

A Discovery of
Glorious Love

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John Durant



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CONTENTS

To the Right Honorable Robert Earl of Warwick	vii
To His Beloved Friends	xi
To the Reader.	xv
1. The Truth of Christ's Love to Believers	1
2. The Transcendence of Christ's Love to Believers	19
3. The Demonstration of the Love of Christ to Be Transcendent	41
4. Further Demonstration of Christ's Love to Believers.	63
5. Believers Study to Know Their Savior's Love.	89
6. The Love of Christ Is the Strongest Cordial in Tribulation.	111

*To the Right Honorable
Robert Earl of Warwick*

My noble lord,

I presume your lordship well knows that Christ's love is our soul (and therefore sole) life. Then (and indeed not till then) do we live when we enjoy divine love. Our bosoms cannot breathe forth the breath of life before Christ breathes in the breath of love.

Indeed, it's the misery of most that they are strangers to this truth. To speak to many of the Lord Jesus, and to tell them of a life in love above what sense feels, and of a comfort, a glory, a happiness flowing from thence, far surmounting what sight sees, is a mystery that they cannot perceive (nor indeed believe), for 'tis foolishness unto them. Not only did the news-mongers at Athens count this to be news that they never heard of, but even the philosophers there themselves accounted Paul's preaching of these things a strange doctrine.

But I hope I may, without either falseness or flattery, say that your honor is well acquainted with these things as experimentally knowing that all your honor, joy, and felicity lies in this: that you know the love of Christ passing knowledge.

And this is one ground of this dedication of these ensuing sermons. But it's not the only ground. For I desire by this also to declare to the world, and yourself, how sensible and mindful

I am of those obligations that your honor has laid upon me, not only by your owning of and respect unto my person but (which I prize most) my ministry.

His person is above my praise whose pen has blotted the common way of dedications. But his ground was, because for the most part they only flatter. And yet he allows for dedications when the argument of the book agrees with the person whom it's dedicated to. The consideration of this I hope (as has been hinted) will secure me from his or others' censure.

Besides, I know, there is a difference between flattery and gratitude. Though the one is odious as a vice, yet the other is amiable as a virtue. And 'tis at this that I have aimed in this dedication.

I know that the bare remembrance (however grateful) of favors received is no requital. But yet, though it serves not to remunerate the favor, yet 'twill to vindicate the benefactor, that he has not ill bestowed his benefits.

My lord, if I say that I cannot requite all your favors, it's no more than all know. And if I say that Christ can, it's no more than I know you believe and I desire. 'Twill be no overexalting of Christ's love, nor any diminution unto your favors, if I say that the least grain of love from Christ to you will abundantly compensate all the weight of your love to me. And this, my lord, is not only my prayer but my belief in your behalf.

I shall not trouble your lordship with many words. Only let me have leave to sound in your ear two words of the Lord Jesus. The one was a word of prophecy, the other of advice.

His word of prophecy was, "The love of many shall wax cold." It's your duty to search, and 'twill be your honor to find, that there is no fulfilling of that in your soul. But, alas, who can say that he does not see too great a fulfilling of this in himself! Oh, the decay of love, zeal, activity, and appearance in the things of Christ that is everywhere! It's a thing that

calls for bloody tears that besides the abounding of iniquity in enemies there is such waxing cold of love in friends. I have sometimes thought Christ spoke this prophecy (as Paul did his rehearsal) weeping.

Christ's word of advice was this: "Strengthen the things that remain," that are ready to die. It's well that under spiritual decays we have anything that remains (happy are they who have not lost all). It's wisdom to strengthen that which languishes (holy are they who strive to do this, and the following sermons may be helpful herein). If the Spirit lays this truth upon our hearts, that Christ loves us with a transcendent love, 'twill at once make us bleed for coolings and burn—yea, blaze—afresh with the fire (internally) and flames (externally) of love to Christ, His people, His truths, and His designs.

But I have gone beyond my intentions, though I hope not beyond your acceptance. Permit me to add that I am in the number of those who both praise and pray for you, and profess to be much obliged to you. I shall trouble you no further, save with the sincere subscription that I am, my lord,

Your honor's singularly obliged soul's servant,

John Durant

To His Beloved Friends

To his beloved friends, the godly inhabitants of the town and port of Sandwich particularly, the congregation over which the Holy Ghost has made my reverend brother (Mr. Francis Prentice) overseer:

Beloved in Christ,

However those who are in the world may account the ensuing sermons riddles and paradoxes, yet to you (whom I hope Christ has taken out of the world) they are experienced truths. It's true you know them already, for I have preached them to you. But that you might have them in remembrance I have been willing to print them for you—and yet not for you only but for as many as believe in the Lord Jesus.

It was Peter's care to perpetuate those things by writing that he preached by word so that, albeit his hearers knew, yet they might be established in the truth. Certainly next to the knowing of truths is the establishment in them, which some, wanting, are gone aside after airy vanities.

'Tis true, your establishment primarily and causally depends on the Spirit. But yet, secondarily and instrumentally, it is attained unto by the Word. For therefore it was that Peter wrote (as he says in 2 Peter 1:12), and surely his writings were

words. And yet the words of Christ were not bare letter. No, they were spirit and life. And the truths of Christ held forth by any, according to the measure of the gift received, are as truly Christ's words now as when He was here on earth, else how could Paul say that Christ came and preached to the Ephesians and was evidently crucified before the Galatians (as 'tis in Ephesians 2:17 and Galatians 3:1), neither of whom heard of Christ till after His ascension. I hope it will be no pride, but a grateful and necessary witness to the grace of Christ, if I say I have both spoken and written the truth as it is in Jesus and as the Spirit has given utterance. Yea, and that in a measure also I can say that those things that I have heard and seen I have declared unto you, that your joy might be full.

I know nothing so directly tending to both the truths and fullness of a saint's joy (of which I account myself obliged to be a helper) as the knowledge of the love of Christ. Now this is the subject I treat. And this I desire to put you in remembrance of, as knowing nothing more strong and constraining unto duty than joy springing forth of this well of salvation.

I shall not trouble you with a large epistle. Four words only in this public view I shall leave with you as my witness unto Christ in some present truths now denied that I desire may never be a witness against you.

1. That Jesus whom we preach, and whose love we declare, is the same Christ still—that is, the same God in man's nature (which is the choice thing in Him capable of being anointed and so of making Him Christ). He that ascended is the same that descended, and He that descended is the same also that ascended (as it is in Ephesians 4:9–10). He still retains the human nature that He once took and so is still not only the same God, but man. It's true, the manhood or flesh of Christ is now glorified, but 'tis not annihilated. His body is made

glorious, but still 'tis in body. The Man is set down on the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

2. This Jesus shall come again in the same manner in which He ascended. As He was visible (even to the eyes of the flesh) when He went away, so shall He be seen in like manner coming again (Acts 1:10–11). He is not so swallowed up in Spirit that He is gone out of the flesh. But albeit His all and only presence is now in Spirit, yet He shall come again, and all eyes shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth, as it is Revelation 1:7. Whoever shall say these Scriptures are not to be taken in the letter (I know I have the mind of Christ if I say in this) does not have the Spirit.

3. Till this coming again we are to wait for Him and upon Him in the spiritual and yet external observation of the ordinances of the gospel. And in them we are to expect, and shall find, the sweet and spiritual incomes of Himself in discoveries of that love of which I treat.

4. In the day of Christ's coming again, those ministers will be found blessed who as faithful and wise stewards shall be found giving the household their portion of meat in due season. And these saints will be blameless who in that day shall be found exercised in, and yet living above, the observation of preaching, fellowship, prayers, and breaking of bread, which Christ has commanded to be kept up till He come.

And now, beloved, what is the panting of my spirit for my own soul, for yours, and for all the saints? Is it not that the morning of that day would dawn? Is it not that the shadows would fly away and that the dayspring from on high might again (in the glory of Christ [God and man]) visit us? Surely these are the daily groanings of the Spirit in me. But with these

there is also a mixture of sighs. Oh, that the Spirit would make us diligent, that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless! And, oh, that we may be counted worthy to escape all these things that (in part are already) come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Yea, and, oh, that when the Lord shall call us to an account concerning the oracles, the ordinances that He has committed to us, we may be found, first, neither as having defiled them with our own inventions, nor, second, as disesteeming them upon pretense of our attainments. No, nor, third, to have made them our rest and confidence. But I shall sigh the rest in secret. I beseech you believe that my heart underwrites this, that I am

Yours, entirely affectionate in the
love and labor of the gospel,

John Durant

To the Reader

In these sermons I presume you will perceive the plainness of man. And my prayer is that you may likewise perceive the power of the Spirit. The time of their preaching was some eleven years since, even the noon of the day of England's trouble. At that time they were accounted seasonable.

The matter of them is some gospel light of the glorious love of Christ, and this makes me think they can never be unseasonable.

The manner of their delivery was (as it ought to be) not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in the simplicity and plainness of the gospel.

The end was and is, next to Christ's glory, your good (O believer!), whoever you are. And if this is not attained, I must cry out, "I have labored in vain!" And two requests I have unto you.

The first is that you charitably cover the failings of the preacher. Remember the heavenly treasure of the gospel is in earthen vessels.

The second is that you carefully correct the errors of the printer, which by reason of my absence from the press could not be avoided.

If to these two you will over and above add your prayers for me, that I may still be enabled from an experimental knowledge of gospel truths to publish the same unto poor souls, you will do more than requite me for my pains in this, even oblige me to a publication of some other papers. In hope whereof, I subscribe myself

Yours in the sincerity and strength of gospel love,
John Durant

CHAPTER 1

The Truth of Christ's Love to Believers

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

—EPHESIANS 3:19

Knowledge is the perfection of the rational creature. It is that whereby we come, as the philosopher speaks, to partake of divinity, to be like unto the deity. God is light and knowledge, and the more we partake of it the more like we are Him. Now by how much the likelier we are unto God, by so much the nearer we come up to perfection.

Knowledge is exceedingly precious. It must be so since it tends to perfection. Indeed, as Aquinas said of seeing, “Though the object of sight is mean in itself yet the very act of seeing is sweet.” So also he determines of knowing, that however the object is low and poor, yet the very act itself of knowledge is high and precious.

Now of all knowledge there is none so precious, nor so perfecting, as that which is divine. Other knowledge (human) can make us perfect only as men. This knowledge (divine) gives us a perfection as saints.

But of all divine knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ in the light of love is most precious, as tending most to the perfection of our souls. As there are degrees of luster in the

heavenly lights, so there are degrees of glory in divine truths. Every star in the firmament has a glorious light, but the light of the sun exceeds them all in glory. And every truth (which is as a star in the heaven of divinity) has a peculiar excellence in it, and the knowledge thereof is precious. But Jesus Christ (who is as the sun in divinity's heaven) has a transcendent excellence in Him, and to know Him far more tends to the perfection of our souls than the knowledge of any or all divine truths besides. Therefore it is that Paul accents this knowledge with an excellence in Philippians 3:8: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." And certainly Paul might well say this, for albeit he had attained the knowledge of other things, yet without this he had been at a loss in point of soul-sacred perfection. So that however other knowledge (as being some way perfecting and precious) is desirable, yet there is no knowledge that is so to be desired, at least by saints, as the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But although the sun is the most glorious of the heavenly lights, yet mortals receive more comfort by its heat than by its light. In like manner, though the knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most transcendent of divine truths, yet our souls receive more sweetness by the warmth of His love than by the luster of His light. As Moses could not see the glory of God and live, and yet must die unless he saw His grace, even so our souls cannot see the luster of the bright beams of Christ's glory and live (we must die ere we can behold that), yet notwithstanding we must see the light of the bosom love of Jesus or else we die. If this light does not dawn upon our bosoms, if this knowledge does not shine into our hearts, we shall sink and die in our souls, especially if we are in fear of any troubles.

Hence it was that the apostle Paul, among the rest of those precious petitions that he puts up to the Father of our Lord

Jesus on behalf of the Ephesians, lest they should faint at his tribulations, he adds this, that they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

I shall briefly give you the context, that it may give some light to the text.

The apostle, having hinted in the first verse of this chapter that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, and having also upon that spoken something of the excellence of the gospel and the warrant that he had to preach the same unto them (which two things were as two great supporters of him in his sufferings), he comes in the fourteenth verse to pray for the Ephesians, that they might not faint at his tribulations. Now there might be a double ground of the apostle's fear why the Ephesians might faint at the news of his tribulations.

The first ground is sympathy. It is usual with saints to sympathize each with others in their tribulations. And Paul upon this ground might rightly think that the tidings of his imprisonment would be sad to these Ephesians; and perhaps he might fear that out of their tender love, both to his person and preaching, they would be overly sad, by sympathy, to understand that now their preacher was in prison.

Second, he might fear that left to themselves they might meet with the like sufferings. For what might they think? Is Paul in prison for preaching the gospel? Then surely may we fear the like for receiving the gospel.

It is commonly seen that the receivers of gospel truths suffer as well as the revealers. And certainly we shall be accounted as faulty for our faith in, as Paul is for his preaching of, the gospel. This peradventure they might argue, fear, and faint. Therefore the apostle bends his knees to Him who alone is able to keep from and support in faintings: "To the Father of our Lord

Jesus.” And three things he begs on behalf of the Ephesians that they might not (upon any ground) faint at his tribulations.

1. Divine strength: That He would grant according to the riches of His glory, that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (verse 16). The spirit of man, the apostle knew, was weak, and so would faint unless God strengthened it. Therefore he begs the Spirit of God (which is the power from on high) for their strengthening in the inner man, that they might not faint in their outward man.

2. Christ’s inhabitation: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,” said he in verse 17. If anything will keep up the heart from fainting, it is that indwelling of Christ with the soul. Christ’s presence creates comfort, and there is no such fence against fainting under any fears as Christ in the soul. The inhabitation of Christ within will support the soul from its faintings at tribulation for Christ without.

3. The knowledge of Christ’s love: That they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge, as it is in the text. Paul well knew the power of Christ’s love, and the efficacy thereof, this way. So that now you may gather up the apostle’s petitions into one prayer, and you may conceive him pouring out his heart after this manner:

Thou Father of our Lord Jesus, since Thou art the God of all comforts, and comfortest Thine in all their tribulations so that they faint not, vouchsafe to grant according to the riches of Thy grace that the Ephesians may not faint at my tribulations. And to this end, strengthen them by Thy Spirit of power in their inner man; fill them by the glorious presence of Christ dwelling in them; but above

all, let them know the love of Jesus Christ which passeth knowledge.

Thus you see by the context, the drift, and scope of the text. But before I speak any further to it, I must clear one thing, which perhaps may be an occasion of doubt, and that is the seeming unreasonableness of this part of Paul's prayer. For, some may say, what reason is there that Paul should pray for that which he hints is impossible? Why should he pray that the Ephesians might know that which he expressly said was above knowledge? "The love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

Though we admit the love of Christ is above knowledge, yet 'tis not unreasonable to desire to know it. For look, although the fulfilling of divine precepts is above our power, yet, notwithstanding, it is to be in our endeavor. In like manner, although the knowledge of Christ, of Christ's love, is above our intellects, yet it may be in our desires. The same infiniteness that grace puts in the will, making it endeavor to fulfill that which it cannot, nay, yea, also puts on the desire for the obtaining of that which cannot be obtained.

But to know the love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge with reference to men as men, not unto saints as such. Indeed, the spirit of man is not able to know or search into the love of Christ (that is above its knowledge). But the Spirit of Christ is able both to search into and to reveal His love. And though Christians as men cannot attain to the knowledge of the love of Christ by the light of reason, yet as saints by the light of faith they may, especially the Holy Ghost (in the meantime) shedding it abroad in their hearts, as it is in Romans 5:5.

The love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge in regard of its perfection of degrees, not simply in regard of its parts.

'Tis true, the perfect knowledge of Christ's love passes the understanding of men and angels (which is its glory). But yet in some measure it may be known (the which is our duty). For that which cannot be known perfectly (in the highest degree) may yet be known partially (and in some measure).

Thus the text may be cleared from the doubt propounded. Now there are four ways in which I shall look upon this Scripture and so speak unto it.

1. As it includes the truth and reality of Christ's love to the saints.
2. As it concludes the height, and royalty, or transcendence of that love.
3. As it holds out the apostle's desire that the Ephesians might know both.
4. As it contains the ground of keeping up the Ephesians' hearts from fainting at Paul's tribulations, which is the drift and scope that Paul drives or aims at in them.

And thus there will be four doctrines that I shall take up and speak unto from these words.

Doctrine 1: There is love in Christ's bosom toward all believers.

Doctrine 2: That love which Christ bears to believers is a transcendent love.

Doctrine 3: It is a thing of necessary concern for every Christian to know the transcendent love of Christ.

Doctrine 4: The spiritual knowledge of the transcendent love of Christ toward believers is of special efficacy to keep up their hearts from fainting under any trouble.

I begin with the first, which however it might more fully be gathered from another text, yet because it will be a good

foundation for the following discourse, and is clear enough in this place, I shall briefly speak unto it now.

Doctrine 1: There is love in Christ's bosom toward all believers.

I suppose it is clearly (couched at least) in these words: *Science* supposes *ens*; Paul would not doubtless pray that the Ephesians might know that which was not; things must be ere they can be known. Nothing falls under the understanding till it first is in being.

I shall briefly open the point and then prove it and apply it.

How love may be said to be in Christ (as any other affection) I shall not need to inquire, though perhaps love may be said to be in Christ as God (for as He is man there is no doubt of it) in far more proper sense than any other passion may because it is (as it were) His essence, God being, as John said, love (1 John 4:16).

What the love of Christ is I shall not curiously define. The moralists have so many definitions of love that indeed it is hard among them (as the proverb is) to find this wood for trees—that is, to know what love is, among their various definitions thereof. Passing by therefore their niceties, I shall content myself with this plain description of love.

Love is the commanding affection of the soul, consisting in the expansion or going out of the heart toward a person or thing in wishings and workings for its good.

I call it an affection, and the commanding one, it being indeed on all hands assented unto. Love is queen regent in the soul, and it sits upon the throne commanding all. It is the centurion in the bosom and has the same power over all the affections that the centurion has over all his servants.

I say it consists in the expansion or stretching out of the heart. Look, as hatred contracts and gathers in, so love opens

and dilates the heart. I add that it consists (in the general) in wishings and workings for good. I do not specify the end, for that describes and denominates the particular kinds of love; therefore, only in the general, I say, it consists in the going out of the heart in wishing and working for the good of the person or thing loved.

So that now, when I say that there is love in Christ's bosom toward all believers, I mean that the commanding affections of Jesus Christ are set upon them, that his heart is open and stretched out unto them, and that the wishings and workings of His soul are toward them for good.

By believers, in a word, I understand all those who close with Christ as tendered in the gospel. However there are differences between them in the degrees of their faith and the ways of their light, yet all agree in this: that they see themselves lost without Christ and that God the Father freely offers Him in the word of grace. They thereupon go out in the strength and sincerity of their souls to embrace Him as He is offered. They are believers, all of them; and in this thing Christ puts no difference (as it is Acts 15:9) between them but burns in His bosom with real love toward them all.

For proof, I should but darken the point if I should bring all that cloud of witnesses that would gladly come and set seal to this sweet truth. Ask John, and he will witness that Christ loved him. He was indeed a bosom-beloved believer (John 13:23; 19:26); and of him it is often said that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. Yea, and John will witness for more than himself. He said Jesus loved him, and all believers besides him. For speaking to them he said, "[He (i.e., Christ) hath] loved us" (Rev. 1:5). Call in Paul, and he will prove that Christ loves believers; for Christ loved him, and such was the love that Christ bore to Paul that he professed that he could, nay, did live upon it: "I live by...the Son of God, who loved me" (Gal.

2:20). Nay, Paul further bears record to this truth and witnesses that Christ's love stretches forth itself to every believing soul: "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37). I shall add no more testimonies to prove this truth. Even the least believer, though but a babe, is able to lisp in the language of this love and tell you that there is a divine fire of love in Christ's bosom burning brightly toward believers.

I shall hint three demonstrations of the doctrine taken from the behavior of Christ toward believers, which will evidently clear cordial love unto them.

Demonstration 1

Christ's eye is always on believers, and He takes delight to look there where they are. The eye is the index of love. It is a sweet star always shining over the hearts and houses of those whom we love. The proverb tells us, "Where we love, there we look." Now it is easy to observe the rollings of Christ's eyes, how that still they are toward believers. Will you listen to Christ's love in its language this way? "Let me see thy countenance [says the believer]...for...thy countenance is comely" (Song 2:14). Such is the pleasure that Christ takes in beholding believers that He seems to live upon their looks and speaks as if He were ravished with their sight. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes" (Song 4:9). He speaks once and again (as if He sucked sweetness from the speech), "Thou hast ravished my heart with thy sight." How can we question Christ's love to believers, when His eyes are thus fixed on them so that their sight ravishes His soul? Build upon it, O believing soul! Christ's delight in looking on you demonstrates His love to you. He peeps through the lattices to declare His love (Song 2:9). Nay, as if He were overpowered (as indeed such an effect does a look of love produce) while He beholds believers He

says, “Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me” (Song 6:5). The word in the Hebrew signifies “have made me proud,” or as our Margent has it, “have puffed me up.” Christ seems to pride Himself in the looks of believers. His eye is on them and His heart is taken up if their eye is on Him.

Demonstration 2

Christ’s tongue speaks His love to believers. The tongue is love’s trumpet; the breathings of the heart fill the lips with sounds of love. Love that is secret in the bosom sounds sweetly in the breath. Speech as a silver trumpet loudly sounds love. It is said of Shechem, the son of Hamor, that his soul cleaved unto Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and the text says that he loved her, and his tongue spoke it; for it is added that he spoke kindly unto the damsel (Gen. 34:3). Believers, Christ’s tongue reveals Him. His lips speak His love to you. Oh, how often has Christ spoken sweetly to your soul? O believer! Can you not gather by His speaking to your heart (for that is the Hebrew phrase for speaking kindly) the love of His heart? How near your heart, O soul, do those words of your Savior go? If any thirsts, let him come and drink freely. Does not His heart open as a fountain of love in this speech? And does He not speak to your heart (i.e., very kindly) when He says, “If you thirst, come and drink?”

Ask the poor woman that had the bloody issue (Mark 5) whether Christ did not speak to her in the language of love when He said, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole.” Poor heart, she had touched Him as she thought unawares, and when she heard Him speak of it she trembled, as if she expected words of wrath. But while she touched His garment secretly, love touched His heart sweetly, and His tongue bespoke it when He called her “daughter.” And as Christ’s tongue trumpets out love when He speaks to believers, so it does when He speaks of believers. Oh, the high epithets (i.e., that which He

adds to believers names when He speaks of their persons), how rhetorical, how eulogistic is the language of His love when He speaks of His spouse: "Thou art fair... thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes... thy hair is as a flock of goats... thy teeth are like a flock of sheep... thy lips are like a thread of scarlet... thy neck is like the tower of David" (Song 4:1-4). As believers declare their love to Christ by speaking highly of Him, so Christ declares His love to believers by speaking highly of them. If believers call Him "the lily of the valley," He calls them the lily among the thorns. Christ's love will not permit Him to speak of them in low language. Thus the lips of your Lord, O believers, are a demonstration of His love to you.

