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THE SAINTS KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST'S LOVE

by John Bunyan (1628-1688)

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Editor's Preface

This treatise is one of those ten distinct works that the author had prepared for the press when he was so suddenly summoned to the Celestial City.¹ Well did his friends in the ministry, Ebenezer Chandler and John Wilson, call it “an excellent manuscript, calculated to assist the Christian that would grow in grace, and to win others over to Jesus Christ.”

It was first published with a selection of Bunyan's works in a folio volume² in 1692, about four years after the author's decease. Although it is a treatise exhibiting very deep research and calculated for extensive usefulness, it does not appear ever to have been published as a separate volume. Like all other of his works, it is original; no one before him treated this subject with such profound depth of thought, nor with such clear Christian philosophy.

The revered John Bunyan proves in this, as in all other of his works, that he was a real and not a pretended descendant from the apostles. He breathes their spirit; he knew his Master's work and faithfully discharged His solemn requirements. His object was as pure as it was apparent: to preach not himself, but Christ Jesus his Lord. One desire appears to have influenced him in writing all his works: that of shrinking back and hiding himself behind his Master, while exhibiting the unsearchable, divine, eternal riches of His grace.

This treatise is admirably adapted to warn the thoughtless, break the stony heart, convince the wavering, cherish the young inquirer, strengthen the saint in his pilgrimage and arm him for the good fight of faith, and comfort the dejected, doubting, despairing Christian. It abounds with ardent sympathy for the broken-hearted, a cordial suited to every wounded conscience, while at the same time it thunders in awful judgment upon the impenitent and the hypocritical professor.³ Wonders of grace to God belong, for all these blessings form but a small part of the “unsearchable riches.”

The reader should keep in his recollection that this treatise was originally conceived for the pulpit, and afterwards, probably with great additions, written for the press. This will account for the divisions and sub-divisions, intended to assist a hearer's memory or to enable a ready writer, by taking notes of each part, to digest prayerfully in private what he had heard in the public ministry of the Word—a practice productive of great good to individuals, and by which families may be much profited while conversing upon the truths publicly taught in the church—instead of what Bunyan would have justly called, “frothy conversation” about the dress or appearances of their fellow-worshippers.

This discourse has been published in every edition of the works of our great author, but, most strangely, the references to Scripture were omitted in all the editions since that of 1737. Bunyan's anxiety at every step of this momentous inquiry is to shew a “thus saith the Lord” in proof of every assertion. In this treatise only, there are nearly *four hundred and forty* distinct references to the holy oracles. These are all carefully restored and have been collated with the standard text, for want⁴ of which some imperfections had crept in, even to the old editions. Where the author preferred the Genevan or Puritan version, it is shewn by a note at the foot of the page.

To point out beauties in such a discourse is to point to the whole treatise—it is all admirable. A solemn earnestness is found in every sentence, even where Bunyan modestly differs with many excellent divines when

¹ **Celestial City** – heaven; term used by Bunyan in his masterwork, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

² **folio volume** – the largest regular size of a book, allowing for least folding of paper.

³ **professor** – one who makes a public statement of belief in Christ, but without a new heart and therefore not born again; those who want heaven in the afterlife, but still live like the world in this life.

⁴ **want** – lack.

treating upon the sufferings of the Saviour, between the period of His crucifixion and of His resurrection. This [portion] is worthy of our prayerful consideration, ever keeping in remembrance those deeply impressive, those awfully triumphant, words of our Lord: "It is finished" (Joh 19:30).

The catholic spirit,⁵ which so pervaded the mind of Bunyan, appears conspicuously in this discourse; and whatever bitter controversy this spirit occasioned him, it ought to be impressed upon the heart of every Christian professor. It is a liberality that shines more brightly, as reflected by one whose religious education was drawn solely from the pure fountain of truth: the holy oracles. However unlettered he was as to polite literature or the learned languages, his Christian liberality can no more be enlightened by the niggard⁶ spirit of learned sectarians,⁷ than the sun could be illuminated by a rush-light.⁸ The inquiry was then, as, alas, it is too frequent now, "Are there many that be saved?"—forgetful of the Saviour's answer and just rebuke, "What is that to thee? follow thou me" (Joh 21:22), seek thine own salvation. The inquiry is pursued a step farther, "Can those who differ with me be saved?" Hear the reply of one so honest and so fully imbued with the Scriptures, into the truths of which his spirit had been baptized,

"A man, through unbelief, may think that Christ has no love to him; and yet Christ may love him with a love that passeth knowledge. But when men, in the common course of their profession, will be always terminating here, that they know how, and how far, Christ can love; and will thence be bold to conclude of their own safety,⁹ and of the loss and ruin of all that are not in the same notions, opinions, formalities, or judgment as they—this is the worst [pride] and greatest of all [delusions]. The text, therefore, to rectify those false and erroneous conclusions, says [that] the love of Christ is a love that "passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:19).

Throughout the whole, there is a continued effort to comfort the sincere, but doubting, Christian.

"Does Satan suggest that God will not hear your stammering and chattering prayers? Does Satan suggest that thy trials, and troubles, and afflictions, are so many that you shall never get beyond them?—relief is at hand, for Christ loves thee with a love that passeth knowledge. This is a weapon that will baffle the devil, when all other weapons fail."

The practical application of these soul-encouraging truths is, "To walk in love, filled with all the fullness of God." Bunyan has, in enforcing this duty, a very remarkable expression:

"These are the men that *sweeten* the churches, and bring glory to God and to religion. Why should anything have my heart but God, but Christ? He loves me; He loves me with love that passeth knowledge; and I will love Him. His love stripped Him of all for my sake. Lord, let my love strip me of all for Thy sake. I am a son of love, an object of love, a monument of love; of free love, of distinguishing love, of peculiar love, and of love that passeth knowledge. And why should not I walk in love—in love to God, in love to man, in holy love, in love unfeigned?"

And will our ministering elders bear with me in respectfully and affectionately commending to them John Bunyan as an example of devotedness to his Master's service, of humble walking with God, of tender faithfulness to the souls of men, of holy fervour? Under such a course of sermons as this treatise would make, how attentively would our children listen with reverence to the voice of truth, and with a divine blessing our earthen vessels would be replenished with heavenly treasure. It is delightful to read the testimony of Bunyan's ministerial friends of various denominations when recording his extensive usefulness. His works do follow him. And upon reading of them, we cannot wonder when we hear that on a week-day morning, in the depth of winter, long before daylight, the inclemency of frost and snow was braved by crowded assemblies of hungry and thirsty souls, who eagerly listened to hear him proclaim "*The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love*," or the unsearchable riches of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

May the effectual blessing of the Holy Spirit attend the reading, as it did the preaching, of these soul-saving truths.

—George Offor; Hackney, England; October, 1848

⁵ **catholic spirit** – universal; directly opposite of a "party spirit," in which a group accentuates a common interest to the detriment of other issues.

⁶ **niggard** – stingy or ungenerous.

⁷ **sectarians** – those who rigidly adhere to the doctrines of one group and are intolerant of other views.

⁸ **rush-light** – crude candle made with the pith of a rush (tall grass-like plant growing near water) as a wick; it gives little light.

⁹ **their own safety** – their own confidence in their own salvation.

I.

The First Part of the Text: Breadth, Length, Depth, Height

*“That ye 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.”*

—Ephesians 3:18-19

A. Introduction

The apostle having in the first chapter [of *Ephesians*] treated of the doctrine of election, and in the second of the reconciling of the Gentiles with the Jews to the Father by His Son, through the preaching of the gospel, comes in the third chapter to shew that *that* also was, as that of election, determined before the world began. Now, lest the afflictions that attend the gospel should, by its raging among these Ephesians, darken the glory of these things unto them; therefore he makes here a brief repetition and explanation, to the end they might be supported and made live above them. He also joins thereto a fervent prayer for them: that God would let them see, in the spirit and faith, how they, by God and by Christ, are secured from the evil of the worst that might come upon them.

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named; that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; 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” (Eph 3:14-19).

Knowing that, their deep understanding what good by these were reserved for them, they would never be discouraged, whatever troubles should attend their profession.

“Breadth,” “length,” “depth,” and “height” are words that in themselves are both ambiguous and to wonderment: ambiguous because [they are] unexplained, and to wonderment because they carry in them an inexpressible something—and that something [is] that which far out-goes all those things that can be found in this world. The apostle here was under a spiritual surprise, for while meditating and writing, he was caught¹⁰—the strength and glory of the truths that he was endeavouring to fasten upon the people to whom he wrote, took him away into their glory, beyond what could to the full be uttered. Besides, many times things are thus expressed on purpose to command attention—a stop and pause in the mind about them—and to divert, by their greatness, the heart from the world, unto which they naturally are so inclined. Also, truths are often delivered to us like wheat in full ears, to the end we should rub them out before we eat them; and take pains about them, before we have the comfort of them.

Breadth, length, depth, and height. In my attempting to open these words, I will give you some that are of the same kind. And then show you, first, the reasons of them; and then also, secondly, something of their fullness.

Those [words] of the same kind are used sometimes a) to shew us the power, force, and subtlety of the enemies of God’s Church (Dan 4:11; Rom 8:38-39), but [sometimes] b) most properly to shew us the infinite and unsearchable greatness of God (Job 11:7-9; Rom 11:33). They are here to be taken in this second sense, that is, to suggest unto us the unsearchable and infinite greatness of God—Who is a *breadth* beyond all breadths, a *length* beyond all lengths, a *depth* beyond all depths, and a *height* beyond all heights; and *that* in all His attributes. He is an eternal being, an everlasting being, and in that respect He is beyond all measures, whether they be of breadth, length, depth, or height. In all His attributes, He is beyond all measure: whether you measure by words,

¹⁰ **was caught** – to be seized and held; caught up in something so as to cause all else to become unimportant.

by thoughts, or by the most enlarged and exquisite apprehension. His greatness is unsearchable; His judgments are unsearchable (Job 5:9); He is infinite in wisdom. “O! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33). “If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong” (Job 9:19); yea, “the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14). “There is none holy as the Lord” (1Sa 2:2); and, “his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him” (Psa 103:17).

If rightly considered, the *greatness* of God, of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is that which will support the spirits of those of His people that are frightened with the greatness of their adversaries—for here is a greatness against a greatness. Pharaoh was great, but God more great: more great in power, more great in wisdom, more great every way for the help of His people; wherein they dealt proudly, He was above them. These words for this people, therefore, take in the great God, Who in His immensity and infinite greatness is beyond all beings.

B. The Reason of the Words

But to come, first, to the *reason* of the words. They are made use of to shew to the Ephesians that God, with what He is in Himself and with what He hath in His power, is all for the use and profit of the believers—else, no great matter is held out to them thereby. But “this God is our God” (Psa 48:14)—there is the comfort. For this cause, therefore, He presenteth them with this description of Him[*self*], to wit,¹¹ by “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” as [if to] say: “the High God is yours; the God that fills heaven and earth is yours; the God Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain is yours; yea, the God Whose works are wonderful, and Whose ways are past finding out, is yours. Consider therefore the greatness that is for you, that taketh part with you, and that will always come in for your help against them that contend with you.” [This greatness of God] is my support; it is my relief; it [is] my comfort in all my tribulations—and I would have it *ours*, and so it will [be] when we live in the lively faith thereof.

Nor should we admit of distrust in this matter from the consideration of our own unworthiness, either taken from the finiteness of our state or the foulness of our ways (Psa 46). For now, though God’s attributes, several of them in their own nature, are set against sin and sinners; yea, were we righteous, [even then His attributes] are so high that they must look over us, for ’tis to Him a condescension¹² to behold things in heaven; how much more then to open His eyes upon such as we—yet by the passion of Jesus Christ, they harmoniously agree in the salvation of our souls. Hence God is said to be love, “God is love” (1Jo 4:8, 16). Some might say, “and justice too”; but His justice is turned—with wisdom, power, holiness, and truth—to love; yea, to love those that be found in His Son, forasmuch as there is nothing fault-worthy in His righteousness that is put upon us. So then, as there is in God’s nature a length, breadth, depth, and height that is beyond all that we can think; so we should conclude that all this is love to us for Christ’s sake, and then dilate with it thus in our minds, and enlarge it thus in our meditations, saying still to our low and trembling spirits, “It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea”¹³ (Job 11:8-9).

C. The Fullness of the Words

But we will pass generals, and more particularly speak, secondly, something of their *fullness*, as they are fitted to suit and answer to the whole state and condition of a Christian in this life. The words are boundless; we have here a breadth, a length, a depth, and a height made mention of; but *what* breadth, what length, what depth, and what height is not so much as hinted. It is therefore *infiniteness* [that is] suggested to us and that has engaged for us, for the apostle conjoins therein, “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” Thus therefore it suits and answers a Christian’s condition while in this world, let that be what it will. If his afflictions be broad, here is a breadth; if they be long, here is a length; if they be deep, here is a depth; and if they be high, here is a height. And, I will say, there is nothing that is more helpful, succouring,¹⁴ or comfortable to a Christian

¹¹ to wit – Latin *videlicet*; namely, that is to say.

¹² condescension – the action of descending or stooping to things unworthy.

¹³ In the first edition of this treatise, which was published four years after Bunyan’s death, this is quoted “deeper than the sea,” probably a typographical error. It is afterwards quoted correctly.—*Ed.*

¹⁴ succouring – assistance and support in time of difficulty and distress.

while in a state of trial and temptation, than to know that there is a *breadth* to answer a breadth, a *length* to answer a length, a *depth* to answer a depth, and a *height* to answer a height. Wherefore this is it that the apostle prayeth for, namely, that the Ephesians might have understanding in these things: “That ye may know what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.”

Of the largeness of the apostle’s heart in praying for this people—to wit “That they might be able to *comprehend* with all saints, what...”—of that we shall speak afterwards. But first, to speak to these four expressions: breadth, length, depth, and height.

“*Breadth*”

First, “What is the *breadth*.” This word is to shew that God is all over, everywhere, spreading His wings, stretching out His goodness to the *utmost bounds*, for the good of those that are His people (Deu 32:11-12; Gen 49:26).

In the sin of His people, there is a *breadth*; a breadth that spreadeth over all, wheresoever a man shall look. The sin of the saints is a spreading leprosy (Lev 13:12); sin is a scab that spreadeth. It is a spreading plague; it knows no bounds (Lev 13:8, 57). Or, as David saith, “I have seen the wicked spreading himself” (Psa 37:35). Hence it is compared to a cloud, to a thick cloud, that covereth or spreadeth over the face of all the sky. Wherefore here is a breadth called for, a breadth that can cover all; or else what is done is to no purpose.

Therefore, to answer this, here we have a *breadth*, a spreading breadth. “I spread my skirt over thee”—but how far? even so far as to cover all: “I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness” (Eze 16:8). Here now is a breadth according to the spreading nature of the sin of this wretched one; yea, a super-abounding spreading; a spreading *beyond*; a spreading to cover. “Blessed is he whose sin is covered” (Psa 32:1), whose spreading sin is covered by the mercy of God through Christ (Rom 4:4-7). This is the spreading cloud, whose spreadings none can understand (Job 36:29). “He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night” (Psa 105:39).

This breadth that is in God, it also overmatcheth that spreading and overspreading rage of men, that is sometimes as if it would swallow up the whole church of God. You read of the rage of the king of Assyria, that there was a breadth in it, an overflowing breadth, to the filling of “the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel” (Isa 8:8). But what follows? “Associate yourselves, O ye people [ye Assyrians], and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries; gird yourselves and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand, for God is with us” (Isa 8:8-10)—God will over-match and go beyond you. Wherefore this word “breadth.”

And what is the breadth? It is here expressed on purpose to succour and relieve, or to shew what advantage, for support, the knowledge of the overspreading grace of God by Christ yieldeth unto those that have it, let their trials be what they will. Alas! the sin of God’s children seemeth sometimes to overspread not only their flesh, and the face of their souls, but the whole face of heaven. And what shall he do now, who is a stranger to this breadth made mention of in the text? Why, he must despair, lie down, and die, and shut up his heart against all comfort, unless he with his fellow Christians can at least apprehend what is *this* breadth, or the breadth of mercy intended in this place. Therefore Paul, for the support of the Ephesians, prays that they may know “what is the breadth.”

This largeness of the heart and mercy of God towards His people, is also signified by the *spreading* out of His hand to us in the invitations of the gospel. “I said,” saith He, “Behold me, behold me...I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people...A people that provoketh me...continually” (Isa 65:1-3). “I have spread out my hands,” that is, opened My arms as a mother affectionately doth when she stoopeth to her child in the warm workings of her bowels, and claspeth it up in them, and kisseth, and putteth it into her bosom.

For by spreading out the hands or arms to embrace, is shewed the breadth or largeness of God’s affections; as by our spreading out our hands in prayer is signified the great sense that we have of the spreading nature of our sins, and of the great desires that are in us that God would be merciful to us (Ezr 9:5-7).

This word also answereth to, or may fitly be set against, the wiles and temptations of the devil, who is that great and dogged Leviathan, that spreadeth his “sharp-pointed things upon the mire” (Job 41:30)—for, be the spreading nature of our corruptions never so broad, he will find sharp-pointed things enough to stick in the mire of them for our affliction. These sharp-pointed things are those that in another place are called “fiery darts” (Eph 6:16), and he has abundance of them, with which he can and will sorely prick and wound our spirits. Yea,

so sharp some have found these things to their souls, that they have pierced beyond expression. “When,” said Job, “I say, my bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions; so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life” (Job 7:13-15). But now, answerable to the spreading of these sharp-pointed things, there is a super-abounding *breadth* in the sovereign grace of God, the which whoso seeth and understandeth, as the apostle doth pray we should, is presently helped—for he seeth that this grace spreadeth itself, and is broader than can be either our mire or the sharp-pointed things that he spreadeth thereupon for our vexation and affliction. “It is broader than the sea” (Job 11:9).

This therefore should be that upon which those that see the spreading nature of sin, and the leprosy and contagion¹⁵ thereof, should meditate, to wit, the *broadness* of the grace and mercy of God in Christ. This will poise and stay the soul; this will relieve and support the soul in and under those many misgiving and desponding thoughts unto which we are subject when afflicted with the apprehensions of sin, and the abounding nature of it.

Shall another man pray for this, one that knew the goodness and benefit of it, and shall not I meditate upon it? And shall not I exercise my mind about it? Yes surely, for it is my duty, it is my privilege and mercy so to do. Let this, therefore, when thou seest the spreading nature of thy sin, be a memento¹⁶ to thee, to the end thou mayest not sink and die in thy soul.

“Length”

Secondly, “What is the breadth, and *length*.” As there is a breadth in this mercy and grace of God by Christ, so there is a length therein. This length is as large as the breadth, and as much suiting the condition of the child of God as the other is. For, though sin sometimes is most afflicting to the conscience while the soul beholdeth the overspreading nature of it; yet here it stoppeth not, but oft-times through the power and prevalency of it, the soul is driven with it, as a ship by a mighty tempest or as a rolling thing before the whirlwind—driven, I say, from God and from all hopes of His mercy, as far as the east is from the west (Psa 103:12), or as the ends of the world are asunder. Hence it is supposed by the prophet that for and by sin, they may be driven from God to the utmost part of heaven (Deu 30:4); and that is a sad thing, a sad thing, I say, to a gracious man.

“Why,” saith the prophet to God, “art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (Psa 22:1). Sometimes a man, yea, a man of God, is, as he apprehends, so far off from God that He can neither help him nor hear him; and this is a dismal state. “And thou hast removed my soul,” said the Church, “far off from peace: I forgot prosperity” (Lam 3:17). This is the state sometimes of the godly, and that not only with reference to their being removed by persecutors from the appointments and gospel-seasons that are their delight and the desire of their eyes; but also with reverence to their faith and hope in their God. They think themselves beyond the reach of His mercy.

Wherefore in answer to this conceit, it is that the Lord asketh, saying, “Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?” (Isa 50:2). And again, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isa 59:1). Wherefore He saith again, “If any of them be driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee” (Deu 30:4). God has a long arm, and He can reach a great way further than we can conceive He can (Neh 1:9). When we think His mercy is clean gone, and that ourselves are free among the dead and of the number that He remembereth no more, then He can reach us and cause that again we stand before Him. He could reach Jonah, though in the belly of hell (Jon 2); and reach thee, even then, when thou thinkest thy way is hid from the Lord, and thy judgment passed over from thy God.

There is *length* to admiration, beyond apprehension or belief, in the arm of the strength of the Lord, and this is that which the apostle intended by this word “length”; namely, to insinuate what a reach there is in the mercy of God, how far it can extend itself. “If I take the wings of the morning,” said David, “and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psa 139:9-10). I will gather them “from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south,” saith He—that is, from the utmost corners (Psa 107:3).

¹⁵ **contagion** – the communication of a disease from one person to another.

¹⁶ **memento** – memorial to awaken memory; that which reminds.

This therefore should encourage them that for the present cannot stand, but that do fly before their guilt¹⁷—them that feel no help nor stay, but that go, as to their thinking, every day by the power of temptation, driven yet farther off from God and from the hope of obtaining of His mercy to their salvation. Poor creature, I will not now ask thee how thou camest into this condition, or how long this has been thy state; but I will say before thee, and I prithee¹⁸ hear me, O the length of the saving arm of God! As yet thou art within the reach thereof; do not thou go about to measure arms with God, as some good men are apt to do. I mean, do not thou conclude that because thou canst not reach God by thy short stump, therefore He cannot reach thee with His long arm. Look again, “Hast thou an arm like God” (Job 40:9), an arm like His for length and strength? It becomes thee, when thou canst not perceive that God is within the reach of *thy* arm, then to believe that thou art within the reach of His—for it is long, and none knows how long.

