

CHARITY

A SERMON

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“Charity (love) never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:8

WE are all poor creatures, and it is of the Lord's mercies, whether we know it or not, that we are not consumed. It is written that “He that has not showed mercy shall have judgment without mercy,” and “Mercy rejoices against judgment.” First, a definition of what we are to understand by this charity or love. First, it is called the love of God, and that love never fails, and that therefore, this text belongs to those who have in their hearts the love of God. It is also called the love of Christ, and that does not fail; it is also called the love of the Spirit, and that does not fail; it is also called the love of the truth, and that does not fail; it is also called the love of God's house “I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells.” The charity, therefore, spoken of in this chapter is nothing more and nothing less than the love of the blessed God, and our text is one of its most delightful representations.

I notice then, first, *the revelation of this charity or love in the Savior*; second, *its revelation in the saints*; and third, *its revelation in the promise of God*.

First, then, *its revelation in the Savior*. I will just run through its qualities, to remind you how he answers to them all, and the character in which every “charity suffers long.” And did not the Savior suffer long? He suffered all his life time, and there were not any sufferings to which he was subjected that could cause him to fail; he did not fail, through any of his suffering. Therefore, he says to his church, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which has a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” So that the Savior infallibly suffered or was infallible through all his sufferings; and his love to God and man was just as great at the end of his sufferings as it was at the beginning of them. So, we see this, then, exemplified in him, that he suffered long and suffered completely. His life was one whole life of suffering. And I may just say a word to you that are Christians here upon this matter, now, what have you to live for? Why, nothing worth comparing for; there is not a single thing under heaven worth living for, in comparison of the love of God, the mercy and the glory of God. Confine your minds to things within the range of mortal life, how poor, how mean, how corrupt, how perishing, how uncertain! Man has but few days and full of trouble. But he who sees in Christ,

infallible love, and sees here that the Savior has suffered all our sins away, and has suffered all God's wrath away, such a one will say, Be this my hope, be this my prospect; let me look beyond the regions at mortality into that that will answer all the desires and capacities of my soul. "Charity suffers long and is kind." And does not the Savior answer to this? Can we find in all his life one act of unkindness towards his disciples? How kind he was to everyone that had the least grain of faith in him that had the least attachment to him! How kind he was! And he is just the same now. He did not fail, therefore, in his sufferings, and he did not fail in his kindness. It "envies not." And did the Savior ever envy any one? No no; he knew he was heir of all things; he knew he could not be greater than he should be; he knew he had not a rival; he knew there was not his equal, except God himself, therefore he envied not. He saw all the splendors of this world, but he envied no man his riches. He envied no man his honors. He envied no man his good name. They were welcome to all; he stood free from envy. "Vaunts not itself." And so, the Savior for the word "vaunt" means "to make a vain display," the Savior did not make a vain display. He healed the leper, "Go to the priest." He healed another, "See you tell no man of it." I have not healed you to make a display. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets." No vain display; he disdained all such means for the carrying on of his cause. Wherever you see much display, it is always a sign that there is no vitality. See what a display the ceremonial law was, what an exhibition of finery! But then it was only a shadow, and it is gone. See what a harlot display of doggery Popery is, but there is nothing in that but hell, and death, and eternal damnation; and so, of other systems as well. Not so here; in the gospel there is simplicity, great simplicity, but at the same time what sublimity, what majesty. The inward is everything. If the heart is right with God, the conscience right with God, the soul reconciled to God, it matters not if you are lying at the rich man's gate, as was Lazarus, full of sores; you will not lie there long; and if you are driven into dens and caves of the earth for the truth's sake, you will not be there long. How little in reality do externals concern us? "Vaunts not itself." And then it is added, "Is not puffed up." No. What a wonderful thing it was for the Savior to hold that position, yet not a particle of pride could get into his heart! It did not matter who the person was, whether it was Zacchaeus the publican, or whether it was Magdalene, or the sinner in Simon's house; did not matter who it was, if they sought mercy, he was not puffed up. He did not say, it would be very humiliating for me to take any notice of you. No, bless his dear name, he was meek and lowly in heart. But his character is so self-evident that I need not enlarge upon this point. "Does not behave itself unseemly." Oh, how hard the adversary tried, in a great variety of ways, to entangle him in politics, or in religion, or in social affairs, something or another; but his behavior on all occasions was so full of self-possession, so dignified, and so noble, that his very adversaries were occasionally struck with admiration, and said, "Never man spoke like this man." No; they could not under any circumstance whatever get hold of him. "Doth not behave itself unseemly." "Seeks not her own." Nor did Jesus. Did he live for his own ease? No, but for your ease. Did he die for himself? No, but for you. Did he seek his own applause or comfort? No; gave himself up entirely to God; he loved us and gave himself for us. He sought not his own ease. And I have sometimes thought we may say, Wonder, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth that this wondrous Person should, in the very depths of his sufferings, have such self-possession as to exercise saving pity, saving charity, saving love, and saving mercy, towards the thief that cried, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Here you will see that though the Savior went into depths where was the noise of God's waterspouts, where all the waves and billows of God's wrath rolled over him, yet he swallowed the whole up, dropped this living promise into the soul of the dying thief "This day shall you be in paradise with me!" "Seeks not her own." "Is not easily provoked." Nor could the Savior be. He was never once really