Demonstration 3

Christ's actions seal to the truth and strengthen the demonstration of doctrine. If there were nothing but the eye or the tongue, it might be feared lest the love expressed by them were but either feigned or fond. But actions following these seal it up that the love is not complimentary but cordial. If love is only in the lip, it is without life, and it may be suspected as counterfeit. But when men not only speak but act love, then love lives and is love indeed. Indeed, where love is in truth it will be seen in action, every action being only love's servant to go on its errands, and love's to do its work. Now, should we take a view of the actions of Jesus Christ, we shall see that they strive to excel and exceed His words in the declaration of His love to believers. I shall only hint at some, as intending the larger discourse of them in the next doctrine.

Consider Jesus Christ manifesting Himself and His secrets to believing souls, and this will demonstrate the truth of His love. Delilah questioned the truth of Samson's love from the concealment of his secrets from her. "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?" she said in Judges

16:15. Thus she seems to argue, “Where there is love in truth, there will be a communication of secrets. But this I do not find in you; therefore, I question whether you indeed love me.” However Delilah did or might argue thus against her Sampson, believers cannot argue so against their Savior’s love. The Lord Jesus unbosoms Himself to believers; the secrets of His heart are with them. Christ tells His disciples that He would manifest Himself unto them in John 14. The men of the world are strangers to Christ’s affections, and therefore they are so to His secrets. Carnal people do not know the mind of the Lord because He does not love them. But we, said Paul—that is, we who are beloved by Christ—we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). The Father loves the Son and declares it by this: that He shows Him all things that He does (John 5:20). In like manner, the Son loves believers and actually demonstrates it by this: that He declares all things (i.e., all these secrets that were needful for them to know) that He heard of the Father (John 15:15). The secrets of Christ’s cabinet counsel are with those whom He loves.

Christ often takes believers to His house and feasts them. Thus we deal with our friends, and thus we declare to them our love. Christ deals so with His. “The king hath brought me into his chambers” (Song 1:4). Nay, He has brought me into His banqueting house (Song 2:4). When David would declare his love to Barzillai he said, “Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem” (2 Sam. 19:33). Thus Christ often speaks and declares His love to believers. “Come thou to Me, poor soul, and I will feed thee with Me in Jerusalem.” Nay, Christ declares His love not only by inviting and bringing believers to His house but also by coming to theirs. He stands at their door and knocks, and if they will but open He will enter (Rev. 3:20). If they love Him so much as to let Him in, He will come and declare His love by dwelling with them

(John 14:23). And He will feast with them in their house—that is, their hearts. And because He will declare He comes to show love, He will make the feast at His own cost, He who gathered His myrrh with His spice for this purpose, as it is in Song of Solomon 5:1.

Christ unites Himself to believers, and in that demonstrates that He loves them. Affection begets union. Augustine long ago defined love to be the juncture of two in one. Love makes one of two. It is said of Jonathan and David that their souls were knit together (1 Sam. 18:1). Christ and believers are knit together, and it is Christ's love that makes the knot. It's more than a moral union that is between Christ and believers; they are not only His friends and brethren but His spouses and members. If He is a Head, they shall be the body; and if He is a Vine, they are the branches. Nay, the union between Christ and believers is nearer than that of the vine and branches; of no branch can it be said (properly) that it is in the vine, and the vine in it. But of believers it is said that Christ is in them and they are in Him. This union demonstrates also the truth of Christ's love to believing souls.

Application

I shall now make a word of application and conclude this point. There are but three uses unto which I speak: a use of information, a use of comfort, and a use of counsel.

Use of Information

The point informs us of the sweetness of Christ to all the saints. Oh, how sweet! How kind! How gracious is Jesus Christ to believers thus to mind them, thus to set His heart upon them? Believers, the Lord loves you. Is He not in this sweet unto you? Ruth, at the consideration of Boaz's love, fell on her face and said, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that

thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?” (Ruth 2:10). Fall on your faces believers; you were once strangers to Jesus Christ, but you have found grace in His eyes. Your names are written upon His heart in letters of love. Well may you say that Christ is sweet, seeing He loves such strangers as you were. The King of Israel is surely sweet in setting His love upon you, who were strangers unto Israel. Oh, how happy are you, O poor believer, in being the object of your Lord’s love! The meanest believer may raise up a very high structure of happiness upon this cornerstone, Christ’s love. Oh, how blessed are you in your Beloved (poor soul!), and how sweet is He to you who always has a fire of love burning in His bosom toward you?

Use of Comfort

This point is very comfortable to believers. It is cordial to you, is it not, O believer, that Christ loves you? Does it not revive your hearts (my brethren) to hear that He who is the Lord of life and glory in Himself is a Lord of grace and love to you? Jesus Christ, who has written upon His garments “Lord of Lords” has also written upon His bosom love to believers. Certainly, believers, could you but see how near you are to Christ, how highly He prizes you, how dearly He loves you, I would not need to bid you rejoice, or be glad, or be of good comfort.

Objection: “No,” the soul will say, “indeed you need not, if I could but see that Christ loved me. But I doubt that.”

Response: Do not doubt it, O believing soul, but be confident, and in that confidence be comforted. Christ loves you, and that, as we shall show hereafter, with a transcendent love.

Objection: But it is good to have a ground of confidence; and in vain shall you comfort me if I see no reason in your words. Why, what reason is there that Christ should love me?

Response: Christ's love is its own reason. He therefore loves because He will. It may be the vanity of our wanton love that we love merely because we love. But it is the glory of Christ's love that He does so. The reason why Christ does this, O poor soul, is in His own bosom. If you look in yours you will not find it, because it is not there; but look up into Christ's bosom, and there it is. He will have mercy upon whom He will. Christ will love you, and does love you, O believer, because He will. Do not therefore stand questioning why He should, but be comforted, and rejoice in this, that He does love you, even you, O poor soul. Though it may be your faith be little, yet Christ's love to you is true.

Question: But though He loves me now, will He love me still? Will not Christ dislike me hereafter, and upon that dislike desert me? I am sure I shall give Him cause, and I fear He will take it. And certainly, if Christ deserts, I die. I cannot live longer than I have His love.

Answer: Neither die nor doubt, poor soul! Your Lord so loves you that He will not leave you; or, if He does for a time, He will not always. Christ's bowels burn with love, and that fire, however smothered for a time, will break out in a flame at last. Christ's love is like Himself, immutable and unchangeable. Love is Christ's life as well as yours. He will not surely kill Himself by deserting you. You cannot live unless Christ loves, and neither can Christ. Your Lord has sworn (and surely if He breaks His oath He dies) that the mountains shall be removed, but His love shall not leave you.

Objection: Oh, but though Christ loves me, yet men hate me. I cannot be so cheerful in Christ's love because I meet with the creature's wrath.

Response: I pity you, poor creature. You have the love of the Potter, and you fear the wrath of the potsherd. Why are you so weak as to sink under the creature's wrath while you have the Creator's love? Be of good comfort. Christ can break in pieces all your enemies with His iron rod, while in the meantime He will comfort you with His shepherd's crook. Why do you droop at the hatred of him who dwells in a tabernacle of clay, and not rather triumph in the love of Him who is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high? Look up, believer; heaven is clear over your head though the earth is dirty under your feet. Though you are in a storm among the creatures, yet the sun of love shines on you from Christ. He smiles and loves you. So what if men frown and hate you? Fear not him who hates your body and at worst can but destroy that; rejoice rather in Him who loves your soul and at the last will raise up your body from the grave and give you a glorious body like His own, and fill your soul with eternal joy in the enjoyment of His everlasting love.

Use of Counsel

The last use of the point is for counsel. Since Christ loves His saints, I would (surely the point might, and does) counsel both the world and believers.

First, you men of the world, if you have an ear to hear, hear. Christ loves believers, so be counseled to do the like. Certainly Christ will take it well at your hands if you love them who are beloved by Him. His friends are sometimes strangers in your land; use them well, show them love, put it upon Christ's score. He loves them, and He will reward you. Jesus Christ so loves believers that He will not let a cup of cold

water, given to them in His name (that is, because He loves them) go unrewarded. I say it again, since Christ is gracious and loves believers, be wise and love them also. However, take heed that you do not wrong them. If you will not do them good, beware you do them no hurt. Believe it, if you do, Christ loves them, and He will not bear it. Tremble lest (while you lift up your hand against believers) that Jesus Christ who loves them dashes you in pieces. Beware of persecuting Christ's beloved ones under pretenses. It will be but a poor excuse to say they were schismatics, because Christ knows them to be saints. Believe it, the blood of believers is very precious, and as He will punish anti-Christian wretches, under whatever names or titles distinguished, so also will He be avenged upon all those who dare touch believers, under whatever nicknames disgraced. Therefore, if you will not be so wise as to love, yet do not be so mad as to hurt those whom Christ loves.

But, second, let this counsel believers, since the Lord Jesus loves them, that they would walk worthy thereof. Believers, live as the objects of Christ's love. Advance His kingdom, embrace His counsels, love all His members, and be abundant in His work and service. In all things show that Christ's love to you has a constraining power in you; at least be counseled to love Christ, who loves you, and that so much the rather because Christ deserves your love though you do not deserve His. Oh, do not let the love of Christ say, "I gave you counsel and you rejected it. In love I gave you commandments, and you transgressed them."

No, but since Christ loves you, love Him; and if you love Him, keep His commandments. Rouse yourselves up, O believing souls! And, considering that Christ loves you, demean yourselves accordingly. If He calls, come. If He bids you go, go. If His kingdom is advancing, join in the work (it is the kingdom of Him who loves you). If His Spirit counsels,

take it, for it comes from love. In a word, in all things live as those who indeed are beloved of Christ. And let your carriage be exactly obedient, kind, and loving unto Him who stoops so low as to love such poor creatures as you are. And if any asks why you love and labor for Jesus Christ, tell them it is because you love Him. And add withal that if they but knew how Christ loves you, they would rather ask why you love Him so little or do for Him no more than you do. But if they demand, "How does Christ love you?" tell them that question is unanswerable. Indeed, say that He loves you and that truly, but withal transcendently. That Christ loves you, tell all the world you know of; but how He loves, tell them that passes your knowledge, yea, and the knowledge of every creature, for it is a love passing knowledge. And this is the next thing, and the chief thing that you shall speak of.

CHAPTER 2

The Transcendence of Christ's Love to Believers

Christ's love is the saint's life. Paul tells you that he was dead to the law that he might live to God. And the ground thereof was that he lived by faith in Christ who loved him (Gal. 2:20). As the life is, so likewise the comfort of the saints is wrapped up in the love of Christ. A believer can neither live nor rejoice if the Lord Jesus does not smile upon his soul. But if Jesus Christ will but smile and shine in the light of love, believers know not only how to live but also how to rejoice in all, even the worst of times. Hence it was that this apostle, praying to the Father of our Lord Jesus for the Ephesians, that they might not faint at his tribulations, entreats that to this purpose, they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

Having briefly touched at the reality of Christ's love to believers (as it is included in this place), I shall now speak more largely to the reality thereof (as it is set out in this phrase), that it passes knowledge. Hence our second point is this:

Doctrine 2: That love which Christ bears to believers is a transcendent love.

You see how fully this point lies in these words. It must be transcendent since the apostle said, "It passes knowledge."

I shall endeavor to open the point and give you the meaning thereof by bringing you to the top of this high hyperbolic expression in three steps or stairs.

1. The love of Christ to believers is transcendent, it being above expression. Those who enjoy Christ's love do not know how to express it. Such is the transcendence of the love that it passes their knowledge how to express it in any language. The Scripture sets out the height of things by this, that they are unspeakable. So when it would heighten and declare the transcendence of that rapture in which Paul was (when wrapped up to the third heavens), and the glory of that which he then heard, it sets it down by this, that it was unutterable. He "heard unspeakable words [which may be a Hebraism for things, *word* and *thing* being interchangeable in the Hebrew], which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). In like manner, when the Scripture speaks of the transcendent joy that believers rejoice with by believing, it uses this phrase, that it was unspeakable: "Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable" (1 Peter 1:8).

And it must not be passed by in silence that the joy of which Peter speaks is that which believers have by faith, which certainly is founded upon Christ's love, so that if the joy in the faith of Christ's love is unspeakable, the love itself is much more so. For, as the logicians speak, that which makes anything so, or such, is much more itself so, or such. This may be the first step to ascend the height of the expression and to declare the transcendence of Christ's love to believers. It passes knowledge in this, that no man (no, though he had the tongues of men and angels) knows how to express it.

2. Christ's love is transcendent and may be said to be above knowledge in that it is above apprehension. As the language of believers cannot express, so neither can their knowledge apprehend the height of their Savior's love. Men often can

apprehend more than they can express; when the tongue is silenced, the understanding may be comprehensive. But now, in the love of Christ there is that which poses and confounds the very intellectuals of men and angels. It is so high that there is no reaching it, so deep that there is no sounding it, so long that it exceeds measuring, and so broad that there is no comprehending it. The most spiritual mathematician is not able to commensurate Christ's love in all its dimensions. It is as possible for that little crevice of the body (the eye) to let in all the light of the sun as it is for that great eye of the soul (knowledge) to let in the luster of Christ's love. The Holy Ghost, when He would set out a thing as transcendent, he uses this phrase, that it is such as cannot be comprehended. As now, speaking of the great things that God does, it is said they are such as we cannot comprehend (Job 37:5). Without doubt, as the operation of the Father's hand, so the expansion of the Son's heart is such as cannot be comprehended.

In this the Father's works and the Son's loves do equally transcend, that they pass knowledge and are not able to be apprehended.

3. Christ bears to believers a transcendent love, and it passes knowledge in that it is above conception. Fancy can conceive that which reason cannot comprehend. The understanding, being bounded by reason, cannot go beyond its limits; and therefore where reason cannot suggest, the understanding cannot apprehend. But now fancy is winged, and it will fly. As Joseph Scaliger says, "It scorns to be bounded, though by reason itself. It flies high, and will guess (at least) at the transcendent height of what reason cannot reach." Yet such, my beloved, is the love of Christ; it is so high, so superlatively transcendent, that let fancy loose, and let it fly as high as it can, it is not able to soar to the top thereof. The understanding going

to its utmost bounds is not able to conceive what is the love of Christ to believers.

So now when I say that the love which Christ bears to believers is transcendent, and when you read in the text that it passes knowledge, you may take the meaning thus: it is above the expression of the finest oratory, the comprehension of the deepest theory, and the conception of the most sublime fancy. Insomuch as let the oratory speak, wisdom study, and fancy fly, yet neither the one, nor the other, nor all, are able to express, apprehend, or conceive what is the love of Christ to believers. Indeed, the love of Christ is such as heaven itself (though it is the state of sight) does not (as hereafter we shall show) exalt the saints so high as to make them able to comprehend that love in the fields where they walk and live. It is with the saints in heaven as with the fish in the sea. They swim up and down in the mighty waters but yet they do not, cannot, comprehend that watery world in which they live. In like manner, the saints above, though they swim up and down in the infinite ocean of love (which is in their Savior's bosom), yet they can no more comprehend that vast sea of love in which to eternity they shall bathe, and bless their souls, than the little fish can comprehend the great sea in which it swims.

Wherefore (ere I proceed further) let me premise this, that it is not in my thoughts, nor dare I presume this, neither would I have you expect, that by anything that I shall or can say I shall be able to set out the infiniteness of that love (of which we shall treat) according to its full latitude and worth. No, this I despair of; only I desire to let you see some of the glimmering beams of that transcendent love that is in Christ's bosom toward believers so that you may wonder at it and set about the more exact study of it. When a painter intends to draw out the sea, or the world in a map, he makes only some little shadows of the earth and sea, so that so the beholder may

be enabled to guess at the vastness thereof. In like manner I shall draw before you (in my discourse) some little shadowy pricks or lines of Christ's love so that thereby I may help you somewhat to imagine what is that infinite, transcendent love that neither saints nor angels are able (in all its luster and dimensions) to paint out or discover.

For the proof I shall not need to add more Scriptures, it being clear enough by what the apostle speaks in this place of Christ's love that it is transcendent. In the verse before this, the apostle hints that there are all the dimensions in Christ's love that may serve to declare anything vast and infinite. There is a breadth, length, depth, and height in the love of Christ. And it is worth noting that the apostle does not tell how great those dimensions were. He does not say how broad, how long, how deep, or how high, but (as if the dimensions of Christ's love transcended his knowledge) he passes it by and only adds that this love passes knowledge.

I do not find this phrase (to my best remembrance) but once more in the New Testament, and that is in Philippians 4:7, where Paul, speaking of the transcendence of the peace of God, says that it passes all understanding. Certainly, it is the glory of Christ's love, as well as of His Father's peace, that it also passes understanding.

If at your leisure you read, and reading spiritually consider, what is presented to faith in the book of the Canticles, you will see this truth (that the love of Christ to believers is transcendent) in the glory and convincing power and proof thereof. It may be in your time you have misspent some hours in reading some romances and have wondered at some strange stories of love that you have met with. But alas! Should you compare the highest love that ever you read of with the love of Christ to believers, you will be forced to confess that that love, in comparison of this, is but like the story itself—that is, a mere

fancy. If ever strength of affection was set out in sweetness of expression, it is in that book to a spiritual eye. When I consider the fourth chapter only of that Song, I cannot choose but wonder at the high transcendence of Christ's love to believers. Surely I conclude the affections are sweet, strong, glorious, and inconceivable when the expressions thereof are so ravishing, so great, and so high as in that chapter they are.

I shall give one general demonstration to let you see the truth of the doctrine that Christ's love to believers is transcendent. Take the demonstration thus:

That love which includes in it, and comprehends all kinds, acts, or demonstrations of love whatsoever, must be a transcendent love. But such is the love of Christ to believers. I suppose the major is clear enough and needs no proof. The painter took the direct and undeniable way to make the picture of Minerva transcend and excel all other beauties when he epitomized or contracted all the several rays and particular beauties that were scattered up and down in other persons or pictures in that one piece. It is upon this ground an axiom indubitable and beyond or above dispute that the sun far transcends in light any or all the other lights, moon, or stars, because in its light all theirs is contained, and that in an eminent manner.

All the question is about the minor, whether Christ's love is such to believers that it includes and contains in it all other kinds or acts of love whatsoever. Now this I shall put out of question by an induction or enumeration of the several kinds or acts of love.

Among others (how exactly I will not determine) the moralists tell us of these four kinds of love as the chief:

1. A love of friendship
2. A love of pity
3. A love of sympathy
4. A love of complacency

In these four only I shall instance (which I would rather call several demonstrations or degrees of one and the same passion of love than particular kinds distinct) and shall show that Christ's love to believers includes and contains in it all of them, and that therefore it must be transcendent.

The love of friendship is so called (not as if it were the habit of friendship itself) because it is that kind or act of love whereby we prosecute or follow one whom we look upon and love as a friend and to whom we wish good. Now this kind (or rather degree) of love is in the love of Christ to believers. Christ looks upon and loves all believers as friends; hence it is that He counts and calls them all by that name "Ye are my friends" (John 15:14). And that this is real appears by His dealing with them. Therefore it is added, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (verse 15). Those whom we love as friends we open our minds unto, and it is their privilege. We communicate to them secrets that we have heard. Christ deals thus with believers and, thus dealing, does He not declare to them the love of friendship?

The love of pity falls in and follows upon the former; for, as Job said, "To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend" (Job 6:14). This also is included in Christ's love to believers. For upon that love of friendship that He bears to them, He acts thus of pity still toward them; when no eye pitied them, His eye did. When sinners, and Satan rather, laugh at their misery, and say, "Aha, Aha, so would we have it," Christ, as it were, sighs to see their sorrows, and indeed pities their souls. Hence it is said in Isaiah 63:9, "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

The love of sympathy (which in truth is but a high degree of pity) is also contained in the love of Christ to believers. Men sympathize with those whom they love, when they, as it were, take up their miseries upon themselves and are as if they were in their friend's case. Thus does Jesus Christ, when He sees any believer groan either under sin or sadness, He comes, and by a sympathy afflicts Himself (for "in all their affliction he was afflicted" [Isa. 63:9]) as if He Himself was in their sadness and under their sin. The author to the Hebrews tells us, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (4:15). His meaning is that indeed our high priest, Jesus Christ, sympathizes with believers in their sorrows. And in Hebrews 5:2 it is said of Christ that He can have compassion on the ignorant; that word signifies that He knows how to pity according to the measure of our misery. Let the misery be never so great (for with reference to great measure, I believe the metaphor is used), Jesus Christ knows how to measure out as great a measure of sympathy as is needful. So that Christ's love to believers, you see, contains in it also the love of sympathy.

Lastly, for the love of complacency (which indeed is the highest degree of love), this also is in Christ's love contained. You have a description of this love of complacency (and a demonstration also of the thing in hand) in Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD thy God [which I understand of Christ] in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in His love, he will joy over thee with singing." It is the nature of the love of complacency to rest in itself and to rejoice in its lettings out unto its object, as it were, with singing. Thus Christ does to believers: He first loves them, and then rests in that love, and after solaces Himself in their souls, and rejoices with singing, while He rests in His love with them, over them, and in them. As the Father from all eternity, by His love

of complacency, rested in the Son and took His delight in Him, as it is in Proverbs 8:30, so Jesus Christ rests in believers, and He solaces Himself in their persons; for it is there added in verse 31, His “delights were with the sons of men.” Thus Christ’s love to believers (you see) comprehends in it this highest kind (or rather degree) of love—namely, that of complacency.

As the sea transcends all other rivers, because they all come and empty themselves into it, in like manner the love of Christ excels all loves whatsoever and is transcendent inasmuch as all the kinds, acts, or degrees of love that run up and down among the creatures (as it were in several channels) all meet and empty themselves in Christ’s bosom, as into the vast ocean of love, and thence flow forth into the bosoms of believers as the sole choice peculiar cisterns of the same great, high, transcendent love.

But because my design is a little to lose myself in this discourse of love, I shall for the further making out and discovery of the transcendence of Christ’s love to believers speak to it more particularly. And at this time I shall touch at the substance and circumstances of this love and in both show how it transcends and passes all knowledge.

As for the substance of the love of Christ to believers, it is such as if rightly (i.e., spiritually) considered will appear to be transcendent. There are (to omit others) but four things that I shall touch upon briefly as the substantial declarations of the hyperbolic excellence of this love: (1) the nature, (2) the degrees, (3) the duration, and (4) the operation.

1. The nature of Christ’s love to believers is transcendent, it being of the same nature that the Father’s is to Him. Jesus Christ loves believers with the same kind or nature of love with which the Father loves Himself. His love to them and His Father’s love to Him are, as for nature, all one. There is

transcendence in the one (viz., Christ's love to believers), for they are in their nature both the same. Christ Himself bears record to this truth: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (John 15:9). That you may fully feel the weight of this demonstration, take it in these three conclusions briefly:

(1) Of all love, that is the most transcendent love that is in God. For God (as the Spirit says) is love (1 John 4:16). Water in the fountain is the sweetest, and love, in like manner, in God is clearest, for He is the God of love (2 Cor. 13:11). As light in the sun is the most transcendent, so love in God must transcend, because love is in Him as light is in the sun—that is, in its prime and proper orb or seat. And, indeed, as every beam of light is but the irradiation of the sun, so all the love that is in the bosoms of creatures is but like some little drops of dew that first fell from the heaven of love, God's bosom.

(2) Of all the love that is in God, that is the most transcendent which He lets out to Christ. It is Christ's glory that He is crowned with the flower, beauty, and glory of the Father's love. Jesus Christ was He who is still not only the beloved but the well-beloved of the Father in whom He was well pleased—that is, in whom the Father rested in the highest degree of His love. And it is apparent by all the actions of God that He loved Christ with the most transcendent kind of love inasmuch that He made all things for Him, gives all things to Him, and lets not out so much as a drop of love to any creature but that it first runs into His bosom, and so through Him to the creature. The very spirits and quintessence of that love that is in God's bosom was let out (and that without measure) into Christ's.

