

## SERMON VI.

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WHAT IS THAT FULNESS OF GOD EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN OUGHT  
TO PRAY AND STRIVE TO BE FILLED WITH ?*And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye  
might be filled with all the fulness of God.*—Ephesians iii. 19.Γινωαι τε την υπερβαλλουσαν της γνωσεως αγαπην του Χριστου, ινα  
πληρωθητε εις παν το πληρωμα του Θεου.

THESE words are a considerable part of that excellent prayer put up to God by the apostle for his beloved Ephesians. (From verse 16 to the end.) And indeed prayer was his tried engine, by which he always could bring down supplies of grace from “the God of all grace,” for his own and the souls of others. In this branch of it, you will easily observe, he prays for *grace the end*, and *grace the mean to reach that end*.

1. He prays for *grace the end*: “That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” This, being the utmost of the soul’s perfection, ought to be the height of its ambition: beyond this we cannot reach, and therefore in the attainment of this we must rest.

2. He prays for *grace the mean to compass that end*: namely, “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” As we grow up into a greater measure of the knowledge of the love of Christ to us, we shall enjoy more of the fulness of God in us.

But here we meet, in each of these parts of the text, with an *εναντιοφανες*, or “a seeming contradiction” in the terms. “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,”—what is that, but to know what is unknowable? And to “be filled with all the fulness of God,”—what is that, but to comprehend what is incomprehensible? The narrow vessel of our heart can no more contain the boundless and bottomless ocean of the Divine fulness, than our weak intellectual eye can drink-in the glorious light of that knowledge.

And yet there are many such expressions in the holy scripture. Thus Moses “saw him that was invisible,” *τον αορατον ορων*. (Heb. xi. 27.) He saw him by the eye of faith in the glass of revelation, whom he could not see by the eye of reason in the glass of creation. And thus we are instructed in the gospel, how to approach that God who is unapproachable; (1 Tim. vi. 16;) to approach that God by Jesus Christ according to the terms of the new covenant, to whom, considered absolutely in himself, we could never approach.

Let us, therefore, first clear and remove the obscurity of the phrases, that we may more comfortably handle the divine matter con-

tained in them ; always taking along with us this useful caution,—that we run not away with a swelling metaphor, and from thence form in our minds rude, undigested notions of spiritual things ; nor fancy we see miracles, when we should content ourselves with marvels.

I. The former of these seeming repugnances is, “*To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.*”—If this love of Christ passeth knowledge, why do we pray, why should we strive, to know it? If it be our duty to pray that we may know it, how is it supposed to pass knowledge? Must we endeavour to reach that which is above all heights? to fathom that which is an abyss, and has no bottom? or to take the dimensions of that which is unmeasurable?

To remove this difficulty, there have been many expedients found out.

1. Some carry the sense thus: “To know the love of Christ, which passeth, or surpasseth, the knowledge of all other things.” There is an excellency, an usefulness in the knowledge of Christ’s love, which is not to be found in the knowledge of any thing else. A man may know, to his own pride, to the admiration of others; he may have the knowledge of all tongues and languages, may understand all arts and sciences, may dive deep into the secrets of nature, may be profound in worldly policies, may have the theory of all religions, true and false; and yet, when he comes to cast up his accounts, shall find himself never the better, never the holier, indeed never the wiser, never the nearer satisfaction, till he can reach this blessed knowledge of the love of Christ.

Only the excellency of the knowledge of the love of Christ consists herein:—

(1.) It must be a knowledge of Christ’s love by way of *appropriation*: to know, with the apostle, that “he loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.” (Gal. ii. 20.)

(2.) By way of *efficacious operation*: that he “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” (Rev. i. 5.)

(3.) By way of *reflexion*: that his love has kindled a mutual love in our souls to him: “We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 John iv. 19.)

(4.) By way of *practical subjection*: when his love subdues our hearts to himself, and constrains us to new obedience: “The love of Christ constraineth us;” (2 Cor. v. 14;) it restrains us from sinning against him, and engages us to obey him. To know, that we may know, and make knowledge the end of itself, is nothing but vain curiosity; to know, that we may be known, is nothing but vain-glorious arrogancy; to know, that we may make others know, is indeed an edifying charity; but to know, that we may be transformed into the image and likeness of what we know of the love of Christ,—this is the true, the excellent, the transcendent way of knowledge. And this was that knowledge of Christ and of his love which the apostle set such a price upon, when he “determined not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;” (1 Cor. ii. 2;) that he

might there see the love of Christ streaming out of his heart, at his wounds, in his blood; and there see Divine Justice satisfied, the law fulfilled; and thence feel his conscience purified and pacified, and his soul engaged and quickened to walk in all new obedience. This is that *το ὑπερῶν της γνώσεως Χριστου*, "the transcendent knowledge of Christ," in comparison of which all other things were "loss and dross and dung;" that he might "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (Phil. iii. 8, 10.) And this is one way of clearing the difficulty, and reconciling the seeming contradiction.

2. Others have recourse to a *hyperbaton*, and would clear the thing by transposing the words; and they order the words thus: *Γνωαις τε την ὑπερβαλλουσαν αγαπην της γνώσεως του Χριστου*. "To know the surprising love of the knowledge of Christ." And then the sense will be this: "I pray that you may know that surpassing, that incomparable love of God, which appeared in giving you the knowledge of Christ." And it must be for ever acknowledged, that this was a marvellous instance of the love of God, that he was pleased to communicate to the world the knowledge of a Redeemer: but yet it seems rather to impoverish the sense, than to give us the full import of the expression.

3. There is no need to fly to critical niceties, nor to call in rhetoric and its figures to our relief. The words will be consistent, and freed from all appearance of self-contradiction, if we attend to these following positions:—

(1.) That which cannot be known by a mere human understanding, may yet be understood by the Spirit of Christ, which "searcheth all things, even the deep things of God." (1 Cor. ii. 10.) And the Spirit of God is given for this end, to "shed abroad the love of God," and so the love of Christ, "in our hearts." (Rom. v. 5.)

(2.) That which cannot be fully known of the love of Christ in this present state, where our understandings are very much clouded and our faith weak through the remainders of inward corruption, yet shall be more gloriously known when we come to see God in Christ face to face: "Now we know in part; but then we shall know even as also we are known." (1 Cor. xiii. 12.)

(3.) Although there be much of the love of Christ which passes all our present knowledge, yet there is enough of that love that may be known: enough to feed our knowledge, that it starve not in this life; and yet to whet the edge of the soul's appetite to know more in the life to come: enough to guide us and conduct us through our pilgrimage; and abundance more, reserved for our portion. The love of Christ has depths in it wherein the daring soul may drown, and yet those shallows wherein the humble soul may safely wade, and comfortably bathe itself, without danger of being swallowed up. And we have some parallel expressions in scripture, which may well illustrate this of the text. "The peace of God passes all understanding," *ὑπερχειουσα παντα νοου*. (Phil. iv. 7.) It "exceeds all conception;" and yet there is that in the peace of God which may be conceived and expressed too; even

something of that inward satisfaction which arises from a well-grounded hope that our peace is made with God, and that peace copied out upon and exemplified in a pure and quiet conscience. So, in the verse following my text, we read that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly," *ὑπερ ἐκ ᾠρισσού*, "above all that we ask or think:" and yet we may conceive something of what God will do for us, and clothe those conceptions with suitable expressions, and make our humble addresses to him for what he has promised to give to us and do for us, in such a way as shall be acceptable to God through the interest of our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. In a word: as Moses could "not see God's face, and live;" (Exod. xxxiii. 20;) and yet Moses could not live except he saw God's face; so is there a measure, a degree, of the knowledge of the love of Christ, which we cannot reach if we would die for it; and yet there is such a measure, such a degree, of the knowledge of that love of Christ, which we must reach, or we die for it. And hence I will briefly touch upon two PROPOSITIONS.

## PROPOSITION I.

*There is something in the love of Christ, which in this present state surpasses all perfect knowledge of it.*

Something of which we may say, as one said of a learned book, "If that which I understand be so admirable, what is that which I do not understand!"

Take any one mystery of the gospel; and when we have pursued it as far as our faculties are able to trace it, we must be forced to make a stand, and, as Paul upon the shore of the ocean of God's unsearchable, untraceable counsels, to cry out, "O the depth!" (Rom. xi. 33;) or, as Job, "Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him!" (Chap. xxvi. 14.)

