

PROFITLESS AND PROFITABLE SERVICE

"Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." – 1 Corinthians 13:3.

THE Apostle has been discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 12 he has shown that the Lord gave one or more miraculous gifts to each one of the early Church who accepted the Gospel Message and became a follower of Christ. These gifts were for two purposes; for the benefit of the person himself, and also for a testimony to outsiders. The Gospel Message was new, and some effective and convincing methods were necessary to the starting of the infant Church. After pointing out these various gifts and intimating that the gift of public teaching, oratory, was the most valuable, St. Paul says, "And yet I show unto you a more excellent way." He then assures them that the fruits of the Spirit are far more important; and that Love is the most valuable fruit, without which all gifts, all zeal, would be valueless.

There are Christian people today who greatly lament that the Church of our time does not have the gifts possessed by the early Church. They feel sure that the absence of these gifts of the Spirit at present denotes a great lack of faith and faithfulness among God's people. But these seem not to have noticed that the Apostle Paul assured the Church of his day that these gifts would pass away. Hear him: "Love never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge [miraculous knowledge or ability to understand], it shall vanish away....And now *abideth* faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (Vs. 8,13.) We see that these miraculous gifts passed away gradually. They were conferred only by the Apostles, and hence after the death of the Apostles and of those upon whom the Apostles had laid their hands in conferring the gifts, no others

could receive them. The possession of one or more of these gifts, however, did not signify acceptance in the Kingdom of Heaven. A man might have some of those miraculous gifts at that time, and still be a castaway.

To whatever extent the Christian cultivates faith, hope, and love, to that extent he is cultivating that which will be eternal. Among these three Love stands first. There is an important sense in which Faith will fail; for when Faith shall be swallowed up in sight, there will not be the need of its exercise that now exists. There is also an important sense in which Hope will cease. For when that which is perfect shall have come, when Hope is lost in full fruition, we shall not need to hope as now. As St. Paul says, "For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" We shall continue to have hope in that we shall always be looking forward to glories to come; and we shall exercise Faith in that we shall never lose confidence in the Lord and His goodness and faithfulness or in one another; but Faith and Hope will not be necessary in the same sense as now. Love, however, will never fail in any sense or degree, but will only enlarge and deepen. "Love never faileth"; it is a characteristic of God Himself, and every perfect being will be an embodiment of this glorious quality. Those possessing the Divine nature will have it to the fullest degree, in its highest attainment.

It is in connection with this contrast between the gifts and fruits of the Spirit that the Apostle uses the language of the text under consideration. Who would give all his goods to feed the poor but from love? We reply, There might be less worthy motives for so doing, as the Apostle intimates. If there be no love, it profiteth nothing. If there be much love, it profiteth much. If there be a little love, it profiteth a little. We believe that the most of those who give to the poor have some love. We believe that many of the benefactions of today are prompted by love. To whatever extent an act of benevolence is thus prompted it will bring a blessing. To

whatever extent it is prompted by selfishness and a desire for vainglory it will bring no blessing. This is true either of the Church or of the world.

The giving of the goods to feed the poor might be done with a view to popularity or to selfish advancement. The Pharisees made a great show of their holiness; but love was not the mainspring of their actions. Our Lord said that they had their reward – which was the praise of men. If a politician running for an office were to give his goods to feed the poor and those poor voted for him at the polls, he would have his reward. Why should he have two rewards? He got his votes, and that was his **[R5786 : page 314]** object in his distributions. But the reward which the Lord gives is both a present and a future one.

As to private charities, there are public provisions made today which to a large extent make private donations to the poor unnecessary and often unwise. But there is another way to feed the poor which is still more important. We may feed the spiritually hungry, and may assist in clothing the spiritually naked. So we may spend our money and give our goods to feed the poor in the very best way possible, though the feeding and the **[R5787 : page 314]** clothing of the body may not be ignored when necessary. But even this spiritual feeding and clothing would not be acceptable to the Lord unless we do it from genuine love for Him and His and all men. To whatever extent any Christian gives to the Lord's Cause for outward show or because he thinks it may be expected of him, or from any motive save that of love for the Lord, to that extent he would receive no reward. If it is done from love it will be rewarded in Heaven; and it "profiteth" also in his character development for the Kingdom.

