

Christian Charity

Or

The Duty Of Charity To The Poor, Explained And Enforced

Jonathan Edwards

Dated January 1732

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

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. 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.

Section I The Words Explained.....	3
I. It is the duty of the people of God to give <i>bountifully</i> for the aforesaid purpose.	5
II. It is the duty of the visible people of God to give for the supply of the needy, <i>freely</i> , and without grudging.....	5
III. This is a duty to which God's people are under very strict <i>obligation</i>	5
Section II Of The Obligation Of Christians To Perform The Duty Of Charity To The Poor	6
I. It is most reasonable, considering the general state and nature of mankind.	6
II. It is especially reasonable, considering our circumstances, under such a dispensation of grace as that of the gospel.	7
Section III An Exhortation To The Duty Of Charity To The Poor	8
I. Consider that what you have is not your own; <i>i.e.</i> you have only a subordinate right.	8
II. 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.	9
III. Consider that there is an absolute necessity of our complying with the difficult duties of religion.	10
IV. The Scripture teaches us that this very particular duty is necessary,	10
<i>First</i> , the Scripture teaches that God will deal with us as we deal with our fellow creatures in this particular,	10
<i>Second</i> , this very thing is often mentioned in Scripture as an essential part of the character of a godly man.	10
<i>Third</i> , Christ teaches that judgment will be past at the great day according to men's works in this respect.....	11
V. 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.	11

<i>First</i> , 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.....	11
<i>Second</i> , 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 temporal interest.	12
Some may think this is strange doctrine;.....	13
It is easy with God to make up to men what they give in charity.	13
God hath told us that this is the way to have his blessing attending our affairs.....	13
<i>Sixth</i> , God hath threatened to follow with his curse those who are uncharitable to the poor;	13
<i>Seventh</i> , consider that you know not what calamitous and necessitous circumstances you yourselves or your children may be in.	14
1. This may put you upon considering how your hearts would be effected, if it should so be.	15
2. If ever there should be such a time, your kindness to others now will be but a laying up against such a time.....	15
3. God hath threatened uncharitable persons, that if ever they come to be in calamity and distress they shall be left helpless.....	16
Section IV Objections Which Are Sometimes Made To The Exercise Of Charity, Answered.....	16
Object. I. I am in a natural 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.	16
<i>First</i> , we have shown already that a temporal blessing is promised to a moral bounty and liberality.	16
<i>Second</i> , you may as well make the same objection against any other duty of religion.....	16
Object. 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,.....	17
<i>First</i> , the same answer may be made to this, as to the former objection,	17
<i>Second</i> , your objection carries it thus, that it is not best for you to do as God commands and counsels you to do.....	17
Object. III. I have in times past given to the poor, but never found myself the better for it.....	17
<i>First</i> , perhaps you looked out for the fulfillment of the promise too soon, before you had fulfilled the condition.....	17
<i>Second</i> , 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?	18
<i>Third</i> , how can you tell what blessings God hath yet in reserve for you if you do but continue in well-doing?.....	18
Object. 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.....	19
<i>First</i> , we are commanded to love and treat one another as brethren.....	19
<i>Second</i> , that we should relieve our neighbor only when in extremity, is not agreeable to the rule of loving our neighbor as ourselves.....	20
Object. V. Some may object against charity to a particular object because he is an ill sort of person... ..	20
<i>First</i> , we are obliged to do so by the <i>general</i> rules of Scripture. I shall mention two.	20
1. That of loving our neighbor as ourselves.	20
2. Another general rule that obliges us to the same thing is that wherein we are commanded to love one another, as Christ hath loved us.....	21
<i>Second</i> , we are obliged to this duty by many <i>particular</i> rules.	21
Object. VI. Some may object from their own circumstances that they have nothing to spare; they have not more than enough for themselves.....	22
<i>First</i> , it must doubtless be allowed that in some cases persons, by reason of their own circumstances, are not obliged to give to others.	22
<i>Second</i> , there are scarcely any who may not make this objection, as they interpret it.....	22