(3) Now that love which Christ bears to believers is the same that He had from the Father. As it flowed from the Father's bosom into His, so it flows from His bosom into believers. It is the same love for nature and quality. As every drop of the sea is the same for quality that all the water in the sea is, so every

drop of love that falls in upon the bosoms of believers from Christ's is of the selfsame nature, and is the same for quality, that the Father bears to Him. Indeed, there is difference in the quantity. And the reason is because our cisterns are not so capacious as Christ's cistern. And yet so much as we can contain we shall have, as I shall show by and by.

So that now herein is the first thing, wherein the transcendence of Christ's love to believers appears. It is the same for nature with that which the Father shows to Himself. Hence it was, and is, that Christ both did, does, and will declare the Father's name to believers, that (as it is in John 17) the love wherewith the Father loved Him may be in them, as He Himself is in them.

2. If we consider the degrees in which, or the measure according to which, Christ lets out His love to believers, we shall see it is transcendent in that also. Christ fills the bosom of believers with as much love as they can hold. The creature, when enlarged to the utmost, is not capable, neither can it contain more than they have, so that as the nature of the love is high, in like manner the degree is full. The prophet Jeremiah, speaking of God's wrath against sinners, uses a metaphor in which he compares God's wrath unto wine (as also the psalmist does in Psalm 75:8) and sinners unto bottles; and setting out the degree of that wrath he says, "Every bottle shall be filled with wine" (Jer. 13:12). Beloved, Christ's love is compared to wine also in Song of Solomon 1:4. And if you compare the bosoms of believers unto bottles (as you may), then certainly know that every bosom is full of the wine of Christ's love. The justice of the Father is not more exact to fill the bosom of sinners with His wrath than the grace of the Son is free to fill the bosoms of believers with His love. Hence it is that He says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10).

You read of a box of ointment that, when it was opened, the whole house was filled with the odor thereof (John 12:3). Such a box of ointment is the bosom of Christ (as may be gathered from Song of Solomon 1:3), which, being opened in the houses (i.e., the hearts of believers) fills them full with the sweet savor thereof. And, indeed, as Christ bids believers ask the Father that their joy might be full, so He is as bountiful Himself (as He would have His Father to be), and therefore, without their asking (for He loves first), He lets out, yea, and fills them with His love. In this life believers have (at least might) as much love as faith can let in; and if the soul is not full, it is only because the mouth is narrow (as the bottle with the narrow neck in the ocean), and hereafter, as much as vision itself can swallow. So that now the transcendent fullness of that degree in which Christ lets out His love to believers evidently declares the love to be transcendent also.

3. Add to both these the consideration of the duration of Christ's love to believers and this will further demonstrate its transcendence. As the nature is high, and the degree full, so the duration is constant and perpetual. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end," it may be, to the perfection (John 13:1). Christ's love is once and ever. It is of the same nature with Himself, unchangeable. As nothing in believers was so good as to make Him to set His love upon them, so nothing is so bad as to make Him take it off again. Indeed, sometime the visible actings or demonstrations may be concealed, but still the love itself remains sure and is never violated. As divines say of Christ upon the cross, "The beatific vision was suspended, but the hypostatic union was not dissolved," in like manner, though the light of Christ's love may be for a time obscured, yet the life thereof is still preserved. The love may be dark sometime but never dies. There is nothing,

no, not even sin, that can totally and finally separate between Christ's love and a believer's soul. Paul asks the question (to this day it is unanswered, yea, and unanswerable), "Who shall separate?" (Rom. 8:35). "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed," said Christ, "but my kindness shall not depart from thee" (Isa. 54:10). Believers, those hills that you sometimes see, at whose sight you wonder, and the mighty mountains that you behold sometime, and are amazed at their vastness, those very hills and mountains not only may but shall depart. But yet the love of Christ toward you is so transcendently high and sure that it shall not—nay, cannot—depart. So that as the very heavens themselves wax old like a garment, and yet the person of Christ remains, even so shall heaven, earth, every creature wax old, decay, and die—but still the love of Christ toward believers shall continue young, fresh, and flourishing. Such is its duration, and such shall be its continuance. Indeed, the very life of Christ must depart, and He die again, ere His love to His can decay. For His love is not only the believer's life but His own (as was hinted formerly). Oh, the transcendence of this love, which shall thus last.

4. Consider now in the last place the operation of Christ's love to believers and you shall see its transcendence answerable to its nature, degree, and duration. We guess at the transcendence of things by the nobleness of their operations. It is a certain rule: the more noble anything operates, the more noble it is in itself. Love, of all the affections, being the most noble, answerably has the most noble operations. Christ's love will easily appear to be transcendent if we consider how much more nobly it operates than any other love in the world. From the first point of time until this, yea, and till time shall be no more, the operations of Christ's love to believers have been, are, and shall be transcendently glorious and noble.

I shall not in this place search so curiously into all the actions of Christ (because I shall more particularly speak to them by themselves) to let them therefore pass. I shall only instance in five particulars, and in them you shall see the transcendent operations of the love of Christ to believers.

Particular 1

There was no condition so low unto which Christ did not condescend to declare that His love did transcend. High love stoops low; and the higher still the love is, the lower still it stoops. You may take love's elevation by its condescension; and the lower still that you observe love condescend, the higher always you must conclude it is elevated. I think it was but a fancy that one reported of a great prince who (it is said) took upon him both the habit and employment of a day laborer, working to build a house (in which his beloved was) that he might visit her. Yet let me tell you, it is no fancy, but a reality in Jesus Christ, that out of the height of His love to believers, He took upon Him both the form and the employment of a day laborer (which some think, though I do not, to be intended in Job 9:33) to declare not only His obedience to His Father but His love to believers. He emptied Himself, or made Himself vain (for so the Greek word may be translated), "and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). Christ became of no reputation that His love to believers might be of high reputation. Oh, how nobly did Christ's love operate toward believers when He stooped so low for their sakes!

Particular 2

There was no action so mean that He did not cheerfully undertake to declare His love to believers. Royal love, as it were, debases the soul to any (though the meanest) service to declare itself. Jacob will be a servant, and keep sheep in the

heat of summer and the cold of winter, rather than not show his love to Rachel. And Jesus Christ will wash His disciples' feet (a mean employment) and, though He is Lord of all, will be a servant unto all His disciples that He may not only teach them humility and love one to another but also that He may declare the height and transcendence of love unto them all.

Particular 3

There is no failing so foul that He does not pass by to declare the surpassing greatness of His love to believers. Great love passes by and pardons great faults. And the greater the faults are that are committed, the greater is the love by which they are pardoned. Peter failed grossly when he denied and forswore his Master. But love operated transcendently when it passed that by. What failing is more gross against the bed of love than adultery? Surely the sons of men will not pass it by; this fault transcends their love. Yet though men will not, Christ will (as it is in Jer. 3:1). His love transcends this fault. Christ's love to believers is far greater, and much transcends the love of men to their wives, and therefore He does that which they will not—that is, pass by the foul failing of adultery. I take the prophet clearly and precisely to speak this of Christ; for it is He alone who, as it is in verse 14, is married unto believers. It is the glory of man's love (and then does love operate nobly) when he passes by an offense. It is much more the glory of Christ's love, and that shows itself transcendently glorious in its operation, by passing by the gross and greatest failings that are in believers.

Particular 4

There was no gift so great that Christ did not bestow upon believers. Love produces gifts. Isaac's love to Rebecca was seen to be great by the great gifts he sent her. "A golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten

shekels weight of gold” (Gen. 24:22). Christ gives grace (which is far more precious than gold) to believers. “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Nay, so great was His bounty and so large were His gifts. “Yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). But what greater gift is there than Himself? Yet such is the transcendent operation of Christ’s love that He gave Himself for believers’ sakes and to their souls.

Particular 5

Add to all these this also that such is the transcendent love of Christ to believers that there is nothing so mean in them but He highly prizes it. Love prizes everything in the party beloved. Christ both prizes and praises mean things in believers because His love toward them is mighty. Their voice, though inarticulate (for so the Hebrew word signifies), is sweet (Song 2:10). Their love, though faint, is fair with Him (Song 4:10). Their gifts, though small, are so prized that wherever the gospel of His love shall be preached, the gifts of their love shall also be divulged (Mark 14:9).

Thus you see all along how transcendently glorious and noble the love of Christ operates toward believers. And what does it declare but that the love of Christ is indeed transcendent, passing knowledge?

Having thus briefly touched at some demonstrations of the transcendence of Christ’s love to believers substantially, I shall now add but a word or two to demonstrate the same yet clearer from some considerable circumstances about Christ’s love to believers.

There are four circumstances that I shall but mention. The consideration

1. of the person loving,
2. of the persons beloved,

3. of the time of this love, and
4. of the end thereof.

1. Consider the person loving, Jesus Christ. He being a transcendent person, His love is like Himself, transcendent also. According to the dimension of the person, so are the dimensions of the affection. The height of the lover is the height also of the love. As the moralists judge the magnitude of crimes by the persons against whom they are committed, so we may also conclude the greatness of the love from the greatness of Him by whom it is declared. A little wrath revealed by God is great because He Himself is great. And a little love let out by Christ must be great love also because He is great. Fire is so much the greater and hotter by how much the fuel, or matter in which it is, is the more combustible. Love is fire, and the flames thereof transcend and exceed according to the vastness of the bosom in which it burns. Fire in wood makes a great flame and gives a great heat, but fire in brimstone flames more and burns hotter. Love being in Christ, it is as fire in brimstone, or rather as fire in a mount of spices: It must therefore give a great heat and make a great light, and that light will reveal His love to be transcendent. As the man is, so is his strength, they said of Gideon in Judges 8:21. As the Lord is (may we say of Christ), so is His love. He is wonderful, and His love must be so too. Because we are but little, therefore our love cannot be great; and because Christ is great, His love cannot be little. The love of the Lord Jesus cannot choose but be transcendent, passing knowledge, because He Himself is such.

2. But consider the persons beloved, and this (especially joined with the former) will indeed demonstrate that the love of Christ is transcendent. Who are believers that are thus beloved? Are they of any note or name? Nothing less than

worms they are, and not men. Nay, not big worms, but poor ones. For so Jacob is called in Isaiah 41:14. He who knows their frame remembers well that they are but dust (Ps. 103:14). But this is not all, for as they are worms, so they are worthless ones; and as they are but dust, so defiled dust too. Now that the rich Jesus should love poor Jacob; that He who is so mighty should affect believers so mean; that He who is so pure, that He who is without spot or blemish should open His heart to such as are spotted all over, and whose very beauty (without Him) is but a blemish—this heightens the love indeed; this declares that it transcends. He who knows how mean, worthless, contemptible creatures believers are (without Christ) will quickly (if he considers that Christ loves them) conclude that the love passes knowledge.

3. If we take into our thoughts the time of love, either when it was first set or first drawn forth, we shall see by this also that it is transcendent. For the beginning therefore, when it was first set, it bears date before time. Before time had either beginning or being, love had both in Christ's bosom toward believers. Christ's love to believers is a more ancient building than the world, for when the one had no foundations, the other had.

Surely, if (as it is in Proverbs 8:31) His delights were in the sons of men—that is, believers (for you may call all the rest of the world sons of Satan rather than sons of men), if His delights were with the sons of men before the fountains of the deep were strengthened or the foundations of the earth were appointed—then certainly His love was also toward them before that time, for His love was the ground of that delight. Indeed, the first words that Christ wrote was love to believers, and this was written with glory (for it was before gold was) upon His bosom, for then other books were not in existence.

And if the love was begun time out of mind, as we say, then certainly the love passes knowledge (as the text says).

And for the time when it was first declared, the prophet tells us that it was at such a time as in which we were most unlovely, when we lay in our blood and were not so lovely as to provoke any eye to pity us. Then Christ passed by, and it was the time of His love; and then His love broke forth with the light of life, for then He said, "Live," as it is in Ezekiel 16.

Surely He showed wit, who fancied the feigned beloved, all besmeared with a poisoned hand and made leprous thereby, and yet stories that the lover was as constant in love as ever. But we shall show only the truth and the transcendence of Christ's love to believers if we affirm from Scripture history, when believers were all poisoned with the leprosy of sin and lay as lepers by the wayside, then Jesus Christ came and took them by the hand and opened the love of His heart in letting out a stream of blood to wash them and make them clean. Now, that before ever the fountains of the deep were laid a fountain of love should spring up in Christ's bosom to believers, and that it should be opened in His side at such a time as they lay in their filth, what does this declare but that Christ's love to believers is transcendent and (as it is in the text) passes knowledge, it being set and declared at or in such a time?

4. Yet, last, take in the consideration of that end at which Christ aims in His love to believers, and this will declare it also to be transcendent. Christ's love to believers is its own end. He loves that He may love; and this makes the love glorious. Jesus Christ, believers, in all the love that He lets out to you, aims not at Himself but at you. He loves you now that He may love you ever. The end at which He drives in declaring love in a lesser measure here is that He may declare love to you in a greater measure hereafter. He makes you vessels of grace in this world

that you may be vessels of glory in that which is to come. All the glory that He aimed at for Himself was the glory of His grace, and that shall be toward you. Christ delights to set the golden apple of His glory in the silver picture of your good. He, being love, only aims that men may see the light thereof, and He chose you (believers) as the golden candlesticks to set up the glorious light of His love to shine in.

Now, then, that so infinite a majesty as Christ is should love such mean worms as believers are, and that He should set His love before the first of the times and let it out in the worst of the times, and that only for their good, as the end—oh, who can consider this but must sit down and wonder and cry out, “Oh, the transcendence of Christ’s love! How, how, it passes knowledge!”

Application

Having thus demonstrated a little, I would now apply this point at present in three uses.

Use of Comfort

Inasmuch as Christ loves believers with a transcendent love, how may this comfort believers at all times! You complain, O believing soul, that the world does not love you; nay, you say it hates you. Why, be of good comfort. Though the world hates, Christ loves; and the world cannot hate you as much as He will love you. His love transcends the world’s hatred. What the angel told Daniel, that say I to every believing soul who groans under the hatred of the world: “O man greatly beloved, fear not” (Daniel 10:19). Why do you complain, O believers, for want of the puddle drops of the creature’s love? You have the pure spring of Christ’s love. What weakness is it to cry for want of the light of the stars so long as you have the light of the sun? You have the Creator’s love, believer. Do not be sad therefore

in wanting the love of the creature, especially considering what a transcendent love it is. Comfort yourselves, O my brethren, with these thoughts: Jesus Christ loves you, and that love of His that He bears to you passes knowledge.

Use of Conviction

Let this be a word of conviction unto sinners. Wretches, be convinced that however you say nobody regards believers, yet there is one who is greater than all, who regards them, and that in a high manner. Know that Christ loves them with transcendent love. "They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it" (Ps. 94:5–7). But be convinced now to the contrary. The Lord Jesus sees, and He regards them. And ere long He will make you know that (however you deal with them) they are dear unto Him; though you do not love them at all, yet He loves them highly. "Were ye not afraid," said God, "to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num. 12:8). God wonders that they were not afraid to speak against a man whom He loved so much. And who can choose but wonder that ever any wretches should be so vile as to speak and act against those cruelly whom Christ loves transcendently? But I pity you, poor creatures. It may be you think that Christ slightes them as you do; yet be convinced now, and take heed hereafter, what you do. Certainly whoever they are whom you oppose, if they are believers, be convinced that the Lord Jesus loves them all with a transcendent love.

Use of Counsel

This doctrine might be a counselor, and it counsels all to look after and prize a part in the love of Christ above all the loves of the world. O friends, why do you spend yourselves and lay

out your souls in the pursuit of that which is not love, at least not transcendent love? I wish you would now be wise; you who courts the creature, court them now no more. I show you a more excellent way of love. Consider the transcendent love of the Lord Jesus, and be counseled to labor to get a share in it. Oh, that hearing that Christ loves believers with a transcendent love might make you sick in your souls till you participate in this love.

When one heard of the great love that was between two choice friends, he said, "Oh, that I were but a third, that I might share with them in their great love." Consider it, you have heard of the high transcendent love that is between Christ and believers. Be on fire therefore, and burn with desire, that you may partake of that love and that at least you may enjoy that love which those who have most are not able to express or conceive, it being transcendent love, passing knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

The Demonstration of the Love of Christ to Be Transcendent

We launched out into the great depth of our Savior's love, wherein our souls may swim very sweetly; and although I can neither sound ground nor see shore, yet I am loath to desire to be from this sea, for it would be delight in the highest manner to be drowned here. The love of Christ is so surpassing sweet in itself, and so infinitely necessary for our souls, as that it is my desire (at least) to make some further discovery of its transcendence.

You see what a hyperbole the apostle uses to express the greatness of Christ's love by, that it passes knowledge.

The last time we gave out the meaning of the expression and entered upon the proof of it in the prosecution of this point of doctrine, that the love that Christ bears to believers is a transcendent love.

This being the main thing that I eye in the text, and indeed the main thing that every soul ought to eye and live upon, I shall proceed further in the prosecution thereof. All that I spoke the last time, for the demonstration of the truth of the doctrine, was but in a general way. I shall therefore now go on to demonstrate the love of Christ to be transcendent from a brief survey of the course of His life.

Indeed, Christ's life was, as it were, but one great act of love, begun at His birth and carried on even to the time of His death. If we follow this Lamb in the whole tract of His life, we shall see that from His cradle unto His cross the whole way was paved (as the bottom of Solomon's chariot was) with love.

There are three headings or demonstrations that I shall now touch upon so that the transcendence of Christ's love to believers may appear yet more full and glorious. They are these:

1. His birth and incarnation
2. His life and conversation
3. His death and passion

Each of these seriously considered will abundantly demonstrate the love of Christ to believers to be transcendent.

Heading 1

Consider His birth and incarnation. How does Christ's love transcend in this act? The low condescension of Christ in becoming man evidently declares the high transcendence of His love to believers. Would it not have been great love in the Lord Jesus to have taken upon Him the angelic nature? Sure it had. If Christ would have come into the world with tidings of love and life, He might have come as an angel of glory (not as a piece of clay), and such a condescension as that would have been much. But He passed by the nature of angels and took upon Himself the nature of man, that in this act He might declare love to believers. The apostle tells us that He did not take upon Himself the nature of angels (Hebrews 2:16); that is, in no wise, at no hand, would He take upon Him the angelic nature, but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham to declare His love to the children of Abraham. That we may see a little more clearly how the love of Christ transcends in His birth, I shall speak to this heading in some particulars; and by all of

them you shall see how Christ's love unto believers appeared and shined gloriously in this act of His when He became man and was born for their sakes.

Here I shall consider therefore particularly (under this heading) these four things:

1. Whence Christ came, when he was incarnate
2. Where Christ came, when he was incarnate
3. How Christ came, when he was incarnate
4. Why Christ came, when he was incarnate

And out of all these you will see the transcendence of Christ's love.

1. Consider whence He came. Christ was in the bosom of the Father, where He lay and lived in the Father's love. Hence He came to declare love to believers. John tells us He came down from heaven (John 6:38). Jesus Christ from all eternity was in heaven. There He had His Father's company. There He enjoyed His Father's love; There He was blessed in His Father's bosom (for so the Scripture says) in John 1:18. He was living in the light of the Father's love. And, being with God, He solaced Himself in God. In that very light and glory in which God Himself was, in that same light and glory Christ triumphed. And yet from this, from this He came for believers' sakes. He forgot, as it were, His kindred, and Father's house, to be born for believers. To undertake a long journey, and from a rare place, for any declares much love to them. Oh, how long a journey did Christ undertake? And from what a paradise of pleasure did He come unto believers when He was born? Surely great was His affection, transcendent is His love, who came (at least for a time) from the house of love (His Father's bosom) to open to believers the fountain of love (His own bosom).

2. But where did Christ come when He came from heaven? Was it into some Goshen, some land of light? Was it into some paradise, some land of life? Was it into some Elysium, some place of pleasure? Nothing less. The place to which He came was Egypt, where believers sat in darkness. It was the wilderness, where believers were in the shadow of death. It was into this world, where nothing is but vanity and vexation. Here it was that Christ came for believers' sakes. And, oh, what transcendent love was it that brought Christ here! His eyes saw that His beloved ones were in a defiled place (which therefore could not be their rest, as it is in Micah 2:10). His love therefore prevailed with Him to come here to fetch His beloved hence. It was great love that Ebedmelech the Ethiopian showed unto Jeremiah when he came to the brink of that filthy dungeon in which the prophet was and put down cords to draw him thence. But what great love had it been if Ebedmelech had not only come to the brink of the dungeon but come down into the dungeon, and not only drew him up with ropes but carried him up in his arms? This would have been love indeed. Why, let me tell you, believers, you were in this world in a worse dungeon than Jeremiah was, in which you were ready to die for hunger and to be drowned in the mire thereof. And the Lord Jesus Christ came (when He was born) not only to the brink of the dungeon with cords to draw you up but into the dungeon itself, to take you up in His very bosom, and to bring you out from perishing here. "I came forth from the Father," said Christ. That was great love, but he added, "[I] am come into the world" (John 16:28). Here was love indeed: for Christ to come from heaven (the Father's throne) into the world (Satan's kingdom); for Christ to come from the place in which glory shines (heaven) unto a place that lies in evil (the world); for Christ to come out from the presence of the Father, who always smiled upon Him, and to come into the place of men,

who ever frowned upon Him; for Him to come from thence, where He always heard the hallelujahs of angels, to come here, where His ears were filled with the reviling of sinners—oh, the height and the depth! Oh, the breadth and the length! Oh, the transcendence of Christ's love to believers!

3. But how did Christ come here? Did He come in pomp with glory? Did He come with the sound of a trumpet, that all might know that though He came into a cottage yet He was a prince? No, He came rather in a poor, mean way. Indeed, when Christ was born a heavenly host appeared, praising God and singing; but that was rather to discover unto the world that the saints' lover was come into their country than in any way to dignify Him who indeed was above all glory. Some expound Isaiah 42:2, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," as if it meant that Christ should not carry the matter (about which He came) in an outward glorious manner, with pomp, but that in a silent way He should both come and do all that unto which His Father's love, and His own, designed Him. And if you consider the history of His nativity, you will say that Christ did not come with any great show. He was born not the son of some great queen, but the infant of a poor virgin. His reputed father was not a mighty monarch, but a mean carpenter. This was it with which He was twitted in the teeth as disgraceful, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Oh, how mean Christ came into the world, when He was born in an inn, and that most likely none of the best (for there were not many lodgings in it), and therefore His traveling mother was fain to lie in the stable, and there was He brought forth. And how did He lie? When being swaddled with some homely clothes, His mother laid Him in the feeding trough. He who was wont to sit upon the throne amid the cherubim was content to be found in the feeding trough among brutes. Verily, while we consider

this, we must conclude that Christ's love was surpassingly great in that He would vouchsafe to seem (at least)—yea, and in a human way—to be so little and to lie so low for your sakes.

4. But join to all these the end of Christ's coming into the world, and this will exceedingly heighten the demonstration and evidence that indeed the love of Christ passes knowledge. Why, for what did He come? Upon what design did the King of glory come from heaven to earth in so mean a way? Did He come to take the crowns off from the heads of kings and to put them upon His own? Indeed, Herod feared this, but without ground, for Christ came for no such end. But the end for which He came was love. His design was to declare and make known that love which lay hidden from eternity (in His own and His Father's bosom) unto believers. Therefore it was that He was born in time, that believers might see and know that love which He bare to them from before time.

