

Love Worketh No Ill

by Charles Finney

True love is a state of the will, a fixed, permanent choice or preference, and benevolence or good-willing that works no ill to our neighbor.

Scripture: Matthew 22:39, Luke 6:31, John 15:12, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:14, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:4, Colossians 3:14, 1 John 4:20

Topics: "True Love", "Benevolence in Action"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that true love, which is the essence of religion, is not merely emotional or based on natural affections, but is a deliberate choice of benevolence towards all beings. He explains that this love works no ill to our neighbors because it respects their rights and seeks their happiness, urging believers to extend this love universally, especially to those closest to them. Finney warns against the delusion of equating emotional experiences with true piety, asserting that genuine religion manifests in active good-willing and benevolence. He concludes that true religion is characterized by a commitment to promote the well-being of others, reflecting God's love and kindness.

Transcript

TEXT--Rom. 13:10: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

In discussing this subject I shall show:

I. WHAT THE LOVE THAT CONSTITUTES TRUE RELIGION IS NOT.

II. WHAT IT IS.

III. WHO IS TO BE REGARDED AS OUR NEIGHBOR.

IV. WHY LOVE WORKETH NO ILL TO OUR NEIGHBOR.

I. What the love that constitutes true religion is not.

1. It is not natural affection, or the love of kindred. This needs no comment. The absence of natural affection, as mentioned in the Bible, is evidence of a high degree of depravity; but its exercise is not holiness.

2. It is not the love that exists between the sexes. This is only a modification of natural affection.

3. It is not the love of complacency. Complacency is an emotion of delight in its object. It is an involuntary state of mind, and exists naturally and often necessarily, when an object calculated to excite emotions of complacency is present to the mind. Being an involuntary state of mind, it often has no moral character at all, and when any degree of moral character is to be ascribed to complacency, it is because the emotions are indirectly under the influence of the will. Emotions are consequent upon thoughts, and arise spontaneously in the mind, when the attention is directed to the deep consideration of any subject. And as the will controls the attention, it indirectly controls the emotions. And emotions of complacency or displacency have moral character only as they are indirectly produced by the action of the will. Complacency may respect a great many different objects:

(1.) Personal beauty. We are so constituted, that the presence of beautiful objects naturally excites emotions of complacency or delight in its object. The presence of a beautiful human being naturally and certainly excites emotions of delight, where no feeling of prejudice, envy, or other selfish consideration, begets an opposite state of emotion.

(2.) Complacency may respect other physical accomplishments, such as an elegant form, dignified deportment, elegant manners, good breeding, and multitudes of similar things. In such things we naturally take delight, and emotions of complacency naturally and certainly exist in the mind, under the consideration of such objects, unless some selfish or envious reason prevents.

(3.) It may respect intellectual endowments, a towering intellect, a lofty imagination, great learning, great eloquence; and innumerable such like things may naturally excite emotions of complacency in their objects.

(4.) It may respect benefits received or expected. We naturally feel emotions of complacency in those who befriend us, or grant us great favors; and therefore men may exercise very strong emotions of love to God on account of favors received or expected from Him, without one particle of true religion; but just as naturally as similar emotions of complacency might be exercised towards any other benefactor, without reference to any other feature of his character than that which is made by the bestowment of the particular favors which excite gratitude and complacency.

(5.) Complacency may respect and be founded in a similarity of views and intentions. Every man knows it to be true, that he naturally feels complacency in those whose views, aims, and objects of pursuit correspond with his own, unless it be in cases where a similarity of aims produce a clashing of interests, as is sometimes the case with competitors in business. We see men of the same political creed having complacency in each other; and so we often see among professing Christians, members of the same sect, often exercise a strong affection for or complacency in each other, solely on account of the fact of a similarity of views and prejudices. But in this there is not a particle of true piety.

(6.) Or, complacency may be a mere reciprocation, a mere loving of those who love us, and because they love us. But there is no piety in this. The Savior says, "If ye love those that love you, what thank have ye? Do not even sinners love those that love them?"

(7.) Or it may respect character, whether good or bad. We often see individuals exercising a high degree of complacency in each other, because they are associated in vice. On the other hand, we often see persons exercising a high degree of complacency in each other, on account of their virtues. Men are so constituted, that they never can conscientiously approve of a wicked character; but on the contrary, they must always approve of right character. And all moral beings in the absence of selfish reasons for a

contrary feeling will naturally experience emotions of delight in right character, when it is the subject of contemplation. But emotions of love or delight in right character do not constitute piety. Nor are they any certain evidence of piety. There is not a moral agent in the universe who knows what the character of God is, who does not approve it. Nor one who may not, and perhaps does not, when viewing the character of God in the abstract, experience strong emotions of delight in the moral beauty of his character, upon the same principles that he would feel emotions of delight in personal beauty.