There are two things that are unmeasurable,—*the evil of sin*, and *the love of a Saviour*; and the love of a Saviour must be therefore unmeasurable to the sinner, because the evil of sin is unmeasurable. He that knows not the exceeding greatness of his debt, can never fully know the exceeding greatness of *his* love that became a Surety for it; he that cannot measure the greatness of the curse [which] he lay under, can never measure the love of his Deliverer; and he that never could fully estimate the misery of his bondage, can never fully value or conceive aright of the love of his Redeemer.

1. *The evil of sin is unmeasurable.*—It is so, whether we consider the object against whom sin is committed, or the punishment which sin hath deserved, or the agonies which the Redeemer suffered to atone it.

(1.) If we consider *sin as committed against an infinite God*, so sin is infinite objectively, and therefore unmeasurable. The malignity of sin is unconceivable: it strikes at the authority, the glory, the very being of the Chiefest Good; every sin would in its tendency dethrone the Most High.

(2.) If we consider *the demerit of sin*, it is that which passes all understanding. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" (Psalm

xc. 11.) We cannot take the just and adequate measure of that wrath which is due to sin, by all the plagues and judgments by which God ever bore witness against the evil of sin. The fire of Sodom and Gomorrah was dreadful fire; but yet it was quenched, a little time extinguished it; but that fire of wrath which burns upon, but never burns up, sinners, is inextinguishable fire: *To πυρ ου σβεννυται.* "The fire is inextinguishable." (Mark ix. 44.) It is "everlasting punishment." (Matt. xxv. 46.) The deluge that drowned the old world argued great displeasure against sinners; yet neither was that a just measure of God's wrath that is due to sin. For the waters of the deluge were soon dried up; but so will not the floods of Divine Vengeance, poured out upon sinners to the uttermost: for "the breath," that is, the anger, "of the Lord, like a stream of" fire and "brimstone, doth kindle" and feed the matter of those flames. (Isai. xxx. 33.) The plagues of Egypt were exceeding great demonstrations of Divine Anger against sin; yet they were determinate for number and duration, and so could not give us a just measure of the demerits of sin.

(3.) If we consider *the sufferings of Christ*, they will prove that the evil of sin is unmeasurable. They were such as could not be expressed; and therefore the ancient Christians used, in their prayers, to beg of Christ that he would deliver them *δι' αγνωστων βασανων σου.* "By thy unknown torments, Lord, deliver us!" And hence we may infer, that the love of Christ must needs be unmeasurable, because he delivered us from unmeasurable wrath by unconceivable torments.

2. *The love of Christ to sinners is unmeasurable*, for these reasons:—

REASON I. *We have no scale in nature in which we can weigh, no line in created things by which we can measure, it.*—If we examine *the love of relations*, we find them all limited and bounded; and they ought to be so.

1. *The love of a father to a child* is an intense love; the love of a father to an undutiful child, a rebellious child, may stretch the line somewhat farther; yet this will fall vastly short of the love of Christ to sinners. The highest instance of this love that I remember, was that of David to his rebellious son Absalom, expressed in 2 Sam. xviii. 33: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Here is paternal love strained up to the highest pitch imaginable. That a king should desire to die for a rebellious subject; that a father should be willing to die for the most disingenuous and rebellious of sons; this was great. But yet we find, this love extended but to a natural death; he would have been unwilling to have "died a cursed death," to have been "made a curse for" him, to have been "made sin for" him. And yet the torrent of this impetuous love soon dried up: it was founded in passion rather than judgment; and perhaps, in cool blood, he would have been unwilling to have died that such a wretch might live. I question much whether David durst deliberately,

advisedly, and premeditatedly, have laid down his life to save that of a vicious, debauched son. Yet such was the love of Christ, who laid down his life for sinners, the greatest of sinners; (1 Tim. i. 15;) and laid it down voluntarily, when none could take it away; (John x. 18;) and not only died against the persuasions of his friends to save his life, (Mark viii. 32, 33,) but against that bitter malice of his enemies, which always sparkled, and at last flamed out in the most cruel, bloody, implacable fury that ever was in the world; nay, against the just displeasure of God as a Judge; all which he had a clear prospect into, and yet gave this great pregnant proof of his unconquerable love,—that he not only poured out his soul in tears, (Luke xix. 41,) his soul in prayers, “Father, forgive them,” (Luke xxiii. 34,) but his soul in sacrifice too, “unto the death.” (Isai. liii. 12.)

2. But if the love of the father to his son will not measure this love of Christ, perhaps *the love of a mother to her son* may. And this is, indeed, naturally the more soft and passionate sex; and of this love the case is put in Isai. xlix. 15: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” The case is put exceeding strong:—“Child,” a “sucking child,” that hangs upon the breast, and is always crying for pity in its natural dialect: “the son of the womb,”—that is more than the child of the breast; she can hardly forget that at any rate, which she brought forth at such a dear rate. Yet the circumstances may be such, that this tender mother may forsake and “forget,” nay, kill and destroy too, this innocent child. Such exigences they have been in, that nature has proved unnatural; or nature in one instance has overcome nature in another. A mother’s hunger has caused her to forget her pity to the child of her womb: “The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children.” (Lam. iv. 10.) To forsake, to forget, to kill, to cook, and at last to eat, is certainly the greatest stemming of the current and stream of natural affection that we can conceive of. But Christ’s love will not suffer him to forget, to forsake: he has often forgotten himself, to remember them; he has forgotten his own food, that he might provide for their souls; (John iv. 34;) he has forgotten his own approaching death, that he might provide for their life: “The same night in which he was betrayed he took bread,” &c. (1 Cor. xi. 23.)

3. And yet perhaps *the love of the husband to his wife* may come up to this example of love: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Eph. v. 25.) Here is an argument, indeed, to enforce that conjugal love; and here is a precedent for conjugal love to look upon: but that “as” is not a note of equality, but of some general similitude. For the husband gives himself to his wife; but will not, is not bound to, die for his wife; he cannot be persuaded to have her sins charged upon his soul. How short are all the loves, the affections of relations, to give us a pattern and example of the love of Christ!

4. But possibly we may find a love in nature more strong than any of these: and that, if any where, must be amongst some of *those*

*great instances of love which have been amongst friends.* It is indeed said, that "Jonathan loved David as his own soul;" (1 Sam. xviii. 1, 3;) and in Deut. xiii. 6, the friend is said to be as a man's "own soul." But yet, when we come to examine these expressions, they fade away, and signify nothing but "the life." Where is the friend that will "make his soul an offering for sin?" (Isai. liii. 10.) However, this is the highest flight that ever human love took, to lay down life for a friend; but Christ has put this quite out of countenance. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John xv. 13.) But a far greater love than this had Christ,—that he laid down his life for enemies. Christ laid down a better life for them that were worse. And this is proposed to our consideration, as that which has out-done all the love in the world. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die." (Rom. v. 7.) No, I think it is out of question that none will; for who would be so friendly to him that walks by the rules of strict justice; that will do no wrong, yet shows no mercy? "Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." If there be an instance found in the world of any that has laid down his life for another, it must be for a good man,—one that is a public blessing to the age wherein he lives. Some one may throw away his private life, which is not very useful, for so generous a person, that is a common good to his country; but if such an instance be found, (which is but a "peradventure,") we have that which will shut it out of all consideration, and eclipse that which otherwise might have had some lustre: "God commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Verse 8.)

REASON II. If the love of relations will not afford us a just measure for the love of Christ; let us see if there be any thing else *in the whole scale of nature* that may furnish us with a line commensurate to it.—And we can no sooner think of making the inquiry, but we propose to ourselves the height of heaven, the breadth of the earth. "The heaven for height, and the earth for depth." (Prov. xxv. 3.) But we must despair of finding any thing that may measure or circumscribe this love, since the apostle has assured us, that "the riches of Christ" are "unsearchable," *ανεξιχνιαστον πλουτον*, (Eph. iii. 8,) such as we must expect "no footsteps of" in the whole creation. The apostle might preach it, but could not fully reach it. The treasures of gold and silver which wise providence has hid so deep in the bowels of the earth, yet the vein may be pursued so far, till it is worn out; but this treasure of love in the heart of Christ is so deep, and is so rich, that we can neither find out nor exhaust the fulness of it. When God would give us some shadow of his love, he represents it by the height of the heavens; not that his love reaches no higher, but because there is nothing in created nature higher to represent it by. "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." (Psalm ciii. 11.) The love of God is only to be measured by itself, that is, by himself; for "God is love." (1 John iv. 8.) No creature, no saint, no angel,

can fathom the love of God's heart: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." (Jer. xxix. 11.)

