

SERMON VIII.

LOVE TO GOD ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED.

MARK xii. 30.—“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.”

THESE words are our Lord's answer to the question proposed by the Scribe, ver. 28, “Which is the first commandment of all?” or, as Matthew has it, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Matt. xxii. 35. These Scribes were of two sorts, either civil, such as our public notaries, or ecclesiastic, being paraphrasers and expounders of the law. This man was of the Pharisees; and among them was the question concerted which he proposed to our Saviour. “When the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together; then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him.” The Pharisees and Sadducees were extremely opposite to one another; but they both agreed in their opposition to Christ. The cunning and policy of the Pharisees is observable here, in that, though the question was concerted among them, yet but one of them proposes it: if he prevailed, they would, all triumph, because he was of their sect; but if he were foiled, as the Sadducees had been lately, they would put it off, and say it was but his own private concert. Some think that this lawyer was one of them that had applauded Christ, for his conquest over the Sadducees in the last conflict, and that for a penance, he was enjoined by his fellow Pharisees to undertake the following dispute with Christ. This they

ground upon what is said in the 28th verse before our text, "and perceiving that he had answered them well." But however that be, our Lord's answer to the question is full, clear, and plain, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." In which words, observe, 1st, A duty enjoined, and that is love, which is the opening or letting out of the heart after some good proportionable to itself. If we consider love, as a habit implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, then it is a grace, and the queen among the graces, as faith is the king. Consider it as acted and put forth by us upon its object, and then it is a duty, and such an one as greatly influences all other duties. Love is a cardinal affection; it is, as it were, the master bee, which carries all the swarm with it. 2dly, Observe the object of this love, viz. God in Christ; for otherwise he cannot be our God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." God out of Christ is a consuming fire, a dread and terror to the guilty; but God in Christ is inviting, amiable, yea, altogether lovely. Hence it is observable, that the covenant of grace is the frontispiece to the moral law. When God came down upon the mount, to speak all the words of the law, the very first word he spoke was a word of grace; yea, it was the very covenant of grace; "I am the Lord thy God," Exod. xx. 2. Is the Lord our God any other way than by the covenant of grace; yea, is not this the express tenor of the covenant of grace, "I will be your God?" 3dly, The manner of this love is likewise enjoined. If we would know how we are to love the Lord, we are to love him with all our heart, and with all our soul. There are two things here, 1st, The extension of parts, the heart and soul, mind and strength. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, for he hath created it; with all thy soul, for he hath redeemed it; with all thy strength, for he hath preserved it; with all thy mind, for he hath enlightened it. The heart is here put for the will, the soul for the affections, and the mind for the understanding. 2dly, The extension of degrees. Our understanding must think of God; our wills must cleave to him; our love, fear,

confidence and delight must be carried out to him, without division or deviation to other things. *Lastly*, We have a powerful motive to the practice of this duty, the loving of God, because it is the first and great commandment: so that while we neglect this, we do just nothing at all. Neither are we to think that the love of God is made the first and great commandment, only by the New Testament dispensation; for Moses says the same thing to the Jews, Deut. vi. 4, 5. that Christ here says to the Scribe.

In discoursing further from these words, I would, *First*, Explain the nature of the duty here enjoined, loving God.

In describing or giving an account of what is commonly called the love of God, there are two extremes which some men have run into, both which ought to be avoided, namely, enthusiasm upon the one hand, and cold philosophy upon the other. Some describe our love to God in such a mystical enthusiastic manner, as makes it both unintelligible and impracticable to mortals: of these there have been instances in the Romish church; and there may be some such among ourselves.

On the other hand, some have been so much prejudiced at these enthusiastic heats and fervours, that they have run into the quite contrary extreme, describing the love of God in a manner abundantly real, but quite cold and uninteresting. They have philosophised it so much, as to take it out of the affections, and place it entirely in the understanding, while, at the same time, it is unintelligible to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor opportunity to understand long chains of reasonings, and so can never in that way be brought to the love of God.

The scripture account of the matter is perfectly plain, and adapted to the meanest capacity. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. And I shall, through grace, endeavour to imitate the plainness and simplicity of the scriptures, in what I have to say upon the subject.

