



A Model of Christian Charity

Governor John Winthrop
(1630 on board the Arbella)

GOD ALMIGHTY in His most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission.

The Reason hereof:

5 **1st Reason.** First to hold conformity with the rest of His world, being delighted to show forth the glory of his wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures, and the glory of His power in ordering all these differences for the preservation and good of the whole, and the glory of His greatness, that as it is the glory of princes to have many officers, so this
10 great king will have many stewards, counting himself more honored in dispensing his gifts to man by man, than if he did it by his own immediate hands.

15 **2nd Reason.** Secondly, that He might have the more occasion to manifest the work of his Spirit: first upon the wicked in moderating and restraining them, so that the rich and mighty should not eat up the poor, nor the poor and despised rise up against and shake off their yoke. Secondly, in the regenerate, in exercising His graces in them, as in the great ones, their love, mercy, gentleness, temperance etc., and in the poor and inferior sort, their faith, patience, obedience etc.

20 **3rd Reason.** Thirdly, that every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection. From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature, man. Therefore God still reserves the property of these gifts to Himself as Ezek. 16:17, He there calls wealth, His gold and His silver, and Prov. 3:9, He claims their
25 service as His due, "Honor the Lord with thy riches," etc. --- All men being thus (by divine providence) ranked into two sorts, rich and poor; under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all others are poor according to the former distribution.

30 There are two rules whereby we are to walk one towards another: Justice and Mercy. These are always distinguished in their act and in their object, yet may they both concur in the same subject in each respect; as sometimes there may be an occasion of showing mercy to a rich man in some sudden danger or distress, and also doing of mere justice to a poor man in regard of some particular contract, etc.

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There is likewise a double Law by which we are regulated in our conversation towards another. In both the former respects, the Law of Nature and the Law of Grace (that is, the moral law or the law of the gospel) to omit the rule of justice as not properly belonging to this purpose otherwise than it may fall into consideration in some particular cases. By the
40 first of these laws, man as he was enabled so withal is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Upon this ground stands all the precepts of the moral law, which concerns our dealings with men. To apply this to the works of mercy, this law requires two things. First, that every man afford his help to another in every want or distress.

45 Secondly, that he perform this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own goods, according to the words of our Savior (from Matthew 7:12), whatsoever ye would that men should do to you. This was practiced by Abraham and Lot in entertaining the angels and the old man of Gibeon. The law of Grace or of the Gospel hath some difference from the former (*the law of nature*), as in these respects: First, the law of nature was given to man in
50 the estate of innocence. This of the Gospel in the estate of regeneracy. Secondly, the former propounds one man to another, as the same flesh and image of God. This as a brother in Christ also, and in the communion of the same Spirit, and so teacheth to put a difference between Christians and others. Do good to all, especially to the household of faith. Upon this ground the Israelites were to put a difference between the brethren of such as were
55 strangers, though not of the Canaanites.

Thirdly, the Law of Nature would give no rules for dealing with enemies, for all are to be considered as friends in the state of innocence, but the Gospel commands love to an enemy. Proof: If thine enemy hunger, feed him; "Love your enemies... Do good to them that hate
60 you" (Matt. 5:44).

This law of the Gospel propounds likewise a difference of seasons and occasions. There is a time when a Christian must sell all and give to the poor, as they did in the Apostles' times. There is a time also when Christians (though they give not all yet) must give beyond their
65 ability, as they of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8). Likewise, community of perils calls for extraordinary liberality, and so doth community in some special service for the church.

Lastly, when there is no other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved in his distress, we must help him beyond our ability rather than tempt God in putting him upon
70 help by miraculous or extraordinary means. This duty of mercy is exercised in the kinds: giving, lending and forgiving (*of a debt*).

Question: What rule shall a man observe in giving in respect of the measure?

75 **Answer:** If the time and occasion be ordinary he is to give out of his abundance. Let him lay aside as God hath blessed him. If the time and occasion be extraordinary, he must be

ruled by them; taking this withal, that then a man cannot likely do too much, especially if he may leave himself and his family under probable means of comfortable subsistence.