(8.) It may respect the natural attributes of a being. Thus the wickedest of men may experience the strongest emotions of admiration and delight, in view of the natural attributes of God, as manifested in the works of creation, without a particle of that love to God that constitutes true religion.

4. It is not a fondness for a particular person. The love that constitutes the essence of true religion does not respect moral character at all. Nor is it complacency in particular individuals, or a feeling of love of any kind for particular individuals, to the neglect of others. God's holiness consists in universal benevolence to all beings, irrespective of their moral character; and for this reason, it led Him to give his only begotten Son to die for his enemies.

5. Nor is this love an emotion, or mere feeling of any kind.

6. It is not a mere experience, or something in which we seem to ourselves to be passive, as we do in the exercise of emotions. A false philosophy has confounded emotions with true religion, under the name of religious affections. And it is astonishing and alarming, to witness the extent to which this mistake and delusion is entertained by mankind. Hence they speak of experiencing religion, and speak of religion as something in which they are passive, something springing up in their own minds involuntarily. They speak of experiencing such and such states of mind, and regard religion as something to be experienced, rather than as something to be done. Indeed the mistake seems to be almost universal, that religion belongs to the emotions, or feelings, rather than to the actings of the will. Hence, complacency in God and in Christians, because they are holy, is generally regarded, not only as evidence of piety, but as constituting the very essence of piety itself. And multitudes of professors of religion are supposing themselves to be highly spiritual, simply because they are in the exercise of lively emotions of gratitude for favors received, of complacency in God, on account of benefits conferred, and of complacency in Christians because they are Christians. Now let me say, that these emotions may be the result of a right state of the will, or of the exercise of that love which constitutes true religion, or they may not. They do not in any case constitute the essence of true religion, and may often exist without it. And what ungodly man, who has ever been in the habit of intense thinking upon religious subjects, cannot testify to the truth of this from his own experience. The fact is, that religion is something to be done, and not merely to be experienced; something in which man is voluntarily active, and not passive. Indeed the foundation of all true religion consists in voluntary action, and not in emotion. By voluntary action I mean, of course, the actings of the voluntary power or the will.

II. What the love that constitutes true religion is.

1. I have just said, it always belongs to the will; that is, it consists in acts of the will.

2. It is a state of the will, in opposition to a single or a series of volitions. There is an important distinction to be here noticed, between choice and volition. Choice is the mind's election or selection of an end. Volition consists in those efforts or actions of the will which are put forth to accomplish the end chosen. A man chooses to be a merchant. In obedience to this choice his will puts forth all those volitions that put his

body and mind in motion, and that are necessary to accomplish the object chosen. Choice, then, is a state of mind in opposition to those volitions that are exercised for obtaining the end chosen.

3. The love, then, that constitutes true religion, is a fixed, permanent choice, or state of the will. It should be understood, that it is a state, abiding choice, or preference; and from the very laws of the mind has a controlling influence. If you choose to go to the city of New-York, this choice will naturally and certainly beget those volitions and states of mind, and actions of the body that will accomplish this end, if it is within your power.

4. The love that constitutes true religion is the choice of a supreme end or object of pursuit, or a selection of the great and ultimate end of existence. It is a supreme, permanent, controlling preference or choice of the mind.

It is benevolence or good-willing; the exact opposite of selfishness. Selfishness is the supreme preference or choice of self-gratification, as the grand end of life. It is a choosing or willing our own gratification. This is the foundation of all sin, and the carryings out of this consist in those volitions, states of mind, emotions, and bodily actions that make up the history of wicked men. The love mentioned in the text, and that constitutes true religion, is that state of mind demanded by the law of God. Hence, it is said in the text, that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' It is the mind's supreme election or choice, of the universal good of being, as the supreme end of existence. And it respects the good of all beings capable of doing or enjoying good. This supremely respects the being of God, as He is capable of doing and enjoying infinitely more good than all other beings. It therefore prefers his good, happiness, and glory, to all other things in the universe. Remember, it is benevolence in God and not complacency in God, that constitutes the foundation of all true religion. Complacency in God is virtue, when it is produced by a virtuous state of the will, but not otherwise. Complacency in the character of God, is often mentioned in the Bible as constituting virtue; but it should always be remembered, that emotions of complacency in God and other holy beings, when they are virtuous at all, instead of constituting the foundation and essence of virtue, are virtue only in its lowest form. I repeat it, the foundation of all virtue is benevolence to God and to the universe. It is good willing and doing, in opposition to mere good feeling. I wish to get this idea distinctly before your minds, because there are so many mistakes upon this subject.