To proceed, then, I conceive there is a sixfold love which we owe to God, as our God in Christ. And,

1st, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of benevolence. This is the lowest degree of love, and therefore I begin with it, that we may ascend from it to higher degrees. This is a love we owe to mankind at large, yea, to our enemies; them we are bound to wish well to. How much more do we owe it unto our God, who performeth all things for us, and is our best friend? All those places of scripture, which express the saints' sorrow for the dishonour done to God, as also their desires, wishes and prayers for the manifestation of God's glory, and for the flourishing of his interest in the world, are instances of this love of benevolence, whereof we speak. We have many examples hereof in the book of Psalms, where the inside of that man is turned out to the view of the church, who was said to be, according to God's own heart. Did not that man wish well to God and his interest in the world, who says, "I beheld transgressors and was grieved. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, let them that hate him flee before him. Blessed be his glorious name for ever. Let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and Amen. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." The saints could wish for a voice that would reach many thousands; and if they had one audible to all the world, they would use it no otherwise than to be precentors of the praises of God, to call up and begin the song, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." The last verse of the book of Psalms expresses the warmest love to the honour and interest of God; "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

2dly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of the highest estimation. One may be the object of love, for whom we can have no great esteem. The love of compassion is often called for, where esteem, value, or honour can have no place; but when God is the object, the highest esteem is due from angels and men, and is still too little, because his excellencies and perfections are infinite: for "who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

We have the saints, up and down the scriptures, expressing their high esteem of their God. Moses, in his swan-like song, Deut. xxxii. 31, says, "For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." The Israelites were very ready to turn aside to the gods of the nations, yet the worshippers of these very gods were ready to acknowledge, that they were no way comparable to the God of Israel. The same man, by way of conclusion to his blessing of the tribes, cries out in a holy transport of admiration, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun," Deut. xxxiii. 26. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity," says the prophet, Mic. vii. 18. To the same purpose speaks the apostle, Phil. iii. 8, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," and do count them but dung or dog's meat, "that I may win Christ." It is recorded to the honour of Moses, in the New Testament, that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt," Heb. ii. 26. A sincere lover of God would not lay all the kingdoms of the world in the balance with him: such an one would rather embrace Christ with his cross, than sin with a crown. Their money perish with them, (said the famous Italian convert) who think all the gold of the Indies to be compared, with one hour's communion with the blessed Jesus.

If then we would know whether we truly love the Lord, let us consider how we rate and value things, when they come in comparison or in competition with God: for many pretend to this love, who discover the naughtiness of their pretensions, when such things are taken from them, as they esteemed above God. Give them God and the world together, and they will make a shift betwixt the two; but take worldly comforts from them, and they can make nothing of God at all. Why? Because they never esteemed him as the most excellent object; they never counted him as the portion of their souls. In their hearts, which is the book of valuation, God is not above all, but he is beneath

all; he is behind all; he is at the foot of their account; he is not the *imprimis*, but an *item*.

3dly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of desire, Psal. lxxiii. 25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee." Psal. lxxiii. 1. A Psalm penned by David when he was in the wilderness of Judah, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Strong and pathetic expressions, which we cannot understand aright, without entering into the spirit of him that uttered them. The warmest addresses that ever were made to heaven by the saints, have come from wildernesses, prisons, dungeons, and places of distress; for the Lord grants an enlargement of spirit, as ballast for the confinement and distress of the outward man.

This love of desire carries three things in it. 1st, A desire of communion and fellowship with God, above all things. "O when wilt thou come unto me? when shall I come and appear before God?" says the Psalmist. The apostle John speaks of this communion, in a way of holy boasting and glorification, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3. Let a soul be brought into the chamber of presence, and admitted unto holy familiarity with God through Christ, and that soul will care but little how the world goes, because it lives above the world. 2dly, A desire after all those ordinances and means which God has appointed for maintaining communion and fellowship with him, as the word, sacraments, and prayer. In the time of Absalom's rebellion David was an exile; but his banishment from the royal palace did not half so much grieve him as his banishment from the sanctuary, Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2. He seems to envy the birds that built their nests near to the altar, ver. 3, "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars."

Saints and hypocrites both attend ordinances and do duties, but with this remarkable difference, that the former

seek God in the duty, and are not satisfied except they find him therein; the latter attend the ordinances, do the duty, and then they think they have done all; but they never enquire after God, or desire communion with him. The saint, through the duty as a means, gets to rest in God; the hypocrite rests externally in the duty, without enquiring after God. 3dly, Distress and uneasiness under the want of communion with God. Job is a lively example of this; "Behold," says he, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot find him. O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat." The soul, under the hidings of God's face, says with the church in Lamentations, "Mine eye trickleth down," &c. Lament. iii. 49, 50.

4thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of delight, Psal. xxxvii. 4, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Hab. iii. 17, 18, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." When this love of delight takes place, nothing can satisfy the soul, but God himself. The presence of an angel could not satisfy Moses, when the Lord refused to go up with the people. At the hearing of the tidings, the people went into mourning, and no man put on him his ornaments, Exod. xxxiii. 4. And Moses protests against the journey, unless he had God along with him, ver. 15. Hypocrites howl to God upon their beds, as the prophet speaks, but let God cast a bone to them, that is to say, give them some earthly comfort, and that satisfies them: whereas, if God should give heaven itself to the saints, and hide himself from them, they could not be happy. If God should take them up to the magnificent mansions of glory, and say, now enjoy yourselves here, and no evil shall ever come near you, but you shall not see my face, I will go into a retiring room and tarry there. My brethren, I be-

lieve, upon such an intimation from God, all the saints would hang up their harps, and the heavenly mansions would sound with groans and lamentations instead of hallelujahs.

