

## SERMON VI.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM COOPER, A. M.

HOW A CHILD OF GOD IS TO KEEP HIMSELF IN THE LOVE OF GOD.

*Keep yourselves in the love of God.\*—Jude 21.*

THIS is the scripture upon which we ground this solemn case and question; and a weighty one it is to every soul that pretends to the love of God and the happy privileges of it. Now the sum of this short epistle, which is but one chapter, is this; I say, the design of the Spirit of God by the apostle is in two things:—

1. To confirm true believers in the faith of Christ.

2. To caution them against the enemies of it. These enemies are described in four things:—

(1.) *By their qualities*: they “turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denied the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Verse 4.) Such were the Carpocratians and Gnostics: this they did both in doctrine and manners.

(2.) *In their entrance into the church*: Παρεισδυσαν, [They “crept in unawares,”] subtilely and secretly; as foxes into the fold, or like wolves in sheep’s clothing,—the proper mark of false teachers.

(3.) *By their end*: which is “condemnation,” whereunto they are appointed. (Verse 4.)

(4.) *By their parallel of the evil angels, the old world, Sodom and Gomorrha*: (verses 6, 7:) such were foretold by Enoch and the apostles. (Verses 14—19.)

Of these the apostle Jude warns the saints, and withal shows how they should quit themselves, principally in two things:—

1. *As to themselves.*

2. *As to others.*

1. The first consists in four things:—

(1.) “Building up” ourselves in the “holy faith.”

(2.) “Praying in the Holy Ghost.” (Verse 20.)

(3.) Keeping of ourselves “in the love of God.”

(4.) “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Verse 21.)

2. The second,—*what they must do to others.*

(1.) They must put “a difference” between them that are fallen off, and them that are falling, as being of different complexions; “having compassion of some” with the spirit of meekness; others

\* The Syriac hath it thus: “Let us keep ourselves in the love of God.” But the Greek, Arabic, and Ethiopic have it as we read it.

treating with some quickness, "pulling them out of the fire." (Verses 22, 23.)

(2.) They must hate the appearance of evil: "Even the garment spotted by the flesh."

(3.) Pray for them, that God would "keep them from falling." (Verses 20, 24.) For the grace of Christ,—by which we alone stand, without which neither they nor we can do any thing,—he both can and will do it faithfully.

(4.) Praise the Lord, who hath made such provision for our preservation and salvation. (Verses 24, 25.)

Now that which I shall confine myself to, is in verse 21, the first clause: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." And then the case and question is this:—

*What we must do to keep ourselves in the love of God:*—A solemn and weighty question, and wherein every soul of us is nearly concerned.

There are three things that require some explication.

QUESTION I. "What is meant by 'yourselves?'"

ANSWER. Every one, himself; and every one, each other, so far as he can.

QUESTION II. "What is meant by the action which each is to see put forth?"

ANSWER. *Τηρησατε*, "to keep, to observe, to preserve," firmly, safely, constantly. *Τετηρηκα*, "I have kept the faith." (2 Tim. iv. 7.) Thus we "keep," and thus God "keeps" us, James i. 27; 1 John iii. 22; Rev. xii. 17; John xvii. 11, 15: in all which places the word is the same in the text, "to keep fast and safe and faithfully," with all care and diligence and conscience; as we would keep a thing for our life: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. iv. 23.)

#### OBSERVATION.

From all which, thus explained, ariseth this proposition:—

*It is the duty of every child of God to keep themselves in the love of God.*

This proposition is grounded upon a threefold supposition:—

1. That some men are in the love of God, really and eternally.
2. That this love, wherewith God loveth his chosen, is a special love, a peculiar and distinguishing love. (Rom. v. 8, 11—13.)
3. That it is a duty, as well as a privilege, to keep ourselves in the love of God,—our activity, as well as God's act: which will be hereafter more explained.

Before we come to the main question, we will answer this question: *How love can be said to be in God.* For love is a passion in the creature; and passions are imperfections, which are contrary to God's perfection.

ANSWER. It is true, nothing of imperfection is in God; but love is in God as a perfection: because love is in God in the abstract,

that is, essentially; for abstracts speak essences: "God is love." (1 John iv. 8.)

The love of God is either *natural* or *voluntary*; thus divines distinguish, and that well.

1. The *natural* love of God is that wherewith God loves himself; that is, the reciprocal love whereby the three Persons love each other. (Matt. iii. 17; John iii. 35; v. 20; xvii. 24.) This essential, natural love of God is therefore necessary; God cannot but love himself.

2. The love of God is *voluntary*: thus he loves his creatures with a general love.

(1.) Because he made them, and made them good, (Gen. i. 31,) therefore he preserves them: for though sin be really evil, and none of God's making, but contrary to God, and hated of God; yet God loves the creatures as his creatures, although sinful, with a *general* love. (Matt. v. 44, 45.)

(2.) He loves some creatures with a *special* love; and by this he loves Jesus Christ as Mediator.

(i.) This love of God to *Christ as Mediator* is the foundation of God's love to his elect. (John iii. 35; Eph. i. 6; 1 John iv. 9; Rom. viii. 39.)

(ii.) By a special love God loves his *elect*: (John xiii. 1:) of this love it is said that it is inseparable. Now this is the peculiar love which God bears to some above others; not because they were more lovely than others, nor because God foresaw they would believe and love him; but because God loved them first antecedently to all those things; (Eph. i. 3—5;) and because he loved them, therefore Christ shall come and die, and therefore they shall believe in him and love him. (Deut. vii. 6—8.) The sum is this: our love to God is the effect, and not the cause, of God's love to us; yea, Christ himself as Mediator is the effect of God's eternal love. (Eph. ii. 3—10.) This is primitive doctrine: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John vi. 37, 44.) "He first loved us." (1 John iv. 19.) "I was found of them that sought me not." (Rom. x. 20.) "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners and enemies, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8, 10.) Upon which I would have old and new Donatists, who make God to love all alike in order to their salvation, and that there is no special grace,—let them read St. Augustine, tom. ix. *Tract.* cii. on John; tom. vii. *Liber contra Donatistas post Collat. Carthag.*, p. 403, also p. 402; likewise in *Breviculus Collat. cum Donatistis*, p. 387, *Collat. tertii diei*; *item*, tom. ix. *Tract.* lxxxvii. on John; *item*, tom. ii. *Epist.* 48, p. 118; and many more places. I have therefore named all these, because there is a sort of men risen up among us, corrupters and perverters of the word and ways of God, (Gal. i. 6, 7,) who raise up Donatism and Pelagianism from the death.

I know, some make this "love of God" in the text to be meant not of God's love to us at all, but of our love to God only. Con-

trary, I judge it spoken principally of God's love to us, not excluding our love to God, but comprehending it, as a great sign that God loves us, when we truly love God. According to this sense I shall proceed to speak to the present case ; which is a practical question :

## QUESTION.

“ How Christians shall do, to keep themselves in the love of God ? ”

ANSWER I. *In general : one whom God loves and favours, must do as the favourite of a prince useth to do, to keep himself in his prince's love and favour.*—He will study what the will of his prince is, and will do all that he can to please him. He will set himself wholly to promote his prince's interest and honour, and to gratify his desires ; yea, he will be infinitely shy of displeasing him. So will a child of God carry himself toward God, to keep himself in the favour and love of God. This is a great art to study,—to know what is the will and pleasure of God, (Eph. v. 17,) and to conform to it. The reason whereof is this :—

1. *Because the will of God is the sovereign will to all the world, therefore to thine and mine : there is no controlling of it. Who can say unto God, “ What doest thou ? ”* When any man's will comes in competition with God's will, thou knowest what thou hast to answer, and what thou hast to do. (Dan. iii. 16—18 ; Acts iv. 19.) But if man's commanding will be agreeable to God's revealed will, (which is the standard,) then we please and not displease God, in submitting to man, because subordinate things do not clash.