And we must say the same of Christ's love. There is one dimension more in the love of Christ than in the creation, "That you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," &c., *πλάτος, και μήκος, και βάθος, και ύψος*. (Eph. iii. 18.)

We are taught to distinguish between the measure of a man and the measure of God. All bodies have but three dimensions: "He measured the city with a reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal, according to the measure of a man;" (Rev. xxi. 16, 17;) but in the measuring [of] spiritual, heavenly things, such as are the love of God and of Christ, there is one dimension more. So we have it in that sublime discourse of Zophar: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Job xi. 7—9.) And thus we are taught modesty, and not to limit God, and his purposes of love, by our narrow conceptions: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isai. lv. 8, 9.)

1. And, First, for *THE BREADTH of the love of Christ*.—It reaches Jews and Gentiles, it extends to all ranks of men, high and low, rich and poor; it reaches all the cases of men's souls, the tempted, deserted, the backslider, and persecutor; it reaches "the bruised reed," "the smoking flax;" it extends to the pardon of all sins truly repented of: so that we may say, that his promises, which are the vehicles of truth and love, are "exceeding broad," (Psalm cxix. 96,) as well as his precepts, which are the indications of his authority and power. The love of Christ is wider than man's will. "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." (Rom. x. 21.) It is wider than man's power: for, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John vi. 44.) And yet, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." (Verse 37.) It is wider than all our wants and necessities: there is more bread in his house than there are hungry souls to eat; more mansions in heaven than there are souls to fill. It is wider than our capacities; and we may sooner enter into our Master's joy, (Matt. xxv. 21,) than that joy can enter into us: it cannot "enter into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. ii. 9.)

2. *THE LENGTH of the love of Christ*.—An extent of grace and love that reaches souls at the greatest distance. It reached Paul when he was in the heat and height of his desperate fury; mad, and desperately mad, with an inveterate enmity against Christ. It reached Mary Magdalene, when she was possessed with seven devils. It reached the Gentiles when they were far off from God, estranged from



the light and life of God by their abominable idolatries: "Ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph. ii. 13.) It reached the prodigal when he was far off. (Luke xv. 20.) And as it finds and reaches souls at the greatest distance of sin and enmity, so it reaches a length which we cannot with consistence of thought conceive of: "Able to save to the utmost," *εις το παντες*; (Heb. vii. 25 :) to the uttermost length of God's promise, and the believer's faith and hope; to the uttermost extent of God's purposes and our prayers; to the uttermost duration of this life and the next, through all time, beyond all time, to eternity.

3. *THE DEPTH of the love of Christ.*—And here, unless we could sound the depth of our misery, we can never fathom the depth of Christ's love; unless we could know the power of God's anger, (Psalm xc. 11,) we can never reach the power of Christ's love. The torments of hell are unknown torments; and those torments which Christ endured in his soul, to deliver us from thence, were unknown torments: the love of Christ does not only reach the depth of our misery by reason of sin, but those depths of sorrow into which sometimes even holy souls are plunged by desertion. The Psalmist "cried unto God out of the depth;" (Psalm cxxx. 1;) divine love heard him and reached him there. Jonah cried unto God "out of the belly of hell;" (Jonah ii. 2;) divine love heard him there, and delivered him thence. Heman was plunged "in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps;" (Psalm lxxxviii. 6;) yet love reached him in that sad and dismal condition.

4. *THE HEIGHT of the love of Christ.*—All the measure of the height of Christ's love we can take, is to say it is unmeasurable: "It is high, we cannot attain unto it:" (Psalm cxxxix. 6:) his love reaches the soul on earth, and never leaves it till it has conducted it to heaven. He loves grace into the soul, and loves the soul into glory. What that glory is, go and see; the taste of it is to be had here, the feast is reserved for hereafter. Wrath to come and life to come are unconceivable, and therefore unexpressible. We can neither order our speech, by reason of our inward darkness, nor of that ineffable light: thoughts fail us, words fail us; we are lost in the thoughts of future blessedness, as well as in those of our former misery. What therefore we cannot perfectly understand, let us silently and reverently admire and adore. What a prodigious height did man fall from when he fell from his God! What a desperate abyss of misery did he fall into when he fell into sin! And therefore what a stupendous height is that which love shall raise him to in glory! All we can do, is to put no bounds to our love to Christ. The true measure of our love to Christ should be, to love him without measure; and the true degree of our love to a Redeemer, is to love him in the highest degree. But, alas! where is our love to Christ? How weakly do we express our love to him, who has given us the fullest, clearest demonstrations of his to us, beyond all expressions! His was "stronger than death;" ours ready to die: the water-floods could not quench his; a few drops extinguish ours: he shed blood

for us with more freedom than we a few tears over him and his bleeding, almost dying, interest in the world. He loved sinners better than we can love saints; he died for us with more flame of zeal than we can live to and for him. Let us be ashamed that we can find a love so vehement for our perishing comforts, nay, for our killing corruptions, and yet have so indifferent affections for a Saviour. How shall we be able to love our enemies for his sake, when we can neither love him with an intense love for his sake nor our own? Let us mourn therefore bitterly that the love of Christ should be unconceivable and invisible, and that our love to him should be so too, upon such different accounts: his for the greatness of it, ours for its smallness.

## PROPOSITION II.

*There is a sufficiency of the love of Christ to us that may be known.*  
 —The love of Christ to sinners may be considered either in the cause, or as in the effects; in the spring and fountain, or in the streams that flow from thence into souls. Love, as it was in the heart of Christ, is unmeasurable; the spring, the original cause and reason of it, was his own unaccountable love; and can only be measured by the love of the Father to his Son, which is equally unmeasurable: "As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you." (John xv. 9.) But Christ's love, in the effects that it has been pleased to produce in and upon our souls, may be understood, and in some good measure apprehended: if we cannot fix our eyes immediately upon the body of the sun in its meridian glory, yet we may comfortably refresh ourselves with its beams, and feel the healing warmth of the Sun of Righteousness arising and shining upon our souls. If we cannot measure Christ's love when it dealt with God, in making "his soul an offering for sin;" nor what that love was wherewith he "loved" us, "and gave himself for" us; (Gal. ii. 20;) yet we may know that love wherewith "he loved us, and washed us from our sins." (Rev. i. 5.) The love of satisfaction passes knowledge, the love of sanctification may be known: as that poor man, John ix. 25, though he could not give a philosophical account to the scribes and Pharisees, how clay and spittle should contribute to the opening [of] his eyes, yet could say, This "one thing I know, that, whereas I was" born "blind, now I see;" so may a renewed soul say, "Though I know not from what unmeasurable fountain this grace and mercy did proceed; though I am ignorant of the manner of its working; yet this one thing I can say, Whereas I was a lover of sin, I now hate it; and whereas I have been a despiser of Christ, I now prize and love him as 'the chiefest of ten thousand:' I can say, that that vanity, that corruption which some time had a mighty power over me, is now subdued and conquered." More particularly,

1. Although we cannot perfectly know the love of Christ, *yet may we know so much of it as may raise our desires to know more.*—As he that meets with a vein of precious metal, though it be small, yet it gives him hopes of meeting with more, and those hopes encourage

his labours to dig deeper and search further; so that little we can attain of the knowledge of Christ's love in our wayfaring state makes the soul labour and strive, and hope and pray, that it may come to fuller knowledge of that love in its own country. As that sight which Moses had of God encouraged him to pray, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory;" (Exod. xxxiii. 18;) so that view we have of Christ "in a glass, darkly," serves to engage our endeavours and sharpen our desires to see him "face to face" in glory. "As we gain upon the knowledge of Christ, so we grow and, as it were, encroach upon him still. If God will condescend and come down to visit the soul, the soul will make an argument from thence, that he would take it up to himself. A taste of Christ's love whets the spiritual appetite after a feast: "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Peter ii. 2, 3.)