Moreover, the soul that delights in God, delights in all that is God's. Hence there is a delighting in the Son of God; "We rejoice in Christ Jesus;" a delighting in the word; "I rejoice at thy Word—thy statutes are my song;" a delighting in the people of God; "the excellent ones—in whom is all my delight."

5thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of friendship. God in Christ is the believer's friend, Song v. 16, "This is my friend:" it is spoken in a way of holy boasting and glorification: and the believer is the friend of God, as Abraham is called, James ii. 23. which is a far more honourable title than that of king, emperor, or monarch. The whole intercourse betwixt God and his people is just a league of friendship, made and maintained by Jesus Christ. Now the love of true friendship is very strong and fervent: for as the scripture saith, "A man's friend is as his own soul," Deut. xiii. 6. And if we love the Lord with this love of friendship,

(1.) Our friendship with the world will be broken up, because it is declared enmity against God, James iv. 4. Not that we are to hate men's persons, or harbour malice in our breasts against any; for this is a temper diametrically opposite to the gospel; but we must hate all the corrupt maxims, customs, practices and examples of the world, as also its vain allurements and entanglements. We must look off all these things to the author and finisher of our faith.

(2.) We will earnestly desire communion and fellowship with God. Intimate friends, you know, are fond of one another's company; and when they are in different places, they will correspond by letters. God, in respect of the immensity of his nature, is everywhere; but as heaven is the place where he fully manifests his glory to his saints, they reckon themselves absent from him, while they are in

the body upon the earth, 2 Cor. v. 6. but in the use of the ordinances and means of grace, they keep up a correspondence with their friend within the veil: their hearts are in heaven; their desires and delight are there; their hope is there; their thoughts and meditations are there; and thither do they send their prayers in the name of Christ.

(3.) We will be tenderly affected with the dishonours done to his name in the world. No man can bear to see his intimate friend abused. Love beareth all things, yet there are two things it cannot bear; the displeasure of God, and the dishonour of God. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law," Psal. cxix. 136. This (says one) is more than Adam did in his innocency. Had he been affected with Eve's disobedience, he would not have followed her example, but have said to her, as Joseph to his mistress, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" or, as the Lord said to Moses, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more."

(4.) We will often speak of him, and commend him unto others; "Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul." When they ask the spouse, Cant. v. 9, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" She launches forth into a particular description of him, and concludes with this, that "he is altogether lovely." Grace, like the author of it, is communicative of itself; and would share its blessed effects among many others. No person partakes of the grace of God in truth, but would wish all others partakers of the same, Acts xxvi. 29.

6thly, We must love the Lord our God, with a love of acquiescence. As the Lord rests in his love towards his people, so they must rest in their love to him. From the moment the soul centres upon a God in Christ by faith and love, it enters into rest, and may sing a *requiem* to itself, as in Psal. cxvi. 7, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Now, whence had David's soul this rest? how came he by it? why, he set his heart and soul upon God, and so he could

not miss it: for, in the first verse of that Psalm he says, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications:" and then it follows in the seventh verse, "Return unto thy rest." As if he had said, I have long been seeking rest and could not find it; but I have at last fixed my heart and hope upon a God in Christ, and so I can invite my soul to an undisturbed bed of rest.

I shall, in the next place, lay before you some of the scripture characters and qualifications of the saints' love to God, that it may be the easier distinguished from the specious pretences of hypocrites. And,

1st, Our love to God in Christ must be sincere. Paul concludes his epistle to the Ephesians, by praying, "Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," Ephes. vi. ult. When our Lord put the question thrice to Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" no doubt it brought to Peter's remembrance his three-fold denial of him; and a humbling sense hereof makes the good man to insist not upon the degree of his love, but upon the sincerity of it. He does not say, Lord, I love thee more than all the rest; I could go to prison and to death with thee: but he rests in a humble appeal to his Master's omniscience, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," John xxi. 17.

My brethren, there is not a grace comes from heaven but it has its counterfeit on earth: therefore, though as some divines observe, love can be hardliest counterfeit of any other grace, yet, no doubt, there have been, and still are, a number of false pretenders unto it. People may really love God, and yet not love him sincerely and purely, because their love does not proceed from right motives and principles: they love him not for himself, but for his benefits. The Capernaumites sought Christ very earnestly, yet it was not for himself, but "because they did eat of the loaves and were filled," John vi. 26.

OBJECTION. But may we not love God, because of the benefit we receive from him. *Ans.* No doubt of it. David says, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of

my supplication," Psal. cxvi. 7. But if we love him only for the benefits we receive of him, this is self-love, and not the love of God. God is in himself the most amiable object, as he is possessed of all possible perfections and excellencies, and as such he should be the object of our superlative love and admiration. Intrants into religion may be brought to love God from the consideration of his benefits, but as they advance further therein, and come to more acquaintance with God, they will love him chiefly, though not only, for what he is in himself. In a word, not to love God for his benefits is monstrous ingratitude: to love him only for his benefits is self-love, and argues unacquaintedness with the perfections and excellencies of his nature.

