

John Winthrop (1588 - 1649)

from: A Model of Christian Charity

"The City upon the Hill."

† The Lawe of Grace or the Gospell hath some difference from the former as in these respects: first the lawe of nature was given to man in the estate of innocency; this of the gospell in the estate of regeneracy:⁸ 2ly, the former propounds one man to another, as the same flesh and Image of God, this as a brother in Christ also, and in the Communion of the same spirit and soe teacheth us to put a difference betwene Christians and others. Do good to all especially to the household of faith; upon this ground the Israelites were to put a difference betwene the brethren of such as were strangers though not of the Canaanites;⁹ 3ly, The Lawe of nature could give noe rules for dealing with enemies for all are to be considered as friends in the estate of innocency, but the Gospell commaunds love to an enemy. Proove. If thine Enemy hunger feede him; Love your Enemies, doe good to them that hate you (Math. 5. 44).

⁸ Mankind is here held to have fallen to an unregenerate state after Adam and Eve sinned. Christ redeemed mankind through his suffering and crucifixion, and thereafter those who believe in him are saved or regenerate.

⁹ Those who lived in the Promised Land, Canaan.

This Lawe of the Gospell propoundes likewise a difference of seasons and occasions; there is a time when a christian must sell all and give to the poore as they did in the Apostles times.¹⁰ There is a tyme also when a christian (though they give not all yet) must give beyond their ability, as they of Macedonia. Cor. 2. 6.¹¹ Likewise community of perills calls for extraordinary liberality and soe doth Community in some speciall service for the Church. Lastly, when there is noe other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved in this distress, wee must help him beyond our ability, rather than tempt God, in putting him upon help by miraculous or extraordinary means. . . .

It rests now to make some application of this discourse by the present design which gave the occasion of writing of it. Herein are 4 things to be propounded: first the persons, 2ly, the worke, 3ly, the end, 4ly the means.

1. For the persons, wee are a Company professing our selves fellow members of Christ, In which respect only though wee were absent from each other many miles, and had our employments as far distant, yet wee ought to account our selves knit together by this bond of love, and live in the exercise of it, if wee would have comforte of our being in Christ; this was notorious in the practise of the Christians in former times, as is testified of the Waldenses¹² from the mouth of one of the adversaries Aeneas Sylvius, "mutuo penè antequam norint, they use to love any of their owne religion even before they were acquainted with them.

2ly. for the worke wee have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a speciall overruling providence, and a more then an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seeke out a place of Colhabitation and Consortship under a due forme of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall. In such cases as this the care of the public must overway all private respects, by which not only conscience, but meeer Civill pollicy doth binde us; for it is a true rule that particuler estates cannot subsist in the ruine of the public.

3ly. The end is to improve our lives to doe more service to the Lord the comforte and encrease of the body of christe whereof wee are members that our selves and posterity may be the better preserved from the Common corruptions of this evil world to serve the Lord and worke out our Salvation under the power and purity of his holy Ordinance.

4ly for the means whereby this must be effected, they are 2fold: a Conformity with the worke and end wee aime at. These wee see are extraordinary, therefore wee must not content our selves with usuall ordinary means whatsoever wee did or ought to have done when wee lived in England, the same must wee do and more also where wee goe; That which the most in their Churches maintain as a truth in profession only, wee must bring into familiar and constant practise, as in this duty of love wee must love brotherly without dissimulation, wee must love one another with a pure hearte fervently, wee must beare one anothers burthens, wee must not looke only on our owne things, but also on the things of our brethren; neither must wee think that the lord will beare with such failings at our hands as hee doth from those among whom we have lived, and that for 3 Reasons.

¹⁰ Luke 18:22: "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poore, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

¹¹ Actually 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

¹² Followers of Pater Valdes, who rejected the authority of the pope and taught that the Bible was the sole authority in religion.

¹³ Pope Pius II (1458-1464).

1. In regard of the more neare bond of marriage, betwene him and us, wherein he hath taken us to be his after a most strict and peculiar manner which will make him the more jealous of our love and obedience, soe he tells the people of Israel, you only have I knowne of all the families of the Earth, therefore will I punish you for your Transgressions.

2ly, because the lord will be sanctified in them that come neare him. Wee know that there were many that corrupted the service of the Lord, some setting up Alects before his owne, others offering both strange fire and strange Sacrifices also; yet there came noe fire from heaven, or other sudden Judgement upon them as did upon Nadab and Abihm," who yet wee may thinke did not sinn presumptuously.

3ly When God gives a speciall Commission he lookes to have it strictly observed in every Article; when hee gave Saule a Commission to destroy Amaleck," hee indented with him upon certaine Articles, and because hee failed in one of the least, and that upon a faire pretence, it lost him the kingdom, which should have beene his reward, if hee had observed his Commission: Thus stands the cause betwene God and us, wee are entered into Covenant" with him for this worke, wee have taken out a Commission, the Lord hath given us leave to drawe our owne Articles, wee have professed to enterprise these Actions upon these and these ends, wee have hereupon besought him of favour and blessing: Now if the Lord shall please to heare us, and bring us in peace to the place wee desire, then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission, and will expect a strict performance of the Articles contained in it, but if wee shall neglect the observacion of these Articles which are the ends wee have propounded, and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnall intentions, seeking great things for our selves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrathe against us be revenged of such a perjured people and make us know the price of the breach of such a Covenant.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwacke and to provide for our posterity is to followe the Counsell of Micah," to doe justly, to love mercy, to walke humbly with our God; for this end, wee must be knit together in this worke as one man, wee must entertaine each other in brotherly Affection, wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities for the supply of others necessities, wee must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, wee must delight in each other, make others Conditions our owne, rejoice together, mourn together, labour, and suffer together, allways having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body. Soe shall wee keepe the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as his owne people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, soe that wee shall see much more of his wisdom power goodness and truth than formerly wee have beene acquainted with, wee shall finde that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee

must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill," the eyes of all people are upon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world, wee shall open the mouths of enemies to speake evill of the ways of god and all professors for Gods sake; wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whether wee are going: And to shutt up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses that faithfull servant of the Lord in his last farewell to Israel (Deut. 30):" Beloved there is now set before us life, and good, death and evill in that wee are Commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another to walk in his ways and to keepe his Commandments and his Ordinance, and his lawes, and the Articles of our Covenant with him that wee may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may blesse us in the land whether wee go to possess it: But if our hartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship other Gods our pleasures, and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, wee shall surely perish out of the good Land whither wee passe over this vast Sea to possess it;

Therefore lett us choose life,¹⁶
that wee, and our Seede,
may live; by obeyeing his
voice, and cleaving to him,
for hee is our life, and
our prosperity.

¹⁶ Matthew 5:14-15: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."
¹⁷ Deuteronomy 30:1-3: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice

according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee."
¹⁸ Deuteronomy 30:9: "... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live..."

¹² See Leviticus 10:1-2.
¹³ In 1 Samuel 15:1-14, God instructed Saul to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions. Because he spared their sheep and oxen, Saul disobeyed God.
¹⁴ A legal contract in which God extends protection to the faithful, who promise to abide by his word.
¹⁵ Micah 6:8: "... and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"