I will in a word mention (omitting others) six particular ends for which Christ was born and came into the world, and you will see them (like so many several lines in a compass) meet all in love as in their only center.

End 1

The first end for which He was born was to redeem the precious souls of believers from that slavery in which they lay, yea, and their bodies also from that vanity unto which (with the rest of the creatures) they were subjected. Christ saw His beloved, captives in Satan's kingdom, bound with chains, and made slaves unto his will. This sight went to His soul, and His love could not contain itself, but He must come that His beloved might be set free. That this was the end of His nativity the apostle witnesses in Galatians 4:4–5: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son [and He readily

came], made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." You were once slaves, believers, and Christ was born that you might be sons. And a part of that adoption to which you were redeemed is not only the redemption of your souls (though that is the chief) but also the redemption of your bodies, as is clear from Romans 8:23. This was the end why Christ was born, and I think I need not say it was an end of love, for you cannot consider this but you must confess that.

End 2

Another end at which Christ aimed in His nativity was to be fitted to suffer for believers' sakes. As Christ was God, and shone with the glory and majesty of the deity, buffetings, spitings, binding, and so on could not, durst not, take hold upon Him. When He but spoke that word, "I am he," the glory of His Godhead shining through it as through a crevice, it is said that they who came to seize Him went backward and fell to the ground (John 18:6). Christ knew that as He was God He could not suffer, and yet He saw a necessity of suffering for believers' sakes; therefore, He was contented to cloud the glory of His deity with the mantle of the seed of Abraham so that He might be fitted to suffer for them. When Codrus saw that his death would profit his country, and that while he had on his imperial robes none dared slay him, the historian said, "He laid aside the royal robe, and put on a homely habit, that he might be fit to die in that disguise." My beloved, the Lord Jesus saw that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. He saw also that yet, if ever believers lived, it must be by blood. And therefore, the Father having prepared Him a body (Heb. 10:5), His heart had this law of love written in it, that He took the body that thereby He might be fit to bleed. Surely you are

blind if you do not see love in this end, that Christ was born to be fit to die.

End 3

A third end why He was born was that He might be like believers. Love tends to likeness. Christ, because He loved, would be born that He might be like them in all things whom He loved above all things. He was made in the likeness of man (Phil. 2:7). He beheld His beloved in the form of servants, and He would be born that He might be in their form. Christ saw His dear ones clothed with the sackcloth of human nature (for that compared with the angelic is but as hair to silk) and therefore stooped to a nativity that He might be in the same fashion and appear in the same suit. Though the human nature (especially clothed with infirmities) was but a very mean array, yet His divine love made Him esteem it above the angelic. Therefore, passing by the nature of angels, He took upon Him the nature of man and was born that He might be like believers. Surely this was love.

End 4

But Christ in His nativity aimed at another end (as like in love the former as might be), and that was to unite Himself more clearly and convincingly unto believers. Union is an effect of affection, and love desires to unite. And if union is designed as the end of any act, we may safely say love was the agent in that design. Christ indeed unites Himself to believers by communicating unto them His own divine nature; but that He might make the union more firm He was born to take upon Him their human nature. Believers, Christ is more nearly united to you than unto the angels. His love to you in this respect transcended His love to them. He did not take upon Himself their nature, and so was not united to them that way; but He

took upon Himself your nature, and was for this end born, that He might be united to you this way. Say, is not this love?

End 5

Yet Christ had another end of love for which He was born, that He might be fitted in a more familiar manner to condescend to the capacities, yea, and to sympathize with the infirmities of believers. Christ desires to converse with them sweetly and to sympathize with them seriously, neither of which He could so clearly do as God; therefore it was that He was born man. As He was God, and had only the divine nature, believers were not able in so free a manner to converse with Him. His glory was so amazing that their weak eyes could not behold it. His majesty was so overpowering that their frail spirits could not converse with it. He was therefore pleased to take our nature and be born that they might converse familiarly with His grace, and not to die, who could not behold His glory and live. Had Jesus Christ took upon Himself the nature of angels, and so have come into the world unto His, alas, His presence (like that of the angels) would have been terrible! Believers could not have borne it. For this end therefore the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (as it is in John 1:14), that we might behold the glory of God in the only begotten Son. The divine glory can now more safely be contemplated by believers while it is in the tent of flesh than it could be by itself.

Now believers may look upon the luster of His deity more sweetly while they can behold it, as it were, through the lovehood of humanity. Besides, Christ being born, He is now fitted to sympathize with the infirmities of His people. It behooved Him to be made like (and this is spoken of His becoming man) unto His brethren, that He might be one who can show tender mercy or pity (Heb. 2:17). Christ, by His being born, and so actually experiencing the infirmities of the human

nature, knows now the better how to sympathize with His own. Now tell me, is not this great love, that Jesus Christ, who might (if He would) have solaced Himself in the contemplation of His own glory, and never have stooped to the fence of our infirmities, yet that He would be born so that we might behold His glory, and He might sympathize with us? He, by His birth, condescended to our capacities and made Himself sensible of our infirmities.

End 6

Add to all these ends, this in the last place, that Christ by His nativity has raised our human nature, the dignity of which was another end of it. Oh! How might I show the love of Christ to transcend in this end of His nativity! Certainly, believers, Christ, by uniting your nature to His own, mightily dignified it. How the human nature shines in the luster of the divine! How the pebble (man's nature) glisters in the golden (I should say the glorious) ring of the divine nature! Oh, the transcendence of Christ's love, that He would stoop so low as to be born for this end, that thereby He might raise high the nature of His beloved ones—that is, believers!

So thus you see how the birth of Christ (thoroughly viewed) gives a bright discovery of the transcendence of His love. Certainly, if you spiritually contemplate all that love which shines in the birth of the Lord Jesus, you will easily conclude that His love to believers passes knowledge.

Heading 2

The second heading (from which I said I would demonstrate the transcendence of Christ's love) was the life of Christ. And now to speak to this a little: you must not imagine that I dare undertake the whole history of His life and demonstrate His transcendent love from every act thereof. No, this would be too

large a field to walk in. I shall hint something in the general of it, and then I shall in a more particular manner speak to some remarkable passages thereof, all speaking transcendent love to believers. Generally, the life of Christ was a perfect mirror of His love: every action of it was full of love, and if we put all the actions of His life together we may conclude that He was born not so much to live as to love. There was not a word that dropped from His lips but it was full of love; and as for His works that He did, they all spoke love so loud that the dearest ear might hear it. So we may say (as the psalmist did in another case) there is no speech or language where the voice of His love was not heard; the line thereof went through every act of His life. Should we begin at the temple where He disputed with the doctors, and follow Him to the mount where He was crucified by the soldiers, we would see all the way strewn with love roses. And as there is no beam in the sun in which there is no light, so there was no act in the life of Christ but to a spiritual eye shines with the light of love. But, omitting others, I shall instance only five particulars and show how Christ in the actions of His life declared the transcendence of His love.

Particular 1

Jesus Christ ran for believers' sakes through all the miseries of this life. You cannot be in any misery (which is human) but Christ was in it for you, to sweeten it unto you. Are you hungry? He was (Matt. 4:2). Are you thirsty? He was (John 4:6). Do you meet with scoffings, scornings, derisions, blasphemies, and buffetings? Why, your Lord Christ, out of His transcendent love, ran through all these in His life for you. Believers, I beseech you to mind it, whenever you meet with any of the miseries of this life, your Beloved met with them for your sakes, and that for this end, that He might sweeten them to your souls. And therefore when you meet with and are pressed by the miseries

of this life in any kind, then think upon your Savior's love who lived a life sensible of these miseries out of His love to you. And I do not doubt but you will say, "Oh, transcendent love!"

Particular 2

The Lord Jesus submitted to all the duties of religion (which was not only to fulfill the righteousness of the law but to declare the infiniteness of His love; for by it believers may see that He requires of them at no time more than He did Himself). The yoke of Christ by this is made smooth and easy. Now His commandments will appear not to be grievous because He obeyed them first Himself. There is no duty, O believing soul, unto which you can be called in the whole course of your life but your Savior in His life did the same. The child may well say that he has a loving father when he can see him first doing that himself in his own person that he commands the child to do. Your everlasting Father, Jesus Christ, O you children of faith, in His life went through (in His own person) all those performances that you are to do in religion. And is not this transcendent love?

Particular 3

Our Lord, in the whole course of His life, was ever careful to provide and use all possible means for the strengthening of believers' graces. Knowledge and faith are the two great graces for the sweetening of the life of believers, and Christ was very careful to strengthen them. Therefore it was that He spoke chiefly to those things that might strengthen these graces. For knowledge, how lovingly did He speak that which His disciples were able to hear? And if He thought they did not well understand what He said, how lovingly did He expound all things to them when they were alone? See it in Mark 4:33–34. Yea, when they asked Him of any parable, what its meaning might

be, how lovingly did He satisfy their desires, telling them that it was their privilege, and to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:9–10)? Nay, when Jesus had spoken anything that they did not understand, and did but perceive their reasonings among themselves about it, He voluntarily (not being asked) informed them as in Matthew 16:7–9. And for faith, it's easy to observe how ready Christ was to strengthen it. Did He not rejoice when He had an opportunity so to do? Mark it in John 11, when Lazarus was dead, and He knew how His raising him would conduce to the confirming of their faith, He professed (speaking of it) that He was glad for their sakes that He was not there when he died, to the intent they might believe (verse 15). Now, my beloved, what does this care of Christ to strengthen your graces declare but the transcendence of His love to your souls?

Particular 4

Jesus Christ in His life aimed more at and rejoiced more in believers' comforts than His own. When He heard that great voice from heaven saying, "I have glorified His name and I will glorify it," He said that this voice did not come for His sake but for His disciples. It seems His end in that request (for that voice was an answer to His prayer) was not His glory, but their good. And therefore, not rejoicing Himself in the excellent glory of that voice from heaven, He spoke to them and applied it to them, professing that it was for their sakes (John 12:30). Hence it is also that He, when He was to die, and knew that His hour was come (and so one would think should have retired and spent some time for Himself), He set Himself to comfort His disciples, that in so doing He might declare that having loved them He loved them to the end with a transcendent love (John 13:1). Tell me, my beloved, should you see one going to the stake or scaffold to die,

and should you observe him spend all his time, breath, and eloquence in comforting some dear beloved one, would not you say his love transcended in making him forget himself to comfort her? Why, so it was with your Savior; there were but few hours before He was to be taken and to suffer. And yet, as if He minded (as indeed He did) the comfort of His disciples more than His own, He improved all that time and spent, as it were, all His eloquence upon them, laboring to silence their despairings and sorrows, not minding His own death and sufferings. Oh, transcendent love!

Particular 5

Last, it must be also minded that Jesus Christ, being in prayer to His Father (the last action, as it were, of His life), He in that prayer declared the transcendence of His love by putting up more requests in the behalf of believers than Himself. You know the prayer in John 17. And if you observe it, you shall find that albeit in the beginning He prays for Himself (“Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son”), yet having but, as it were, mentioned this in verse 1, and reiterated it in verse 5, He (in a manner) shuts Himself out of all the rest of the prayer and spends it wholly for believers. And, oh, what glorious things did He beg on their behalf: that the Father would keep and preserve them (verse 15); that He would own and sanctify them (verses 10 and 17); that they might be one with the Father, as He was one (verses 21 and 22). And in the close of all, how He entreats the Father to admit them to be there where He was, and to behold His glory? And how strongly He argues for this! Does He not use the cogent motive of love? “For thou lovedst me” (verse 24). It is as if He should say, “Father, I know Thou lovest Me. Thou didst so before ever the world was; now I beseech Thee, by that love, as if ever Thou wouldst declare that Thou dost love Me, own, preserve, sanctify, make one

with Thyself Mine, as I am (for this is the argument to the whole prayer) and let them whom I loved in the world be with Me when they leave the world. O Father, as Thou lovest Me, hear, grant this (as My last) request for My beloved ones.” Tell me now, how transcendent is Christ’s love? And how near do believers lie to His bosom who, being now, as it were, to pray and die, forgets Himself, and breathes out His last requests in so many, so transcendent particulars in their behalf.

Thus you see how easy it is to run through the life of Christ and, yet running, to read all along transcendent love to believers. But I must now speak a word to the death of Christ, and you shall see this also as lively demonstrating (as either or both the other branches) the truth of the point is that the love of Christ to believers passes knowledge.

Heading 3

The third head of demonstrations being the death of Christ, I shall speak to it a little distinctly, though briefly.

But where shall we begin His passion? And at what part of it shall we enter upon this demonstration? Shall we go with Him into the garden (indeed, there it began), or shall we ascend Mount Calvary (how upon it, it ended), or shall we speak of what He suffered in the high priest’s hall? I do not think it amiss to mention each.

I begin, therefore, at the garden in which Christ was taken. Oh, how transcendently sweet is the smell of His love here!

Believers, look upon your Savior in the garden. See Him when His soul began to be sorrowful and very heavy, and listen a little to what He said: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt. 26:38). You experienced saints, tell me, what manner of love is this: for your Lord to be sad unto death, that He might remove those clouds that have sometimes kept your souls in the shadows of death and darkness? But go on

and listen to your Lord's cry to the Father, once and again, when He begged that the cup might pass from Him. Surely the wrath in the bottom of the cup was very bitter (which made Him desire to be delivered from it). But just as surely the love in Christ's bosom was very sweet that yet prevailed with Him to submit His will to the Father's and to drink it up for your sake. Did you hear ever of sweating in a cold night, and that upon the cold ground in an open garden? Surely, you will say, He must be hot within who can or could do so. Why, the heat of your Savior's love was such that it supported Him to bear the heat of God's wrath, that as cold as the night was (and 'twas a winter's night, as is rationally conjectured) and as open as the place was (a garden), yet then and there He did sweat, and that clods of blood (His veins issuing out freely, and the air congealing it presently), and this in the beginning of His sufferings, believers, for your sakes. I presume you are not blind, and certainly you are if you cannot read matchless love in this. Some have been so weak (reports reiterated tell us so) as to write letters to their beloved with their blood. If it is true, you will say it is much (and I'll say, 'twas mad). But yet let me tell you, it's no simple tale, but a sweet truth, Christ in the garden bled enough to write a large letter of love to you. And if you read spiritually, you read such love as yet, when you read, you cannot express it while you read the story of Christ's agony in the garden. The greatness of Adam's folly is not so legible in his eating the forbidden fruit in the garden (which was the shutting of us out of paradise) as the transcendence of Christ's love is in His agony in the garden (which was to reinstate believers in a happier state than paradise was or could be).

But let's follow our Lord from the garden to the high priest's hall. And here, let's hear a little the hideous outcries of the rude rabble against Him. Ah, Lord! What was that stopped our Savior's ears so that He would not regard? And silenced

His tongue that He would not reply? Was it not love? When you read how some spit upon and others railed at Christ; how some blasphemed Him and others buffeted Him; how many scoffed, how many scorned, how many accused; how all cried out against Him? I say, when you read this, can you not as sweetly read the transcendent love of Christ to you as the transcendent malice of the Jews against Christ?

But not to stay here, go out with Christ to Calvary. As He ascends the mount, does not the demonstration ascend too? See Him nailed to the cross for your sakes, and tell me if that sight does not clear this truth (as a nail fastened by the masters of assemblies, such as Paul was) that the love of Christ passes knowledge. Surely, believers, Christ's hanging on the cross, and then breathing out His last breath, and pouring out His heart's blood in a shameful, cursed, and tormenting way, for your sakes, is enough to make you cry out, "Oh, the depth of His love!" 'Twas well said by one that Mount Calvary was love's academy, and he is worse than a dunce that cannot learn the transcendence of Christ's love to believers here.

The blood of the cross speaks love in strength, and no such sermon of love in the Bible, nor in the creation, as the blood of the cross, said a fine pen. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Indeed, man has no greater, nay, scarce so great a love as that. But Jesus Christ had, and showed as great, nay, a far greater love than this, for He laid down His life for His foes (such, believers, you were). 'Twas but a brag of Peter's (his words were greater than his love) when he said that he would die for Christ. But 'twas a reality in Christ when, speaking of the baptism of His death, he said, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished?"

Certainly it was a large love that straitened His soul till He tasted death for you. The Scriptures record it as the character of the transcendence of the martyrs' love to Christ that they

loved not their lives unto the death for His sake. But, alas, their death for Christ was but their duty (they were bound to it because Christ loved them), whereas Christ's love to us is grace, for He loved us first. Ask a condemned malefactor, what if the prince's son should go to his father and say, "Father, I confess the wretch deserves to die, but I see a willingness in you that he should live; only I perceive it sticks with your justice. You would magnify your mercy in his pardon. Could you also satisfy your justice? Why, for that, father, here I am, and I will die, myself, to satisfy your justice; only let the poor wretch live to the glory of your and my free grace." And, having thus said, he goes to the place of execution and dies indeed. Ask, I say, the malefactor what kind of love he counts and calls this.

Believers, ask your own hearts (for you were the malefactors) and tell me, what word is great enough to express the great love of Jesus Christ that He lively expressed to you in His death for you? Surely, you will say, the thought of this love is too big for your mouth; you cannot, through your narrow expressions, let out your large conceptions of Christ's love in His death.

I must profess, if you can, I cannot. This heading of demonstration is more fit for meditation than expression. And yet, when we have meditated the most on it, we shall never be able to reach the height of it. The thoughts of Christ's life are swallowed up by the thoughts of His death. His death does set out His love most to the life. I will wind up this heading with this conclusion: you are no scholars in Christ's school if you cannot read a large and long lecture of love upon Christ's cross. Let it pass as an aphorism, the love of Christ, expressed in His death, transcends so high above our thoughts that we shall never be able to come to the height thereof all our life. His love transcends our expressions and confounds our conceptions, yet it must be believed and applied.

Application

At present, I shall offer but three words to help you in the application of the transcendence of Christ's love to believers.

1. First, stand and wonder, O believing souls, at this love; indeed, it's more fit for wonder than words. Think upon this that I have said, and let your thoughts dwell upon the meditations hereof. And when, in the working of your thoughts, you have ascended to some height, then, in the wonderment of your souls, cry out, "Oh, the depth of the love of Christ, that passes knowledge!" Wonder and say, "Lord Jesus, what is man (by sin, the worst creatures), and what am I (by belief the worst of men) that Thou shouldest thus mind me as to be born for me, to live, yea, to die, to declare love to me!" Oh, that you would live, and lose yourselves in the thoughts of your Savior's love! And when you have lost yourselves (which you may interpret to mean to find your souls) in the bottomless gulf of your Lord's love, then recover your spirits again and cry out, "Oh, the dazzling heights! Oh, the confounding (yet comfortable) depths! Oh, the divine (yet immensurable) dimensions of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge!"

2. Lament! Oh, lament, believers, when you consider that notwithstanding Christ thus loves you, yet you are too, too apt to neglect the consideration thereof, and too, too poor in its requital. That holy man, Mr. Welch, wept because he saw his heart so dull that he could not consider the love of Christ as he should and would. And truly, who can with a dry eye consider the neglect of the thought of the transcendent love of Christ? What, O soul, does Christ love you much, and do you think on it but little? Can you spend days and weeks in reading the fond fancies of feigned loves? And have you not an hour to meditate on the real, royal love of the Lord Jesus? And as you mind

it but seldom, so you requite it but sorrily. What small returns of love has Christ had from you for this vast expense of love upon you? He loves us richly, but, alas, we love Him poorly. His love passes knowledge; none can understand it; and our love in a sad sense passes knowledge too, for none can perceive it. How little, alas, do we, will we forsake for Christ? And yet He forsook much for us.

He forsook heaven and came into the world for us and we will not forsake earth (although it is to go to heaven) for Him. He did much for us and counted it but little. He lived from first to last for us; but we do but little for Him, and yet we count it much, grudging to give Him the last and least, though Satan has had the first and most part of our life. He, as you have heard, suffered for us even death itself; but which of us is willing to taste suffering for Him? True, some have said if they had a thousand heads they would lose them all for Christ; yet these some are but few. For who of us would lose one head for Him? Ignatius, in former times, said that he was willing to endure fire, cross, butcheries, and all for Christ; but these are the latter days. And though His love was hot, ours is grown cold. We can scarcely endure a word, a jeer, a scoff for Christ. Well, I beseech you, sit and sigh, and say, "Oh! How meanly do we requite the love of Christ! He was born, lived, and died out of love to us. But we are so far from dying for Christ that we scarcely are willing to live to Jesus Christ."

3. Inasmuch as Christ thus loves you, O believers, with a transcendent love, be satisfied herewith, and be content (if it must be so) to want the love of men. It's a shame that any who are the beloved of Christ should mourn for not being loved by the creature. Why should the king's daughter, who has (or at least should), forget her kindred and her father's house? Why, I say, should she (i.e., the believing soul) weep because the

servant scorns her when the king himself embraces her? It's but meet that you should rest satisfied in the love of Christ since it's so transcendent. Wherefore, drink waters out of your own cistern, O Christian, and, as Solomon said, rejoice with the wife (or rather with Christ the husband) of your youth. Let Him be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe; let His breasts satisfy you at all times. Do not err in mourning for want or hunting after the enjoyment of creature love; but err always or (as we render it) be ravished always with His love. Bathe yourself, O believer, always in Christ's bosom; live upon and be contented with His love. Let others sip and drink (if they'll be so weak) of the puddle waters of the creature's love while you, as wise, neither envy nor desire to partake with them. Surely, did you but remember that the love of Christ toward you passes knowledge, you would not be discontented at the want of the love of any or all the creatures; considering therefore that it is such, be contented with it. It's a sign that the love of Christ passes knowledge, in the transcendent worth thereof, if in the midst of the absence of all other loves you can be content and satisfied with this.

CHAPTER 4

Further Demonstration of Christ's Love to Believers

We are yet upon the consideration of the transcendence of Christ's love to believers. And, oh, how sweet is it to lose ourselves in this consideration! How loath am I to leave a point of such infinite necessity and sweetness? How gladly could I not only live but die in the declaration of the love of Christ to believers! I doubt not but the very mention of the point that the love of Christ to believers is a transcendent love makes the hearts of you to leap for joy. Tell me, O believer, could you not wish to have your cares ever followed with this sound, that Christ loves you with a love passing knowledge? Something we have already hinted, and something more we shall add at this time; yet because when I have said all that I can about the transcendence of Christ's love to believers I shall come many thousand steps short of its height, I am resolved to say all that I intend to say on this point at this time.

Therefore, a little more to demonstrate that the love of Christ passes knowledge, I shall entreat you to view:

1. His command over them
2. His care for them
3. His endeavor not only to declare to but to persuade believers of this love

1. First, if we consider the command that Christ exercises over believers, we shall see the transcendence of His affection even in that. It is Christ's glory that He is the King of the saints (in a peculiar manner), and it is His grace that He exercises that kingly power in a sweet way. However He rules the nations with a rod of iron, yet He rules the saints with a golden scepter. Hence it is that although in wrath His iron rod breaks the nations in pieces, yet His golden scepter is still stretched out in love to entertain the saints. You read that King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. "He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love" (Song 3:10). That chariot which Solomon made for himself, and in which he rode, might well set out the chariot in which Christ rides up and down the world of believers whom He governs. Indeed, it is very glorious, and it glitters with beams of light, but withal it is very gracious, being paved with stones of love. Love is the throne on which He sits; love is the scepter with which He rules, and all His government is managed in such a way that believers may say that He is the Lord of love even in His ruling of them. Absalom did but flatter when he stood by the way of the gate and kissed all who passed by (and by it insinuated how sweetly he would govern if he came to the kingdom), but that which was flattery in Absalom is reality in Christ. When any of the spiritual pilgrims come (as believers do) to do Him obeisance (as they ought to do, being under His commands), He puts forth His hands, takes them, and kisses them, and not only promises but performs transcendent love in all His commands over them. But to read this more particularly, you will see the transcendence of Christ's love discovered in His command over believers if you consider three things.

