

SERMON UPON 1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 4-8.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.—1 Cor. xiii. 4-8.

I HAVE a long time had a desire to open the nature of this divine and heavenly grace of charity. I know not how the argument will relish with you, but my aim is rather to profit than to please. We are defective in our duties to God, the Lord knoweth; but what and if I show that we are as defective in our duties to man, wherein we think natural conscience is a sufficient guide to us. A little serious reflection upon this scripture will discover it. In the context observe,

1. The excellency and necessity of charity above all other gifts.
2. The nature and properties of it.

1. For the excellency and necessity of charity. Gifts are of several sorts, as on the same tree grow leaves, flowers, fruit. None *ad pompam*, for show, but all *ad usum*, for use. But in the gifts for use, some make us profitable, others acceptable. Though they have their use, yet they profit not to salvation: 'Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' A man may sacrifice a stout body to a stubborn mind, yet if it be not for God's glory, and to edify others, it availeth not.

2. The nature and properties of it, in the text; where the properties of this excellent grace of charity are reckoned up: 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly,' &c.

In all these predications there is a metonymy, either of the subject or of the effect. Of the subject; charity doth thus, that is, the man endowed with this heavenly gift or grace. If of the effect, then the

meaning is, that where this habit is impressed and rooted, it is the cause that these effects ensue; that a man is long-suffering, kind, &c.

It is all one in which sense we expound the apostle, for all cometh to the same issue. This premised, let us next explain the several clauses.

1. 'Charity suffereth long,' *μακροθυμεῖ*; that is, maketh a man long-suffering. This being the first and principal act of charity, it concerneth us to state it aright; and so it meaneth that where christian love prevaieth in the heart of any, he doth not presently break out into anger when he is injured by another, but patiently expecteth his repentance, and his own deliverance by the Lord. This *μακροθυμία*, long-suffering, signifieth a slowness to anger: James i. 19, 'Be slow to wrath.' This agreeth with the pattern: Rom. ix. 22, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?' And it agreeth with the nature of love; for we are not easily offended with those whom we love. Love and anger are contrary; love would profit, anger would hurt and offend others; therefore love will not easily give place to its contrary. Charity doth pass by and wink at causes of offence; and therefore a quick resentment of injuries is quite opposite to christian love. Paul requireth of the servant of the Lord, that he be patient, *ἀνεξίκακον*, 2 Tim. ii. 24, 'The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient;' to which he adds, ver. 25, 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.' And in the context here he speaketh of using gifts in an edifying manner, but to all christians he saith, 'Charity suffereth long.' It is meant that they should be long-suffering, not easily drawn to a fury or revenge of injuries. So that this first property of charity is, that it restraineth wrath and a desire of revenge, notwithstanding reproaches and injuries: Rom. xiii. 19, 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath;' that is, bear with it; leave it to God, who will in time convince the party of his wrong, or recompense it unto him; which is according to the example of the Lord Jesus: 1 Peter ii. 23, 'Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.' When foul crimes were laid to his charge, he did not give the least ill word for the worst usage, but only resigned himself to his righteous Father, to deal with him and his persecutors as he saw fitting. Now therefore we should be patient, and long patient. Alas! how many injuries doth God put up at our hands! Whence is it that he hath not long since dissolved the world, and put an end to the wickedness of man? We can only render the reason of the text, 'Love suffereth long.' If we cannot suffer long, we are like that naughty servant that, when his Lord had forgiven ten thousand talents, and his fellow-servant, to whom he owed an hundred pence, said, *μακροθύμησον ἐπ' ἐμοί*, Mat. xviii. 29, 'Have patience with me;' that is, setting aside thy present anger, bear a little, and see what I can do to pacify thee. An instance of this rash anger, which is contrary to this suffering long, we have in David: 1 Sam. xxv. 22, 'God do so to me, and more also, if I leave off all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth

against the wall.' But he behaved himself better towards Saul, whom he spared when he had him in his power; which was not the manner of men in those times, as Saul confesseth: 1 Sam. xxiv. 18, 'For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away?'