2. *Because the will of God is a holy will ; and we can never keep ourselves in the love of God, but by what is agreeable to his holiness : and that is, when we ourselves are holy ; (1 Peter i. 15, 16 ;)* because this is not only the will of God, but the image of God : “ Created after God.” (Eph. iv. 24.) Now God loves children that are most like him ; for likeness is the cause of love. Thus much in general.

ANSWER II. *But now more particularly :*

I. *He that will keep himself in the love of God, must he himself love God.*—For love deserveth love, and love begetteth love : God's love worketh thus toward us, and therefore our love must work toward God. Our love to God is but the reflection of the beams of God's love upon us. Love wisdom, and she shall love thee : “ I love them that love me.” (Prov. iv. 6 ; viii. 17.) And thus the beams are doubled, and the love of God to the soul, and the soul's love to God, increaseth the heat between both ; as it is with the sun shining on the earth.

II. *He that loves God loving him, is drawn to God by the attractive beams of divine love.\**—These are called the “ bands of love.” (Hosea xi. 4.) He that loves God loving him, is inflamed with God's love ; as it is in a burning-glass. This is a heavenly fire, kindled from heaven, and not easily quenched. (Canticles viii. 7.) He that loves God loving him, finds the strongest obligation upon him to love

\* *Magnes amoris amor.* “ Love is the loadstone of love.”—EDIT.

God, as "constrained" to it; (2 Cor. v. 14;) and God endears him to love God from his heart; for love ravisheth the heart beyond all things in the world. The Lord and his spouse "ravish" one another. (Canticles iv. 9.)

III. *He that will keep himself in the love of God, must mind and meditate on four attributes and properties of God's love, which will have great influence upon his heart and love.*

1. On the *eternity* of God's love to him.—Which hath been ever of old, time out of mind. Yea, before all time he hath been "thine own friend and thy father's friend;" therefore forget him not. (Prov. xxvii. 10.) Because election, which is the effect of God's eternal love, is eternal; (Eph. i. 4;) and because he is love essentially; (1 John iv. 8;) therefore his love is eternal as himself.

2. On the *freeness* of God's love. (Hosea xiv. 4.)—All the arguments of his love are drawn out of his own breast; therefore this free love of God is called "grace," which is no grace unless it be gratuitous and free. "Not according to our works," saith the apostle, the great champion of free grace, which Bradwardin calls "the cause of God;" "but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (2 Tim. i. 9.) And again: "There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." (Rom. xi. 5, 6.) O, meditate on this! How should the consideration of this keep us in the love of God! Mark and mind this well: free grace and love sent Jesus Christ into the world, and all the train of spiritual blessings. (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9.)

(1.) The free love of God was the cause of *election*. (Rom. xi. 5.)

(2.) The free love of God is the cause of *our effectual vocation*. (Gal. i. 6, 15.)

(3.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of *our adoption*. (Eph. i. 5, 6.)

(4.) The free love and grace of God is the cause of *our justification*. (Rom. iii. 24.)

(5.) The free love and grace of God is the cause of *the pardon of sin*. (Rom. v. 20.)

(6.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of *true and thorough conversion*. (1 Cor. xv. 10.)

(7.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of *true faith*. (Acts xviii. 27.)

(8.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of *Christ's suffering for us*. (Heb. ii. 9.)

(9.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of that inestimable jewel and blessing, *the word of God*. (Acts xiv. 3.)

(10.) The free grace and love of God is the cause of *our salvation*. (Eph. ii. 5, 8.)

O, meditate and mind the infinite, free love of God in all the sweet streams of it, and dwell upon the meditation of it, and be ravished with it, and give the God of grace and love the glory of it for ever!

3. Mind the *immensity* of God's love.—This is so vast an ocean, that thou wilt find neither bounds nor bottom in it. Hear the apostle upon it: "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;" (Eph. iii. 17—19;) to know it to pass all knowledge.

The consideration of this alone hath so amazed some devout souls, that they have been in an ecstasy, above and beside themselves with it.

4. Mind and meditate on the *unchangeableness* of God's love.—This is grounded upon "two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie." (Heb. vi. 17, 18.) This, O, this gives sure anchor-hold and comfort to a true believer in a storm. (Verse 19.) This assurance God hath given his people of old: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer. xxxi. 3.) It is an inseparable love: (Rom. viii. 39:) it is a *final* love, but not a *finite* love; it is "to the end," and without end. (John xiii. 1.) It is invincible love: (Canticles viii. 6:) it is an unquenchable love. (Verse 7.)

OBJECTION. "If this be so, what need, then, of the apostle's exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God?"

ANSWER I. Because God's promises and believers' privileges do not exclude, but include, the use of means. For instance: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. i. 4.) In 2 Peter i. 4—10, he tells them, God hath given them "exceeding great and precious promises;" yet bids them to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure," by adding grace to grace. In Eph. ii. 8, he saith, We "are saved by grace through faith, which is the gift of God;" without works: and yet he saith, "We are created unto good works, that we should walk in them;" and this "God hath ordained." (Verses 9, 10.) In 1 Thess. v., after he had exhorted them to many duties, he adds this: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Mark our text, and compare it with the context after: when he bids us "keep ourselves in the love of God," he saith, God "is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." (Jude 24.)

ANSWER II. God, who prevents us with his grace, and works upon us and in us unto conversion and regeneration, hereby puts into us an active principle, and helps and recruits it continually by auxiliary grace. Our habits of grace cease acting, if God suspends the influence of grace: as we see in Peter's case; both upon the waters, when he began to sink, till the Lord gave him a hand; and [when he] went on denying his Master, till the Lord looked upon him, and melted him into tears. (Luke xxii. 61, 62.) God will ever have us beholden to him, and lean upon him: and we are made up of nothing else but dependency and frailty. (John xv. 4, 5.) Now this active principle is chiefly

faith and love: "Faith which worketh by love." (Gal. v. 6.) Faith gives us union to Christ, and maintains that union. Now as we are kept by faith, so we and our faith are kept *both* "by the power of God unto salvation." Our inheritance is kept in heaven for us, and we are kept in earth for it, till we possess it in heaven. (1 Peter i. 4, 5.) *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* \* We should be poorly and miserably kept, if the Lord were not our keeper. How did Adam keep his estate, and the angels theirs, and Esau his birth-right, and the prodigal his portion, when all was trusted in their own hands? One lost all for an apple, and another for a mess of dainty broth, and another for his carnal pleasures: but happy [are] believers, whose all is in better trustees' hands, even the hand of a faithful God! (1 Peter iv. 19.)

IV. *He that will keep himself in the love of God, must keep himself free from the love of the world.*—Because the love of this world is contrary to the love of God, and therefore inconsistent with it. (1 John ii. 15, 16.)

1. Because the love of the world and its trinity, or threefold lust, is a *dangerous heart-thief*.—It steals away the heart from God, as Absalom stole away the hearts of the people from David by his kisses and flatteries. (2 Sam. xv. 5, 6.) What the prophet speaks of wine and whoredom, is true of all other worldly things. (Hosea iv. 11.)

2. The love of the world *makes God jealous, because worldlings make an idol of it*.—And it is the worst idolatry, being that of the first commandment. So is covetousness and mammon; when the heart is inordinate upon creatures,—silver, gold, relations; that is our treasure. (Matt. vi. 24; Luke xii. 34; Col. iii. 5.)

Therefore saith the Lord, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness:" (Luke xii. 15:) a double caution; all little enough. And of this nature is luxury, and epicurism also, drunkenness, the love of pleasure more than God; belly-gods. *Ὁν ὁ Θεός ἡ κοιλία* ["Whose God is their belly"]. (Phil. iii. 18—20.)

Nay, thus it is likewise in the inordinate love of children; which is soon done; and they become idols, and God in his jealousy breaks them, or breaks us for them, as he did old Eli, honouring his sons above God. (1 Sam. ii. 29; iii. 18.) And, "He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," saith Christ. (Matt. x. 37.)

