
Cases and Directions for Loving Our Neighbour as Ourselves

by Richard Baxter

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Title I. *Cases of Conscience about Loving our Neighbour.*

Question I. In what sense is it that I must love my neighbour as myself? Whether in the kind, of love, or in the degree, or only in the reality.

Answer. The true meaning of the text is, you must love him according to his true worth, without the diversion and hinderance of selfishness and partiality. As you must love yourself according to that degree of goodness which is in you, and no more; so must you as impartially love your neighbour according to that degree of goodness which is in him so that it truly extendeth to the reality, the kind and the degree of love, supposing it in both proportioned to the goodness of the object. But before this can be understood, the true nature of love must be well understood.

Quest. II. What is the true nature of love, both as to myself and neighbor?

Answer. Love is nothing but the prime motion of the will to its proper object; which is called complacence: the object of it is simple goodness, or good as such it ariseth from suitableness between the object and the will, as, appetite doth from the suitableness of the desired fancy and food. This good, as it is variously modified, or any way differeth, doth accordingly cause or require a difference in our love therefore that love which in its prime net and nature is but one, is diversely denominated, as

its objects are diversified. To an object as simply good, in itself, it followeth the understanding's estimation, and is called, as I said, mere complacency or attachment: to an object as not yet attained, but absent, or distant, and attainable, it is called desire or desiring love: and as expected, hope, or hoping love (which is a conjunction of desire and expectation): to an object nearest and attained, it is called fruition, or delight, or delighting love: to an object which by means must be attained, it is called seeking love, as it exciteth to the use of those means: and to an object missed it is, by accident, mourning love. But still love itself in its essential act is one and the same. As it respecteth an object which wanteth something to make it perfect, and desireth the supply of that want, it is called love of benevolence; denominated from this occasion, as it desireth to do good to him that is loved. And it is a love of the same nature which we exercise towards God, who needeth nothing, as we rejoice in that perfection and happiness which he hath; though it he not to be called properly by the same name. Goodness being the true object of love, is the true measure of it; and therefore God, as infinitely and primitively good, is the prime and only simple object of our absolute, total love. And therefore those who understand no goodness in any being, but as profitable to them, or to some other creature, do know no God, nor love God as God, nor have any love but selfish and idolatrous. By this you may perceive the nature of love.

Quest. III. But may none be loved above the measure of his goodness? How then did God love us when we were not, or were his enemies? And how must we love the wicked? And how must an ungodly person love himself?

Answer. If only good, as such, be the object of love, then certainly none should be loved but in proportion to his goodness. But you must distinguish between mere natural and sensitive love or appetite, and rational love; and between love, and the effects of love; and between natural goodness in the object, and moral goodness. And so I further answer, I. There is in every man a natural and sensitive love of himself and his own pleasure and felicity, and an averseness to death and pain and sorrow, as there is in every brute: and this God hath planted there for the preservation of the creature. This falleth not under commands or prohibitions directly, because it is not free but necessary; as no man is

commanded or forbidden to be hungry, or thirsty, or weary, or the like: it is not this love which is meant when we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. For I am not commanded to feel hunger, and thirst, nor to desire meat and drink by the sensitive appetite for my neighbour: nor sensitively to feel his pain or pleasure, nor to have that natural aversion from death and pain, nor sensitive desire of life and pleasure, for him as for myself. But the love here spoken of; is that volition with the due affection conjunct, which is our rational love as being the act of our highest faculty, and falling under God's command. As to the sensitive love, it proceedeth not upon the sense or estimate of goodness in the person who loveth himself or any other (as beasts love their young ones without respect to their excellency). But it is rational love which is proportioned to the estimated goodness of the thing beloved 2. Physical goodness may be in an object which hath no moral goodness; and this may contain a capacity of moral goodness: and each of them is amiable according to its nature and degree. 3. Beneficence is sometimes all effect of love, and sometimes an effect of wisdom only is to the object, and of love to something else; but it is never love itself. Usually benevolence is an act of love, and beneficence an effect, but not always. I may do good to another without any love to him, for some ends of my own, or for the sake of another. And a man may be obliged to greater beneficence, where he is not obliged to greater love.

And now to the instances, I further answer, 1. When we had no being, God did not properly love us *in esse reali* (unless you will go to our co-existence in eternity; for we were not *in esse reali*); but only as we were *in esse cognito*; which is but to love the idea in himself: but he purposed to make us, and to make us lovely, and to do us good, and so he had that which is called *amor benevolentiae* to us which properly was not love to us, but a love to himself, and the idea in his own eternal mind, which is called a loving us in *esse cognito*, and a purpose to make us good and lovely. That which is not lovely is not an object of love: man was not lovely indeed, when he was not; therefore he was not an object of love (but *in esse cognito*.) The same we say of God's loving us when we were enemies: he really loved us with complacency so far as our physical goodness made us lovely; and as morally lovely he did not love us, otherwise than *in esse cognito*. But he purposed to make us morally

lovely, and gave us his mercies to that end; and so loved us with a love of benevolence, as it is called; which signifieth no more than out of a complacence (or love) to himself, and to us, as physically good, to purpose to make us morally good and happy.