6. But here let me say, that the love which constitutes true religion is disinterested love. And here again let me beg you not to misunderstand me. For oftentimes, when we speak of disinterested love, it is manifest that we are understood to mean disinterested good emotions, rather than disinterested good willing. When it is said that disinterested love consists in loving God for what He really is, it often seems to be meant, that we are to exercise complacency in God, on account of his character, and this complacency is represented as disinterested love; but this is a grand mistake. To love God for what He is, and with that love which constitutes true religion, is to love Him with the love of benevolence, to will his good, his glory, and happiness. Now complacency in his character will naturally and certainly exist where there is true benevolence toward Him, and as I have already said, it may exist where there is no benevolence at all, when his character is viewed as it may be, as a mere abstraction. But let it be for ever remembered, that true religion consists in benevolence to God and to men, and to all beings capable of loving or receiving good. This benevolence does not respect personal character, but regards the good of every moral and every sentient being, in proportion to its relative value as that is apprehended by the mind, whether sinful or holy. It longs for the salvation of the wicked as much as for the salvation of the righteous. This is manifestly the temper and spirit of God. This is the spirit of Christ, and this is the essence and substance of true godliness wherever it exists. It would not wantonly injure a fly nor tread upon a worm. It regards

happiness as a real good. It longs for the diffusion of universal holiness among all moral agents, and of universal enjoyment among all sentient beings. God delights Himself in the happiness of the little chirping birds, and bounding lambs, and leaping fishes, and all the multitudes of animal existences with which the universe is teeming. So every benevolent mind has chosen the promotion of universal good as the supreme end of life. Consequently its volitions, thoughts, and actions are in deep harmony and sympathy with God, and directed to the same end to which He directs his efforts.

III. Who is to be regarded as our neighbor.

1. We are to regard all moral beings as our neighbors, in whatever country or in whatever world they may exist. We are to regard their interests and happiness according to their relative value. This cannot reasonably, and probably will not be doubted.

2. All sentient beings are to be regarded as our neighbors, all connected with us in the great chain of being. And the good of mere animals is to be regarded and treated by us according to its relative value. The beasts of the field--the fowls of the air--the fishes of the sea--every thing that has life and breath, all are to be regarded as our neighbors.

3. Especially those moral beings most immediately within our reach, and who are the most naturally and certainly affected by our influence--those whose geographical proximity to us brings them within our immediate neighborhood, in a most emphatic sense. Our families, and those whose habitations are most contiguous to ours, who live in the same town, county, state, or nation--these are to be regarded as especially our neighbors, not to the neglect or annihilation of our relation to the human family and to the universe. But to those more within our reach, we are under special obligations, whether they be men or mere animals. Every sentient being within our reach, is to be regarded as emphatically our neighbor.

IV. Why this love worketh no ill.

1. Because, as it belongs to the will and therefore naturally controls the actions of both body and mind, it will work no ill to its neighbor. As it directs the thoughts, it will not think evil of a neighbor. As it consists in choice, and therefore directs the volitions, it will not suffer volitions that shall work ill to its neighbor. As it controls the attention, and therefore the emotions, it will neither beget nor suffer emotions or desires that work ill to its neighbor. As through the volitions it controls the outward actions, it cannot work ill to its neighbor.

2. Because it has no tendency to work ill to our neighbor--

(1.) It respects a neighbor's rights, and aims at securing instead of trampling upon them.

(2.) It respects a neighbor's piety, and endeavors by all possible means to make him holy as a means of making him happy. It regards his holiness and happiness as a great good, and is not reckless of the influence it exerts, either to promote or destroy a neighbor's piety.

(3.) It regards the interests and well-being of a neighbor in all respects.

(4.) Especially does it respect the rights, piety, and happiness of those with whom we are most nearly in contact, and who for this reason are more immediately under our influence.

(5.) Benevolence omits no known duty, whereby our neighbor's interest may suffer, and therefore does not by omission work ill to its neighbor.

(6.) It does not omit any duty, whereby he is stumbled, and led through imitation of our example or in other ways to fall into sin.