3. Because the love of the world is a *choke-pear to all that is truly good*.—As is clear in the thorny ground. (Matt. xiii. 7, 22.) Experience teacheth this universally, and the nature of the things, being contrary one to the other, and killing one of another: † one being spiritual and heavenly; the other, carnal, sensual, and destructive: yea, both are destroyers of each other. Do not we see what mortal enemies worldly men are to divine things? The word saith, "The world lieth in wickedness;" the devil is the prince of the wicked

\* "But who shall keep the keepers themselves?"—EDIT. † Like the torment of Mezentius,—putting the living to the dead, which corrupts and kills the living. Rom. vii. 24: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

world, and "ruleth in the children of disobedience;" it feeds the flesh, and nourisheth the carnal part, and "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. viii. 7.) Yea, it is a deadly thing to the soul; and such deadly things are these two lovers, that is, these two lusts, that they hunt for the life of each other, fighting against each other to the death; and the quarrel always ends in the death of one or the other: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. viii. 13.) See the scriptures in the margin. (Rom. vi. 6; Gal. v. 17, 24; vi. 14; ii. 20.)

4. The love of the world *hath sorcery and witchcraft in it*.—When once men drink of the world's cup, they are intoxicated. We read of Simon Magus, how he "bewitched the people." (Acts viii. 9.) We read of Jezebel's witchcrafts, (2 Kings ix. 22,) and Babylon's sorceries and witchcrafts; (Nahum iii. 4; Rev. xvii. 2, 4;) and it is joined with "the works of the flesh," sixteen in number. (Gal. v. 17—21; Rev. xxii. 15.) *Maxima totius orbis venefica*: "The greatest witch in the world" is the world. Her honours are bewitching honours; her delights and pleasures are bewitching; her riches and profits are bewitching.\* How, then, is the love of the world consistent with God's love? Therefore, for the love of God, love not the world.

5. The love of the world *makes men apostates from Christ*.—So it made Demas; (2 Tim. iv. 10;) and so it hath made thousands more, and thee among the rest, if thou lookest not well to thyself.

6. Because the love of the world *makes men take up their heaven on this side heaven*. (Psalm xvii. 14.)—Of those men the apostle could not speak without weeping. (Phil. iii. 18—20.) This is like the prodigal, that preferred a tavern and a brothel-house before his father's house. (Luke xv. 13.)

V. *He that will love God, and keep himself in the love of God, must not be a self-lover*.—There is no greater enemy to the love of God than to love ourselves. Mark the place,—2 Tim. iii. 2; for it is a remarkable place. He tells you of "perilous times" a-coming, and there gives nineteen marks of such men as make the times perilous: of all which "lovers of themselves" lead the van; for where once this principle prevails, it opens a flood-gate to all sin, and shuts the door upon all holy motions. If self be beloved, admired, and idolized, it is the worst idol in the world; this is an idol in a secret place, continually adored; this is Dagon, set above the ark, and a man above God, and provokes to jealousy; this perverts the course of nature and God's order, who is one God, and uppermost, and only to be adored. And men set up themselves in God's throne, and un-god him by deifying themselves; and for one God, they set up millions of gods,—as many gods as creatures. This is man's misery by losing the integrity wherein God made him, and seeking out many inventions. And when the Lord Christ came into the world, he bespeaks our love, and woos us for it, and commands self-denial as the first lesson to be

\* *Falsus et fallax est mundus, exterius aureus, interius luteus*.—N. N. "The world is false and deceitful; outwardly golden, but muddy within."—EDIT.



learned in his school, (Matt. xvi. 24, 25 ; x. 37, 38,) whereby the great stumbling-block to God's love is taken away.

VI. *If ye would keep yourselves in the love of God, be very shy of sin, both in the risings of it, and as to the temptations to it.*—For the love of God and the love of sin are more contrary to each other than heaven and hell ; because they are morally contrary.

1. *Sin is "enmity against God" in the abstract.* (Rom. viii. 7.)

2. *Sin is hateful to God.*—Therefore inconsistent with the love of God : "These six things doth the Lord hate : yea, seven, which his soul hateth." (Prov. vi. 16.) Therefore, "ye that love the Lord, hate evil." (Psalm xcvi. 10.) These are two masters whom we cannot hate and love both. (Matt. vi. 24.)

3. *Sin separates from God.*—Therefore we cannot keep ourselves in the love of sin, and in the love of God. Sin makes us to depart from God, and God to depart from us. Therefore conversion reconciles God to us, because it mortifies sin in us, by virtue of Christ's death for us.

VII. *He that will keep himself in the love of God, must clear-up his interest and union to Jesus Christ.*

1. Because Jesus Christ was sent us as the greatest instance and the greatest token of God's love in the world. (1 John iv. 9.)

2. Because the Lord Jesus purchased the love of God to us, when we were the greatest enemies to each other. (Rom. v. 8—10.)

3. Because Jesus Christ is the soul's love. (Canticles iii. 1.)

4. Because Jesus Christ is "all loves." (Canticles v. 16.)

5. Because this was the end of Christ's coming into the world,—to save us from our sins, the sole cause of God's hatred to sinners. (Matt. i. 21.)

6. Because the Father loveth whom Christ loveth, and he loveth them that love Christ. (John xvi. 27.)

7. Because our interest in Christ puts a soul out of all danger. (Rom. viii. 1 ; v. 1 ; vii. 24, 25.)

8. Because the Lord Jesus makes the Father's love to him the measure of his love to us : "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you : continue in my love : " (John xv. 9 :) that is, "By this ye keep in God's love."

9. Because the Lord Jesus teacheth us the way how to keep in his love. (John xv. 10.)

Consider all this, and how cogently they prove this head,—of clearing up our interest and union unto Christ, to keep ourselves in the love of God.

VIII. *An eighth way of keeping ourselves in the love of God, is by keeping God's commandments.*—I do not mean as to a covenant of works, but upon a gospel-account : "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John xv. 10, 14.) O, mind that ! Again, mark this : "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me : and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father,

and I will love him, and we will make our abode with him." (John xiv. 21, 23.) This "love is the fulfilling of the" whole "law," and the gospel too. There be many that will compliment a love to God, but will do nothing for him. The greatness of Abraham's love to God, and of David's love, and of Peter's love, and of Mary's love, of Paul's love, and of the martyrs' love, was in doing and in dying for him. And is not the greatness of God's love and of Christ's love to us in doing and suffering? (John xv. 13.) We read of "labour of love;" because true love is laborious, as it was in Jacob's love for Rachel.

There is nothing God hates more than pretending to love; therefore the Lord hates hypocrites: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. vii. 21.) As God saith: "This people have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always!" (Deut. v. 28, 29;) so I say of professors and great pretenders, that show much kindness with their mouth, but their heart is not right with God: "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would make conscience to do the will of God!" If the Lord loved the young man that was in a fair way of keeping the commandments of God, and was not perfect and thorough-paced; how much more will he have a love for them that have a "respect to all the commandments" of God! (Psalm cxix. 6.)

IX. *The way to keep ourselves in the love of God, is to walk closely with God in ways of strict holiness.*—This is a commendation and character upon record of God's chiefest favourites. Thus it was with Abraham; (Gen. xvii. 1;) thus it was with Enoch; (Gen. v. 22;) thus it was with Noah; (Gen. vi. 9;) thus it was with Caleb; (Num. xiv. 24;) and thus David. (Psalm lxxiii. 28.) Now we shall see how such an one is to God, who desires to keep in the love of God: "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 John iv. 16.) O sweet dwelling!

You shall find that the holiest persons were always the highest favourites of God. Witness those before-mentioned, and these following instances:—

**JOB:** how did God bless him, and praise him, and try him, and reward him for his eminent holiness! (Job i. 1; ii. 3.)

**ZACHARIAS** and **ELISABETH:** how singularly did they shine in holiness and in the favour of God; to whom God gave a son in their old age,—the harbinger of Christ! (Luke i. 6, 7.)

