

## 9. Charity

### 1. What does the word charity mean to you?

'Charity' now means simply what used to be called 'alms' — that is, giving to the poor. Originally it had a much wider meaning. Charity means 'Love, in the Christian sense'. But Love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but [reflected in your actions].

I pointed out in the chapter on Forgiveness that our love for ourselves does not mean that we like ourselves. It means that we wish our own good (care about ourselves and others). In the same way Christian Love (or Charity) for our neighbors is quite a different thing from liking [them] or [having affection for them]. We 'like' or are 'fond of' some people, and not of others. It is important to understand that this...is neither a sin nor a virtue, any more than your likes and dislikes in food are a sin or a virtue. It is just a fact. But, of course, what we do about [our likes and dislikes for people] is either sinful or virtuous.

### 2. "What we do" means how we act. How can how we act towards those we like or dislike be sinful or virtuous (good)?

[When we like a person] it makes it easier to be 'charitable' (kind, giving) towards them. [Therefore we try]...to 'like' people as much as we can...not because [liking them]...is the virtue of charity, but because it helps. On the other hand, it is also necessary to keep a very sharp lookout [for liking one person can make] us uncharitable, or even unfair, to someone else.

### 3. How might our like for someone (a friend, family member, etc.) cause us to be uncharitable (not giving/ unkind) to others?

[It] would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is..to manufacture affectionate feelings ("like" for someone). Some people are 'cold' by nature; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is a sin; and it does [not stop them from] learning charity. Do not waste time [asking] whether you 'love' (feeling) your neighbor; act as if you did.

4. Why might it be easier to simply act as if you love someone instead of asking yourself whether you like them or not?

If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less. There is, indeed, one exception. If you do him a good turn...to show him what a fine forgiving [person] you are, and to put him in your debt, and then sit down to wait for his [thanks], you will probably be disappointed. (People are not fools: they have a very quick eye for anything like [this].)

5. If you act kind towards someone to expect thanks and the debt of that person, is that really charity?

This same spiritual law works terribly in the opposite direction. The Germans, perhaps, at first ill-treated the Jews because they hated them: afterwards they hated them much more because they had ill-treated them. The more cruel you are, the more you will hate; and the more you hate, the more cruel you will become — and so on in a vicious circle for ever.

6. Do you believe what C. S. Lewis is trying to say in this last paragraph: that if we act poorly towards someone we do not like, that it will make it easier to dislike them and act even worse towards them in the future?