(7.) As it consists in good-willing, or in choosing the universal good of being as the supreme end of life, it will of course beget those volitions and actions, that will promote the good of all around us, and especially of those who are near, and most immediately affected by our conduct. In the 13th chapter of first Corinthians, the Apostle describes this love as the foundation and sum of all virtue; and after asserting in the strongest language, that no faith or work is of any value without it, he mentions several of its prominent characteristics, with the manifest design of distinguishing that which constitutes true religion from every thing else. Our translation calls it charity. The original word is the same as that which is rendered love in this text. The same word is uniformly used in the original for that state of mind that constitutes true religion, or the love required by the law of God. This love, H[h]e says, is "patient and long suffering." And who does not know, that we are naturally very patient and long suffering towards those whose happiness is very dear to us, and toward whom we feel truly benevolent. Mere complacency is fitful and evanescent, and depends so much upon the particular exhibition made to our mind at the time, as to be transitory from its very nature. See the complacency that parents have in their children. When they are sweet, and smiling, and lovely, the parent is exceedingly delighted with them. But if they become ill-natured, and hateful, here another exhibition is made to the mind, which, instead of exciting complacency, begets impatience and fretfulness. Just so a mere complacency in God will often be exceedingly fitful and of short duration, as the ever varying course of his providence exhibits Him to our minds as robed in smiles or clothed with frowns. But benevolence is not subject to these changes; because it has not its foundation in the moral character, in the naturally pleasing or displeasing manifestations that are made to the mind; but it is good-willing. It is a patient, persevering, supreme disposition to promote the good of its object.

A second characteristic named by the Apostle is kindness. "Charity suffereth long and is kind." This is of course a characteristic of benevolence, or good-will.

A third characteristic is, that it "envieth not." Envy is an emotion of unhappiness in view of the prosperity of others. Now as the love that constitutes true religion consists in benevolence, it is impossible that it should consist with envy. Benevolence cannot be disturbed and made unhappy by the prosperity of its object. Envy is, therefore, the very opposite of true religion, and is the offspring of hell. An envious man is "of his father the devil, and the lusts of his father he will do."

A fourth characteristic of this love is, that it "vaunteth not itself," or, as rendered in the margin, it is not rash. It is mild and amiable, and not rough and head-strong.

A fifth characteristic of this love is, that it "is not puffed up." It is not swelling, and pompous, and showy, and Pharisaical, ostentatious, and proud; but is exactly the reverse of all this.

A sixth characteristic is, that it "doth not behave itself unseemly." True politeness consists in the practice of benevolence. And when wicked men affect to be truly polite, they affect to be truly benevolent. They are, to be sure, hypocritical in this; but still, it remains a truth, that true politeness manifests itself in a disposition to make every body happy. So that one of the characteristics of true religion is true politeness. It "doth not behave itself unseemly." There is a natural urbanity and courteousness that is always a characteristic of true benevolence. True religion does not need the polish of a dancing school, or to ape

the manners of nobility, or the most refined classes of society, in order to exhibit genuine politeness. Who doubts that Jesus Christ was truly polite? His benevolence led Him to seek the comfort and happiness of all around Him. He sought both their temporal and their spiritual good. When at a feast, he chose not the chief seat for Himself; but gave others the preference. His benevolence exhibited itself in making as little trouble wherever He went as possible; and consequently when in the house of Martha and Mary, He manifested no disposition to have the sisters give up their time to preparing good dishes for his entertainment. But He commended Mary for listening to his instructions, and reprov'd Martha for giving herself up to carefulness for his entertainment. Take any person you please, and let him be filled with the love of God, and he will naturally and certainly exhibit a lovely exterior instead of that which is unseemly. If riding in a stage coach, if in a steam boat, a railroad car, at a public house, at home, or abroad, in public, or in the family circle, he will exhibit a disposition to accommodate, to prevent all unhappiness, and all sin, and to make every body comfortable, and holy, and happy. He will not be boorish and unmannerly, rough, outrageous, and unseemly; but will exhibit that wisdom that cometh down from heaven, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

A seventh characteristic is, that it "seeketh not her own." Its supreme object is the promotion of the universal good and happiness of all. Of course it will not be selfish, but will manifest itself in the most assiduous endeavors, to make all around as comfortable, and as happy, and as holy, as possible.

An eighth characteristic is, it "is not easily provoked." Of course benevolence will not easily quarrel with its object. It is not quickly impatient, and ready to scold, but is extremely calm and forbearing.