**MARY,** the mother of Christ: how was she for her holiness pronounced *κεχαριτωμενη*, "highly favoured!" (Luke i. 28.)

And **SIMEON,** (Luke ii. 25—35,) and **ANNA.** (Verses 36—38.)

Holiness and purity bring us to 'the sight of God, which is called "beatifical;" which is the soul's highest happiness, and ultimate end, (Matt. v. 8; Psalm xxiv. 3, 4; Heb. xii. 14,) and therefore is pronounced "blessed." (Psalm cxix. 1, 2.)

X. *They keep themselves in the love of God, who do not waver or*

*abate their profession and practice of godliness in evil times, and do not balk the ways of God under severe providences and sharp trials.*—This was eminent in all Christ's worthies :—

Thus DAVID: Psalm xliv. 17—22 : mind that place : though they were "sore broken," and smitten into "the place of dragons, and covered as with the shadow of death ; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither declined from thy way," &c.

Thus JOB: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job xiii. 15.)

Thus HABAkkUK: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom ; the vine, olive, and fields shall fail" of their fruit ; and not any flocks or herds [be] left ; "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength." (Hab. iii. 17—19.)

And thus all the champions of God : let PAUL be one instance more. (Rom. viii. 35—39.)

REASON 1. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for" the day of "adversity." (Prov. xvii. 17.)

2. They know, the Lord's chastenings are in love. (Prov. iii. 11, 12 ; Heb. xii. 6 ; Rev. iii. 19.)

3. They know that all the Lord's severities are for good, many ways :—to drive them to ordinances and duties, to sweeten them, and to teach them to profit by them, to know more of the will of God by them ; and to give us a better relish of the word by the rod ; (Psalm cxix. 67, 71, 72 ;) as shepherds let loose their dogs to hunt the straggling sheep into their bounds ; as parents use bugbears to make their children run into their arms,—all in love, and to keep them in it by keeping them from excursions.

XI. *Another means to keep ourselves in the love of God, is to keep in our hearts a quick sense of the pardon of sin ; of the wonderful love of the Lord to a poor sinful soul, to pardon great and many sins.*—This puts such an obligation upon a sinner, that he cannot choose but express his great love to the Lord for it. See a famous instance of this in Mary Magdalene, who, having received this great mercy from the Lord, came where he was in Simon the Pharisee's house, kneeled down at her dear Saviour's feet, and, instead of water, her eyes were ewers, and she wept tears upon the feet of Christ, and washed his feet with them ; so abundant were they ! And then, instead of a towel, she wiped his washen feet with the hair of her head ; and not only so, but kissed his feet : \* (Luke vii. 38 :) all which, though the envious Pharisee blamed, yet the Lord Jesus allowed and highly praised, with tart reflection upon the proud Pharisee, who omitted those civilities which that humble, loving convert performed.† Moreover, the Lord, that knew her heart, testifies for her, she did it all in much love to him, for the forgiveness

\* Φιλημα απο του φιλειν. "The word used in the original for 'kiss' is derived from a verb signifying 'to love.'"—EDIT. † Φιλημα μοι ουκ εδωκας ατη δε, αφ' ης εισηλθον, ου διελιπε καταφιλουσα μου τους ποδας ["Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet." (Luke vii. 45.)]

of her many sins : 'Οτι αγαπησε πολυ' ["For she loved much."] (Luke vii. 47.)

1. Because forgiveness of sin is an act of the greatest grace, condescension, and kindness of God to a poor soul ; because by the guilt of sin a soul is bound over to eternal death and wrath in hell, there to make satisfaction, which will be ever a-doing, and never done. Pardon of sin looseth the sinner from that by Christ's satisfaction for him.

2. Because every one thus pardoned is made truly sensible of the kindness of God to him in it, and by converting grace hath an "ingenuous and noble spirit" created in his heart, that will never suffer him to forget it, nor think he can ever sufficiently prize or express it : "Uphold me," וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה "with thy ingenuous," or "generous," "spirit." (Psalm li. 12.)

XII. *A further means to keep ourselves in the love of God, is not only to love the Lord, but to keep-up our love to him to the height.*—Such a love as the bride and bridegroom have to each other, which is brisk and highest then. "I remember," saith the Lord, "the love of thine espousals." (Jer. ii. 2.) And again : "I have somewhat against thee, because thou art fallen from thy first love. Repent, and do the first works." (Rev. ii. 4, 5.) The Lord commands our love toward him in the most intense degree of affection : "With all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," כָּל מְאֹדֶךָ *cum omni valde tuo*, "with all thy utmost power." (Deut. vi. 5 ; xi. 1, 13, 22 ; xix. 9.) "Cursed be the deceiver, which hath" this "male in his flock," this masculine love, and yet giveth God the lame and the lean. (Mal. i. 14.) The highest love of the soul is a present for the greatest King in the world : therefore labour to keep-up thy love to the height toward God. Thou canst never be excessive in thy love to God ; to the creature thou mayest, and commonly art. But, behold the perverseness of man in this affection ! We stint our love to God, where it should know no bounds nor measures ; and we are boundless in our love to creatures, which always ought to be bounded.

XIII. *If we will keep ourselves in the love of God, let us labour to grow in grace, and to carry-on the work of it in our souls to the highest perfection.*—This is grounded upon the verse immediately before the text ; namely : "Ye, beloved, building-up yourselves in your most holy faith ;" where the participle "building" agrees with the verb in the text : "Keep yourselves in the love of God ;" noting this growth in grace and knowledge to be an effectual means to keep ourselves in the love of God ; whether we understand this clause, "building-up yourselves in your most holy faith," to be understood of the doctrine of faith or the grace of faith, or of both ; for we cannot well sunder them, they being helps to each other ; according to that of Peter, who puts them both together,—to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ;" and this is a sovereign remedy against falling away. (2 Peter iii. 17, 18.) Now there is good reason why our growth in grace, and particularly in faith, is a principal means to keep ourselves in the love of God :—

1. Because "the power of God" goes with faith, to keep us firm "unto salvation:" (1 Peter i. 5:) *Εν δυναμει Θεου φρουρουμενοι* we are "kept" thereby as with a strong guard.

2. Because, by building-up ourselves in our most holy faith, we please God; without faith we cannot do that: and we gain upon his love; for we are in the way of God, and doing his will: "This is the will of God, even our sanctification." (1 Thess. iv. 3.) "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him." (John xiv. 21.) "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." (John xv. 9, 10.)

XIV. *A great means of keeping ourselves in the love of God is this, to "pray in the Holy Ghost."* (Verse 20, the verse before my text.)—Now we shall see how forcible and cogent this means is. Consider,

1. All good things come from God: (James i. 17:) prayer is the key of God's closet and treasury. We are mere beggars, and have nothing of our own, but are fain to beg our daily bread of God, who keeps us from hand to mouth: God will have it so, because he will have us know to whom we are beholden for all. Moreover, he loves to see our face, and hear our voice; and the oftener, the more welcome. And this he doeth as tender fathers use to do with their children, who know what they need, but will have them come to them for all, with bended knees for their father's blessing; nor shall they come in vain:—

(1.) For the Lord commands it, and approves it. (Matt. vi. 9.)

(2.) He hath annexed great promises to prayer:

(3.) Even the Holy Spirit. (Rom. viii. 15, 26, 27.)

(4.) And hath given us a Mediator to intercede and plead for us by office; and this is the great office of his high-priesthood. (Heb. ii. 17, 18; iv. 15, 16.) By all which we see, how seasonably the duty of prayer and the privilege of prayer is here annexed, to "keep ourselves in the love of God." (Jude 20.)