I should not have wished that person to succeed in the attempt, who, in a fit of enthusiasm, is said to have gone through the streets of a city, with water in the one hand to quench hell, and fire in the other to burn up heaven, that man might serve God for himself, and not for hope of reward or fear of punishment. Success, I am afraid, in that attempt, would have burnt up the strongest cords and sinews of religion: for the scripture everywhere addresses our hopes and fears, as the two handles by which our souls are taken hold off and managed: so, what God is in himself, and what he does for us, are two motives to love him, which we must not disjoin or separate, any more than we do faith and good works.

2dly, Our love to God in Christ must be fervent. This is intended in the heaping up of words in the text, "All the heart, all the soul." Cant. viii. 6, 7, "Love is strong as death.—The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The fervency of the believer's love to God in Christ appears, in that, (1.) They count nothing too much for him. Fervent love stands at no cost or expense upon the object beloved; it can bestow all it has, or can do, upon the Lord. Abraham is willing to offer unto the Lord his son, his only son Isaac, the staff of his old age, the hope of his life, the child of the

promise. David might have had Araunah's threshing floor in a present, to build an altar unto the Lord; but David would needs give fifty shekels of silver for it; for, (says he) "I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nought," 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. The same fervency of love to his God appeared in his vast contributions for the building of the temple. He prepared a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and of brass and iron without weight. The sum of what David offered is computed to be more than any king in the world is worth; and yet when he had done all, he says, "In my trouble (or poverty) have I done this," 1 Chron. xxii. 14. The primitive Christians, out of love to Christ, sold their lands, and laid the money at the apostles' feet; and the converts at Ephesus burnt their magic books, to the value of fifty thousand pieces of silver. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," Acts xix. 20. (2.) They count nothing too hard for him, I mean, to suffer for him. "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," Acts xxi. 13. But may be this was only a flourish of his colours, when he knew the enemy to be far enough off: he may yet change his thoughts when he comes to look death in the face: nay, what he said he stands to, in 2 Tim. iv. 6, "For I am now ready to be offered." He had already laid his head upon the block, and was dead before the stroke was given, not with fear as some have been, but with a free resignation of himself unto it. The first Christians counted nothing too hard for Christ: yea, they rejoiced and reckoned it an honour to suffer the hardest things for his name's sake. And, my brethren, though we are not now a-days called to such hard conflicts as they were inured unto, yet are we called to have the same affections towards Christ that they had, and to consider all worldly things, even life itself, in the same light that they did, when they come to stand in competition with the honour and interest of Christ.

3dly, Our love to Christ must be active and laborious, as was that of the Hebrews, for which the apostle commends them, Heb. vi. 10, "For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Paul laboured more abundantly than any of the rest of the apostles; he planted more churches, preached more sermons, wrote more epistles, and travelled longer journeys than any of the rest. He had done more in opposition to Christ than any of them in the days of his irregnecy; but afterwards it appeared, that where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound. It is likely he loved Christ more than any of them; and so laboured more for him than any of them. It is he who denounces that terrible curse against those who loved not our Lord Jesus, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

If we are lovers of God, we must be active, laborious, and diligent people; we must be always abounding in the work of the Lord; we must be filled with the fruits of righteousness. We must not turn remiss and indolent, or sit down on what we have already attained, but must be growing in grace, and flourishing in all the acts and duties of holiness. There should be an ambitious emulation among Christians, to go before and excel one another, in every good thing.

4thly, Our love to God in Christ must be constant, like the holy fire upon the altar of old, which was kept continually burning. Observe Paul's prayer for the Philipians, you that are lovers of Christ, and put it up for yourselves, that your love may abound yet more and more, Philip. vii. 9. and downwards. Some set off in religion with flying colours and topsails, with a mighty flow of affections towards God and Christ; but, having no root in themselves, they endure but for a while: their love cools by degrees, till they fall from it altogether, and so become seven times more the children of the devil, than they were before. The love of the world, the love of carnal lusts and pleasures, carries them off from their first love, and they turn apostates.

5thly, Our love to God must be superlative; that is to say, we must love him above all persons and things whatsoever, Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26. The hypocrite has a double heart, as the expression is in Psalm xii. 2. or rather as it is in the original, "an heart and a heart," that is to say, two hearts, one for God, and another for the creature, or for any thing else. But the Lord claims the whole heart; "my son, give me thy heart;" and he will either have it all, or none of it at all. A heart divided betwixt God and the creature, is such an heart that the love of God cannot dwell therein. As she was not the true mother of the child, who was for dividing it, so neither are those true lovers of God, who divide the heart betwixt God and Mammon.