2. 'And is kind,' *χρηστεύεται*; that is, tender and compassionate, ready to do good. We have a pattern of both in God, not only of forbearance, but of goodness. Therefore it is said, Rom. ii. 4, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' Now, charity, that is of divine original, infuseth into man's nature a benignity which moveth a man to consider others as well as himself, that he may do good to them. It is a godlike quality: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious,' *ὅτι χρηστός*, that he is kind. This is a quality by which they are inclined and ready to do good to every one, even to enemies. Well, then, it is not enough *μακροθυμείν*, to bear long, and not to hurt, but *χρηστεύεται*, it disposeth us to do good. This is fitly coupled to the former. The perfection and strength of Christianity lieth in these two things—*mala pati, et bona agere*; to suffer evil, and do good for it. To return good for good, and evil for evil, the heathens knew this, and publicans will do this. To render evil for good is the property of the devils, and men inspired by them; but to do good for evil, and to overcome evil with good, this is proper to Christians. And therefore by these two properties doth heavenly charity bewray itself, by long-suffering and kindness. Therefore if you would know whether the love of God doth dwell in your hearts, are you made ready to suffer, and to do anything for the glory of God, and the salvation of your neighbour? If so, then you are sincere with God. He that loveth, suffereth long; he that loveth, is kind, and doth all the good he can to others, delights in doing good; and that not only to friends, in which there is nothing eximious; they do nothing but what the carnal world would do: Mat. v. 46, 47, 'For if you love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not the publicans so?' But to those that deal frowardly with us, as Joseph to his brethren, Gen. xlv.

3. 'Charity envieth not,' *ὄν ζηλοῖ*. Nothing is more adverse to the goodness commended to us than envy, which cannot bear the good of another, and therefore is very far from procuring it and promoting it. Such was the envy of Cain, who taking notice that his brother's offerings pleased God more than his own, he could not bear it, and at length slew him: 1 John iii. 12, 'Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' Emulation and malignity at those that are better than ourselves is the very poison and venom which the devil hath infused into human nature; the affection which put Cain upon killing his brother, and puts the world upon persecuting serious christians, when at the bottom they have no other quarrel against them, but because they excel in the simplicity of the christian faith, and holiness, and obedience. Such were Joseph's brethren, whose virtue was an eyesore to them, and therefore endea-

voured his destruction, Gen. xxxvii. Such were the Jews in the time of the apostles, who, despising the gospel, could not endure it should be preached unto the gentiles: Acts xiii. 45, 'But when the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.' Therefore well doth the apostle James call this 'Bitter envying,' James iii. 14. It is like gall, which corrupts good food, and maketh it unprofitable. So doth this bitter zeal corrupt all their actions whom it doth possess. Well, then, 'Charity envieth not.' Those whom we love sincerely, we will rejoice in their gifts and graces as in our own, their success and prosperity as in our own, and be well pleased with their happiness. But where envy prevaleth, charity hath no place; their praises are our disgrace, their success is our lessening; and few there be that can say, with John the Baptist, 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' John iii. 30; that is, in splendour and fame. Alas! as placid and well-contented as many seem without, envy burneth within, and if it be not checked, will soon produce mischievous effects.

4. 'Charity vaunteth not itself,' *ὃν περπερεύεται*; that is, it doth nothing pragmatically and foolish in word or deed; where it possesseth the hearts of men, they do not arrogantly speak of themselves, or what they have done or can do. Hesychius telleth us the meaning of the word is *μετὰ βλακείας ἐπαιρόμενος*, one that is lifted up with folly, as giddy proud fools are wont to vaunt or strut themselves, so that their own pride rendereth them ridiculous. And so it forbids arrogancy and external ostentation, as internal pride and self-conceit is touched in the next property. Now charity is contrary to more vices than one; to pride, as it manifests itself by contemptuous and scornful carriage, which irritateth others rather than edifieth them.

5. 'Is not puffed up,' *ὃν φυσιοῦται*. He had told us, 1 Cor. viii. 1, that 'Charity edifieth, but knowledge puffeth up;' that is, with a vain conceit of our own worth, despising others. Now though knowledge may beget this through the fault of him that receiveth that gift, yet charity serveth all, despiseth none; therefore pride and insolency showed in despising others or overvaluing ourselves is far from the temper of this heavenly grace. Poor empty bubbles are soon blown up, contemning those that are beneath them in honours, favours, riches, knowledge, and some external services which look like grace: Luke xviii. 11, 'God, I thank thee I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or as this publican.' This condemneth that pride, whereby we thus conceit of our own good estate above others. Whereas brotherly love would persuade us in honour to prefer one another, Rom. xii. 10; and in humility to think others better than ourselves, Phil. ii. 3; not with our lips only, setting on a show of humility, but with our hearts; for there is no man so great that is not in some things beneath those whom he despiseth. And we are conscious to our own infirmities, and should have a modest esteem of our own graces and virtues; for the true excellency of a christian lieth in a mean esteem of himself. For the great business of his religion is to represent to him his own sinfulness, and the undeserved goodness of God; and therefore he seeketh no other esteem with others than God fairly alloweth him, and dareth not set too high a price upon himself, nor is troubled if others come not up to his price.