angry with his disciples; he kindly reproved them now and then, but he bore what no other could bear; and so is the truth now. "Think no evil." What shall I say to this? I know some read it, "imputes no evil;" very well, we will have it both ways. He imputes no evil to his people. Satan is very fond of imputing evil to them, and they more willingly impute evil to themselves and sometimes they are very kind to impute evil to each other, but he imputes no evil; no, by his achievement the church was to be free from evil; so, he held them, so he holds them, and so he will hold them. Or let us take the present reading, "thinking no evil." There's a wretch you are, and yet he never had one evil thought of you, never; all he has thought of is loving you, and choosing you, and putting your sins away, and justifying you, calling you, keeping you as the apple of his eye, and leading you along, and feeding you, and sustaining you; and when you come to die, he won't let you die alone, he will be there to take your tabernacle down; he will make you so to die as one of our members died a few days ago, whom I shall have to refer to this evening, as happy as he was when he died. "Thinks no evil;" that is what we are, evil; but not an evil thought no; "thinks no evil." "I know the thoughts I think towards you, thoughts of piece, and not of evil." Say you, this is very encouraging, if it were for me. I shall have to put you to the test presently. "Thinks no evil." God never had an evil thought of his people yet; Christ never had an evil thought of them; the Holy Spirit never had an evil thought of them. "Love covers the multitude of sins." Do you not read that love covers all sins? Did you not read that he puts them into such a position that there is no evil? He has taken it away; does not think evil of you. What a God is our God! How feeble my poor whispers are of his loving-kindness and mercy in comparison of what it is. Now Jesus Christ thinks no evil; he did not then, and he does not think any now. "Rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth." Iniquity here has special reference to that stay of iniquity which has been set at work ever since the foundation of the world, to oppose, and misrepresent, and persecute the church of God. Did Christ rejoice in that? Did he say to the Pharisees, well, gentlemen, you are all a very learned, respectable body of men: you are the chief men of the day, and I ought to rejoice in your prosperity, I ought to glory in your broad phylacteries, I ought to be delighted with your formalities. But no; he denounced the whole, as you well know, and he rejoiced in the truth. And what was the truth he rejoiced in? The truth of God's good will, sir. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." My meat is to confirm the covenant that is ordered in all things and sure. He rejoiced not, therefore, in the devil's religion, but he rejoiced in God's religion. And though the devil wanted him to join his church, Give you all the kingdoms of this world, don't know what I will give you, if you will join my church, come to worship me; but no, bless his holy name, he knew all things, and therefore could not be deluded. "Bears all things;" which he did. Why, says the devil, I don't know, when we come to get him to Jerusalem, and infect every possible indignity upon him, I think he will forget himself then. I think he will be provoked then, I think he won't be able to bear all that I shall put upon him without his committing an act of rebellion. But no; he bore the whole of it, and so bore it that the governors, even heathen and Jewish governors, were astonished at his self-possession. How beautifully does he illustrate the truth concerning himself that "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, he opened not his mouth?" You cannot bear much without grumbling. Why, sometimes when I have spoken very boldly, and sometimes rather stormy perhaps, why, some of you have misunderstood me, and kicked, and some have gone away, and pretended they have gone away because I have offended them; but I have my thoughts about it. No, the creature can bear but very little without murmuring or grumbling. But the dear Savior bare all things. See him over night before the high priest; see him the next morning brought before the priest again; see him hurried off to Pilate; see him hurried off from Pilate to Herod, and set at naught there; see him hurried back to the priest,