2. How can friends maintain their amity, without frequent converse? Abraham was called "the Friend of God;" (James ii. 23;) and ye see what power he had with God in prayer for wicked Sodom. God communicated his secrets to him, as one friend to another: and Abraham made intercession to Him, as favourites of princes for malefactors; so did he for Sodom; and ye know how far he prevailed. (Gen. xviii. 17—33.) For he was a righteous man; and such a man's "prayer availeth much." (James v. 16.) And what was Abraham's righteousness? Even "the righteousness of faith" by imputation; and this faith living and working. (Rom. iv.)

XV. *We keep ourselves in the love of God, when we declare a public spirit for the cause of God in his church against the enemies of it, by being zealous for his glory and valiant for his truth in our station.*—This is lively asserted in the song of Deborah and Barak; (Judges v. ;)

who, after she had praised some for their appearing, and others for not appearing in this cause dispraised; the Lord she praised above all for his presence with his people, and for that spirit of love he poured-out upon them, in these words: "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." (Verse 31.)

Now the reason why this public spirit in the cause of God is expressed by our love to God, is this:—because God is so much concerned in it,

1. As to his *honour*: to defend and deliver his people from his and their enemies, as the Midianites were.

2. As to his *power*: in reducing thirty thousand to three hundred, as in Gideon's case,—all "that lapped:" he, as a poor barley-cake, tumbled all the enemies down, and by a small company. (Judges vii.) And a woman, in Deborah's case, that is, by herself and Jael, (Judges iv. 21,) destroyed Jabin and Sisera's mighty host: to omit many other instances of public hearts, in this case signally owned by God, because they signally appeared for God. Thus Moses; (Exod. ii. 11—14;) this was their love. Thus saith Deborah: "My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the Lord. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death, in the high places of the field." And thus did Issachar: but Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, Dan, and Asher, are branded for their cowardice. (Judges v. 9, 15—18.) I say, all this, appearing in the defence of all that was dear to God and them, is called "love to God." Therefore we may in no wise exclude this noble public spirit in the cause of God and his people from the love of God; for there is no principle in the world like to the love of God, to animate and inflame the soul to do great things for God. This spirit was marvellous in David, whose very name, דָּוִד was from "love." Therefore it is the duty of every child of God to pray for the Spirit of God, who only sheds all divine love abroad in the heart, (Rom. v. 5,) which God inspires as he pleaseth. (John iii. 8.)

XVI. *A great means of keeping ourselves in the love of God is, to be sincere and sound in the worship of God.*—Mark this well; for herein lies the love, or hatred of God, as appears plainly in the second commandment: \* "That love me, and keep my commandments." † (Exod. xx. 6.) Therefore idols and idolaters are called our "lovers," Hosea ii. 5, 7; Jer. iii. 1: They "kissed the calves." (Hosea xiii. 2.) Therefore our hankering and embracing of a false worship provoke God to jealousy: therefore the Lord deals with superstition and idolatry in his people after the law of harlots and adulterers; the scrip-

\* *Deum odisse in sacris literis peculiariter illi dicuntur, qui falsos deos colunt.*—MAIMONIDES. "In holy writ they especially are said to hate God, who worship false gods."—EDIT. † *Illa præcipue quæ ad arcendas pravas superstitiones pertinent.*—GROTIUS. "Those commandments in particular which relate to the prohibition of wicked superstitions."—EDIT. *Hinc θεοσεβεις et כַּסִּיּוֹת פִּי דִּיעִי הֵנּוּ.* "Hence, in the scriptures, the pious are designated 'God-reverers' in the Greek, and 'well-doers' in the Hebrew."—EDIT.

ture is full of this language. (Ezek. xvi. 33, 36, 37; xxiii. 5.) There is no higher act of love in God, than to espouse a people to be his own, and to give them a rule of worship of his own institution, and to hold them to it, as he did Israel: "I remember the love of thine espousals." (Jer. ii. 2.) And when a people follows God, and serves God according to his own appointments, there are no higher acts of love toward Him in God's account. God is enamoured with such a people; he calls them his "Hephzibah" and his "Beulah." (Isai. lxii. 4.)

We see it, also, in the instance of good kings: how the Lord prized and praised them for this very thing,—for reforming and setting up the true worship of God: as David, Asa, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah. How the Lord prospered them, because their hearts were right and perfect with God in this thing. On the other side: how he hath branded and blasted all those that were false herein.\* For this was David, "a man after God's own heart,"—"fulfilling all his will;" (Acts xiii. 22;) which is chiefly meant in the point of God's worship. As for the wills of men in the worship of God, by their inventions, traditions, and commandments, he tells you he hates them, and they are abomination to him. (Mark vii. 7; Col. ii. 22; Matt. xv. 2, 3, 6.) And no wonder: for what intrencheth more upon the honour of God's wisdom and sovereignty, than this,—that he doth not know best how to appoint his own worship, but must be fain to be beholden to man for his devices and dictates in the case? This, though it seems very gay, is whorish and poisonous; this golden dress and cup is intoxicating. (Rev. xvii. 4, 5.)

XVII. *A great means of keeping in the love of God, is keeping up the communion of saints in all the parts and duties of it.*—What this is, we shall see according to scripture. "The communion of saints" is our participation of all the good things of God in common; whereunto all the saints, and only they, have right; consisting in our union to God, as our chiefest Good. This is with God as a Father, with the Son, and Holy Spirit. (1 John i. 3; 2 Cor. xiii. 13, 14.)

1. We have communion with *the Father* as children; and all in the greatest love. (1 John iii. 1; Rom. viii. 16, 17.) This is procured by Christ, (1 John ii. 23,) only obtained by believing, (John i. 12,) and maintained by the Spirit; (Rom. viii. 14;) who walk not in darkness, but in light. (1 John i. 6, 7.)

2. We have communion with *Jesus Christ*, the Son of God; by which we are made partakers of him, of his nature, and of his grace, and of his glory. All which is done by faith, that uniting and marrying grace: and this works such conjugal love between Christ and his church, as makes them spiritually bone of each other's bone, and flesh of each other's flesh. (Eph. v. 25—33.) We maintain our

\* God in his highest acts of jealousy was enraged against his idolatrous people. (Psalm lxxviii. 59.) They kissed their idols, giving them all the tokens of love and homage. (1 Kings xix. 18; Job xxxi. 27.) They burned their children to them as the costliest sacrifice: as Abraham would [have burnt] his Isaac in love to God; but God only tried him by it.

communion with Christ not only by eating *with* him, but also by eating *of* him. (John vi. 53—57.) God the Father calls us into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is said to “dwell in our hearts by faith,” (Eph. iii. 17,) and by his Spirit also; for he that hath “not the Spirit of Christ, is none of his.” (Rom. viii. 9.) This our fellowship and communion with Christ is evidenced by our perseverance in grace firmly “unto the end.” (Heb. iii. 14.) This our fellowship with Jesus Christ is confirmed by the sacraments:—

(1.) He that is *baptized* into Christ hath “put on Christ.” (Gal. iii. 27.)

(2.) By the *supper*; which is therefore called “the communion,” because the saints gather together in that, as the highest act of their fellowship with the Lord and with one another: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. x. 16.) The children of God, “walking in the light, have thereby fellowship” with Christ, and “one with another.” (1 John i. 7.) As Christ is God and man in one person, so we have fellowship with him in *both natures*:—

(1.) In his *divine* nature. (2 Peter i. 4.)

(2.) In his *human* nature: partaking with him in the same flesh and blood. (Heb. ii. 14.)

*In the Spirit*: “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” (1 Cor. vi. 17; Rom. viii. 11.) “There is one body, and one Spirit.” (Eph. iv. 4.)

*In afflictions*: “That I may know the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” (Phil. iii. 10.)

We have communion with Christ *in glory*: “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. viii. 17, 18.) “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” (Phil. iii. 21.) So, John xvii. 21—24.)