First, Christ lays no commands upon believers but such as are of love and sweetness. He reduces all the Decalogue to

these two headings: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Well might John say that "his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). The word is *burdensome*, and, indeed, what burden is there in the commands of Christ, unless love is a burden? Indeed, He might have commanded (which is His peculiar prerogative) what He pleased, but He commanded nothing but what is pleasant in itself and will be so to a sanctified soul (which is the transcendence of His love). "A new commandment," said He, "I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Well may the commandment be called "new," it being such as was never given by any king beside Himself.

And surely there was great love in His bosom to believers when He only laid a burden, or a command of love, upon their shoulders. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness" (Prov. 3:17). The ways of Christ, which are His commands, are ways of pleasantness (for I take it that Solomon there by wisdom understands Christ). Believers, if you could but live in the love, you would fulfill the law of your Lord; for He, being a Lord of love to you, love is the fulfilling of the law He lays upon you. Yea, such is the transcendence of His love to believers that He lays no commandment upon them to do anything that He did not do Himself. Flesh and blood may think it a hard and a harsh commandment to wash the feet of a poor believer, a fellow servant. But grace will see the command to be sweet and lovely (and Jesus Christ to be loving in laying this command) because it is no other than what He Himself has done before. Ask the servant whether his lord is loving who lays no commandment upon him but that which is sweet in itself, sweet in its fruit, and no worse than his lord himself will undertake. Believers, it is your case. All the commands of your

Lord Christ are sweet in themselves and sweet in their fruit; and they are such as He Himself (while He lived) stooped unto. Does not this declare transcendent love?

Second, Christ lays all His commands in a way of love. That which He bids believers do (who are under His command), it is in a loving way: as the command is, so is the manner of its imposing—that is, sweet and loving. It is possible that a sweet thing may be enjoined in a harsh way. An easy commandment in itself may be burdensome in the way of its imposition. To command with a bended fist and a frowning forehead is not to command in a loving way; but now Jesus Christ, whenever He commands, does it sweetly and smilingly. He does not lift up His voice and cry (as some understand that place in Isaiah 42:2). He does not speak in an austere, rough, rugged manner. But as the Lord is loving, so is His language loving. Observe with what love He lays His commands on believers: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). He does not threaten and say, “I will be your foe if you will not obey,” but “if you do, you shall be My friends.” And so again, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” It is worth noting that grace may be said to come in this respect by Christ. He did not give His law (as Moses did) with thundering and lightning, in a dreadful manner, but He gave the law to His disciples Himself, in a sweet and loving way. He began His sermons with “Blessed are ye.” And all His commands drop from Him like the drops of dew upon the tender grass. “He shall come down [said the psalmist, Ps. 72:6] like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth”; that is, He shall come down both softly and sweetly. This is spoken of Christ’s coming as a king. So you may see the transcendence of Christ’s love unto you in the manner in which He lays His commandments on you.

Third, consider the end that Christ aims at in all His commandments, and that will also discover the transcendence of His love to believers. He does not seek Himself, but them, in all His commands. He bids the believer work, not that He may reap anything Himself but that the believer may get all. He puts them to labor in His vineyard that they may have all the harvest. As it is inconsistent with His deity to have anything added to Him, so also it is inconsistent with His love. He puts His servants to reap that they may have all the corn, and He sets them to work rather that He may give them wages than that He shall get anything by their workings. "Take my yoke upon you," He said, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). Christ lays a yoke upon their necks not to burden them but to ease them, not to break their backs but to refresh their bosoms. Many kings and rulers aim at themselves in their commands, and they seek too often rather their own greatness than their subjects' good. But, believe it, Jesus Christ, your King, is not such a one. All that He aims at in His government is your good. The end of His commandments is your comfort. As His government increases over you, so His peace increases in you. This is the effect and fruit of all His commandments, not so much that others may take notice of His glory in commanding as that you may find His grace in obeying. Indeed, love is the work and wages of His commandment. He therefore bids you do so that He may love you; therefore, it is that though you are frail and weak and cannot obey, He will be kind to love you, notwithstanding all.

So that now the commands of Christ, being, as it were, love materially in substance, and love formally, in their imposition, and love finally, in their aim, what can you conclude from all this but that the love of Christ, even to believers, is declared to be transcendent in the exercise of His command over them?

2. Consider the care that Christ has of them. Oh, the transcendent love that Christ expresses to believers in the care that He takes of them for all necessities! He is not only a Lord to command, and to set them on work, but He is a Father to take care and provide for His. And it is easy to observe transcendence of love in the transcendent care that Christ has to provide for His. Food, raiment, and lodging are the least things that can be taken care for; and yet you shall see Christ not only takes care for them but He takes care that believers have food to eat, and that it is of the finest (the finest of the wheat, and the finest flour); raiment, and glorious raiment; a house, and a fine one too.

First, Christ takes care that believers may have food to eat. He knows they must have bread, and therefore He has provided bread of life. He knows they must have drink, and therefore He has opened the sealed fountain of the water of life. The care that God had to feed His people in the wilderness demonstrated His love unto them, that He gave them quail and manna, and so on. Believers, while you are in the wilderness of this world, your Lord has declared His love in making rich provisions of spiritual food for you. He has prepared the hidden manna that He will give unto you. "A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6). Nay, even in the midst of your enemies He has prepared a table for you. And not only that you may be sure of food but that the food might be surpassingly sweet, He has made Himself to be meat for you. If it is true that the pelican feeds her young ones with her own blood, then that bird may be a type of your Beloved. His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed; and this He gives for the life of your souls, O believers. Cleopatra, that she might outdo Mark Antony's love, caused, as history relates, a pearl of great price to be dissolved that he might drink thereof. Christ, believers,

has done more for you and has outdone her love to him. Gold, silver, and pearls are but corruptible things in comparison of this precious blood, and yet that blood He has prepared for believers to drink that they might live forever.

Second, Christ has provided not only food for the belly but raiment for the back too. And as the food, so also the raiment transcends in love. A garment of needlework, rich and costly attire, Christ has provided for believers. When you were naked, believer, and had no clothes to cover you but the filthy rags of your own works that defiled you, then, even then He clothed you in broidered work, shod you with badgers' skins, covered you with fine linen, decked you with ornaments, and put bracelets on your hands, a chain on thy neck, a jewel on thy forehead, earrings on your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. Thus He adorned you and you were exceedingly glorious with the garments He put on you. Greater love can none declare than this, to give another as good garments as he himself wears. Why, this Jesus Christ does. On the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) it is said, "His raiment was white as the light." And when the saints appeared to John in his vision, they appeared in garments of the same color; it is said they were arrayed in white robes (Rev. 7:13). Righteousness is His garment, and so it is believers' too. It was an act of great love to Mordecai (and Haman thought the king could express no greater) that the royal apparel should be brought that the king used to wear, and to be put on him. Why, believers, such is the transcendent love of Christ to His, in His care for your apparel, that the royal apparel that He wears Himself is brought to you and is put on your souls now (and you are all glorious within here), and it shall be put on your bodies hereafter. Even that body that is now vile shall be made glorious like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). And when Christ shall come and appear in His garments of glory, you shall appear with Him in the like (Col. 3:4; 1 John

3:2). And then He shall be admired not only in Himself but in you (2 Thess. 1:10). Oh, transcendent love, that Jesus Christ should provide such clothing for us poor creatures!

Third, as for lodging, Christ has provided that likewise for believers. Indeed, He Himself had no house here on earth (not so much as a hole wherein to lay His head), and therefore believers fare no worse here than He did; they have as good a lodging as their Lord. In this world indeed they have no house to be in, nor a bed to lie on (as their own); but as to hereafter He has provided a house, and not a mean one, but a mansion house, and the building thereof is fine. It is a building of God, and the bravery of it appears in this (which was the bravery of Christ's body, Heb. 9:11), that it is a house not made with hands. The Shunammite declared her love to the man of God by making him a little chamber and by setting a bed therein, and a table, a stool, and a candlestick for him (2 Kings 4:10). Jesus Christ shows greater love than this in having provided a better room for believers; not a little chamber, but a great mansion (a bed of glory, Abraham's bosom); not a stool, but a throne; not a candlestick (no, nor the sun), but Himself to be as a light, and this not on the wall (as it were without His own palace), but even within, where He is, in His own presence: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (John 17:24). Consider this, believers, Christ has prepared as good a house for you as for Himself, and when He was, as it were, in the entry thereof, He stood at the door and did in a manner agree with the Father beforehand that you should come in as well as Himself. And therefore it was He went to prepare a place for them.

So that now here is rich provision of necessities, food, raiment, and lodging: And what does this declare but rich love in Christ that He should take such care of believers?

We might add not only that Christ has prepared these things that are the necessities, but He has prepared other things that are glorious. But, oh, who shall be able to declare all the gracious provision that Christ has made for His! When as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive those things; we will therefore break out with the psalmist, “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up [as a secret treasure, for so the word signifies] for them that fear thee” and believe in Thee (Ps. 31:19). Thus you see the transcendent love of Christ in His care for as well as His command over believers.

3. Last, we might abundantly demonstrate the transcendence of Christ's love to believers in His endeavor to declare and persuade the hearts of believers of all this love. That Christ should love at all, and love so much, is transcendent; but that He should take pains to persuade the hearts of believers to believe this is an addition to the transcendence of the love. Christ saw how backward we would be to believe and how hardly we would be brought to persuade ourselves that indeed He loved us at all. Therefore it is that He took such care and made such provision for the persuading of the hearts of believers to close with the truth of this, that He loved them. “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them” (John 17:26). This is the great work that He did Himself when He was on earth and that His ambassadors now do in His name (now that He is in heaven)—that is, to persuade the hearts of His people that He loves them. What a great deal of love was there in that cry of His when He was on earth, that if any came to Him He would in no wise cast them out, and that if they did but thirst they might come to Him and drink? How did He declare the strength of His love in persuading souls to come to

Him that they might taste and see how He loved them? It had been much if Jesus Christ would have given a poor soul leave to love Him and would have accepted it upon his seeking to Him; but that He should love and woo us to love Him and take pains to make us believe that He loves us, this is transcendent love! O believers, such is the strength and transcendence of the love of Christ toward you that when He was upon earth Himself He made it His great work not only to tender love freely but to persuade you to believe it fully. And now that He has gone to heaven, He has taken care to appoint ambassadors, and they always in His name beseech you to believe that He loves you. And it is the great longing of His soul to fill you not only with His own love but with His Father's love too. Wherever the gospel of free grace sounds, the sum thereof is this, that God so loved the world that He sent His Son and that Jesus Christ Himself so loved poor souls that He came Himself that if any would but believe they might have Him, and in Him everlasting life and love.

To all this I might add the consideration of the easy price that Jesus Christ sets upon His love that He offers—it is but acceptance. If any man will but come to (His bosom) the fountain of love, he may take the waters thereof freely; that fountain is not a sealed, but an open fountain. And this is the transcendence thereof, that it is open even for those in whom there was a fountain of wrath and enmity flowing up, and that against Himself. O my brethren! If you did but consider that the love of Christ passes knowledge; that in its nature it is in every way full, and in its tender free; and that He offers rich love to those who by nature were the children of wrath, and that all this is in a beseeching way—certainly you must conclude that the love of Christ is a transcendent love and that it passes knowledge. It was the tenderness of the love of Jonathan and David that it passed the love of women. “Thy love to

me," said David, "was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). Surely, believers, the love of Christ to you is wonderful (transcendently wonderful), passing the love of women (passing the love of Jonathan and David), comprehending (as formerly has been hinted), yea, and surmounting any or all the loves of all the creatures whatsoever. Neither man nor angels could or ever did express so much love as Jesus Christ has not only expressed and declared but even tenders and beseeches believing souls to accept. I shall add no more for the demonstration thereof but this: that when I have said all that I can (though I had all the tongues both of men and angels) of the love of Christ, you who find it in your bosoms will have reason to tell me that the one half was not told you. For the love of Christ is such as all the saints who in the fullest measure enjoy it are not able to express it but must be fain to cease speaking and so wrap up their souls in wondering at it and cry that it is a love passing knowledge.

Before I come to the application, I shall briefly answer two objections that may come in and be made against the truth of this doctrine.

Objection 1: It will be objected, "If the love of Christ is so transcendent to believers, whence then does it come to pass that He permits them oftentimes to lie so low that their enemies triumph and insult over them?" Surely will some weak (for weakness is the ground of the objection) believer say, "If Christ loves me so highly, why does He permit me to lie so low? If I am so near to His heart, how is it that He allows wicked men to tread upon me? If He lays me in His bosom, why is it that He allows me to lie at the world's feet?"

Answer 1: This may consist with love. Tell me, you weak soul, was not Christ the dearly beloved of the Father, and yet did not the Father permit wicked men to persecute Him? Can

you be reviled, buffeted, scourged, or crucified worse than He? And yet, notwithstanding all, He was beloved of the Father, and that in a transcendent manner. In like manner, you may be the beloved of Christ's soul and yet be delivered into the hands of your enemies, as it is in Jeremiah 12:7.

Answer 2: Nay, this is not only consistent with love, but it is an act of love; for while Christ permits these sufferings of yours, He makes you like Himself. It was desired by Paul as it makes him conformable unto Christ (Phil. 3:10). Even a mourning garment is glorious when it is the same that Christ wears. What soul is there that may not, as it were, be proud and glory in its tribulations (as the word signifies in Romans 5:3) when he considers in them he is made like Christ. Yea, a suit of sackcloth is to a spiritual soul brave and fine when the Lord of glory goes in the same fashion.

Objection 2: But some will object further and say, "I do not question whether Christ loves me transcendently because of the sufferings I lie under but rather because of the desertions in which I am. Alas! I question whether He loves me at all because He withdraws Himself from me so long. Much more reason have I to question whether He loves me transcendently while I see Him altogether deny me His company. Indeed, in a sense, I think that the love of Christ passes knowledge (for I know but little of Christ). Methinks I see Him withdrawn. I will not deny but He has sweet smiles, but I am a stranger to those smiles. Time was when I thought He loved me transcendently, but now I fear He does not love me at all, for He deserts me."

Answer: To such a soul as objects thus I would say but three words. First, these withdrawings of Christ whereof you complain are but in show, not in substance. The sun is but absent in show when it does not shine; it is present still though behind a cloud. I have often thought that Christ's withdrawing

in this respect may be called rather His concealed presence than His real absence. He was close by Mary although she did not see Him. He was in the company of His disciples though they knew it not. His presence was not manifest (not because His person was not there, but) because their eyes were held that they should not know Him (Luke 24:16).

Second, these withdrawals whereof you complain are not total. Christ never so withdraws from the believer but He leaves something behind. He puts something in his hand before He goes (as it is in Song 5:4). And surely his hand was never empty. If He is absent in shining, He is present in strengthening; though He does not appear rich in love, yet He is still present, upholding your life. The very breath that you breathe (poor, deserted creature) declares that Christ is present in some measure. It would be impossible that you should breathe if Jesus were not within your bosom. Your weepings after Him are demonstrations that in some measure He is with you.

Third, Christ's departure will not be final. He will be found again, though He is not felt now: And when He comes He will make rich amends for His absence. Thus said Mr. Peacock after this desertion, "The sea is not more full of water, nor the sun more full of light, than my heart is full of joy; the joy that I feel in my heart is incredible." "Ah," said another poor soul (that had cried Christ was gone), "He is come, He is come, He has kissed me with the kisses of His lips. His love is better than wine. He has not deceived me, neither will He deceive any."

I shall therefore retort the argument thus: though believers give Christ occasion to go away very often, yet Christ never goes away altogether, but even in His conceived absence vouchsafes a concealed presence and at His sensible return makes rich amends for His staying and going away. What do these declare but that His love is transcendent and (as the text says) passes knowledge?

Application

I shall add four uses by way of application:

1. A use of information
2. A use of reproof
3. A use of exhortation
4. A use of persuasion

Use of Information

Inasmuch as it is thus clear that Christ loves His own with transcendent love, then it may inform us of these four things.

First, note the deservedness of that great and dreadful curse that Paul denounced against those who do not love Christ: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor. 16:22). That is, let him be cursed with the highest and greatest degree of cursing that may be possible; for of those three degrees of cursing that the Jews used in their threefold excommunication, this of “Anathema Maranatha” was the highest, and it includes as much as this: “Let the Lord come and strike this person with eternal perdition.” And tell me, do not those deservedly expose themselves to this dreadful curse who do not love such a one as Jesus Christ is, who loves all His with a transcendent love? Mind this, wretches, you who do not love the Lord Jesus, what can you say for yourselves, that you should not lie under this curse? Why do you not love Jesus Christ? What reason do you have for it? Is not He lovely, fairer than the sons of men? Is He not loving? Does not His love for His own pass the love of women? Were Christ unkind, you might with some pretense plead that you have reason not to love Him; but being so kind, so loving that He opens His bosom and lets out transcendent love to all who are His, certainly you may expect, and that justly, to be accursed in this high degree for not loving Christ.

Second, see here the true ground of a believer's glory. Is it not a ground of glory to be beloved of Christ with such a transcendent love as you have heard? Well may believers make their boast of Christ all the day long; and well may they glory in the love that they enjoy. Why? That love is transcendent, passing knowledge. None of all the sons or daughters of men have any such just ground of glory (though they should enjoy the love of all the creatures) as believers have who enjoy only the love of Christ. For that love they have in Him transcends and excels (and that infinitely) all that love which any can have from all the creatures. Let the world falsely and fondly brag of their creature loves (and pity them, O believers, when you see them do so). But rejoice yourselves in the meantime with joy exceedingly great and full of glory. And the point will bear you out in it, for you have such a love as is not to be found in all the world beside. Having the love of Christ, you have that love that passes knowledge.

And surely, believers, if the men of the world think they have good ground to glory in this, that they enjoy the low love (though of some seeming great creatures), you have much more ground to rejoice who enjoy this high love of Him who is indeed greater than all the creatures, Jesus Christ. Do men think they have just ground to sit and glory in that they sip the puddle drops of creature loves? Have not you more ground, and that more just and true, to sing and glory in this: that you drink in the pure love of Jesus Christ, which is so sweet, so excellent, and so transcendent that it passes knowledge?

Third, inasmuch as Christ loves believers with a transcendent love, then see here the rise and ground of all that which Christ does for them. You wonder, believers (at least you might), and that justly, whence it is that Christ does so much for you. One is while He is filling you with His unsearchable riches, another is while He is crowning you with His own glory.

Now you have Him giving you choice gifts, and anon you have Him bringing you choice graces. In this duty you have Him embracing your souls in His arms. And in that duty you find Him kissing you with the kisses of His lips, and you are ready to cry out, "Whence is it that Christ does all this for me!" One example is while you are sick, and Christ visits you, makes your bed, and sits by your bedside. Another is while you go abroad and Christ walks with you, and you lean upon Him as upon your beloved. Now you are in the wilderness (it may be under some banishment) and Christ comes to you. At another time, it may be, you are in prison (under some restraint) and Christ visits you there too. And all this makes thee cry out, "Whence is it that my Lord should thus come to me?" Why, see the point, and in that see the cause: He loves you, O believer, and He loved you with a transcendent love. And hence it is that He does all that He does for you and gives all that He bestows on you.

You wonder why Christ should sanctify such unsanctified hearts as yours are and cleanse by the washing of water, and by the Word, such impure spirits as yours are. And you are ready to say, "Whence is it that the Lord of glory should stoop to wash such as I am? Whence is it that He at whose feet angels fall and bow should come and wash the feet of such a creature as you are?" Hence it is, believers, Christ has loved you, and that with a transcendent love. Do not wonder therefore henceforth (unless it is with wondering why Christ does anything, or all things, for you). There is a reason, yea, a great reason—though not in you, yet in Himself. It is this we have been speaking of—that is, the transcendent love He bears to you.

Fourth, let this inform believers that, since Christ loves them with a transcendent love at all times, they have then a just ground to act out their faith upon Him in any case. Why is it, O believer, that you doubt whether Christ will do this for you or give that to you when you consider that He loves you

with such a transcendent love? Upon all occasions, act your faith, O you children of faith, in your Beloved. Whatever it is that you want, and He has, whatever it is that you would have, and He can give, believe that Christ will not let you go without it, for He loves you with a transcendent love.

In three cases more particularly this truth will inform you of the sure ground that believers have to act their faith on Jesus Christ.

First is the case of hearing their prayers. Surely He who so transcendently loves their persons will without doubt hear their prayers. You say, O believing soul, that you have great necessities and they force you to make many prayers. You say that Christ can help you at all times and therefore you are calling upon Him at all times. But, you say, will He hear me? Why should you not believe that He will when you consider the transcendent love He bears to you? The love that is in His bosom toward you will open His ears to hear the breathings that come from you. Indeed, sometimes He may seem to be deaf and not hear your prayers, and sometimes also He may seem harsh and not accept your person. But it is to try your faith. For, notwithstanding, He will hear you and accept you in what you desire according to His will, for your good, that He may declare His transcendent love. You know Christ called the woman of Canaan a dog and seemed to speak harshly with her; and yet even all the while that He looked, as it were, sourly upon her, and spoke, as it were, sadly against her, yet even then His bowels rolled for her, and even then was there love in His bosom to her. And therefore though, for a while, He seemed to deny that He might try the sincerity of her faith, yet afterward He granted her requests that He might declare the reality of His own love. In this case, therefore, you have a sure ground of faith, O believers. Christ will not reject your prayers, because He loves your persons, and the more

transcendent His love is toward the one, the more sure may you be that He will hear the other.

Second is the case of obtaining counsel from Christ and knowing the mind of Christ. This point will inform us in a sure ground of faith and love. O believer, love will open Christ's bosom and let you see the counsels that are there. Surely He will counsel you in case of doubts because He loves you as He does.

You say, "Here is a doubt, and there is a question, and I would fain know the mind of Christ concerning this or that. But how can I hope that ever He will open His mind to me, either in the one or about the other?"

Why do you say so, O believer? Is not His transcendent love a good ground for the acting of your faith in this case? Verily, because His heart is to you, therefore it will be with you (that I may allude to that phrase of Judg. 16:15). However Delilah said to Sampson, "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?" You have no reason to say as she said (in such a way as she did). You may believe that His heart will be with you because you hear that He loves you. I would fain persuade my own heart, and yours also, in these times of doubting and of darkness (in which we need counsel, and would be glad to know the mind of Christ more), I would say, persuade my own heart, and yours also, to this point: to act faith upon Christ in this case, whatever the truth of such a Scripture be (as you would know) or of such a question (as you would fain be resolved in). Since Christ loves you with a transcendent love, act faith in this case, that in due time He will reveal even the one and the other to you.

Third, Christ's transcendent love gives a sure ground of faith in the case of raising up the saints out of suffering. Verily (O you children of faith and love), believe it, Jesus Christ who loves you in such a transcendent manner as you have heard

will not let you always be under those great sufferings that you are under now. His great love (for the present) makes Him sympathize with you. In all your afflictions, He is afflicted. Men who persecute you persecute Him who loves you. He looks upon your sufferings as His own. And because He loves you so transcendently, He will ere long tell those who persecute you the same terribly. Believe it, Christ who has appeared to you in this, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you out of the state of sin," will also say unto you, "I love you with a transcendent love, and therefore with the same lovingkindness will I draw you out of the state of sufferings." Act out faith, O believers, upon this ground of Christ's transcendent love, even a sweet and a singular faith, in the case of delivering you out of sufferings. As He will not always strive Himself with you, so neither always will He allow wicked men to trample on you.