A ninth characteristic is, that it "thinketh no evil." It not only does not meditate any evil, but does not surmise or suspect evil where all appearances are right. A selfish mind is always suspecting hypocrisy in others, because it is conscious of hypocrisy in itself. A hypocrite, a liar, a knave, or dishonest man, is apt of course to suspect others, because he naturally judges others by himself. But an honest, upright, benevolent mind, thinketh no evil, unless there is some appearance of evil.

A tenth characteristic is, that it "speaketh no evil." This is not especially mentioned by the Apostle in this connection, but it is a doctrine abundantly taught in the Bible. And if it were not, the very nature of true benevolence, renders it certain, that it speaketh no evil. Speaking evil, is speaking either truth or falsehood, which is prejudicial to the character of any one, with a selfish intention, and when the circumstances of the case do not demand such speaking as a dictate of benevolence. Now benevolence is the choice of the universal good of being. It is therefore impossible that benevolence should be guilty of evil speaking. It is tender of every man's reputation as of the apple of its own eye, and would as soon pluck out its own eyes, as to inflict a needless wound upon the character of any one.

Another characteristic is, that it "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." As all iniquity is injurious to the universe, benevolence must deplore it of course, and cannot rejoice in it. But as truth is the instrument of universal good, benevolence must of course rejoice in the truth.

The Apostle goes on to say, it "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." I cannot enlarge upon these particulars. He concludes by saying, charity or love "never faileth;" that is, it abideth. From its very nature, it is a state of mind, and is not fitful and evanescent like emotions. The emotions of the mind are naturally like an effervescence, thrown into an excitement, and then naturally and quickly subside. On the contrary, "charity never faileth." It is the supreme, deliberate choice

of the mind, or abiding, permanent state of the will; instead of that feverish excitement which people talk of experiencing, and which they falsely denominate true religion.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject we learn the delusion of an Antinomian religion. Vast multitudes of professors of religion suppose religion to consist in frames and feelings, instead of good-willing. They can relate what they call a good experience. They can talk of their views, and raptures, and peace of mind; and in these things they manifestly suppose true religion to consist. Now, I have already said, and wish here to repeat it, that as these frames consist in emotions, and are only indirectly under the power of the will, they are the very lowest forms of virtue, and doubtless may exist, where there is no true religion at all. They may arise solely out of a mistaken view of God's character and relations, and of our own character and relations. The Universalist doubtless exercises the love of complacency toward the God which he worships. The Antinomian feels complacency in God, as he understands his character. Thus every form of enthusiasm, fanaticism, and delusion, may be united with complacency in an imaginary God. Indeed it is very easy to see, that almost any possible or conceivable state of the emotions, or mere feelings, may be produced, by mistaken views of things. Now as the mere feelings or emotions of the mind depend upon the views and opinions which are entertained by the mind, very little dependence can be placed upon them, even as evidences of true piety. Much less should it be supposed, that true piety consists in them. Many persons are carried away with dreams, and entertain the strangest and most absurd opinions on religious subjects; but their emotions will be found to correspond with their views, thoughts and opinions. And these emotions will sometimes be exceedingly deep and overpowering, and it matters not at all whether these opinions are true or false. Persons will feel just as deeply in a dream, in view of the most absurd and ridiculous things that a dreaming mind can imagine, as if those things were actual realities. Now it would be strange indeed if the reality and depth of these emotions should be depended upon as evidence of the reality of their objects. The solemn fact is, that there is a great, very common, but ruinous mistake upon this subject, in making religion to consist in emotions, and what are very commonly termed affections, instead of consisting, as it really does, in the state and actions of the will.

It appears to me, that Pres. Edwards has committed a sad mistake upon this subject, in confounding the sensibility with the will, and has laid a foundation for a vast amount of delusion.

And here let me be understood. Emotions, or frames and feelings, are the certain and necessary results of a right state of the will, or of the benevolence or good-willing that constitutes true religion. If the will is right, it will direct the attention of the mind to the consideration of those subjects that will naturally and necessarily beget lively and deep emotions of gratitude, complacency, godly sorrow, and all those states of mind of which Christians speak, and which they are so apt to conceive as constituting true religion. But these constitute the happiness, rather than the virtue of the mind. They are rather the reward of holiness than holiness itself. To be sure, they are virtuous so far as they are indirectly under the influence of the will. But they are only virtuous on that account, and are so, therefore, in no other sense than tho'ts, and the decisions of conscience may be virtuous. Thought is the spontaneous & necessary acting of mind when the will directs the attention to an object of thought. The decisions of conscience are the necessary decisions of reason when the attention of the mind is directed by the will, to a consideration of those subjects that come under the jurisdiction of conscience. Both the thoughts and the decisions of conscience are necessary, when the attention of the mind is thus employed by the will. These actions of the mind are, therefore, moral actions, in the same sense that the outward or bodily actions are moral actions. The muscles move at the bidding of the will. And whenever any state of mind, or motion of the

body, is under the control of the will, there is a sense in which these actions have moral character. But separate them from the actions of the will, and they have no moral character at all. Now if the will be right, there is a sense in which the thoughts, and decisions of conscience, and outward actions may be virtuous; and if the will be wrong, there is a sense in which they are all vicious.