<i>Third</i> , 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.	22
<i>Fourth</i> , those who have not too much for themselves are willing to spare seed to sow, that they may have fruit hereafter.	23
Object. VII. Some may object concerning a particular person that they do not certainly know whether he be an object of charity or not.	23
<i>First</i> , this is Nabal’s objection, for which he is greatly condemned in Scripture;	23
<i>Second</i> , we are commanded to be kind to strangers whom we know not, nor their circumstances.	23
Object. VIII. Some may say they are not obliged to give to the poor till they ask.	24
<i>First</i> , it surely is the most charitable to relieve the needy in that way wherein we shall do them the greatest kindness.	24
<i>Second</i> , this is not agreeable to the character of the liberal man given in Scripture;	24
<i>Third</i> , we should not commend a man for doing so to his own brother.	24
<i>Fourth</i> , we should commend others for taking a method contrary to that which is proposed by the objector.	24
Object. IX. He has brought himself to want by his own fault.	24
<i>First</i> , if you mean a want of a natural faculty to manage affairs to advantage, that is to be considered as his calamity.	25
<i>Second</i> , if they have been reduced to want by some oversight and are to be blamed that they did not consider for themselves better, yet that doth not free us from all obligation to charity towards them.	25
<i>Third</i> , if they are come to want by a vicious idleness and prodigality, yet we are not thereby excused from all obligation to relieve them, unless they continue in those vices.	25
<i>Fourth</i> , if they continue in the same courses still, yet that doth not excuse us from charity to their families that are innocent.	25
Object. X. Some may object and say, Others do not their duty.	26
Object. XI. The law makes provision for the poor, and obliges the respective towns in which they live to provide for them.	26
<i>First</i> , that the towns are obliged by law to relieve everyone who otherwise would be an object of charity.	26
<i>Second</i> , this objection is built upon another supposition which is equally false,	27

Section I The Words Explained

Subject: ’Tis the most absolute and indispensable duty of a people of God to give bountifully and willingly for the supply of the wants of the needy.

The duty here enjoined, 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 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 Lev. 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, Luke 10:29, etc. 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. bountifully, and willingly*. We should give *bountifully*, and *sufficiently* for the supply of the poor's need. Deu. 15:7, 8, "Thou shalt not shut up 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." 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*. Deu. 15:7, "Thou shalt not harden thine heart from thy poor brother," And verse 10, "And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest him."

We may also observe how peremptorily 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. Deu. 15:7, "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother." Verse 8, "But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him." Verse 10, "Thou shalt surely give him." Verse 11, "I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy."

Moreover, God strictly warns against objections, Deu. 15:9, "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." 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, 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. "Thou shalt be willing to lend, expecting nothing again."

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 give 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." And Deu. 15:9, "Beware that thine eye be not evil against thy poor brother." And verse 11, "Thou shalt open thine hand wide to thy brother." 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 (Deu. 15:10). — Another is, that we shall never want proper objects of our charity and bounty. Verse 11, "For the poor shall never cease out of thy land." This God

saith to the Jewish church; and the like Christ saith to the Christian church, Mat. 26:11, “The poor ye have always with you.” 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 wants of the needy. — But more particularly,

I. 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.” 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 wants, 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 Deu. 15:8, “Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his want, in that which he needeth.” 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; [for] 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 suffered 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.* 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, Deu. 15:11, that there shall be no such time when there shall be no poor, who shall be proper objects of charity. — When persons give very *sparingly*, it is no manifestation of charity, but of a contrary spirit. 2 Cor. 9:5, “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.

II. 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. 2 Cor. 9:7, “Every man according as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

III. This is a duty to which God’s people are under very strict *obligation*.

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.

Section II Of The Obligation Of Christians To Perform The Duty Of Charity To The Poor

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 Lev. 25:35, etc. "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 at the conclusion of verse 38, God enforces it with saying, *I am the Lord thy 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. Mic. 6:8, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, *to love mercy*, and to walk humbly with thy God?" 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. Jam. 1:27, "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."

So Christ tells us, it is one of the weightier matters of the law. Mat. 23:23, "Ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." 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. Hos. 6:6, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;" Mat. 9:13 and 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 most reasonable in itself. And so, on this account, there is reason why God should much insist upon it.

I. 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 nearly 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. Mankind in this respect are as the members of the natural body, one cannot subsist alone, without an 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 at the things of others, Phil. 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 private niggardly 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, [we] 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 straits.

II. 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 mean 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. Agreeably to 2 Cor. 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 loth 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 relations one to another, hath made us children of God, children in the 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 hath 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, 1 Cor. 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. Gal. 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

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, Eze. 16:49, “This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness in her, and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

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 [does] not lie under guilt in this matter. Have you not forborne to give when you have seen your brother in want? Have you not 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. 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.

Section III An Exhortation To The Duty Of Charity To The Poor

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 see 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.

I. 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. 1 Cor. 6:20, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; your body and your spirit are God’s.” 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. 1 Pet. 4:9, 10, "Use hospitality one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 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 proprietor of them. He hath nothing to do with them, only as he is to use them for his master. He is to give everyone of his master's family their portion of meat in due season.

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 everyone 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 proprietors of our Master's goods, what account shall we give of this?