2. So also we must love a wicked man with a love of benevolence: which properly is but to love him in his physical worth, and his capacity of moral goodness and happiness, and thereupon (but especially through the love of God) to desire his happiness.

3. And as to the loving of ourselves, (besides the sensitive love before mentioned which respecteth self as self; and not as good,) a wicked man may rationally love himself according to his physical goodness as a man, which containeth his capacity of moral goodness, and so of being holy and serviceable to God and to good men, and happy in the fruition of God. But beyond all such goodness (which only is amiableness) no man may rationally love himself or any other, with the true formal act of love, which is complacence; though he may wish good to himself or another beyond the present goodness which is in them; nay, he wisheth them good, not because they are good, but because they lack good.

And though some define loving to be *bene velle alicui ut illi bene sit*, to desire another's welfare, yet indeed this may be without any true formal love at all. As I may desire the welfare of my horse, without any proper love to him, even for myself and use. When God from eternity willeth to make Paul, and to convert and save him, *ut illi bene sit*, it is called love of benevolence; but properly it is only to be called, a will to make Paul good and lovely (but if any be resolved to call mere benevolence by the name of love, I will not contend about a name); it being only God himself who is the original and ultimate end of that will and purpose; and himself only which he then loveth, there being nothing but himself to love; till in that instant that Paul is existent, and so really lovely. For Paul *in esse cognito* is not Paul; yet no reality doth *oriri de novo* in God but a new respect and denomination, and in the creature new effects. (Of which elsewhere.)

Quest. IV. Must I love every one as much as myself in degree, or only some?

Answer. You must love every one impartially as yourself; according to his goodness; and you must wish as well to every one as to yourself; but you must love no man complacentially so much as yourself; who is not or seemeth not to have as much loveliness, that is, as much goodness, or as much of God, as yourself.

Quest. V. Must I love any one more than myself?

Answer. Yes, every one that is and appeareth better than yourself. Your sensitive love to another cannot be as much as to yourself; and your beneficence (ordinarily) must be most to yourself, because God in nature and his laws hath so appointed it; and your benevolence to yourself and to others must be alike; but your rational estimation, and love or complacence, (with the honour and praise attending it,) must be more to every one that is better than yourself; for that which is best is most amiable, and that which hath most of God.

Quest. VI. Will it not then follow, that I must love another man's wife and children better than mine own, when they are really better?

Answer. Yes, no doubt; But it is only with that rational, estimative love. But there is besides a love to wife and children, which is in some measure sensitive, which you are not obliged to give to others and rationally they are more amiable to you, in their peculiar relations and respects, though others are more amiable in other respects; and besides, though you value and rationally love another more, yet the expressions must not be the same; for those must follow the relation according to God's command. You may not cohabit or embrace, nor maintain and provide for others as your own, even when you rationally love them more; the common good requires this order in the expressive part, as well as God's command.

Quest. VII. Who is my neighbour that I must love as myself?

Answer. Not devils or damned souls, who are under justice and from under mercy, and are none of our society: but, 1. Every natural man *in via*, being a member of God's kingdom in the same world, is to be loved

as my natural self; and every spiritual man as a member of the same kingdom of Christ, must be loved as my spiritual self; and every spiritual man as such, above my natural self as such; and no natural man as such, so much as my spiritual self as such; so that no man on earth is excluded from your love, which must be impartial to all as to yourself, but proportioned to their goodness.

Quest. VIII. Are not antichrist and those that sin against the Holy Ghost excepted out of this our love, and out of our prayers and endeavours of their good?

Answer. Those that (with Zanchius) think Mahomet to be antichrist, may so conclude, because he is dead and out of our communion. Those that take the Papacy to be antichrist (as most Protestants do) cannot so conclude; because as there is but one antichrist, that is, one Papacy, though a hundred Popes be in that seat, so every one of those popes is *in via*, and under mercy, and recoverable out of that condition; and therefore is to be loved and prayed for accordingly. And as for those that blaspheme the holy Ghost, it is a sin that one man cannot certainly know in another, ordinarily at least; and therefore cannot characterize a person unfit for our love, and prayers, and endeavors.

Quest. IX. May we not hate the enemies of God? How then must we love them as ourselves?

