

THE

NATURE AND VALUE

OF

BROTHERLY LOVE:

A SERMON.

DELIVERED ON SABBATH, FEBRUARY 7th, 1841.

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To all connected with the Baptist, and the Methodist, and the Associate Reformed, and the Old and New School Presbyterian churches, in the Village of Oxford; and to all the good people connected with any other church, whose situation is any way similar to that of the churches in Oxford, the following Discourse is

Most respectfully inscribed,

By their Friend and Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

A SERMON.

“ Let brotherly love continue.”—HEBREWS, xiii. 1.

LOVE is an affection, or a strong attachment to some one object, or to a class of objects. This object may be a person, or a thing, or an abstract quality. Thus we speak of the love of money—the love of country or a party—the love of excellency—and the love which unites the husband and the wife, the parent and the child, the sister and the brother.

The text and context, and the bible generally, speak particularly of brotherly and christian love, as essentially different from all other applications of the term.

1st. The brotherly love of the bible is of heavenly origin. It has its source in the eternal love of God to our lost and ruined family. “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John iii. 16. “ In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”—Titus i. 2.

2nd. Wherever this affection exists in the human heart, there is a deep conviction of depravity—that we are by nature children of wrath—entirely destitute of any amiable quality to recommend us to the favor and protection of Heaven. That, on the contrary, we are haters of God and haters of one another, and particularly opposed to the plan of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. “ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die ; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—Romans v. 7, 8. “ Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves-

also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior."—Titus iii. 1-6.

3rd. This affection is continued and cherished, wherever it exists, by regular intercourse with Jehovah, the father of mercies, and the father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as revealed to us through the death and the sufferings of God in our nature. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—2. COR. iii. 18. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"—ROMANS, viii. 32. "For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."—ROMANS vi. 10.

"Simon, Simon," said our Lord on a certain occasion, "I have somewhat to say to thee." "Master, say on," said Simon. "Well, hear it, Simon, and make the application for thyself. A man had two debtors. The one owed him five hundred pence and the other fifty—and forasmuch as they had nought to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore which of these two ought to love their benefactor most?" "Certainly, said Simon, he to whom he forgave most." "Thou hast well said, Simon." The man who has the deepest sense of his own depravity, and the justest conception of a full and free salvation, will habitually have the strongest and most efficient love to his God and to his fellow-men.

A genuine son of God, on the most imperfect and partial survey of the subject, can find no words or modes of expression to express the amount of his obligations to love the Lord his God supremely. The love of God to him was and is everlasting love. It reaches from eternity to eternity. Speaking

after the manner of men, it was to God expensive love. Its manifestation to our lost world was made through the incarnation and obedience, and sufferings, and death of his only begotten Son. It is unchanging love. God loved the saved sinner when he was a child of wrath—while dead in trespasses and in sins—and he continues to love him while although he is justified—yet he is only partially sanctified and is daily and hourly abusing, in some form or other, the exceeding riches of grace.

The manifestations of Jehovah's kindness to the human family are most abundant. They are written upon all the operations of nature, as well as in all the declarations of mercy. His tender mercies are over all his works. Earth is full of his goodness. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust." "Nevertheless he left not himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."—ACTS xiv. 17. And to all these is added his continued offer of pardon, and peace, and eternal glory, to the very worst of men. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who know no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2. COR. v. 20-21. "As I live, saith Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?—EZEKIEL, xxxiii. and 11. And finally, we are to consider all this as connected with the unutterable glories and enjoyments of heaven, contrasted with the worm that never dies, and the fire that is unquenchable, and the bottomless pit, and the blackness and darkness of eternal death. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—1. JOHN, iii. 1-2. We remark;

4th. That the love of which we speak is active and efficient love. It is the fulfilling of the moral law. All the law is summed up in love to God and love to man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Particularly thy redeemed brother—thy fellow heir of glory—thy brother and thy companion in the tribulation and the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. Dost thou know the extent to which thou lovest thyself? To the same extent thou art to love thy brother. Dost thou love thy heavenly Father? Thou wilt also love all the members of the great family of the redeemed. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 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?"—1. JOHN, iii. 16-17. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."—1. JOHN, iv. 7, 11.

Love is the fulfilling of the moral law. Love to man is fulfilling and acting out, to the greatest possible extent, the six last commandments. Let us refresh our memories and hearts with these holy, and heavenly, and benevolent commandments. They are these: "Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Thou shalt not kill—nor commit adultery—nor steal—nor covet any thing that is thy neighbor's.

Christian brotherly love is manifested by daily, and hourly, in all our social intercourse, musing more or less upon these

good commandments—in all their length and breadth, in all their details, and in all their varied applications to the infinite variety of social relations.