Use of Reproof

This point, that Christ loves His own with a transcendent love, may justly reprove the world, yea, and the saints themselves also.

First, it may reprove the world, who are ready not only to think but to say (as he in the parable) that Christ is an austere man (Luke 19:21). No, my brethren, Christ, you see, is not austere but sweet. As His name is, so is His nature, love, and that in a transcendent manner. Be reprov'd, wretches, in entertaining unkind or reviling thoughts of Christ. You wrong Him in His love, and yourselves in the truth, while you think or say that He is not a loving Lord. You shall ere long not only see that He loves but that He loves all His with a love passing knowledge.

But, second, it reprov's the saints also who are ready very often to question if not the reality yet the transcendence of Christ's love. Be reprov'd for saying Christ does not love you at all or, if He does, but very little; for you hear that He loves

even all His own with a transcendent love. I profess it is sad to see upon what petty, poor occasions even believers themselves are ready to question (at least the greatness of) Christ's love. If He denies them though but a vanity, yet because their hearts are set upon it so much they think that His heart is not set upon them at all. Such is their weakness that they are ready to think that Christ loves them but a little because He does not give them happily a knife, which He sees they would use to cut their own throat with. Your bosoms, O believers, will hint you the particulars in this case, and therefore I pass them by. Only let the word of reproof fall upon you who for any occasion, whether great or small, dare to question the transcendence of Christ's love when you see it to be a clear truth (written as with a sunbeam upon your souls and bosoms) that the love He loves you with is passing knowledge.

Use of Exhortation

This point is a word of exhortation to exhort believers (upon the consideration of this transcendent love that Christ bears to them) to do at least these four things.

First, tremble to think that ever you should sin against Him who loves you so much. View your sins, O believer, in the light of your Savior's love; and when you see the transcendence of that love which is in His bosom toward you, then sit down and bleed to behold your great sins against Him. Then indeed does transcendent love have a sweet working upon your spirit, when the thoughts of it can make you mourn for your sins. How sweetly did love work upon that woman (who was a sinner) when she tasted the transcendent love of her Savior? The sight of the great love that was in His bosom toward her made her sit at His feet and weep bitterly at the thoughts of her sins. For the present I will not dispute the point whether mourning for sin before closing with Christ can be sincere.

I am sure of this, that after closing with Christ and tasting His love, then mourning for sin is most sweet. And though nothing in the world melts the heart for sin, yet the thought of the love of Christ will. Well, believers, let it then have such a work in your bosoms. Oh, let His transcendent love (which you may read written with the blood of His heart) dissolve your hard heart. And let it make you mourn for your sins greatly. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him" (Zech. 12:10). Why, believers, do you see Him whom you have pierced with your sins? Do not you mourn, especially when you see Him in the light of love? I say no more but this: either you have not tasted this transcendent love of Christ or else your spirits are very much hardened if the sense and thoughts thereof do not cause you to mourn for sin. Therefore, let this word of exhortation sink deeply into your hearts, O believers! Weep, and weep tears of blood, to think that ever you should sin against Jesus Christ, who has written in His own blood this truth, that He loves you with a love passing knowledge.

Second, be exhorted to be ambitious to answer this transcendent love of your Savior with the like. Let this love of your Lord be that which attracts your love. Let it constrain you to love Him transcendentally who loves you so. I know it is impossible that you should parallel it (which is the glory of Christ's love), yet strive at least to imitate it (which will be your glory). Do not content yourself to love Him little who loved you much. Since Christ has loved you richly, be ashamed to love Him but poorly. Ambition in this respect will be a grace, if so be that the fire of Christ's love to you sets you in flames of great love to Him. Oh, be ambitious to declare as much as in you lies the exceeding greatness of your love to your Lord.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola notes it as a badge of love that it makes the person willing, yea, and desirous to suffer for

the party beloved. Believers, Christ's love to you had such a work as that, and if your love to Him has not yet risen so high as to desire to suffer for Him, yet let it at least rise thus high as to be willing to suffer anything for Him if He calls you to it. It will be a sweet and sure character of love.

As Christ wrote a letter of love to you in His own blood, so you (upon occasion) write a letter of love back to Him in the same rubric. "The love of Christ," said Paul, "constraineth us; because we thus judge" (2 Cor. 5:14). The consideration of Christ's love had a constraining power upon Paul's spirit, and he could not choose but judge this, that if Jesus Christ died for him, he should be willing to die for Christ. Then is a Christian sweetly exercised when the golden ball of divine love is tossed to and again between Christ's bosom and his. Let this therefore sink into your spirits; labor to answer, O believers, this transcendent love of Christ toward you that passes knowledge.

Third, upon all occasions have recourse to this transcendent love. As the miser said, "People deride me abroad, but I comfort myself when I come home." He meant by looking into his boxes and there seeing his gold. Believers, though the world derides you abroad, yet you may have recourse to this love of Christ and comfort yourselves when you come home. Look, as it were, into the glorious box (Christ's bosom) and there see that which I am sure to you is better than gold, His grace. Weak people have their little bottles of spirits and cordials to carry about with them, to refresh them when they are faint. Believers, you (especially you who are weak) imitate their wisdom: let this bottle of Christ's transcendent love always be in your bosom, and have recourse to this. Refresh your spirits upon all occasions (especially when you begin to faint), and without doubt there is a refreshing power in this transcendent love of Christ to keep your hearts from fainting under troubles (as we shall see in the next point when we

come to it). Jesus Christ, in His trouble, had recourse to His Father's love. Why, then, in any trouble, do you not have recourse to Christ's love?

Fourth, inasmuch as Christ loves all His with a transcendent love, let it be your care, O believers, to imitate your Savior. Love all His as He does, with such a transcendent love (Eph. 5:2). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). At least, O believers, be persuaded to have salt in yourselves, and to love one another, and that very dearly, since Jesus Christ does the like. Be followers of Christ (in this) as dear children, and be walkers in love one to another, as Christ has loved you all. Whoever they are that are believers, Christ loved them very dearly because they are His. He does so; why should not you? Oh, that wherever you see the light of Christ's love shining upon any bosom, that there you would cause your love to shine also upon the same.

Especially take heed that you do not frown upon those on whom Christ smiles. You have heard (and therefore mind it) that Christ loves all His with a transcendent love; therefore, take in this exhortation also: whoever they are that belong to Jesus Christ (though in many things they differ from you), yet let them have your love for this one thing, Christ in them. At least learn to love them really because you hear Christ loves them transcendently; Christ loves different saints with the same love. I am sure that believers of all or any opinions are the object of Christ's affection, and though they are unhappily, it may be, erring about some truths, yet they are all of them happy in the enjoyment of this truth, that Jesus Christ loves them all with a love passing knowledge. It is sad to see those look strangely one upon another who are yet all beloved of Jesus Christ. But it is sadder to see any saint look upon another with a frowning countenance when Christ looks upon him with a smiling face. Who does not bleed to see one

believer write a book of revilings against another when you look upon the gospel (as a glorious book of love) written by Christ to them all? Do not tell it in Gath; do not publish it in the streets of Askelon. Oh, do not let the daughters of the unbeloved triumph to see you who are the highly beloved ones of Jesus Christ traducing and reviling one another. I say no more but this: since Jesus Christ loves all the saints, and every believer, with a transcendent love, you who are believers (and so share in the sweetness of this truth) do the like.

Use of Persuasion

I shall add but a word of persuasion, and let it be to persuade all those who as yet are strangers to Jesus Christ to come in to Him. Oh, that you could behold the glorious beams of transcendent love toward all believers; doubtless such a sight as that could not choose but work upon your hearts and strangely draw your spirits to close with Him who is so lovely in Himself and so loving unto His wandering souls that err up and down the wilderness of the world. Return, you sinners, unto holds of love; kiss the Son; embrace Jesus Christ; know that He is the Lord of love, One who embraces all who come to Him freely, and then loves them all transcendently. I fear you are ignorant of this truth, that Christ loves His with a love passing knowledge.

And it may be your ignorance of this that keeps you from closing with Him. But know it now, and be persuaded to come to Christ, to close with Him, to embrace His gospel, to love His truth, to be conversant in His ordinances, knowing that if you are you shall have love from Him that passes knowledge. Be content now to break off from the ways of sin and vanity and come into the ways of righteousness; be content to bid the creature adieu, and now be willing to embrace Christ. Do not say that if you take up Christ in His gospel and in His ways friends will leave you, the world will loathe you, and the devil will stir

up the sons of Belial against you. It does not matter; though the creatures leave you, Christ will embrace you; though they loathe you, Christ will love you. And why should you fear the rising up of the sons of Belial when you shall enjoy the loves of Christ's bosom? Hear and give ear, O you children of folly, be wise at least once and you shall taste love. Christ calls you all, whoever you are, to come to Him, embrace Him cordially, and you shall find Him loving you transcendently. I have said all, and happy I would be, and you too, if I could but prevail with you to be drawn to Jesus Christ with these cords of love.

However you are strangers to it now, yet if you would but come in, you should know the love of Christ and know the truth of this point. Your own experience should be forced to witness to this, that Jesus Christ loves believers with a transcendent love passing knowledge.

CHAPTER 5

Believers Study to Know Their Savior's Love

There is nothing of greater force to allure men than the desire of knowledge. Job tells us, “For vain men would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). Albeit it is our fate that since the fall we are subject to folly (and in that sense we are vain), yet there remains at least so much wit in us as to approve of knowledge and to desire to be wise. Only here is our misery, that there is a great deal of vanity in our desiring knowledge. We are all of us apt either to desire the knowledge of that which is above us (and so unattainable) or else beneath us (and in that respect not so much desirable). It was this golden apple of knowledge that was so taking and tempting with our grandmother Eve, that albeit the best she got by eating that apple was but the knowledge of evil (which we had all been better without), yet she was drawn to eat of the apple—not only as persuaded of its being pleasant to the taste but because it was desirable to make one wise. And surely as our grandmother ate those sour grapes, so we all her children have ever since had our teeth set on edge with this same desire.

Hence it is that too often, out of an eager desire and affectation of knowledge, we are apt on the one hand to fly too high, and to pry into those hidden secrets that God has not revealed, or else on the other hand we are apt to stoop too

low and to dive into niceties and vanities, at least into the knowledge of such things in which we are not concerned. But, as the apostle says, "I shall show you a more excellent way" by declaring how you may poise your desire of knowledge so that you should be neither too high nor too low in the pursuit thereof. Do not say, therefore, "Who shall ascend to bring down Jesus Christ from above, and to reveal the knowledge of hidden glories and unconceivable mysteries?" Neither say, "Who shall descend to raise Him up from beneath?" But remember the Word (the Scripture) is nigh, even the gospel that we preach. Labor to know it, and you shall know enough not only as to salvation but even as to the perfection of your knowledge. Christ, who is the wisdom of God, and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, is fully and clearly revealed in the gospel, and by the study and the knowledge of it we shall come to the knowledge of Him.

Now of all knowledge, the knowledge of Christ, as it is most sacred, so it is most satisfactory. And of all things in Christ, the most satisfactory is the knowledge of His love. And as that is most satisfactory, so it is most sweet. It is this knowledge that the apostle here prays that the Ephesians might obtain (and by consequence that knowledge which all Christians ought to desire and labor for). It concerns you not so much to know arts and sciences (though in themselves, and their way, they are necessary and of worth), neither does it concern you (at least) so much to be acquainted with other truths of the Scriptures (which in their place are very precious). But this is that which so mainly concerns you, that you know the love of Christ passing knowledge.

Doctrine 3: It is a thing of necessary concern for every Christian to know the transcendent love of Jesus Christ.

We have already endeavored to hold out, at least, a beam of light toward the discovery of that bosom love that is in Christ toward His. And at this time my desire is to hint something that may at least put you on to endeavor to make a further discovery of the riches, the glory, and the transcendence of that love. For my design is to make it appear that the study for the knowledge thereof is of very choice, special, and necessary concern for you all.

The subject of the point, you see, is the knowledge of the love of Christ. Now when I say that the knowledge of the love of Christ is of necessary concernment,

(1) I mean not simply the bare believing of this truth but a clear and full understanding of it, the substance and circumstances thereof. There are divine and infinite dimensions in the love of Christ, and it is our duty to labor for the knowledge of all these. We should strive to be able to measure both the length and the breadth, yea, and also to take the height and to sound the depth of the love of Christ. Christ's bosom is a very glorious mine of love, and it concerns us to dig very deep into it and not content ourselves with a bare discovery of that golden ore or vein of love that is upon the surface or top of the same mine and in which we may easily discover, as it were, in the very letter of the gospel; but it does concern us to endeavor to attain unto the deep and mysterious discoveries thereof, which saints by the light of the Spirit come to attain.

(2) Yea, and not only so, but we are also to endeavor to get an experimental knowledge of this love. As the painter curiously painted love by drawing the type of it out of his own bosom, so we in like manner may be able by our Christian discourses to paint forth and declare what the love of Christ is, taking especially the grounds thereof out of our own

experiences. Divines observe that the Scriptures own nothing for knowledge (at least saving) that is not experimental. And certainly that knowledge of the love of Christ whereof we shall now speak ought to be not only a bare head knowledge but especially a heart knowledge, an experimental knowledge. This I thought good to add for the explication of the subject of the proposition.

Now for the predicate (or the things that do affirm of this knowledge of the love of Christ) you may do well, for the clearer apprehending thereof, to take it in these particulars.

Particular 1

This knowledge is of concern. There are many things the knowledge whereof may be expedient but not of such concern. But this knowledge whereof we speak is such a knowledge as not only may be expedient for us to know but also of concern for us that we should know.

Particular 2

I say it is of necessary concern; some knowledge may be of accidental concern to be known that is not of necessary concern, some things indeed as being accidental to some greater truth, and the discovery thereof are in that respect of concern to be known (and so may concern a man to endeavor for the knowledge thereof). But now this knowledge has a necessity laid upon it, and woe to every soul that does not know the love of Christ.

Particular 3

I add, it is of necessary concern for every Christian. There are some truths that albeit they may be of necessary concern for some persons who are, as it were, anointed with a higher anointing and employed in a more special way (as officers in

the church, etc.) that may yet not be of such necessary concern to all. But now this knowledge whereof we are speaking is of necessary concern for every soul that is named by the name of Christ (and so pretends to be a Christian), but especially every soul that is united to Jesus Christ (and so is indeed a Christian) ought to labor for solid knowledge of the love of Christ. As the fathers in Christ's school are not above this knowledge, so neither the babes and children in Christ's school are beneath it, but all, even the one and the other, are bound, and it lies upon them as that which concerns them very near, and very necessary, to know this love of Christ that passes knowledge.

One word I shall only add by way of caution. I do not speak, neither would I have you understand me, as if this were the only knowledge to be labored for. Indeed, it is the sovereign but not the sole knowledge that Christians should desire and endeavor to obtain.

In all that therefore I shall speak, I desire to be understood not exclusively, shutting out other truths, but as inclusively, and eminently driving at this in a peculiar manner. And as Christ said with reference to doing, "Those things you ought to have done [that is, especially] and not leaving the other undone [i.e., altogether neglect]," I say in like manner of knowing: the knowledge of Christ you ought especially to labor for (as a thing of more choice and special and necessary concernment), but you are not altogether to neglect the knowledge of other gospel truths, as if they were of no necessity or of no necessary concern at all.

For proof, I shall not need to add many places (it being so fully laid down in this). Certainly this wise apostle Paul would never have so earnestly and particularly begged of God that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge if it were not of special and necessary concern for them. I shall only add to this his desire for the Ephesians that

determination of his for himself (which he expressed to the Corinthians): “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Now the knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified (as I hinted once before) is the knowledge of Christ in His love. Though the whole life of Jesus Christ was but (as it has been shown) like one great sermon of love, yet the death of Christ was, as it were, a longer and clearer sermon of love than all His life was. Never did Christ speak love more fully and more freely than when He was, as it were, in that pulpit, the cross. Now, then, if certainly Paul determined to know nothing but this, we may safely conclude, both from his determination for himself and his desire for the Ephesians, that the knowledge of Christ’s transcendent love (especially in a clear, experimental way) is of necessary concern for every Christian.

I shall offer some reasons to make this point clearer.

Reason 1

The knowledge of the love of Christ contains in it the sum of the gospel (Christ being the sum of the gospel, and love the sum of Christ). God so loved the world that He gave Christ, and Christ so loved the world that He gave Himself, contains in it the marrow and pith of all the gospel. This little word *love* (written in the golden letters of free grace upon the bosom of Jesus Christ) is an epitome of the gospel. Look, as “Oh, love the Father” is the fulfilling of the law, so Christ’s love to us is the fullness of the gospel. You have done the law if you love God sincerely, and you understand the gospel if you know Christ’s love soundly.

Reason 2

The knowledge of Christ’s love is of necessary concern because it contains in it the chief motive to duty. You will never do duty

(at least with that sweetness in your own spirits that you should, and with that acceptance of God that you would) if you do not act from a principle of love. Now the love of Christ known to us is that which chiefly enflames our love to Him. What was the reason, that notwithstanding that love that God showed to Israel when he was a child, and taught him to go, taking him by the arms, did not have that impression upon Israel that it should have had? The prophet hints at the reason, because Israel knew it not (Hos. 11:3). God showed, but Israel did not understand His love; and therefore it was that Israel would not walk answerably thereunto. In like manner, we shall never walk answerably by doing our duty (for I take duty to be at least an answer of love) if we do not know what the love is wherewith Christ has loved us. Paul was more abundant than all the rest of the apostles were in his labors. And surely this might be the reason that perhaps he understood more of the love of Christ than the rest did. Hence it may be that you have that expression in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For the love of Christ constraineth us." The consideration of Christ's love (which Paul came to have by the knowledge thereof) was, as it were, a whole crowd or throng of arguments, or like a whole siege of motives (for the word will bear both metaphors) unto Paul both to die and to suffer for Jesus Christ. There is no soul but needs a spur to duty, being dull in himself. Now the knowledge of the love of Christ, being of such special efficacy this way, must also be of necessary concern for every Christian.

Reason 3

Christ's love is a fountain of a believer's life, and therefore it must be of necessary concern for a believer to know it inasmuch as he cannot live without it; verily, this is life eternal, to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. If it is of necessary concern for the soul to live, it must be also of necessary

concern to know Christ's love, inasmuch as without the one he cannot enjoy the other. "I live," said Paul; but how? "by the faith [now faith is but a higher degree of knowledge of the love of Christ] of the Son of God, who loved me." As Moses pressed the Israelites to the sincere keeping of the law, "because it is your life," in like manner may we press Christians to the serious knowledge of Christ's love, because it is our souls' life.

Reason 4

The knowledge of Christ's love is the foundation of a soul's joy and a Christian's comfort, and therefore it is of such necessary concern. The reason why the saints are sometimes so sad is because they do not know the love of Christ (at least in all the dimensions thereof). Hence it is that peace is joined with love sometimes in the gospel. "Peace [said Paul] be to the brethren," but from whence? From this (as it is added): "and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:23). The hearts of believers would be at peace if they fully understood the love of Christ. "Oh," says the soul of that believer, and of this believer, "indeed they live sweetly upon Christ's love because they have it, but I go sadly in the want of Christ's love because I think there is none for me." The soul is sad because it does not see the fullness of the love of Christ.

"Aye," says another soul, "such a one who has more grace than I, and such a one who has less sin than I have, may live joyfully because of Christ's love; but I must go sadly because I fear He will not love me." The reason of this soul's sadness is because it does not know the fullness of love that is in Christ, and the freeness thereof. Without a doubt, did we but know the love of Christ better than we do, we would not be so sad so often as we are. That bosom disciple, John, who knew much of the love of Jesus, and had declared the knowledge of it unto

others, said it was for this end: "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full." Since therefore the joy and the comfort of our souls is built upon the love of Christ as its foundation, it necessarily concerns us to get the knowledge thereof.

Reason 5

The knowledge of Christ's love is of necessary concern because it is the rise of Christian thankfulness. Hence it is that thankfulness springs; it is from this fountain whence it flows. Those souls will be most thankful for the love of Christ who understand it most. Ignorance begets ingratitude, but knowledge makes thankful. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Ps. 103:2). Men will not be thankful for that which they forget; neither can men remember that which they do not know: all that Christ looks for from the saints is that they should acknowledge the transcendent love He bears unto them. We will never be able to sing "glory and dominion be to Him who hath loved us" except we know how He loved us. Look, as a lark, at the discovery of the light of the day, ascends chirping and chirping, and the lighter the heavens appear the higher she ascends, and the sweeter she sings, in like manner the soul that knows the love of Christ and sees the light thereof mounts and sings, and the more bright the beams of Christ's bosom love shines in upon them, the higher is the soul elevated and the sweeter it chirps and chants that spiritual song of thankfulness unto Christ. You are bound, believers, to thank Christ for His love, and you will never purpose to go about to cancel that bond if you know the transcendence of that love with which He has bound you.

Reason 6

Christ's love is all the legacy He has left Christians. Surely it is of necessary concern for Christians to know that which Christ

left them in His will. He has not left them ample possessions nor brave buildings in this world. His Father (though He loved Him) left Him no house to put His own head in here, but dear love, rich love, transcendent love, love passing knowledge. This Christ has left to believers (as His Father left Him): “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9). Ask the widow whether it does not necessarily concern her to know that which her husband left her. Ask the child whether there lies a necessity upon him to know that which his father left him. Both the one and the other will say, yes. Why, believers, your everlasting Father, and your soul’s husband, Jesus Christ, has left you nothing but His love. Surely it is necessary that you should know it.

Reason 7

As the soul is filled with the knowledge of the love of Christ, so it is filled with the fullness of God. You empty creatures, does it not concern you (and that necessarily) to be filled with the divine fullness, the fullness of God? Surely, you will say yes. Then know that it as necessarily concerns you to be acquainted with the love of Christ; without that, you cannot be so filled. Some have thought that knowledge is nothing but a union between the thing known and the understanding; hence it is, that they say and conclude, that by how much any partakes of knowledge, by so much they partake of fullness. God is love, and if the knowledge of God’s love is the union thereof with the soul, then certainly by how much we know the one, by so much we partake and are filled with the other. Observe how the apostle therefore joins this in the text: “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). Every drop of this knowledge of the love of Christ tends toward the filling of the soul with the fullness of God. Surely, therefore to be filled,

and to be filled with God, and to be filled with the fullness of God, yea, with all the fullness of God, being so necessary for every soul as it is, and the knowledge of Christ's love being so advantageous to this, it must be a thing of special concern for every Christian to labor to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

Application

Briefly now for application:

Use of Lamentation

It may serve for a use of lamentation that, notwithstanding the knowledge of the love of Christ is thus necessary, yet, first, that this knowledge has been little studied, and second, though it should be much studied, yet it can be little obtained.

First, I say, it has been but little studied. Men have been very swift in searching after other truths, but they have been slow in searching after this. An ample, exact discovery of this love of Christ may well be set down among the desiderata—that is, the desirables of divines, it having been so little handled by any. Indeed, much of the law (in the point of duty) has been discovered, but little of the gospel (especially in this point of Christ's love) has been inquired into. I do not know any one author of eminence (indeed, as yet I have met with none at all) who on purpose has handled or discoursed exactly concerning this subject—namely, the transcendence of the love of Christ. I have heard that the precious divine, Dr. [John] Preston, was wont to complain of the great defect this way. Surely it is very sad to think that the knowledge of the love of Christ, being of such necessary and high concerns, has been so little inquired into. Oh, what a gallant gospel design would it be for someone who is acquainted with the Spirit in a large measure to go over the whole history of the gospel

and to observe the glorious shinings of the love of Christ to believers in all. It would be precious if some would take it in hand and perfect it to the purpose. But it is sad to think it has been neglected so long.