It should, however, be borne continually in mind, that the praise or blame-worthiness lies in the voluntary actions of the mind, or in the decisions of the will; and, properly speaking, in the decisions of the will alone.

2. From this subject it is easy to see, that where there is true religion, there must of necessity be a corresponding life. The emotions do not control the actions of body or mind. Consequently, if religion consisted in emotion, it might exist in the mind in its reality and strength, without being evinced in the outward conduct. For we know, that men often exercise the deepest feelings and emotions on subjects, while they refuse or neglect to act in conformity with their feelings. But the same cannot be said of the actions of the will. Men always act outwardly in conformity with their volitions. Their outward actions are connected with the actings of their will, by a natural necessity. Good-willing, therefore, or true religion, always manifests itself in a holy life. Inaction and supineness in religion are absurd and impossible, where true religion exists. Benevolence, or good-willing, must produce action and good action, by a natural necessity. It is therefore absurd and ridiculous to say, that a man has true religion, and yet is not employed in doing good, where he is able to act at all. Remember, I beseech you, that religion is benevolence or good-willing, and not mere feeling or emotion; and because it is good-willing, it necessarily produces good acting. So that the very essence of religion is activity, exertion, or effort of heart and life, to promote universal good. A religion of supineness is therefore not the religion of Christ. Antinomian inaction is as opposite to true religion as light is to darkness. And a person can no more be truly religious, and give himself up to inaction, and ecstasy, and peace, and joy, than he can do any thing else that involves a contradiction. Religion consists in the state or actings of the heart, or will; and is, therefore, in its very nature, essential activity. I mean as I say. Religion is activity itself. It is the mind, willing the good of universal being.

3. You see also the great delusion of making religion to consist in a complacent love of God and of Christians. I have already said, that complacency is an emotion, and where the will or heart is right, will always be exercised towards God. But it is rather the effect, than the essence of true religion. It appears to me, that many mistake in supposing, that the love of the brethren, which is so largely insisted on in the Bible, is complacency rather than benevolence. But a little consideration will show, that the love of the brethren and Christians, insisted upon by Christ and his Apostles, is benevolence, and not complacency. It is spoken of as the same kind of love with which Christ loved us. Hence, it is said, that "as Christ laid down his life for us, we should be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren." But the love of God and of Christ for the world was benevolence, and not complacency. It was a love exercised to enemies, and not to those that were holy, and consequently must have been benevolence.

4. We see the mistake of those who excuse themselves for the want of love to the brethren, because they say they do not see in them the image of Christ. The love that we exercise to the image of Christ is complacency. And this excuse shows that those who make it suppose the love required of them to be complacency and not benevolence; and that, consequently, where there is no holiness manifest, there is no obligation to exercise love. Now this is a ruinous mistake. For the love which we are required to exercise to the brethren is good-will, or benevolence, and therefore does not respect their moral character. So that a true Christian exercises deep and permanent affection for the brethren, whatever may be their spiritual state. There are many persons who seem to give themselves up to the most censorious and

denunciatory speaking of heartless professors of religion, and seem to think, that this is all well enough, because they are all backsliders or hypocrites. Now, I would humbly ask, is this benevolence? Is this love?

To this benevolence the love of complacency is added, where there is a foundation for it, or a manifestation of holy character. And complacency will render it still more certain, that he who exercises it will avoid all evil speaking. But benevolence itself, where there is no manifestation of holy character, as I have already shown, will naturally avoid speaking evil, or "working ill to our neighbor."