see him travelling to the cross; see him on the cross; see the insults offered there; see the majesty, see the dignity; nothing could move him; at last, he said, "It is finished!" Here was the love that bare all things. "Behold the Lamb of God that takes," or, the better rendering, "Behold the Lamb of God that bears, "Behold the Lamb of God that bears away the sin of the world." Oh, if I am nothing but sin, if I am nothing but guilt, if I am nothing but corruption, if I have but a grain of faith in this Savior, that unites me to the love that swallows up all my woe, and will bring me triumphant into possession of that kingdom wherein the song is that that suits every convinced sinner; "Unto him that loved us" here is the charity "and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory for ever and ever." "Bears all things; believes all things;" that is, all things that are true. You could not get the Savior to disbelieve one part of God's truth. Poor Peter, in false charity, tried to move him from it, "Lord, this shall not be." Peter, you don't understand the 53rd chapter of Isaiah; Peter, you don't understand the 22nd Psalm; Peter, you don't understand the 9th of Daniel; Peter, you don't understand the ultimate meaning of the sacrifices of the ceremonial law; Peter, you don't clearly understand, as yet, the end for which I am come into this world. Could not get the Savior to disbelieve one thing predicted of him. "Believes all things;" and believing all things written in the book of the law concerning him, he abodes immovably thereby. "Hopes all things," 22nd Psalm shows that from his very infancy he hoped; never get him to despair, no, never find him speaking in despairing language. He had no doubts and fears, no; he did not look at the leper, and say, I do not know, I am half afraid. He did not look at the woman who had been afflicted for twelve years, spent all her living, and got rather worse than better, and say, I do not know, this is very bad. He did not come to the grave, and say, well, can I get Lazarus out of the grave, but hardly sure about it but he hoped with a sure hope, there were no doubts connected with it, there he stood, no despair about him. "Believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things;" so he did, all that which was appointed for him to endure. And this love never fails. So then, here we have all these qualities of the love of God in their perfection; and that must be your life, that must be your hope.

Now, if you have brought your understanding with you this morning, I shall be able to do something with you; but if you have left them somewhere, why, I shall be able to do nothing with you. Now then, let us enter upon this matter, as it applies to the believer, with a clear understanding. What is that charity that never fails in the believer? What is that love? perhaps I had better use that word love here, what is that love in the believer that has all these qualities, and never fails? Now then, listen to me for a moment. I just now said that in the Christian there is the love of God, the love of Christ, the love of the Spirit, the love of the truth, the love of the habitation of God's house, and the love of the brethren, this is nothing else but the same love in different forms.

Now then, the truth of God represents God our Father in the abundance and eternity of his mercy, and in his counsels; and the Christian loves the truth that so represents God and loves God in that representation which the truth gives. The truth represents Christ in his dignity, and in the perfection of his work, and the Christian loves that truth that so represents the Savior and loves the Savior as thus represented by the truth of God. The truth represents the Spirit of God, and the Christian loves the Holy Ghost as represented by the truth of God, as being with us forever, and bearing the several relations described in the word of God. The truth represents the service of God, and the Christian loves the service of God; and the truth represents it not as men make it, but as the truth represents it. The Christian loves the service of God; he loves the truth loves the service of God as represented by the truth. And then the truth represents the people of God as loved, chosen, redeemed,

reconciled to God, and saved; and the Christian loves those people as represented by the truth of God. But you cannot love them, not spiritually so, in any other shape or form whatever. Let me have the Christian as the truth represents him namely, a believer in Christ, reconciled to God by the substitutional work of Christ, and the love of a covenant God, a man that stands out for the truth; let me have the Christian in this form, then I have a Christian love to him.