Mind what Christ says, Luke xiv. 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Not that we are to hate any person, far less our nearest friends; but the meaning is, that when the enjoyment of these comes in competition with the honour and interest of Jesus Christ, we must freely give up with them. Holy Jerome understood this text well, when he said, "If my father should stand before me, my mother should hang upon me, my brethren should press about me, I would break through my brethren, throw down my father, tread under foot my mother, to cleave to Jesus Christ."

Having opened up the nature of the love of God, and assigned the scripture characters and qualifications thereof, I proceed, in the third place, to offer some reasons for it, and these shall be two.

1st, He best deserves our love. We are ready to bestow our love upon very undeserving objects; and often when the object is deserving, we nevertheless bestow more love upon it than it does deserve. Our passions generally run out either upon unlawful objects, or in immoderate degrees on lawful ones. But if God in Christ be the object of our love, it is impossible we can exceed in the degree of it: for he is the most deserving object.

(1.) In respect of what he is in himself. But alas, what a lame and imperfect account is it that we can give of God; for "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Simonides being asked by Hiero king of Sicily, what God was, desired a day to think of it, which being elapsed, he desired a second, and then a third; and at last told the king, that the more he thought of the question, the more he was diffculted how to answer it. And indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who knew not the scriptures could give but little account of God; for though his glory shines brightly in the sun, and sparkles in every star, yet the blind cannot see it, which is the case of all natural men. Nor are the heathen sages excepted here; for the apostle, speaking of them, says, Rom. i. 22, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

God is the greatest and the best of beings. Goodness and greatness meet in him, and are sweetly tempered together. He is self-sufficient, and all-sufficient; all perfections and all excellencies centre in him; and whatsoever of excellence is to be found about any creature, it is derived from him as the fountain. Here then, O Christian, is the proper object of love, a God in Christ. Who is like unto him; who in heaven or in earth may once be compared with him? "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun," Deut. xxxiii. 26.

(2.) In respect of what he is and does unto us. Have we not reason to say with the Psalmist, Psal. ciii. 1—4, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

He is our Creator, the Father of our spirits, and the Former of our bodies. He is called "the God of the spirits of all flesh," Numbers xxvii. 16. A most condescending expression; that he, who hath innumerable myriads of

spirits inhabiting the spacious realms of light, should not disown, but acknowledge a relation to spirits so meanly embodied, as ours are, in frail and mortal flesh. And David praises him for the curious formation of the body, Psal. cxxxix. 14. and downwards. It is natural for us to love our parents according to the flesh; and shall we not love the great Parent of the universe, in whom we live, move, and breathe, and from whom we have our beings? He called us forth into being, when we might never have been seen or heard of, without any diminution of his glory; and he has admitted us into the class of rational intelligent creatures, capable of enjoying himself, and surely this calls for our love and gratitude.

He is our preserver, Acts xvii. 28. Psal. xxxvi. 6. If he should withdraw his supporting arm from us, we could not subsist one moment. He preserves us in our going out and coming in: he preserves us from morning to evening, and from evening to morning again. He preserves us amidst a multitude of dangers that surround us, and holds our life in his hand, as we hold a candle in a hollow lanthorn, in a dark windy night, that is ready every moment to be blown out. We do not know how many times in a day, the sharp scythe of death is within an inch of the tender thread of life, yet it is not snapt in two, because he preserves it, holding it in his hand. Whom shall we love, if we love not the God of our life, and the length of our days, whose mercies are new to us every morning?

He is our Redeemer; and this is the strongest obligation of all, to love him above all. The apostle John celebrates redeeming love as matchless, saying, "Herein is love, not that we loved God; but that he first loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 10. What, is there love in no other instance but this? There is love in many other instances besides this: he gave us our being among rational creatures; herein is love: he preserves us in being; herein is love: he feeds us, clothes us, and gives us sleep; herein is love. But all these instances of his love, and many more than these, when com-

pared with his giving his Son to the death for us, are but as so many twinkling tapers set up before the sun in his meridian splendour: and therefore the inspired apostle, utterly overwhelmed with this instance of his love, cries out, as if there were none other, "Herein is love," love without precedent, love without parallel. This instance of love stands single and unexampled in all the annals of time, and will stand so through eternity.

Here then is a threefold cord to bind us unto the altar, creation, preservation, and redemption. Reason, justice, equity, interest, gratitude, plead and demand the chief room in our affections to God in Christ. And reflecting on these things, we should say with the martyr, "None but Christ, none but Christ." But,

2dly, He demands our love. Prov. xxiii. 26, "My son, give me thine heart." God says of the heart, as Joseph did to his brethren concerning Benjamin, "Ye shall not see my face without it." Nor is this a counsel or advice which we may take or refuse, as we think proper; but it is a peremptory command which we must obey, under the pain of God's eternal displeasure. "My son, give me thine heart." The son may make entreaties to his father, but it is the privilege of a father to lay commands upon his son. Yet the phrase, my son, imports love as well as authority: and how inexcusable shall we be, if we refuse to obey God's commands, which are so much for our advantage?