Again, is there such a *length*?—such a length in the arm of the Lord, that He can reach those that are gone away as far as they could? Then this should encourage us to pray, and hope for the salvation of any one of our backslidden relations, that God would reach out His arm after them, saying, “Awake...O arm of the Lord...art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” (Isa 51:9-10). Awake, O arm of the Lord, and be stretched out as far as to where my poor husband is, where my poor child [is], or to where my poor backslidden wife or dear relation is, and lay hold, fast hold; they are gone from Thee, but, O Thou the hope of Israel, fetch them again, and let them stand before Thee.

I say, here is in this word *length* matter of encouragement for us thus to pray; for if the length of the reach of mercy is so great, and if also this length is for the benefit of those that may be gone off far from God (for they at present have no need thereof that are near), then improve¹⁹ this advantage at the throne of grace for such, that they may come to God again.

“Depth”

Thirdly, as there is a breadth and length here, so there is a *depth*: “What is the breadth, and length, and depth.” And this depth is also put in here on purpose, to help us under a trial that is diverse from the two former. I told you, that by the *breadth* the apostle insinuates a remedy and succour to us when we see our corruptions spread like a leprosy; and by *length* he would shew us that, when sin has driven God’s elect to the farthest distance from Him, yet His arm is long enough to reach them and fetch them back again.

But, I say, as we have here a breadth, and a length, so we have also a *depth*...Christians have sometimes their sinking fits, and are as if they were always descending, or as Heman says, “counted with them that go down into the pit” (Psa 88:4). Now guilt is not to such so much a wind and a tempest, as a load and burden. The devil, sin, the curse of the Law, and death are gotten upon the shoulders of this poor man, and are treading of him down, that he may sink into and be swallowed up of his miry place. “I sink,” says David, “in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” (Psa 69:2).

Yea, there is nothing more common among the saints of old than this complaint: “Let neither the water flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, neither let the pit shut her mouth upon me” (Psa 69:14-15). Heman also saith, “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves” (Psa 88:6-7). Hence it is again that the Psalmist says: “Deep calleth unto deep, at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves, and thy billows are gone over me” (Psa 42:7). “Deep calleth unto deep”—what is that? Why, it is expressed in the verse before: “O God,” says he, “My soul is cast *down* within me.” “Down,” that is, deep into the jaws of distrust and fear. And Lord, my soul in this depth of sorrow calls for help to Thy depth of mercy. For though I am sinking and going down, yet not so low but that Thy mercy is yet underneath me. Do of Thy compassions open those everlasting arms (Deu 33:27), and catch him that has no help or stay in himself, for so it is with one that is falling into a well or a dungeon.

Now mark, as there is in these texts, the sinking condition of the godly man set forth, of a man whom sin and Satan is treading down into the deep. So in our text, which I am speaking to at this time, we have a depth that can more than counterpoise²⁰ these deeps, set forth with a hearty prayer that we may know it. And although the

¹⁷ **fly...guilt** – flee from God because they feel so guilty for their sins.

¹⁸ **prithee** – slang expression for “pray thee.”

¹⁹ **improve** – make good use of for spiritual profit.

²⁰ **counterpoise** – to act against with equal power or effect; to balance.

“deeps,” or depths of calamity into which the godly may fall, may be as deep as hell, and methinks they should be no deeper, yet this is the comfort, and for the comfort, of them of the godly that are thus a sinking. The mercy of God for them lies deeper; “It is deeper than hell, what canst thou know?” (Job 11:8).

And this is that which made Paul that he was not afraid of this depth: “I am persuaded,” saith he, “that neither...height nor depth shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39). But of this he could by no means have been persuaded, had he not believed that mercy lieth deeper for the godly, to help them, than can all other depths be to destroy them. This is it at which he stands and wonders, saying, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33)—that is, to find out a way to save His people, notwithstanding all the deep contrivances that the enemy hath and may invent to make us come short [of] home.

This is also that, as I take it, which is wrapped up in the blessing wherewith Jacob blessed his son Joseph. “God shall bless thee,” saith he, “with blessings of heaven above,” and with the “blessings of the deep that lieth under” (Gen 49:25)—a blessing that he had ground to pronounce, as well from his observation of God’s good dealing with Joseph, as in a spirit of prophecy, for he saw that he lived and was become a flourishing bough by a wall, after that the archers had done their worst to him (Gen 49:22-24). Moses also blesseth God for blessing of Joseph thus, and blessed his portion to him, as counting of it sufficient for his help in all afflictions. “Blessed,” saith he, “of the Lord, be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath” (Deu 33:13).

I am not of belief that these blessings are confined to things temporal or carnal, but to things spiritual and divine; and that they have most chiefly respect to soul and eternal good. Now mark, he tells us here, that the blessings of the deep do “couch” beneath—“couch,” that is, lie close, so as hardly to be discerned by him that willingly would see that himself is not below these arms that are beneath him. But that, as I said, is hard to be discerned by him that thus is sinking, and that has as he now smartingly²¹ feels, all God’s waves and His billows rolling over him. However, whether he sees or not, for this blessing lieth couched, yet there it is and there will be, though one should sink as deep as hell—and hence they are said to be “everlasting arms” that are “underneath” (Deu 33:27), that is, arms that are long and strong, and that can reach to the bottom, and also beyond, of all misery and distress that Christians are subject to in this life. Indeed mercy seems to be asleep when we are sinking, for then we are as if all things were careless of us, but it is but as a lion couchant:²² it will awake in time for our help (Psa 44:22, 26; Mar 4:36-39). And forasmuch as this term is it, which is applicable to the lion in his den, it may be to shew that as a lion, so will God at the fittest season arise for the help and deliverance of a sinking people. Hence when He is said to address Himself to the delivering of His people, it is that he comes as a roaring lion: “The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies” (Isa 42:13). However, here is a depth against the depth that is against us, let that depth be what it will. [If] it be the depth of misery, the depth of mercy is sufficient. If it be the depth of hellish policy, the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God shall go beyond it, and prevail.

This therefore is worthy of the consideration of all sinking souls, of the souls that feel themselves descending into the pit. There is such a thing as this [that is] experienced among the godly. Some come to them when tempted...they will tell you [that] they have no ground to stand on—their feet have slipped, their foundation is removed, and they feel themselves sinking as into a pit that has no bottom (Psa 11:3). They inwardly sink, not for want of something to relieve the body, but for want of some spiritual cordial to support the mind: “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains,” said Jonah, “the earth with her bars was about me for ever...my soul fainted within me” (Jon 2:6-7).

Now for such to consider that underneath them, even at the bottom, there lieth a blessing, or that in this deep whereinto they are descending, there lieth a delivering mercy couching to catch them, and to save them from sinking forever—this would be relief unto them, and help them to hope for good. Again, as this, were it well considered by the sinking ones, would yield them stay²³ and relief, so this is it by the virtue whereof, [that] they who have been sinking heretofore, have been lifted up and above their castings down again. There are of those that have been in the pit, [who are] now upon mount Sion, with the harps of God in their hands and with the song of the Lamb in their mouths.

²¹ **smartingly** – with keen pain.

²² **couchant** – lying down, but with head raised and not sleeping, ready to spring to action when needed.

²³ **stay** – stop; cessation of motion.

But *how* is it that they are there? Why, David, by his own deliverance, shews you the reason: “For great is thy mercy towards me,” saith he, “and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell” (Psa 86:13). And again,

“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit [a pit of noise, a pit wherein was the noise of devils, and of my heart answering them with distrust and fear], out of the miry clay [into which I did not only sink, but was by it held from getting up: but He brought me up] and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God” (Psa 40:2-3).

But let me here give, if it may be, a timely caution to them that think they stand upon their feet. Give not way to falling *because* everlasting arms are underneath; take heed of that—God can let thee fall into mischief; He can let thee fall and not help thee up. Tempt not God, lest He cast thee away indeed. I doubt there are many that have presumed upon this mercy, that thus do couch beneath, and have cast themselves down from their pinnacles into vanity, of a vain conceit that they shall be lifted up again—whom yet God will leave to die there, because their fall was rather of *willfulness* than *weakness*, and of stubbornness and desperate resolutions, than for want of means²⁴ and helps to preserve them from it.

“Height”

Fourthly, as there is a breadth, length, and depth in this mercy and grace of God through Christ towards His people, so there is also a *height*: “That ye may comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth, and *height*.” There are things that are high as well as things that are low, things that are above us as well as things that are under, that are distressing to God’s people. It is said, when Noah was a preacher of righteousness, there were *giants in the earth* in those days (Gen 6:4). And these, as I conceive, were some of the heights that were set against Noah; yea, they were the very dads and fathers of all that monstrous brood that followed in the world in that day. Of this sort were they who so frightened and terrified Israel when they were to go to inherit the land of promise. The men that were tall as cedars, and strong as the oaks, frightened them; they were in their own sight, when compared with these high ones, but as grasshoppers. This therefore was their discouragement (Num 13:31-33; Deu 2:10; 9:2).

Besides, together with these, they had *high walls*, walls as high as heaven; and these walls were of purpose to keep Israel out of his possession. See how it is expressed: “The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there” (Deu 1:28). One of these, to wit, Goliath by name, how did he fright the children of Israel in the days of Saul! How did the appearance of him make them scuttle together on heaps before him (1Sa 17). By these giants, and by these high walls, God’s children to this day are sorely distressed, because they stand in the crossways²⁵ to cut off Israel from his possession.

But now to support us against all these, and to encourage us to take heart notwithstanding all these things, there is for us a *height* in God. He hath made *His Son higher* than the kings of the earth (Psa 89:26-28). *His Word also* is settled forever in heaven, and therefore must needs be higher than their walls (Psa 119:89). He also saith in another place, “If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest, regardeth, and there be higher than they” (Ecc 5:8). ’Twas this that made Paul [so] that he feared not the height, not things present nor things to come (Rom 8:39).

But again, as there are these things standing or lying in our way, so there are another sort of heights that are more mischievous than these: they are the *fallen angels*. These are called “spiritual wickedness [or wicked spirits] in high places” (Eph 6:12), for God has suffered them for a time to take to themselves principality and power, and so they are become the rulers of the darkness of this world. By these we are tempted, sifted, threatened, opposed, undermined. Also by these there are snares, pits, holes, and “what not” made and laid for us—if peradventure by something we may be destroyed. Yea, and we should most certainly be so, were it not for the Rock that is *higher* than they: “he that cometh from heaven is above all” (Joh 3:31)! These are they that our King has taken captive, and hath rid (in His chariots of salvation) in triumph over their necks. These are they, together with all others, whose most devilish designs He can wield, turn, and make work together for His ransomed’s advantage (Rom 8:28). There is a height, an infinitely overtopping height in the mercy and goodness of God for us, against them.

²⁴ **means** – resources considered as the instruments of effecting a purpose; as in “the means to an end.”

²⁵ **crossways** – obscure paths intersecting the main roads.

There are heights also that *build up themselves in us*, which are not but to be taken notice of. Yea, there are a many of them, and they place themselves directly so that if possible they may keep the saving knowledge of God out of our hearts. These high things therefore are said to exalt themselves against the knowledge of God (2Co 10:5)—and do oftentimes more plague, afflict, and frighten Christian men and women than anything besides. It is from these that our faith and spiritual understanding of God and His Christ is opposed and contradicted, and from these also that we are so inclinable to swerve from right doctrine into destructive opinions. 'Tis from these that we are so easily persuaded to call into question our former experience of the goodness of God towards us, and from these that our minds are so often clouded and darkened that we cannot see afar off. These would betray us into the hands of fallen angels, and men, nor should we by any means help or deliver ourselves, were it not for One that is higher. These are the dark mountains at which our feet would certainly stumble and upon which we should fall, were it not for One Who can leap and skip over these mountains of division, and come in to us (Song 2:8, 17).

Further, there is a height also that is oblivious to our senses, the which, when it is dealt withal by our corrupted reason, proves a great shaking to our mind, and that is the height and *exceeding distance that heaven is off of us*, and we off it. "Is not God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are?" (Job 22:12). Hence heaven is called the place for height (Pro 25:3). Also, when Ahaz is bid to ask with reference to heaven, he is bid to ask it in the height, the height above (Isa 7:11). Now saith reason, how shall I come thither?—especially therefore when a good man is at his furthest distance, which is when he is in the grave. Now I say, every height is a difficulty to him that is loaden with a burden, especially the heaven of heavens where God is, and where is the resting-place of His to them that are oppressed with the guilt of sin.

And besides, as I said before, the dispensation²⁶ which happeneth to us last—to wit, *death*—makes this heaven, in my thoughts while I live, so much the more unaccessible. Christ indeed could mount up (Act 1:9), but me, poor me, how shall I get thither? Elias indeed had a chariot sent him to ride in thither, and went up by it into that holy place (2Ki 2:11); but me, poor me, how shall I get thither? Enoch is there, because God took him (Gen 5:24); but as for me, how shall I get thither? Thus some have mourningly said. And although distrust of the power of God, as to the accomplishing of this thing, is by no means to be smiled upon, yet methinks the unconcernedness of professors thereabout, doth argue that considering thoughts about that are wanting.

I know the answer is ready: *Get Christ and go to heaven!* But methinks the height of the place, and the glory of the state that we are to enjoy therein, should a little concern us, at least so as to make us wonder in our thinking, that the time is coming that we must mount up thither. And since there are so many heights between this place, between us and *that*, it should make us admire at the heights of the grace and mercy of God, by which means is provided to bring us thither. And I believe that this thing, this very thing, is included here by the apostle when he prays for the Ephesians that they might know the height.

Methinks, "How shall we get thither" will still stick in my mind. "I will ascend," says one, "above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High" (Isa 14:14). And I, says another, will set my "nest among the stars" of heaven (Oba 4). Well, but what of all this? If heaven has gates, and they shall be shut, how wilt thou go in thither? Though such should climb up to heaven, from thence will God bring them down (Amo 9:2). Still I say, therefore, how shall we get in thither? Why, for them that are godly, there is the power of God, the merits of Christ, the help of angels, and the testimony of a good conscience to bring them thither! And he that has not the help of all these, let him do what he can, shall *never* come thither.

Not that all these go to the making up of the height that is intended in the text, for the height there, is what is in God through Christ to us alone. But the angels are the servants of God for that end (Luk 16:22; Heb 1:14), and none with ill consciences enter in thither (Psa 15:1; 24:3-4). What, "know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived" (1Co 6:9), such have none "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5).

Oppositions

This then should teach us that in God is a power that is able to subdue all things to Himself. In the completing of many things, there seems to be an utter impossibility—as that a virgin should conceive in her womb, as a virgin, and bring a Son into the world; [or] that the body that is turned into dust should arise and ascend into

²⁶ **dispensation** – event arranged by God (as are all events).

the highest heaven (Phi 3:21). These things with many more seem to be utterly impossible. But there is that which is called the power of God, by the which He is able to make all things bend to His will, and to make all obstructions give place to what He pleases. God is high above all things and can do whatever it pleaseth Him.

But since He can do so, why doth He suffer this and that thing to appear, to act, and [to] do so horribly repugnant to His Word? I answer, He admits of many things to the end He may shew His wrath and make His power known, and that all the world may see how He checks and overrules the most vile and unruly things, and can make them subservient to His holy will. And how would the *breadth, length, depth, and height* of the love and mercy of God in Christ to us-ward be made to appear so as in all things it doth, were there not admitted that there should be breadths, lengths, depths, and heights to oppose? Wherefore these oppositions are therefore suffered, that the greatness of the wisdom, power, mercy, and grace of God to us in Christ might appear and be made manifest unto us!

This calls, therefore, upon Christians wisely to consider of the doings of their God. How many opposite breadths, lengths, depths, and heights did Israel meet with in their journey from Egypt to Canaan—and all to convince them of their own weakness and also of the power of their God. And they that did wisely consider of His doings there, did reap the advantage thereof. “Come, behold the works of the Lord towards me” (Psa 46:8), may every Christian say. He hath set a Saviour against sin; a heaven against a hell; light against darkness; good against evil, and the breadth, length, depth, and height of the grace that is in Himself, for my good, against all the power, strength, force, and subtlety of every enemy!

This also, as I hinted but just before, shews both the power of them that hate us, and the inability of us to resist. The power that is set against us none can crush and break but God, for it is the power of devils, sin, death, and hell. But we for our parts are crushed before the moth—being a shadow, a vapour, and a wind that passes away (Job 4:19). Oh! how should we and how would we, were but our eyes awake, stand and wonder at the preservations, the deliverances, the salvations and benefits with which we are surrounded daily, while so many mighty evils seek daily to swallow us up as the grave! See how the golden psalm of David reads it: “Be merciful unto me, O God; for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most high” (Psa 56:1-2). This is at the beginning of it; and he concludes it thus, “Thou hast delivered my soul from death: will not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living” (verse 13).

By this also we see the reason why it is so impossible for man or angel to persuade unbelievers to come in to, and close with, Christ; why there is a breadth that they cannot get over, a length that they cannot get beyond, a depth that they cannot pass, and heights that so hinder them of the prospect of glory and the way thereto, that they cannot be allured thither. And that nothing can remove these but those that are in God and that are opposite thereto; even the breadth, length, depth, and height that is in the text expressed, is to all awakened men an undoubted truth.²⁷

Jesus Christ, the Ladder

One item I would here give to him that loveth his own soul, and then we will pass on in pursuance of what is to come. Since there is an height oblivious to sense, and that that height must be overcome ere a man can enter into life eternal: let thy heart be careful that thou go the right way to overpass this height, that thou mayest not miss of the delectable plains and the pleasures that are above. Now, there is nothing so high as to overtop this height but Jacob’s “Ladder”—and that can do it. That Ladder, when the foot thereof doth stand upon the earth, reacheth with its top to the gate of heaven. This is the Ladder by which angels ascend thither, and this is the Ladder by which *thou* mayest ascend thither. “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12).

This Ladder is Jesus Christ, the Son of man, as is clear by the evangelist John (Joh 1:51). And in that it is said to stand upon the earth, that is to shew that He took hold of man who is of the earth, and therein laid a foundation for his salvation. In that it is said the top reached up to heaven, that is to shew that the divine nature was joined to the human, and by that means He was every way made a Saviour complete. Now concerning this Ladder, ’tis said heaven was open where it stood, to shew that by Him there is entrance into life. ’Tis said also concerning this ladder, that the Lord stood there, at the top, above it, saying: “I am the Lord God of Abraham”

²⁷ How admirably does Bunyan bring home to the Christian’s heart these solemn truths. The breadth, length, depth, and height of our guilt and misery, requires a remedy beyond all human power. This can only be found in the love of God in Christ: this extends beyond all bounds. It is divine, unsearchable, eternal mercy, swallowing up all our miseries.—*Ed.*

(Gen 28:13)—to shew His hearty and willing reception of those that ascend the height of His sanctuary this way. All this, Christ further explains by saying, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). Look to thyself then, that thou do truly and after the right manner embrace this Ladder—so will He draw thee up thither after Him (Joh 12:32). All the rounds²⁸ of this ladder are sound and fitly placed; not one of them is set further than that by faith thou mayest ascend step by step unto—even until thou shalt come to the highest step thereof, from whence, or by which, thou mayest step in at the celestial gate where thy soul desireth to dwell.

Take my caution then and be wary; no man can come thither but by Him. Thither, I say, to be accepted; thither, there to dwell and there to abide with joy forever. “That ye 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.”

²⁸ **rounds** – rungs or steps of a ladder.

II. The Prayer of the Apostle

“That ye 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.”—Ephesians 3:18-19

Having thus spoke of the breadth, length, depth, and height that is in God’s mercy by Christ to us-ward, we will now come more directly to the prayer of the apostle for these Ephesians with reference thereunto; to wit, that they might be able to comprehend with all saints what they are.

A. “That ye may be able.”

And first as to the ability that he prays for, to the end that they may be capable to do this thing.

The weakness that is here supposed to hinder their thus comprehending, etc., did doubtless lie in their grace as well as their nature; for in both, with reference to them that are Christians, there is great disability unless they be strengthened mightily by the Holy Ghost. Nature’s ability depends upon graces, and the ability of graces depends upon the mighty help of the Spirit of God. Hence, as nature itself, where grace is not, sees nothing, so nature by grace sees but weakly—if that grace is not strengthened with all might by the Spirit of grace. The breadths, lengths, depths and heights here made mention of, are mysteries, and in all their operations do work wonderfully mysteriously—insomuch that many times, though they are all of them busily engaged for this and the other child of God, yet they themselves see nothing of them. As Christ said to Peter, “What I do thou knowest not now” (Joh 13:7), so may it be said to many where the grace and mercy of God in Christ is working: they do not know, they understand not, what it is nor what will be the end of such dispensations²⁹ of God towards them. Wherefore they also say as Peter to Christ, “Dost thou wash my feet?...thou shalt never wash my feet” (Joh 13:6-8). Yea, and when some light to convince of this folly breaks in upon them, yet if it be not very distinct and clear—causing the person to know the true cause, nature, and end of God’s doing of this or that—they swerve with Peter as much on the other side (Joh 13:9-10). [As if God were to say,] “They have not known My ways and My methods with them in this world”—were that that caused Israel always to err in their hearts (Heb 3:10) and lie cross to all, and [to] each of these breadths, lengths, depths, and heights, whenever they were under the exercise of any of them in the wilderness.

