

## *Holy Living*

### Of Charity, or the Love of God.

Love is the greatest thing that God can give us; for himself is love; and it is the greatest thing we can give to God; for it will also give ourselves and carry with it all that is ours. The apostle calls it the band of perfection; it is the old, and it is the new, and it is the great commandment, and it is all the commandments; for it is the fulfilling of the law. It does the work of all other graces without any instrument but its own immediate virtue. For as the love to sin makes a man sin against all his own reason, and all the discourses of wisdom, and all the advices of his friends, and without temptation, and without opportunity, so does the love of God; it makes a man chaste without the laborious arts of fasting and exterior disciplines, temperate in the midst of feasts, and is active enough to choose it without any intermedial appetites, and reaches at glory through the very heart of grace without any other arms but those of love. It is a grace that loves God for himself, and our neighbours for God. The consideration of God's goodness and bounty, the experience of those profitable and excellent emanations from him, may be, and most commonly are, the first motive of our love; but when we are once entered, and have tasted the goodness of God, we love the spring for its own excellency, passing from passion to reason, from thanking to adoring, from sense to spirit, from considering ourselves to an union with God: and this is the image and little representation of heaven; it is beatitude in picture, or rather the infancy and beginnings of glory.

We need no incentives by way of special enumeration to move us to the love of God, for we cannot love anything for any reason real or imaginary, but that excellence is infinitely more eminent in God. There can but two things create love — perfection and usefulness: to which answer on our part, 1. Admiration; and 2. Desire; and both these are centered in love. For the entertainment of the first, there is in God an infinite nature, immensity or vastness without extension or limit, immutability, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, dominion, providence, bounty, mercy, justice, perfection in himself, and the end to which all things and all actions must be directed, and will, at last, arrive. The consideration of which may be heightened, if we consider our distance from all these glories, our smallness and limited nature, our nothing, our inconstancy, our age like a span, our weakness and ignorance, our poverty, our inadvertency and inconsideration, our disabilities and disaffections to do good, our harsh natures and unmerciful inclinations, our universal iniquity, and our necessities and dependencies, not only on God originally and essentially, but even our need of the meanest of God's creatures, and our being obnoxious to the weakest and most contemptible. But for the entertainment of the second, we may consider that in him is a torrent of pleasure for the voluptuous; he is the fountain of honour for the ambitious; an inexhaustible treasure for the covetous. Our vices are in love with fantastic pleasures and images of perfection, which are truly and really to be found nowhere but in God. And therefore our virtues have such proper objects that it is but reasonable they should all turn into love; for certain it is that this love will turn all into virtue. For in the scrutinies for righteousness and judgment, when it is inquired whether such a person be a good man or no, the meaning is not, What does he believe? or what does he hope? but what he loves.