*In all good things*: “wisdom, righteousness, redemption,” faith, repentance, regeneration, adoption, justification, “sanctification,” and spiritual liberty. (1 Cor. i. 30.) All these are benefits and high blessings, communicated from the Father, by the Spirit, through the purchase and merit of Jesus Christ. See that place,—2 Cor. v. 16, 17: it is very pregnant and apposite. (1.) He tells you, “We know Christ no more after the flesh:” because that dispensation is over; we are now under the dispensation of the Spirit. (2.) “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (3.) Our communion with Christ is not hereby lost, but advanced higher: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” “In Christ” still, and “a new creature” by Christ’s Spirit working in us all new things, and working out all old. (4.) All this is the work of God in us and for us, by the Son reconciling us, and the Spirit perfecting us in “the ministry of reconciliation.” (Verses 18, 19.) (5.) All this arose from love, (verse 14,) the root of the communion of saints with the blessed



Trinity; (6.) As ye have heard, founded in union, expressed in a communication of all good things by Christ, our Head and Husband; with reciprocation and returns of love on our part, in all the acts of it, by entire and sincere obedience; also in mutual interchanges of duties, respecting our fellow-members of the same body. This is so fully set forth by the apostle Paul, "according to the grace of God given unto" him, that I need say no more about it, but commend the reading of that whole chapter to you, 1 Cor. xii., from verse 4 to the end. I fear, this relation and fellowship is little minded, with the duties of it, by many, that yet think themselves in the body, and presume of the privileges of it. Mark these few things for your help:—

(1.) The differences of gifts and administrations, offices and services, in the body spiritual, as in the body natural. (Verses 4, 12.)

(2.) All these coming from "one Spirit," and one Head Jesus Christ, the Fountain-Head of all. (Verse 13.)

(3.) That all these gifts and graces are divided to every member as the Lord pleaseth, for the same use and end, "to profit withal;" without "schism," without a conceit of self-sufficiency and unconcernedness for others. (Verses 7, 11, 25.)

(4.) All this called "Christ," to show the near and blessed communion of saints. (Verse 12.)

XVIII. The last means I shall name to you is in the words immediately following my text, in the same verse: ["Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life:"] (Jude 21:) which, doubtless, the Holy Ghost points us to, as an effectual means to "keep ourselves in the love of God:"—

REASON 1. Because it is the highest act of God's love to us,—to bestow eternal life on us.

2. The Lord, that hath provided eternal life for us, will have us always walk in expectation of it. (Gen. xlix. 18; Titus ii. 13.)

3. We have no ground at all to expect eternal life from God, without keeping ourselves in the love of God. (Rom. viii. 23, compared with verse 39.)

4. We keep ourselves in God's love, by being found in such a state and in such a way as leads to life; which is chiefly faith and obedience.

5. Such as are found out of this way and state are not children, but strangers and enemies; therefore have no reason to expect an inheritance; they have no title nor right to it. Now a son that is heir-apparent by adoption in Christ to such an estate of eternal life in heaven,—he will not only be always in expectation of it, but will judge himself bound to study all the ways he can possibly do to please God, to keep in his love and favour; and withal fear and take heed of forfeiting the love of God:—

(1.) Because it is an act of mercy and free grace: it is not a debt, or any thing thou canst challenge; the Lord Jesus is sole purchaser. Text: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vi. 23.)

(2.) If we look for all as an act of mercy, it will keep the soul humble and thankful. Such a frame of soul the Lord loves and favours. (Micah vi. 8; James iv. 6; 1 Peter v. 5.)

(3.) The prospect of eternal life will keep us from being much enamoured with this life, which is vain and sinful and sorrowful and transient. (2 Cor. iv. 18; v. 1.)

(4.) The prospect of a better life will make us prepare for it, and lay hold on it: (2 Peter iii. 11—14; 1 Tim. vi. 12; Rev. xxi. 2; Phil. iii. 12—14;) by watchfulness, as the wise virgins; (Matt. xxv. 4, 10;) by constancy in our course and race; (1 Tim. vi. 19;) by casting away every clog. (Heb. xii. 1, 2.)

(5.) Because all creatures wait for this glory, and are in "earnest expectation" of it. (Rom. viii. 19.)

(6.) Because all saints have ever lived up to it: this is the haven of their rest; (Heb. iv. 1, 9;) here they cast anchor; (Heb. vi. 19, 20;) with this they comfort themselves; (1 Thess. iv. 18;) for this they groan.

Now let me propound a few incentives to blow and stir up the dying embers of divine love in our souls.

1. No man can love God truly, unless he *know God truly*.—"If any man love God, the same is known of him." (1 Cor. viii. 3.) Therefore examine what knowledge thou hast of God, especially what practical knowledge. It is clear, practical, gospel-knowledge,—to "know God" in Christ,—this is saving, and brings "life eternal." (John xvii. 3.) This is knowledge that transforms; (2 Cor. iii. 18;) this is a sanctifying knowledge; (Eph. iv. 21, 22;) this is a justifying knowledge, or the knowledge of faith. (Isai. liii. 11; Phil. iii. 8—10.) This light and knowledge comes into the soul by the illumination of the Spirit of God, turning our darkness into light, and is the teaching of God, and "the anointing" of God, "teaching all things." (John xiv. 26; 1 John ii. 20, 27.) This principally teacheth us these two things:—

(1.) The love of God in Christ to us.

(2.) The loveliness of Christ, to inflame our love to him, by his beauty and excellency. Now when we clearly see and duly consider this, our hearts are marvellously drawn out in love to the Lord: and without this knowledge of God we can never truly love him. O, pray for it, and attend, and improve the means of it! This is that which the apostle points at, (1 Cor. ii. 9—16,) as the most transcendent of all other in the world, which carnal hearts are no ways capable of without the work of God's Spirit in the soul. Read and mind that scripture well. There are some things which we can never see in their excellences without the help of telescopes and perspective-glasses, by reason of the weakness and dimness of our sight: in like manner, we can never see the amiableness of God in Christ, without the help of God's Spirit. This sets the soul upon the top of a high mountain, as Moses upon the top of Pisgah, whereby he gains a prospect of the heavenly Canaan; or as Christ and his disciples, upon Tabor in the transfiguration, from that "excellent glory;" (2 Peter

i. 17, 18;) or such a sight as Paul had in his rapture. (2 Cor. xii. 2—4.)

2. A second means and motive to blow up the flame of divine love in us, is to consider that the Lord is incomparably the most lovely object in the world, being the chief of all good and goodness. (Psalm cxix. 68.)—For which reason our Saviour saith, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” (Matt. xix. 16, 17.) If we love a drop of good in the creature, how should we be ravished with an ocean, many oceans, in God! Happy he that enjoys the Fountain of good; for with him “is the well of life,” &c. (Psalm xxxvi. 7—10.) “God is purely good without mixture, infinitely good without measure, absolutely good without dependency, communicably good without failure, eternally good without end,” say the Schools; “therefore most amiable.” O consider this! And, “This Good, this God, is ours for ever and ever,” may every believer say. O, let this inflame our love to this Good!

3. *Examine thy faith in the truth of it, and labour for the growth of it, and observe the working of it.*—For true “faith works by love;” (Gal. v. 6;) and the stronger thy faith is, the stronger thy love is. The apostle Peter showing the excellency of faith, and of a tried faith, that it is “more precious than gold,” he saith, [that] by it we love Jesus Christ, though we never saw him with our bodily eyes; and we love him by believing, and rejoice in it “with unspeakable, glorious joy.” (1 Peter i. 7, 8.) Faith is the first principle and chief root of all operation in the soul; \* and it is therefore a vain thing to talk of loving God, without believing: for “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” God doth not put the oil of his mercy but into the vessel of faith.† “We believe, and therefore speak,” saith the apostle: we believe, therefore we love. What made the saints not value worldly treasures and delights? What made them love not their lives to the death? What made them so wonderful in their active and passive obedience for Christ, but their faith, by “seeing Him who is invisible?” (Heb. xi. 24—27.) For there is not such an eye on earth, that sees spiritual things in their spirituality, and notwithstanding their remotest distance: such a faith doth break forth in the flames of love to God, that thereby the heart, where it is, is ravished by it; the Lord saith, his heart is also “ravished with” that eye. (Canticles iv. 9.)