6. 'It doth not behave itself unseemly,' *οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ*. This followeth well on the former; for men puffed up transgress the rules of all decency in setting out themselves, not giving others the respect due to them. Therefore it must needs be one of the properties of charity to make men do that which will become meekness, modesty, and godliness, and to abstain from all things that may be an offence and scandal to others in words, deeds, gesture, clothing, generally in all parts of conversation. Whatever may expose us to the contempt of others, or may argue a contempt of them, or may be a just offence, charity will mind us to forbear it: Phil. iv. 8, 'Whatsoever things are lovely, think on these things.'

7. 'Seeketh not her own,' *ὄν ζητεῖ τα ἑαυτῆς*. Self-love prompteth us merely to seek our own things, but charity seeketh the profit of others. It doth not drive on a self-seeking trade, or mind these things which make for our own advantage, but the welfare of others, and is as sensible and zealous for other men's good as of its own. To take care of their safety, *τὰ ἑτέρων ζητειν*, Phil. ii. 4, 'Look every man to the things of others.' To maintain our neighbour's good estate in his profit, honour, fame. Spiritual blessings should be aimed at by us by the same accuracy and diligence that we use in reference to ourselves. The law of charity here is, that we study not our own private profit so as to neglect others, or that any damage should thereby arise to others. Paul often presseth this: 1 Cor. x. 24, 'Let no man mind his own, but every man another's wealth.' Not so seek his private profit as to neglect the public. A man must mind his own affairs, but not with the neglect and damage of others; first, in the use of his christian liberty; secondly, in his calling; wherein they sin greatly who seek to draw all to themselves.

8. 'It is not easily provoked,' *ὄν παροξύνεται*. If differences arise, it handleth them peaceably. It doth not draw on things to fervour, and acerbity of contention. A paroxysm is the sharp fit of a fever, and signifieth when anger is boiled to a height. But charity is not exasperated, or highly provoked to anger, or embittered into wrath and passion. This property is to show that it tempereth just anger, that men fall not into immoderate violent distempers of passion upon whatever provocation. It is hard to abstain from all anger when we meet with so many occasions of it in the course of our lives, but the violence is corrected by love. There was a hot fit between Paul and Barnabas: Acts xv. 39, 'And the contention was so sharp between them, that they parted asunder one from the other.' Paul's cause was more just. Those that love one another may find a temptation, but love should allay these bitter gusts, for we should always remember that, 'Be angry and sin not;' that is, if ye be angry, beware of sin, Eph. iv. 26.

9. 'Thinketh no evil,' *ὄν λογίζεται τὸ κακόν*. The word signifieth two things—to think or design, to impute or reckon. In the first acceptation the sense is that a charitable person plotteth not in his mind how he shall do his neighbour any evil. Now designing evil is so vile a thing, and so abhorred by heathens, that the apostle would not mention the forbearing of that as an effect of divine charity; therefore most probably we must pitch upon the latter sense; not for

not contriving hurt to others, but not to reckon or impute it to them. And so it is the property of charity not rashly to impute evil to any man. It suspects no evil in others, as long as their actions are capable of a good interpretation, or while other good is mingled with it. Envy and detraction, like a fly, pitcheth on the sore place; but charity doth not easily think evil of its neighbour, but interpreteth doubtful things in the better part. If wronged by others, they rather impute it to their inconsideration than their malice; and if it cannot be excused, they do not impute, charge, or upbraid them with it, as brawling people do.

10. 'It rejoiceth not in evil,' *ὃν χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ*. Nothing is more abhorrent from the nature of charity than *ἐπιχαίρεκακία*, rejoicing in the hurt of another. Now this may happen on two occasions—(1.) When any one doth that which is unjust; (2.) When injustice is done to any one. In the first case, charity rejoiceth not that others fall into sin, which indeed is a pleasure to them that hate them, but charity will make a man heartily mourn and grieve for any sin that is committed by another. It is a joy to see others discharge their duty, but a grief that they offend God. The second case is, if our enemy be injured by others, we boastingly say, Oh, how well is this man served! Now thus to rejoice in or applaud the misery of others will not stand with charity, which seeketh the reformation of others, not their ruin and disgrace. David, when he heard of the death of Saul, he rent his clothes and wept and fasted: 2 Sam. i. 11, 12, 'And David took hold of his clothes and rent them, and all the men that were with him; and they mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel, because they were fallen by the edge of the sword.' And Job saith, chap. xxxi. 39, 'If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him; neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.' Revenge is sweet to a carnal nature, but divine love checketh it, and purgeth out this old leaven of malice more and more.

11. 'But rejoiceth in the truth,' *συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*. Truth is taken for sincerity of goodness. Charity wisheth those that displease us were better than they are, and that they did nothing but what is right, just, and good; rejoices at any good that befalleth others, especially at the holy and virtuous actions performed by them, and their integrity and sincerity. This is a good note; for what a man really is, he desireth others should be.

