

THE TWELFTH  
MEDITATION,

UPON EPH. iii. 19.

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

**T**HE knowledge of Christ, and of his love, is deservedly, in this place, set down among the *desiderata Christianorum*, the most desirable enjoyments of believers in this world. This love of Christ had entered the apostle's heart; he was swallowed up in the meditation and admiration of it, and would have all hearts inflamed and affected with it, as his was.

Some think the apostle speaks extatically in this place, and knows not how to make the parts of his discourse consistent with each other, when he puts them upon endeavours to know that love of Christ, which himself confesses to pass knowledge.

But though his heart was ravished with the love of Christ, yet there is no contradiction or inconsistency in his discourse. He doth earnestly desire for the Ephesians, that they may know the love of Christ; i. e. that they may experimentally know his love, which passeth knowledge: That is, as some expound it, all other kinds of knowledge; yea, and all knowledge of Christ, which is not practical and experimental. Or thus: Labour to get the clearest and fullest apprehensive knowledge of Christ and his love, that is attainable in this world, though you cannot arrive to a perfect comprehensive knowledge of either. *Mens humana hoc et capit, et none capit; atque in eo capit, quod rapitur in admirationem*: as others reconcile it.

The note from it is,

Doct. *That the love of Christ surpasses, and transcends, the knowledge of the most illuminated believers.*

The love of Christ is too deep for any created understanding to fathom; it is unsearchable love, and it is so in divers respects.

1. It is unsearchable, in respect of its antiquity; No understanding of man can trace it back to its first spring; it flows from one eternity to another. We receive the fruits and effects of it now; but, O how ancient is that root that bears them! He loved us before this world was made, and will continue so to do, when it shall be reduced into ashes. It is said, Prov. viii. 29, 30, 31. 'When he gave the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him: rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.'

2. The freeness of the love of Christ passes knowledge. No man knows, nor can any words express, how free the love of Christ to his people is: It is said, Isa. lv. 8. *My thoughts are not your thoughts.* The meaning is, *My grace, mercy, and love* to you, is one thing, as it is in my thoughts, and quite another thing when it comes into your thoughts. In my thoughts, it is like itself, free, rich, and unchangeable; but in your thoughts it is limited and narrowed, pinched in within your strait and narrow conceptions; that it is not like itself, but altered according to the model and platform of creatures, according to which you draw it in your minds. Alas! we do but alter and spoil his love, when we think there is any thing in us, or done by us, that can be a motive, inducement, or recompence to it. His love is so free, that it pitched itself upon us, before we had any loveliness in us at all: 'when we were in our blood, he said unto us, live;' and that was the time of love. It did not stay till we had our ornaments upon us; but embraced us in our blood, in our most loathsome state; and of all seasons, that is the season of love, the chosen time of love, Ezek. xvi. 7, 8. Christ loved us, not upon the account of any foreseen excellency in us, or upon any expectation of recompence from us: Nay, he loved us not only without, but against our deserts. Nothing in nature is found so free, as the love of Christ is; our thoughts therefore of this love going beyond all examples and instances that are found amongst men, quickly lose themselves in an immense ocean of free grace, where they can find neither bank nor bottom.

The bounty and liberality of the love of Christ to his people, passeth knowledge. Who can number, or value the fruits of his love? They are more than the sands upon the sea shore. It would weary the arm of an angel, to write down the thousandth part of the effects of his love, which come to the share of any particular Christian in this world. Who can tell how many sins it pardons? 'The free gift is of many offences unto justification;' Rom. v. 16. How many dangers it prevents; or how many wants it supplies? This, we know, that 'of his fulness we all receive grace for grace;' John i. 16. But how full of grace Christ is, and how many mercies have flowed, and shall flow to us out of that fountain of love; this is unknown to men, to the best, wisest, and most observant men. O if the records of the mercies of our lives were, or could be gathered and kept, what vast volumes would they swell to! It is true, indeed, you have the total sum given you in 1 Cor. iii. 22. *All are yours;* but it is such a number, as no man can number.

The constancy of Christ's love to his people passeth knowledge: No length of time, no distance of place, no change of condition, either with him or us, can possibly make any alteration of his affections towards us: 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' Heb. xiii. 8. It is noted also by the evangelist; John xiii. 1. 'That

having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.' It is true, his condition is altered; he is no more in this world conversing with his people, as he did once in the *days of his flesh*: He is now at the right-hand of God, in the highest glory; but yet his heart is the same that ever it was, for love and tenderness to his people. Our conditions also are often altered in this world; but his love suffers no alteration. Yea, which is much more admirable, we do many things daily, that grieve him, and offend him; yet he takes not away his loving-kindness from us, nor suffers his faithfulness to fail. We pour out so much cold water of unkindness and provocation, as is enough to cool and quench any love in the world, except his love; but notwithstanding all, he continues unchangeable in love to us. This Peter found, notwithstanding that great offence of his: No sooner was the Lord risen from the dead, but he greets him in the stile of his former love and antient respect; *Go tell the disciples, and tell Peter.*

