when they are selfish in it, for we are not to act as if we were our own, or for ourselves simply, since we belong to God, and not to ourselves. When a fault is committed wherein God is sinned against, and per-

sons are injured by it, they should be chiefly concerned, and their spirits chiefly moved against it because it is against God; for they should be more solicitous for God's honor, than for their own temporal interests. All anger, as to occasion, is either a virtue or a vice, for there is no middle sort that is neither good nor bad; but there is no virtue or goodness in opposing sin, unless it be opposed as sin. The anger that is virtuous, is the same thing which, in one form, is called zeal. Our anger should be like Christ's anger. He was like a lamb under the greatest personal injuries, and we never read of his being angry but in the cause of God against sin as sin. And this should be the case with us. And as anger may, in these three ways, be unsuitable and unchristian with respect to the occasion or cause of it, so,

3. *It may be undue and sinful with respect to its end.*—And this in two particulars:—

First, When we are angry *without considerately proposing any end* to be gained by it. In this way it is, that anger is rash and inconsiderate, and that it is suffered to rise, and be continued, without any consideration or motive. Reason has no hand in the matter;

but the passions go before the reason, and anger is suffered to rise before even a thought has been given to the question, "of what advantage or benefit will it be, either to me or others?" Such anger is not the anger of men, but the blind passion of beasts: it is a kind of beastly fury, rather than the affection of a rational creature. All things in the soul of man should be under the government of reason, which is the highest faculty of our being; and every other faculty and principle in the soul should be governed and directed by that to its proper end. And, therefore, when our anger is of this kind, it is unchristian and sinful. And so it is,

Second, When we allow ourselves to be angry *for any wrong end*. Though reason would tell us with regard to our anger, that it cannot be for the glory of God, or of any real benefit to ourselves, but on the other hand, much to the mischief of ourselves or others, yet because we have in view the gratification of our own pride, or the extension of our influence, or getting in some way superiority to others, we allow anger as aiding to gain these or other ends, and thus indulge a sinful spirit. And lastly,

4. *Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian with respect to its measure.*—And this, again, in two particulars, as to the measure of its degree, and the measure of its continuance. And,

First, When it is immoderate *in degree.* Anger may be far beyond what the case requires. And often it is so great as to put persons beyond the control of themselves, their passions being so violent that, for the time, they know not what they do, and seem to be unable to direct and regulate either their feelings or conduct. Sometimes men's passions rise so high that they are, as it were, drunk with them, so that their reason is gone, and they act as if beside themselves. But the degree of anger ought always to be regulated by the end of it, and it should never be suffered to rise any higher than so far as tends to the obtaining of the good ends which reason has proposed. And anger is, also, beyond measure, and thus sinful,

Second, When it is immoderate *in its continuance.* It is a very sinful thing for persons to be long angry. The wise man not only gives us the injunction, "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry," but he adds, that "Anger

resteth in the bosom of fools," Ecc. vii. 9; and says the Apostle, "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath," Eph. iv. 26. If anger be long continued, it soon degenerates into malice, for the leaven of evil spreads faster than the leaven of good. If a person allows himself long to hold anger towards another, he will quickly come to hate him. And so we find that it actually is among those that retain a grudge in their hearts against others for week after week, and month after month, and year after year. They do, in the end, truly hate the persons against whom they thus lay up anger, whether they own it or not. And this is a most dreadful sin in the sight of God. All, therefore, should be exceedingly careful how they suffer anger long to continue in their hearts.

Having thus shown what is that angry or wrathful spirit, to which charity or a Christian spirit is contrary, I pass, as proposed, to show,

II. *How charity, or a Christian spirit, is contrary to it.* And this I would do by showing, first, that charity or love, which is the sum of the Christian spirit, is directly, and in itself, contrary to the anger that is sinful.

and secondly, that the fruits of charity which are mentioned in the context, are all contrary to it. And,