Nay, not only is the love of God commanded, but if we will take Christ's testimony, it is the first and great commandment of the law, Matt. xxii. 38. It is first in dignity, because it commands us things concerning God. It is the first in the order of nature, because the love of our neighbour flows from the love of God, as the streams from the fountain, or the effect from the cause. It is the great commandment in respect of its precedence to all the rest. It is great, because the understanding and practice of it is of the greatest importance to us, as it determines our state before God. It is the great commandment, as all the rest are included in it. He who truly loves God, must of

necessity be a conscientious observer of the duties belonging to both tables of the law. It is the great commandment, because it is the end of all the commandments, yea, of the whole revelation which God has made of himself unto mankind; I say, the end and design of it all, is to implant in our hearts a prevailing principle of love to God. Hence the apostle says, 1 Tim. i. 5, "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject.

From the account you have heard of the love of God, two things may be inferred.

1st, That it does not consist in such enthusiastic heats, raptures and ecstasies as some have boasted of. There may be true and solid love to God in the hearts of those who are strangers to these motions; and they may feel these raptures and transports, whose hearts were never yet melted with a sense of the love of God. The stony ground hearers anon with joy receive the word, Matt. xiii. 20. yet it is a sorry account we have of one of these hearers, in the very next verse; "Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." That true lovers of God have at times transports of joy, is what I nothing doubt; but then I would by no means make these infallible criterions or evidences of the love of God; for then we would condemn numbers of the generation of the righteous, and we would lay soft pillows under the heads of many hypocrites.

2dly, Neither is it consistent with a cold stoical unconcernedness about God and the things of God. Some have been so much prejudiced at pretended raptures and ecstasies in the love of God, that they have turned it out of the affections altogether, and placed it in the understanding, establishing the love of God absolutely upon the principles of reason. The text strikes against this extreme, when it calls us to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Secondly, Methinks the doctrine of the love of God may be improved for our conviction and humiliation before the Lord. The old complaint may too justly be resumed; "because iniquity does abound, the love of many waxeth cold," Matt. xxiv. 12. Many never had the love of God, and many who once seemed to have had it, are fallen from it. To convince you, how little of the love of God is among us, consider,

1st, The little love and regard that the most have to the ordinances and institutions of the gospel, the word, sacraments, and prayer. How many can let the Bible lie by them from one Sabbath to another, without ever looking on it: public ordinances are a burden to them; they say of the Sabbath, what a weariness is it, and when will it be over, that we may buy and sell and get gain? how many seldom or never bow a knee to God in prayer, which is one great means of keeping up an intercourse with heaven! praying hypocrites there may be; but, sure I am, prayerless saints there cannot be. You may as well suppose a living man without breath, as a lover of God without prayer. It is the very first work of the new creature, as we see in Paul, "Behold he prayeth," Acts ix. 11.

2dly, The prevalence of the love of the world. This is the sin of the professors of the age wherein we live, and there is no convincing them of it: they seem to say of it, as Lot said to Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" people, with all freedom, set heart and soul upon the world, and pursue the business of it, as if it were their chief end. Well, where the love of the world is in a person, or in a place, there the love of God is not; for "we cannot serve God and mammon; and if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John ii. 15.

3dly, The selfishness of the most part, and the little regard had to their neighbour's welfare, speaks them strangers to the love of God. We seem to be fallen into the last times, times of great apostasy, in which men shall be lovers of themselves, making themselves as it were the centre, and all things else the circumference.

Our times are exactly such as the prophet describes, Jer. ix. 4, 5, "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth:" and in the 8th verse, "One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in heart he layeth wait." Where I do not see the effect, I cannot acknowledge the cause. The love of our neighbour, is the certain effect of the love of God; and therefore, where that effect is wanting, I must say, the love of God is not in that place, nor among that people.

4thly, The general hatred and contempt that tender serious Christians meet with, speaks how little of the love of God is among us: "for he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten." He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. One of a tender conscience, who scruples at any thing which is sinful, is like a speckled bird in the world, and is the object of its malice, scorn, and reproach. Such an one is called a hypocrite, a precise affected person, unfit for human society. They say the panther has such an antipathy at man, that it will tear the very picture of a man. So wicked men show their hatred and contempt of God, by maltreating of the saints, who are images and representations of him.

Thirdly, This doctrine may be improven by way of trial and examination. If Jesus Christ should put the question to us, that of old he put to Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" some, who never felt this love in their hearts, would be bold to answer in the affirmative, and would seem to take it amiss, that their love should be called in question. What, would they say, not love God! God forbid we should not love him: and yet the scripture marks of the love of God are not to be discerned about them: yea, the tract and tenor of their life is like a banner displayed against God and his Christ. But others there are, who, notwithstanding that they truly love God, are so doubtful and diffident of themselves, that they would not know

what to answer. Now to cut off the false pretences of hypocrites, and to satisfy real Christians, perplexed with doubts and fears in this point, I shall, from the scripture, lay down some marks of the love of God, by which we may try and examine ourselves.