Let us repeat them again and again; and while we repeat them, let us pray to God that they may be written upon the fleshly tables of our heart, as upon the rock with the point of a diamond. It is evident that they are all good, and that the true dignity of human nature is advanced, and that all that is valuable and lovely in society is promoted, just in proportion as men know and understand, and act out these commandments.

We cherish, and strengthen, and perfect brotherly love, just in proportion as we oppose the violation of these commandments, whether gross or refined, whether in ourselves or others, in thought, or word, or deed. The slightest disrespect to family relations, or to any of the relations in all the ramifications of society, is a violation of the great law of love: "Honor thy father and thy mother." The religion of the bible teaches, and enforces, and carries out, to the full, all the principles of genuine politeness, as well as all the principles of honesty and fidelity betwixt man and man.

Anger, and malice, and wrath, in all their varied forms, and degrees—all irregular appetites and desires—every thing that savours of fraud, or deceit, or violence—every thing inconsistent with the strictest veracity—all envying and grieving at the prosperity of our neighbour in the enjoyments of worldly comforts, or mental superiority, or honor, or influence in society—all these and every similar sinful, and degrading, and hurtful desire, and affection, and propensities, will be guarded against, and avoided, and crucified, by all upon whose heart is written according to the good word of promise this good and holy law.

What a happy state of society would there be, did all, or even a majority of men and women, understand and feel the authority of this good and perfect law. No more disrespect or disobedience in any of our social connections. No more malice, or plotting against the life and comforts of any man. No more degrading of our nature, and disturbing the peace of so-

ciety, by the lusts of the flesh. No more fraud or deceit, nor violence in matters of public or private property. No violations of solemn contracts, or departure in any form or degree from speaking the truth in man's ordinary intercourse with his fellow man. And no envious, or malicious, or covetous emotions cherished in the human breast.

The great and leading design of the gospel, and of all the institutions of the gospel, is to extend the influence of this good and holy law, as the law of love and kindness, through all the departments of organised society. The day shall also arrive when the great mass of all the inhabitants of the earth will be distinguished for their conformity to this law. Open the bible and read Ezekiel xxxvi, 25-27. Psalms lxxii, throughout. Zech. xiv. 20, 21. And Heb. viii. 10-13.

The man who has the law thus written upon his heart, meditates upon it, more or less, day and night. His daily prayer is—"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wonders out of thy law." His hourly wish is—"Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes." His great and chief plea at the throne of mercy is—"Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." The result of all is a continued approximation to the moral nature of that God whose essence is love, and to God in our nature who went about doing good, and came into our world, and sojourned in our world, to seek and to save that which was lost; and who in his exalted state still wears our nature, and has a fellow feeling for all our infirmities.

5th. "Let brotherly love *continuc.*" Difficulties are to be expected, and they must be met, fully, and fairly, and calmly, and perseveringly. The chief source of all the difficulties in this matter is the irascible disposition of man in his present state of depravity and rebellion against Jehovah's good and gracious government. Every man has a large portion of this irascibility in him. It exists, of course, in all its varieties, and in almost every degree, in the family of the redeemed. The lion and the tiger are not even under the sanctifying influences of God's Spirit, instantaneously changed into

the lamb or the dove. Moses was in his day the meekest of all the men on the face of the earth. And he needed this heaven-born quality in a high degree; for he had to govern and mould a most turbulent and rebellious multitude, under the most trying circumstances, for the long period of forty years. Yet Moses, the meek Moses, in one unguarded hour, spake unadvisedly with his lips; and under the discipline of the new covenant, he was severely chastised for this offence. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."—JAMES iii. 5-10.

Ecclesiastical controversy, as it has been conducted, has been, and still is, peculiarly trying to the temper and disposition, of the Lord's people.

As a general rule, he who lives nearest his God, and has the deepest and most abiding sense of his own weakness and depravity, will possess, to the greatest degree, "that wisdom which is from above, and which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."—JAMES iii. 17.

6th. Let brotherly love *continue*. Whatever else may be given up or lost—whatever other changes may take place—let brotherly love continue. Let it be cherished by one and all, and by every one. Let it be seen and felt, and perfected in all the departments of social life.

Wealth may disappear and be lost—all the modes of obtaining a comfortable livelihood for ourselves and our families may be frequently changed—our family or neighbourhood society may be broken up or dispersed to the four winds all around the

globe—our ecclesiastical connections may change—even some of the articles of our religious creed and our modes of worship may be changed—but by all means let brotherly love continue, and increase, and be perfected.

7th. Brotherly love is *worth* being continued, and held fast, and perfected, at almost any sacrifice. Did I say at almost any sacrifice? I beg leave to recall the expression, and to say at every sacrifice, without any exception.