1. *Christian charity or love, is directly, and in itself, contrary to all undue anger.*—Christian love is contrary to anger which is undue in its nature, and that tends to revenge, and so implies ill-will, for the nature of love is good-will. It tends to prevent persons from being angry without just cause, and will be far from disposing any one to be angry for but little faults. Love is backward to anger, and will not yield to it on trivial occasions, much less where there is no cause for being angry. It is a malignant and evil, and not a loving spirit, that disposes persons to be angry without cause. Love to God is opposite to a disposition in men to be angry at other's faults, chiefly as they themselves are offended and injured by them: it rather disposes them to look at them chiefly as committed against God. If love be in exercise, it will tend to keep down the irascible passions, and hold them in subjection, so that reason and the spirit of love may regulate them and keep them from being immoderate in degree or of long continuance. And not only is charity,

or Christian love, directly, and in itself, contrary to all undue anger, but,

2. *All the fruits of this charity which are mentioned in the context, are also contrary to it.*—And I shall mention only two of these fruits, as they may stand for all, viz.: those virtues that are contrary to pride and selfishness. And,

First, Love or charity is contrary to all undue and sinful anger, as, *in its fruits, it is contrary to pride.* Pride is one chief cause of undue anger. It is because men are proud, and exalt themselves in their own hearts, that they are revengeful, and are apt to be excited, and to make great things out of little ones that may be against themselves. Yea, they even treat as vices things that are in themselves virtues, when they think their honor is touched, or when their will is crossed. And it is pride that makes men so unreasonable and rash in their anger, and raises it to such a high degree, and continues it so long, and often keeps it up in the form of habitual malice. But, as we have already seen, love or Christian charity is utterly opposed to pride. And so,

Secondly Love or charity is contrary to all

sinful anger, as, *in its fruits, it is contrary to selfishness*. It is because men are selfish and seek their own, that they are malicious and revengeful against all that oppose or interfere with their own interests. If men sought not chiefly their own private and selfish interests, but the glory of God and the common good, then their spirit would be a great deal more stirred up in God's cause, than in their own; and they would not be prone to hasty, rash, inconsiderate, immoderate, and long-continued wrath, with any who might have injured or provoked them, but they would, in a great measure, forget themselves for God's sake, and from their zeal for the honor of Christ. The end they would aim at, would be, not making themselves great, or getting their own will, but the glory of God, and the good of their fellow-beings. But love, as we have seen, is opposed to all selfishness.

In the application of this subject, let us use it,

1. *In the way of self-examination*.—Our own consciences, if faithfully searched and imperatively inquired of, can best tell us whether we are, or have been persons of such an angry spirit and wrathful disposition as has been

described; whether we are frequently angry, or indulge in ill-will, or allow the continuance of anger. Have we not often been angry? And if so, is there not reason to think that that anger has been undue, and without just cause, and thus sinful? God does not call Christians into his kingdom, that they may indulge greatly in fretfulness, and to have their minds commonly stirred up and ruffled with anger. And has not most of the anger you have cherished been chiefly, if not entirely on your own account? Men are often wont to plead zeal for religion, and for duty, and for the honor of God, as the cause of their indignation, when it is only their own private interest that is concerned and affected. It is remarkable how forward men are to appear as if they were zealous for God and righteousness, in cases wherein their honor, or will, or interest has been touched, and to make pretence of this in injuring others or complaining of them; and what a great difference there is in their conduct in other cases, wherein God's honor is as much, or a great deal more hurt, and their own interest is not specially concerned. In the latter case, there is no such appearance of zeal and engagedness of spirit and no.

forwardness to reprove, and complain, and be angry, but often a readiness to excuse, and leave reproof to others, and to be cold and backward in anything like opposition to the sin.

And ask, still further, what good has been obtained by your anger, and what have you aimed at in it; or have you even thought of these things? There has been a great deal of anger and bitterness in things passing in this town on public occasions, and many of you have been present on such occasions; and such anger has been manifest in your conduct; and I fear rested in your bosoms. Examine yourselves as to this matter, and ask what has been the nature of your anger. Has not most, if not all of it, been of that undue and unchristian kind that has been spoken of? Has it not been of the nature of ill-will, and malice, and bitterness of heart; an anger arising from proud and selfish principles, because your interest, or your opinion, or your party was touched? Has not your anger been far from that Christian zeal that does not disturb charity, or embitter the feelings, or lead to unkindness or revenge in the conduct? And how has it been with respect to