80 **Objection:** A man must lay up for posterity, the fathers lay up for posterity and children, and he is worse than an infidel that provideth not for his own.

Answer: For the first, it is plain that it being spoken by way of comparison, it must be meant of the ordinary and usual course of fathers, and cannot extend to times and occasions
85 extraordinary. For the other place the Apostle speaks against such as walked inordinately, and it is without question, that he is worse than an infidel who through his own sloth and voluptuousness shall neglect to provide for his family.

Objection: "The wise man's eyes are in his head," saith Solomon, "and foreseeth the
90 plague;" therefore he must forecast and lay up against evil times when he or his may stand in need of all he can gather.

Answer: This very Argument Solomon useth to persuade to liberality (Eccle. 11), "Cast thy
95 bread upon the waters...for thou knowest not what evil may come upon the land." Luke 16:9, "Make you friends of the riches of iniquity..." You will ask how this shall be? Very well. For first he that gives to the poor, lends to the Lord and He will repay him even in this life an hundredfold to him or his. The righteous is ever merciful and lendeth, and his seed enjoyeth the blessing; and besides we know what advantage it will be to us in the day of
100 account when many such witnesses shall stand forth for us to witness the improvement of our talent. And I would know of those who plead so much for laying up for time to come, whether they hold that to be Gospel Matthew 6:19, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," etc. If they acknowledge it, what extent will they allow it? If only to those primitive times, let them consider the reason whereupon our Savior grounds it. The first is that they are subject to the moth, the rust, the thief. Secondly, they will steal away the heart:
105 "where the treasure is there will your heart be also."

The reasons are of like force at all times. Therefore the exhortation must be general and perpetual, with always in respect of the love and affection to riches and in regard of the
110 things themselves when any special service for the church or particular distress of our brother do call for the use of them; otherwise it is not only lawful but necessary to lay up as Joseph did to have ready upon such occasions, as the Lord (whose stewards we are of them) shall call for them from us. Christ gives us an instance of the first, when he sent his disciples for the donkey, and bids them answer the owner thus, "the Lord hath need of him." So when the Tabernacle was to be built, He sends to His people to call for their silver and
115 gold, etc., and yields no other reason but that it was for His work. When Elisha comes to the widow of Sareptah and finds her preparing to make ready her pittance for herself and family, he bids her first provide for him, he challenges first God's part which she must first give

120 before she must serve her own family. All these teach us that the Lord looks that when He
is pleased to call for His right in any thing we have, our own interest we have must stand
aside till His turn be served. For the other, we need look no further then to that of 1 John
3:17, "He who hath this world's goods and seeth his brother to need and shuts up his
compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Which comes punctually to
this conclusion: If thy brother be in want and thou canst help him, thou needst not make
doubt of what thou shouldst do; if thou lovest God thou must help him.

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Question: What rule must we observe in lending?

Answer: Thou must observe whether thy brother hath present or probable or possible means
of repaying thee, if there be none of those, thou must give him according to his necessity,
130 rather then lend him as he requires (*requests*). If he hath present means of repaying thee,
thou art to look at him not as an act of mercy, but by way of commerce, wherein thou art to
walk by the rule of justice; but if his means of repaying thee be only probable or possible,
then he is an object of thy mercy, thou must lend him, though there be danger of losing it.
(Deut. 15:7-8): "If any of thy brethren be poor ... thou shalt lend him sufficient." That men
135 might not shift off this duty by the apparent hazard, He tells them that though the year of
Jubilee were at hand (when he must remit it, if he were not able to repay it before), yet he
must lend him, and that cheerfully. It may not grieve thee to give him, saith He. And
because some might object, why so I should soon impoverish myself and my family, he
adds, with all thy work, etc., for our Savior said (Matt. 5:42), "From him that would borrow
140 of thee turn not away."

Question: What rule must we observe in forgiving (*a debt*)?

Answer: Whether thou didst lend by way of commerce or in mercy, if he hath nothing to
145 pay thee, thou must forgive, (except in cause where thou hast a surety or a lawful pledge).
Deut. 15:1-2 --- Every seventh year the creditor was to quit that which he lent to his brother
if he were poor, as appears in verse 4. "Save when there shall be no poor with thee." In all
these and like cases, Christ gives a general rule (Matt. 7:12), "Whatsoever ye would that
men should do to you, do ye the same to them."