5. You see from this subject, the delusion of those who profess to be religious and yet transact business upon selfish principles. Selfishness and benevolence are exact and eternal opposites. Said a professional man to me, not long since, "I have been surprised, that the religion of those who have been long religious does not do more to overcome their selfishness." This is just the same thing as to express surprise, that those who have long professed to be religious have no religion. The fact is, that the very beginning of religion, or the new birth itself, is the overthrow of selfishness, as the reigning principle of the mind. It is the establishment in the mind, as a permanent state of the will, of the antagonist principle of benevolence. Hence, it is said, that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world," and that "he who is born of God cannot sin, for his seed remaineth in him, so that he cannot sin, because he is born of God." By this I do not understand the Apostle to mean, that a soul that is born of God cannot be seduced into occasional sins, by the power of temptation; but that he cannot live in sin. He cannot transact his daily business upon selfish principles, which are the essence of all sin. It is therefore absurd and impossible, that a benevolent or truly religious mind should transact business upon selfish principles.

6. Love, or benevolence, and its necessary fruits, is the whole of religion. I say necessary fruits, because the actions of the mind and body are connected with the actions of the will, by a natural necessity; so that the fruits of holiness are the necessary products of a right state of the heart, or will.

7. Where there are no fruits there is no true religion. It is in vain for unfruitful souls, Antinomians, and persons who sit down in inaction, to pretend to be pious. They talk in vain of their views, their experience, and their raptures. Unless the fruits of benevolence, or good-willing, are upon them; unless, like Christ, they go about doing good, when they are able to go about at all, it is a delusion and nonsense for them to suppose, that they are truly religious.

8. We see from this subject the delusion of those individuals, and churches, and ecclesiastical bodies, who seem to be given up in a great measure to censoriousness and vituperation, engaged it would seem, in little else than watching for the haltings and the errors of their brethren, and who seem to be abandoned to a spirit of fretfulness rather than of love or good willing. In this remark, I do not of course mean to accuse the whole Church of being in this state, but speak of those who really are in this state.

9. You see the delusion of those editors of news papers, whose columns savor of gabble rather than of the sweet benevolence of God. Look into their pages: is that the "love that worketh no ill to his neighbor"? Why, instead of working no ill to his neighbor, it would work the ruin of the world if people had any confidence in what they read in such periodicals. No thanks to some of the editors of the present day, if their papers do not work unlimited mischief. It will only be because the readers have ceased to confide in them. I do not of course design this remark to be of universal application, but that there are lamentable cases to attest the truth of this remark, will be acknowledged with sorrow by those who truly love the Lord.

10. We see the delusion of those whose religion consists in desiring the happiness of those who are at a distance, while it neglects the happiness of those in its immediate neighborhood. Multitudes of individuals

will go to the Monthly Concert and pray for the heathen, will give money to send the Gospel or the Bible to the heathen, but their prayers seem always to overlook those right around them, and who are more immediately and necessarily affected by their conduct. Their own domestics or clerks, or laborers, are perhaps daily rendered unhappy by their malevolence and peevishness.

They are left in a great measure unprayed for, unwarned, unblest by them. They seem to be engaged in anything but promoting the happiness of those within their reach, and yet suppose themselves to be truly religious. But herein is a great delusion. It is the religion of the imagination and desires. It is like the piety of a man who contemplates going on a foreign mission--feels deeply as he says for the heathen, but never bestirs himself to save the souls of men at home. He can go through with his education as lazily as a drone.

He can let his own class-mates and perhaps his own room-mate go down to hell unblest and unwarned. He can let his own neighborhood and his own kindred sink down to death and hell around him, and yet imagine himself to feel truly benevolent and to long for the salvation of the heathen; never promote piety and revivals of religion at home, and yet work himself into the belief that he shall do it abroad. But again I say this is the religion of the imagination, and a deep and ruinous delusion.

Let such a man go on to heathen ground and be surrounded with the naked and cold realities of heathenism, and he will find at last his sad mistake; and were it not for his pride of character and fear of the loss of reputation, he would soon find his way back to Christian lands, and the repose and indolence of a contemplative life. How many there are who are in the constant neglect of the happiness of all in their immediate neighborhood, whose prayers and efforts seem always to overleap the heads of all within their reach, and light down upon distant and unknown lands.

Now true benevolence embraces all mankind, but it always concerns itself for the time being, to secure the well-being of those most immediately within its reach. Those that compose the domestic circle are the objects upon which it necessarily and primarily exerts itself. Through these it flows abroad to all that are near, especially, and ceases not till it reaches those that are afar off. In this sense it is true that "charity begins at home," but not in the sense in which this is generally understood.

This saying is generally supposed to mean that charity regards self-interest first and most, but the very fact that the term charity is used which is synonymous with benevolence, shows that the true meaning of this saying is, that benevolence begins by seeking the happiness of those in its immediate neighborhood, and continues to extend itself until it reaches those that are afar off.