So then the love of Christ is a love transcending all creature-love, and human understanding. We read in Rom. v. 7, 8. that 'peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die;' but we never find where any, beside Jesus Christ, would lay down his life for enemies. It is recorded as an unparalleled instance of love in Damon and Pythias, the two Sicilian philosophers, that each had courage enough to die for his friend. One of them being condemned to die by the tyrant; and desiring to give the last farewell to his family; his friend went into prison for him, as his surety to die for him, if he returned not at the appointed time: But he did not die; yea, he had such a confidence in his friend, that he would not suffer him by default to die for him; and if he had, yet he had died for his friend. But such was the love of Christ, that it did not only put him into danger of death, but put him actually unto death, yea, the worst of deaths, and that for his enemies. O what manner of love was this! We read of the love that Jacob had for Rachel, and how he endured both the cold of winter, and heat of summer, for her sake. But what is this to the love of Jesus, who for us endured the heat of God's wrath? Beside, she was beautiful, but we unlovely. David wished for Absalom his son, *Would God I had died for thee!* But it was but a wish; and had it come to the proof, David would have shrunk from death, for all the affection he bare his beautiful son. But Christ actually gave his life for us, and did not only wish he had done it. O love, transcending the love of creatures; yea, and surmounting all creature-knowledge!

The *uses* follow.

1. *Use.* If the love of Christ pass knowledge, O then admire it! yea, live and die in the wonder and admiration of the love of Christ! As it is a sign of great weakness, to admire small and common things; so it speaks great stupidity not to be affected with great and unusual things. O Christian! if thou be one that conversest with the thoughts

of this love, thou canst not but admire it; and the more thou studi-est, the more still wilt thou be astonished at it. And among the many wonders that will appear in the love of Christ, these two will most of all affect thee, viz.

1. That ever it pitched at first on thee.

2. That it is not, by so many sins, quenched towards thee.

1. It is admirable, that ever the love of Christ pitched at first upon thee; for are there not millions in the world, of sweeter tempers, and better constitutions than thyself, whom it hath passed by, and yet embraced thee? 'Lord, (said the disciples) how is it, that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' John xiv. 22. Surely he did not set his love upon thee, nor choose thee, because thou wast better than others, but because he loved thee.

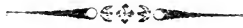
2. It is admirable, that his love to thee is not extinguished by so many sins as thou hast committed against him. Lay thy hand, Christian, this day upon thy heart, and bethink thyself, how many have been the provocations, wrongs, and dishonours thou hast been guilty of against thy God, and that since he called thee by his grace, and set his love upon thee. What, and yet love thee still! Yea, notwithstanding all, he is still thy God, and loves thee with an unchangeable love. O, with how many notwithstanding is his love continued to thy soul! All this is just matter of admiration and wonder for ever.

3. Is the love of Christ past knowledge, an unsearchable love? Then learn, whence and why it is, that the souls of believers never are, nor can be tired, in beholding and enjoying Jesus Christ. We use to say, one thing is tiresome; and it is very true, if it be an earthly thing, it will be so, how sweet or excellent soever it seems at first: And the reason is, because the best creature-enjoyment is but a shallow thing, and a few thoughts will sound it to the bottom; and there being no supply of new matter, to feed the hungry soul upon, it is quickly sated and cloyed with the repetition of the same thing over and over. But it is far otherwise in Christ: For though he be but one, yet in that one thing all things are virtually and eminently contained; so that every day he seems a new Christ for sweetness, and yet is the same Christ still. And in heaven the redeemed shall view him with as much wonder, and love him with as much ardour, after millions of years, as they did at their first sight of him. O, there is no bottom in the love of Christ; it passeth knowledge.

4. In a word; Bestow your best and chiefest love upon Christ, whose love to you passeth all knowledge. Let no creature be loved equally with Christ; but as his love to you passeth all creature-love, so let yours to him be a matchless love.

Believer; Christ loves thee with an unsearchable love; he loves thee more than the dearest friend, *that is as thine own soul*, loves thee. He loves thee more than thou lovest thy child, or the wife of thy bosom; more than thy soul loves thy body, with which it is so intimately united: And wilt thou content thyself with such poor, narrow, re-

miss affections to Jesus Christ? O look upon him this day in his red garments! Behold him in the strength of his love, breaking through the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the agonies of death, to bring home the fruits of his eternal love to thy soul; and whilst thou art beholding, and musing upon it, let thy heart melt, thy eyes drop, and thy very soul cry out, ‘Behold how he loved me! Blessed be God for Jesus Christ.’



A FAMILIAR  
CONFERENCE

BETWEEN A

MINISTER AND A DOUBTING CHRISTIAN,

CONCERNING THE

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

*Christian.*] **S**IR, if it may be no interruption to your studies, I would be glad to be resolved of several doubts, that arise in my mind, about receiving the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

*Minister.*] ‘I shall be very glad to contribute any thing for removing those scruples which may disturb you upon that account; therefore, pray go on.’

*Christian.*] Sir, I have heard many sermons, and read several discourses, which do much urge and declare the necessity of communicating in this blessed ordinance; and yet I durst never presume to join therein.

*Minister.*] ‘Have you then hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty.’

*Christian.*] To speak freely, Sir, I never yet did communicate therein all my life; because I have much questioned, whether I were worthy to receive that blessed and holy seal, to the glory of God, and my own edification and comfort; since I never truly understood the institution, nature, administration, and ends of it, nor the qualifications of those who are to be partakers thereof, according to the appointment of Jesus Christ.