12. 'It beareth all things.' The word is *πάντα στέγει*, covereth all things, which the Greek word also signifieth; and so there is a tautology avoided; for the last clause of this verse is 'endureth all things.' Now the meaning of this clause is, that charity doth not easily divulge the crimes of others: Prov. x. 12, 'Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all sins.' None of us can expect to live in the world but we shall meet with many failings and wrongs in the best of God's children. These will need the cover of love, that we may neither shame our brethren nor disgrace our religion. Therefore one property of this grace is to hide and conceal the evil we know by another, as far as it is for his good, and not contrary to the greater

good of others ; for then a greater charity obligeth us to reveal it. As if a man be a seducer, or if one profess to do religion a mischief, it is our duty to reveal it ; but otherwise it is an offence to speak all we know of others, though it be true ; for all evil must not be divulged, but sometimes covered with the cloak of love. There may be malice in reporting truth ; for an eager desire to spread a fault wanteth not sin : Jer. xx. 10, ' Report say they, and we will report it.' Nay ; if there be no ill intent, such prattle will come under the charge of idle words, unless it be for discovering a hypocrite, that others may not be deceived nor ensnared.

13. ' It believeth all things,' *πάντα πιστεύει* ; not such things as are apparently false, but hath no prejudice against that which others profess, if not prevalently contradicted. It desireth others should be good, and therefore easily believeth them according to the profession which they make, and whilst things are any way credible, and not manifestly false. It dareth not harbour an ill conceit of others, interpreting all things to the best as long as the contrary appeareth not, and whatever can be said for the mitigation of a fault. It is easily persuaded, James iii. 17. It doth not indulge unwarrantable suspicions, and as long as it can taketh all things in good part that are said or done by others ; for till it hath an idoneous proof, it had rather be deceived in thinking well of others than suspecting evil. It is a malignity to fasten an evil sense on a speech or action that may bear a good one.

14. ' Hopeth all things,' *πάντα ἔλπιζει*. This is added because what charity cannot believe it hopeth for. When nothing is said by way of defence and excuse, it hopeth the best the matter is capable of ; if not for the present, it despaireth not that, being fallen, they will rise again ; they despair not of their repentance, nor give over the use of all probable means to reclaim them.

15. ' It endureth all things,' *πάντα ὑπομένει* ; that is, suffereth injuries done to itself, for peace's sake, without revenging itself. They can endure much pain, and trouble, and loss to procure a greater good to others ; that is, greater than the pain we suffer ourselves ; and therefore it meditath not revenge.

16. And lastly, ' Charity never faileth,' *οὐδέποτε ἐκπίπτει* ; that is, never ceaseth in this life to bring forth these fruits ; neither shall it cease in the life to come. There the love of God and our brethren abideth and is perfect. Men die, but charity liveth, and is exercised by us in another world. It is not a grace out of date in heaven. Here it is not weary, Gal. vi. 9 ; there it shall not cease, 1 Cor. xiii. 13. The duties are other, but the grace is the same.

Use 1. Let me beseech you, as Chrysostom did his hearers, often to ruminate on this description of charity. Remember it is a discriminating grace, not an arbitrary thing, that we are speaking of. The business is whether you are something in religion or nothing. They that cannot bridle their passions, but live in enmity, malice, pride, and covetousness, and have not charity, are nothing.

2. What reason we have to deprecate God's strict judgment, and clear up the business of our sincerity. Alas ! without an evangelical interpretation what would become of us ? It is true we break not into

gross enormities, but how many infirmities stick to us! Though a christian cannot wholly subdue them, he must in some measure overcome them. Anger will stir when we are provoked, but by the ordinary assistance of God's grace we may keep off from running out into furious words and actions, or cursing or swearing, or striking or reviling. An envious thought may arise against our brother because he is preferred before us, but we hate it, labour to keep it under, chide ourselves for it, do not let our envy break out into a malignant detraction from their worth, or blemishing their gifts and graces. A child of God may feel the ticklings of pride, yet he will not suffer it to break out into boasting language; some motions of revenge, but they do not break out into mischievous contradiction.

3. What need there is of constant mortification. How else can we exercise this love, we being so covetous, proud, passionate, and self-seeking? the *πάθη* and *ἐπιθυμίαι*, affections and lusts, must be both broken: Gal. v. 24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof.'

4. What a friend christianity is to human society; for how peaceable might we live together if this love did more rule in our hearts!

5. How perverse man is, who accounts this duty irksome, when he will do much more for his lusts and ambition: ver. 7, 'Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Easily will men bear this task for their worldly ends.

6. How much love in the Spirit differeth from ordinary love. This is a fruit of love to God: 1 John v. 1, 'Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him;' and of faith in Christ: John xv. 12, 'This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;' and hopes of eternal life, in the text.