11. The kind of religion or rather of irreligion of which I have just been speaking would be of no benefit if the world were full of it. Suppose that all mankind had this kind of religion, each one desiring and praying for the happiness of those beyond his reach, but neglecting and trampling upon the happiness of all within his reach. Who then would be happy? Every one employed in making those immediately in contact with him unhappy, and only seeking the happiness of those at a distance, who are in their turn rendering themselves and those immediately around them unhappy while they are desiring and praying for the happiness of others at a distance. Such religion as this would leave the world in wretchedness if every man on earth possessed it.

12. You can see how real religion makes its possessor happy. There is a sweetness and a divine relish in the exercise of benevolence itself, and in addition to this the emotions of the mind will, ordinarily, be in accordance with the state of the will or heart. And thus true religion necessarily results in the happiness of

its possessor.

13. You see what a truly religious family, neighborhood or universe would be. Every one employed in making those around him happy to the full extent of his power. A most divine religion this! Take but a single family, where benevolence is the law of every inmate. See the husband and wife, brothers and sisters, and all the inmates of the family, how careful they are not to injure each other's piety, or unnecessarily to wound each other's feelings--how kindly they watch over each other for good--how watchful they are to each other's interests and happiness--how pleased each one is to deny himself to promote the general good. The law of kindness dwells ever on their tongues. Such a family is a little picture of heaven. Wherever such a family is found, it is an oasis, or a little green spot in the midst of a vast wilderness of moral death.

14. You see the utter unreasonableness of infidelity. Infidels affect to disbelieve the necessity of a change of heart. But what do they mean? do they not know by their own observation that mankind are by nature supremely selfish? And can they be happy without a radical change of heart? A world of selfish beings make up heaven! The idea is absurd and ridiculous. It is self-evident that without that change of heart which consists in a radical change of character from selfishness to benevolence, mankind can never be saved.

15. You see from this subject how to detect false hopes. False professors are either inactive in religion, or manifest a legal spirit in opposition to the spirit of love. There are two extremes that should always be well guarded in religion. The one is antinomianism, which satisfies itself with frames and feelings while it makes little or no exertion for the salvation of the world. The other is a legal zeal that bustles about often harshly and furiously and professes to be working for God, when there is a manifest dash of bitterness and misanthropy in the countenance and manner and life. This is not the love that worketh no ill to his neighbor. It is not the benevolence and spirit of Christ; and all such religion is spurious however zealous, however active, and however apparently useful it may be.

16. Spurious conversions often throw the mind into a state of fermentation and deep feeling which of course soon subsides. But true conversion consists in a change of choice, and is of course an abiding state of mind. Where there are revivals of religion the chaff may be easily discovered from the wheat when the effervescence of excited emotion has passed by. You can then see whether the will is under the control of truth. While the emotions are strong they may induce a series of volitions which would lead for the time being to the conclusion that the will or heart is really changed, but as soon as these emotions subside, if the heart is not changed, the selfish preference will again resume its control; and just in proportion as the excitement ceases will it become apparent in the man's life, and spirit, and temper, and especially in his business transactions, that his selfish heart or preference is not changed, and that he is still an unregenerate man. The fact that the emotions very often induce volition, and many times a series of volitions inconsistent with the governing preference of the will or heart, renders it impossible for us, in the midst of the excitement of a revival, to distinguish clearly between true and false conversions; but as the excitement subsides, if we are willing to be guided by the word of God, we can clearly distinguish between those that are born again, and those that are not. And we are bound so to distinguish, and to deal faithfully, and promptly, and energetically with those who are seen still to remain in selfishness.

17. You see the vast importance of distinguishing that which constitutes true religion, and all those frames and feelings upon which so much stress is laid in many portions of the Church, who are yet inactive in the cause of Christ and who suppose themselves holy simply because they know not what holiness is. They

do not understand that their frames are the result of their views and opinions, and whether their opinions are right or wrong, cannot be known by their frames or emotions, but by the actings of their will. They may have love in the form of emotion--they may have peace, and joy, and even ecstasy in the form of emotions, without one particle of true religion. And if they are not really in a state of efficient good-willing--if they are not engaged in doing good, in promoting individual and general happiness to the extent of their power, it is absolutely certain that they are not truly religious. O that this were understood! O that it were known that religion is benevolence--the love that is willing to lay down the life for its neighbor! How much that is called religion is working continual ill to its neighbor! But blessed be God, true religion worketh no ill to its neighbor. Give me then religious neighbors, and I am content. Give me irreligious neighbors, and I will try to do them good. Let him hear that hath an ear to hear. Amen.

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