

2. The love of the SON. The love of the dear Lord Jesus has always been a most pleasing theme to the saints of God; upon which they have dwelt with increasing affection, and upon which all the ransomed of the Lord shall dwell, with hearts expanded, and overflowing with love to the exalted Lamb of God, when they shall surround his throne, for ever exempted from all sin, sorrow, coldness, and darkness of heart, to praise him in the full blaze of eternal day!

My brethren, I would now pray in your behalf, as *Paul* prayed for the *Ephesian* church, (O let us all unite in the petition to heaven,) “That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians iii. 17—19.)

And wherein hath the precious Jesus discovered his love for our souls? *First*, in his covenant undertaking. Does he not voluntarily propose to become our surety, and willingly undertake our cause?

Hear his loving language; “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” (Psalm xl. 6—8. Hebrews xviii. 5, &c.)—*Second*,

in his amazing condescension. He leaves the bosom of the Father, the inexpressible joys of heaven, where he was highly exalted as the eternal God, receiving the homage, the worship, and rapturous praises, of the bright inhabitants of the glorious world of bliss—to lay aside his dignity, glory, divine grandeur, and happiness itself!—To veil his divinity in human flesh—to become a man of sorrows, and to be acquainted with grief—to be treated with indignity and contempt by sinful worms, and to be tempted of the Devil!—Thus to exchange the incalculable heights of bliss and happiness, in glory, for the unfathomable depths of sorrow, distress, and ignominy, in this lower world, is love that soars beyond all possible imagination!

Meditate upon this wonderful contrast; and ask, what but love, unparralleled love, could ever excite the Saviour to this wonderful condescension?

But in these, our researches, we are not yet arrived to the summit of his sufferings, nor to the extensiveness of his love. For, *third*, his love is particularly manifested in his agonizing *death*. Here the great love of Christ appears in a most conspicuous light. Here is love unequalled—“Love beyond degree!” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John xv. 13.) But, when we were his most malicious enemies, Christ died for us!

What! love enemies, traitors, the most sinful, and most rebellious; whose demerit cried for Jehovah's vengeance?

Yes, his church was involved in sin and ruin, yet he LOVED the church, and gave himself for it. (Ephesians v. 25.) A sacrifice, a ransom price—hath *purchased* his *church* with his own blood. (Acts xx. 28.) “In his LOVE, and in his pity he redeemed them.” And in accomplishing this everlastingly complete redemption, O what did he endure! Not only the contempt of men, and the temptations of the devil—not only the pains of body, when the thorns pierced his temples, when lashed with the cutting scourges, when the nails tore his tender hands and feet, and the spear entered his loving, bleeding heart!—The sorrows of death not only compassed him, but the pains of hell gat hold upon him. (Psalm xi. 63.) He must endure the wrath of heaven—the Father frowns, and his *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was, as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground!—And O on the accursed tree!—The wrath of men and devils united, and a fierce storm of heaven's tremendous vengeance, were then fully experienced, by the bleeding Lamb of God!

Still his love to his people is immoveable. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”

Who that knows the Saviour, can reflect on this without feeling the warmest emotions of love?

My brethren, if our hearts are not hardened to stone, or frozen to ice, under the influence of the monster *sin*, surely upon these considerations, we must feel an unfeigned love to this loving and altogether lovely Saviour; who hath omnipotently vanquished the powers of darkness, extracted the dreadful sting of the last enemy death, and unbarred the dreary prison of the grave! "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians ii. 15.) "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet;" (Psalm xlvii. 5.) and is highly exalted, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians i. 21.) And having loved his own, he loved them unto the end;—he loves them perpetually, and expects to see his enemies made his footstool, (Hebrews x.) and all the objects of his redeeming love brought home, to those mansions that he is gone to prepare for them.