2. However our knowledge of Christ's love is imperfect, *yet we may know so much as may shame us that we have loved him no better.*—We know, the love of Christ carried him out to suffer most dreadful things upon our account; and may hence reflect upon ourselves, with great shame, that our love has been so weak as not to carry us out to suffer for his name: he "endured the cross," we are terrified at the sight of it. The argument is very strong, 1 John iii. 16. Thus:—If Christ "laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." But how weakly does it work upon us! How little a matter can this love constrain us to lay down for their sakes! And it is a most concluding argument, that we should "forbear and forgive one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, *as Christ forgave us.*" (Col. iii. 13.) But, alas! how little does this instance of the love of Christ prevail upon us! That love which prevailed with him to forgive us talents, will not, does not prevail with us to forgive our brethren a few pence. (Matt. xviii. 27—30.) The love of Christ was a conquering, a triumphant love; it bore down whatever stood in its way; it grappled with the displeasure of God, with the malice of devils, the fury of unreasonable men, and with the unkindness of his friends; it broke through all discouragements, and trampled upon all oppositions; the "waters" could not "quench it, the floods" could not "drown it." (Canticles viii. 7.) So much we know, and may blush that our love to Christ is so easily quenched, discouraged, and disheartened.

3. Although our knowledge of Christ be imperfect, *yet so much we may know as may serve to guide and encourage our obedience to him.*—All our knowledge of Christ is vain, all our love to him is a pretence, if we know him not that we may love him, and love him not that we may keep his commandments: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;" (1 John ii. 4;) for as that is not reputed with God to be any obedience which is not performed by a principle of love, so neither is that accepted as any love that is not productive of obedience. The authority of Christ over us is the reason of our obedience; but the love of Christ in us is the true principle of that

obedience. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." (John xiv. 21.) Christ will not acknowledge any man to love him that does not serve him : and as the love of Christ was an universal love, it extended to all our spiritual necessities ; so must our love to Christ be as universal, and have a sincere respect to all his commandments. And upon lower terms than these, Christ will not own our love to be any thing. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John xv. 14.)

4. Although we cannot perfectly understand the love of Christ in this our present state, *yet may we know so much of his love as shall be of more true use and worth than all we know besides.*—We may know something of God, and know it to our terror and confusion : there may be such rays of divine knowledge let into a guilty soul, as may make it wish it could shut them out again. And hence it is that sinners say, "Depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." (Job xxi. 14.) The most ungrateful, unwelcome thing to an impenitent sinner in the world, is to see God, and to be convinced that God sees him, that God's omniscience looks into his rotten heart ; and the sinner must needs sit very uneasy under this knowledge of God, till he can see God reconciled to him in Christ, and have the light of that knowledge comfortably "shining into his heart in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 6.)

There is no knowledge to be compared with the knowledge of God ; no knowledge of God comparable to the knowledge of God as reconciled in Christ ; no knowledge of Christ to be compared with the knowledge of his love ; nor any knowledge of his love to be compared with that knowledge of it which subdues our hearts to his obedience, transforms our souls into his likeness, and raises up the soul to aspire after his enjoyment. Thus it is that "we joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." (Rom. v. 11.)

All other knowledge may swell the head sooner than better the heart or reform the life. A man may go silently down to hell by hypocrisy ; he may go triumphantly thither by open profaneness ; and he may go learnedly down to hell, with great pomp and ostentation, whatever he knows, if he knows not the love of Christ, ruling in him, and giving laws to him, and conforming him both to the death and resurrection of his Saviour.

And let this suffice to have spoken of the second proposition : that though the love of Christ in its highest elevation passes all perfect knowledge, in our present dark, imperfect state, yet there is enough of the love of Christ that may be known to engage our desires and endeavours to know more, to shame us that we know so little of what may be known, to engage our hearts to him, and make us confess, that whatever else we know without this is not worth the knowing.

II. Come we now to the second part of the text, namely, the apostle's prayer for grace the end : "*That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*"—Wherein we meet with a second *εναρτισθῆναι*, or "something that implies a contradiction in appearance."

The apostle prays that the Ephesians might, and certainly we

ought to add our prayers to his, that we may [be filled], and to second our prayers with endeavours that God would fill us with all his fulness. And yet we are here a-ground again. To be filled with God's fulness, with all his fulness, seems rather the object of our despair, than of our prayer; it is that which startles faith, discourages hope, which supersedes prayer and endeavour; for how can our finite grasp his infinite? our narrow vessel comprehend the sea of his divine perfections? We can no more comprehend the incomprehensible of God, than we can apprehend the unapprehensible love of Christ. Our hearts must needs be narrow, because our minds are so. We can see but little; we can love no more than we can see: what the eye cannot behold, the hand cannot hold.

For the solution of this, I shall only observe at the present, that as there is *το γνωστον του Θεου*, "that which may be known of God," (Rom. i. 19.) and the *αγνωστον του Θεου*, "that which cannot be known of God;" (in which respect we are like the Athenians, and erect our altar *Αγνωστω Θεω*, "to the unknown God," Acts xvii. 23;) so there is *το καταληπτον του Θεου*, "that which may be comprehended of God," and *το ακαταληπτον*, "that which cannot be comprehended," in which respects we are all sceptics, and must confess, *Ου καταλαμβανα*, "I cannot comprehend it."

For the clearing therefore of this difficulty, perhaps we may have some relief from the original: *Ἰνα πληρωθητε εις παν το πληρωμα του Θεου* which we may render thus: "That ye may be filled unto all that fulness of God." There is a measure of grace unto which the Divine Wisdom has appointed believers; unto that measure, that degree of fulness, we ought to aspire, and to pray that God would fill us with it; which seems to be the purport of that other prayer of this apostle for the Thessalonians: "We pray always for you, that our God would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness;" *Ἰνα πληρωση πασαν ευδοκιαν αγαθωσυνης*. (2 Thess. i. 11.) God is the fountain, his saints are vessels. These vessels are of several capacities: God, according to his good pleasure, has gauged these vessels; now it is our duty to pray and strive, to strive and pray, that God, from the inexhaustible fountain of his goodness, would fill these vessels with grace up to the brim; and that, according to that capacity which God has graciously bestowed, he would graciously fill up that capacity. For if you should pour the whole ocean upon a vessel, yet it receives only according to its own dimensions. And this is the interpretation of Theophylact, who, when he had recited and rejected some other interpretations, fixes on this. *Κρειττον δε οιμαι νοεισθαι ούτως*: "I conceive," says he, "this to be the best interpretation:" *Ἰνα ητε τελειοι εν παση τη κατα Θεον τελειοτητι, παντα γνωσκοντες τα θεια, ὡς ενεστι*: "That ye may be perfect in every divine perfection, knowing all spiritual things as far as it is possible." Seeing, then, there is a fulness of God which we cannot comprehend, cannot receive, and yet there is something of the fulness of God which we may receive, it will be seasonable to propound that question which has been recommended to our consideration.

## QUESTION.

*What is that fulness of God which every true Christian ought to pray and strive to be filled with ?*

This inquiry will oblige us to speak something *by way of supposition*, and then something further *by way of direct solution*.

(I.) That which is necessary to be spoken *by way of supposition* will fall under these two heads :

1. *That there is a fulness in God and of God, which we cannot be filled with.*

And, 2. *That there is a fulness of God with which we may, and therefore ought to pray and strive to, be filled with.*

SUPPOSITION I. It is presupposed to this inquiry, *that there is a fulness in God with which we cannot be filled, and therefore ought not to pray, ought not to strive, to be filled with it.*—It was the destructive suggestion and temptation of Satan, to persuade our first parents to be ambitious of being like to God : “Ye shall be as gods.” (Gen. iii. 5.) And the tempter never showed himself to be more a devil than when he prosecuted this design ; nor did man ever fall more below himself than when he was blown up to an ambition to be above himself. It is the perfection, the glory, the happiness of the rational creature to be like unto God in his communicable attributes ; it is the destruction, the ruin of the rational creatures to aspire after a likeness to God in his incommunicable ones. And it is a sinful ambition, too, to aspire after a likeness to God even in his communicable attributes and perfections in that way wherein they are in God ; so that it may be our destruction to aspire after a conformity to God, and it may be our perfection to aspire after a conformity to him.

