

delight to do it. This ought to be a recommendation to the requirement that we give cheerfully. But is there not the most decided aversion to identify the cause of Christ with our own interests, so as to feel that his cause is ours, and that we are under the most sacred obligations to answer to its calls? We have examples, given in the New Testament, of the influence of the truth, by which we see how devoted to the cause of Christ the early Christians were—how far his people were then led to identify themselves with his cause, when they yielded to the full impulse of his love. But how few consider these examples as recorded for our imitation! Paul, however, in this chapter refers to an example which will continue to be a pattern throughout all ages, and which from no circumstance can ever lose its force. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” The example of Christ is here presented for the purpose of enforcing the duty of liberality, which is inculcated throughout the chapter. And how sacred the duty as thus exemplified, how extensive and disinterested ought our benefactions to be? The influences of the Holy Spirit are therefore necessary to lead us to give from motives, and in a spirit and manner which honour Christ, and which render it a service which God will accept.

(3.) The Scriptures require an extent of benevolence which is not in accordance with our feelings. The requirement is, “as God has prospered us.” The claims of God are ever upon us, that we serve him to the full extent of our ability with all that is under our control, and as our capabilities increase, his claims extend with our growing ability. But how few are disposed to look back to see how great has been the increase which God in his Providence has given to their substance, that thus they may know “how much they owe to their Lord.” The stan-

dard given in the New Testament, however, by which to measure the return that we ought to make to God of our substance, requires that we thus review his dealings with us in his Providence; so that where there is an increase of substance there ought to be an increase in the return which we give to him, who has bestowed on us all that we have, that we may thus express our sense of dependence on him and of his kindness to us. The question with too many, however, is, not how many things will they be able to want that they may have the more to give for the sake of Him who has bestowed on them all that they have, and withheld nothing required for their salvation; but rather, how much will they be able with some plausibility to withhold from his cause, that they may add to their substance, their comforts, or enjoyments? And if you hear them express their mind upon the subject without restraint, how many show that this is in their estimation the most unimportant matter that comes before them, and everything else may be attended to before it, convincing you that a very great change must be effected before the anxiety be experienced “to give unto God as he has prospered them.”

(4.) Benevolence, to be a Christian grace, must become a habit—a feature of character which marks the genuine Christian as decidedly as justice or purity. “On the first day of the week let every one lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.” The regular and habitual attention to the duty is thus distinctly taught. You not unfrequently meet with examples of liberality, which are certainly beneficial to the cause or individual that may be the object of its exercise, but if you inquire into the moving spring, you find that it has been under the influence of something like favouritism, or on account of some accidental circumstance, which the object or person may have had, that drew out the kindly