1st, The first mark of the love of God shall be hatred of sin in all its kinds, degrees, and appearances, Psal. xcvi. 10, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Rom. xii. 9, "Let love be without dissimulation." What is the proper evidence thereof? it follows, "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." Say then, you who pretend to the love of God, how stand you affected to God's utter enemy, sin? whether is sin the desire and delight of your souls, or is it the grief and burden of your souls? They who truly love God hate sin above all things; and chiefly, because it is contrary to the holy nature and will of God: nor is it some one or more sins that they hate; but, as David says, they hate and abhor every false way: for if we reserve but one sin, and let that be but a little one comparatively, yet it will make such a leak in the ship of the soul, as will infallibly sink it, if it is not stopped. Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel, yet one remained, and therefore Samuel says to him, "are here all thy children?" 1 Sam. xvi. 2. So if you pretend to love God, he says to you, are here all your lusts? is there any thing hid with you in your tent? is there any sweet morsel which you will roll under your tongue? if there be the least reserve, your heart is not mine. Paul was a great lover of Christ, and how he stood affected to sin, let his heavy groan which yet sounds in the ears of the Christian church bear witness; "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Rom. vii. 24.

2dly, Keeping his commandments. Christ himself puts the matter upon this footing, John xiv. 15. And the disciple who lay in his bosom, says, "And this is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments," 1 John v. 3. That is to say, this is the proper evidence, mark and test of the love of God, that we keep his commandments. But alas!

who upon earth perfectly keeps the commandments of God? "There is not a just man upon earth that doth good and sinneth not." How do you explain this mark? *Ans.* Let the tender Christian know that there is a twofold perfection: 1st, A legal perfection, which consists in a sinless conformity to the whole law of God: and thus only the saints and angels in heaven are made perfect. But 2dly, There is an evangelical perfection competent to saints in this life, which consists in an unfeigned respect to all the commandments of God, and a sincere endeavour after universal obedience, Psal. cxix. 6. Say then, how stand you affected to God's holy law: whether do you look on it as an iron chain about your leg, fettering you, or do you esteem it as a golden chain about your neck adorning you?

The hypocrite's report of the law, at least of some part of it, is as in John: but the lovers of God make the same report of his law that Paul does, Rom. vii. 12, "The law is holy, and just, and good." The ten commandments are like a ten-stringed instrument, you must touch on every string, observe every command, otherwise you will never make sweet melody. One says, a good Christian is like a pair of compasses, one foot of the compass stands upon the centre, the other goes round the circle. So a Christian, by faith and love, stands on God the centre, and by obedience, goes round the circle of God's commandments. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," says Christ, John xiv. 21. Many have the commandments in their heads, in their memories, and in their mouths; but there is not one tittle of them in their hearts, or in their lives. If you have them not in word only, but also in walk and conversation, then are you lovers of God.

3dly, Mortification to the world. 1 John ii. 15, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." God and the world are two such contrary masters, that we cannot serve them both: besides, they are two such capacious objects, that any one of them will take up the heart. If the world has got your heart, it will make it like the inn at Bethlehem; there will be no room for

Christ there: and if Christ has got the heart, then the world must go to the stable and the manger.

In fine, my brethren, the love of God, and the love of the world, are like two buckets in a well, as the one goes up, the other must go down. Meantime, this mark is not to be understood, as if all care and concern about the world were to be laid aside; for this is contrary to other parts of holy scripture, which commands us to be diligent in our particular callings, and to provide things honest: but you must pursue these things, always in a due subordination to the chief end of man. You may possess the things of the world, but let not them possess you. You must keep God in your hearts, and the world in your hands, and but loosely too, that if God take it from you, you may let go your hold, and not have it wrung and torn from you.

4thly, Love to all the saints. 1 John iv. 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God." 1 John v. 1, "And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten." People may love souls accidentally, that is to say, from considerations quite extrinsic and foreign to their saintship; but if you love God, you will love saints as such, be they otherwise what they will. You will love them because you discern the image of God in them, though they are not of your opinion in every thing, nor yet of your communion. Though they be poor and despised in the world, weak in their intellect, and peevish in their tempers; I say, notwithstanding these things, you will love them, and associate with them as members of the same mystical body.