Now then, let us set out with this idea, that the love here spoken of, in all its qualities, means the love of the truth. I take the word truth because the truth represents everything; represents God the Father, represents the Savior, represents the Holy Ghost, represents the service of God, and represents the people of God, and represents the ultimate glory of God. Now let us take it in this light, and then you will find that the spirit of the Christian answers to all these qualities. In the first place, "Charity suffers long." The Christian for the truth's sake suffers long. Go into the Old Testament, or into the New Testament times; how many thousands that have gone before us have been made acquainted with this very truth! They have suffered long; and had it been their lot to have lived an antediluvian life, they would have gone on suffering to this day rather than give up God's truth. Thus, then, this charity, this love of the truth, suffers long for the truth's sake; must keep it to that. The man that does not know the truth cannot suffer for the truth's sake. Mere professors may be jeered at for their religion, and may suffer, perhaps, some little persecution from the profane world, but they do not suffer for the truth's sake. And hence the apostle gave the Galatians to understand that if they were not suffering for the truth's sake their suffering was in vain. "Have you suffered so many things in vain; if it be yet in vain?" Thus, then, the love of the truth; the Christian suffers long for the truth's sake. Are you prepared for this? Do you feel and see that that gospel truth that represents God in an eternal covenant, do you feel that you are prepared, as far as your feelings are concerned, that is, grace enabling you, to suffer anything and everything rather than give up that truth? Then you possess this charity that is, this love; and if you possess this love, then you are not as sounding brass, but a living soul. You are not a tinkling cymbal, but a praying man; your knowledge is not merely theoretical, but vital; your faith is not merely intellectual, but divine; and your zeal is of the right kind, because it is a zeal for God's eternal truth. But we will go on. "And is kind." Kind to God's truth, and to those that love it. Yes, I have never been able, since I have known the Lord, to have an unkind feeling toward Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant. I have not had an unkind feeling toward his truth. I have had a great many unkind feelings in the flesh toward some of his dealings with me in providence; but then we must keep to the spirit here, not the flesh. The Christian is kind to the truth. Ah, he says, I love the truth; cannot hate that; cannot be unkind to it; I could not dislike it, could not slight it, could not make light of it. Kindly feeling. And so, when you meet with the truth, you know what I am going to say, at least, you will know it when I say it that is the truth, when you meet with the truth, when you meet with the truth in a man, that is, experimentally that the man has really some experience of it, what a kindly feeling it gives you toward him! makes you feel kindly toward him directly; yes, does away with unkindness, overcomes ten thousand prejudices, and unites you to that man's soul in spite of all that might stand in the way, just as the Lord loved us,

"Saw us ruined in the fall,
Yet loved us not withstanding all."

"Envy's not." Who is the Christian to envy? Envy! Says the Christian; why, I haven't my superior. I stand upon a level with all Christians; I stand above angels; I am the heir of God, and a joint-heir

with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is mine, the promises of the gospel are mine; life is mine, and heaven is mine, and God is mine. Whom have I to envy? "Envy's not." If I am God's, whom have I to envy? Cannot be better off than I am; a son of God, king and priest to God; nothing to do but to live a little while, and then go to heaven; nothing to do but to be happy to eternity, possess the kingdom, a scepter, a crown, a robe of immortality, and that divine sociality that shall fill the soul with a fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore; no more sorrow, no more tears, no more pain. Whom have I to envy? No one. "And vaunts not itself." No; I want to make no vain display. This

"Love keep's me low at Jesus feet,
Yet lifts me high to honors great.