The reason is, as I said before, for that they [the breadths, lengths, depths, and heights of God’s providences] are very mysterious in their workings. For they work by, upon, and against oppositions, for and in order to the help and salvation of His people. Also, as was hinted a while since, that the power and glory of *this* breadth, length, etc., of the mercy and grace of God, may the more shew its excellency and sufficiency as to our deliverance, we by Him seem quite to be delivered up to the breadths, lengths, depths, and heights that oppose [us] and that utterly seek our ruin. Wherefore at such times, nothing of breadths, lengths, depths, or heights can be seen, save by those that are very well skilled in those mysterious methods of God, in His gracious actings towards His people. “Who will bring me into the strong city,” and “wilt not thou, O God, which *hadst cast us off?* and thou, O God, which *didst not go out* with our armies?” (Psa 60:9-10)—this is a lesson too hard for every Christian man to say over believingly. And what was it that made Jonah say, when he was in the belly of hell, “Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple” (Jon 2:4), but the good skill that he had in understanding of the mystery of these breadths, lengths, depths, and heights of God, and of the way of His working by them.

Read the text at large:

²⁹ **dispensations** – acts of divine ordering and arrangements of events.

“Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas, and the floods compassed me about. All thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple” (Jon 2:3-4).

These, and such like sentences, are easily played with by a preacher when in the pulpit, specially if he has a little of the notion of things. But of the difficulty and strait³⁰ that those are brought into—out of whose mouth such words are extorted by reason of the force of the labyrinths they are fallen into—of *those* they experience nothing, wherefore to those they are utterly strangers.

He then that is able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, length, depth, and height, must be a good expositor of *providences*, and must see the way and the workings of God by them. Now, there are providences of two sorts, seemingly good and seemingly bad—and those do usually as Jacob did, when he blessed the sons of Joseph: cross hands and lay the blessing where we would not. “And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him” (Gen 48:17). I say, there are providences unto which we would have the blessings entailed, but they are not.³¹ And, there are providences that smile upon the flesh, to wit, such as cast into the lap health, wealth, plenty, ease, friends, and abundance of this world’s good—because these (which Manasseh’s name signifies)³² have in them an aptness to make us “forget all [our] toil” (Gen 41:51), our low estate and from whence we were; but the *great* blessing is not in them. There are providences, again, that take away from us whatever is desirable to the flesh—such is the sickness, losses, crosses, persecution, and affliction—and usually in these, though they make us shuck³³ whenever they come upon us, blessing coucheth and is ready to help us. For God, as the name of Ephraim signifies, makes us “fruitful in the land of our affliction” (Gen 41:52). He therefore, in the blessing of His people, lays His hands across, guiding them wittingly, and laying the chiefest blessing on the head of Ephraim—or in that providence, that sanctifying affliction.

Abel—what, to the reason of Eve, was he in comparison of Cain? Rachel called Benjamin the “son of her sorrow,” but Jacob knew how to give him a better name (“son of my right hand,” Gen 35:18). Jabez also, though his mother so called him because, as it seems, she brought him forth with more than ordinary sorrow, was yet more honourable, more godly, than his brethren (1Ch 4:9-10).

He that has skill to judge of providences aright, has a great ability in him to comprehend with other saints, what is the breadth, length, depth, and height. But he that has not skill as to discerning of them is but a child in his judgment in those high and mysterious things. And hence it is that some shall suck honey out of that...which others tremble for fear it should poison them. I have often been made to say, “sorrow is better than laughter; and the house of mourning better than the house of mirth” (Ecc 7:3-5). And I have more often seen that the afflicted are always the best sort of Christians. There is a man [who is] never well, never prospering, never but under afflictions, disappointments, and sorrows; why, this man, if he be a Christian, is one of the best of men. “They that go down to the sea...that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep” (Psa 107:23-24).³⁴ And it is from hence, for aught I know, that James admonishes the brother of high degree to rejoice in that he is made low. And he renders the reason of it, to wit, for that the fashion of the world perisheth, the rich man fadeth away in his way; but the tempted, and he that endureth temptation, is blessed (Jam 1:10-12).

Now, I know these things are not excellent in themselves, nor yet to be desired for any profit that they can yield, but God doth use by these, as by a tutor or instructor, to make known to them that are exercised with them, so much of Himself as to make them understand *that* riches of His goodness that is seldom by other means broken up to the sons of men. And hence ’tis said that the afterwards of affliction doth yield “the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb 12:11).

³⁰ **strait** – narrowness in a path as to make passage difficult; a bad situation.

³¹ **but they are not** – that is, these “good” providences do not come to pass as we wish, and we are disappointed.

³² Ephraim and Manasseh were the two sons of Joseph upon whom Jacob crossed his arms in blessing them, opposite of what Joseph had expected. Manasseh’s name signifies the way God’s crossing our expectations in circumstances makes us forget our other difficulties: “And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil” (Gen 41:51).

³³ **shuck** – corrupted form of “shrug”; to express horror by a small motion of the body.

³⁴ This is a very striking application of these words of David, which so fearfully describe the agitation of those who are exposed to a hurricane at sea. We too generally limit this passage to its literal sense. To Bunyan, who had passed through such a deep experience of the “terrors of the Lord,” when he came out of tribulation and anguish, he must have richly enjoyed the solemn imagery of these words, depicting the inmost feelings of his soul when in the horrible deeps of doubt and despair. But young Christians must not be distressed because they have never experienced such tempests; thousands of vessels of mercy get to heaven without meeting with hurricanes in their way.—Ed.

The sum is: these breadths, lengths, depths, and heights of God are to be discerned; and some that are good do more [so], and some do less discern them—and how they are working and putting forth themselves in every providence, in every change, in every turn of the wheel that passeth by us in this world. I do not question but that there are some that are alive³⁵ that have been able to say, the days of affliction have been the best unto them—and that could, if it were lawful, pray that they might always be in affliction, if God would but do to them as He did when His hand was last upon them. For by them He caused His light to shine; or as Job has it, “Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvelously upon me” (Job 10:16). See also the writing of Hezekiah, and read what profit he found in afflictions (Isa 38).

But again, these breadths, lengths, depths, and heights have in themselves naturally that glory which cannot be so well discerned, or kept in view, by weak eyes. He had need have an eye like an eagle that can look upon the sun, that can look upon these great things and not be stricken blind therewith. You see how Saul was served when he was going to Damascus (Act 9), but Stephen could stand and look up steadfastly into heaven, and that too when with Jonah he was going into the deep (Act 7).

But I have done with this, and proceed.

B. “That ye may be able to comprehend.”

Although apprehending is included in comprehending, yet to comprehend is more. To comprehend is to know a thing fully, or to reach it all. But here we must distinguish and say that there is a comprehending that is *absolute*, and a comprehending that is *comparative*.

Of comprehending *absolutely*, or perfectly, we are not here to speak; for that the apostle could not, in this place, as to the thing prayed for, desire³⁶—for it is utterly impossible perfectly to know whatsoever is in the breadths, lengths, depths, and heights here spoken of; whether you call them mercies, judgments, or the ways of God with men: “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33). Or, if you take them to signify His love, unto which you see I am inclined, why, *that* you read of in the same place, to be [His love] “which passes knowledge.” Wherefore should the apostle by this term, conclude or insinuate that what he calls here breadths, lengths, depths, or heights might be fully, or perfectly, understood and known, he would not only contradict other Scriptures, but himself, in one and the self-same breath.

Wherefore, [this “comprehending”] must be understood *comparatively*; that is (and that he says), “with” (or as much as) others, as any, even “with all saints”: “That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height”—[that is,] I would ye were as able to understand, to know, and to find out these things, as ever any were; and to know with the very best of saints, the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. There are, as has before been hinted, degrees of knowledge of these things; some know more, some less; but the apostle prays that these Ephesians might see, know, and understand as much thereof as the best, or as any under heaven.

1. *The love of a minister*

And this, in the *first* place, shews us the love of a minister of Jesus Christ. A minister’s love to his flock is seen in his praying for them—wherefore Paul, commonly, by his epistles, either first or last or both, gives the churches to understand that he did often heartily pray to God for them (Rom 16:20, 24; 1Co 16:23; Gal 6:18; Eph 1:16; Phi 1:4; Col 1:3; 1Th 1:2; 1Ti 6:21; 2Ti 4:22)—and not only so, but also specifies the mercies, blessings, and benefits that he earnestly begged for them of God (2Co 13:7; 2Th 1:11).

2. *Great benefits to Christians*

But, *secondly*, this implies that there are great benefits accrued to Christians by the comprehending of these things. Yea, it implies that something very special is ministered to us by this knowledge of these—and here to touch upon a few of them.

a. *Understand the greatness, wisdom, and power of God*

³⁵ **some that are alive** – those who are born again into new life in Christ.

³⁶ **for that...desire** – Paul could not pray for comprehending perfectly.

He that shall arrive to some competent knowledge of these things, shall understand more thoroughly *the greatness, the wisdom, the power*, etc. of the God that is above. For by these expressions are the attributes of God set forth unto us. And although I have discoursed of them hitherto under the notion of grace and mercy, yet it was not for that I concluded, they excluded the expressing of His other attributes, but because they all, as it were, turn into *loving* methods in the wheel of their heavenly motion towards the children of God. Hence it is said, “God is love” (1Jo 4:16); “God is light” (1Jo 1:5); God is what He is for His own glory, and the good of them that fear Him. God! Why, God—in the breadth, length, depth, and height that is here intended—comprehends the whole world (Col 1:17). The whole world is *in* Him, for He is before, above, beyond, and round about all things. Hence it is said that He gathereth the wind in His fists (Pro 30:4), and that the heavens for breadth are but His span, [that He] measureth the waters in the hollow of His hand, weigheth the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance (Isa 40:12). Yea, that “all nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity” (Isa 40:17). Hence we are said to live and move in Him (Act 17:28), and that He is beyond all search.

I will add one word more, notwithstanding there is such a revelation of Him in His Word, in the book of creatures,³⁷ and in the book of providences;³⁸ yet the Scripture says, “Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him?” (Job 26:14). So great is God above all that we have read, heard, or seen of Him—either in the Bible, in heaven, earth, the sea, or what else is to be understood. But now that a poor mortal—a lump of sinful flesh, or, as the Scripture phrase is, poor “dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27)—should be in the favour, in the heart, and wrapped up in the compassions of *such* a God: O amazing! O astonishing consideration! And yet “This God is our God for ever and ever; and he will be our guide even unto death” (Psa 48:14).

It is said of our God that He “humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven” (Psa 113:6). How much more then when He openeth His eyes upon man—but most of all when He makes it, as one may say, His business to visit him every morning, and to try him every moment, having set His heart upon him, being determined to set him also among His princes. “The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people” (Psa 113:3-8).

b. No fear of anything in this world

If *this* God be our God, or if our God be such a God, and could we but attain to *that* knowledge of the breadth, length, depth, and height that is in Him—as the apostle here prays, and desires we may—we should *never be afraid of anything* we shall meet with, or that shall assault us, in this world. The great God, the former³⁹ of all things, taketh part with them that fear Him and that engage themselves to walk in His ways of love and respect, [which] they bear unto Him; so that such may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6). Would it not be amazing should you see a man [who was] encompassed with chariots and horses, and weapons for his defence, yet [who was] afraid of being sparrow blasted, or over-run by a grasshopper! Why, “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth,” and to whom “the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers” (Isa 40:22)—*that* is the God of the people that are lovers of Jesus Christ. Therefore we should not fear them. To fear man is to forget God, and to be careless in a time of danger is to forget God’s ordinance.

What is it then? Why, let us fear God and diligently keep His way, with what prudence and regard to our preservation, and also the preservation of what we have, we may. And if [in our] doing this, our God shall deliver us and what we have into the hands of them that hate us, let us laugh, be fearless and careless, not minding *now* to do anything else but to stand up for Him against the workers of iniquity—fully concluding that both we and our enemies are in the hand of Him Who loveth His people, and Who will certainly render a reward to the wicked, after He has sufficiently tried us by their means.⁴⁰ “The great God that formed all things, both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors” (Pro 26:10).⁴¹

³⁷ **book of creatures** – creation.

³⁸ **book of providences** – God’s decrees for what happens in the world.

³⁹ **former** – one who forms.

⁴⁰ **means** – instruments through which God works.

⁴¹ How thankful we should be, for the great spread of gospel light in this country since Bunyan’s days. He, for refusing to attend what he considered an unscriptural church, suffered above twelve years incarceration in a miserable den, while all his friends were either imprisoned or plundered. It was a dreadful attempt to root out Christianity from England, but it was overruled to make [faith] take deeper root. How long will Antichrist still hold up his head in this country? He has had some hard knocks of late.—*Ed.*

c. *Holy fear and reverence of God*

Another thing that the knowledge of what is prayed for of the apostle, if we attain it, will minister to us, is a *holy fear and reverence* of this great God in our souls; both because He is great, and because He is wise and good (Jer 10:7). “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?” (Rev 15:4).

Greatness should beget *fear*; greatness should beget reverence. Now who [is] so great as our God; and so, who to be feared like Him! He also is wise and will not be deceived by any. “He will bring evil, and not call back his words, but will rise against the house of evil-doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity” (Isa 31:2). Most men deal with God as if He were not wise, as if He either knew not the wickedness of their hearts and ways, or else knew not how to be even with them for it—When, alas! He *is* wise in heart and mighty in power; and although He will not without cause afflict, yet He will not let wickedness go unpunished. This therefore should make us fear [Him]. He also is good, and this should make us serve Him with fear. Oh! that a great God should be a good God; a good God to an unworthy, to an undeserving people who continually do what they can to provoke the eyes of His glory—this should make us tremble. He is fearful in service, fearful in praises.

The breadth, length, depth, and height of His out-going towards the children of men should also beget in us a very great fear and dread of His majesty. When the prophet saw the height of the wheels, he said they were dreadful (Eze 1:18); and cried out unto them, “O wheel!” (10:13). His judgments also are a great deep (Psa 36:6), nor is there any “searching of his understanding” (Isa 40:28). He can tell how to bring His wheel upon us, and to make our table a snare, a trap, and a stumbling-block unto us (Isa 8:14; Rom 11:8-10). He can tell how to make His Son to us a rock of offence, and His gospel to be a savour of death unto death unto us (2Co 2:15-16). He can tell how to choose delusions for us (Isa 66:4; 2Th 2:11-12), and to lead us forth with the workers of iniquity (Psa 125:5). He can out-wit and out-do us, and prevail against us forever (Job 14:20)—and therefore we should be afraid and fear before Him, for our good, and the good of ours forever.

Yea, it is for these purposes, with others, that the apostle prayeth thus for this people, for the comprehending of these things does poise and keep the heart in an even course. This yields comfort; this gives encouragement; this begets fear and reverence in our hearts of God.

d. *Make us willing*

This knowledge will make us willing that He should be our God; yea, will also make us abide by that willingness. Jacob said with a vow,

“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Gen 28:20-22).

Thus he considered the greatness of God, and from a supposition that He was what he had heard Him to be, of his father, he concluded to choose Him for His God, and that he would worship Him, and give Him that honour that was due to Him as God. How did the king of Babylon set Him above all gods when but some sparkling rays from Him did light upon him. He calls Him “a God of gods” (Dan 2:47), prefers Him above all gods, charges all people and nations that they do nothing amiss against Him (Dan 3:28-29). He calls Him “the most high” God, the God “that liveth for ever”; and confesses that He doth whatsoever He will in heaven and earth; and concludes with praising and extolling of Him (Dan 4). We naturally love greatness; and when the glorious beauty of the King of glory shall be manifest to us, and we shall behold it, we shall say as Joshua did: Let all men do as seems them good, “but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Jos 24:15).

When the Apostle Paul sought to win the Athenians to Him, he sets Him forth before them with such terms as bespeaks His greatness, calling of Him (and that rightly),

“God that made the world and all things therein...[the] Lord of heaven and earth...he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men...and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation...he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being,” etc. (Act 17:24-28).

These things bespeak the greatness of God, and are taking to considering men. Yea, these very Athenians, while ignorant of Him, from those dark hints that they had by natural light concerning Him, erected an altar to Him and put this singular inscription upon it, “To the unknown God”—to shew that, according to their mode, they had some kind of reverence for Him. But how much more when they came to know Him, and to believe that God, in all His greatness, had engaged Himself to be theirs—and to bring them to Himself that they might in time be partakers of his glory.

e. *Better conception of heaven*

The more a man knows or understands of the greatness of God towards him—expressed here by the terms of unsearchable breadth, length, depth, and height—the better will he be able in his heart to conceive of the excel-

lent glory and greatness of the things that are laid up *in the heavens* for them that fear Him. They that know nothing of this greatness, know nothing of them; they that think amiss of this greatness, think amiss of them; they that know but little of this greatness, know but little of them. But he that is able to comprehend with all saints what is the *breadth, length, depth, and height* [of God's love], he is best able to conceive of and, consequently, to make a judgment concerning the due worth and blessed glory of them.

This is evident to both reason [and] experience... Those dark souls that know nothing of His greatness, have in derision those who are, through the splendor of the glory, captivated and carried away after God. Also, those whose judgments are corrupted—and themselves thereby made as drunkards to judge of things foolishly—they, as it were, step in the same steps with the other, and vainly imagine thereabout. Moreover, we shall see those little-spirited Christians, though Christians indeed, that are but in a small measure acquainted with this God—with the breadths, lengths, depths, and heights that are in Him—taken but little with the glory and blessedness that they are to go to when they die. Wherefore they are neither so mortified to this world, so dead to sin, so self-denying, so delighted in the book of God, nor so earnest in desires to be acquainted with the heights and depths that are therein.

No, this is reserved only for those who are devoted thereto, who have been acquainted with God in a measure beyond that which your narrow-spirited Christians understand. There doth want as to these things enlargings in the hearts of the most of saints, as there did in those of Corinth and also in those at Ephesus. Wherefore, as Paul bids the one, and prays that the other may be enlarged and have great knowledge thereabout, so we should, to answer such love through desire, separate ourselves from *terrene*⁴² things that we may seek and intermeddle with all wisdom (Pro 18:1). Christ says, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (Joh 7:17; see Isa 28:9). Oh, that we were indeed enlarged as to these breadths, lengths, depths, and heights of God, as the apostle desired the Ephesians might!

f. Eschatology

[If we know more of Christ's love,] then those great truths—the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment—would neither seem so like fables, nor be so much off our hearts as they do and are (1Co 15:35). For the thorough belief of them depends upon the knowledge of the abilities that are in God to perform what He has said thereabout. And hence it is that your inferiour sort of Christians live... as if none of these things were at hand, and hence it is again that they so soon are shaken in mind about them when tempted of the devil or briskly assaulted by deceivers. But this cometh to pass that there may be fulfilled what is written: “And while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept” (Mat 25:1-7). Surely the meaning is [that] they were asleep about His coming, the resurrection, and the judgment; and, consequently, had lost much of that knowledge of God—the which if they had retained, these truths would have been upon their hearts with power. The Corinthians were horribly decayed here, though some more than others; hence Paul, when he treats of this doctrine, bids them “awake to righteousness” and not sin, telling them that some among them had not the knowledge of God (1Co 15:34). To be sure, they had not such a knowledge of God as would keep them steady in the faith of these things (vs. 51).

Now, the knowledge of the things mentioned above, to wit, “this comprehending knowledge,” will greaten these things, bring them near, and make them to be credited as are the greatest of God's truths. And the virtue of the faith of them is to make one die daily. Therefore,

g. Next world desirable

Another advantage that floweth from this knowledge, is that it makes the next world desirable, not simply as... those lean souls who desire it only as the thief desireth the judge's favour, that he may be saved from the halter—but out of love such have to God and to the beauties of the house He dwells in, that they may be rid of this world, which is to such as a dark dungeon. The knowledge of God that men pretend they have, may easily be judged by the answerableness or un-answerableness of their hearts and lives thereto. Where is the man that groans earnestly to be gone to God, that counts this life a strait unto Him, that saith as a sick man of my acquaintance did, when his friend at his bed-side prayed to God to spare his life—“No, no,” said he, “pray not so; for it is better to be dissolved and be gone.” Christians should shew the world how they believe; not by words on paper, nor by gay and flourishing notions (Jam 2:18); but by those desires they have to be gone. And the proof that these desires are true is a life in heaven while we are on earth (Phi 3:20-21). I know words are cheap, but a

⁴² *terrene* – pertaining to the earth.

dram⁴³ of grace is worth all the world. But where, as I said, shall it be found?—not among carnal men, nor among weak Christians, but among those, and those only, that enjoy a great measure of Paul's wish here.

⁴³ **dram** – unit of weight equal to 1/8 ounce; a small amount.

III.

The Love of Christ

“And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

—Ephesians 3:19

These words are the second part of the text, and they deal mainly about the love of Christ, Who is the Son of God. We have spoken already briefly of God, and therefore now we shall speak also of His Son. These words are a part of the prayer afore-mentioned, and have something of the same strain in them. In the first part, he prays that they might comprehend that which cannot absolutely by any means be comprehended; and here he prays that that might be known, which yet in the same breath he saith, *passeth knowledge*, to wit, the love of Christ. “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” In the words we are to take notice of three things: first, of the love of Christ; second, of the exceeding greatness of it; and third, of the knowledge of it.

We will begin with the first of these, to wit, *Of the love of Christ*. Now for the explication of this we must inquire into three things. First, Who Christ is. Second, What love is. Third, What the love of Christ is.

A. Who Christ Is

First, Christ is a person of no less quality than He is of Whom we treated before: to wit, *very God*. So I say, not titularly, not nominally, not so counterfeitly, but the self-same in *nature* with the Father (Joh 1:1-2; 1Jo 5:7; Phi 2:6). Wherefore what we have under consideration is so much the more to be taken notice of; namely, that a person so great, so high, so glorious, as this Jesus Christ was, should have love for us that *passes* knowledge. It is common for equals to love, and for superiors to be beloved; but for the King of princes, for the Son of God, for Jesus Christ to love *man* thus: this is amazing—and that so much the more, for that man, the object of this love, is so low, so mean, so vile, so undeserving, and so inconsiderable, as by the Scriptures everywhere he is described to be.