3. *The love of the Spirit.* It is a most striking proof of the Spirit's personality, that his love is spoken of in contradistinction both to that of the Father, and of the Son: as in Romans xv. 30. "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for *the love of the*

Spirit,"—And he hath in a most gracious and endearing manner, manifested his love :

First, in convincing us of our sin, alarming us of our danger, and converting our souls to God. (Ephesians ii. 4, 5.) *Second*, in taking possession of our hearts. Herein appear the freeness and perpetuity of his love: That he should take up his abode in us, who are in ourselves nothing but sin, is love amazingly free: and there could not, in this respect, be any thing amiable, or inviting in our sin-polluted hearts, to excite such an holy inhabitant there to dwell. Neither did he ever receive an invitation from us, previous to his first gracious visit. We never once desired, or requested the comfortable presence of this celestial visitant; but, on the contrary, did every thing in our power to oppose his Divine operations. But, is it possible for a worm of the earth to withstand Omnipotence? Presumption to suppose! No, we could not, rebellious as we were, withstand his omnipotent influence; no, not for a moment. In his great love, he made us willing in the day of his power.

While I am speaking of the Spirit's operations, and of his dwelling in our hearts, it is very probable that some persons may be condemning me for an *Enthusiast*. But, if this be Enthusiasm, may the Eternal Spirit make us all Enthusiasts! For, *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* (Romans viii. 9.) (And how

awful the consequence of not being Christ's!) And farther, if this be *Enthusiasm*, then Paul was as much of an *Enthusiast* as ever existed; and, even in this case, includes all believers with himself, in this very intelligent and important interrogation: "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLETH IN YOU?*" (1 Corinthians iii. 16.)

And the Spirit not only demonstrates his love in taking possession of, but also in *abiding* in us. The Father sends us his holy Spirit, that he may *abide* with us *for ever*! And this is a convincing proof of his love. For do not we particularly court the company of those whom we dearly love? And do we not wish always to abide with them? But if *our* friends slight us, or treat us with a cold indifference, our love for them daily declines; and instead of desiring, we gradually withdraw from their company. Not so the ever-blessed Spirit. O how transcendently glorious his love herein shines! Though we have grieved him, and slighted his love, still he abides with us, to convince us of our folly, and to restore our wandering feet to the paths of peace!

"Midst all our care, and sin, and woe,
The Spirit will not let us go."

Third, He manifests his love, by revealing pardon and peace to our souls, through the blood

of Christ; and by witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. (Romans viii. 16.)

“ All praise to the Spirit, whose whisper Divine,
Seals mercy, and pardon, and righteousness mine.”

Fourth, By affording us his most gracious assistance in prayer, and in every other act of worship;—“ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans viii. 26.)

Fifth, In *comforting* us. And this he does by teaching us the most comfortable, and instructive lessons of spiritual wisdom; by shewing us the things of Christ, and by a powerful application of the Divine promises to our souls! Herein consists our solid, and substantial comfort.

When our souls are bowed down in us, through the prevalency of indwelling sin; or, under the darkness of unbelief, exposed to the most powerful, and most malicious foes; who, but the gracious Spirit, can administer a cordial of comfort, soothe our sorrows, remove our fears, and restore us to perfect tranquillity of mind? On this account he is emphatically denominated **THE COMFORTER**—*the only real Comforter!* The world may talk of comfort, happiness, and pleasure, as long as

they please; but, while they remain strangers to the ever-blessed Comforter, they never will experience one drop of *real* comfort; for as they are “in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity,” the *gall of bitterness* must, unavoidably, be mingled with the cup of their pretended pleasures!

May we admire, then, the distinguishing love of the Lord, who has taught us willingly to depart *from*, and to look with an holy contempt upon, all those carnal amusements that the world call pleasure, and that we ourselves once delighted in! —That he hath taught us to persue celestial pleasures, and given us to taste that joy which is unspeakable, and full of glory! O how comfortable! to walk in the “green pastures (Psalm xxiii.) of the Gospel, enjoying perfect liberty, uncontrolled by sin and Satan; no more alarmed by the terrifying voice of an accusing conscience, nor by the melancholy apprehension of divine vengeance; but, breathing in celestial air, fanned by the sweet and refreshing zephyrs of redeeming love, charmed by the most melodious sounds of *Praise unto our God*, and gazing, with increasing delight, upon the Sun of Righteousness, shining in all the refulgence of his eternal Glory!