"Vaunts not itself." The man that has this love, he feels he is nothing, he sees he is nothing loathes himself in his own sight and is clothed with humility. "Is not puffed up." But he is built up. The Christian is built up. Yes. As a Pharisaic old woman said to me not quite fifty years ago, "Ah, you'll come down by-and-bye; you have been brought into the enjoyment of the gospel, and you are got up into these eternal truths, but you'll come down by-and-bye; you will be brought down low enough before you die; you are puffed up a bit." I never liked that old woman after that; I do not think I saw her more than two or three times after that, and did not want to see her again, unless the grace of God altered her, for she mistook me altogether; I was not puffed up, I was built up, and there I have been ever since. I was on the rock then, and I am on the rock now; I stood by faith then, and I stand by faith now; I was not puffed up; I was built up then, and I am built up now. So then, where this love is, the man is not puffed up, as though what he possessed he had not received; no, the more he has a sight and sense of what he is, the humbler will he be. "Does not behave itself unseemly." Bring the Christian to the truth and see how seemly he deals with that; put him right in a moment. He may be, and is, unseemly in some other respects; but bring him to the truth of God, he is down, as it were, directly, submits directly. Well, now, Job, you are talking in a very unseemly sort of way, very angry sort of way. I am, to those three friends of mine; such friends as they are. And they could not silence him. Why, Job said, "You are forgers of lies," Now, Job, if I had said that I do not know what people would have said. "You are all physicians of no value; I am not inferior to you." No. But you do not always behave as you ought to do, Job. No; but stop. Presently when the master comes, when the Lord comes, when he comes in, oh, how seemly Job becomes then, how silent, how heart-broken, how heart-melted, how humbled down! "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Oh, how seemly he then behaved! And when his captivity was turned, he prayed for his friends, how seemly was that! And glorified God for what the Lord had done for him. Now, then, if you take this, that the Christian is all this in his love to the truth and his decision for the truth; but if you take the Christian after the flesh, and try to make the old Adam a new Adam, you may depend upon it you will miserably fail in attempting to make the Ethiopian white, or to get rid of the spots of the leopard. "Seeks not her own;" that is, not her own only-most unselfish. Why, a minister prays, and labors and toils, and how infinitely welcome is every soul to his services! And the more that are brought into the same things, the more the minister rejoices. And so, the Christian will say. What is going on at our place? Are there souls from time to time quickened? Are the saints from time to time refreshed? Is the Lord of hosts with us? Is the Lord with our minister? For we are not selfish; we do not want to seek merely our own, we want to seek the good of others, because herein is our God glorified; to seek the extension of his kingdom, the furtherance of his truth, the good of souls, and hereby the glory of his name. So, then, if you possess this real

love to the truth, you will seek your own, it is true, but not in a selfish way, to the exclusion of others. And what an honorable thing it is to be truly and really concerned for the welfare of others! "Is not easily provoked." Well, now, what will you do with this? Oh, as easy as possible. Why, you could no more so provoke me as to make me hate the truth than you could turn the moon into a green cheese. I do not know what else to say just at the present moment. Ah, say you, that is how you get out of it, is it, is it? Yes of course it is; I do not want to get out of it in any other way. Job was so provoked that he cursed the day of his birth; but Job proved the devil to be a liar. The devil said, "He will cure you;" no, Job would not do that, could not be provoked to do that. Mere professors, stony ground and wayside hearers, are easily provoked to hate the truth, and those who love it, and especially those who preach it; but the Christian cannot be so provoked as to hate it. "Not easily provoked;" not provoked at all, cannot be. Why, say you, you are making the Christian out to be a fine character. Of course, he is; only the world does not see it; it knows us not, because it knew him not. They judge after the flesh we after the Spirit; he that is spiritual judges all things, but he himself is judged of no man. Some of you may not like this, perhaps, but may God open your eyes to see that while Jesus Christ answers directly, and properly, and perfectly, without exception, to the description here given, that the Christian also, in his love to the truth (keep up that idea), answers to all these qualities as well. "Thinks no evil." Why, if the Christian has an evil thought of the truth, he hates that evil thought. I do not believe there is a Christian under the canopy of heaven that with the consent of his mind would have an evil thought concerning God's truth. Mind, we have in the flesh evil thoughts concerning his truth. For instance, election, hard doctrine: suppose some of my children should be left out, suppose my parents should be left out, not chosen! Very hard doctrine, that election. But then that is of the flesh; the Christian does not consent to that; and therefore, it is no more the Christian that does it, it is sin not grace that thinks evil of God's truth, but the sin that dwells in him. The Christian after the Spirit does not think evil of the truth, no, he thinks so highly of the truth that he says, "My meditation upon it is sweet;" it is above everything. I have sometimes said, and I say it now, that Christ's prophetic character, of all his official characters, was the highest character he bore. It was above his priesthood, above his kingship, above his matrimonial relation, above his suretyship responsibility: truth stood above every character he bore; it was the highest character. Say you, I do not see that. Well, do see it, then. His priesthood did not govern the truth, but the truth governed, but the truth regulates that; His matrimonial relation to his people does not set truth aside, but the truth guides that, regulates and governs that. His suretyship responsibility does not overrule the truth, but the truth overrules that. God is a God of eternal truth. And thus, then, the Christian after the Spirit thinks no evil of God's truth. "Rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth." Zephaniah said that "the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity;" Ah, say you, that is in their Covenant Head, that Head as their representative. That is true; but we will come closer than that. The 35th of Isaiah says that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein;" and the meaning is that the Christian shall be so completely delivered from error, he shall not advocate one iniquitous doctrine, he shall have done with the mystery of iniquity, and find his present and eternal all in the mystery of godliness. Hence the two are set here in contrast for the purpose of impressing our minds with the character of them both. "But rejoices in the truth;" and so the Christian does, with all his heart, with all his might, with all his soul, with all his strength, with all his affection: there is nothing that the Christian so delights in as he does in God's sworn truth; that sworn truth representing the Eternal Three, and everything we need for time and eternity. I could talk for three hours upon that one sentence, "rejoices in the truth," because it delights my soul, rejoices my soul, girdles my soul, everything, from first to last. Mortal life is a card house, a cobweb, a passing nothing, in

