

is but a development of that which has been provided for us in the family. God brings us together by natural ties—and thus teaches us, from early childhood, the lesson of mutual forbearance; and then, in our riper age, the great lesson is repeated in the family of God. We are taught, all our lives long, to understand more and more what is meant by denying or renouncing *ourselves*. Not merely abandoning external advantages, or outward possessions, or ease and self-indulgence, but learning to divest ourselves of that innermost and most subtle self-love, and self-pleasing, which, so long as it retains its hold upon us, must effectually prevent our being faithful followers of Him who "pleased not Himself." The "one body" of Christ was designed to be, to every member of the same, a school of Christ-like charity—to discipline us to practise, more and more fully, what the Apostle calls "the endurance of Christ." 2 Thes. iii. 5).

And now, brethren, is it not well that we should ask ourselves, as in the presence of Almighty God, whether we are realizing our position and duties as members of the "one Body," whether we are promoting the benefits which, doubtless, were designed to follow from this incorporation to the body at large, whether we are deriving the benefits which we, ourselves, as individual members, were intended to receive. There is very much, in these, our days, to warn us that we are greatly forgetting plain and oft-repeated injunctions of Holy Scripture concerning the duty which we owe to our brethren in Christ. If, then, we would seek to recal ourselves to the recognition and the practice of this duty, let us contemplate the example of St. Paul. If ever there was a man of strong and clear convictions, as respecting sacred truth, it was he, and his feelings were as ardent as his convictions were strong. He stands out conspicuous on the sacred page, even beyond his fellow apostles, as the unflinching and impassioned assertor of truth against error; keenly detecting and emphatically denouncing any corrupt teaching or practice which would hinder or vitiate the Gospel of his Lord. Yet, was there ever a larger charity than his? Observe, then, the manner of his teaching. To the Colossians he says: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Here is clear uncompromising doctrine—these usages are but a shadow—the body, the reality of them pertains to Christ," and so, on these points, no man is to be suffered to judge, or lay down prescriptions, to the Christians of Colosse. Yet what says he to the Romans respecting the toleration of the spontaneous practice of individuals on the self-same points? "One believeth that he may eat all things, another that is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, for he giveth God thanks, and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not and giveth God thanks." Do we always follow the Apostle's instructions here? Do we not sometimes act, as if we considered his teaching to the Colossians irreconcilable with his instructions to the Romans? Again, how often are we not warned, both by our Lord and by His Apostle, against judging others? Do we

carefully abstain from such judgment? Our Lord's solemn charge, "Judge not," has been admirably illustrated by words, which can scarcely be called a limitation, but rather a development, of their meaning—*sine scientia, sine caritate, sine necessitate*. Are our judgments never formed and expressed on most imperfect knowledge? *Sine caritate*. Are they always tempered by that spirit of love which "thinketh no evil," or rather "imputeth not the evil," where evil undoubtedly exists, putting the most favourable construction on acts which must in themselves be allowed to be wrong, refusing to charge the erring with an evil purpose which he may not have entertained. And again, *Sine necessitate*. What a vast number of rash and cruel judgments are thus excluded; how many grievous breaches of charity would be prevented, could we but learn to say: "this is not a matter, respecting which duty in any way obliges me to pronounce a judgment! And again, brethren, do we bear in mind, as we ought, the Apostle's solemn warning: "Judge no man before the time, until the Lord come"? How should not the thought of that righteous judgment to come hold in check our judgments of each other? What a reversal of human judgments will be there? Not only will there be, on the part of the ungodly, the bitter confession concerning the objects of their impious scorn, "We fools accounted His life madness, and His end to be without honour: how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints." There is another reversal, less awful indeed than this, yet one which every honest, truth-loving heart cannot but anticipate with the most profound compunction: the reversal of rash ill-informed unloving judgments, which they whom the great Judge may then alike accept, have yet permitted themselves to form of each other here. How must not they, who shall then be thus accepted, in the presence of His great love, deplore their want of love! How shall they, whom the arms of His mercy alike embrace, endure the recollection of their former estrangement from each other—of the bitter dark thoughts, in which, perchance they once presumed mutually to exclude each other from that gracious acceptance, by which He now teaches them that they were, and are forevermore, brethren in Himself? Till *this* time come, let us patiently strive to hold in abeyance our own puny judgments, which cannot fail to be vitiated both by intellectual and by moral error.

But further, we must acknowledge that it is our duty, as members of the "One Body," not only to extend charity to others, but also to aid others in extending the like charity to ourselves. It is *not* charitable to make undue—unrighteous demands on the Christian forbearance of others, to be careless whether they exercise that forbearance or no—to provoke them to entertain harsh opinions, and to pronounce severe judgment, respecting us. Can we, brethren looking at the history of our Church for some years past, possibly think that we have been duly avoiding this error? Have we been careful not to give needless offence? Have we dealt with those who differ from us, as with brethren whose love we are solemnly bound, by our common relation to our one Lord and Master, not wilfully, and willingly to forego? Have we acted towards them as if we desired to win them, as we surely ought to desire, to a right understanding of the points on which we differ, and to a closer agreement with us, if so it please God, both in doctrine and in practice, so that we may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify God? "He

by Whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified" will in answer to our prayers, "grant us, by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things;" and surely, looking both to the past and to the future, we must feel that the right judgment, which God the Spirit alone can give, is most deeply needed by us. Will He not teach us to distinguish, to our own peace and to the peace of the Church, between things which widely differ? In our teaching, between the great articles of the Christian faith, which we are solemnly bound both to receive ourselves and to declare to the people, and matters of opinion which however dear they may be to the understanding and to the heart of the individual Christian, are, neither by God's word nor by his Church, placed upon a level with the revealed Christian verities? Has no harm been done—have no needless jealousies being awakened—no miserable strifes engendered—by neglecting this important distinction? And again, in matters of practice, may we not well believe that the Spirit of wisdom and of peace would teach us to distinguish between means and ends—between things essential and non-essential—between the indispensable requirements of Christian worship, and those accidents of it, the fitness of which must ever be determined by variable circumstances? There is an inherent dignity in Christian worship which, if it be truly offered, it must *everywhere* possess even where it lacks those external graces and adornments with which every devout Christian heart would gladly see it invested. Yet do we not know that it is but too possible *not* to have a right judgment here, to fail to discern the august character of prayer and praise, under whatever conditions they truly are offered, and thus to fix the thoughts and the affections exclusively upon the outward form in which these spiritual acts find, or should find, their sensible expression? Are we quite sure that needless offence has never been given by an inordinate zeal for the external accessories of worship, a zeal which has not been duly controlled and chastened by the primary and all-important object of winning the ill instructed and irreligious to worship God in spirit and in truth? Have we never needed the warning of our Blessed Lord that the altar of God must ever be infinitely greater than any gift, precious or beautiful though it be, which we can lay upon it: that the temple of God must ever be infinitely more august than any gold with which the hand of man can possibly adorn it? Let us strive, brethren, in heart and mind hither to ascend, whither our Lord is gone before us; and, in that pure heavenly light to behold our duty to Him and to each other. Seen through the mists of earthly passion and prejudice, even the most sacred truths will become distorted and discoloured; let us seek then, by God's grace, habitually to rise above them; to see things now, by faith, as we must see them at no distant future: so shall we be instructed and strengthened to follow the great example of Him, who "pleased not Himself," and learn the exceeding blessedness of renouncing, for His glory and for the good of our brethren in Him, all things, which, apart from the love of Him and of them, we might have grasped and cherished as our own.

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