Answer. We may and must hate sin in every one; and where it is predominant, as God is said to hate the sinner for his sin, so must we; and yet still love him as ourselves: for you must hate sin in yourselves as much or more than in any other; and if you are wicked you must hate yourselves as such; yea, if you are godly, you must *secundum quid*, or in that measure as you are sinful, abhor, and loathe, and hate yourselves as such. And yet you must love yourselves according to the in measure of all that natural and moral goodness which is in you; and you must desire and endeavour all the good to yourselves that you can. Just so must you hate and love another; love them and hate them impartially as you must do yourselves.

Quest. X. May I not wish hurt sometimes to another, more than to myself?

Answer. You may wish a mediate hurt which tendeth to his good, or to the good of others; but you must never wish any final hurt and misery to him. You may wish your friend a vomit or bloodletting for his cure; and you may wish him some affliction, when it is needful and apt to humble him and do him good, or to restrain him from doing hurt to others; and on the same accounts, and for the public good, you may desire penal justice to be done upon him yea, sometimes unto death; but still with a desire of the saving of his soul. And such hurt you may also wish yourself as is necessary to your good; but you are not to wish the same penalties to yourself; 1. Because you have somewhat else first to wish and do, even to repent and prevent it. 2. Because you are not bound ordinarily to do execution upon yourself. It is more in your power to repent yourself; and make repentance less necessary by humble confession and amendment, than to bring another to repentance. Yet I may add also, that hypothetically you may wish that destruction to the enemies of God in this life, which absolutely you may not wish; that is, you must desire first that they may repent, and secondly, that they may be restrained from hurting others; but if neither of these may be attained, that they may be cut off.

[Tit. 2 Directions for Loving our Neighbour as Ourselves.](#)

Direct I. Take heed of selfishness and covetousness, the two great enemies of love. Of which I have spoken more at large before.

Direct. II. Fall out with no man; or if you do, be speedily reconciled; for passions and dissensions are the extinguishers of love.

Direct. III. Love God truly, and you will easily love your neighbour; for you will see God's image of him, or interest in him, and feel all his precepts and mercies obliging you hereunto. As 1 John 3:11,23; and 4:7,12,20,21.

Direct. IV. To this end let Christ be your continual study. He is the full revelation of the love of God; the lively pattern of love, and the best teacher of it that ever was in the world: his incarnation, life, and

sufferings, his gospel and covenant, his intercession and preparations for our heavenly felicity, all are the great demonstrations of condescending, matchless love. Mark both: God's love to us in him, and his love to man, and you will have the best directive and incentive of your love.

Direct. V. Observe all the good which is in every man. Consider of the good of humanity in his nature, and the goodness of all that truth which he confesseth, and of all that moral good which appeareth in his heart and life; and let not oversight or partiality cause you to overlook it, or make light of it. For it is goodness which is the only attractive of love; and if you overlook men's goodness, you cannot love them.

Direct. VI. Abhor and beware of a censorious disposition, which magnifieth men's faults, and vilifieth their virtues, and maketh men seem worse than indeed they are. For as this cometh from the want of love, so doth it destroy that little which is left.

Direct. VII. Beware of superstition and in erring judgment, which maketh men place religion where God never placed it. For when this hath taught you to make duties and sins of your own humour and invention, it will quickly teach you to love or hate men accordingly as they fit or cross your opinion and humour: thus many a papist loveth not those that are not subjects of the Roman monarch, and that follow not all his irrational fopperies. Many an anabaptist loveth not those that are against his opinion of re-baptizing: one loveth not those who are for liturgies, forms of worship, and church music and many love not those who are against them; and so of other things (of which more anon).

Direct. VIII. Avoid the company of censorious backbiters and proud contemners of their brethren: hearken not to them that are causelessly vilifying others, aggravating their faults and extenuating their virtues. For such proud, supercilious persons (religious or profane) are but the messengers of Satan, by whom he entreateth you to hate your neighbour, or abate your love to him. And to hear them speak evil of others, is but to go hear a sermon against charity, which may take with such hearts as ours before we are aware.

Direct. IX. Keep still the motives and incentives of love upon your minds. Which I shall here next set before you.

Tit. 3. The Reasons or Motives of Love to our Neighbour.

Motive I. Consider well of the image and interest of God in man. The worst man is his creature, and hath his natural image, though not his moral image; and you should love the work for the workman's sake. There is something of God upon all human nature above the brutes; it is intelligent, and capable of knowing him, of loving him, and of serving him; and possibly may be brought to do all this better than you can do it. Undervalue not the noble nature of man, nor overlook that of God which is upon them, nor the interest which he hath in them.