For, First, *God is essentially full of all divine excellences.*—He is so by nature, by essence ; what we are, we are by grace. It is not much we have, and that little is [of] grace : “By the grace of God I am what I am.” (1 Cor. xv. 10.) Holiness is not our essence ; there was a time when we were not holy ; we were born without it, and may die without it ; but if we die as empty of grace as we were born, it had been good for us never to have been born.

Secondly. *The holiness of God is a self-holiness.*—God is not only full, but self-full, full with his own fulness : he lends to all, borrows of none. But the fulness of a believer is a borrowed, a precarious fulness. We depend on God for the beginning and begetting of grace ; for the increasing and nourishing of that grace [which] he has begotten and begun ; for the confirming and strengthening that grace [which] he has increased ; for the perfecting and completing of that grace [which] he has confirmed and strengthened ; and for the crowning of what he has so perfected and completed. Chrysostom, upon that, John i. 16, “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace,” informs us, that Christ is *Αυτοπηγη*, the “very Self-fountain :” believers must confess with David, that all our springs are in him. (Psalm lxxxvii. 7.) Again : that Christ is *Αυτορριζα*, the “very Self-root :” we must freely and thankfully own, that in him is our fruit found. (Hosea xiv. 8.)

Again : that Christ is *Αυτοζωη*, the “very Self-life :” he “has life in himself :” (John v. 26 :) that [which] we have, we acknowledge it to be from him, as our Principle, Spring, Root, with whom “is the fountain of life ;” (Psalm xxxvi. 9 ;) and that “the life which we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God.” (Gal. ii. 20.) In a word : all our obedience is rooted in the habits of grace wrought in the soul, and those habits are all rooted in Christ ; who, as Chrysostom goes on, *εν εαυτω συνεχει των αγαθων τον πλουτον*, “contains in himself the treasures of all good things ;” and not only so, but *εις τους αλλους ακαντας υπερβλυζει*, “he overflows and ever flows with streams of grace to all the saints,” not only being full, but filling others ; not only rich, but enriching others ; a living Jesus, and giving life to others. And thus by faith engrafted into Christ, we “partake of the root and of the fatness of the olive-tree.” (Rom. xi. 17.)

Thirdly. *The fulness of holiness, of grace, of all perfections that are in God, is unlimited, boundless, and infinite.*—God is a sea without a shore ; an ocean of grace without a bottom. The fulness of believers is circumscribed within the bounds and limits of their narrow and finite beings ; and this finiteness of nature will for ever cleave to the saints, when they shall be enlarged in their souls to the utmost capacity. “Mortal shall put on immortality,” but finite shall never put on infiniteness ; “corruptible shall put on incorruption,” but our measured natures shall never put on immensity. (1 Cor. xv. 53.)

Fourthly. *And hence the fulness of God is inexhaustible.*—As all the lesser stars replenish their urns with light from the sun, and yet he is never the less full of light. Thus God is called “the Father of lights ;” (James i. 17 ;) by which, some think, is meant “the Father of spirits,” who, as so many lamps, are lighted up from the sun ; or else “the Father of all grace, comfort, peace,” each of which may be termed “light.” Now when all the saints in earth, all the angels in heaven, have filled up their vessels from this fountain, yet he is still the same infinitely blessed all-full God.

Fifthly. And the fore-mentioned father thinks that the similitude of the fountain and of the ocean do not fully express the fulness of God. For, if you take but one drop from the ocean, there is that drop less in the ocean than there had been if it had not been taken thence ; and therefore we add this last head, *that the fulness of goodness, grace, holiness, and all other divine perfections that are in him, is not only inexhaustible, but undiminishable.*—For, after all the derivations of grace from the God of grace, he remains “full,” and not only so, but, as he expresses it, *πληρης και ουδενι ελαττουμενος*, “not at all lessened by those communications.” Nor need we puzzle ourselves with this matter ; for our derivations from God are not essential, but influential ; the soul partakes not of the divine nature materially, but by way of efficiency. Believers are *θειας κοινανοι φυσεως*, “partakers of the divine nature,” (2 Peter i. 4,) not by substance, but resemblance ; for we must hold this as a fixed principle, that the divine nature, essentially considered, is not discernible nor divisible, and therefore not communicable.

This therefore is the first thing we must suppose, and take as granted, *that there is a fulness in God, (namely, his essential self-fulness,) which is infinite, inexhaustible, undiminishable, and therefore incommunicable.*

SUPPOSITION II. A second thing we must suppose, is, *that there is a fulness of God with which we may, and therefore ought to pray and labour that we may, be filled.*—We cannot reach the original fulness, but we may a borrowed, derivative fulness; though we cannot attain the fulness of the fountain, we may receive a fulness of the vessel from that fountain; and if we cannot partake any thing of God's essence, we may partake of his influence. We cannot be filled with the formal holiness of God, for that holiness is God; yet may we derive holiness from him as an efficient cause, "who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will." (Eph. i. 11.) The wisdom of God,—there is *principium dirigens* ["the directing principle"]; the will of God,—there is *principium imperans* ["the commanding principle"]; and he works according to these,—there is *principium exequens* ["the performing principle"]. His will commands, his wisdom guides, his power executes, the decrees and purposes of his wise counsel and holy will.

(II.) Having thus cleared the way, we proceed to *the direct solution of the question* :—

*What is that fulness of God which every true Christian ought to pray and strive to be filled with?*

For seeing we have supposed that there is a fulness of God which we cannot be filled with, we must lay aside all ambitions and vain aspirings after that fulness; and seeing we have supposed that there is a fulness of God wherewith we may be filled, (and the very prayer of the apostle supposes it,) we therefore are to take up this holy and humble ambition to be filled with it.

Now this question can be no sooner proposed, but our thoughts will suggest to us these two things: First, What is *the matter* of that fulness? and, Secondly, What is *the measure* of that fulness? With *what* of God, and with *how much* of God, ought we to pray and strive that we may be filled? And therefore of necessity we must divide the question into these two branches :—

#### FIRST BRANCH OF THE QUESTION.

"What is *the matter* of that fulness of God which we are to pray and strive to be filled with?"

When we speak of filling, we conceive immediately that, under that metaphor, there must be comprised these three things: *a fountain*, from whence that fulness is communicated; *a recipient, a vessel, a cistern*, into which that fulness is derived; and then of *something analogous to the matter which from that fountain is communicated, and by that vessel received.* Now, in the case before us, this *fountain* must needs be God, the Author of "every good and perfect gift." (James i. 17.) Souls are the *vessel* into which the fulness is received. But, "what we are to conceive and understand by 'the matter,' or the



*quasi materia*, with which these vessels from that fountain are filled," is the subject of our present inquiry.

And to this branch of the main inquiry I shall answer, First, more generally: Secondly, more particularly.

First. *To speak generally*:—That which we are to pray and strive to be filled with, is the Spirit of God: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit;" (Eph. v. 18;) where, first, the apostle dehorts against intemperance: we may have too much of the best outward things; it is easy to run into excess in these matters. The Psalmist assures us, that "wine maketh glad the heart of man;" (Psalm civ. 15;) and the prophet assures us too, that "wine takes away the heart." (Hosea iv. 11.) It is no more but this: the use is good, the abuse is sinful; and the danger is, lest from the lawfulness of the use we slide insensibly into the abuse. "Be not therefore filled with wine, wherein is excess:" but then he exhorts too, "But be ye filled with the Spirit." No fear of excess or intemperance in this case; when God fills the souls of his people with his Spirit, he fills them with all the spiritual good things that their hearts can fill their prayers with. Compare but these two places: "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. vii. 11.) "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi. 13.) The comparing of these two scriptures evidently proves, that in praying for the Holy Spirit, we pray virtually for all good things; and that when God is graciously pleased to communicate his Spirit, he communicates all good things. When the Father gives his Son, he gives all things; so the apostle has taught us to believe and argue: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.) And we have equal reason to believe, that he that spared his Spirit, and gave him to us, will in him and with him freely give us all things. But these "all things" are to be taken *in suo genere* ["in their several kinds"]: the gift of Christ comprehends "all things" that are to be done for us; the gift of the Spirit includes "all things" to be wrought in us: Christ is "all things" for justification; the Spirit is "all things" for sanctification and consolation. I shall touch at present upon some few things.