But to speak a little more particularly of this person: He is called God (Joh 1:1), the King of glory (Psa 24:10), and Lord of glory (1Co 2:8), the brightness of the glory of His Father (Heb 1:3), the head over all things (Eph 1:22), the Prince of life (Act 3:15), the Creator of all things (Col 1:16), the upholder of all things (Heb 1:3), the disposer of all things (Mat 28:18), the only beloved of the Father (Mat 11).

But the persons of Him beloved, are called transgressors, sinners, enemies, dust and ashes, fleas (1Sa 24:14), worms, shadows, vapours; vile, sinful, filthy, unclean, ungodly fools, madmen. And now is it not to be wondered at, and are we not to be affected herewith, saying, And wilt thou set thine eye upon such an one? But how much more when He will set His *heart* upon us. And yet this great, this high, this glorious person, verily, verily loveth such.

B. What Love Is

We now come to the second thing, namely, *to shew what is love*; not in a way of nice distinction of words, but in a plain and familiar discourse, yet respecting the love of the person under consideration.

Love ought to be considered with reference to the subject as well as to the object of it. The subject of love in the text is Christ. But forasmuch as love *in him* is diverse from the love that is *in us*, therefore it will not be amiss, if a little [of] the difference be made appear.

Love in us is a passion of the soul, and being such, is subject to *ebb* and *flow*, and to be extreme both ways. For whatever is a passion of the soul, whether love or hatred, joy or fear, is more apt to exceed or come short, than to keep within its due bounds. Hence, oft-times that which is loved today is hated tomorrow (2Sa 13:15); yea, and that which should be loved with bounds of moderation, is loved to the drowning of both soul and body

in perdition and destruction (1Ti 6:9-10). Besides, love in us is apt to choose to itself undue and unlawful objects; and to reject those that, with leave of God, we may embrace and enjoy—so unruly, as to the laws and rules of divine government, oft-times is this passion of love in us.

Love in us requires that something pleasing and delightful be in the object loved, at least so it must appear to the lust and fancy of the person loving, or else love cannot act. For the love that is in us, is not of power to set itself on work where no allurements are in the thing to be beloved.

Love in us decays, though once never so warm and strongly fixed, if the object falls off as to its first alluring provocation; or disappointeth our expectation with some unexpected reluctancy to our fancy or our mind.

All this we know to be true from nature, for every one of us are thus; nor can we refuse or choose as to love, but upon, and after, the rate and the working thus of our passions. Wherefore our love, as we are natural, is weak, unorderly, fails and miscarries, either by being too much or too little—yea, though the thing which is beloved be allowed for an object of love, both by the law of nature and grace. We therefore must put a vast difference betwixt love as found in us, and love as found in Christ, and that both as to the nature, principle, or object of love.

Love in Christ is not love of the same nature as is love in us; love in Him is essential to His being (1Jo 4:16); but in us it is not so, as has been already shewed. God is love; Christ is God; therefore Christ is love, *love naturally*. Love therefore is essential to His being. He may as well cease to *be*, as cease to *love*. Hence therefore it follows that love in Christ floweth not from so low and beggarly a principle as doth love in man; and consequently is not, nor can be, attended with those infirmities or defects that the love of man is attended with.

It is not attended with those unruly or uncertain motions that ours is attended with: here is no ebbing, no flowing, no going beyond, no coming short; and so nothing of uncertainty. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1).

True, there is a way of manifesting of this love, which is suited to our capacities as men, and by that we see it sometimes more, sometimes less (Song 7:11-12). Also it is manifested to us as we do, or do not, walk with God in this world (Joh 14:23); I speak now of saints.

Love in Christ pitcheth not itself upon undue or unlawful objects; nor refuseth to embrace what by the eternal covenant is made capable thereof. It always acteth according to God; nor is there at any time the least shadow of swerving as to this.

Love in Christ requireth no taking beauteousness in the object to be beloved, as not being able to put forth itself without such attracting allurements (Eze 16:6-8). It can act of and from itself, without all such kind of dependencies. This is manifest to all who have the least true knowledge of what that object is in itself, on which the Lord Jesus has set His heart to love them.

Love in Christ decays not, nor can be tempted so to do by anything that happens, or that shall happen hereafter, in the object so beloved. But as this love at first acts by, and from, itself, so it continueth to do until all things that are imperfections are completely and everlastingly subdued. The reason is because Christ loves to *make* us comely, not *because* we are so (Eze 16:9-14).

Objection. But all along Christ compareth His love to ours; now, why doth He so, if they be so much unlike?

Answer. Because we know not love but by the passions of love that work in our hearts; wherefore He condescends to our capacities, and speaketh of His love to us according as we find love to work in ourselves to others. Hence He sets forth His love to us by borrowing from us instances of our love to wife and children (Eph 5:25). Yea, He sometimes sets forth His love to us by calling to our mind how sometimes a man loves a woman that is a whore, “Go [saith God to the prophet], love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the word of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine” (Hos 3:1)! But then, these things must not be understood with respect to the nature, but the dispensations and manifestations of love; no, nor with reference to these neither—any further than by making use of such suitable similitudes, thereby to commend His love to us, and thereby to beget in us affections to Him for the love bestowed upon us.

Wherefore Christ’s love must be considered both with respect to the essence, and also as to the divers workings of it. For the essence thereof, it is as I said, natural with Himself, and as such, it is the root and ground of all those actions of His, whereby He hath shewed that Himself is loving to sinful man. But now, though the love that is in Him is essential to His nature, and can vary no more than God Himself, yet we see not this love but by the fruits of it, nor can it otherwise be discerned. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1Jo 3:16).

We must then betake ourselves to the discoveries of this love, of which there are two sorts; [namely,] such as are the *foundations*, and such as are the *consequences* of those fundamental acts. Those which I call the foundations, are they upon which all other discoveries of His goodness depend, and they are two: 1) His dying for us, [and] 2) His improving of His death for us at the right hand of God.

C. What the Love of Christ Is

And this leads me to the third particular, to wit, to shew you *what the love of Christ is*; namely, in the discovery of it. “And to know the love of Christ.”

The love of Christ is made known unto us, as I said, first, by His dying for us; [and] second, by His improving of His dying for us.

1. Christ's dying for us

His dying for us appears, a. to be wonderful in itself, [and] b. in His preparations for that work.

a. Christ's death itself

[Christ's death] appears to be *wonderful in itself*, and that both with respect to the nature of that death, as also with respect to the persons for whom He so died.

The love of Christ appears to be wonderful by the death He died, in that He died such a death. 'Twas strange love in Christ that moved Him to die for us; strange, because not according to the custom of the world. Men do not use, in cool blood, deliberately to come upon the stage or ladder, to lay down their lives for others; but this did Jesus Christ, and that too for such whose qualification, if it be duly considered, will make this act of His far more amazing: He laid down His life for His enemies (Rom 5), and for those, that could not abide Him; yea, for those, even for those that brought Him to the cross—not accidentally, or because it happened so, but knowingly, designedly (Zec 12:10). He knew it was for those He died, and yet His love led Him to lay down His life for them. I will add that those very people for whom He laid down His life—though they by all sorts of carriages did what they could to provoke Him to pray to God His Father that He would send and cut them off by the flaming sword of angels (Mat 26:53)—[He] would not be provoked, but would lay down His life for them. Nor must I leave off here: We never read that Jesus Christ was more cheerful in all His life on earth, than when He was going to lay down His life for them: now He thanked God (Luk 22:19), now He sang (Mat 26:30).

But this is not all. He did not only die, but died such a death as indeed cannot be expressed. He was content to be counted the sinner—yea, to be counted the *sin* of the sinner; nor could this but be odious to so holy a Lamb as He was—yet willing to be this, and thus for that love that He bare to men.

This being thus, it follows that His sufferings must be inconceivable; for that, what in justice was the proper wages of sin and sinners, He must undergo—and what that was can no man so well know as He Himself and damned spirits; for the proper wages of sin, and of sinners for their sin, is that death which layeth pains, such pains that it deserveth upon the man that dieth so. But Christ died so, and consequently was seized by those pains not only in body but in soul. His tears, His cries, His bloody sweat (Luk 22:44), the hiding of His Father's face—yea, God's forsaking of Him in His extremity (Mat 27:46)—plainly enough declares the nature of the death He died (Mar 15:39). For my part, I stand amazed at those that would not have the world believe that the death of Jesus Christ was, in itself, so terrible as it was!

I will not stand here to discourse of the place called *hell*, where the spirits of the damned are; we are discoursing of the nature of Christ's sufferings. And, I say, if Christ was put into the very capacity of one that must suffer what in justice ought to be inflicted for sin; then, how we can so diminish the greatness of His sufferings, as some do, without undervaluing of the greatness of His love, I know not—and how they will answer it, I know not. And on the contrary, what if I should say that the soul of Christ suffered as long as His body lay in the grave, and that God's loosing of the pains of death at Christ's resurrection, must not so much be made mention of with reference to His body, as to His soul, if to His body at all. For what pain of death was His body capable of, when His soul was separate from it (Act 2:24)? And yet, God's loosing the pains of death seems to be but an immediate antecedent⁴⁴ to His rising from the dead.

And this sense Peter doth indeed seem to pursue, saying,

⁴⁴ **antecedent** – going before in time; prior.

“For David speaketh concerning him; I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption” (Act 2:25-27).

This, saith Peter, was not spoken of David, but he—being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath, that of the fruit of his loins according to the flesh he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne (verses 29-30)—he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption (verse 31). “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell”; His soul was not left in hell. Of what use are these expressions if the soul of Christ suffered not, if it suffered not when separated from the body?—for of that time the Apostle Peter seems to treat. Besides, if it be not improper to say, that soul was *not* left there, that never was there, I am at a loss. “Thou wilt not leave”: His soul was not left there; ergo,⁴⁵ it *was* there, seems to be the natural conclusion.

If it be objected, that by *hell* is meant the grave, 'tis foolish to think that the soul of Christ lay there while His body lay dead therein. But again, the apostle seems clearly to distinguish between the places where the soul and body of Christ was, counting His body to be in the grave, and His soul, for the time, in hell.

If there be objected what was said by Him to the thief upon the cross (Luk 23:43), I can answer: Christ might speak that with reference to His God-head, and if so, that lies as no objection to what hath been insinuated. And why may not that be so understood, as well as where He said, when on earth, “The Son of man which is in heaven” (Joh 3:13), meaning Himself. For the personality of the Son of God, call Him Son of man or what other term is fitting, resideth not in the human, but divine nature of Jesus Christ. However, since hell is sometimes taken for the place (Act 1:25), sometimes for the grave, sometimes for the state (Psa 116:3), and sometimes but for a figure of the place where the damned are tormented (Jon 2:2), I will not strictly assign to Christ the place, the prison where the damned spirits are (1Pe 3:19)—but will say, as I said before, that He was put into the place of sinners, into the sins of sinners, and received what by justice was the proper wages of sin both in body and soul, as is evident from that 53rd of Isaiah (verse 10-11). This soul of His I take to be that which the inwards and the fat of the burnt sacrifices was a figure, or shadow, of. “And the fat and the inwards were burnt upon the altar, whilst the body was burned for sin without the camp” (Exo 29:13-14; Lev 8:14-17).

And now having said this much, wherein have I derogated from the glory and holiness of Christ? Yea, I have endeavoured to set forth something of the greatness of His sorrows, the odiousness of sin, the nature of justice, and the love of Christ. And be sure, by how much the sufferings of the Son of God abounded for us, by so much was this unsearchable love of Christ made manifest. Nor can they that would, before the people, pare away and make but little these infinite sufferings of our Lord, make His love to be so great as they ought, let them use what rhetoric they can, for their objecting the odious names and place of hell, accounting it not to be fit to say that so holy a person as the Son of God was there. I answer, though I have not asserted it, yet let me ask: which is more odious, hell or sin? Or whether such think that Christ Jesus was subject to be tainted by the badness of the place, had He been there? Or whether, when the Scripture says, God is in hell, it is any disparagement to Him (Psa 139:8)? Or if a man should be so bold as to say so, whether by so saying, he confineth Christ to that place forever? And whether by so thinking he has contradicted that called the *Apostles' Creed*?⁴⁶

b. Christ's preparations for His suffering

Having thus spoken of the death and sufferings of Christ, I shall in the next place speak of *His preparations for His so suffering* for us; and by so doing, yet shew you something more of the greatness of His love.

Christ, as I have told you, was, even before His sufferings, a person of no mean generation, being the Son of the eternal God. Neither had His Father any more such sons but He. Consequently He of right was heir of all things, and so to have dominion over all worlds. For, “for him were all things created” (Col 1:16). And hence all creatures are subject to Him; yea, the angels of God worship Him (Heb 1). Wherefore as so considered, He augmented not His state by becoming lower than the angels for us, for what can be added to Him, [Who] is naturally God. Indeed, He did take, for our sakes, the human nature into union with Himself, and so began to manifest His

⁴⁵ *ergo* – therefore.

⁴⁶ The descent of Christ into hell has been the subject of much controversy, and the question is as far from solution now as it was in the dark ages, when it was first propounded, and then arbitrarily decreed to be an article of faith. Those who explain hell as *hades*, the place of departed souls, or of the dead generally, fortify themselves with Psalm 139:8, and also Psalm 16:10; and yet the first passage may only imply the omnipresence of God, and the second, the resurrection of the incorruptible body of Christ from the grave. The descent of Christ into the place of torment is a figment, a monkish fable, in which Bible incidents and heathen myths are woven together to delude a credulous and ignorant laity. This is certainly the meaning of the descent into hell in the opinion of the Roman Catholics. Learned commentaries have been published, in various languages, on its authenticity and right interpretation. Erasmus considered it an interpolation.—*Ed.*

glory; and the kindness that He had for us before all worlds, began now eminently to shew itself. Had this Christ of God, our friend, given all He had to save us, had not His love been wonderful? But when He shall give for us *Himself*, this is more wonderful! But this is not all, the case was so betwixt God and man, that this Son of God could not, as He was before the world was, give Himself a ransom for us—He being altogether incapable so to do, being such an one as could not be subject to death, the condition that we by sin had put ourselves into.

Wherefore that which would have been a death to some—to wit, the laying aside of glory and becoming, of the King of princes, a servant of the meanest form—this He of His own good-will was heartily content to do. Wherefore, He that once was the object of the fear of angels, is now become a little creature, a worm, an inferior one (Psa 22:6); born of a woman, brought forth in a stable, laid in a manger (Luk 2:7), scorned of men, tempted of devils (Luk 4:2), was beholden to His creatures for food, for raiment, for harbour, and a place wherein to lay His head when dead. In a word, He “made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phi 2:7), that He might become capable to do this kindness for us.

And it is worth your noting, that all the while that He was in the world, putting Himself upon those other preparations that were to be antecedent to His being made a sacrifice for us, no man, though He told what He came about to many, had, as we read of, an heart once to thank Him for what He came about (Isa 53:3). No, they railed on Him, they degraded Him, they called Him devil, they said He was mad and a deceiver, a blasphemer of God, and a rebel against the state. They accused Him to the governor; yea, one of His disciples sold Him, another denied Him, and they all forsook Him, and left Him to shift for Himself in the hands of His horrible enemies—who beat Him with their fists, spat on Him, mocked Him, crowned Him with thorns, scourged Him, made a gazing stock of Him, and finally, hanged Him up by the hands and the feet alive, and gave Him vinegar to increase His affliction, when He complained that His anguish had made Him thirsty. And yet all this could not take His heart off the work of our redemption. To die He *came*, die He *would*, and die He *did* before He made His return to the Father, for our sins, that we might live through Him.⁴⁷

Nor may what we read of in the Word concerning those *temporal* sufferings that He underwent be overlooked and passed by without serious consideration, they being a part of the curse that our sin had deserved. For all temporal plagues are due to our sin while we live, as well as the curse of God to everlasting perdition when we die. Wherefore this is the reason why the whole life of the Lord Jesus was such a life of affliction and sorrow, He therein bare our sicknesses, and took upon Him our deserts—so that now the curse in temporals, as well as the curse in spirituals and of everlasting malediction, is removed by Him away from God’s people. And since He overcame them and got to the cross, it was by reason of the worthiness of the humble obedience that He yielded to His Father’s Law in our flesh. For His whole life (as well as His death) was a life of merit and purchase and desert. Hence it is said, “he increased in favour with God” (Luk 2:52), for His works made Him still more acceptable to Him—for He, standing in the room of man and becoming our reconciler to God, by the heavenly majesty, He was counted as such, and so got for us what He earned by His mediatory works;⁴⁸ and also partook thereof as He was our head Himself.

And was there not in all these things love, and love that was infinite? Love that was not essential to His divine nature, could never have carried Him through so great a work as this—passions here would have failed, would have retreated, and have given the recoil; yea, His very humanity would here have flagged and fainted, had it not been managed, governed, and strengthened by His eternal Spirit. Wherefore it is said that “through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God” (Heb 9:14), and that He was declared to be the Son of God with so doing and by the resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4).

⁴⁷ This is one of those strikingly solemn passages, which abound in Bunyan’s works. It almost irresistibly brings to our imagination his expressive countenance, piercing eyes, and harmonious voice; pressed on by his rapid conceptions and overpowering natural eloquence. How must it have riveted the attention of a great congregation. It is a rush of words, rolling on like the waves of the sea; increasing in grandeur and in force as they multiply in number.—*Ed.*

⁴⁸ **mediatory works** – “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Saviour of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto Whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.”—*The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* 8.1; available from Chapel Library.

2. Christ's improving of His dying for us

We come now to the second thing propounded, and by which Christ's love is discovered, and that is *His improving of His dying for us*. But I must crave pardon of my reader if he thinks that I can discover the ten hundred thousandth part thereof, for it is impossible; but my meaning is, to give a few hints what beginnings of improvement He made thereof, in order to His further progress therein.

a. Christ's death reconciled all of God's elect.

Therefore, this His death for us was so virtuous, that, in the space of three days and three nights, it reconciled to God in the body of His flesh as a common person all, and every one, of God's elect. Christ, when He addressed Himself to die, presented Himself to the justice of the Law as a *common* person;⁴⁹ standing in the sted, place, and room of all that He undertook for, He gave "his life a ransom for many" (Mat 20:28). "He came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15). And as He thus presented Himself, so God, His Father, admitted Him to this work; and therefore it is said, "The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all," and again, "surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa 53:4, 6, 12). Hence it unavoidably follows that, whatever He felt and underwent in the manner, nature, or horribleness of the death He died, He felt and underwent all as a common person; that is, as He stood in the sted of others. Therefore it is said, "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities," and that "the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him" (Isa 53:5). And again, "the just died for the *unjust*" (1Pe 3:18).

Now then, if He presented Himself as a common person to justice, if God so admitted and accounted Him, if also He laid the sins of the people, whose persons He represented, upon Him, and under that consideration punishes Him with those punishments and death that He died, then Christ in life and death is concluded by the Father to live and die as a common or public person, representing all in this life and death for whom He undertook thus to live, and thus to die. So then, it must needs be that what next befalls this common person, it befalls Him with respect to them in whose room and place He stood and suffered. Now, the next that follows is, that He is justified of God, that is, acquitted and discharged from this punishment, for the sake of the worthiness of His death and merits—for that must be before He could be raised from the dead (Act 2:24). God raised Him not up as guilty, to justify Him afterwards: His resurrection was the declaration of His precedent justification (Rom 4:25). He was raised from the dead, because it was neither in equity or justice possible that He should be holden longer there; His merits procured the contrary.

Now, He was condemned of God's Law and died by the hand of justice; He was acquitted by God's Law and justified of justice—and all as a common person. So then, in His acquitting we are acquitted, in His justification we are justified; and therefore the apostle applieth God's justifying of Christ to himself, and that rightly (Isa 50:8; Rom 8:33-34). For if Christ be my *undertaker*, will stand in my place and do for me, 'tis but reasonable that I should be a *partaker*. Wherefore we are also said to be "quickened together with him" (Eph 2:5)—that is, when He was quickened in the grave, raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Therefore another Scripture saith, you "hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13).

This quickening must not be understood of the renovation of our hearts, but of the restoring of Jesus Christ to life after He was crucified; and we are said to be quickened together with Him because we were quickened in Him at His death, and were to fall or stand by Him quite through the three days and three nights work; and were to take therefore our lot with Him. Wherefore it is said again that His resurrection is our justification (Rom 4:25), that by one offering He has purged our sins forever (Heb 10:12), and that by His death He hath "delivered us from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10). But I say, I would be understood aright: This life resideth yet in the Son, and is communicated from Him to us as we are called to believe His Word; meanwhile we are secured from wrath and hell, being justified in His justification, quickened in His quickening, raised up in His resurrection, and made to sit already together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus!

And is not this a glorious improvement of His death, that after two days the whole body of the elect, in Him, should be revived, and that in the third day we should live in the sight of God, in and by Him (Heb 6:18-20)!

b. Christ's death destroyed death.

⁴⁹ The reader must not misunderstand the word "common" as here applied to the Saviour. It has the same meaning that is applied to a piece of land, to which many persons have an equal or common right; but which none of these, who have a right or title, can use. It strikingly illustrates the union of Christ and His church.—Ed.