The brotherly love of the bible, whatever may have been said or written to the contrary, is at all times, and under all circumstances, perfectly consistent with holding fast the truth as it is in Jesus, in all its fulness and all its purity. Perfectly consistent with contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. How can that love, which is the fulfilling of the whole law, be in opposition to truth?

Christian brotherly love habitually cherished in any individual, the apostle John being witness, is the great test of new covenant sonship. It is the most decisive evidence that a man is born again and is possessed of a new and divine nature. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."—1 JOHN, ii. 10, 11.

Mark carefully the contrast in these two verses. Abideth in light—walketh in darkness. Hath none occasion of stumbling in him—knoweth not whither he goeth. Loveth his brother—hateth his brother.

Hear the same apostle again. "We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also."—1 JOHN, iv. 19, 20, 21.

Open your bibles and read and ponder and pray over 1st COR. xiii. 4. to the end.

Charity, or brotherly love, is the Queen of all the rich and

varied graces of the holy spirit. It is itself the most decisive evidence that all the other graces are possessed. The possession of it in a high degree is the most decisive evidence that a man is passed from childhood to manhood in the christian life. Enjoying it, and exercising it to perfection, will be the most distinguishing characteristic in the state of glory.

Read also, and pray over in the same way, JOHN'S gospel, xv. 12-16.

Thus much for the doctrinal part of the subject. Now for the application.

1st. Let those who are disposed to boast of the natural goodness of their heart, test their character and state by the principle of the text. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."—ROM. iii. 19-20.

Let any man narrowly and faithfully examine the state of his daily and weekly and yearly intercourse with his fellow men and let him compare the results with this perfect and good law of liberty and love. He may then discover that in the very best state of his affections toward his fellow men he needs the prayer of the publican: "God be merciful unto me a sinner."

2nd. Let the professed and genuine christian go also minutely into the same scrutiny; and with the text of the evening, let him think of a portion of his daily prayer. "My Father who art in heaven, forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me." Deal with me for time and eternity as I deal—Nay, nay—for the sake of him who bore our sins is his own body on the tree, deal *not* with me neither in time nor eternity as I have again and again dealt with my brother. Psalm cxxx. iii.

But an event of considerable importance to the most of us has just occurred to which we ought honestly as in the imme-

diate presence of the Searcher of hearts to apply the doctrine of the text.

It is very far from my purpose at this time to say any thing of the various causes and circumstances which have produced this event. I would avoid, if possible, to call it an evil; yet it is an evil and an evil of no slight magnitude. It becomes us therefore to remember that we have all had our full share in producing this evil; and that an important hour may arrive, and that very soon, when each of us may find that we were very far from being, as we ought to have been in many cases, when we were very confident that we were faithful and zealous in endeavoring to maintain and defend nothing but the truth.

Hence I make free to say to every man and woman, not excepting myself, who has had any agency, direct or indirect, remote or within these few days past, in this matter, to each of these I say—consider what you have done or occasioned. Examine the whole as you would do on a dying bed. Examine your motives, and feelings, and desires, and all that you may have said or done in this thing, and settle the matter with your God and your Judge. Learn also something from the whole, to make you more heavenly-minded and more obedient to the authority of heaven, and more under the influence of brotherly love in all your future intercourse with your fellow men and with your fellow christians, than perhaps you have been in this matter.

The facts of the case, are these.

1st. The Presbyterian church of Oxford is no more one, but two distinct churches, to be known in the common language of the day as the Old and new School churches of Oxford. We have followed the fashion of the times; and whether it is agreeable or disagreeable to us, we must take the names and abide by all the consequences.

2nd. The church and congregation, if I am rightly informed, is likely to be nearly equally divided, as to numbers, and respectability, and means of efficiency for good or for ill. This fact is a pretty plain intimation that it is not with us as it

was with the apostolic church in the happy days which preceded and followed the day of Pentecost. It also suggests an important instruction. Beware of rash judging as to the state and character of those who may be in opposite divisions. You are nearly equally divided. You cannot be both right in every thing in which you both differ; but you may be both wrong in many things, perhaps in every thing, in which you differ.

3rd. There are fully as many members and adherents, belonging to each division, as belonged to the whole of the Presbyterian Church in Oxford, when the building of the house, in which we are now assembled, was proposed. Our God can help and work triumphantly by few as well as by many, provided these few are of the right stamp. Read and pray over Isaiah xiv. 1, 2, 3, and 29, to the end.