II. 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.

Pro. 19:17, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord." God hath been pleased to make our needy neighbors his receivers. He in his infinite mercy hath 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; see Mat. 25:40. There Christ says to the righteous on his right hand, who had supplied the wants of the needy, "In that ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." In like manner he says to the wicked who had not shown mercy to the poor, verse 45, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." — 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. Luke 8:2, 3, "And certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalen, 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." So he still, in many of his members, needs the charity of others.

III. 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 hath 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 seem 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.

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

Particularly,

***First*, 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. Mat. 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Psa. 18:25, “With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful.” 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. Jam. 2:13-16, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed 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 you warmed, and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”

***Second*, this very thing is often mentioned in Scripture as an essential part of the character of a godly man.**

Psa. 37:21, “The righteous showeth mercy, and giveth.” And again, verse 26, “He is ever merciful, and lendeth.” Psa. 112:5, “A good man showeth favour, and lendeth.” And verse 9, “He hath dispersed, and given to the poor.” So Pro. 14:31, “He that honoureth God, hath mercy on the poor.” Again, Pro. 21:26 and Isa. 57:1. A *righteous* man and a *merciful* man are used as synonymous terms: “The *righteous* perisheth, and *merciful* men are taken away,” etc.

It is mentioned in the New Testament as a thing so essential, that the contrary cannot consist with a *sincere* love to God. 1 John 3:17-19, “But whoso hath this world’s goods, 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.” 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. See 2 Cor. 8:8, “I speak to prove the sincerity of your love.”

Third, Christ teaches that judgment will be past 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. 25:34, etc. 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.

V. 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 hath 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. Acts 20:35, "I have showed 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." He that gives bountifully is a happier man than he that receives bountifully. Pro. 14:21, "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he."

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 Ecc. 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 about 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 that giveth to the poor lendeth 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. Pro. 19:17, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again." God will not only pay you again, but he will pay you with great increase. Luke 6:38, "Give, and it shall be given you," that is, in "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over."

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

First, 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.

Mat. 10:42, "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."

Giving to our needy brethren is in Scripture called laying up treasure in heaven, in bags that wax not old. Luke 12:33, "Sell what ye have and give alms, provide for yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth." 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 approaches nor moth corrupts. 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 fullness, 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. Luke 14:13-16, "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and 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."

Second, 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 temporal 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. Pro. 11:24, 25, "There is that 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." And Pro. 28:27, "He that giveth to the poor, shall not lack."

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 Ecc. 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 verse 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 doth 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, 2 Cor. 9:6, 7, 8, “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 towards you; that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

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.

God hath told us that this is the way to have his blessing attending our affairs.

Thus, in the text, Deu. 15:10, “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 all that thou puttest thine hand unto.” And Pro. 22:9, “He that hath a bountiful eye, shall be blessed.” 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.

Sixth, God hath threatened to follow with his curse those who are uncharitable to the poor;

as Pro. 28:27, “He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes, shall have many a curse.” It is said, *he that hideth his eyes*, because this is the way of uncharitable men. 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 niggardly 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 close 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.

Seventh, 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 you 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 hath 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, Ecc. 11:1, 2, “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 earth.” Thou knowest not what calamitous circumstances thou mayest be in thyself, in this changeable uncertain world. You know not what circumstances you or your children may be brought into by captivity, or other unthought-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 fore-mentioned 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;” *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 Ecc. 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 effected, 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 captivity, ^{*1*} 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, and thou shalt find it after many days, says the wise man. 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 now 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 that giveth 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. Psa. 37:25, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." 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 God's pity and help, if not of that of our fellow creatures. And God hath promised that at such a time, he that hath been of a charitable spirit and practice, shall find help. Psa. 41:1-4, "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." 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 hath threatened uncharitable persons, that if ever they come to be in calamity and distress they shall be left helpless.

Pro. 21:13, "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself and not be heard."

Section IV Objections Which Are Sometimes Made To The Exercise Of Charity, Answered.

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

Object. I. I am in a natural 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,

First, 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.

Second, 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 hath 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.

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 Dan. 4:27, "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by *showing mercy to the poor.*"

Object. 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,

First, 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, of 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.

Second, 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.

Object. 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:

First, perhaps you looked out for the fulfillment 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, niggardly spirit, than of any bounty or liberality. The promises are not made to every many 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 niggardly 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 and closeness, 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 doth 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 hath found by experience.

Second, 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 hath no where 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 close 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?

Third, how can you tell what blessings God hath yet in reserve for you if you do but continue in well-doing?

Although God hath promised great blessings to liberality to the poor, yet he hath 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 again *after many days*." 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, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. 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 Ecc. 11:4, "He that observeth the winds shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." In this context the wise man in 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 that regardeth the winds and clouds, to prognosticate thence prosperity to seed, and will not trust Providence with it, is not like 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, Ecc. 11:6, "In the morning sow thy seed, and 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." — Therefore (Gal. 6:9) "Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." 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.