4. *Consider, that God best deserves thy love.*—All the world cannot vie with God in loving us, therefore are not worthy to be rivals with him: it is a horrid and an amazing thing, how the glorious God should so far be provoked by such rivals, and bear so long. Of this he complained severely in his people of old: read the prophets, and that one chapter, for instance, Jer. ii. 5, 11—13, 31, 32. And this is true of the greatest part of the world; one silly idol or other courts all of them: yet they never did any man any good, nor can [do] it, but hurt. By loving them, they cannot love us again; they cannot save us in our trouble; (Jer. ii. 28;) they cannot

\* AUGUSTINI *Tractatus* vii. in 1 Joh.

† BERNARDUS.

hear us when we cry, no more than Baal did his priests. (1 Kings xviii. 26.) Our love is lost upon them; they distress us, but help us not; like summer-brooks that are dry when we most need them. (Job vi. 15—18.)

What say you, doth not the Lord best deserve your love? What is there that he hath not done for you? You owe him, not only for your blessings, but for your being; you stand indebted to him for "all things pertaining to life and godliness," for all in hand and hope. And how many grow fat and wanton under the mercies of God! yea, Jeshurun, kicking at his bowels, and beating the breasts that feed them! (Deut. xxxii. 15.) Strange, degenerate brats! so far that the Lord cries out to heaven and earth to be astonished at it; (Isai. i. 2, 3;) yet for all this continues loving them still, and, like a good shepherd, seeks after straying sheep, that of themselves would never return without fetching. (Jer. iii. 1.) Will any creature in the world whom thou idolizest do this for thee? Is this after the manner of men? No; it is the peculiar kindness of God only; think on it.

5. Consider: *if thou love the Lord truly, and keep thyself in his love, thy heart will cease to love any thing else in the world, and be dead to creatures, and they will be dead to thee.* (Gal. vi. 14.)—*Si cor amore Christi inardescit, omnis creatura vilescit*: "All things are contemptible to one that truly loves God." (Phil. iii. 8.) When the sun shines, the stars vanish; and when it shines upon a fire, it puts the fire out. So doth the love of God in the soul extinguish all worldly love: and this is an infallible sign of the love of God in the soul; for they two are contrary, and mortal enemies one to the other, and seek the destruction of each other. (Gal. v. 17.) The reason is plain:—

(1.) They differ in their *rise and offspring*: one is heaven-born, the other is earthly.

(2.) They differ in their *quality*: one hates what the other loves.

(3.) They differ in their *objects*: one loves God, the other loves the creature.

(4.) They differ in the means of their *attainments*: one minds the will and word of God, to follow that only; the other minds "the wills and lusts of the flesh," to "fulfil" them, (Eph. ii. 3,) and to "make provision for" them. (Rom. xiii. 14.)

(5.) They differ in their *end*: the love of creatures is disappointed and lost; the love of God enjoys him for ever, and rests satisfied in that enjoyment, and not before. (Psalm xlii. 1, 2.)

6. Consider: *thou canst never keep thyself in the love of God, if thou art not quit and utterly disengaged from the love of the world, in the lusts and vanities of it, by thy inordinate desires and hankerings after it.*—God never comes into the soul till the world go out; and then the soul moves nobly, when it moves to its principle.\* This makes the circular motion of the heavens to be most noble,—because it returns *always* to the same point where it began. Thus Noah's dove found no rest out of the ark, but returned to it after

\* TAULERUS.

long fluttering about, because it found no food among the carrion; but the raven did, and therefore abode by it. A bird, as long as it flies aloft in the air, is free from the fowler's gin; but when it lights down on the ground, and falls a-picking in the earth, then is nearest unto danger: thus it fares with men of the earth. "O poor soul," saith St. Augustine, "how dost thou debase thyself! thou lovest earthly things, and thou art better than them; thou admirest the sun, and thou art more beautiful and excellent than the sun: only God is above thee, and thou wert made to love him only." A child of heaven and a son of the earth differ in this as much as heaven and earth. (Phil. iii. 18—20.) The ground is cursed, and this world shall be burnt up; (2 Peter iii. 10;) why art thou enamoured with it? Therefore the Lord embitters the world's breasts to his children, that they may be weaned, and no longer suck of them; and then, when the world begins to be bitter to us, the Lord begins to be sweeter to us. When Peter had found some sweetness on Mount Tabor, he was loath to come down, and would dwell there above the world in that heavenly company. (Matt. xvii. 4.) That wife never truly loved her husband that loves her jewels above him. Did not Israel do so, when they made a calf of the jewels [which] God gave them, and a god of that calf, and themselves beasts in worshipping of it? What abominable idolatry, what apostasy, what ingratitude is here!

## USES.

I. All that hath hitherto been said of this great duty of keeping ourselves in the love of God, is practical, and carries application with it, containing true signs of such as keep themselves in God's love. What is that, but a great **USE OF EXAMINATION** of our state and of our practice? 1. *Whether we are "in the love of God?"* 2. *Whether we do indeed walk so as to "keep" ourselves in it?* Be not deceived; compare your state, heart, and life with these rules; be serious and solemn in it.

II. You have had, by way of contrary, sufficiently hinted, the cross practice of the greatest part of the world herein, who keep themselves out of God's love, by keeping in an evil state of enmity between God and them; and though God hath long beseeched them by his ambassadors to "be reconciled to God," (2 Cor. v. 20,) yet they will not, but stand out in open defiance against God, and "desire not the knowledge of his ways." (Job xxi. 14.) They prefer the love of men before the love of God; they prefer the love of money and carnal delights before the love of God. (Luke viii. 14; 2 Tim. iii. 4.) They hate the knowledge of God, they hate the people of God, they hate the ways of God; they love those that hate God, and whom God hates. Can these think themselves in the love of God? Can they "keep" themselves in the love of God, before they are come into it? And this carries in it a **USE OF REPREHENSION, CONVICTION, DISCRIMINATION, AND LAMENTATION**, all of them respectively. O, mind and consider it well!

III. We have a USE OF EXHORTATION. The text is properly such a use: it contains a duty to be practised all your life. Perform the duties of that state; study what doth please God; take heed of that which doth offend God; shun all that is inconsistent with the love of God. Meditate on the happy privilege of such a state: \* thou art a candidate of heaven, a favourite of God. Such are out of the reach of danger; they have a sweet calm and sunshine in their conscience; they have a pleasant spring of singing of birds, and like the fragrant smell of a garden of spices, and the fill of divine flagons in Christ's "banqueting-house." (Canticles i. 2, 3; ii. 4—6, 12, 13; iv. 16; v. 1.)

IV. *If thou keep thyself in the love of God, thou needest not to fear the hatred of men.*—This is to be feared of all that are not in the love of God. Those that are in God's love, have no cause in the world to fear worldly men's hate; they have the strongest security against it:—

1. From the *power of God*: which is omnipotent. (Gen. xv. 1; Rom. viii. 31—39.)

2. From the *promise of God*: which is faithful, and never fails.

3. From the *eternity of Christ*: "The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Heb. xiii. 5, 6, 8.) Read Deut. xxxiii. 26—29. God "will be a wall of fire round about" those that are in his love. (Zech. ii. 5.) Read Deut. xxxii. 9—14. What higher expressions can be uttered, to set forth the tender love of God to his people, while they are under his wing? Will ye have more? Consider that of the prophet Isaiah, in chap. lvi. 13, 14: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted. And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb."

V. If ye mind this duty aright, to "keep yourselves in the love of God," First, *You must labour to understand the love of God to his elect truly, and then meditate duly on it, and then walk worthy of it.*—Now this love of God I cannot more compendiously declare, than by that of the apostle: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," &c. (Eph. i. 3—5.) In which ye are to observe six remarkable things in God's blessing of us, for which we are to bless him:—

1. That God the Father of Christ is the author of all our blessings, especially of spiritual blessings; election, redemption, and all that flow from thence, are given us upon the account of Christ, by whom God becomes our Father, that is, by adoption; by which we have the right of inheritance, that is, salvation.