1. *Do you find an emptiness of grace, and do you long to have your souls replenished with it?*—You go to "the God of all grace," (1 Peter v. 10,) that he would give you more faith, more love, more patience, more self-denial, more heavenly-mindedness, &c.: you do well; but the compendious way is, to pray that God would fulfil that promise, and so fill your souls with his Spirit: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication." (Zech. xii. 10.) First, the Spirit of grace, that we may pray; and then the Spirit of prayer, that we may be filled with more grace. Can we be content with a few drops, when God has promised to pour out his Spirit? "He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This spake he of

the Spirit." (John vii. 38.) Can we satisfy ourselves, that we have so much grace as just keeps us alive, when, if we would pray and strive for the Spirit, we might be more lively and vigorous Christians? Can we be content with a taste, when God has provided a feast? Some of the ancients who were anointed with material oil, were anointed with the cruse, others with the horn: O let us not be satisfied that we have a few drops from the cruse, when God is ready to pour out his grace "more abundantly!" (John x. 10.)

2. *Would you answer the glorious title of "a child of God" with a more glorious and suitable spirit, that you may pray as children, walk as dear children?*—Come to God, not as slaves, but as children; and walk before God, not under the resemblance of the spirit of bondage, but with an ingenuous liberty and freedom, as becomes the heirs of salvation. Pray for the Spirit of God, that he may be a Spirit of adoption to you, as well as of regeneration; pray in the Spirit for the Spirit, that you may have the frame of a child, [be] filled with zeal for the Father's name and interest. It is "the Spirit of adoption" that teaches us to "cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. viii. 15.) It is the Spirit of God that gives us an inward freedom and liberty: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. iii. 17.) This Spirit will not give you a liberty unto sin, but from it; nor from God, but with him. This Spirit will not break the bonds of the commandment, but tie up your hearts to it, and give you liberty and cheerfulness in it.

We read that the Son makes us free: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John viii. 36.) We read also that the Spirit makes us free too, but in different respects. The Son makes us free from the curse of the law, from the guilt of sin, from the wrath of God; but the Spirit makes us free too, from the reigning power of sin, from the bondage that is in the conscience. The authority of God has made his precepts necessary; what is necessary in the precept, the Spirit makes voluntary in the principle. God charges the conscience with duty; and the Spirit enlarges the heart to obedience: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." (Psalm cxix. 32.)

3. *Pray for the Spirit, that he would perform his whole office to you, that you may not partake only of the work of the Spirit in some one or some few of his operations, but in all that are common to believers.*—And especially that he that has been an anointing Spirit to you, would be a sealing Spirit to you also; that he that has sealed you, may be a witnessing Spirit to his own work; and that he would be the earnest of your inheritance, a pledge of what God has further promised and purposed for you. "Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Cor. i. 21, 22.)

Secondly. *To speak a little more particularly.*—What the apostle prays for his Ephesians in more general terms, he prays for the Colossians more particularly: "We do not cease to pray for you, and to

desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. i. 9, 10.) And when I have opened the particulars of this scripture, I shall not need to seek elsewhere for an answer to this inquiry : "What is *the matter* of the fulness of God, which we ought to pray and strive to be filled with ?"

1. *Let us pray and strive, and strive and pray again, adding endeavours to prayers, and prayers to endeavours, "that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will."*—And we have need to make this an essential part of our prayer ; for,

First. We may haply do the will of God materially, when we do it not formally ; not under that formal and precise consideration, that what we do is the will of God, and that we do it under that consideration because it is the will of God. A man may perhaps stumble upon some practices that are commanded by the moral law, and yet in all this not do God's will, but his own. That which in all our obedience we are to eye and regard, is the authority, the will, of God : we cannot be said to observe a commandment, unless we observe God's authority in that commandment ; nor to keep God's statutes, unless we keep God in our eye as the great Legislator and Statute-maker. A blind obedience even to God is no more acceptable, than a blind obedience to men is justifiable.

Secondly. We ought to pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, that there may be more employment for the powers and faculties of the soul ; which, in every heart wherein the grace of God radically is, are in the general inclined to do the will of God. There are some well-disposed Christians, of strong affections, and good inclinations to do God's will, who are but slenderly furnished with knowledge what that will of God is which he would have them do. And thus those warm propensions of spirit either lie like dead stocks upon their hands, or else they lay out the zeal of their souls upon that which is not the will of God ; and when they have spent their vigour and strength of soul upon it, they come to God for a reward, who asks them, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isai. i. 12.) And thus even holy David's zeal was mislaid upon this account,—that God had not spoken a word, nor revealed his will in the case. (2 Sam. vii. 7.)

Thirdly. It is our great concern, that we may know the will of God, and be filled with that knowledge ; that the knowledge of God's will may be an operative principle of obedience. Thus David prays, "Teach me to do thy will," O God. (Psalm cxliii. 10.) We are to pray that God would teach us to know, and then teach us to do, his will. Knowledge without obedience is lame, obedience without knowledge is blind ; and we must never hope for acceptance if we offer the blind and the lame to God. "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Luke xii. 47.) As

therefore all our practice must be guided by knowledge, so must all our knowledge be referred to practice.

Fourthly, and lastly. We ought to pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will; that, this knowledge being rooted and grounded in our souls, it may render that obedience easy and delightful, which is so necessary to its acceptation. When Satan had entered Judas's heart, he would not stick at any of the devil's commands; and when he had "filled" the heart of Ananias and Sapphira, (Acts v. 3,) how ready were they to "lie unto God!" If our hearts were more filled with the knowledge of God's will, that this Divine law were written there, duty would be our delight, obedience our meat and drink; nor would there be room left for those corruptions which hang upon us like dead weight, always encumbering us in our obedience.

2. *Let us pray again that we be "filled with all wisdom" in the doing of the will of God.*—We want knowledge much, we want wisdom more; we need more light into the will of God, and more judgment how to perform it. For,

First. It is one great instance of wisdom, to know the seasons of duty, and what every day calls for. As the providence of God disposes us under various circumstances, so it calls for the exercise of various duties: one circumstance calls for mourning, another for rejoicing; and yet neither ought our mourning to exclude a humble rejoicing in God, nor our rejoicing shut out a holy mourning. The men of Issachar are recorded as famous on this account, that they "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." (1 Chron. xii. 32.) And herein we are oftentimes at a great loss; like those children that complained of their fellows,—they had piped unto them, and yet not been answered with dancing; that they had mourned to them, but they had not lamented. (Matt. xi. 17.) Holy wisdom would teach us to accommodate the present frame of our hearts to God's present dispensations: providence does not teach us new duties, but how to single out those that God has made our duties.

Secondly. We need wisdom, that we be not deluded with shadows instead of substances, that we take not appearances for realities; for want of which, O how often are we cheated out of our interests, our real concerns, our integrity of heart, and peace of conscience! We account him a weak and foolish man who is imposed upon by copper for gold; that would warm his hands by painted fire, or hope to satisfy his craving appetite with painted food: yet such are we, who "spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which" profits us "not;" (Isai. lv. 2;) who set our affections on those things "that are not." (Prov. xxiii. 5.)

Thirdly. Another point of wisdom which we need to be instructed in, is the worth of time, and what a weight of eternity depends on these short and flitting moments. But we weak and silly ones count a day for no more than it stands for in the calendar, an hour no more than so much time measured by the hour-glass; when one hour

to repent in, a moment to "make our calling and election sure" in, may come to be more worth than all the world can be to us.

Fourthly. Wisdom would teach us the due order and method of all things; what first, what last, ought to be our study and our concern. Wisdom would teach us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" (Matt. vi. 33;) and then, if there be time to spare, to bestow some small portion of it for those other things which God in his bounty will not deny, and in his wisdom knows in what measure to bestow.

Fifthly. Wisdom would teach us the true worth and value of all things; to labour, pray, and strive for them proportionably to their true intrinsic dignities; to think that heaven cannot be too dear, whatever we pay for it; nor hell cheap, how easily soever we come by it. Wisdom would instruct us, that we cannot lay out too much of our time, strength, contrivance upon eternal, nor too little upon these perishing temporals; that earth deserves very little of our hand, less of our head, and nothing at all of our heart; little of our pains, less of our plotting, and least of all of our love and affections.