As the Spirit hath thus loved us, and manifested his love, in such a variety of pleasing, and satisfactory instances, what ingratitude it must be in us, to walk contrary to the holy direction which

he has given us in the scriptures! But, alas! such is the base ingratitude of our carnal nature; and will frequently be again! For it is *unavoidable*, only as we are *kept by the power of God*. (1 Peter i. 5.) O may he teach us, then, seriously to attend to that weighty exhortation, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” (Ephesians iv. 30.) If he leave us to ourselves, we feel nothing but ingratitude; with every thing that is carnal and rebellious, for our nature possesses nothing else: but, when he is pleased to shine upon us, and direct our hearts into the Love of God, we cannot but be *grateful* and *obedient*, under a firm persuasion of our interest in that love! If we are firmly persuaded that a friend loves us, we would not wish to do any thing to grieve that friend: how much more, then, will this principle influence our hearts, and govern our actions, under a consideration of the Spirit’s love to our immortal souls! *This, I say then, walk in the Spirit*, (contemplate his amazing love, look to him for assistance, follow his gracious directions,) *and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*. (Galatians v. 16.)

Thus I have concisely stated, and irrefutably proved from the Scriptures, some of the manifestations of the love of the sacred THREE; FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT; the one true and eternal God over all, blessed for ever! And now, by way of conclusion to this part of the subject, shall make the following observations: that if the

Lord hath thus made known his love to your souls,

1. He hath given you everlasting consolation, and good hope; according to the language of inspiration: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father which hath LOVED us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace, comfort your hearts." (2 Thessalonians ii. 16.)

This consolation is derived, from a view of the immutability of Jehovah's gracious counsel and the stability of his covenant and promises; whereby the salvation, and eternal glorification of his people are everlastingly secured. (Hebrews vi. 18, 19.)

And the *Hope* is denominated *good*, because, like precious faith, it is the gift of God; and is well-grounded, having Christ for a *sure* foundation, and is, therefore, an anchor to the soul, both *sure* and stedfast! And also, because it hath *good objects* in view; a complete deliverance from all sin, and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ!

2. You experience his chastisement: "For whom the Lord LOVETH he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;—but, if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons:" for-

mal professors, and not the heaven-born children of God. (Hebrews xii. 6—8.)

3. He giveth you the victory over your spiritual enemies: "We are more than conquerors *through him* that LOVED *us*." (Romans viii. 37.) For thus saith the Lord, "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee, in judgment, thou shalt condemn." (Isaiah liv. 17.) The Lord will manifest his love to his people, even in the face of their enemies; according to his gracious promise, and encouraging declaration: "Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have LOVED thee." These are the promises of EVERLASTING LOVE; which, notwithstanding all our present troubles, and threatening foes, shall be *completely fulfilled*, to our comfort and astonishment, to the confusion of our enemies, and to the eternal glory of DIVINE FAITHFULNESS! (Revelations iii. 9.)

We now proceed to consider,

III. The nature, and properties of the love of God.—And O, how comfortable, for poor lost sinners, as we are, to consider that it is,

In the first place, free and unmerited! There is nothing in us that Jehovah foresaw, sees now, or ever will see, to attract his gracious notice, or,

merit his divine love. You who are acquainted with yourselves, as sinners, will readily acquiesce with me in this sentiment, and confess, to the glory of God, that his love is infinitely free, both in its nature and communications.

In order to express its freeness, and to convey to our minds, in a forcible, and comprehensive manner, its independent, and unmerited nature, it is represented by the singular love of an husband to an *adulterous* wife. Thus the Lord speaks to his revolted Israel, in Hosea iii. 1 : “ Go, yet love a woman (beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress) according to the love of the Lord towards the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.” Is there any thing in the detestable adulteress to attract the love of the deceived, injured, and forsaken husband? No; but, on the contrary, every thing calculated to create in his breast, a most implacable hatred to such a filthy, and degenerate character! We should think him a singular man indeed, possessed of very unusual, and almost immoveable affection, who, in such aggravating circumstances, could yet love that woman! But strange, and singular as this may appear, it bears but a very faint resemblance of the love of God, to those *who look to other gods*—who willingly obey the god of this world, which is the devil:—who are filled with pride, which is an abomination to the Lord; (Proverbs vi. 16, 17.) with *covetousness, which is idolatry*; (Colossians iii. 5.) with open and continual rebellion to the

King of kings, which is as the sin of witchcraft; (1 Samuel xv. 23.) whose very nature is polluted and corrupt—who are earthly, sensual, and devilish! Will any one presume to say, that merit is attached to such? who are guilty of the grossest enormities, and whose hearts are contaminated with every iniquity! Wherewith should they come near the Lord? Or upon what ground expect any favour from him? Whose commands they have violated, whose authority they have trampled under-foot, and with whom they are at the bitterest enmity!