\* *Qui in amore Dei se custodiunt suaviter habitant, instar apum in alvearibus, in favis mellis; ut sponsa in sinu sponsi.* "They who 'keep themselves in the love of God' dwell sweetly, like bees in their hives, in the honey-combs; or as the bride in the bosom of her husband."—EDIT.

2. That by the word "blessings," he includes all things pertaining to salvation; because he saith, "with all spiritual blessings;" alluding to God's promise made to Abraham in Christ, saying, "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." And therefore he will give the consummation of this blessing at the day of judgment to his elect, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," (Matt. xxv. 34,) that is, from his everlasting love. (Eph. i. 6.)

3. That the Father loves and blesseth "us," that is, his "chosen" ones, and none else; who declare themselves such by their faith and holiness and love. (Verses 4, 5.)

4. That these blessings are principally "spiritual blessings," such as the elect only receive, in a peculiar and distinguishing way; and that under two considerations:—

(1.) They are not *carnal* blessings; though the Father denies not these to his children, for which his child must bless him; but here they are called "spiritual," because chiefly such.

(2.) They are not *common spiritual* blessings neither. Such are temporary faith, a great degree of knowledge even in spiritual things, yea, a taste also of the Holy Ghost, and the beginning of a pious life, &c. (Heb. vi. 1—5; 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.) But only saving grace and eternal glory, the fruit of eternal election, (for all other spiritual blessings follow and flow from that; as, the true knowledge of God, a living faith, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, a Christian life, love to the saints, and life eternal,) *this* the apostle calls *πασα ευλογία*, "all blessing," as containing and comprehending all fully and perfectly.

5. But there is one thing more to be noted from that word, "In heavenly places:" for as carnal blessings have their beginning in the earth, and there they end; so heavenly blessings come from heaven, and terminate there in glory without end. Therefore we render it, "in heavenly places," because it notes the place of it, which is heaven, where Christ is exalted in glory as our Head, to communicate and accumulate all spiritual blessings on his elected and redeemed members. There it is said, "In heavenly places in Christ;" all this is amplified in this first, (Eph. i. 19—23,) and more particularized in the second, where he saith, "He hath quickened us together, and raised us up together, and made us sit together with Christ in heavenly places." (Eph. ii. 4—6.) All this is a high act of divine love toward us: by which three things here and in heaven, all grace and glory is meant, and that saints do partake of them with and by Christ. And this leads to,

6. A Sixth thing, wherein the love of God to us is declared in the place afore-cited, (Eph. i. 3—5,) namely, "in Christ;" by which is assigned the material cause of all spiritual blessings, namely, Christ as Mediator and High Priest.

(1.) We are blessed "in Christ," that is, for Christ's sake and upon his account.

(2.) "In Christ," by the merits of Christ, by his obedience, passion, and death.

(3.) "In Christ," as our Head;—from whom, as such, all our blessings flow in our souls and bodies: therefore is he called "the Lord our Righteousness;" (Jer. xxiii. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30;)—that is, in the person of Christ. We are "raised" with him, and "sit in heaven" with him; that is, we are counted raised and sitting there by his dignity and glory, as our Head. By this imputation, the Papists' justification by inherent righteousness is fully confuted. Also we have infinite privilege and comfort, that the Lord Jesus is made to us, his members, righteousness and holiness, which can never be had any other way, either within us or without us, but in Christ our Head only; and there only it is perfect and sure: and all this in love. For the Father hath demonstrated his love to Christ for this his undertaking; and his love to us, because he appointed him for us, and accepts us in him. (Eph. i. 3—6.)

This is THE FIRST BRANCH of the fifth use,—of studying the love of God to us in Christ in all the causes of it and in all the parts of it: for this is a strong motive to "keep" us in this love,—to understand it, and to believe it, and to walk up to it.

THE SECOND BRANCH: *To understand and practise our love to the Lord, answering his love to us.*

Understand what love that is wherewith we are to love the Lord, and whereby we keep ourselves in his love to us. In order unto this, ye are to know, that the whole worship of God consists in the love of God. (Matt. xxii. 36, 37.) Hence Ambrose saith, "The love of God is the form of all virtue, yea, the head and foundation of all true religion." "The end of the law is love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." (1 Tim. i. 5.)

There are three things that are in true love:—

1. To be *affected* with a desirable object, upon our knowledge of it to be good.

2. To be carried out strongly in our *desires* after it, that we may be united with it.

3. When we enjoy it, to *rejoice* in it, and to rest in it, as in our end and centre of our desires. This the word signifies in the original Hebrew and Greek: *רַחַץ אַהֲבָה, αγαπαν, αγαπωνωνεσθαι*, "to rest greatly in the enjoyment of" the thing beloved; as etymologists have it, Phavorinus, &c.

So true love contains in it affection, desire, joy, as the beginning, progress, and end of it; and this will be perfect in heaven, and our perfection and happiness. In this, love outvies all other grace. (1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.) We have an excellent saying of St. Augustine to this purpose: "This is then the rest of the soul, when it is fixed by the love of God as to its desire, nor desires any thing or object besides; but, having got possession of that which it desires, is wholly taken up with the delight of it, and is happy in the secure enjoyment of



it."\* Whence we are to learn wherein the true nature of our love of God stands,—that the heart rest in the enjoyment of what it desires, which it can do in nothing else ; and only our love to God is true and perfect love, because our souls find rest in God only.

St. Bernard makes four degrees of our love to God :—

1. When a man loves *himself for himself* : but herein he can have no rest nor content ; for it is not to be found in him.

2. When he loves *God for himself, and not for God* ; when he would have God make him happy.

3. When he loves *God for God himself*, as judging him most worthy of all love.

4. When he loves *himself and all things else for God only*, and is therein satisfied, desiring nothing more.

This is indeed to love God, when we love him for himself, and ourselves and all other things subordinately unto God, in him and for him only. Our soul, as Noah's dove, hath no rest, till it return to this ark. This enjoyment satisfies : (Psalm xvii. 15 :) ye "shall be abundantly satisfied," because it is the water "of life," (Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9,) which, being once drunk of, quencheth thirst for ever.

I conclude all with this,—that, considering the circumstances into which we are cast, it is our duty, wisdom, and privilege to keep ourselves in the love of God, from the transcendent advantages we have by it above the love and favour of men, which is hard to get, and yet not worth the pains when gotten ; yea, when gotten, it is as hard to keep, and yet not worth the keeping ; yea, it is easily lost, and better lost than kept. Therefore never labour to keep thyself in the love of men, by which thou mayest lose the love of God ; but keep yourselves in the love of God, and that will keep you safe here and for ever. The Lord gives it as a reason why he would not cast off his people, though he threatened them as if he would do it : "Because," saith he, "I am God, and not man." (Hosea xi. 8, 9.) It is not after the manner of men to be constant in their love ; but [He] is like Himself, and never breaks-off or keeps-in his love.

The Lord will be called "Husband" of his people ; and is he not the best and dearest in the world ? Doth he take any people or soul to wife for rare beauty or rich dowry ? Alas ! there is none. Did he not find us in our gore-blood, and yet loved us when such ? (Ezek. xvi. 5—8.) Now, whom he loves, he cleaves to. (Gen. ii. 24 ; Eph. v. 31.) Thus "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit : " (1 Cor. vi. 17 :) the word is *προσκολλημενος*, "glued," to show the close union of divine love. Pray, then, to God for the Holy Ghost, whom he hath promised to give to them that ask, that he may "shed abroad the love of God in your hearts ;" (Rom. v. 5 ; 2 Thess. iii. 5 ;) for hereby you will "keep yourselves in the love of God."

\* Tom. iv., *Libro de Substantiâ Dilectionis*, cap. 6.