3. *Let us pray and strive, strive in the due and diligent use of means, and pray for a blessing upon them, that we may be "filled with a spiritual understanding."*—A carnal heart will carnalize the most spiritual mercies, and a carnal mind will debase the most spiritual truths. The manna was designed to feed the souls as well as the bodies of the Jews; but they "ate the spiritual meat, and drank the spiritual drink," (1 Cor. x. 3, 4,) with very carnal heads and hearts; so that they needed the Spirit of God to instruct them in the right use of it. "Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth." (Neh. ix. 20.) They might then have eaten their own condemnation, as well as we under the gospel, by that symbol. Christ had delivered a great and necessary truth, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" (John iii. 3;) but Nicodemus, though a great rabbi, turns it into a gross and carnal interpretation: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (Verse 4.) And at the same pass were his rude and carnal hearers: "I am the living bread," says Christ, "which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, that I will give for the life of the world;" (John vi. 51;) but his Capernaical hearers conceive of nothing but a literal and oral manducation of his natural flesh: "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Verse 52.) And yet Christ had said enough to obviate that gross mistake: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." (Verse 35.)

One man hears the great duties of the gospel pressed upon his conscience, and either, sitting down, despondeth at the *το αδυνατον του νομου*,\* or else undertakes them in his own strength, and the

\* "The impossibility of the law."—EDIT.

power of his free-will ; not considering that there is covenant-grace to answer covenant-duties, and covenant-pardon for those imperfections that attend them. Another perhaps hears the curse thundered out against "every one that continues not in all things written in the law to do them:" (Gal. iii. 10;) he hears that the primitive end of the law was to justify a righteous person that had perfectly observed it; and he falls upon the observation of that law, as the condition of the covenant of works, hoping to drudge out a righteousness thereby that shall present him blameless before God; not knowing that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom. x. 4.) Let us therefore pray for a spiritual understanding, that we may know every "truth as it is in Jesus;" (Eph. iv. 21;) that every line, every letter, of the Old and New Testament has its centre in a Redeemer.

4. *Let us pray again, and strive, that "we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."*—Knowing that all our services, all our sacrifices, are nothing unless our God smell a sweet savour in them; nor can we fill the sails of our souls with a more noble and generous ambition, than to be accepted of God. This was the height of the apostle's ambition: "We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him;" (2 Cor. v. 9;) which was the glorious frame of our blessed Saviour's heart, that "he always did the things that pleased his Father." (John viii. 29.) It is a common delusion of professors, that if they can get the work off their hands, not to regard whether ever it comes upon God's heart or no. But what are our prayers, if God receives them not? our praises, if God accepts them not? our obedience, if God regards it not? Now, that we may reach this great end, we "must walk worthy of the Lord," *περιπατησαι αξιωσ του Κυριου*. There ought to be a suitableness between the frame of our hearts and the tenor of our conversations to this God whom we serve. If there be not that exact and punctual walking up to what God in strict justice may expect, yet there must be that accuracy and circumspection which God in mercy will accept; we must be holy, as the Lord our God is holy; spiritual, because we walk before him that is a Spirit; sincere, as being always under his omniscient eye; acting our faith upon him that is faithful and true; casting our care and burden upon him that has undertaken to care for us; and in all things proving what is the will of God, and then approving that will, and practising what we have thus approved.

5. *Let us pray and strive, let us add holy endeavours to humble prayers, and second again those endeavours with our prayers, that we may "be fruitful in every good work."*—That there may be grace in the root, grace in the fruit, grace in the habit strengthened, grace in the exercise multiplied. Let us pray that our faith may not be a dead faith, for want of the grace of obedience; that our obedience be not a dead obedience, for want of a living faith, and a lively, active love; that our fruit may be of the right kind, new obedience from a new heart; that it may be right for its proportion; for "herein is our Father glorified, that we bring forth much fruit;" (John

xv. 8;) that it be rightly directed; that we may bring forth fruit to God, and not to ourselves. And to all our prayers we must add this, that we may increase in the knowledge of God; that knowing God better, we may love him better; and loving him more, we may serve and glorify him more, and be riper every day for the enjoyment of him.

And thus much in answer to the first branch of the question: I proceed to the second.

#### SECOND BRANCH OF THE QUESTION.

“What is *the measure* of that fulness of God, with which every true Christian ought to pray and strive that he may be filled?”

There is *plenitudo fontis, et plenitudo vasis*; “the fulness of the fountain, and the fulness of the vessel.” There is, again, *plenitudo solis, et stelle*; “the fulness of light in the sun, and the fulness of light in a star.” Again, there is *plenitudo capitis, et membri*; “the fulness of the head, and the fulness of a member.” A fountain is full, a vessel may be full, but with different measures: Jesus Christ, as Head of the church, has the fulness of the Spirit without measure. (John iii. 34.) A gracious soul may be also full, but it is with the “residue of the Spirit” which Christ can spare for the use of those that are his. (Mal. ii. 15.)

God is full of all grace with the fulness of the fountain; he is full with his own fulness, but not filled from another. A believer may be full too; but he is filled from the fulness of God. Thus John the Baptist is said to be “filled with the Holy Ghost;” (Luke i. 15;) and so Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Ghost;” (verse 41;) so was Zechariah; (verse 67;) and thus were the disciples “all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts ii. 4.) All these were full, but their fulness was borrowed; they were filled: it was of Christ’s fulness, that they received “grace for grace.” (John i. 16.) They were filled, but they could not fill others from their fulness; they had grace, but none to spare. And every believer must answer his brother that would borrow of him, as the wise virgins did: “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.” (Matt. xxv. 9.) There is an all-sufficiency of grace in Christ; it is well if believers have a sufficiency, according to Christ’s promise to the apostle: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” (2 Cor. xii. 9.)

And having premised this little, I shall give the direct answer to the question in these following particulars:—

1. *Every gracious soul ought to pray and strive to be filled with such a measure of the fulness of God, and of his grace, as the Holy Spirit, who is the proper Judge of that measure, shall see fit to communicate to us.*—The Holy Spirit has these parts in this matter: (1.) *He is the immediate Worker of grace.* (2.) *He is the Distributor of all grace.* (3.) *He is the Arbitrator of that quota and proportion of grace which every believer has need of.* “All these worketh one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally

as he will ;" (1 Cor. xii. 11 ;) where you may observe the several parts that the Spirit of God hath in this matter :—

(1.) *Ενεργει.* "*He works*" this grace.—It is by his energy, or powerful working that there is root or fruit, habit in us, or act of grace proceeding from us.

(2.) *Διαιρουν ιδια εκαστω.* *He divides, and distributes to every one severally.*—He is the great Steward of the household of Christ, and dispenses the measure of grace to individuals.

(3.) *Καθως βουλεται.* *This measure is distributed by his absolute power.*—It is "according to his will," "as he pleases ;" for, the grace being his own, he may do with and dispose of his own grace according to his own will ; and though he will be faithful in the discharge of his trust, yet will he be sought unto to do it for us. Thus, when there was a promise that God would "sprinkle clean water upon" his people, and "cleanse them from all their filthiness, and from all their idols ;" and that he would give them "a new heart, and a new spirit," and "take away the heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh, and put his Spirit within" them, &c. ; yet still, "I will yet for all this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, 37.)

2. *Every gracious soul ought to pray for such a measure of grace as may fit his capacity.*—None are so full, but they may receive more : we have so little of grace, because we ask no more : "Ye have not, because ye ask not." (James iv. 2.) We are but poor in ourselves, we might be enriched from Christ ; and if we were more poor in spirit, we should be more enriched with grace from him. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (John xvi. 24.) We should not satisfy ourselves with the present measure of grace received ; but pray and strive that we may have "grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Eph. iv. 7.)

3. *We ought to pray and strive that our narrow vessels may be widened, our capacities enlarged, that we may be more capable of grace.*—The vessels of divine grace are of different sizes ; as "one star differs from another in glory," so one saint differs from another in grace. And as the Spirit enlarges the heart, he will enlarge his own hand : "I am the Lord," even "thy God : open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." (Psalm lxxxi. 10.) Our blessed Saviour may say to us, as the apostle to the Corinthians, "Ye are not straitened in me, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." (2 Cor. vi. 12.) Our hearts are narrow toward spiritual and heavenly things, because they are so enlarged toward earthly and visible things : when the "heart is enlarged as hell, and death, that cannot be satisfied," (Hab. ii. 5,) for these perishing things, no wonder if there be little room for the graces of the Spirit. This is therefore our great concern,—to pray that God would enlarge our desires, that he may satisfy and fill them.