Common sense, to say nothing of christian charity, suggests that every individual, male or female, young or old, connected with either division, should in his thoughts, and words, and daily intercourse with his fellow-christians, guard against, as in the presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, every thing which may have the least influence in increasing or aggravating any of the evils which may be connected with the separation. The thing is now done. The church is divided. If possible, let all that has been disagreeable in our situation, for some months past, be entirely forgotten. But human nature is weak. The best of men are very imperfect. Nor in the whole range of human thought, is there a single class of objects, in which good men, and great men, have given more striking illustrations of their weakness, than in such matters as are now referred to. It is an easy thing to give an advice which all men will approve, but which not one out of fifty of those to whom it is addressed, will ever think of following. Hence nothing but an effusion of the regenerating and sanctifying influences of God's Spirit, poured out more copiously than any we have enjoyed for years past, can save us.

Have we any encouragement to hope for such an effusion? We are not worse than the betrayers and murderers of our Lord were, on the morning of the day of Pentecost.

One of the most cheering circumstances connected with the event, is, that both divisions individually and unitedly hold in theory and in practice, the Bible and Protestant doctrine of catholic communion.

In the separation there is no withdrawing from the church of the living God, which he purchased with his own blood. The members of both divisions, stand still in the same relation which they ever did to the Holy Protestant Catholic church. They are still the members of the one body of which the exalted Redeemer is the head; and they can still recognize one another as members of that one body. Hence, though they may belong to different visible organizations, they can, under the living, and holy, and active principle of brotherly love, be yet one body. There may be a separation, and yet no schism. In occasional or regular prayer-meetings, in the sabbath-schools, on communion seasons, and at protracted meetings, and in operating upon a world lying in wickedness, whether in christian or heathen lands, both divisions, and the individuals of each division, will, we hope, think, and speak, and act, in perfect unity. One remark more:

If brotherly love is to be continued, and cherished, and perfected among us, every thing which may have the appearance of making proselytes from one division to another, must be carefully guarded against. It must not exist. There is a vast difference, betwixt making converts from the world, and making converts from one church to another. In the one case, the command given by the Saviour to the Apostles, "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," is obeyed; and an immortal soul is taken from the broad way that leads to destruction and put in the way of salvation. But in the other case, there is only a change of church connection. There is no addition made to the one visible church. There are, also, generally some circumstances essentially connected with a transfer of this nature, which, in the most of cases, have an unhappy influence on all concerned—upon the church, and upon the world, and upon the dignity and efficiency of the ordinances of God's house. The transfer is always made, from

a' supposed less perfect to a more perfect, from a less pure, to a more pure communion; while, in many cases, it is only an evasion of wholesome church discipline. Hence the supposed convert is pretty much as the sick man who changes his position on his couch, while the disease continues to rage with all its malignity. Hence, also, in by far the greater number of such cases, the change so far as religion and moral character are concerned, is nothing more than a change to the use or to the not use, of some local or party peculiarity, not essential to the salvation or edification of souls.

The present division, is not a sudden transaction—the result of momentary excitement. It has been thought of and talked about, and arrangements, more or less, have been made to meet it for at least eighteen months. It is to be presumed then, that each individual who has acted, has taken his place with one or the other division calmly and deliberately. Let each therefore stay where he has placed himself, and turn in and faithfully, and affectionately, act with his fellow church members in promoting, by all lawful, and honorable, and scriptural means, the great cause of our common Redeemer. But let no one interfere directly or indirectly with the proper duties or privileges, or standing of any of his fellow-christians in the other division.

Every one who knows any thing of family government and neighborhood intercourse, knows well—that friendship and good neighborhood, and a great deal of social intercourse, may be enjoyed while each separate family has its own appropriate residence, and its own appropriate employments—and yet those very same persons could not be either agreeable or useful were they all at all times under the one family government and in the same building though occupying different departments. Even so is the church of God—the great family of the redeemed. There are personal attachments and diversified modes of thinking, and of speaking, and of acting, and various habits, and if you will, even prejudices, which are perfectly consistent with christian character, which may suggest and render proper distinct and separate ecclesiastical organizations while under the great principle of brotherly

love, and implicit obedience to divine authority—all these separate organizations, may be perfectly consistent, with endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There may be still one body and one Lord, one faith and one baptism.

Let us then in all the changes which have taken place, or which may yet take place, recognise and treat every one in each of the divisions as a brother & companion in tribulation, & in the kingdom, & patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember that we are not only all of the great family of the redeemed, but that we are to serve the Redeemer publicly and privately, and to serve the Redeemer only, in the same village and in the same neighborhood, and in the use of the same means. We must face the same enemies, struggle with the very same difficulties of various kinds—need all the help which we can mutually afford to one another—and, finally, we must depend for success, and direction, and protection, upon the same Lord and Master. To this Master, also, we are soon individually, we know not how soon, to render our account. Hear his voice: “Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write unto him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”—REV. iii, 11, 12, 13.

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