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Question: What rule must we observe and walk by in cause of community of peril?

Answer: The same as before, but with more enlargement towards others and less respect
towards ourselves and our own right. Hence it was that in the primitive Church they sold all,
155 had all things in common, neither did any man say that which he possessed was his own.
Likewise in their return out of the captivity, because the work was great for the restoring of
the church and the danger of enemies was common to all, Nehemiah directs the Jews to
liberality and readiness in remitting their debts to their brethren, and disposing liberally to

160 such as wanted, and stand not upon their own dues which they might have demanded of them. Thus did some of our forefathers in times of persecution in England, and so did many of the faithful of other churches, whereof we keep an honorable remembrance of them; and it is to be observed that both in Scriptures and latter stories of the churches that such as have been most bountiful to the poor saints, especially in those extraordinary times and occasions, God hath left them highly commended to posterity, as Zaccheus, Cornelius, Dorcas, Bishop
165 Hooper, the Cutler of Brussels and divers others. Observe again that the Scripture gives no caution to restrain any from being over liberal this way; but all men to the liberal and cheerful practice hereof by the sweeter promises; as to instance one for many (Isaiah 58:6-9) "Is not this the fast I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness, to take off the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke ... to deal thy bread to the
170 hungry and to bring the poor that wander into thy house, when thou seest the naked to cover them ... and then shall thy light brake forth as the morning and thy health shall grow speedily, thy righteousness shall go before God, and the glory of the Lord shalt embrace thee; then thou shall call and the Lord shall answer thee," etc. And from Ch. 2:10 (??) "If thou pour out thy soul to the hungry, then shall thy light spring out in darkness, and the Lord
175 shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in draught, and make fat thy bones, thou shalt be like a watered garden, and they shall be of thee that shall build the old waste places," etc. On the contrary most heavy curses are laid upon such as are straightened towards the Lord and his people (Judg. 5:23), "Curse ye Meroshe ... because they came not to help the Lord." He who shutteth his ears from hearing the cry of the poor, he shall cry and
180 shall not be heard." (Matt. 25) "Go ye cursed into everlasting fire," etc. "I was hungry and ye fed me not." (2 Cor. 9:6) "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly."

185 Having already set forth the practice of mercy according to the rule of God's law, it will be useful to lay open the grounds of it also, being the other part of the Commandment and that is the affection from which this exercise of mercy must arise, the Apostle tells us that this love is the fulfilling of the law, not that it is enough to love our brother and so no further; but in regard of the excellency of his parts giving any motion to the other as the soul to the body and the power it hath to set all the faculties at work in the outward exercise of this duty; as when we bid one make the clock strike, he doth not lay hand on the hammer, which
190 is the immediate instrument of the sound, but sets on work the first mover or main wheel; knowing that will certainly produce the sound which he intends. So the way to draw men to the works of mercy, is not by force of Argument from the goodness or necessity of the work; for though this cause may enforce, a rational mind to some present act of mercy, as is frequent in experience, yet it cannot work such a habit in a soul, as shall make it prompt
195 upon all occasions to produce the same effect, but by framing these affections of love in the heart which will as naturally bring forth the other, as any cause doth produce the effect.

200 The definition which the Scripture gives us of love is this: Love is the bond of perfection. First it is a bond or ligament. Secondly, it makes the work perfect. There is no body but consists of parts and that which knits these parts together, gives the body its perfection, because it makes each part so contiguous to others as thereby they do mutually participate

205 with each other, both in strength and infirmity, in pleasure and pain. To instance in the most
perfect of all bodies: Christ and his Church make one body. The several parts of this body
considered a part before they were united, were as disproportionate and as much disordering
as so many contrary qualities or elements, but when Christ comes, and by his spirit and love
210 knits all these parts to himself and each to other, it is become the most perfect and best
proportioned body in the world (Eph. 4:15-16). Christ, by whom all the body being knit
together by every joint for the furniture thereof, according to the effectual power which is
in the measure of every perfection of parts, a glorious body without spot or wrinkle; the
ligaments hereof being Christ, or his love, for Christ is love (1 John 4:8). So this definition
is right. Love is the bond of perfection.