Motive II. Consider well of God's own love to man. He hateth their sins more than any of us; and yet he loveth his workmanship upon them: "And maketh his sun to shine and his rain to fall on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust," Matt. 5:45. And what should more stir us up to love, than to be like to God?

Motive III. And think oft of the love of Christ unto mankind; yea, even unto his enemies. Can you have a better example, a livelier incentive, or a surer guide?

Motive IV. Consider of our unity of nature with all men: suitability breedeth and maintaineth love. Even birds and beasts do love their kind; and man should much more have a love to man, as being of the same specific form.

Motive V. Love is the principle of doing good to others. It inclineth men to beneficence: and all men call him good who is inclined to do good.

Motive VI. Love is the bond of societies; of families, cities, kingdoms, and churches: without love, they will be but enemies conjunct; who are so much the more hurtful and pernicious to each other, by how much they are nearer to each other. The soul of societies is gone when love is gone.

Motive VII. Consider why it is that you love yourselves, (rationally,) and why it is that you would be beloved of others. And you will see that the same reasons will be of equal force to call for love to others from you.

Motive VIII. What abundance of duty is summarily performed in love! And what abundance of sin is avoided and prevented by it! If it be

the fulfilling of the law, it avoideth all the violations of the law (proportionably). So far as you have love, you will neither dishonour superiors, nor oppress inferiors, nor injure equals: you will neither covet that which is your neighbor's, nor envy, nor malice them, nor defame, nor backbite, nor censure them unjustly nor will you rob them or defraud them, nor withhold any duty or kindness to them.

Motive IX. Consider how much love pleaseth God; and why it is made so great a part of all your duty; and why the gospel doth so highly commend it, and so strictly command it, and so terribly condemn the want of it! And also how suitable a duty it is for you, who are obliged by so much love of God! These things well studied will not be without effect.

Motive X. Consider also that it is your own interest, as well as your great duty. 1. It is the soundness and honesty of your hearts. 2. It is pleasing to that God on whom only you depend. 3. It is a condition of your receiving the saving benefits of his love. 4. It is an amiable virtue, and maketh you lovely to all sober men: all men love a loving nature, and hate those that hate and hurt their neighbours. Love commandeth love, and hurtfulness is hatefulness. 5. It is a sweet, delightful duty: all love is essentiated with some complacence and delight. 6. It tendeth to the ease and quietness of your lives. What contentions and troubles will love avoid! What peace and pleasure doth it cause in families, neighborhoods, and all societies! And what brawling vexations come where it is wanting! It will make all your neighbours and relations to be a comfort and delight to you, which would be a burden and trouble, if love were absent. 7. It maketh all other men's felicity and comforts to be yours. If you love them as yourselves, their riches, their health, their honours, their lordships, their kingdom is, yea, more, their knowledge, and learning, and grace, and happiness, are partly to you as your own: as the comforts of wife and children, and your dearest friends, are; and as our love to Christ, and the blessed angels and saints in heaven, do make their joys to be partly ours. How excellent, and easy, and honest a way is this, of making all the world your own, and receiving that benefit and pleasure from all things both in heaven and earth, which no distance, no malice of enemies can deny you! If those whom you truly love have it, you have it. Why then do you complain that you have no more health, or wealth, or honour, or that others are preferred before you? Love your neighbour as yourselves, and then you will be comforted in his health, his wealth, and his preferment,

and say, Those have it whom I love as myself, and therefore it is to me as mine own. When you see your neighbour's houses, pastures, corn, and cattle, love will make it as good and pleasant to you as if it were your own. Why else do you rejoice in the portions and estates of your children as if it were your own? The covetous man saith, Oh how glad should I be if this house, this land, this corn were mine: but love will make you say, It is all to me as mine own. What a sure and cheap way is this of making all the world your own! Oh what a mercy doth God bestow on his servants' souls, in the day that he sanctifieth them with unfeigned love! How much doth he give us in that one grace! And oh what a world of blessing and comforts do the ungodly, the malicious, the selfish and the censorious east away, when they cast away or quench the love of their neighbours; and what abundance of calamity do they bring upon themselves! In this one summary instance we may see, how much religion and obedience to God doth tend to our own felicity and delight; and how easy a work it would be, if a wicked heart did not make it difficult! And how great a plague sin is unto the sinner; and how sore a punishment of itself! And by this you may see, what it is that all fallings-out, divisions, and contentions tend to; and all temptations to the abatement of our love; and who it is that is the greater loser by it, when love to our neighbour is lost; and that backbiters and censurers who speak ill of others, come to us as the greatest enemies and thieves, to rob us of our chiefest jewel and greatest comfort in this world; and accordingly should they be entertained.