But, while I am giving this sad (though just) description of human nature, I know, poor self-condemned sinner, you readily confess, it is a striking delineation of your miserable state, and rebellious, ungrateful conduct to the Lord! And, under such a conviction, are you earnestly enquiring what you shall do to be saved?

To you I proclaim, with increasing pleasure of soul, the *freeness* of God's love, to the most unworthy sinner.—*But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet SINNERS, Christ died for us!* (Romans v. 8.)

And as unworthy *sinner*s, we are invited to approach this great and precious Saviour! Hear his free invitation, and gracious direction, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us gra-

ciously:" and concerning such as thus approach him, he declares, " I WILL LOVE THEM FREELY." (Hosea xiv. 2—4.)

And as God's love is infinitely free, it must be,

Second, SOVEREIGN LOVE. But, alas! I am touching upon a subject that is become almost obsolete; and that is, to many professors of christianity, unbearable; and to some other, altogether detestable! For men and devils are up in arms against the sovereignty of God.

Poor proud man, not only wants to make *demands* upon the Lord, for his *supposed* merit, but, in his natural and ambitious rebellion, would even *command* the eternal God himself!—Would take away his power of *working all things after the counsel of his own will*. (Ephesians i. 11.) Would usurp the eternal throne, and call the Deity to an account for his sovereign transactions!—Would,

" Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,

" Re-judge his justice, be the GOD of God!"

POPE.

But, whatever man may attempt to do, in his satanic pride, God is a Sovereign still; and his love to his people is the result of his Divine sovereignty. He did not set his love upon them, because they were more excellent than other people—he was under no restraint whatever, but

loved because he would love! As it is written, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, (for ye were the fewest of all people) but because the Lord loved you." (Deuteronomy vii. 7, 8.)

My friends, have we *known and believed the love that God hath to us?*—O let us not attribute any merit, or glory to ourselves, but ascribe all the glory to *sovereign* grace!

"Pause, my soul; adore, and wonder,
Ask, O why such *love to me?*
GRACE hath put me in the number,
Of the Saviour's family!"

And as this love is *sovereign*; as there can be no restraint laid upon the KING OF KINGS; but, as it rests entirely with himself, whether to love or hate; and, as his love flows *freely*, without any motive, attraction, or expectation from us, we are naturally led to enquire, *Who are the objects of his love?* In reply to this enquiry, as authorized by Scripture, I shall venture to appropriate to the DIVINE LOVE, the epithet *distinguishing*. And, O Sirs! Let not the term disgust you; but first enquire, is it *scriptural?* Weigh every sentence that I shall utter, impartially in the balance of the sanctuary, while I take upon me to prove, by biblical expressions, that God's love is,

THIRD, *distinguishing* love. There certainly

is a universality attached to God's love, which is spoken of by Christ himself—"God so loved the WORLD." But is every individual of *Adam's* posterity here intended by the word *world*? No; this word has very seldom such a signification in Scripture. And were that the intention, how violently would this Scripture clash with those, where Jehovah expresses his hatred to certain characters. *Malachi* speaks of a "*People against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.*" (*Malachi* i. 4.) And who are they? Certainly they are a part of *Adam's* fallen progeny. But, you will say, "*He once loved them*"—I would ask, then, how it is that he now *hateth* them, since he hath informed us, that HE CHANGES NOT? (*Malachi* iii. 6.) How is it, that HIS *love* is become *hatred*, with whom there is no variation, nor even the *shadow* of turning! (*James* i. 17.)

God's loving the *world*, then, cannot imply his loving every individual of the human race, without distinction, or discrimination. But it evidently implies the extension of his love to his people, in every *age*, and *nation* of the *world*; which is abundantly confirmed, by a variety of corresponding passages, both in the Old and New Testament. (*Isaiah* xliii. 6, and 1 *John* ii. 2, compared with *John* xi. 52.)