Second, we may lament not only to think this knowledge has been but little advanced by the labors of any but especially that it is such that after all labor it can be but little gained. We may weep to think how little of the love of Christ it is that those who have most knowledge of it do or can know. We read of a book that was sealed, and John wept much because no man was found worthy in heaven or in earth who was able to open the book or to look thereon. Beloved, the heart of Christ may be compared to a glorious book in which the mysterious history of His transcendent love is written. But, alas, who is there, not only in earth but in heaven, that is able to open this book and to discover the mysteries thereof? Beloved, when we shall come to heaven, we shall then be in a capacity of more perfect knowledge of the love of Christ. But, alas, even then we shall never be able to comprehend the love of Christ in the perfection thereof—that is, so fully as it may be known. Then indeed we shall apprehend it in the perfection of our knowledge so far as it can be known by the finite knowledge of creatures; but yet then we shall not know it so full as it is.

The schoolmen speak of knowledge (as they do of seeing). There is a twofold fullness of knowledge. First, there is a fullness in regard of the object, such a fullness as regards the thing itself. Second, there is a fullness of knowledge in regard of the subject in which it is. Now for my own part, I incline at least for the present to conclude that although without doubt there shall be a fullness of knowledge of Christ in respect of our knowledge (i.e., according to the utmost bounds or extents that our knowledge, when it is perfected to the highest, is capable of), yet, notwithstanding in regard of the fullness of

knowledge as it relates to the thing itself (namely, the love of Christ, when it is considered so far forth as it may be had unto all the effects and purposes where unto that knowledge extends itself), I think we shall not have, but to all eternity we shall be admiring and adoring of this love of Christ that passes knowledge.

Wherefore, then, we must lament to consider that although the knowledge of the love of Christ is of such necessary concern, yet it has been but little searched after by many; and when we shall make the greatest search after it, we shall never be able fully to attain it.

Use of Reproof

It may be a use of reproof unto those who neglect this study of the knowledge of the love of Christ altogether. There are many who are little in the study of the Bible, less in the study of the gospel, but least of all in this, which is the light and luster and glory of all the gospel, the love of Christ to believers. And I cannot choose but think those blameworthy, and to be reprov'd, who in these times speak much of their parts and abilities in the beating out of some truths that are merely controversial (which yet I speak not against in its place) and yet neglect this knowledge that is of such necessary concern. I do not altogether blame those who study this headship of Christ (I mean this government), it being, I think, this present truth, which is most controverted in these times; yet, notwithstanding, to study so far the head of Christ as to neglect His heart, so far to mind His government as to neglect His love, is, without doubt, a thing to be reprov'd.

But much more are those to be reprov'd who study neither the one nor the other but spend all their time, their pains, and their parts in controversies and niceties, prying either into unrevealed positions or being busied about needless questions,

neglecting in the meantime this one necessary thing—namely, the knowledge of the love of Christ. How many are there that may (as one said of the schoolmen) be like travelers, or men in a journey, who have good bread about them but go gnawing and biting upon hard stones? So indeed there are some men who have (at least means to have) the bread of life, Christ's love, but they neglect it and spend their time in gnawing upon hard trivials, at least not useful questions. Be reprov'd, O all you, who so far spend yourselves about the obtaining of any knowledge when in the meantime you neglect the study of this knowledge (the love of Christ) that is of necessary concern.

Use of Exhortation

Last, I shall add a word of exhortation to stir up all the study of the love of Christ. You who have spent, or rather misspent, many a precious hour in reading romances and fond histories of feigned loves, yea, you who spend all your time, though it is about some matters of concern, but neglect this, be stirred up now to lay out yourselves in the study of that which is sweet and necessary, the study of the love of Christ that passes knowledge. You must conceive that (as I hinted in the explication) my desire is that you would labor to be well versed and to be exact students in this business. I would not have you content yourselves in some general things, but labor to make a particular discovery of the love of Christ in its substance, in its circumstances, and in its sundry actions and declarations. Oh, remember that this knowledge includes in it all that knowledge which is necessary to be known for salvation.

When you have studied it well, you shall find that there is nothing in the whole doctrine of salvation that is not comprehended in this love of Christ (as Calvin has well observed upon the place). This knowledge is both safe and sweet; it is not such knowledge as will puff up the head, but it will purify the

heart. I do not doubt that any can grow wanton who attains to any spiritual saving degree of this knowledge. The love of Christ will constrain to duty and restrain from sin; therefore take yourselves to this study above all others.

Now I shall offer something as means to help you and as motives to encourage you. Only by way of caution, learn to take heed of promising yourselves too much. Do not think that you shall ever come to perfection of knowledge in this point, at least while you are in this life. It is a point that may take up the study of all the saints (perhaps so much may be couched in the eighteenth verse of this chapter, that you “may be able to comprehend with all saints”). He speaks as if it were a text about which not only every saint is to set himself but as which requires all the abilities of all the saints. Look, as some great point requires the abilities of many scholars (and all little enough, when joined together) to make a good discovery thereof, such is the love of Christ that all the saints may well spend themselves in the study of it, and when they have brought all their notes together and added all their studies together, they will be able to make (at least in this life) but a very little discovery thereof. Therefore take heed of promising yourselves perfection in this study.

Now I add this caution not to deter you from the study but to make you more serious in it and also to keep you from casting of it off after you have begun to understand it. It is with some saints as with scholars who have set about some study, and after some progress find the business so hard and high that they can never come to the perfect knowledge thereof, they begin to slack in their endeavors and to cast it off. But now, beloved, consider it beforehand so that you may not afterward cast off the study of the love of Christ. When you have spent yourselves to the uttermost, you shall never come to a perfection.

Yet let me add this, the least beams of the love of Christ have so much light in them that they will be very sweet, and every piece or part of this knowledge will be of very special worth. Yea, the low and imperfect knowledge of the love of Christ (if experimental and spiritual) is of infinitely more value than the high and perfect knowledge of ten thousand besides. Yea, and one thing more let me add: It is possible for you to attain to a very sweet and satisfactory degree of this knowledge.

Question: But what shall I do to attain a satisfactory degree of this knowledge of the love of Christ, so that albeit I cannot attain to the knowledge thereof fully, yet I may be able to attain so much as may make me (at least) say, as it is in the text, I “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”?

Answer: For that I shall offer some directions concerning the means and helps how you may obtain the knowledge of the love of Christ and also as concerning the manner how we should carry ourselves in that study.

The Means

First, be much conversant in reading the gospel. However the Bible in general gives testimony concerning the person of Jesus Christ, and also in some measure concerning His affection for the saints, yet the gospel (of all parts of the Bible) in a more ample, clear, and satisfactory way holds out the love of Christ to believers. That which all the prophets spoke of Him, or of His love, is so allegorical and so dark that it is not easy (at least for everyone) to observe the light of Christ’s love so clearly shining in them. Indeed, the sunshine of Christ’s love is in the firmament of the Old Testament, but, as it is there, it is much clouded and much veiled. But in the firmament of the New Testament it shines in its full brightness, luster, and glory. And therefore be most conversant in reading it. And while you

read the gospel, be sure to carry this along with you, that all that which you shall read there, either in the life or death of Christ, is still to be understood as a demonstration of His love to believers.

Second, if you would know the love of Christ, be sure to labor to get into the bosom of Christ. That soul knows little of Christ's love in the power, sweetness, and spirituality thereof who knows only Christ in his head, as being without Him, and is a stranger to the knowledge of Christ in his heart, as being in Him. Labor therefore to have Christ revealed in you (as Paul speaks of himself); otherwise, all that knowledge that you have of the love of Christ will be to little or no purpose. Look, as Jesus Christ therefore knew the Father most because (as the Scripture says) He lay in the Father's bosom, in like manner you labor to be in the bosom of Jesus Christ, that you may better know what is His love to believers.

Third, counsel with believers. Ask those objects of love concerning the love of Christ to them. They who have had experience of His love can best inform you. I make no question but that a poor believer who has tasted the love of Christ, and in some measure experienced the transcendent sweetness thereof, is far better able to help you in this great study of the love of Christ than the greatest scholar in the world is who, it may be, has read or heard something of His love but yet has no experience thereof in his soul.

Fourth, study your own experiences. Consider the carriage of Christ particularly toward your soul. Remember how long He bore with you while you were in the state of nature and an enemy to Him. How long did He stand knocking at the door before you opened? How long did He come wooing your soul before you embraced Him? How many ways did He take to work upon you, to open your heart to let Him in that He might love you? How freely did He offer love to your soul? Was there

any other condition on which He offered Himself to you than your acceptance of Him? Did He not say, when He came and knocked at your door, "If you will open, I will come in and sup. And your heart shall be at no cost to prepare. I have brought that with Me that shall feast you"? Did He not say, "If you do but thirst, come and drink; and if your heart is but willing, eat the good things of My bosom and live forever"? Thus mind those experiences of Christ's acting toward you. Remember all the feasts of love that He has given you, and by these you will come to see how good, how kind, and how loving He is.

Last, add prayer to all these. It is the choicest wisdom to be wise in the knowledge of Christ's love. And if you lack this wisdom, James gives you his advice: ask it of God, and if you ask of God a wise heart in this particular, doubtless He will not deny you, for He gives liberally to those who ask and He upbraids no man. Then ask of Him often. Beg Him for a wise and understanding heart, to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. Entreat God that you may be taught of Him to know what is the love of Himself and of His Son. As Christ said, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." So every soul that the Father teaches will quickly learn to know what is the love of Christ to believers. And that you may be able to know the love of Christ in its luster, beg God to bestow upon you His Spirit. Christ said the Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him (Luke 11:13). And the apostle said, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11). Go to the Lord Jesus, and remind Him of His promise. Tell Him that He has promised to send His Spirit, and that when the Spirit is come He shall take of Christ and show it unto the soul. Entreat Him therefore to show His Spirit, and entreat Him also that His Spirit would come with the shedding abroad of His love. Say,

“Oh, that the Spirit would take Thy love and shed it into me. And, oh, that He would shed it abroad into my heart, that I may be able with all the saints to comprehend the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of the love of Christ, and that I may be able also to know that love which passes knowledge.”

The Manner

Having thus hinted a few words concerning the means how we may attain to the knowledge of Christ's love, I shall now add a word or two concerning the manner how we should behave ourselves in the use of this means while we study the knowledge of Christ's love. And for this take these directions.

First, be very exact. Exactness is requisite in all studies but especially in this. Gather up, O believer, all the crumbs and filings of this gold (Christ's love). When you read anything concerning Christ, be exact to observe the smiles of His countenance, the words of His lips, the gesture of His hands, and the turning of His eye. Love thus observes them.

Observation was made of eyes, of hands, and of countenance. So you observe: be very curious to study this love in all its circumstances, in all its doings, in all its demonstrations. If ever you would show exactness in any study, show it in this one. Doubtless the more exact you are in this study, the more clearly you will be able to comprehend Christ's love.

Second, be loving. Those who know most of Christ's love to them are those who abound most in love to Him. John seemed to be most loving of all the disciples, and therefore he seemed to have the greatest knowledge of Christ's love. He was so happy as to lean on the bosom of the Lord Jesus; and to him was revealed more than to the rest of the apostles. Look, as that man does but in vain expect mercy of God who is without mercy himself, so does that soul in vain desire to know Christ's love who is without all love himself. You may do well to observe

the context here in Ephesians 3:17–19: “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” To be grounded in love is an excellent way to comprehend love. And doubtless Christ will be very kind in the revelations of His love to those in whom He observes the workings of love.

Third, be very admiring in all the study; let all your reading be mixed with admiration at every love passage of Christ; sit and meditate at every word of love; stay and wonder; adore the glory of that light that appears in any beam of love. And in the admiration of that love which appears, cast yourself at the feet of Christ and cry out, “Oh, depth of love in Thee! Oh, the riches of the love of Thy bosom, that should thus let out Thyself to believers.”

Last, when you come, as it were, to a standstill and cannot comprehend the transcendence of this love, imitate the philosopher and cast yourself into that sea of love that you would fain fathom or sound, and are not able. Let that love comprehend you that you cannot comprehend yourself. Emerge and drown yourself in that vast ocean of your Savior’s bosom, and because you are not able with any line of yours to sound the depth, sink your very soul that it may be able to taste that which your study will not help you so much as to see.

I shall now add but a word to stir you up in the use of these means, and in this manner seriously to prosecute the sweet study of the love of Christ.

First, I might tell you that all the time that you spend in this study will be very delightful and very profitable, and you will have no reason to repent thereof. Those who have spent (or rather misspent) their time in reading the fine histories of feigned loves have at last been forced to confess their follies

in so doing. That well-deserving person, Sir Philip Sidney, is reported to have lamented upon his deathbed the misspending of those parts that God had given him in the penning of that well-penned piece, his *Arcadia*. But surely, believers, to lie upon a deathbed and to consider that although all your time were (every hour thereof) spent in the study of Christ's love, you will be so far from repenting of it that you will have just cause to rejoice in it.

Second, consider the times in which we live. How little love is there in these days! Surely the love of many is waxen cold; though it is pressed much, yet it is but little practiced. Though all pretend to complain of the want of love, and seem to press the exercise of love, yet where is the man who makes it the sweetness of his life to let others taste the sweetness of his love? Surely while there is such little love among men, it is but fitting that we should study the love that is in Christ.

Third, especially consider the sweetness that the knowledge of the love of Christ will bring to your soul in any case. Little do you know what comfort is wrapped up in the knowledge of Christ's love. How often does but a thought of this revive the spirits of the fainting saints? With what composure of spirit is a believer able to have himself in any tribulation when he knows that the love of his Savior is without knowledge? Without the knowledge of this love, nothing will be sweet; but with the knowledge of this love, nothing can be bitter. And this is that which we shall come to as the last thing observed from these words, to let you see how efficacious the love of Christ is unto the supporting of believers in any tribulation.

CHAPTER 6

The Love of Christ Is the Strongest Cordial in Tribulation

He that is but little skilled in the knowledge of the face of times may very well see that these times wherein we live are very sad. Calamity lies upon every creature, and woe has, as it were, entered upon the stage of the world and acts a very bloody part to the terror of all, even believers themselves. Some put on black and walk disconsolately; yea, almost all the sons of men are clad in mourning as being sensible of the misery under which most of the world at this day groans. In these times, therefore, what can be more suitable to our thoughts than to consider that which may serve to support our spirits? It is the wisdom of such as are weak and liable to fainting to carry about them some cordial or other to revive them. And it should doubtless be the wisdom of believers (who are liable always to tribulations) to lay in something that may keep them from fainting under these tribulations. Indeed, our Lord Jesus, out of the riches of His mercy, has prepared and provided rich and glorious cordials to support the souls of His. And it is our duty (especially who are the ministers of the Lord Jesus) to help believers with these cordials that our Lord and their Lord has prepared. And therefore, while others, forgetting not only the saints but themselves, take leave to press and urge great things (as matters of faith) upon poor souls (as if they had dominion

over their faith), I shall endeavor to imitate the great apostle Paul, rather to show myself a helper of your joy than a lord of your faith (2 Cor. 1:24). It was this indeed that Paul was much upon, the furtherance of the joy and comfort of believers. And it is this at which he drives in these words in the behalf of the Ephesians; for fearing lest the news of these troubles in which he was should so far trouble the Ephesians as to make them faint, he therefore bows his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He would be pleased to give them the knowledge of the love of Christ so that by it their spirits may be kept from fainting, either at the news of his or fear of their own tribulations. This being therefore the end why Paul prays to God on behalf of the Ephesians, that they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge, I observed this doctrine:

Doctrine 4: The spiritual knowledge of the transcendent love of Christ toward believers is of special efficacy to keep up their hearts from fainting under any trouble.

I suppose you easily see both the foundation and the proof of this point in this place; yet that you may see both more clearly, let me hint at these three things.

First, consider that the apostle supposes that the Ephesians' hearts were apt to faint at their tribulations. At verse 13, his desire that they might not faint clearly intimates that they were apt to faint. Indeed, the children of faith are not only prone to fear but are apt to faint in those fears.

Second, observe how upon this fear of the apostle lest they might faint, or (if you will) upon his desire that they might not faint, he falls to prayer and makes it his request to God (whose alone royalty is to support the fainting spirits of all the creatures) that He would be pleased to keep them from fainting: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:14). That is, upon this desire of mine that

you might not faint, I bow my knee to Him who alone is able to support your spirits.

Third, consider that among the rest of those things that he prays to God for in their behalf, that they might not faint, he prays for this in the text (as in the last place), that they may know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

And, indeed, the very spirit and strength of all that the apostle had prayed for (in the former verses, in their behalf) lies in this last. And happily therefore it was that he brings in this as the last particular, being, as it were, that last cordial that he prayed for in their behalf; and if it had failed he did not know, as it were, what to ask of God for them. This is, as it were, the last dose of the doctor that, if it does not help the patient, the doctor is at a standstill, and is puzzled, and knows not what else to give. So that I suppose you may easily see not only the footing that this text affords for this truth but also a great and solid proof of the truth thereof in it.

And yet, that you may see this truth more clearly from this place, I will in a word show you how that the very spirits and strength of the other cordials that he here prays for are, as it were, wrapped up in this: the knowledge of the love of Christ.

For consider, first, he prays that they might be strengthened in the inward man by His Spirit (verse 16). Now what is that strength of the inward man by the Spirit but that divine and spiritual joy that is through Him? The joy of the Lord gives strength (Neh. 8:10). Now it is easy to demonstrate that the chief ground upon which the Holy Ghost builds that joy (which through Him is in the hearts of believers) is this: the shedding abroad of the love of Christ in them. Christ, having promised to send the Spirit as a comforter to believers, says that "He [i.e., the Spirit] shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:15). Now what is there in all Jesus Christ of sweeter efficacy and power that the Spirit can take and

declare to believers than the knowledge of His love that passes knowledge?

So that if the strengthening of the inward man by the Holy Ghost is that which helps to support your soul from fainting, and if that working of the Holy Ghost is by a creation of divine joy or bringing of divine comfort, and that bringing of comfort in the Spirit depends upon revealing something of the heart of Christ to the soul, then it must be that the spirit of this cordial lies in the knowledge of the love of Christ, which alone the Spirit is able to bring in, as it were, from Christ's heart and shed it into the hearts of believers for the strengthening of the inward man.

Second, the apostle prays as a means to keep the Ephesians from fainting that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith (verse 17). Now a very few thoughts will discover that the strength of this comfort lies in the knowledge of Christ's love. For whereas the soul may say, "Ah! But will Christ dwell in my heart? I would fain believe it, but what ground do I have for such a belief? He is the high and lofty one, and I am mean and a poor creature. He is not only the brightness of the Father's glory but the fullness of the Father's holiness. And will such a pure person as He is come and dwell in such a polluted house as I am?" Thus the soul would or might reason; but now all this reasoning is quieted, and this doubting will be easily resolved by the knowledge of Christ's love; for he who knows the love of Christ knows how willing Christ is to come into the heart of a poor believer and how that daily and hourly He stands at the door knocking for entrance.

So I say that the very spirits of other cordials and, as it were, their quintessence, lies in this, the knowledge of the love of Christ.

It is very plain that the knowledge of the love of Christ is of special virtue and efficacy to keep the hearts of believers from

fainting under tribulations. But I shall demonstrate this point a little more by opening wherein this knowledge of the love of Christ consists and then by showing wherein the special efficacy of that knowledge appears for the supporting of the soul from fainting fits in the time of trouble. Then, in the close of all, I shall make some use and application.

Wherein does the knowledge of Christ's love consist, or what kind of knowledge of the love of Christ is it that keeps the heart from fainting?

In general, I hinted it in that expression "the spiritual knowledge of the love of Christ"—that is, such a knowledge of Christ's love as the soul has by the revelation of the Spirit, acting by the shedding abroad of that love even upon the spirit of a believer. As the carnal knowledge of Christ's person (the knowledge of Him after the flesh, as the apostle's phrase is) is not saving, neither is it sweet, so neither is the carnal knowledge of His love. It is the spiritual knowledge of His person and the spiritual knowledge of His love that furthers the everlasting happiness of a soul hereafter and the sweetness and comfort of a soul here.

But, more particularly, I shall hint two words for the explanation of the knowledge of Christ's love, what it is.

First, negatively, it does not consist in the bare notion of it. All divine knowledge (whatsoever it is) is without any efficacy if it is but barely in the notion. As in reference to duty, knowledge is not effectually imperative to put the soul upon doing unless it sinks deep into the soul (for the Word, falling among stones and wanting root, did not arise up in fruit). In like manner, with reference unto joy, knowledge is in no way efficaciously restorative (although it is the knowledge of Christ's love) unless it sinks down from the head into the hearts of believers. But as the apostle puts the knowledge of the glory of God the Father (as to salvation) in this, that "God, who

commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts" (2 Cor. 4:6), in like manner He puts the virtue of the knowledge of the love of God in making the soul patient in its waitings (and by consequence not fainting in his troubles) in this, that the Lord would direct the Thessalonians' hearts into the love of God. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5). Wherefore, then, this is the first thing by way of negation (that you may know wherein the knowledge of the love of Christ does not consist)—it is not the bare notion or apprehension thereof in the head.

Second, and positively, the right knowledge of the love of Christ, in reference to the matter at hand, I conceive chiefly consists in two things.

It consists in a particular application of the love of Christ to the soul by faith—that is, that the soul should be able to lay home that to himself in particular which he understands to be in the heart of Christ to every believer in general. The soul should be able to say of the love of Christ, "It is mine, for else what is all this to me if it is not mine?" In like manner will the soul say, "What is it to me if there is a transcendent love in the bosom of Christ to believers if I have no share in it?" As the preaching of the Word does not profit them in whom it is not mixed with faith (i.e., in the particular application thereof to themselves), in like manner neither does the love of Christ comfort any if it is not mixed with faith (i.e., particularly applied to their own souls). "This is a faithful saying [said Paul], and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Herein was the truth of the saying that Christ came to save sinners, but herein was the joy and comfort of Paul, that he could say, "I am chief." It is most clear that the knowledge of the love of Christ is comforting, but the efficacy of it lies in the application. However choice the cordial is (that is, by the

doctor), it is no comfort to cure the patient if it is not taken. In like manner, though the knowledge of the love of Christ is one of the choicest cordials that is revealed, yet it is of no virtue to the soul unless it is taken (i.e., particularly applied by faith). This is the first thing wherein the right knowledge of the love of Christ, as it is efficacious to comfort in troubles, consists.

But, second, it consists not only in the particular application but in a serious meditation thereof, being applied. Application takes the cordial, as it were, in the mouth and lets it down into the stomach. But meditation sucks out the sweetness thereof. And therefore it is said, "My meditation of him shall be sweet" (Ps. 104:34). Not only the knowing and believing of it to be the soul's but also the meditation is that which makes it more sweet; if the cordial that the patient takes is never so sweet, yet if it is spit out again and not chewed, as it were, or swallowed down, it affords but little refreshing. In like manner, though the love of Christ is surpassingly sweet (yea, and albeit it is, as it were, applied in the general), if it is not meditated upon it will be but of little efficacy to keep the heart from fainting. "We will be glad and rejoice in thee," said the spouse in Song of Solomon 1:4, yea, but wherein would they find their joy? It follows, in "thy love." But how would they find out the sweetness of that joy, out of that love? It is hinted in this, "We will remember thy love more than wine." The remembrance or the meditation upon the love of Christ greatly rejoices the heart of a believer more than wine does the heart of any carnal creature.

