

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13. - "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

ANOTHER characteristic of this Divine Charity is, that it OFTEN INVOLVES CONFLICT.

It was so with our Lord. He was the very personification of it. He was love itself, and grace and truth poured from His lips incessantly. His blessed feet went about doing good, and His hands ministering to the necessities and happiness of His creatures, yet His whole course through this degenerate world was one of conflict, opposition, and persecution. His proper mission was to bring peace on earth; but the result of it was a sword. Why? It was not His fault. He would, doubtless, have liked to have "lived peaceably with all men," as His ambassador exhorts us - "as much as lieth in you," Rom. 12:18. Surely the Lord would have liked to be at peace, for He was the Prince of Peace. Then, how was it that wherever He went there was sword, opposition, and conflict to the death? Why? Because men RESISTED AND REJECTED His Divine and Heavenly ministrations. They would not have His rebukes and His teaching, because they condemned them. They would not listen to His voice, because they were of their father the Devil, and the works of their father they would do; and, therefore, they went about to persecute Him and to kill Him.

This was the reason - not that He wanted it to be so, but it was the consequence of their resistance to the beautiful, heavenly, and Divine truths which He taught; and it is just so now, with the same truth, and the living embodiments of such truth. JESUS CHRIST COME IN THE FLESH AGAIN IN HIS PEOPLE, living out before the world His principles, acting upon His precepts, living for the same objects for which He lived, will produce, exactly and everywhere, the same result. It must be so while men are divided into two classes - the righteous and the wicked - those who are born of the flesh, and those who are born of the Spirit. One side must give in, or there must be perpetual conflict and warfare. It was so with the Saviour, and so, perhaps, with some of us.

I think this is often a snare to God's really sincere people. I think some of God's people are afraid, they don't like the feeling that their hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them, or nearly so. They do not like the sense of isolation; they do not like being compelled to take a course which nearly all the Christian professors round about them condemn, and make out to be uncharitable, and they often examine themselves to see whether it is possible that they may be going wrong in following the Divine Spirit. They say with Jeremiah, and with the Jeremiahs of every age, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" They are as "a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her." They feel

this opposition and conflict deeply, but what are they to do? Very often, in following the leadings of the Divine Spirit, it is impossible for us to avoid such consequences. We have to march through troops of opposing forces. We have to become the subjects of almost universal suspicion. But what then? Must we give in? Must we decline to tread in the bloodstained footsteps of the Captain of our salvation? Must we decline the honour of being in the advance guard of the Lamb's army because of the pain, because of the conflict, because of the persecution? Nay, nay; let us hold on, those here, who are thus led by the Divine Spirit into paths which involve conflict with everybody. Follow on, brother! follow on, sister!

There is no point on which those who want to come out thoroughly for God suffer more than on this. They continually say, "You see my friends! (they are Christian friends) my friends object." People come to see me, or they write that the Spirit of God has been urging them into a certain course for months or years, and they are held back by the opinions and wishes, perhaps, of parents, or of brothers and sisters, or uncles, or aunts, or Christian friends.

I BELIEVE IT WILL BE FOUND, IN THE GREAT DAY OF ACCOUNT, THAT THERE HAVE BEEN MORE BLESSED ENTERPRISES SQUASHED, MORE LEADINGS OF THE HOLY GHOST DISOBEYED, MORE URGINGS OF THE SPIRIT QUENCHED THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF WHAT ARE CALLED CHRISTIAN FRIENDS THAN ALL OTHER INFLUENCES PUT TOGETHER. "SUFFER ME FIRST TO GO AND BURY MY FATHER," IS AN EVERLASTING STANDING EXCUSE FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD CALLS ON IN ADVANCE PATHS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE. OH, MY FRIENDS, I AM SURE OF IT. LOOK OUT, YOU FATHERS AND MOTHERS, YOU BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND AUNTS!