My dear people! read the Bible for yourselves; and hear what the inspired writers say, respect-

ing the objects of God's love. Read Deuteronomy xxxiii. 3. *Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand.*—Those whom the Lord hath loved are in the hand of Christ. And who are they? A people *distinguished* from the rest part of mankind, and, who are particularized in the *tenth* chapter of *John*, under the character of *sheep*, in contradistinction to the wicked, who are characterized *goats*. And what saith the precious Jesus concerning the sheep, which everlasting love put into his hand, to redeem? He speaks with all the dignity, and authority of the Omnipotent, in vindicating their eternal security in him. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. Is not here distinguishing love?”

And doth not the discrimination of Divine love farther appear in conversion work? In calling some by Divine grace, while others, equally as worthy (for we are all unworthy sinners) are left to perish in their sins? I will appeal to you, my Brethren, *who have known and believed the love of God*. Doth not *distinguishing* love shine perspicuously, and refulgently clear, in your regeneration?—When you review the state of the wicked,—when you look around upon your unconverted neighbours, what are your reflections? Can you say, I am more worthy, I have been more obedient than they; and *therefore* the Lord hath taken possession of my soul? Ah! no;—for we are children of wrath *even as others*; conse-

quently you must be led to exclaim, "Why me and not others? How is it, that the Lord should thus love me? For, am I better than they? No, in no wise. I might have been left to have filled up the measure of my iniquity, and to have sunk under the ponderous weight of my guilt, in irrecoverable ruin!—All glory to *distinguishing* love! So eminently displayed in the salvation of the chiefest of sinners." Farther, by the prophet *Malachi*, Jehovah calls upon his people to remember, how peculiarly, and discriminately he has loved them, in these most endearing expressions, and striking interrogations: "I have loved you, saith the Lord: yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." (Malachi i. 2, 3.)

FOURTH,—The love of God is ETERNAL. It never had any commencement—"I have loved thee, saith the Lord, *with an everlasting love.*" And it never will have any change, alteration, addition, diminution, or termination.—"*He rests in his love.*" Eternity itself will not impair it; it is of eternal duration. It must be so; for God, the great UNCHANGEABLE and ETERNAL, himself is LOVE! He loves his people with the same love wherewith he hath loved Christ! And will any person presume to say, that the Father did not love the Son from everlasting! Or, that he will cease to love him! No, that man who should only presume to suppose the possibility of

such a thing, would be very justly charged with the most pitiable irrationality; and even in the supposition, would be guilty of horrid blasphemy! It is a plain and uncontested truth, that the Father's love to the Son is *eternal*. If then we have but one plain text of Scripture to prove, *that the Father loveth his people with the very same love wherewith he loveth the Son*; we shall immediately establish it, as an undeniable fact, that God's love to his people is *eternal* love. Now, have we a Scripture that will fully answer this purpose?—Yes, a most glorious passage, uttered by Christ himself, in his fervent and pathetic addresses to the Father: which you may find in John xvii. 23, 24.—*And hast loved them as thou hast loved me—for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

With this Scripture, we may boldly declare, and defy all the enemies of truth, ever to contradict us in the declaration, that God's love to his people, in Christ Jesus, never had beginning, and shall never never cease!

The love of Jehovah has many other epithets in Scripture, and is beautifully and strikingly represented, as possessing many other very engaging properties, such as *strong*, (Solomon's Song viii.) *great*, (Ephesians ii. 4.) *incomprehensible*, (Ephesians iii. 19.) *inseparable*, &c. (Romans viii. 35—39.) And it is with a degree of reluctance, that I now deny myself the pleasure of enlarging upon

each of them : but in order to avoid a tedious and unpleasant prolixity, I shall conclude ; commending you to the love of God, and beseeching the ever blessed Spirit, to make a powerful, and comfortable APPLICATION of this infinitely important subject, to your immortal souls ! I pray for such a Divine application, under the firmest persuasion, that *Paul* may plant, and *Apollos* water, but God only can give the increase ! To him be glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*