comparison of the substantial realities of God's infallible truth. "Bears all things;" so the Christian will, for the sake of the truth. "Believes all things" that the truth says; "hopes all things" that the truth sets forth; "endures all things" for the truth's sake; and so, the love never fails. Thus, then, Jesus Christ did not fail, and we have that love to the truth in God the Father, and to God the Father are represented by that truth; that love to Christ by which the truth represents him; and to the truth as it represents the Holy Spirit, and to the Holy Spirit as represented by that truth; and to the service of God as represented by the truth of God; and to the people of God as they stand by the truth of God, and this never fails. Why, if I should live fifty years longer, I believe I should have more love to the truth than I have now. Fail, fail! Why, say you, how is it that you do not fail? Why, because Jesus Christ did not fail, and because God does not fail. Here, then, is the love of Christ that did not fail, and here is that love in the Christian that does not fail to keep the Christian in a lifetime of decision for God's blessed truth.

Now the last point, just a word upon it; we see this infallible love also *in the promise of God*. There are four reasons why the promise of God cannot fail. First, because the promise is unconditional: "In blessing I will bless; in multiplying I will multiply." That is one reason it cannot fail. I speak now not of old covenant promises, which are conditional, but of new-covenant promises, that are unconditional; and if the promise fails, it must be by the Lord Himself failing; I say it in reverence and love to his name. There is nothing dependent on the creature. No; "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power." The second reason the promise cannot fail is because it is confirmed by the work of Christ. Shall I, if our eight pages will admit it, just throw in here what I said on Wednesday evening? You know I do not see some of you on Wednesday evening; you cannot get here, you, are so far off, and you are so busy, yes. Now the four points which I just throw in here, to show the yea and amen character of the promise: 1st chapter of 2nd Corinthians, the apostle declares that he himself was not yea and nay; always had the same end in view the gospel of Christ, the good of men, the glory of God, never contradicted himself, did not preach two gospels. Second, "Our word toward you was not yea and nay;" did not preach a yea and nay gospel. Third, the Son of God is not yea and nay. Fourth, the promise of God is not yea and nay. All are yea and amen. Here is a yea and amen apostle; here is a yea and amen gospel; here is a yea and amen Jesus Christ; and a yea and amen promise. So, charity never fails; the love of God, as shown in his promise, can never fail; always come to pass, because it is sealed by what the Savior has done. The third reason the promise cannot fail, is the immutability of the blessed God.