your holding anger? Has not the sun more than once gone down upon your wrath, while God and your neighbor knew it? Nay more, has it not gone down again and again, through month after month, and year after year, while winter's cold hath not chilled the heat of your wrath, and the summer's sun hath not melted you to kindness? And are there not some here present, that are sitting before God with anger laid up in their hearts, and burning there? Or if their anger is for a time concealed from human eyes, is it not like an old sore not thoroughly healed, but so that the least touch renews the smart; or like a smothered fire in the heaps of autumn leaves, which the least breeze will kindle into a flame? And how is it in your families? Families are societies the most closely united of all; and their members are in the nearest relation, and under the greatest obligations to peace and harmony and love. And yet what has been your spirit in the family? Many a time have you not been fretful, and angry, and impatient, and peevish, and unkind to those whom God has made in so great a measure dependent on you, and who are so easily made happy or unhappy by what you do or say—

by your kindness or unkindness? And what kind of anger have you indulged in the family? Has it not often been unreasonable and sinful, not only in its nature, but in its occasions, where those with whom you were angry were not in fault, or when the fault was trifling or unintended, or where, perhaps, you were yourself in part to blame for it; and even where there might have been just cause, has not your wrath been continued, and led you to be sullen, or severe, to an extent that your own conscience disapproved? And have you not been angry with your neighbors who live by you, and with whom you have to do daily; and on trifling occasions, and for little things, have you not allowed yourself in anger toward them? In all these points it becomes us to examine ourselves, and know what manner of spirit we are of, and wherein we come short of the spirit of Christ.

2. *The subject dissuades from, and warns against, all undue and sinful anger.*—The heart of man is exceeding prone to undue and sinful anger, being naturally full of pride and selfishness; and we live in a world that is full of occasions that tend to stir up this corruption that is within us, so that we cannot

expect to live in any tolerable measure as Christians should do, in this respect, without constant watchfulness and prayer. And we should not only watch against the exercises, but fight against the principle of anger, and seek earnestly to have *that* mortified in our hearts, by the establishment and increase of the spirit of divine love and humility in our souls. And to this end, several things may be considered. And,

First, Consider frequently *your own failings, by which you have given both God and man occasion to be displeas'd with you.* All your life-time you have come short of God's requirements, and thus justly incurred his dreadful wrath; and constantly you have occasion to pray God that he will not be angry with you, but will show you mercy. And your failings have also been numerous toward your fellow-men, and have often given them occasion to be angry with you. Your faults are as great perhaps as theirs; and this thought should lead you not to spend so much of your time in fretting at the motes in their eyes, but rather to occupy it in pulling the beams out of your own. Very often those that are most ready to be angry with others, and to carry

their resentments highest for their faults, are equally, or still more guilty of the same faults. And so those that are most apt to be angry with others for speaking evil of them, are often most frequent in speaking evil of others, and even in their anger to vilify and abuse them. If others then provoke us, instead of being angry with them, let our first thoughts be turned to ourselves, and let it put us on self-reflection, and lead us to inquire whether we have not been guilty of the very same things that excite our anger, or even of worse. Thus thinking of our own failings and errors, would tend to keep us from undue anger with others. And consider, also,

Second, How such undue anger *destroys the comfort of him that indulges it.* It troubles the soul in which it is, as a storm troubles the ocean. Such anger is inconsistent with a man's enjoying himself, or having any true peace, or self-respect in his own spirit. Men of an angry and wrathful temper, whose minds are always in a fret, are the most miserable sort of men, and live a most miserable life; so that a regard to our own happiness should lead us to shun all undue and sinful anger. Consider, again,

Third, How much such a spirit *unfits persons for the duties of religion*. All undue anger indisposes us for the pious exercises, and the active duties of religion. It puts the soul far from that sweet and excellent frame of spirit, in which we most enjoy communion with God, and which makes truth and ordinances most profitable to us. And hence it is, that God commands us not to approach his altars while we are at enmity with others, but “first to be reconciled to our brother, and then come and offer our gift,” Matt. v. 24; and that by the Apostle it is said, “I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;” 1 Timothy ii. 8. And, once more, consider,

Fourth, That *angry men are spoken of in the Bible, as unfit for human society*. The express direction of God is, “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul,” Proverbs xxii. 24, 25. Such a man is accursed as a pest of society, who disturbs and disquiets it, and puts everything into confusion. “An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression,” Proverbs xxix.

22. Every one is uncomfortable about him ; his example is evil ; and his conduct disapproved alike by God and men. Let these considerations, then, prevail with all, and lead them to avoid an angry spirit and temper, and to cultivate the spirit of gentleness, and kindness, and love, which is the spirit of heaven.