Another improvement of His death for us, was this: by that He slew for us our infernal foes, by it He abolished death (2Ti 1:1), by death He destroyed him that had the power of death (Heb 2:14). By death He took away the sting of death (1Co 15:55-56), by death He made death a pleasant sleep to saints, and the grave, for a while, an easy house and home for the body. By death He made death such an advantage to us, that it is become a means of translating of the souls of them that believe in Him, to life. And all this is manifest, for that death is ours, a blessing to us, as well as Paul and Apollos, the world and life itself (1Co 3:22).

And that all this is done for us by His death, is apparent, for that His person is where it is, and that by Himself as a common person He has got the victory for us. For though as yet all things are not put under our feet, yet we see Jesus crowned with honour and glory, Who by the grace of God tasteth death for every man. “For it became God, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:7-10). It became Him; that is, it was but just and right, He should do so, if there was enough in the virtuousness of His death and blood to require such a thing. But there *was* so! Wherefore God has exalted Him, and us in Him, above these infernal foes.

Let us therefore see ourselves delivered from death first, by the exaltation of our Jesus. Let us behold Him, I say, as crowned with glory and honour, as, or because, He tasted death for us. And then we shall see ourselves already in heaven by our Head, our Undertaker, our Jesus, our Saviour!

c. Christ's death obtained the Holy Ghost for us.

Another improvement that has already been made of His death for us, is thus: He hath at His entrance into the presence of God, for His worthiness sake, obtained that the Holy Ghost should be given unto Him for us, that we by that might, in all things yet to be done, be made meet⁵⁰ to be partakers *personally*—in ourselves, as well as *virtually* by our Head and Forerunner—of the inheritance of the saints in light. Wherefore the abundant pourings out of that was forborn until the resurrection and glorification of our Lord Jesus. “For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (Joh 7:39). Nor was it given so soon as received, for He received it upon His entering into the holy place, when He had sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of sprinkling, but it was not given out to us till sometimes after (Act 4), however it was obtained before (Act 2:32-33). And it was meet that it should, in that infinite immeasurableness in which He received it, first abide upon Him, that His human nature, which was the first fruits of the election of God, might receive by its abidings upon Him, that glory for which it was ordained—and that we might receive, as we receive all other things, first by our head and undertaker, sanctification in the fullness of it.

Hence it is written that, as He is made unto us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and redemption, so sanctification too (1Co 1:30)—for first we are sanctified in His flesh, as we are justified by His righteousness. Wherefore He is that holy one that setteth us, in Himself, a holy lump before God, not only with reference to justification and life, but with reference to sanctification and holiness—for we that are elect are all considered in Him as He has received that, as well as in that He has taken possession of the heaven for us. I count not this all the benefit that accrueth to us by Jesus, His receiving the Holy Ghost at His entrance into the presence of God for us, for we also are to receive it ourselves from Him, according as by God we are placed in the body at the times appointed of the Father, [so] that we, as was said, may receive personal quickening, personal renovation, personal sanctification, and in conclusion, glory. But I say, for that He hath received this Holy Spirit to Himself, He received it as the effect of His ascension, which was the effect of His resurrection, and of the merit of His death and passion. And He received it as a common person, as a head and undertaker for the people.

d. Christ's death obtained that Christ be made Lord.

Another improvement that has been made of His death and of the merits thereof for us, is that He has obtained to be made of God, the chief and high Lord of heaven and earth for us (all this while we speak of the exaltation of the human nature, in, by, and with which the Son of God became capable to be our reconciler unto God). “All things,” saith He, “are delivered unto me of my Father” (Mat 11:27). And “all power is given unto me in heaven and earth” (Mat 28:18); and all this because He died.

“He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, of things in earth, or things under the earth: and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:8-11).

⁵⁰ meet – suitable; fit.

And all this is, as was said afore, for our sakes. He has given Him to be head over all things to the church (Eph 1:22).

Wherefore, whoever is set up on earth, they are set up by our Lord. “By me,” saith He, “kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (Pro 8:15-16). Nor are they, when set up, left to do, though they should desire it, their own will and pleasure. The *Metheg-Ammah*,⁵¹ the bridle, is in His own hand, and He giveth reins, or check, even as it pleaseth Him (2Sa 8:1); He has this power for the well-being of His people. Nor are the fallen angels exempted from being put under His rebuke: He is the “only potentate” (1Ti 6:15), and in His times will shew it. Peter tells us, He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him” (1Pe 3:22).

This power, as I said, He has received for the sake of His church on earth, and for her conduct and well-being among the sons of men. Hence, as He is called the king of nations in general (Jer 10:7), so the King of saints in special (Rev 15:3), and as He is said to be head over all things in general—so to His church in special.

e. Christ's death has made sufficiency of gifts for our ministers.

Another improvement that He hath made of His death for us, is, He hath obtained and received into His own hand sufficiency of gifts to make ministers for His church withal. I say, to make and maintain, in opposition to all that would hinder, a sufficient ministry (1Co 12:28-30). Wherefore He saith,

“When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for edifying of the body of Christ. Until we all come in the unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:8-13).

Many ways has Satan devised to bring into contempt this blessed advantage, which Christ has received of God for the benefit of His church—partly while he stirs up persons to revile the sufficiency of the Holy Ghost as to this thing; partly while he stirs up his own limbs and members to broach his delusions in the world, in the name of Christ and, as they blasphemously call it, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost;⁵² partly while he tempteth novices in their faith to study and labour in nice distinctions, and the affecting of uncouth expressions, that vary from the form of sound words, thereby to get applause and a name, a forerunner of their own destruction (Joh 3:6).

But, notwithstanding all this, “Wisdom is justified of her children” (Mat 11:19); and at the last day, when the outside and inside of all things shall be seen and compared, it will appear that the Son of God has so managed His own servants in the ministry of His Word, and so managed His Word while they have been labouring in it, as to put in His blessing by that upon the souls of sinners, and has blown away all other things as chaff (Jam 1:18).

f. Christ's death has obtained heaven for us.

Another improvement that the Lord Christ has made of His death...is the obtaining and taking possession of heaven for them. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12). This heaven, who knows what it is (Mat 22:23)! This glory, who knows what it is! It is called God's throne, God's house (Joh 14:2), God's habitation, paradise (2Co 12:4), the kingdom of God, the high and holy place (Isa 57:15), Abraham's bosom (Luk 16:22), and the place of heavenly pleasures (Psa 16:11). In this heaven is to be found *the face of God forever* (Psa 41:12)—immortality, the person of Christ, the prophets, the angels, the revelation of all mysteries, the knowledge of all the elect, *eternity!*

Of this heaven, as was said afore, we are possessed already; we are in it; we are set down in it, and partake already of the benefits thereof, but all by our head and undertaker. And 'tis fit that we should believe this, rejoice in this, talk of this, tell one another of this, and live in the expectation of our own personal enjoyment of it. And as we should do all this, so we should bless and praise the name of God Who has put over this house, this kingdom, and inheritance, into the hand of so faithful a friend—yea, a brother, a Saviour, and blessed undertaker for us.

And lastly, since all these things already mentioned, are the fruit of the sufferings of our Jesus, and His sufferings the fruit of that love of His that passeth knowledge, how should we bow the knee before Him, and call Him tender Father. Yea, how should we love and obey Him, and devote ourselves unto His service, and be willing to be also sufferers for His sake, to Whom be honour and glory forever.

⁵¹ There is no affectation of learning in Bunyan's giving the meaning of the Hebrew word *Metheg*; it is translated in the margin of our Bibles as “the bridle” of Ammah.—*Ed.*

⁵² Bunyan seems here evidently to refer to the case of unregenerate and worldly men entering into the ministry, and making a public and solemn declaration that they “are inwardly moved thereto by the Holy Ghost,” and “truly called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.” See form and manner of ordaining deacons and priests in the Church of England.—*Ed.*

And thus much of the love of Christ in general. I might here add many other things, but as I told you before, we would under the head but now touched upon, treat [only] about the fundamentals or great and chief parts thereof.

IV. The Exceeding Greatness of the Love of Christ

“And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

—Ephesians 3:19

A. It Passeth Knowledge and Is Unsearchable.

1. Understanding the words themselves

[Now we will speak] of the exceeding greatness of Christ’s love. In that it is said to “pass knowledge,” ’tis manifest it is exceeding great, or greatly going beyond what can be known; for to exceed is to go beyond, be above, or to be out of the reach of what would comprehend that which is so. And since the expression is absolutely indefinite, and respecteth not the knowledge of this or the other creature only, it is manifest that Paul, by his thus saying, challengeth all creatures in heaven and earth to find out the bottom of this love if they can.

“The love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” I will add that, forasmuch as he is indefinite also about the knowledge, as well as about the persons [who are] knowing, it is [without] doubt that he here engageth *all* knowledge, in what enlargements, attainments, improvements, and heights soever it hath, or may forever attain unto. It “passeth knowledge”!

Of the same import also is that other passage of the apostle a little above in the self-same chapter.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

I preach, saith he, among the Gentiles “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), or those riches of Christ that cannot by searching be found out in the all of them. “*The riches*”—the riches of His love and grace. The riches of His love and grace *towards us*. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich” (2Co 8:9).⁵³ Ye know the grace that is so far, and so far every believer knows it; for His leaving heaven and taking upon Him flesh, that He might bring us thither, is manifest to all. But yet, all the grace that was wrapped up in that amazing condescension, knoweth none, nor can know—for if that might be, that possibility would be a flat contradiction to the text: “The love of Christ which *passeth* knowledge.” Wherefore the riches of this love in the utmost of it, is not, cannot be, known by any—let their understanding and knowledge be heightened and improved what it may. Yea, and being heightened and improved, let what search there can by it be made into this love and grace. “That which is afar off, and exceeding deep, who can find out?” (Ecc 7:24). And that this love of Christ is so, shall anon be made more apparent.

2. Particular challenges to our understanding this love

But at present we will proceed to particular challenges for the making out of this, and then we will urge those reasons that will be for the further confirmation of the whole.

First, this love passes the knowledge of *the wisest saint*; we now single out the greatest proficient in this knowledge—and to confirm this, I need go no further than to the man that spake these words, to wit, Paul, for in his conclusion he includes himself. [It is as if he had said,] “the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, even *my* knowledge.” [It is] as [any] should say: “Though I have waded a great way in the grace of Christ, and have as much experience of His love as any in all the world, yet I confess myself short as to the fullness that is therein.” Nor will I stick⁵⁴ to conclude of any other, that “he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (1Co 8:2; 13:12).

⁵³ Bunyan originally quoted this passage from the Puritan version; vulgarly [commonly] called “The Breeches Bible.”—*Ed.*

⁵⁴ **stick** – hesitate.

Second, this love passeth the knowledge of *all the saints*, were it all put together. We, we all, and every one, did we each of us contribute for the manifesting of this love—what it is, the whole of what we know—it would amount but to a broken knowledge: we know but in part; we see darkly (1Co 13:9-12); we walk not by sight but faith (2Co 5:7). [It is] true; now we speak of saints on earth.

But *third*, we will speak of *saints in heaven*. They cannot to the *utmost* know this love of Christ. For though they know more thereof than saints on earth because they are more in the open visions of it—and also are more enlarged than we on earth, being spirits perfect—yet, to say no more now, they do not see the rich and unsearchable runnings out thereof unto sinners here on earth. Nor may they there measure that to others, by what they themselves knew of it here—for sins, times, persons, and other circumstances may much alter the case. But were all the saints on earth and all the saints in heaven to contribute all that they know of this love of Christ, and to put it into one sum of knowledge, they would greatly come short of knowing the utmost of this love, for there is an infinite deal of this love yet unknown by them. 'Tis said plainly that they on earth do not *yet* know what they shall be (1Jo 3:2). And as for them in heaven, they are not yet made perfect *as they shall be* (Heb 11:39-40). Besides, we find the souls under the altar—how perfect [they may be] now when compared with that state they were in when with the body (Isa 63:16)—yet are not able in all points, though in glory, to know, and so to govern themselves there without directions (Rev 6:9-11). I say, they are not able, without directions and instructions, to know the kinds and manner of workings of the love of Christ towards us that dwell on earth.

Fourth, we will join with *the angels*, and when all of them, with men, have put all and every whit of what they know of this love of Christ together, they must come far short of reaching to, or of understanding, the utmost bound thereof. I grant that angels do know, in some certain parts of knowledge of the love of Christ, more than saints on earth can know while here; but then again, I know that even they do also learn many things of saints on earth, which shews that themselves know also but in part (Eph 3:10).

So then, *all* as yet, as to this love of Christ and the utmost knowledge of it, are but as so many imperfects (1Pe 1:12). Nor can they all put all their imperfects together [to] make up a perfect knowledge of this love of Christ—for the texts do yet stand where they did, and [those texts] say: His riches are unsearchable and His love [is] that which passeth knowledge.

B. The Reason Why This Love Is Unsearchable

We will come now to shew you, besides what has been already touched on, the reason why this love is unsearchable and passeth knowledge.

1. It is eternal.

The first reason is because it is *eternal*. All that is eternal has attending [to] it, as to the utmost knowledge of it, a fourfold impossibility: a) It is without beginning; b) It is without end; c) It is infinite; d) It is incomprehensible.

a. It is without beginning.

That which was before the world was, is without a beginning—but the love of Christ was before the world!

This is evident from Proverbs 8:31. Before God had made the world, “his delights” are said to be “with the sons of men.” Not that we then had being, for we were as yet uncreated; but though we had not beings created,⁵⁵ we had being in the love and affections of Jesus Christ. Now, this love of Christ must needs, as to the fullness of it, as to the utmost of it, be absolutely unknown to man. Who can tell how many heart-pleasing thoughts Christ had of us before the world began? Who can tell how much He *then* was delighted in that being we had in His affections, as also in the consideration of our beings, believings,⁵⁶ and being with Him afterwards.

In general we may conclude, it was great, for there seems to be a parallel betwixt His Father's delights in *Him*, and *His* delights in *us*. “I was daily his delight...and my delights were with the sons of men” (Pro 8:22, 30-31). But I say...who can tell altogether *what* and *how much* the Father delighted in His Son before the world began? Who can tell what *kind* of delight the Father had in the Son before the world began? Why, there seem to be a parallel betwixt the Father's *love* to Christ, and Christ's love to us; [and] the Father's *delight* in Christ, and

⁵⁵ **not beings created** – bodies that did not yet physically exist.

⁵⁶ **believings** – saving faith of the children of God, which they come to after their birth into the world.

His delight in us. Yea, Christ confirms it, saying, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you, continue ye in my love" (Joh 15:9).

I know that I am not yet upon the nature of the word *eternal*. Yet, since by eternal we understand *before the world began*, as well as *forward to an endless forever*, we may a little enquire of folks as they may read, if they can tell the kind or measure of the love wherewith Christ then loved us. I remember the question that God asked Job, "Where," saith He, "wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:4); thereby insinuating that because it was done before he had his being, therefore he could not tell how it was done. Now, if a work so visible as is the creation, is yet as to the manner of the workmanship thereof wholly unknown to them that commenced in their beings afterwards—how shall that which has been more hidden and inward in all the circumstances of it, be found out by them that have intelligence thereof by the ear, and but in part, and that in a mystery, and long afterwards? But to conclude this, that which is eternal is without all beginning. This was presented to consideration before, and therefore it cannot be known to perfection.

b. It is without end.

That which is eternal is without end, and how can an endless thing be known? That which has no end has no middle, wherefore it is impossible that the one half of the love that Christ has for His church should ever be known by them. I know that those visions that the saved shall have in heaven of this love will far transcend our utmost knowledge here, even as far as the light of the sun at noon goes beyond the light of a blinking candle at midnight. Hence it is that, when the days of those visions are come, the knowledge that we *now* have shall be swallowed up. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1Co 13:10). And although [the apostle] speaks here of perfection ("when that which is perfect is come," etc.), yet even that perfection must not be thought to be such as is the perfection of God, for then should all that are saved be so many *externals* and so many *infinities*, [just] as [Christ] is infinite.

But the meaning is, we shall then be with the Eternal, shall immediately⁵⁷ enjoy Him with all the perfection of knowledge—as far as is possible for a creature, when he is wrought up to the utmost height that his created substance will bear, to be capable of. But for all that, this perfection will yet come short of the perfection of Him that made him, and consequently, short of knowing the utmost of His love, since that in the root is His very essence and nature. I know it says also that "we shall know even as we are known." But yet this must not be understood as if we should know God as fully as He knows us; it would be folly and madness so to conclude. But the meaning is: we are known *for* happiness; we are known of God *for* heaven and felicity. When that which is perfect is come, then shall we perfectly know and enjoy that for which we are now known of God. And this is that which the apostle longed for, namely, if by any means he might "apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phi 3:12)—that is, know and see that unto the which he was appointed of God and apprehended of Christ Jesus.

'Tis said again, "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). This text has respect to the Son as to His humanity, and not as to His divinity—and not as to His divinity simply or distinctly considered, for as to that it is as possible for a spirit to drink up the sea, as for the most enlarged saint that is, or ever shall be in glory, so to see God as to know Him altogether, to the utmost, or throughout. But the humanity of the Son of God, we shall see throughout, in all the beauty and glory that is upon Him, and that was prepared for Him before the foundation of the world—and Christ will [ensure] that we see this glory, when He takes us up in glory to Himself (Joh 17:24). But the utmost boundlessness of the divine majesty, the eternal deity of the Son of God, cannot be known to the utmost or altogether.

I do not doubt but that there will then in...Christ and in us, break forth these glorious rays and beams of the eternal majesty, as will make Him in each of us admirable one to another (2Th 1:10); and that then, that of God shall be known of us, that now never entered into our hearts to think of. But the whole is not, cannot, [nor] shall ever be fully known of any. And therefore the love of Christ, it being essential to Himself, cannot be known because of the endlessness that is in it.

I said before [that] that which has no end has no middle, how then shall those that shall be in heaven eternally ever pass over half the breadth of eternity? True, I know that all enjoyments there will be enjoyments eternal; yea, that whatever we shall there embrace, or what embraces we shall be embraced with, shall be eternal. But I put a difference betwixt that which is eternal as to the *nature*, and that which is so as to the *durableness* thereof.

⁵⁷ **immediately** – directly; without anything in between.

The nature of eternal things we shall enjoy so soon as ever we come to heaven, but the duration of eternal things, that we shall never be able to pass through, for they are endless. So then, the eternal love of Christ, as to the nature of it, will be perfectly known of saints when they shall dwell in heaven; but the endlessness thereof they shall never attain unto—and this will be their happiness! For could it be that we should, in heaven, ever reach the end of our blessedness (as we should, could we reach to the end of this love of Christ), why then, as the saying is, we should be at the land's end and feel the bottom of all our enjoyments. Besides, whatsoever has an end has a time to decay and to cease to be, as well as to have a time to shew forth its highest excellencies. Wherefore, from all these considerations, it is most manifest that the love of Christ is unsearchable, and that it passes knowledge.

c. It is infinite and incomprehensible.

Now the other two things follow of course, to wit, that this love is *infinite* and *incomprehensible*. Wherefore here is that that still is above and beyond even those that are arrived to the utmost of their perfections. And this, if I may so say, will keep them in an employ⁵⁸ even when they are in heaven—though not an employ that is labourous, tiresome, burdensome, [but] yet an employ that is dutiful, delightful, and profitable. For although the work and worship of saints in heaven is not particularly revealed as yet, and so “it doth not yet appear what we shall be,” yet in the general we may say, there will be that for them to do, that has not yet by them been done; and by that work which they shall do there, their delight will be delight unto them.

The Law was the shadow and not the very image of heavenly things (Heb 10:1). The image is an image, and not the heavenly things themselves (the heavenly things are the saints). There shall be worship in the heavens (Heb 9:23), nor will this at all derogate⁵⁹ from their glory. The angels now wait upon God and serve Him (Psa 103:20); the Son of God is now a minister, and waiteth upon His service in heaven (Heb 8:1-2); some saints have been employed about service for God after they have been in heaven (Luk 9:29-32)—and why we should be idle spectators when we come thither, I see not reason to believe. It may be said, they there “rest from their labours” (Rev 14:13); true, but not from their delights. All things then that once were burdensome, whether in suffering or service, shall be done away, and that which is delightful and pleasurable shall remain. [Someone else may say,] “But then will be a time to receive, and not to work”; true, if by work you mean such as we now count work—but what if our work be there to receive and bless. The fishes in the sea do drink, swim, and drink. But for a further discourse of this, let that alone till we come thither.⁶⁰

But to come down again into the world, for [in this section] we [have been] talking of things aloft—

2. We cannot know the utmost of our sin.

The second reason this love of Christ must needs be beyond our knowledge, [is] because we cannot possibly know the *utmost of our sin*. Sin is that which sets out, and off, the knowledge of the love of Christ. There are four things that must be spoken to for the clearing of this: a) The nature of sin, b) The aggravations of sin, c) The utmost tendencies of sin, and d) The perfect knowledge of all this.

a. The nature of sin

Before we can know this love of Christ, as afore, we must necessarily know the *nature of sin*—that is, what sin is, what sin is in itself. But no man knows to the full the nature of sin, what sin in itself is. The apostle saith that sin in itself is “exceeding sinful,” that is, exceeding as to its filthiness, going beyond our knowledge—[and that] this is seen “by the commandment” (Rom 7:13). Now the reason why none can know the horrible nature of sin to the full, is because none can know the blessed nature of the blessed God to the full. For sin is the opposite to God. There is nothing but sin that seeketh absolutely and in its own nature to overcome and annihilate God—and sin doth so. Sin is worse than the devil; he therefore that is more afraid of the devil than of sin, knows not the badness of sin as he ought, nor but little of the love of Jesus Christ. He that knows not what sin would have done to the world, had not Christ stepped betwixt those harms and it, how can he know so much as the extent of the love of Christ in common? And he that knows not what sin would have done to him in particular, had not Christ the Lord stepped in and saved, cannot know the utmost of the love of Christ to him in particular. Sin

⁵⁸ **keep them in an employ** – keep them occupied in a full-time job.