Now in the next place we shall show wherein the efficacy of such a knowledge as this is (of the love of Christ) appears for the supporting of fainting souls, and this we shall show in two branches.

Branch 1

Generally, the knowledge of the love of Christ will appear in its effecting of five things that are of great virtue to bear up the heart that it faints not in any troubles.

1. It frees the soul from those doubts and fears in which it is about its eternal condition. There is a great deal of virtue in such a freedom as this is, to keep up the soul from fainting in troubles; usually even those who are faithful, when they are in any troubles, are fearful of their eternal estate and much question it. But when that fear is removed, and that great question is resolved, they are exceedingly enabled to bear up not only in regard of fainting under but also cheerfully to go through all their troubles. The example of that martyr Robert Glover is famous for this. He much doubted his condition a little before he suffered, and there were a great many despondencies in his spirit and a great many faintings so that he did not carry himself so cheerfully as he would. But afterward, when God was pleased to shine in with the assurance of His love, and to free him from this doubt under which he fainted, then was he enabled not only to bear out from fainting but to go out and suffer with a great deal of joy and cheerfulness.

Now it is easy to show how the love of Christ serves to free the soul from those doubts in which it is about its eternal condition. He who knows the transcendence of Christ's love will be easily freed from doubting about his condition. The knowledge of Christ's love in this respect casts out fear. And, indeed, the chief ground of this doubting is the want of the knowledge of the love of Christ. Once the believer is able to say, "I know the love of Jesus Christ, and I know it not only for others, but myself," then he will be able to resolve, "What should I doubt? Or whom should I fear since Jesus Christ loves

me with such transcendent love?" And thus being freed from his fears, he is also freed from his faintings.

2. An assurance of a reward, after all sufferings and tribulations, mightily supports the soul from fainting under them. Therefore it was that Moses did not faint (though he was in afflictions with the people of God), because he was assured of the recompense of reward. Therefore it was that Paul, notwithstanding his great tribulations, was kept from fainting, because he was assured of a crown of life that was laid up for him. Therefore it was that Jesus Christ Himself was enabled to endure without fainting because of the joy that was set before Him. Now the knowledge of the love of Christ effects and produces this assurance. The soul that knows how dearly Jesus Christ loves him, and what transcendent affection He bears unto him, will with a little pain be brought to believe that certainly He will fully and gloriously reward him for all the tribulations he endures for Him. "Oh," says the believer that knows the love of Jesus Christ, "albeit what I feel before, and what I fear is sadder, though my tribulations are many, yea, and heavy too, yet I know I shall have a reward for all after all because Jesus Christ loves me with a love passing knowledge." And thus the believer will be sweetly supported from fainting.

3. A full acquiescence for rest in Christ is very efficacious to keep the soul from fainting under troubles. That which causes the heart to despond, and to be apt to faint, is because it is apt to be tossed up and down. An unstable soul is like the vessel in the storm without an anchor, tossed up and down with every wave and every wind; therefore it is that souls are apt to fret and to faint because they do not and cannot rest in God. Hence is that exhortation in Psalm 37:7: "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself." Men fret and faint

because they do not rest in the Lord, whereas if they could do the one they would be free from the other. Now the knowledge of the love of Christ brings the soul to such a resting and quiescence on Christ. "Oh," says the believer, "when I consider how Christ loves me, how out of that love to me He will plead my cause for me, and will one day make those by whom I now suffer tribulation to come and worship before me that they may know that He loves me" (Rev. 3:9). When I consider this, says the soul, then am I enabled quietly to rest my heart in Christ, and to solace my soul in Him, and to be so far from fainting under or fretting at my tribulations that I am able in my patience to possess myself and to rejoice in Christ. Thus the knowledge of the love of Christ works a resting upon Him, and that rest keeps from fainting.

Fourth, strength of love to Jesus Christ's person serves to support the soul from fainting under tribulations. Jacob's love to Rachel kept him from fainting under any hardness that he endured for her. And the spouse, being sick of love to Christ, was made strong by that sickness to endure much for Christ without fainting. The watchmen smite her and wound her; the keepers of the wall take her and abuse her, taking away her veil from her, yet she holds out; yet she faints not at all this trouble. And why? Because she was sick of love for the Lord Jesus. Thus, strength of love to Christ keeps a soul from fainting under sorrow.

Now the knowledge of Christ's love very facilely and freely works this. He who knows how transcendently Christ loves him cannot choose but at least really love Christ again, yea, and strongly too. Believers cannot choose but love Him whom they know loved them first. Hence it is that gathering together all the spicy actions of Christ's love, and sweetly meditating upon them, they can fetch fire out of all, and sweetly die in the flames of that fire and never faint. Oh, how easily can the

soul support itself from fainting under tribulations for Christ while it burns with love to Christ? And how easy also is it for a soul not only to fetch fire to kindle but even to enflame? How also when it considers the transcendent love of Christ to him.

Fifth, add to this in the last place the consideration that divine joy is ever efficacious to keep the soul from fainting under trouble. There is a strengthening power in spiritual joy to keep the souls of believers from fainting fits (as was hinted in the beginning). Now the knowledge of Christ's love is that which is able to produce that divine joy, and that divine joy, keeping the heart from sinking under sadness, it is easy to gather up this conclusion that the knowledge of Christ's love is of special efficacy for keeping the soul from fainting under troubles.

Now you have seen in a general way the efficacy of the knowledge of Christ's love to support the spirit from fainting in times of trouble. If you will see the sum of these things reduced into one argument, take it thus.

If freedom from fear about a man's eternal condition, if assurance of a reward after all tribulations, if resting upon Christ in a time of trouble, if strength of love to Christ, and also of divine joy through the Spirit, is efficacious to keep the heart from fainting under troubles, then the knowledge of the love of Christ must be efficacious because it produces all these.

Thus far we have seen that freedom of the soul (1) from doubts about the eternal condition, (2) in assurance of a reward after all tribulations, (3) in an acquiescence or resting on Christ in time of trouble, together with (4) strength of love to Christ and (5) divine joy, is ever efficacious that way.

Branch 2

But now, more particularly, I shall show the efficacy of this cordial (the knowledge of this love) to keep the heart from fainting under troubles in these four things.

1. The knowledge of the love of Christ (especially in such a nature as has been described) goes to the heart and refreshes the spirits of a believer. Therefore, anything is cordial and refreshing because it goes to the heart and has a power on the spirits. Wine, hot water, and spirits therefore are cherished because they warm the heart and revive the spirits. Thus now the knowledge of the love of Christ, because it goes to the very heart and revives the spirits of the saints (which if revived there is no fainting), therefore it must be so efficacious as it is. As now the fear of God is most sovereign to keep from evil because (as the phrase is) it is put into the heart, so likewise the knowledge of the love of Christ is most sovereign and efficacious to support from fainting under trouble because it goes to the heart and cheers the spirits. Hence is the phrase of the shedding abroad the love of God in your hearts.

2. This knowledge of the love of Christ appears to be efficacious to keep from fainting under troubles in that it makes the faculties of the soul so intense. Intension makes insensible and so frees from fainting. Saul, though he was opposed and much mocked by the sons of Belial, yet being newly lifted up to the kingdom was so intense upon that that he did not at all mind the sons of Belial, much less did he faint at their sordid carriage (1 Sam. 10:27). Some conceive that therefore men in a frenzy do not faint at anything (as others do) because of their intensiveness; what was it that kept the apostle from fainting in affliction but the intensiveness of his spirit about everlasting and eternal objects. "For which cause we faint not...while we

look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:16, 18). Paul was so intense upon higher objects that he did not faint at his tribulations. Now the knowledge of the love of Christ makes the soul very intensive in the contemplations of all its sweet dimensions. Thus says the soul that knows the love of Christ, “Oh, the height, and depth, and length of the love of Christ! Oh, that so great a person as Christ is should love so mean a creature as I am! Oh, that one who is not only man, but God, should set His heart upon me, who am not only a man but a worm!” And thus now, being intense in that contemplation of Christ’s love, it is kept from fainting under tribulations.

3. It appears that the knowledge of Christ’s love is efficacious because it makes the soul to forget all the loves of men. The reason why we are apt to faint under tribulations is because we are apt to overprize the love of men. Did we not set our hearts so much on the love of men we would not faint for want of that love. What if men (yea, all the sons of men) shall hate and oppose? So long as I do not prize their love nor fear their hatred, I shall never faint. Now the contemplation of the love of Christ to the soul works this effect upon the heart: it makes a man to forget all love of men. Peter forgot the earth when he saw but a glimpse of glory in the mount. Man’s glory is not seen when Christ’s glory appears; the light of the stars is not seen when the light of the sun shines. And while the soul is taken up in the meditation of the love of Christ that passes knowledge, he does not mind the loves of men, and therefore he is free from fainting at the want of them.

4. Last, the efficacy of the knowledge of Christ’s love will appear in that it has a power to make a man forget all those tribulations he lies under. King Lemuel said, “Give strong drink unto him

that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more” (Prov. 31:6–7). A soul that can make application and meditation of the love of Christ drinks, as it were, that wine that makes him forget his sorrows and remember his troubles no more. Hence it is you shall have the poor believer say, “I was so taken up with the remembrance of the love of Christ that I forgot I was in prison.” Paul, when he wrote this epistle (being a prisoner at Rome), yet was so taken up with the love of Christ that, forgetting in a manner his imprisonment, he prayed not for himself, lest he should faint at tribulations, but he poured out his heart that way in the behalf of the Ephesians that they might know. So there is a divine, spiritual, intoxicating power in the love of Christ to cause a man not to mind or to remember the tribulations under which he lies; and surely the soul never faints under that which it forgets.

Thus now we have gone over the second thing, and showed you both generally and particularly wherein the power of the knowledge of the love of Christ (as it helps in keeping the heart from fainting under troubles) consists. We will wind up all in a word of application.

Application

Use of Information

This point that the knowledge of Christ’s love is of such special efficacy to keep up the heart from fainting under troubles lets us see what great need we have to study the love of Christ. Men have much studied the nature of some plants and minerals because they are of special use for cordials. You hear of what special use for spiritual cordials the knowledge of the love of Christ is; have you not ground then to study it? Paracelsus, concluding all to lie within the compass of his Sol, Sulfur, and Mercury, spent all or most of his study in the search and

knowledge of them. The love of Christ is the most universal cordial, not only including all other cordials but the life that the soul finds in all others. As God's love is put for all causes (John 3:16) when He gave His Son, so Christ's love is put for all cordials when the saints get comfort. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, perils, sword, neither any nor all these can bear down when the soul knows the love of Christ who loves Him. And as it is the most universal cordial, so it is the most uniform. Those cordials are of most efficacy that are most natural and most suiting to the spirits. Why, love is our life (Gal. 2:20). Christ's love falls in with the life of a Christian; it is most suitable to it and therefore most sovereign. Verily, if there is need of studying that which may be a cordial to any condition, there is necessity of studying the love of Christ, which is such a universal and uniform cordial as it suits with the spirits and as it fits all the troubles that any believer meet with.

Use of Lamentation

This doctrine speaks lamentation also. How sad it is to see that though this love of Christ is such a cordial to believers in any trouble, yet they fail to find comfort in it.

First, they neglect it and make no use of it. Such is their folly that they have this precious price in their hands and they do not know it so as to make use of it. What a sad thing is it for the fainting man to see a cordial at the bed's head and not to use it?

Second, instead of using this they use other cordials. Who does not lament to see believers in these times of trouble, one while eyeing counsels, another while eyeing armies, and in the meanwhile not eyeing the love of Christ which alone is able to comfort when all other things fail. It is lamentable to see how believers leave this fountain of living comforts and seek after,

yea, and dig for cisterns, yea, broken cisterns, that neither have nor can hold any comfort in them.

Third, which is worst of all, when Christ offers this cordial they put it by and will not take it. How often Christ opens His bosom to the believer and lets him see love written in the golden letters of free grace and beseeches the believer to look and live, to contemplate it, and to take comfort from it. How often does Christ say, "Soul, I love you. I love you with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn you into this wilderness of trouble, that here I might speak comfort unto you where none can help you"? And yet it is lamentable to hear believers saying that they will not believe it, though their souls might be comforted by it.

Thus, believers, this cordial point may set you all a weeping that, notwithstanding the love of Christ is so comfortable, you do not use it but instead thereof use other cordials. How lamentable it is that when Christ opens this cordial, you will not open your mouths widely that He may fill them with it.

Use of Reproof

Be reprov'd, you children of faith, for this fault. Has Christ provided such a cordial for you, and do you neglect it? Is there such refreshing for your souls in His love, and will you not use it? Does He, as it were, bring it home to your hearts, and will not you take it? Be reprov'd for your folly, O ye of little faith. Suppose the mother should provide some cordial for the weak, fainting child, and bring it to the child, beseeching the little one to take it that it might live. Were not the child much reprov'd if, forgetting all the mother's care and cost, it should put it by? It is your folly and your blame, O believers, who, notwithstanding all the care (yea, and the cost of Christ too) in preparing and bringing this cordial (His love) unto you, yet too often you put it by and, Rachel-like, because of your

children (creature comforts), you will not be comforted with this cordial of Christ's love.

Use of Direction

Let this doctrine direct believers where to go for a cordial in time of trouble. What have you to do with the waters of Sehor? Run to the bosom of your Savior; why do you spend yourselves to go after the puddle streams of creature sweetness? Go to the running river of your Lord's love; drink thereof and be refreshed and comforted in any case.

Objection: Aye, says some soul, I would go there (as being indeed in a sad case, needing comfort), but how shall I draw out the water of life that is in Christ's love?

Answer: Why, what is your case, poor heart? What is your case in which you need comfort and for which you would go to Christ's love?

Reply: My case is spiritual; my soul is troubled within. I see much sin, but little grace, and this goes to my heart, filling it with trouble. How shall I improve Christ's love in this case for a cordial?

Answer: For that, believer, know that Christ loves you notwithstanding all this. I believe you think that Christ does not have affection for you because your sin is so much and your grace is so little. Know soul, though the woman was a sinner in the city, and so full of sin, yet Christ's love passed by her sin and pardoned her. Christ's love took the advantage of her many sins to show much love to her soul. And it is His custom where sins abound, there to make love superabound. Therefore you may comfort yourself, O sad soul, with the thoughts of Christ's love. This love made Him to suffer for sin, and this love makes Him every day to pardon sin. Yea, and He will show the transcendence of His love in passing by the transcendence of sin.

Objection: Oh, but I have not only much sin but little grace!

Answer: It may be so, O believer, yet the love of Christ may comfort you notwithstanding it. You think that grace is the cause of love, but you are deceived—it is the effect of love. Christ loves not because there is grace, but because He loves He gives grace. Grace is given in a time of love; love is not shown because of grace. Therefore comfort yourself, O believing soul, at the consideration of the transcendence of Christ's love. It is the glory thereof that it pardons much sin and that it loves little grace; and it will work so that in time sin shall be little and shall be grace much.

Objection: Oh, but, says the poor soul, I have lost Christ. I think there was a day in which I saw that His love was my life and the consideration thereof was my comfort. But I have lost the one and so cannot solace myself in the other.

Answer: Why, yet, believer, the consideration of Christ's love may be a choice cordial here. Did you consider the very nature of Christ's love aright, you will know this to be the glory thereof, that once had it can never be lost. It may be the sun may be in a cloud and you do not see it, but it will appear again. But the sun shall sooner leave the firmament than Christ's love shall leave you. Did you but also consider the transcendence of Christ's love, you would know that though Christ seems to withdraw Himself awhile, yet His love will not permit His withdrawing to be long. "Yet a little while, and you shall not see Me." It is but a little while that Christ is seemingly lost. "And yet a little while, and you shall see Me again." Christ knows your spirits would fail if He should be away for long. Love therefore looks to it that it shall never be so long as in the loss thereof you would faint and die. If you knew the transcendent nature of Christ's love, you would know that though you may faint a little, yet you shall not die. Love will come and

revive you. Yea, did you but consider the love of Christ aright, it will be a cordial in other particulars also in that it makes a large amends for a little tarrying. For a moment's withdrawing, it lets out everlasting kindness, and it therefore departed for a season that you might have it forever.

Objection: Oh, but, says the soul, I faint to think that I have lost Christ through my own defect. I have been so base as to drive Him out of my bosom; and I faint to think that He will never come again.

Answer: Why, poor soul, you are ignorant of the nature of Christ's transcendent love. Could you but know it, you would easily resolve your soul in this case and support it with a sweet cordial. Such is the nature of transcendent love that, though you have been foolish to drive Christ away, yet it is so powerful to bring Christ again. It was the folly and the fault of the spouse that, though her beloved was knocking at her door till his locks were wet with the dew of the night, yet she sluggishly lay in her bed and would not let him in. Indeed, he went away that she might see her folly, but he came again that he might show love's transcendence.

Objection: Nay, says the soul, with all this I have violated and wronged conjugal love; and the thoughts of these sink my spirit. I faint and die to think of this for fear that Christ will not pass by these.

Answer: Still I say, believer, that did you but know the nature of the transcendent love of Christ it would afford you a cordial in this case also. This is the glory of this love, that it passes by such violations. Indeed, the love of men will not, but the love of Christ will pass by this foul transgression because Christ's love transcends men's love: "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me" (Jer. 3:1) and

“Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel.... Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:20, 22). Oh, transcendent love that is in Christ’s bosom, that knows how to pardon the defilement of the bed of love. Indeed, there is no failing so great but if you knew the transcendence of Christ’s love you would see it to be greater than any failing of yours can conquer. So now in case this fear should be able to disturb your comfort and to make you faint, yet the consideration of Christ’s love may support your soul and be a cordial unto you, even in this case.

Objection: Yet I hear others cry out and say, “What shall we do to draw joy out of this well of salvation? How shall we make the considerations of Christ’s love a cordial to us in our troubles?”

I ask, what are your troubles, poor souls, that make you stand in need of the comfort of this consideration?

And you may say, “I have lost much, nay, all, for Christ because I stood for His cause. I have lost all the creatures, lands, and livings too, yea, and house and household too. I have lost all.”

And I answer, yet consider Christ’s love, and it will comfort you in the midst of this loss. It is the nature of transcendent love to repair all losses, and that double; in your land, you shall possess double (Isa. 61:7). And there is no man that hath left for Christ parents, brethren, house, or children, but love will make up all that (Luke 18:29–30). Transcendent love scorns to let any be a loser by it. May not this comfort you?

Objection: Oh, but I have not only lost all, but am still opposed; they have stripped me to my change for Christ’s sake and yet oppose my very skin. How shall I comfort myself with the considerations of Christ’s love now?

Answer: Thus, poor soul, consider that Christ will comfort as fast as men oppose; transcendent love gives the soul answerable consolation to any tribulation in which the soul can be. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," said Christ, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," and in Me ye might have peace (John 16:33). Transcendent love gives a smile for every frown, a kiss for every buffet, an embrace for every blow. This is the nature thereof; consider it, and be of good comfort.

Objection: Oh, but, says the soul, I have not only lost all and been stripped to the change but am brought to the stake. How shall I fetch comfort out of Christ's love now?

Answer: Consider, you dying soul, Christ's love has provided a comfort for it. It says that you shall have your life by thus losing it. You are in the way to secure your life; by this you shall not die, but live. Thus says transcendent love, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). After one blast, you are into Christ's bosom. It is but a wink with the eye, and then into the land of the living immediately.

Thus you see where to go for comfort in any tribulation, to Christ's bosom, and there you may find in His love a cordial suitable to any tribulations, whether within or without, spiritual or corporal. Be directed therefore upon all occasions, O you believers, to run to Christ's love and to comfort yourselves in the consideration thereof.

Use of Terror

This may be a use of terror to Christless creatures. You hear the consideration of Christ's love is a cordial, able to support in any trouble; but, wretches that you are, you have no right to it. "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2:9). You will meet with tribulation, Christless creatures; ere long, divine wrath will come and visit you surely. And

what will you do in the day of the visitation thereof? Where will you run for consolation in the hour of your trouble? Will you run to men? Alas! Miserable comforters they are, and so you will find them to be. "Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie" (Ps. 62:9). Where will you go in the anguish of your souls for a drop of sweetness? Will you go to duties? Alas, without Christ they are but dry! And you that are Christless will not know how to manage duties so as to suck comfort through them. Will you say that you are in Christ? The Scriptures will confute you. You are told, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). Do not say, "I am baptized." Many are baptized into Christ's name who are not baptized into His person. You will say that you have heard Him preaching in your streets, that you have eaten in His presence (that you have been, as you say, at the sacrament). Alas, poor creatures! All this may be, and yet you have no right to Christ. Tremble, therefore, you Christless creatures. His love is the cordial in trouble, and the consideration thereof may support the soul from sinking in any tribulation. But woe to you! Woe to you! You have no part in that, so what will you do? What will become of you when Christ shall appear in wrath? It will be in vain for you to call to the mountains to hide you from the wrath of the Lamb. It will be in vain for you to think upon the creatures. Nothing, nothing, will be able to support your souls. Indeed, believers, when He shall appear in flames of fire, will be able to comfort themselves with the knowledge of His transcendent love. But, alas, you who have no right to Christ, what will you do in that day? You must, doubtless, if you remain as you are, sink in despair and die under His wrath.

Use of Exhortation

Last, I shall add one word of exhortation and conclude. Inasmuch as the knowledge of the love of Christ is of such special

efficacy (as you have heard) to support your souls under tribulations, then be exhorted.

First, be exhorted to labor to be well acquainted with the love of Christ in the substance thereof, in the circumstances thereof, and especially in the fullness and freeness thereof. Read, study, pray, do what you can, that you may be acquainted with this love, the knowledge and consideration of which is a cordial in any trouble.

Second, labor to clear it up to yourselves that you have a share in this love and a right to it. This is the cordial of Christ's love, for the soul to see that it is this. So much I hinted at in the explication thereof. Especially strive, poor souls, to clear up this. Know that you once had no part in it; you were born children of wrath, without Christ. Let it be your constant care, therefore, to make it appear that now you have a share in that transcendent love which is in Christ.

Third, upon all occasions run to this fountain of love. Draw out of it suitable cordials for any trouble. You have heard that it will comfort (and a word was hinted to direct you). Now, up and be doing; and in all occasions, labor that the love of Christ may keep your spirits from fainting.

Considering what times you live in, you may expect to meet with tribulation. I cannot assure you of sweet and loving dealing from the world; neither can I assure you of kind dealing from those who call themselves by the name of brethren. But this I can assure you, if upon the words of grace you act faith and come to Christ, He will sweeten your troubles.

You have heard that there is love in His bosom for every believer and that love is of a transcendent nature.

You have also heard how that it concerns you all to labor and study for the knowledge of it. And now you hear that if you attain the right and spiritual knowledge thereof, it will be very comfortable to you in any trouble.

I beseech you, therefore, as you prize your souls, as you prize comfort in tribulations, believe, and labor to get a part in Christ; and then know that, let your condition be what it will be, however the world shall go well or ill with you, yet you shall still find a friend in Christ. He will still follow you with a full, free cordial and a transcendent love.

I have no more but this. Let the consideration of the love that is in Christ to believers, and of all the comfort that is in that love in any troubles, prevail with you to look after it and to lay hold upon Jesus Christ. Then shall you know experimentally that the love of Christ passes knowledge.

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