Object. 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 but that they can live, though they suffer some hardships. — But,

It doth 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.

First, we are commanded to love and treat one another as brethren.

1 Pet. 3:8, "Have compassion one of another; love as brethren; be pitiful." 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, only when they are in extremity? Doth 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. Gal. 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." 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. Rom. 12:15, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." 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, doth 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 over nice, 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.

Second, 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 wont 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 are wont 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.

Object. V. Some may object against charity to a particular object because he is an ill sort of person.

He deserves not that people should be kind to him. He is of a very ill temper, of an ungrateful spirit, and particularly, because he hath not deserved well of *them*, but has treated them ill, has been injurious to them, and even now entertains an ill spirit against them.

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

First, 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 ill sort of man, and even our enemy, as Christ himself teaches us by his discourse with the lawyer, Luke 10:25, etc. 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 all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." 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 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 passed by without affording him any relief. The same as 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 a parity 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 hath loved us.

We have it 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 hath 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 hath loved us. We have the same again, 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 hath 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 fellow men 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 ill disposition, and are very undeserving. Christ loved us, and laid himself out to relieve us, though we were his enemies, and had treated him ill. So we, as we would love one another as Christ hath loved us, should relieve those who are our enemies, hate us, have an ill spirit toward us, and have treated us ill.

Second, 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 sendeth 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 the effect.

Not but 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. Yet if things be otherwise, that doth not render them not fit objects of our charity, nor set us free from obligation to kindness towards them.

Object. VI. Some may object from their own circumstances that they have nothing to spare; they have not more than enough for themselves.

— I answer,

First, 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 vanity 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 an affectation of having them accounted about what they in truth are.

Second, 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.

Third. 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.

As if our neighbor's difficulties and necessities be much greater than our own, and we see that he is not like to be otherwise relieved, we should be willing to suffer with him, and to take part of his burden on ourselves. Else how is that rule of *bearing one another's burdens* fulfilled? If we be never obliged to relieve others' burdens, but 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 a superfluity, yet we may be obliged to afford relief to others who are in much greater necessity. As appears by that rule, Luke 3:11, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." — 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 want. The apostle commends the Macedonian Christians, that they were liberal to their brethren, though they themselves were in deep poverty. 2 Cor. 8:1, 2, "Moreover, 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."

Fourth, 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 doth 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.

Object. VII. Some may object concerning a particular person that they do not certainly know whether he be 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 be in want as he pretends. Or if they know this, they know not how he came to be in want, whether it were not by his own idleness, or prodigality. Thus they argue that they cannot be obliged, till they certainly know these things. — I reply,

First, this is Nabal's objection, for which he is greatly condemned in Scripture;

see 1 Sam. 25. David in his exiled state came and begged relief of Nabal. Nabal objected, 1 Sam. 25:10, 11, "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?" 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 no way countenanced 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 in that chapter, 1 Sam. 25:3, that "she was a woman of a good understanding." At the same time God exceedingly frowned on Nabal's behavior on this occasion, as we are informed that about ten days after God smote Nabal that he died, verse 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 be 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.

Second, 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. Heb. 13:2, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." 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. Else how could it be unawares?

Object. 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 straits to me, and then it will be time enough for me to give him. Or if he need 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,

First, 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.

Second, 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 a begging to us. But to inquire who stand 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.

Third, we should not commend a man for doing so to his own brother.

If a man had an own brother or sister in great straits, and he were well able to supply them, under the pretense that if he or she want 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.

Fourth, 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 wont 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?

Object. IX. He has brought himself to want by his own fault.

— In reply, it must be considered what you mean by his fault.

First, if you mean a want 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 hath given you such a gift, which he hath 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 hath given wisdom, should be willing that the ignorant should have the benefit of his knowledge.

Second, if they have been reduced to want by some oversight and are to be blamed that they did not consider for themselves better, yet that doth 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 hath loved us.

Third, if they are come to want by a vicious 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 hath loved us*. Now Christ hath loved us, pitied us, and greatly laid out himself to relieve us from that want 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.

Fourth, if they continue in the same courses still, yet that doth 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. And that 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.

Object. 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 straits. 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.

ANS. We ought to relieve those who are in want 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 him. If a man be brought into straits 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.

Object. 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 however the charity of Christians in those times be 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.

First, 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 doth 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 want, as to leave no room for Christian charity.

Second, this objection is built upon another supposition which is equally false,

viz. that there are in fact none who are proper objects of charity, but those that 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 in want, as to stand in need of our charity, then that law doth 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 belong 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 suffer and be 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 so in want 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.