Do not misunderstand me. Carefully weigh, probe, and examine before God your impressions and desires. Go into your closet, spread them there before the Lord. Lay them out, examine your own heart. Be sure there is no self-interest, no vain glory, no desire to be great, or to do some out-of-the-way thing. Be as clear as you like; be satisfied, in your own mind, that it is God's call, and then let fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, or wives complain - but go forward, my brother, and God will justify you. If, twenty years ago, I had stopped for Christian friends to sanction and to open the door, I should have waited till today, and the many souls which God, in His infinite mercy, has given me, I should not have gathered. But I did not wait for anybody's sanction to my Lord and Master's call; but said 'Lord, if I die in attempting it, I will do it.' He seldom lets people die in attempting His will. He stands by them, and gives them abundant fruit.

A lady said to me, the other day, 'You know my father is a Christian, and I am so afraid of going in opposition to him.' 'Yes,' I said, 'That is quite a right feeling; I respect that feeling in you.' But she was a woman of considerably-matured age, and I added, 'But is your father awake to the interests of God's kingdom as he ought to be.' She replied, 'I dare not say that he is.' 'I suppose,' I said, 'he is comparatively old - a sort of dried-up Christian, who has lost the vigour and enterprise of his youthful days, when he wanted to go out and make everybody Christian?' 'Yes,' she said, 'he has gone sadly behind in his zeal for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.' Now, I said, 'God holds you responsible, just as He holds any other being. HE HAS NOT TWO CODES - ONE FOR MEN AND ONE FOR WOMEN. There will be no two judgment seats, whatever men do here. God will hold you responsible for obedience to the teaching of His Spirit, and the leading of His providence, as much as your brother. What shall you say?' 'You will be in the position of the man who said, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father.'" She said, 'I am afraid I shall.'

Now, I say, let us settle this, you Protestant Christians here. Because Catholicism has abused this principle, that a man is to leave his father and mother, and houses and lands, if needs be, is that any reason that we Protestants are to give it up? And has it come to this, that a man has only to follow Christ, when everybody approves it - cries 'Amen' - and when his own interests appear to him to be secured by so doing? Then, if it were so, I would give up religion altogether, and go and enjoy myself. I said to a lady, 'When you married yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, you put yourself in the same position as you would to an earthly husband.' What woman in the world would feel, that she ought to obey father and mother rather than her husband? Ridiculous! Much less is she to obey her father, if her father's wishes are exactly contrary to the Divine teaching. She is only to obey IN THE LORD, and yet thousands of fathers and mothers are preventing their children working for God. Oh! what will you say to God when your precious children stand at His bar, without the sheaves they might have gathered, and the souls they might have won? What will you say to Him? And why do you hold them back? Oh, the mean, paltry considerations that you would be ashamed to own before this congregation! Is it for fear of suffering? Not in many instances; but, even if it were, did you bargain with Jesus Christ when you gave yourself and children to Him that they were not to suffer for Him? Is it because of your pride? Because you want for them this world's applause and favour? Look out! God has wonderful ways of chastising His people in those very things in which they sell his interest. But you say that 'everybody will be against you.' Yes, very likely. Let us settle that at once. Count all things dung and dross. Let none of these things move you. You say, 'It will be a life of conflict to the end.' Very likely, so was His. 'I am so weak,' you say. He knows all about that. You say, 'It will be so cutting to have people saying this,

and saying the other.' I know it is cutting, but that is the path He calls you to tread and He will give you grace to bear the cutting. 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;' and, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.'

He does not show where He is leading us, so we can only go a step at a time. The future may look dark, but let us be fully persuaded in our own minds that the step in advance is the step the Lord wants us to take - then take it, and leave the future with Him. Come out, as Abraham did, not knowing whither you go; and, as sure as He sits upon the throne, He will vindicate your course, and, perhaps, the very things that you sacrifice, or that you think you sacrifice, for Him, He will give you as the reward of your faithfulness.