⁵⁹ **derogate** – detract.

⁶⁰ **till we come thither** – until we come to it in due course.

therefore, in the utmost evil of it, cannot be known of us; so, consequently, the love of Christ, in the utmost goodness of it, cannot be known of us.

Besides, there are many sins committed by us, dropping from us, and that pollute us, that we are not at all aware of. How then should we know that love of Christ by which we are delivered from them?

Lord, “who can understand *his* errors?” said David (Psa 19:12). Consequently, who can understand the love that saves him from them? Moreover, he that knows the love of Christ to the full, must also know to the full that wrath and anger of God that, like hell itself, burneth against sinners for the sake of sin—but this knows none! Lord, “who knoweth the power of thine anger?” said Moses (Psa 90:11). Therefore, none knows this love of Christ to the full! The nature of sin is to get into our good, to mix itself with our good, to lie lurking many times under the formality and shew of good—and that so close, so cunningly and invisibly, that the party concerned embraces it for virtue, and knows not otherwise to do. Yet, from this he is saved by the love of Christ. Therefore, as was hinted but now, if a man doth not know the nature of his wound, how should he know the nature and excellency of the balsam that hath cured him of his wound?

b. The aggravations of sin

There are the due *aggravations* that belong to sin, which men are unacquainted with. It was one of the great things that the prophets were concerned with from God towards the people (as to shew them their sins, so), to shew them what aggravations did belong thereto (Jer 2; Jer 3; Eze 16).

There are—

- sins against light;
- sins against knowledge;
- sins against love;
- sins against learning;
- sins against threatenings;
- sins against promises, vows, and resolutions;
- sins against experience;
- sins against examples of anger; and
- sins that have great, high, and strange aggravations attending of them—the which we are ignorant of, though not altogether, yet in too great a measure.

Now if these things be so, how can the love that saveth us from them be known or understood to the full?

Alas! Our ignorance of these things is manifest by our unwillingness to abide affliction, by our secret murmuring under the hand of God, by our wondering why we are so chastised as we are, by our thinking long that the affliction is no sooner removed. Or, if our ignorance of the vileness of our actions is not manifest this way, yet it is in our lightness under our guilt, our slight thoughts of our doings, our slovenly doing of duties and asking of forgiveness after some evil or unbecoming actions. 'Tis to no boot⁶¹ to be particular; the whole course of our lives doth too fully make it manifest that we are wonderful⁶² short in knowing both the nature and also the aggravations of our sins—and how then should we know that love of Christ in its full dimensions, by which we are saved and delivered therefrom?

c. The tendencies of sin

Who knows the utmost *tendencies* of sin—I mean what the least sin driveth at, and what it would unavoidably run the sinner into? There is not a plague, a judgment, an affliction, an evil under heaven, that the least of our transgressions has not called for at the hands of the great God! Nay, the least sin calleth for all the distresses that are under heaven to fall upon the soul and body of the sinner at once. This is plain for that the least sin deserveth hell, which is worse than all the plagues that are on earth. But I say, who understandeth this? And I say again, if one sin, the least sin, deserveth all these things, what thinkest thou do *all* thy sins deserve? How many judgments! how many plagues! how many lashes with God's iron whip dost thou deserve! Besides [these], there is hell itself, the place itself, the fire itself, the nature of the torments, and the durability of them—who can understand?

⁶¹ **boot** – profit; gain; advantage; derived from “booty.”

⁶² **wonderful** – incredibly.

But this is not all! The tendencies of thy sins are to kill others. Men, good men, little think how many of their neighbours one of their sins may kill—[such] as, how many good men and good women do unawares, through their uncircumspectness, drive their own children down into the deep (Psa 106:6-7)? We will easily count them very hardhearted sinners that used to offer their children in sacrifice to devils, when 'tis easy to do worse ourselves: they did but kill the body, but we body and soul in hell, if we have not a care.

Do we know how our sins provoke God? How they grieve the Holy Ghost? How they weaken our graces? How they spoil our prayers? How they weaken faith? How they tempt Christ to be ashamed of us? And how they hold back good from us? And if we know not every one of all these things to the full, how shall we know to the full the love of Christ, which saveth us from them all?

d. The perfect knowledge of all this

Again, but who has the perfect knowledge of *all* these things? I will grant that some good souls may have waded a great way in some one or more of them, but I know that there is not any that thoroughly know them *all*. And yet the love of Christ doth save us from *all*, notwithstanding all the vileness and soul-damning virtue⁶³ that is in them. Alas, how short are we of the knowledge of ourselves and of what is in us! How many are there that do not know that man consisteth of a body made of dust *and* of an immortal soul? Yea, and how many be there of those that confess it, who know not the constitution of either. I will add, how many are there that profess themselves to be students of those two parts of man, that have oftentimes proved themselves to be but fools as to both? And I will conclude that there is not a man under heaven that knoweth it all together: For man is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psa 139:14). Nor can the manner of the union of these two parts be perfectly found out. How much more then must we needs be at loss as to the fullness of the knowledge of the love of Christ! But,

3. We cannot know all the wiles of the devil.

Reason Third. He that altogether knoweth the love of Christ, must, precedent to that, know not only all the wiles of the devil, but also all the plottings, contrivings, designs, and attempts of that wicked one. Yea, he must know all the times that he hath been with God, together with all the motions that he [the devil] has made that he might have leave to fall upon us, as upon Job and Peter, to try if he might swallow us up (Job 1, 2; Luk 22:31). But who knows all this? No man; no angel. For, if the heart of man be so deep that none, by all his actions, save God, can tell the utmost secrets that are therein, how should the heart of angels, which in all likelihood are deeper, be found out by any mortal man. And yet this must be found out before we can find out the utmost of the love of Christ to us.

I conclude therefore from all these things, that the love of Christ passeth knowledge, or that by no means the bottom, the utmost bounds thereof, can be understood.

4. We cannot know the utmost merit of Christ's atonement.

Reason Fourth. He that will presume to say this love of Christ can be to the utmost known by us, must presume to say that he knoweth the utmost of the merits of His blood, the utmost exercise of His patience, the utmost of His intercession, the utmost of the glory that He has prepared and taken possession of for us. But I presume that there is none that can know all this, therefore I may without any fear assert, there is none that knows, that is, that knows to the full, the other.

We have spoken of the *love* of Christ; and of the *exceeding greatness* of it. We come now more particularly to speak of the knowledge of the love of Christ.

⁶³ **virtue** – secret agency; efficacy without visible or material action.—*Walker's Dictionary; Ed.*

V.

The Knowledge of Christ's Love

Now we will show the knowledge of Christ's love that *is* attainable in this world, under these three heads. As to this, First, it may be known as to the nature of it. Second, it may be known in many of the degrees of it. Third, but the greatest knowledge that we can have of it here, is to know that it passes knowledge.

A. The Nature of Christ's Love

First, we may know it in the *nature* of it, that is, that it is love *free, divine, heavenly, everlasting, incorruptible*. And this no love is but the love of Christ; all other love is either love corruptible, transient, mixed, or earthly. It is divine, for 'tis the love of the holy nature of God. It is heavenly, for that it is from above. It is everlasting, for that it has no end. It is immortal, for that there is not the appearance of corruptibleness in it, or likelihood of decay.

This is general knowledge, and this is common among the saints, at leastwise in the notion of it. Though I confess it is hard, in time of temptation, practically to hold fast the soul to all these things. But, as I have said already, this love of Christ must be such, because love, in the root of it, is essential to His nature, as also I have proved now. As is the root, such are the branches; and as is the spring, such are the streams, unless the channels in which those streams do run should be corrupted and so defile it. But I know no channels through which this love of Christ is conveyed unto us, but those made in His side, His hands, and His feet, etc. Or those gracious promises that dropped like honey from His holy lips, in the day of His love in which He spake them. And, seeing His love is conveyed to us as through those channels, and so by the conduit of the holy and blessed Spirit of God to our hearts, it cannot be that it should hitherto be corrupted. I know the cisterns, to wit, our hearts, into which it is conveyed, are unclean, and may take away much, through the damp that they may put upon it, of the native savour and sweetness thereof. I know also that there are those that tread down and muddy those streams with their feet (Eze 34:18-19). But yet, neither the love nor the channels in which it runs should bear the blame of this.

And I hope those that are saints indeed, will not only be preserved to eternal life, but nourished with this that is incorruptible unto the day of Christ. I told you before that, in the hour of temptation, it will be hard for the soul to hold fast to these things—that is, to the true definition of this love—for then, or at such seasons, it will not be admitted that the love of Christ is either transient or mixed. But we count that we cannot be loved long, unless something better than yet we see in us be found there as an inducement to Christ to love, and to continue to love, our poor souls (Isa 64:6). But these the Christian at length gets over; for he sees, by experience, [that] he hath no such inducement (Deu 9:5); also, that Christ loves freely, and not for, or because of, such poor, silly, imaginary enticements (Eze 16:60-62). Thus therefore the love of Christ may be known, that is, in the nature of it.

It *may*, I say, but not easily (Eze 36:25-33)—for this knowledge is neither easily got, though got; nor easily retained, though retained. There is nothing that Satan setteth himself more against, than the breaking forth of the love of Christ in its own proper *native* lustre. For he knows it destroys his kingdom, which standeth in profaneness, in errors and delusions, the only destruction of which is the knowledge of this love of Christ (2Co 5:14). What mean those swarms of opinions that are in the world? What is the reason that some are carried about as clouds with a tempest? What mean men's waverings, men's changing, and interchanging, truth for error, and one error for another? Why, this is the thing: the devil is in it! This work is his, and he makes this ado [in order] to make a dust; and a dust to darken the light of the gospel withal. And if he once attaineth to that, then farewell the true knowledge of the love of Christ!

Also, he will assault the spirits of Christians with divers and sundry cogitations,⁶⁴ such as shall have in them a tendency to darken the judgment, delude the fancy, to abuse the conscience. He has an art to metamorphose⁶⁵ all

⁶⁴ **cogitations** – ponderings, meditations, thinking seriously and deeply.

things. He can make God seem to be to us a most fierce and terrible destroyer; and Christ a terrible exactor of obedience, and most amazingly pinching⁶⁶ of His love. He can make supposed sins unpardonable, and unpardonable ones appear as virtues. He can make the Law to be received for gospel, and cause that the gospel shall be thrown away as a fable. He can persuade that faith is fancy,⁶⁷ and that fancy is the best faith in the world. Besides, he can tickle the heart with false hope of a better life hereafter, even as if the love of Christ were there. But, as I said before, from all these things the true love of Christ, in the right knowledge of it, delivereth those that have it shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, which He hath given (Rom 5). Wherefore it is for this purpose that Christ biddeth us to *continue in His love* (Joh 15:9); because the right knowledge and faith of that to the soul, dispereth and driveth away all such fogs and mists of darkness; and makes the soul to sit fast in the promise of eternal life by Him; yea, and to grow up into Him Who is the head, "in all things" (Col 1:18).

Helps to the knowledge of the love of Christ

Before I leave this head, I will present my reader with these things as helps to the knowledge of the love of Christ. I mean the knowledge of the nature of it, and as *helps* to retain it.

Help First. Know thy self: what a vile, horrible, abominable sinner thou art—for thou canst not know the love of Christ, before thou knowest the badness of thy nature. "O wretched man that I am" (Rom 7:24) must be, before a man can perceive the nature of the love of Christ. He that sees himself *but little*, will hardly know *much* of the love of Christ; he that sees of himself *nothing at all*, will hardly ever see *anything* of the love of Christ—but he that sees most of what an abominable wretch he is, he is like to see most of what is the love of Christ. All errors in doctrine take their rise from the want of this (I mean errors in doctrine as to justification). All the idolizing of men's virtues and human inventions, riseth also from the want of this.

So then, if a man would be kept sure and stedfast, let him labour before all things to know his own wretchedness. People naturally think that the knowledge of their sins is the way to destroy them, when in very deed, it is the first step to salvation. Now if thou wouldest know the badness of thy self, begin in the first place to study the Law, then thy heart, and so thy life. The Law thou must look into, for that is *the glass*; thy heart thou must look upon, for that is *the face*; thy life thou must look upon, for that is *the body* of a man, as to religion (Jam 1:25). And without the wary consideration of these three, 'tis not to be thought that a man can come at the knowledge of himself, and consequently to the knowledge of the love of Christ (Jam 1:26-27).

Help Second. Labour to see the emptiness, shortness, and the pollution that cleaveth to a man's own righteousness. This also must in some measure be known, before a man can know the nature of the love of Christ. They that see nothing of the loathsomeness of man's best things, will think that the love of Christ is of *that* nature as to be procured, or won, obtained, or purchased by man's good deeds. And although so much gospel light is broke forth as to stop men's mouths from saying this, yet 'tis nothing else but sound conviction of the vileness of man's righteousness, that will enable men to see that the love of Christ is of that nature as to save a man without it; as to see that it is of that nature as to justify him without it—I say, without it, or not at all. There is *shortness*, there is *hypocrisy*, there is a desire of *vain glory*, there is *pride*, there is *presumption* in man's own righteousness. Nor can it be without these wickednesses when men know not the nature of the love of Christ. Now, these defile it, and make it abominable. Yea, if there were no imperfection in it but that which I first did mention, to wit, *shortness*, how could it cover the nakedness of him that hath it, or obtain for the man, in whole or in part, that Christ should love and have respect unto him.

Occasions many thou hast given thee to see the emptiness of man's own righteousness, but all will not do unless thou hast help from heaven. Wherefore, thy wisdom will be, if thou canst tell where to find it, to lie in the way of God, that when He comes to visit the men that wait upon Him in the means of His own appointing, thou mayest be there—if perhaps He may cast an eye of pity upon thy desolate soul, and make thee see the things above mentioned, that thou mayest know the nature of the love of Christ.

Help Third. If thou wouldest know the nature of this love, be much in acquainting of thy soul with the nature of the Law and the nature of the gospel (Gal 3:21). The which, though they are not diametrically opposite one to another, yet do propound things so differently to man, that if he knows not where, when, and how to take them, 'tis impossible but that he should confound them—and in confounding of them, lose his own soul (Rom 9:31-

⁶⁵ **metamorphose** – to change into a different form; to transform.

⁶⁶ **pinching** – squeeze into only small doses.

⁶⁷ **fancy** – delusive imagination; fantasy.

32). The Law is a servant, both first and last, to the gospel (Rom 10:3-4). When therefore it is made a Lord, it destroyeth—and then, to be sure, it is made a Lord and Saviour of, when its dictates and commands are depended upon for life.

Thy wisdom therefore will be to study these things distinctly and thoroughly; for so far as thou art ignorant of the true knowledge of the nature of these, so far thou art ignorant of the true knowledge of the nature of the love of Christ. Read Paul to the Galatians. That epistle was indicted by the Holy Ghost on purpose to direct the soul in and about this very thing.

Help Fourth. The right knowledge of the nature of the love of Christ is obtained and retained, by keeping of these two doctrines at an everlasting distance as to the conscience; to wit, not suffering the Law to rule but over my outward man, not suffering the gospel to be removed one hair's breadth from my conscience. When Christ dwells in my heart by faith (Eph 3:17), and the moral law dwells in my members (Col 3:5)—the one to keep up peace with God, the other to keep my conversation in a good decorum—then am I right, and not till then.

But this will not be done without much experience, diligence, and delight in Christ. For there is nothing that Satan more desireth, than that the Law may abide in the conscience of an awakened Christian, and there take up the place of Christ and faith; for he knows if this may be obtained, the veil is presently drawn over the face of the soul, and the heart darkened as to the knowledge of Christ—and being darkened, the man is driven into despair of mercy, or is put upon it to work for life (2Co 3:13-15). There is therefore, as I say, much diligence required of him that will keep these two in their places assigned them of God. I say much diligent study of the Word, diligent prayer, with diligence to walk with God in the world. But we will pass this, and come to the second head.

B. The Degrees of Christ's Love

As the love of Christ may be known in the *nature* of it, so it may be known in many *degrees* of it. That which is knowable admits of degrees of knowledge, [and] the love of Christ is knowable. Again, that which is not possible to be known to the utmost, is to be known we know not how much; and therefore, they that seek to know it should never be contented or satisfied to what degree of the knowledge of it soever they attain—but still should be reaching forward, because there is more to be known of it before them. Said Paul,

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended [that is, to the utmost], but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:13-14).

I might here discourse of many things, since I am upon this head of reaching after the knowledge of the love of Christ in many of the degrees of it. But I shall content myself with few.

1. *Begin with Christ*

He that would know the love of Christ in several degrees of it, must begin at His person, for in Him dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Nay, more: in Him “are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3)—in Him, that is, in His person—for, for the godhead of Christ and our nature to be united in one person, is the highest mystery, and the first appearance of the love of Christ by Himself to the world (1Ti 3:16). Here I say, lie hid the treasures of wisdom, and here, to the world, springs forth the riches of His love (Joh 1:14). That the eternal Word, for the salvation of sinners, should come down from heaven and be made flesh, is an act of such condescension, a discovery of such love, that can never to the full be found out. Only *here* we may see, love in Him was deep, broad, long, and high; let us therefore first begin here to learn to know the love of Christ in the high degrees thereof.

a. Here, in the first place, we perceive love in that the *human nature*, the nature of man, not of angels, is taken into union with God. Who so could consider this, as it is possible for it to be considered, would stand amazed till he died with wonder. By this very act of the heavenly wisdom, we have an inconceivable pledge of the love of Christ to man; for in that He hath taken into union with Himself our nature, what doth it signify but that He intendeth to take into union with Himself our person—for, for this very purpose did He assume our nature. Wherefore we read that in the flesh He took upon Him, in *that* flesh He died for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1Pe 3:18).

b. As He was *made flesh*, so as was said afore, He became a public or common person for us. And hereby is perceived another degree of His love: undertaking to do for His what was not possible they should do for them-

selves—perfecting of righteousness to the very end of the Law; and doing for us—to the reconciling of us unto His Father and Himself (Rom 10:3-4; 3:24).

c. Herein also we may attain to another degree of knowledge of His love, by understanding that He *has conquered* and so disabled our foes, that they cannot now accomplish their designed enmity upon us (Rom 5; Eph 5:26-27)—but that when Satan, death, the grave, and sin have done to His people whatever can by them be done, we shall be still more than conquerors (though on our side be many disadvantages), through Him that has loved us over them (Rom 8:37).

d. By this also we may yet see more of His love, in that as a forerunner, He is *gone into heaven* to take possession thereof for us (Heb 6:20)—there to make ready, and to prepare for us, our summer-houses, our mansion dwelling-places. As if we were the lords, and He the servant (Joh 14:2-3)! Oh this love!

e. Also we may see another degree of His love in this: that now in His absence He *has sent the Third Person* in the Trinity to supply His place as another comforter of us (Joh 16:7; 15:26), that we may not think He has forgot us, not be left destitute of a revealer of truth unto us (Joh 14:16). Yea, He has sent Him to fortify our spirits, and to strengthen us under all adversity, and against our enemies of what account or degree soever (Luk 21:15).

f. In this also we may see yet more of the love of Christ, in that though He is in heaven and we on earth, nothing can happen to His people to hurt them, but He *feels* it, is touched with it, and counteth it as done unto Himself. Yea, [He] *sympathizes* with them, and is afflicted and grieved in their griefs and their afflictions.

g. Another thing by which also yet more of the love of Christ is made manifest, and so may by us be known, is this: He is now, and has been ever since His ascension into glory, laying out Himself *as high-priest* for us (Heb 7:24-26), that by the improving⁶⁸ of His merits before the throne of grace in way of intercession, He might preserve us from the ruins that our daily infirmities would bring upon us (Heb 8:12)—yea, and make our persons and performances acceptable in His Father's sight (Rom 5:10; 1Pe 2:5).

h. We also see yet more of His love by this: that He *will have us where Himself is*, that we may behold and be partakers of His glory (Joh 17:24). And in this degree of His love, there are many loves.

- Then He will come for us as a bridegroom for his bride (Mat 25:6-10).
- Then shall a public marriage be solemnized and eternized betwixt Him and His church (Rev 19:6-7).
- Then she shall be wrapped up in His mantles and robes of glory (Col 3:4).
- Then they shall be separated, and separated from other sinners, and all things that offend shall be taken away from among them (Mat 25:31; 13:41).
- Then shall they be exalted to thrones and power of judgment; and shall also sit in judgment on sinful men and fallen angels, acquiescing, by virtue of authority, with their King and Head upon them (1Co 6:2-3).
- Then, or from, thenceforth forever, there shall be no more death, sorrow, hidings of His face, or eclipsing of their glory forever (Luk 20:36).

And thus you may see what rounds this our Jacob's ladder hath, and how by them we may climb and climb, even until we are climbed up to heaven. But now we are set again, for *all* the glories, *all* the benefits, *all* the blessings, and *all* the good things that are laid up in heaven for these, who can understand?

2. Pass by angels

A second thing whereby the love of Christ in some degrees of it may be known, is this: that He should *pass by [fallen] angels* and take hold of us. Whoso considereth the nature of spirits, as they are God's workmanship, must needs confess that, as such, they have a pre-eminency above that which is made of dust. This then was the disparity 'twixt us and them: they being by birth far more noble than we. But now—when both are fallen, and by our fall both in a state of condemnation—that Jesus Christ should choose to take up us, the most inconsiderable, and pass by them, to their eternal perdition and destruction—O love! love in a high degree to man, for verily He took not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham He took hold (Heb 2:16).