From hence we may frame these conclusions:

215 First of all, true Christians are of one body in Christ (1 Cor. 12). Ye are the body of Christ
and members of their part. All the parts of this body being thus united are made so
contiguous in a special relation as they must needs partake of each other's strength and
infirmity; joy and sorrow, weal and woe. If one member suffers, all suffer with it, if one be
in honor, all rejoice with it.

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Secondly, the ligaments of this body which knit together are love.

Thirdly, no body can be perfect which wants its proper ligament.

225 Fourthly, All the parts of this body being thus united are made so contiguous in a special
relation as they must needs partake of each other's strength and infirmity, joy and sorrow,
weal and woe. (1 Cor. 12:26) If one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one be in honor,
all rejoice with it.

230 Fifthly, this sensitivity and sympathy of each other's conditions will necessarily infuse into
each part a native desire and endeavor, to strengthen, defend, preserve and comfort the
other. To insist a little on this conclusion being the product of all the former, the truth hereof
will appear both by precept and pattern. 1 John 3:16, "We ought to lay down our lives for
the brethren." Gal. 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burden's and so fulfill the law of Christ."

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First in regard that among the members of the same body, love and affection are reciprocal
in a most equal and sweet kind of commerce.

240 Secondly, in regard of the pleasure and content that the exercise of love carries with it, as
we may see in the natural body. The mouth is at all the pains to receive and mince the food
which serves for the nourishment of all the other parts of the body; yet it hath no cause to

complain; for first the other parts send back, by several passages, a due proportion of the same nourishment, in a better form for the strengthening and comforting the mouth. Secondly, the labor of the mouth is accompanied with such pleasure and content as far exceeds the pains it takes. So is it in all the labor of love among Christians. The party loving, reaps love again, as was showed before, which the soul covets more than all the wealth in the world.

Thirdly, nothing yields more pleasure and content to the soul then when it finds that which it may love fervently; for to love and live beloved is the soul's paradise both here and in heaven. In the State of wedlock there be many comforts to learn out of the troubles of that condition; but let such as have tried the most, say if there be any sweetness in that condition comparable to the exercise of mutual love.

From the former considerations arise these conclusions:

First, this love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary.

Secondly, this love is as absolutely necessary to the being of the body of Christ, as the sinews and other ligaments of a natural body are to the being of that body.

Thirdly, this love is a divine, spiritual, nature; free, active, strong, courageous, permanent; undervaluing all things beneath its proper object and of all the graces, this makes us nearer to resemble the virtues of our heavenly father.

Fourthly, it rests in the love and welfare of its beloved. For the full certain knowledge of those truths concerning the nature, use, and excellency of this grace, that which the holy ghost hath left recorded, 1 Cor. 13, may give full satisfaction, which is needful for every true member of this lovely body of the Lord Jesus, to work upon their hearts by prayer, meditation continual exercise at least of the special influence of this grace, till Christ be formed in them and they in him, all in each other, knit together by this bond of love.

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Thus stands the cause between God and us. We are entered into covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a commission. The Lord hath given us leave to draw our own articles. We have professed to enterprise these and those accounts, upon these and those ends. We have hereupon besought Him of favor and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath He ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, and will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it; but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles which are the ends we have propounded, and, dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the

Lord will surely break out in wrath against us, and be revenged of such a people, and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant.

285 Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the
counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end,
we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in
brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the
supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness,
290 gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions
our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before
our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So
shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and
delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all
295 our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than
formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us,
when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a
praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like
that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes
300 of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have
undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a
story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil
of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of
God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be
305 consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

And to shut this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord,
in his last farewell to Israel, Deut. 30. "Beloved, there is now set before us life and death,
good and evil," in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love
one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his ordinance and his
310 `laws, and the articles of our Covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and
that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts
shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other Gods, our
pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely
perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

315 *Therefore let us choose life,*
that we and our seed may live,
by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him,
for He is our life and our prosperity.

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