4. *We ought to pray and strive, that all the powers and faculties of the whole man may be filled according to their measures.*—There is much room in our souls that is not furnished ; much waste ground there that is not cultivated and improved to its utmost. We might have more



light in the understanding, more tractableness in the will, more heat in our love, and a sharper edge set upon our zeal; and we have warrant to pray for this measure of the fulness of God: Now "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. v. 23.)

5. *Every gracious soul ought to pray and strive for such a measure of grace, that he may be qualified for any duty and service that God shall call him to, and engage him in.*—The Hebrew word, which we render "consecration, or separation to an office," is "filling the hand:" "Consecrate Aaron and his sons;" (Exod. xxix. 9;) in the Hebrew, מִלֵּא אֶת־יַד אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו "Fill the hand of Aaron and his sons." Where God employs the hand, he will fill the hand. We have ground to believe that he will send us about no errand, but he will bear our charges; wherever he gives a commission, he will bestow a competent qualification; when we go about his work, we may expect his presence and assistance in the work. And Moses seems to stand upon these terms with God: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." (Exod. xxxiii. 15.) As therefore there is great variety of duties in our Christian calling, we may in faith expect, and from that believing expectation pray, that we may be furnished with a suitable variety of grace for the discharge of them.

6. *Every true Christian ought to pray and strive for such a measure of grace, as may enable him to bear patiently, cheerfully, and creditably, those afflictions and sufferings, which either God's good pleasure shall lay upon us, or for his name's sake we may draw upon ourselves.*—We ought to pray, that either he will lay no more upon us than our present strength can bear; or if he increases our trials, he will increase our faith. There is no danger of excess in our prayers, when we confine them to the limits of his gracious promises. Now here we have encouragement from his word: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x. 13.)

7. *Every true Christian ought to pray and strive for such a measure of grace, as may bring the soul to a settlement and stability, that he be not soon shaken by the cross and adverse evils that he shall meet with in this life.*

And the apostle Peter has gone before us in this prayer: "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Peter v. 10.) And herein especially let us keep an eye upon these particulars:—

1. *Pray that God would so stablish you in the truth, that ye may not be blown away with every wind of doctrine.*—A sorry, trivial error many times oversets and puzzles a weak understanding. Now it is our great interest to pray and strive that we may reach such a clear, distinct, coherent light into the doctrine of the gospel, that every small piece of sophistry may not perplex and stagger our belief of it.

So the apostle Paul would have believers "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." (Eph. iv. 14.)

2. *Pray also that God would so establish you in the truth of the promises, that your faith may not be shaken with every wind of providence.*—We are apt to have our hearts tossed by contrary dispensations. So, upon a rumour, the "heart of Asa was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." (Isai. vii. 2.) It argues great weakness of faith, that we cannot maintain an equality of mind under various providences; the only remedy of which evil is, to pray that God would increase and strengthen our faith; that we may be so firmly built upon the unmovable Rock, that we may "not be afraid of evil tidings," having our "hearts fixed, trusting in the Lord." (Psalm cxii. 7.) And this was the glory of Job's faith,—that though God should "slay" him, yet would he "trust in him." (Job xiii. 15.)

3. *Let us pray and strive that God would so settle and establish us in love to himself, that no blast of afflictions from his hand may cool the fire of divine love in our hearts.*—We want exceedingly the faith, that God carries on a design of love under all his various and seemingly contrary dealings with us. He can love and correct; why then cannot we love a correcting God? Whether he wounds or heals, his love is the same; and why not ours? Can we not love God upon the security of faith that he will do us good, as well as upon the experience that he has done us good?

4. *Pray we and strive that God would so settle and establish us in our inward peace, that no wind of temptation may overthrow it.*—It is a slender and ill-made peace which every assault of the tempter dissolves. The Psalmist stood upon a firmer bottom, when the terrifying onsets from without made him fly more confidently to his God: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." (Psalm lvi. 3.) And we have God's own promise to answer our faith: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (Isai. xxvi. 3.)

And thus I have returned some answer to the second branch of the question: "What is *the measure* of the fulness of God with which every true Christian ought to pray and strive to be filled?"

There will still remain an inquiry, "How we may reach to such a measure of the divine fulness as has been described." To which though the limits of this discourse will not allow a full and just answer, yet the importance of the question will oblige me to point at some few things, upon which your own meditations may find matter of enlargement.

1. And, first, *it is necessary that we be convinced that we are very far short of that fulness of God, which is attainable even in this life.*—Many might have had more grace, if they had not been under the delusion that they had grace enough already. The dream of perfection attained, has prejudiced the perfection which is attainable: as

Tully observes, *Multi ad sapientiam pervenissent, nisi eò jam se pervenisse putassent*: "Many men had arrived at a high degree of wisdom, had they not fondly conceived that they had already reached the top of it." The apostle's frame was most excellent and imitable: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after it, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Phil. iii. 12, 13.) He considered more what was before, than what he had left behind; that is, he more looked forward to what he had not yet attained, than backward to what he had.

2. *Let us pray that we may know more of the love of Christ to us, as the proper mean to be filled more with the fulness of God in us.*—This is the expedient of the text; and what greater encouragement can there be to love, serve, obey, and glorify our God, than that he has so freely, wonderfully loved us in Christ?

3. *Let us strive to keep our vessels pure and clean, though they be small and narrow.*—That however they are of a narrow capacity, yet, being pure and clean, God may delight to fill us, and to enlarge our hearts, that we may receive more of his fulness. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matt. v. 8.) The sight of God, which a pure and holy heart qualifies us for, is the enjoyment of God; that is, God's communicating his love in its sanctifying and saving effects. And so we shall find, if we compare John iii. 3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," with verse 5: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

4. *Labour to experience poverty of spirit.*—The way to be rich in grace, is to be poor in spirit; which poverty of spirit does not consist in having little grace, but in a sense that, whatever we have, little or much, it is not of or from ourselves, but from the fulness of God.

The more we empty ourselves in that sense, the more God will fill us: "Every valley shall be filled." (Luke iii. 5.) The humble valleys are often fruitful, when the high hills are commonly barren: self-sufficiency discharges and disoblges the all-sufficiency of God: "The rich he sends empty away." (Luke i. 53.) Now as by "the rich" we are here to understand such as are rich in their own conceit, though they be really poor; so by "the poor in spirit" we are to understand them that are convinced of their own original indigency, though by the grace of God they are enriched, and their spiritual wants supplied. (Phil. iv. 19.) This poverty of spirit, though it pretend not to merit, yet has a meetness for the fulness of God: "I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul." (Jer. xxxi. 25.)

5. *From this spiritual poverty arise a spiritual hunger and thirst after more of the grace of God.*—Which temper of soul lies directly in the way of that promise: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled:" (Matt. v. 6:) for it is "upon him that is thirsty" that God promises to "pour" out

“water;” and it is “the dry ground” that God promises to satisfy with the “floods.” (Isai. xliv. 3.)

6. *Attend, in conscience and faith, with constancy and perseverance, upon all the ordinances of the New Testament.*—You read, Zech. iv. 12, of “two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves.” Let the two olive-branches be the person of Christ in two natures; the golden oil will then be his precious grace, and the golden pipes the ordinances of Christ, by which he empties out of himself that precious grace into holy and clean, though earthen, vessels. Amongst many other terms which the ancients gave to the Lord’s supper, they called it *το τελειον*, “the perfect,” or “the perfection.” So Zonaras: *Εις το τελειον ερχεσθαι, ηγουν εις αγιαν μεταληψιν* “To come to the perfection is to come to the holy eucharist.” And indeed where do believers find their choicest derivations from God, their sweetest communion with God, but in that sacred ordinance worthily received?

7. And, lastly, to all these we must add, and with all these we must join, *fervent and believing prayer.*—Which as it glorifies God, God will glorify it, and make it the means of conveying down to our souls such a measure of fulness as may serve us in the time of our need. We can never be poor whilst we can pray; he that is the Spirit of supplication in us will be the Spirit of grace to us. Let us therefore pray, with the apostle, that “the God of hope would fill us with all joy and peace in believing.” (Rom. xv. 13.) Let us pray, that “the God of all grace would make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle us;” (1 Peter v. 10;) that “the very God of peace would sanctify us wholly.” (1 Thess. v. 23.) And let us pray, that the same God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give us “to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.”