Oh, have I not known many such instances. I have known daughters who have been turned out of their father's houses for following the leadings of the Spirit of God, and who have endured all sorts of persecution, and trial, and suffering, and those fathers, when they were dying, would have nobody else to pray with them but that individual daughter. The way to win the souls of parents is by a consistent, steadfast, holy consecration to the Lord Jesus; whereas, if you pander, and trim, and hesitate, you will miss the reward. Do you think people do not know when we are inconsistent? Oh, yes, they know quite well, and they say, 'That is not the right sort of religion;' but you be consistent and thorough, and God will honour these very means to the winning of the souls about whom you are so concerned.

Further, a false Charity shrinks from opposition. It cannot bear persecution. Now here is one unfailing characteristic of a false Charity: it is always on the winning side - that is, apparently, down here, not what will be, ultimately, the winning side. When Truth sits enthroned with a crown on her head, this false Charity is most vociferous in her support and devotion; but, when her garments trail in the dust, and her followers are few, feeble, and poor, then Jesus Christ may look after Himself. I sometimes think respecting this hue and cry about the glory of God and the sanctity of religion, I would like to see some of these saints put into the Common Hall with Jesus again, amongst a band of ribald, mocking soldiers. I would like to see, then, their zeal for the glory of God, when it touched their own glory. They are wonderfully zealous when their glory and His glory go together; but, when the mob is at His heels, crying, "Away with Him! - crucify Him! - crucify Him!" - then He may look after His own glory, and they will take care of theirs.

True Charity sticks to the LORD JESUS IN THE MUD, when He is fainting under His cross, as well as when the people are cutting down the boughs and crying "Hosanna!" I fear many people make the Lord Jesus Christ a stalking-horse on which to secure their ends. God grant us not to be of that number, for, if we are, He will topple us from the very gates of Heaven to the nethermost Hell. This false Charity cannot go to the dungeon - you never find it at the stake. It always manages to shift its sides, and change its face, before it goes so far as that. Never in disgrace; never with Jesus Christ in the minority, at Golgotha - on the cross. Always with Him when He is riding triumphant!

Oh, I often think if times of persecution were to come again, how many of us would be faithful? How many would go to the dungeon? How many would stand by the truth with hooting, howling mobs at our heels, such as followed HIM on the way to the cross - such as stood around His cross and spat upon Him, and cast lots for His vesture, and parted His garments among them, and wagged their heads and cried, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." How many of us would stick to Him then? But, as your soul and mine liveth, that is the only kind of love that will stand the test of the Judgment Day.

Oh, have you got this Charity? Love in the darkness; Love in the garden; Love in sorrow; Love in suffering; Love in isolation; Love in persecution; Love to the death. Have we got this love? Examine yourselves, beloved, and see whether you are in the faith or not; for there is much need of it in this day, when there are so many false gospels and so much false doctrine; when we hear so much about being 'complete in Him' by people, who never were in Him at all, and no more understand what it means, than the very kitten that lies on their hearth. I say, examine yourself, whether you be in the faith or not, and whether you are in Him; for, verily, it is no easier now to be His real followers than ever it was.

Further, a false Charity refuses to call things by their proper names. What endless ways it has of putting lying! Oh, the lying that is done in this day by professing Christians! Oh, the nice, comfortable, self-indulgent ways it has of looking at ungodly trades and practises! What do I mean? I mean trades that cannot be made subservient to the interest of the Kingdom of Christ; trades that thrive by ministering either to the vile passions of human nature, or to the ungodliness and worldliness of human nature. By what nice names it calls Satanic traffics in the bodies, hearts, and souls of men! And when Divine Charity remonstrates with it, it turns round and says, 'Well, you know, but we must have regard to our own interests; we have large interests at stake.' I sometimes say, 'God knows you have! and, when the Judge riseth up to avenge those who have been oppressed and destroyed by your iniquitous traffics, you will find them sadly TOO LARGE, TOO BIG FOR HELL ITSELF TO CONTAIN.'