5thly, Doing good to others for Christ's sake, especially to the household of faith. 1 John iii. 17, "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" If you love God, you will love mankind for God's sake, as they were made after his image; and you will love the saints for Christ's sake, as they are part of his body. Hence you will be charitably

disposed to those that are in need, and supply them according to your ability, and as you have opportunity; and more especially if they be saints. Christ professeth himself still to be naked, hungry, sick, and in prison, and to stand in need of our visits and supplies. If thou hadst a whole wardrobe of costly apparel, Christ hath more nakedness than all that can cover; if whole barns full of corn, Christ hath more empty bowels that all these can fill. Take heed, then, of an hard unrelenting heart towards them that are in misery, and of a narrow penurious hand; both are inconsistent with the love of God.

OBJECTION. But some will say, I am much under the power of slavish fears, and the scripture says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear," 1 John iv. 18. And this darkens all my evidences. *Ans.* You must distinguish betwixt fear in the love of God, and fear in the lovers of God. The apostle says, "there is no fear in love," but not, that there is no fear in the lovers of God. So I say, there is no unbelief in faith; but if I should say there is no unbelief in believers, they would jointly give me the lie. Again, the apostle says, "Perfect love casteth out fear:" but whose love is perfect in this world? No doubt, the more that any is perfected in love, there will be so much the less of slavish fear: but they may be both together in the same soul. If therefore these fears are your burden, and you desire and endeavour to cast them out, then the love of God is in you of a truth, though not to such a degree as it is in some others. Those fears argue the weakness of love, not the want of it. God made the ant as well as the elephant, the worm as well as the eagle. Cesar's image is upon a silver penny, as well as on the broadest piece of gold: therefore be not too much discouraged.

Fourthly, This doctrine may be improved by way of exhortation, and that in the words of the text. "Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

1st, For motives, consider, It is God who planted the

affection of love in your hearts, therefore hath he a most just title unto your love; and you are guilty of the most horrid ingratitude if you deny it unto him. Who plants a vineyard, and looks not to drink of the wine thereof? God calls our corn and wine his; and much more may he claim our love and joy as his. Should a valuable friend give you notice he was coming to visit you, and send you before hand a vessel of rich wine, would you grudge to broach it for his entertainment when he came? but would it not be monstrous, if with this gift of your valuable friend, you should entertain his declared enemy, and have nothing reserved for him when he came? It is just so here: God your best friend, has implanted the affection of love in you, which is like a rich vessel for his entertainment when he comes; but behold this vessel is broached for Satan and the world, the declared enemies of God: and when God himself comes, you have nothing for him but the stale dregs and sediments which his enemies have left. Be astonished at this, O ye heavens!

2dly, The love of God is the first and great commandment, the end of the law, and the fulfilling of the law; therefore, without it no other duties will be acceptable unto God. The call and commandment from heaven is, "My son, give me thine heart." If you should give all your time to religious duties, all your substance to feed the poor, yea, if you should give your body to be burned, and have not charity, that is to say, the love of God, it will profit you nothing, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. Faith is the king among the graces, and love is the queen that sits at his right hand.

3dly, Love is one of the graces which passes over unto eternity, and shall be exercised there, when faith shall be turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment. Therefore, says the apostle, "Charity never faileth," 1 Cor. xiii. 8. and last verse, "And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Will you not then begin that on earth, which is to be carried on through eternity in heaven?

4thly, If you love God, all things shall work together for your good, Rom. viii. 28. Prosperity or adversity, sickness or health, poverty or riches, death or life, all things shall work together for your good, if you are lovers of God. On the contrary, if you are haters of God, all things shall work for your ruin; your prosperity shall destroy; your table shall be a snare to you; your basket and store shall be cursed; Christ himself shall be a stumbling block to you, and the word of the gospel shall be the savour of death unto death unto your souls.

5thly, Consider the great things which God has prepared for them that love him, 1 Cor. ii. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Heaven, with all its joys, is prepared for the lovers of God, even as hell, with all its torments, is prepared for his enemies. The white robes, the palms, and the crown of glory, are prepared for them that love him.

Lastly, Consider what a heavy curse is denounced against those who love him not, 1 Cor. xvi. 22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." The word "Maranatha" is a compound of two words, which signify, "the Lord cometh:" and so the meaning is, that obstinate enemies of Jesus Christ shall be cursed from henceforth, even unto the coming of the Lord to judge the world at the last day.

I shall now conclude with giving some short directions how to obtain the love of God.

(1.) Be deeply sensible of your enmity against God, and bewail it before him, Rom. viii. 7. (2.) Flee to Jesus Christ by faith for the removal of this enmity, and securing your peace and friendship with God: for he is our peace. (3.) Cry to God earnestly, that he would implant in your hearts, by his holy Spirit, a principle of love to God: "For he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (4.) Make much use of the word and ordinances; in them the beauty, glory and excellency of Jesus Christ are let

forth into the soul. As kings and princes send their pictures to those whom they espouse; so God has, in his word and ordinances, presented you with an image and representation of himself, that he may engage your hearts thereby. (5.) Meditate much on the love of God and of Christ. (6.) Watch carefully against the prevalence of earthly affections. (7.) Live much in the view of the unseen world, and learn to die daily.