Yet this is not all; in all probability, this Lord Jesus has ten times as much to do now He has undertaken to be our Saviour, as He would have had, had He stepped over us and taken hold on them.

a. He needed not to have *stooped so low* as to take flesh upon Him, theirs being a more noble nature.

⁶⁸ **improving** – not in quality, but by extending the benefits; employing to good purpose; turning to profitable account.—Ed.

b. Nor would He in all likelihood, have met with those *contempts*, scorns, reproaches, and undervaluings from them, as He has all-along received in this His undertaking, and met with from sinful flesh. For they were more noble than we, and would sooner have perceived the design of grace, and so one would think more readily have fallen in therewith, than [creatures in] such darkness as we were, and still by sin are.

c. They would not have had those disadvantages as we, for that they would not have had a *tempter*, a destroyer, so strong and mighty as ours is. Alas, had God left us and taken them, though we should have been ever so full of envy against their salvation, yet being but flesh; what could we have done to them to have laid obstacles in the way of their faith and hope, as they can and do in ours?

d. They—it may fairly be presumed, had they been taken and we left, and [they] made partakers in our sted while we had been shut out as they [now] are—would not have *put Christ so to it now in heaven* (pray bear with the expression, because I want a better) as we by our imperfections have done and do. Sin, methinks, would not have so hanged in their natures as it doth in ours—their reason, sense, and apprehensions being more quick, and so more apt to have been taken with this love of Christ, and by it more easily have been sanctified.

e. The Law that they have broken, being *not so intricate* as that against which we have offended—theirs being a commandment with faithfulness to abide in the place in which their Creator had set them, methinks, considering also the aptness of their natures as angels—would not have made their complete obedience so difficult.

f. Nor can I imagine but, had they been taken, they, as creatures excelling in strength, would have been *more capable* of rendering these praises and blessings to God for eternal mercies, than such poor sorry creatures as we are, could. But, “behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God” (1Jo 3:1)—that *we*, not they, notwithstanding all that they have [done] or could have done to hinder it, should be called the children of God!

This therefore is an high degree of the love of Jesus Christ to us, that when we and they were fallen, He should stoop and take up us, the more ignoble, and leave so mighty a creature in his sins to perish.

3. *Unwearied work with man*

A third thing whereby the love of Christ in some of the degrees of it may be known, will be to consider more particularly the way and unwearied work that He hath with man to bring him to that kingdom, that by His blood He hath obtained for him.

a. Man, when the Lord Jesus takes him in hand to make him partaker of the benefit, is found an *enemy* to his Redeemer; nor doth all the intelligence that he has had of the grace and love of Christ to such, mollify him at all, to wit, before the day of God's power comes (Rom 4:5; 5:7-10)—and this is a strange thing. Had man, though he could not have come to Christ, been willing that Christ should have come to him, it had been something. It would have shewn that he had taken His grace to heart and considered of it—yea, and that he was willing to be a sharer in it. But verily here is no such thing; man, though he has free will, yet is willing by no means to be saved God's way, to wit, by Jesus Christ, before (as was said before) the day of God's power comes upon him. When the good shepherd went to look for his sheep that was lost in the wilderness, and had found it, did it go one step homewards upon its own legs? Did not the shepherd take her and lay her upon his shoulder, and bring her home rejoicing (Luk 15). This then is not love only, but love to a degree.

b. When man is taken and laid under the day of God's power, when Christ is opening his ear to discipline, and speaking to him that his heart may receive instruction, many times that poor man is as if the devil had found him, and not God. How *frenzily* he imagines; how crossly he thinks! How ungainly he carries it under convictions, counsels, and his present apprehension of things! I know some are more powerfully dealt withal, and more strongly bound at first by the world; but others more in an ordinary manner, [so] that the flesh and reason may be seen to the glory of Christ. Yea, and where the will is made more quickly to comply with its salvation, 'tis no thanks to the sinner at all (Job 4:18)—'tis the day of the power of the Lord that has made the work so soon to appear. Therefore count this an act of love, in the height of love, love in a great degree (Joh 15:16).

c. When Christ Jesus has made this mad man to come to himself, and persuaded him to be willing to accept of His salvation, yet he may not be trusted nor left alone, for then the corruptions that still lie scattering up and down in his flesh will *tempt* him to it, and he will be gone. Yea, so desperately wicked is the flesh of saints, that should they be left to themselves but a little while, none knows what horrible transgressions would break out. Proof of this we have, to amazement, plentifully scattered here and there in the Word. Hence we have the patience of God and His gentleness so admired (2Ch 32:21), for through that it is that they are preserved. He that

keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa 121:4), but watches for them and over them, every moment, for He knows else they will be hurt (Isa 27:3).

d. Yea, notwithstanding this, how often are saints found playing *truant*, and lurking like thieves in one hole or other—now in the guilt of backsliding by the power of this, and then in filth by the power of that corruption (Jer 2:26). Yea, and when found in such decayings, and under such revoltings from God, how commonly do they hide their sin—[as] with Adam and David—even until their Saviour fireth out of their mouths a confession of the truth of their naughtiness. “When I kept silence,” said David (and yet he chose to keep silence after he had committed his wickedness), “my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Psa 32:3-4). But then, why didst thou not confess what thou hadst done? So I did, saith he, at last, and “thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (vs. 5).

e. When the sins of saints are so visible and apparent to others, that God, for the vindication of His name and honour, must punish them in the sight of others; yea, must do it, as He is just; yet then for Christ's sake, He *waveth such judgments* and refuseth to inflict such punishments as naturally tend to their destruction, and chooseth to chastise them with such rods and scourges as may do them good in the end, that they may not be condemned with the world (1Co 11:31-32). Wherefore the Lord loves them, and they are blessed, whom He chasteneth and teacheth out of His Law (Heb 12:5-8; Psa 94:12). And these things are love to a degree.

f. That Christ should *supply out of His fullness* the beginnings of grace in our souls and carry on that work of so great concern, and that which at times we have so little esteem of, is none of the least of the aggravations of the love of Christ to His people. And this work is as common as any of the works of Christ, and as necessary to our salvation as is His righteousness, and the imputation thereof to our justification—for else how could we hold out to the end (Mat 24:13); and yet none else can be saved.

g. And that the love of Christ should be such to us that He will thus act, thus do to for us with *gladness* (as afore is manifest by the parable of the lost sheep), is another degree of His love towards us; and such an one, too, as is none of the lowest rate. I have seen hot love soon cold; and love that has continued to act, yet act towards the end, as the man that by running, and has run himself off his legs, pants, and can hardly run any longer—but I never saw love like the love of Christ, Who as a giant, and bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and as a strong man rejoiceth to run his race (Psa 19:5). Loving higher and higher, stronger and stronger—I mean as to the lettings out of love, for He reserveth the best wine even till the last (Joh 2:10).

h. I will conclude with this: that His love may be known in many degrees of it by *that sort of sinners* whose salvation He most rejoiceth in, and that is in the salvation of the sinners that are of the biggest size: great sinners, Jerusalem sinners, Samaritan sinners, publican⁶⁹ sinners. I might urge, moreover, how He hath proportioned invitations, promises, and examples of His love, for the encouragement and support of those whose souls would trust in Him—by which also great degrees of his love may be understood. But we will come now to the third thing that was propounded.

C. Christ's Love Passes Knowledge.

The greatest attainment that, as to the understanding of the love of Christ, we can arrive to here [in this life], is to *know* that it passes knowledge: “And to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.”

1. *This truth is discovered by two things.*

a. *Discovered by the text itself*

By the text itself, for the apostle here, in this prayer of his for the Ephesians, doth not only desire that they may know, but describeth that thing which he prays they may know, by this term: it *passeth knowledge*. “And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” As our reason and carnal imagination will be rudely and unduly tampering with anything of Christ—so more especially with the love and kindness of Christ, judging and concluding that just such it is, and none other, as may be apprehended by them—yea, and will have a belief that just so, and no otherwise, are the dimensions of this love; nor can it save beyond our carnal conceptions of it, saying to the soul as Pharaoh once did to Israel in another case: “Let the Lord be with you, as I will [judge it

⁶⁹ **publican** – collector of tribute and taxes, often despised by the oppressed.

meet he should] let you go" (Exo 10:10). We think Christ loves us no more than *we* do think He can, and so conclude that His love is such as may by us be comprehended, or known to the utmost bounds thereof.

But these are false conceptions, and this love of Christ that we think is such, is indeed none of the love of Christ, but a false image thereof set before our eyes. I speak not now of weak knowledge, but of foolish and bold conclusions. A man through unbelief may think that Christ has no love for him, and yet Christ may love him with a love that *passeth knowledge!* But when men in the common course of their profession will be always terminating here, that they know how and how far Christ can love, and will thence be bold to conclude of their own safety, and of the loss and ruin of all that are not in the same notions, opinions, formalities, or judgments as they—this is the worst and greatest of all. The text therefore, to rectify those false and erroneous conclusions, says, it is a love that *passeth knowledge!*

And it will be worth our observation to take notice that men, erroneous men, do not put these limits so commonly to the Father and His love, as [to] the Son and His. Hence you have some that boast that God can save some who have not the knowledge of the person of the Mediator Jesus Christ the Righteous—as the heathens that have and still do make a great improvement of the law and light of nature—crying out with disdain against the narrowness, rigidity, censoriousness, and pride of those that think the contrary. Being not ashamed all the while to eclipse, to degrade, to lessen and undervalue the love of Jesus Christ; making of Him and His undertakings (to offer Himself a sacrifice to appease the justice of God for our sins) but a thing indifferent, and in its own nature but as other smaller matters!

But all this while the devil knows full well at what game he plays, for he knows that without Christ, without faith in His blood, there is no remission of sins (Mat 26:28). Wherefore, saith he, let these men talk what they will of the greatness of the love of God as *Creator*, so they sleight and undervalue the love of Christ as *Mediator*. And yet it is worth our consideration that the greatness of the love of God is most expressed in His giving of Christ to be a Saviour, and in bestowing His benefits upon us that we may be happy through Him.

But to return: The love of Christ that is so indeed, is love that *passeth knowledge*. The best and highest of our knowledge of it is that we know it to be such.

b. Discovered by the great men of old

Because I find that at this point, the *great men of God of old*, were wont to stop, be set, and beyond which they could not pass. 'Twas this that made Moses wonder (Deu 4:31-34). 'Twas this that made David cry out,

"Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psa 40:5).

And again,

"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Psa 139:17-18).

And a little before, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (vs. 6). Isaiah saith, there hath not entered into the heart of man what God "hath prepared for them that waiteth for him" (Isa 64:4). Ezekiel said, this is the "river that could not be passed over" (47:5). And Micah to the sea (7:19), and Zechariah to a fountain (13:1), hath compared this unsearchable love. Wherefore the apostle's position that the love of Christ is that which *passeth knowledge*, is a truth not to be doubted of.

2. To know that this love *passeth knowledge* is the highest we can go.

Consequently, to know this, and that it is such, is the farthest that we can go. This is to justify God, Who has said it; and to magnify the Son, Who has loved us with such a love—and the contrary is to dishonour Him, to lessen Him, and to make Him a *deficient* Saviour. For suppose this should be true: that thou couldest to the utmost comprehend this love; yet, unless by thy knowledge thou canst comprehend who shall be saved (beyond all evil of sin, or beyond what any man sins [or] can spread themselves or infect), [then] thou must leave some pardonable man in an unpardonable condition—for that thou canst comprehend this love, and yet canst not comprehend that sin. This makes Christ a deficient Saviour! Besides, if thou comprehendest truly, [then] the word that says "it *passeth knowledge*" hast lost its sanctity, its truth.

It must therefore be that this love *passeth knowledge*; and that the highest pitch that a man by knowledge can attain unto, as to this, is to *know* that it *passeth knowledge*. My reason is, for that all degrees of love (be they never so high, or many and high)...if we can comprehend them, rest in the bowels of our knowledge—for that only which is beyond us, is that which *passeth knowledge*. That which we can reach, cannot be the highest; and

if a man thinks there is nothing beyond what he can reach, he has no more knowledge as to that. But if he knows that together with what he hath already reached, there is that which he cannot reach before [him]; then he has a knowledge for that also, even a knowledge that it *passeth* knowledge.

'Tis true a man that thus knoweth may have divers conjectures about that thing that is beyond his knowledge. Yea, in reason it will be so, because he knows that there is something yet before him; but since the thing itself is truly beyond his knowledge, none of his conjectures about that thing may be counted knowledge. Or suppose a man that thus conjectureth should hit right as to what he now conjectures; his right hitting about that thing may not be called knowledge: it is as yet to him but as an uncertain guess, and is still beyond this knowledge.

3. What good is it to know that it passeth knowledge?

Quest. But some may say, "What good will it do a man to know that the love of Christ passeth knowledge? One would think that it should do one more good to believe that the knowledge of the whole love of Christ might be attainable."

Answer. That there is an advantage in knowing that the love of Christ passeth knowledge must not be questioned, for that the apostle saith it doth (Eph 3:19)—for to *know* what the holy Word affirms is profitable. Nor would he pray that we might know that which passeth knowledge, were there not, by our knowing of it, some help to be administered. But to shew you some of the advantages that will come to us by knowing that the love of Christ passeth knowledge,

a. Reserve in the day of temptation

By knowing of this a child of God has in *reserve* for himself, at a day when all that he otherwise knows may be taken from him through the power of temptation. Sometimes a good man may be so put to it, that all that he knows comprehensively may be taken from him; to wit, the knowledge of the truth of his faith, or that he has the grace of God in him, or the like—that, I say, may be taken from him. Now if at this time, he knows the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, he knows a way in all probability to be recovered again. For if Christ Jesus loves with a love that passeth knowledge, then, saith the soul that is thus in the dark, He may love me yet—for ought I know, for I know that He loves with a love that passeth knowledge, and therefore I will not utterly despond.

Yea, if Satan should attempt to question whether ever Christ Jesus will look upon me or no, the answer is, if I know the love that passes knowledge, [that] He may look upon me; yea, and love and save me too—for ought I, [a] poor sinner, know, for He loves with a love that passeth knowledge. If I be fallen into sin that lies hard upon me, and my conscience fears that for this there is no forgiveness, the help for a stay from utter despair is at hand—there may [be such help], say I, for Christ loves with a love that passeth knowledge. If Satan would dissuade me from praying to God, by suggesting as if Christ would not regard the stammering and chattering prayer of mine, the answer is ready—[Christ] may regard, for ought I know, for He loves with a love that passeth knowledge. If the tempter doth suggest that thy trials, troubles, and afflictions are so many, that it is to be thought thou shall never get beyond them, the answer is near—for ought we know, Christ may carry me through them all, for He loves with a love that passeth knowledge.

Thus I say, relief is at hand, and a help in reserve for the tempted, let their temptations be what they will. This therefore is the weapon that will baffle the devil when all other weapons fail: for ought I know, Christ may save me, for He loves with a love that passeth knowledge! Yea, suppose he should drive me to the worst of fears, and that is to doubt that I neither have nor shall have forever the grace of God in my soul—the answer is at hand, [and] I have or may have it, for Christ loves with a love that passeth knowledge.

Thus therefore you may see that, in this prayer of Paul, there is a great deal of good. He prays, when he prays that we might know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, that we may have a help at hand, and relief against all the horrible temptations of the devil. For this is a help at hand, a help that is ready to fall in with us, if there be yet remaining with us but the least grain of right reasoning according to the nature of things. For if it be objected against a man that he is poor, because he has but a groat⁷⁰ in his pocket; yet if he has an unknown deal of money in his trunks, how easy is it for him to recover himself from that slander, by returning the knowledge of what he has upon the objector. This is the case, and thus it is and will be, with them that know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. Wherefore,

⁷⁰ **groat** – English silver coin worth four pence, used from the 14th to the 17th century.

b. Liberty to grow in spiritual things

By this knowledge, room is made for a Christian, and liberty is ministered unto him, to turn himself every way in all spiritual things. This is the Christian's Rehoboth, that well for which the Philistines have no heart to strive,⁷¹ which will cause that we be fruitful in the land.

If Christians know not with this knowledge, they walk in the world as if they were pinioned,⁷² or as if fetters⁷³ were hanged on their heels. But this enlarges their steps under them (2Sa 22:37); by the knowledge of this love, they may walk at liberty, and their steps shall not be straitened.⁷⁴ This is that which Solomon intends when he saith, "Get wisdom, and get understanding" (Pro 4:5). Then "when thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened, and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble" (Pro 4:12). A man that has only from hand to mouth, is oft put to it to know how to use his penny, and comes off also, many times, but with an hungry belly. But he that has not only that, but always over and to spare, he is more at liberty, and can live in fullness and far more like a gentleman.

There is a man [that] has a cistern that is full of water; there is another, also, that has his cistern full, and withal, his spring in his yard. But a great drought is upon the land in which they dwell. I would now know, which of these two have the most advantage to live in their own minds at liberty, without fear of wanting water? Why, this is the case in hand. There is a Christian that knows Christ in all those degrees of His love that are knowable, but he knoweth Christ nothing in His love that passeth knowledge. There is another Christian, and he knows Christ as the first, but withal, he also knows Him as to His love that passeth knowledge. Pray now tell me, which of these two are likeliest to live most like a Christian, that is, like a spiritual prince, and like him that possesseth all things? Which has most advantage to live in godly largeness of heart, and is most at liberty in his mind? Which of these two have the greatest advantage to believe, and the greatest engagements laid upon him to love the Lord Jesus? Which of these have also most in readiness to resist the wiles of the devil, and to subdue the power and prevalency of corruptions?

'Tis this that makes men fathers in Christianity: "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known...I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known" (1Jo 2:13-14). Why have not others known, not so as the fathers? The fathers have *known* and *known*. They have known the love of Christ in those degrees of love which are *knowable*, and have also known the love of Christ to be such which *passeth knowledge*. In my father's house is "bread enough and to spare," was that that fetched the prodigal home (Luk 15:17). And when Moses would speak an endless all to Israel, for the comfort and stay of their souls, he calls their God, "The fountain of Jacob upon a land of corn and wine" (Deu 33:28).

c. Greater desire to press forward

By this knowledge, or knowing of the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, there is begot in Christians a greater desire to press forwards to that which is before them (Phi 3:12-21). What is the reason of all that sloth, carnal contentedness, and listlessness of spirit in Christians, more than the ignorance of this? For he that thinks he *knows* what can be *known*, is beyond all reason that should induce him to seek yet after more.

Now the love of Christ may be said, not to be knowable, upon a threefold account: for that my knowledge is weak, for that my knowledge is imperfect, or for that, though my knowledge be never so perfect, because the love of Christ is eternal.

1). There is love that is not to be apprehended by *weak knowledge*. Convince a man of this and then, if the knowledge of what he already has be truly sweet to his soul (Pro 2:10), it will stir him up with great heartiness to desire to know what more of this is possible.

2). There is love beyond what he knows already, who is indued with the most *perfect knowledge*, that man here may have. Now if what this man knows already of this love is indeed sweet unto him, then it puts him upon hearty desires that his soul may yet know more. And because there is no bound set to man, [regarding] how much he may know in this life thereof; therefore his desires, notwithstanding what he has attained, are yet kept alive and in the pursuit after the knowledge of more of the love of Christ. And God in old time has taken it so well at the hands of some of His that their desires have been so great, that when, as I may say, they have known

⁷¹ "And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen 26:22).

⁷² **pinioned** – bound with bands to the arms.

⁷³ **fetters** – chains for binding prisoners.

⁷⁴ **straitened** – reduced to hardship or poverty.

as much on earth as is possible for them to know (that is, by ordinary means), He has come down to them in visions and revelations—or else taken them up to Him for an hour or two into paradise—that they might know, and then let them down again.

3). But this is not all. There is a knowledge of the love of Christ, that we are by no means capable of until we be *possessed of the heavens*. And I would know, if a man indeed loveth Christ, whether the belief of this be not one of the highest arguments that can be urged, to make such an one weary of this world, that he may be with Him. To such an one, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phi 1:21-23). And to such an one, it is difficult to bring his mind to be content to stay here a longer time; except he be satisfied that Christ has still work for him here to do.

4). I will yet add, there is a love of Christ, I will not say that cannot be known, but I will say that cannot be *enjoyed*; no, not by them now in heaven (in soul) until the day of judgment. And the knowledge of this, when it has possessed even men on earth, has made them choose a day of judgment, before a day of death, that they might know what is beyond that state and knowledge which even the spirits of just men made perfect now do enjoy in heaven (2Co 5:4). Wherefore, as I said at first, to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, is advantageous upon this account: it begetteth in Christians a great desire to reach, and press forward to, that which is before.

5). One thing more and then, as to this reason, I have done. Even that love of Christ that is absolutely unknowable, as to the utmost bound thereof because it is eternal, will be yet in the *nature* of it sweet and desirable, because we shall enjoy or be possessed of it so. This therefore, if there were no more, is enough, when known, to draw away the heart from things that are below, to itself.

d. Fruitfulness

The knowledge of the love that passeth knowledge is a very *fruitful knowledge*. It cannot but be fruitful. Some knowledge is empty and alone, not attended with that good and with those blessings wherewith this knowledge is attended. Did I say, it is fruitful? I will add, it is attended with the best fruit; it yieldeth the best wine. It fills the soul with all the fullness of God: “And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be *filled with all the fullness of God*.” God is in Christ, and makes Himself known to us by the love of Christ. “Who-soever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God,” for God is not to be found nor enjoyed but in [Christ]; consequently, he that hath and “abideth in the doctrine of Christ, hath both the Father and the Son” (2Jo 9).