The Lord have mercy on any of you who are living on the follies or wickedness of your fellow-men!

Make haste to get out of such trades. Wash your hands of them, for, depend upon it, that is the Devil's Charity that would try to make you comfortable in them. It has nothing to do with Divine Charity.

"Oh, my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united," but stand aloof from all such alliances of light with darkness, of truth with falsehood; "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." He is the same God; He changes not! Let us call things by their right names. Let us face the evil. Let us chase it out of the world - or, at any rate, chase it out of the Church. Depend upon it, the Lord is going to prove all things. I can hear, as it were, the rumbling of the earthquake of the Divine indignation underground, I can see the gathering of the Divine wrath overhead; and, IF THIS NATION DOES NOT REPENT, AND IF THE CHURCHES OF THIS LAND DO NOT COME OUT AND WASH THEIR HANDS OF THESE THINGS, GOD WILL SEND US SUCH A BAPTISM OF BLOOD AS WE HAVE NEVER CONCEIVED OF, AND HE WILL PUT US ASIDE, and put some other nation in our place, or else He will act contrary to all His former dealings with nations. Do you suppose that Jerusalem was more guilty than we are? Have we not been exalted much higher than Jerusalem ever was? And have we not sinned against greater light and privilege than ever she did? Are not our professed Christians exactly the same in character as her Pharisees? Do they not make long and fine prayers, and, at the same time, devour the widow and fatherless? Yea, for hellish gain, do they not make widows and orphans wholesale? Might not God truly say of us, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward?" Even "the prophets prophesy falsely," and the "people love to have it so."

Do you say, 'No, we are not SO BAD'? I answer, look abroad over the land, open your eyes, observe and see. Has it not become proverbial - have you not heard it until your ears have tingled, and your face has burned with shame - 'Better go and deal with anybody than with a Christian.' and, alas! has not there been much ground for it? Have we any need to wonder, that infidels wag their heads? Can you go into a shop, where you are sure you will not be extorted? Do you know anybody, who keeps a conscience with respect to the profits he makes? Is there scarcely anybody who won't charge his neighbour more than the article is

worth, if he has the chance, and call it lawful? That is extortion. It may be only asking twopence for an article worth a penny, or £1,000 for what £700 should buy; the amount does not matter; it is EXTORTION!

God puts extortioners amongst the blackest of sinners. The Lord help me to "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others," and have the Charity that will not take a mean advantage of my neighbour because I have the chance, and thus traduce the precious name of the Holy Jesus by calling myself one of His followers. It is time this Satanic Charity was swept out! The very first law, the very vital principle of true Charity, is RIGHTEOUSNESS! There is no Charity apart from righteousness. If your Charity is incompatible with righteousness, it is born of the Devil and leads to Hell!

I was going to notice the bearing of this law of Charity on some of the iniquities of this generation; but I must save that for next Sunday. Will you remember, in the meantime, "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light." If you have had anything revealed to you this afternoon in your heart or life that you see to be wrong, say, 'Here Lord, pour the light in; I am so glad You have shown this thing to me while there is time to alter it. Now bring your dissecting knife, and cut it away, even if the roots go deep down into my very heart's core. I will have it out.' Will you? Will you be made true, straight, clean? Will you be made divine? Will you be filled with the pure, holy love of God towards God, and towards men, and all beings? This is what the Lord wants you to have. This is what He has sent His Son to do. No subterfuge; no make-believe work to get you into Heaven as you are; but He wants to make you as He wants you to be, and HE CAN DO IT. The Great Physician is able, He is willing, He has got love enough, and power enough, and grace enough to do it for you. Confide all your heart to Him. Will you have this Divine Charity wrought in you? It will make you willing to suffer, to endure hardness, and shame, and contempt, and persecution. It will make you willing to do anything that human nature can do, and endure anything that human nature can suffer, that you may accomplish the same purposes that He came to accomplish, that you may help onward the progress of His glorious kingdom.