Now, since there are degrees of knowledge of this doctrine, and since the highest degree of the knowledge of Him is to know that He has a love that passeth knowledge, it follows that if he, that has the least saving knowledge of this doctrine, hath God; [then] he that hath the largest knowledge of it, has God much more—or, according to the text, is filled with all the fullness of God. What this fullness of God should be, is best gathered from such sayings of the Holy Ghost, as come nearest to this, in language, “filled”:

- Full of goodness (Rom 15:14)
- Full of faith (Act 6:5)
- Full of the Holy Ghost (Act 7:55)
- Full of assurance of faith (Heb 10:22)
- Full of assurance of hope (Heb 6:11)
- Full of joy unspeakable, and full of glory (1Pe 1:8)
- Full of joy (1Jo 1:4)
- Full of good works (Act 9:36)
- Being filled with the knowledge of his will (Col 1:9)
- Being filled with the spirit (Eph 5:18)
- Filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God (Phi 1:11).

These things to be sure are included either for the *cause* or *effect* of this fullness. The cause they cannot be, for that is God's, by His Holy Spirit. The effects therefore they are, for wherever God dwells in the degree intended in the text, there is shewn in an eminent manner by these things, “what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). But these things dwell not in that measure specified by the text, in any but those who know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

But what a man is he, that is filled with all these things, or...as we have it in the text, [is] “filled with all the fullness of God!” Such men are, at this day, wanting in the churches. These are the men that *sweeten* churches, and that bring glory to God and to religion. And knowledge will make us such, such knowledge as the apostle here speaketh of.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ How delightfully has Bunyan brought forth the marrow [main and essential part] of this important text. He felt that those who were filled with all the fullness of God, sweetened the churches in his day. They were wanted then; are they not equally wanted now?—*Ed.*

VI. Applications

I have now done, when I have spoken something by way of *use* unto you, from what hath been said.

A. This Knowledge Shows Us God Has Great Goodwill toward Us.

Use First. Is there such breadth, length, depth, and height in God for us? And is there toward us love in Christ that passeth knowledge? Then this shews us not only the greatness of the majesty of the Father and the Son, but the *great good will* that is in Their heart to them that receive Their Word.

God has engaged the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love, the wisdom, the power, and the truth that is in Himself, for us; and Christ has loved us with a love that passeth knowledge. We may well say, “Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?” (Exo 15:11). Or, as another prophet has it, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever: because he delighteth in mercy” (Mic 7:18). Yea, no words can sufficiently set forth the greatness of this love of God and His Son to us poor miserable sinners.

B. Seek This Great Love.

Use Second. Is there so great a heart for love towards us, both in the Father and in the Son? Then let us be much in the *study and search* after the greatness of this love. This is the sweetest study that a man can devote himself unto, because it is the study of the love of God and of Christ to man. Studies that yield far less profit than this, how close are they pursued by some who have adapted themselves thereunto? Men do not use to count [as] burdensome to them telling over of their money, nor yet the recounting of their grounds, herds, and flocks when they increase. Why, the study of the unsearchable love of God in Christ to man, is better in itself and yields more sweetness to the soul of man, than can ten thousand such things as but now are mentioned. I know the wise men of this world, of whom there are many, will say as to what I now press you unto, “Who can shew us any good in it?” But Lord, “lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psa 4:6-7). David also said that his meditation on the Lord should be sweet.

Oh, there is in God and in His Son that kindness for the sons of men that, did they know it, they would like to retain the knowledge of it in their hearts. They would cry out as she did of old, “set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: For love is strong as death” (Song 8:6-7). Every part, crumb, grain, or scrap of this knowledge is to a Christian as drops of honey are to sweet-palated⁷⁶ children—worth the gathering up, worth the putting to the taste to be relished. Yea, David says of the Word, which is the ground of knowledge, “It is sweeter than honey or the honey-comb. More,” saith he, “to be desired are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey or the honeycomb” (Psa 19:10).

Why then do not Christians devote themselves to the meditation of this so heavenly, so goodly, so sweet, and so comfortable a thing, that yieldeth such advantage to the soul? The reason is, these things are talked of, but not believed. Did men believe what they say when they speak so largely of the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ, they would, they could, not but meditate upon it. There are so many wonders in it—and men love to think of wonders. There is so much profit in it—and men love to think of that which yields them profit. But, as I said, the belief of things is wanting. Belief of a thing will have strong effects, whether the ground for it be true or false. Suppose one of you should, when you are at a neighbour’s house, believe that your own house is on fire whilst your children are fast asleep in bed, though indeed there were no such thing; I will appeal to any of you if this belief would not make notable work with and upon your hearts! Let a man believe he shall be damned, though afterwards it is evident he believed a lie, yet what work did that belief make in that man’s heart. Even so and much more, the belief of heavenly things will work, because [they are] true and great and most good. Also,

⁷⁶ **sweet-palated** – those whose taste greatly desires sweetness.

where they are indeed believed, their evidence is managed upon their spirit by the power and glory of the Holy Ghost Itself. Wherefore, let us study these things!

C. We Must Cast Ourselves upon This Great Love.

Use Third. Let us *cast ourselves upon* this love. No greater encouragement can be given us, than what is in the text and about it. It is great [love]; it is love that passeth knowledge. Men that are sensible of danger are glad when they hear of such helps upon which they may boldly venture for escape. Why, such an help and relief the text helpeth trembling and fearful consciences to. Fear and trembling as to misery hereafter can flow but from what we know, feel, or imagine; but the text speaks of a love that is beyond that we can know, feel, or imagine, even of a love that passeth knowledge—consequently, of a love that goes beyond all these.

Besides, the apostle's conclusion upon this subject plainly makes it manifest that this meaning which I have put upon the text is the mind of the Holy Ghost. "Now unto him," saith he, "that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21). What can be more plain? What can be more full? What can be more suitable to the most desponding spirit in any man? He can do more than thou knowest He will! He can do more than thou thinkest He can!

What dost thou think? "Why, I think," saith the sinner, "that I am cast away." Well, but there are worse thoughts than these, therefore think again. "Why," saith the sinner, "I think that my sins are as many as the sins of all the world." Indeed this is a very black thought, but there are worse thoughts than this, therefore prithee think again. "Why, I think," saith the sinner, "that God is not able to pardon all my sins." Ay, now thou hast thought indeed, for this thought makes thee look more like a devil than a man—and yet because thou art a man and not a devil, see the condescension and the boundlessness of the love of thy God. He is able to do above all that we think!

Couldst thou (sinner), if thou hadst been allowed, thyself [to] express what thou wouldest have expressed: the greatness of the love thou wantest, with words that could have suited thee better?—for 'tis not said He can do above what we think, meaning our thinking at present, but above *all* we *can* think, meaning above the worst and most soul-dejecting thoughts that we have at any time. Sometimes the dejected have worse thoughts than at other times they have. Well, take them at their worst times, at times when they think, and think, till they think themselves down into the very pangs of hell—yet this word of the grace of God is above them, and shews that He can yet recover and save these miserable people.

And now I am upon this subject, I will a little further walk and travel with the *desponding ones*, and will put a few words in their mouths for their help against temptations that may come upon them hereafter; for as Satan follows such now with charges and applications of guilt, so he may follow them with interrogatories and appeals—for he can tell how by appeals, as well as by charging of sin, to sink and drown the sinner whose soul he has leave to engage. Suppose therefore that some distressed man or woman should after this way be engaged, and Satan should with his interrogatories and appeals, be busy with them to drive them to desperation; the text last mentioned, to say nothing of the subject of our discourse, yields plenty of help for the relief of such an one.

Says Satan, "Dost thou not know that thou hast horribly sinned?" "Yes," says the soul, "I do."

Says Satan, "Dost thou not know that thou art one of the vilest in all the pack of professors?" "Yes," says the soul, "I do."

Says Satan, "Doth not thy conscience tell thee that thou art and hast been more base than any of thy fellows can imagine thee to be?" "Yes," says the soul, "my conscience tells me so."

"Well," saith Satan, "now will I come upon thee with my appeals. Art thou not a graceless wretch?"—Yes. "Hast thou an heart to be sorry for this wickedness?"—No, not as I should. "And albeit," saith Satan, "thou prayest sometimes, yet is not thy heart possessed with a belief that God will not regard thee?"—Yes, says the sinner. "Why then, despair and go hang thyself!" saith the devil. And now we are at the end of the thing designed and driven at by Satan!

"But what shall I now do," saith the sinner. I answer, take up the words of the text against him: Christ loves with a love that passeth knowledge!—and answereth him farther, saying, "Satan, though I cannot think that God loves me, though I cannot think that God will save me; yet I will not yield to thee—for God can do more than I think He can. And whereas thou appealest unto me, if whether when I pray, my heart is not possessed with unbe-

lief that God will not regard me; that shall not sink me neither—for God can do abundantly above what I ask or think!”

Thus this text helpeth, where obstructions are put in against our believing, and thereby casting ourselves upon the love of God in Christ for salvation.

And yet this is not all, for the text is yet more full: “He is able to do abundantly more,” yea, “exceeding abundantly more,” or “above all that we ask or think.” It is a text made up of words picked and packed together by the wisdom of God, picked and packed together on purpose for the succour and relief of the tempted, that they may when in the midst of their distresses, cast themselves upon the Lord their God. He can do abundantly more than we ask!

“Oh,” says the soul, “that He would but do so much for me as I could ask Him to do. How happy a man should I then be!” Why, what wouldst thou ask for, sinner?

“You may be sure,” says the soul, “I would ask to be saved from my sins; I would ask for faith in and love to Christ; I would ask to be preserved in this evil world, and ask to be glorified with Christ in heaven.” He that asketh of all this, doth indeed ask for much, and for more than Satan would have him believe that God is able or willing to bestow upon him. But mark, the text doth not say that God is able to do *all* that we can ask or think, but that He is able to do *above* all, yea, *abundantly* above all, yea, *exceeding* abundantly above all that we ask or think. What a text is this! What a God have we! God foresaw the sins of His people, and what work the devil would make with their hearts about them, and therefore to prevent their ruin by his temptation, He has thus *largely*, as you see, expressed His love by His Word.

Let us therefore, as has been bidden us, make this good use of this doctrine of grace, as to cast ourselves upon this love of God in the times of distress and temptation.

D. We Must Take Heed of Abusing This Great Love.

Use Fourth. Take heed of *abusing* this love. This exhortation seems needless, for love is such a thing that, one would think, none could find in their heart to abuse. But for all that, I am of opinion that there is nothing that is more abused among professors this day, than is this love of God. There has of late more light about the love of Christ broke out than formerly; every boy now can *talk* of the love of Christ—but this love of Christ has not been rightly applied by preachers, or else not rightly received by professors. For never was this grace of Christ so turned into lasciviousness⁷⁷ as now. Now it is a practice among professors to learn to be vile, of [from] the profane; yea, and to plead for that vileness. Nay, we will turn it the other way, now it is so that the profane do learn to be vile, of [from] those that profess (that is, [the professors] teach the wicked ones their ways)—a thing that no good man should think on but with blushing cheeks (Jer 2:33).⁷⁸

Jude speaketh of these people, and tells us that they, notwithstanding their profession, deny the only Lord God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ (vs. 4). “They profess,” saith Paul, “that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Ti 1:16).

But, I say, let not this love of God and of Christ be abused. ’Tis unnatural to abuse love; to abuse love is a vilany condemned of all. Yea, to abuse love is the most inexcusable sin of all. It is next [to] the sin of devils to abuse love, the love of God and of Christ.

And what says the apostle? “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2Th 2:10-12). And what can such an one say for himself in the judgment, [one] that shall be charged with the *abuse of love*? Christians,

- deny yourselves;
- deny your lusts;
- deny the vanities of this present life;
- devote yourselves to God;

⁷⁷ **lasciviousness** – quality of being inclined to lust or sexual desires.

⁷⁸ Bunyan lived in singularly eventful times. Under the Commonwealth, the strictest outward morality was enforced. But when a licentious monarch was placed upon the throne, a flood of the grossest debauchery was let loose; and those hypocrites, who had put on a cloak of religion to serve a temporary purpose, threw it off and became ringleaders in the vilest iniquities (see Mat 12:43-45).—*Ed.*

- become lovers of God, lovers of His ways, and a “people zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14)

—then shall you show one to another, and to all men, that you have not received the grace of God in vain (2Co 6:1).

Renounce therefore the hidden things of dishonesty; walk not in craftiness nor handle God’s word deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commend yourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. Do this, I say, yea, and so endeavour such a closure with this love of God in Christ, as may graciously constrain you to do it; because, when all proofs of the right receiving of this love of Christ shall be produced, none will be found of worth enough to justify the simplicity of our profession, but that which makes us “zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14). And what a thing will it be to be turned off, at last, as one that abused the love of Christ, as one that presumed upon his lusts, this world, and all manner of naughtiness—because the love of Christ to pardon sins was so great! What an unthinking, what a disingenuous one wilt thou be counted at that day! Yea, thou wilt be found to be the man that made a prey⁷⁹ of love, that made a stalking-horse⁸⁰ of love, that made of love a slave to sin, the devil, and the world—and will not that be bad? (Read Ezekiel 16.)

E. We Must Remember This Great Love When We Are Hindered.

Use Fifth. Is the love of God and of Christ so great? Let us then labour to improve it to the utmost for our advantage against all the *hindrances* of faith. To what purpose else is it revealed, made mention of, and commended to us? We are environed with many enemies, and faith in the love of God and of Christ is our only succour and shelter. Wherefore our duty, wisdom, and privilege is to improve this love for our own advantage. Improve it against daily infirmities; improve it against the wiles of the devil; improve it against the threats, rage, death, and destruction that the men of this world continually, with their terror, set before you.

But *how* must that be done? Why, set this love and the safety that is in it before thine eyes, and behold it while these things make their assaults upon thee. These words, the faith of this, *God loves me*, will support thee in the midst of what dangers may assault thee. And this is that which is meant when we are exhorted to rejoice in the Lord (Phi 3:1), to make our boast in the Lord (Psa 44:8), to triumph in Christ (2Co 2:14), and to set the Lord always before our face (Psa 16:8)—for he that can do this thing stedfastly, cannot be overcome; for in God there is more than can be in the world, either to help or hinder. Wherefore, if God be my helper, if God loves me, if Christ be my Redeemer and has bestowed His love that passeth knowledge upon me, who can be against me (Heb 13:6; Rom 8:31)? And if they be against me, what disadvantage reap I thereby, since even all this also worketh for my good? This is improving the love of God and of Christ for my advantage.

The same course should Christians also take with the degrees of this love, even setting it against all the degrees of danger, for here *deep calleth unto deep*. There cannot be wickedness and rage wrought up to such or such a degree, as of which it may be said, there are not degrees in the love of God and of Christ to match it. Wherein Pharaoh dealt proudly against God’s people, the Lord was above him (Exo 18:11), did match and overmatch him; He came up to him and went beyond him; He collared with him, overcame him, and cast him down. “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea...they sank into the bottom as a stone” (Exo 15:5). There is no striving against the Lord Who hath loved us; there is none that strive against Him [who] can prosper.

If the shields of the earth be the Lord’s (Psa 47:9), then He can wield them for the safeguard of His body, the Church; or, if they are become incapable of being made use of any longer in that way and for such a thing, can He not lay them aside and make Himself new ones? Men can do after this manner; much more God. But again, if the miseries or afflictions that thou meetest with, seem to thee to overflow and to go beyond measure, above measure, and so to be above strength, and begin to drive thee to despair of life (2Co 1:8)—then thou hast also, in the love of God and of Christ, that which is above, and that goes beyond all measure also; to wit, love unsearchable, unknown, and “that can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Now God hath set them one against the other, and ’twill be thy wisdom to do so too, for this is the way to improve this love.

⁷⁹ **prey** – that which is taken by force from an enemy in war.

⁸⁰ **stalking-horse** – real or factitious horse behind which a fowler conceals himself from the game he is intending to kill; hence, a pretense.

F. Counsels to Assist in Facing Difficulties

But, though it be easy thus to admonish you to do, yet you shall find the practical part more difficult; wherefore, here it may not be amiss if I add to these another head of counsel.

Counsel First. Wouldest thou then improve this love of God and of Christ to thy advantage? Why, then thou must *labour* after the knowledge of it. This was it that the apostle prayed for, for these Ephesians, as was said before; and this is that that thou must labour after, or else thy reading and my writing will, as to thee, be fruitless. Let me then say to thee, as David to his son Solomon, “And thou Solomon, my son, *know* thou the God of thy father” (1Ch 28:9). Empty notions of this love will do nothing but harm; wherefore, they are not empty notions that I press thee to rest in, but that thou labour after the knowledge of the favour of this good ointment (Song 1:3), which the apostle calleth the favour of the knowledge of this Lord Jesus (2Co 2:14). Know it until it becometh sweet or pleasant to thy soul, and then it will preserve and keep thee (Pro 2:10-11).

Make this love of God and of Christ thine own, and not another’s. Many there are that can talk largely of the love of God to Abraham, to David, to Peter and Paul—but that is not the thing. Give not over until this love be made *thine own*; until thou find and feel it to run warm in thy heart by the shedding of it abroad there, by the spirit that God hath given thee (Rom 5:5). Then thou wilt know it with an obliging and engaging knowledge; yea, then thou wilt know it with a soul-strengthening and soul-encouraging knowledge.

Counsel Second. Wouldest thou improve this love? Then set it against the love of all other things whatsoever, even until this love shall conquer thy soul from the love of them to itself. This is Christian. Do it therefore, and say,

“Why should anything have my heart but God, but Christ? He loves me; He loves me with love that passeth knowledge. He loves me, and He shall have me. He loves me, and I will love Him. His love stripped Him of all for my sake; Lord, let my love strip me of all for Thy sake. I am a son of love, an object of love, a monument of love, of *free* love, of distinguishing love, of peculiar love, and of love that passeth knowledge; and why should not I walk in love—in love to God, in love to men; in holy love, in love unfeigned?”

This is the way to improve the love of God for thy advantage, for the subduing of thy passions, and for sanctifying of thy nature. ’Tis an odious thing to hear men of base lives talking of the love of God, of the death of Christ, and of the glorious grace that is presented unto sinners by the Word of the truth of the gospel. Praise is comely for the upright, not for the profane. Therefore let him speak of love that is taken with love, that is captivated with love, that is carried away with love. If this man speaks of it, his speaking signifies something; the powers and bands of love are upon him, and he shews to all that he knows what he is speaking of. But the very mentioning of love is, in the mouth of the profane, like a parable in the mouth of fools, or as salt unsavory. Wherefore, Christian, improve this love of God as thou shouldest, and that will improve thee as thou wouldest. Wherefore,

Counsel Third. If thou wouldest improve this love, keep thyself in it: “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21). This text looks as if it favoured the Socinians,⁸¹ but there is nothing of that in it. And so doth that, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love: even as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (Joh 15:10). The meaning then is this, that living a holy life is the way, after a man has believed unto justification, to keep himself in the savour and comfort of the love of God. And oh, that thou wouldest indeed so do—and that because, if thou shall want the savour of it, thou will soon want tenderness to the commandment, which is the rule by which thou must walk, if thou wilt do good to thyself or honour God in the world. “To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God” (Psa 50:23). He that would live a sweet, comfortable, joyful life, must live a very holy life. This is the way to improve this love to thyself indeed.

Counsel Fourth. To this end, you must take root and be grounded in love; that is, you must be well settled and stablished in this love, if indeed you would improve it. You must not be shaken as to the doctrine and grounds of it (Eph 3:17). These you must be well acquainted with; for he that is but a child in this doctrine, is not capable as yet of falling in with these exhortations—for such waver and fear when tempted, and “he that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1Jo 4:18), nor can he so improve it for himself and [his] soul’s good as he should.

⁸¹ **Socinians** – followers of the sect founded by Faustus Socinius, 16th century Italian theologian, who denied the deity of Christ and denied that the cross brought forgiveness of sins. Their focus was on their own efforts, apart from Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sin.

Counsel Fifth. And lastly, keep to this end those grounds and evidences that God hath given you of your call to be partakers of this love, with all clearness upon your hearts and in your minds. For he that wants⁸² a sight of them, or a proof that they are true and good, can take but little comfort in this love. There is a great mystery in the way of God with His people. He will justify them without their works; He will pardon them for His Son's sake—but they shall have but little comfort of what He hath done, doth, and will do for them that are careless, carnal, and not holy in their lives. Nor shall they have their evidences for heaven at hand, nor out of doubt with them; yea, they shall walk without the sun, and have their comforts by bits and knocks;⁸³ while others sit at their father's table, have liberty to go into the wine-cellar, rejoice at the sweet and pleasant face of their heavenly Father towards them, and know it shall go well with them at the end.

To the Carnal World. Something now for a conclusion should be spoken to the carnal world, who have heard me tell of all this love. But what shall I say unto them? If I should speak to them and they should not hear, or if I should testify unto them and they should not believe, or intreat them and they should scorn me—all will but aggravate and greaten their sin, and tend to their further condemnation. And therefore I shall leave the *obstinate* where I found him!—and shall say to him that is *willing* to be saved: Sinner, thou hast the advantage of thy neighbour, not only because thou art willing to live, but because there are [Those] that are willing thou shouldst—to wit, Those unto Whom the issues from death do belong, and they are the Father and the Son, to Whom be glory with the blessed Spirit of grace, world without end. Amen!



⁸² **wants** – lacks.

⁸³ **bits and knocks** – this phrase is now obsolete. It alludes to a dog at table, who, while picking up the crumbs, often gets a bite and a buffet or knock with it, but still perseveres.—*Ed.*