

SERMON XLII.*

GOSPEL CHARITY.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.—Col. iii. 14.

THE word ἀγάπη, which we here translate ‘charity,’ is the only word used in the New Testament to signify ‘love.’ And I wish we had always rendered it so, because in our common use of speech, charity is restrained to one effect of love in relieving the poor and afflicted, which is nowhere the sense of the word in Scripture. It is love then that is intended. ‘Above all these things put on love.’ There is no grace nor duty but the exercise and practice of it is commanded in the Scriptures, and most of them fall under particular commands, and are enjoined absolutely; but there is but this one, that I remember, which hath a preference given unto it in a command above other things, as here, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις, ‘Above all these things put on love:’ so 1 Pet. iv. 8. πρὸ πάντων, ‘Before all things have fervent love among yourselves.’ And so in that of our apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 31. he had given them directions about the use and improvement of spiritual gifts for the edification of the church (and it is an excellent way to have the church edified by the due and orderly exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the elders and members); but when he hath done, he adds, ‘Behold I yet shew you a more excellent way:’ and that is this duty of love, as he shews in the next chapter. It is not only commanded, but it hath a special eminency and excellency put upon it in reference to all other duties for some certain end.

That which I shall at present discourse upon, is this :

Observation. Love, and its exercise, is the principal grace and duty that is required among, and expected from, the saints of God, especially as they are engaged in church-fellowship.

* This sermon was preached June 5, 1673, upon the uniting of Mr. Caryl’s church with the Doctor’s.

I shall not prove it in general, but speak to these three things :

I. I shall shew you the nature of this love that is thus signalized in the gospel precept.

II. Give you the reasons of the necessity and importance of it, by mentioning some of them the Scriptures give.

III. Lay down some directions for its practice.

I. Concerning the first we may observe, that the love here intended is the second great duty that was brought to light by the gospel. There is nothing of it in the world, neither as to the degree, nor as to the knowledge of it, but what proceeds from the gospel. The world neither hath it, nor knows what it is. Variance, strife, wrath entered by sin; for when we fell off from the love of God, and from his love to us, it is no wonder if we fell into all hatred and variance among ourselves. The love of God was originally in the state of innocency, the bond of perfection; when that was broke, all the creation fell into disorder; all mankind in particular into that state described by the apostle, Tit. iii. 3. 'Living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' There is carnal and natural love still in the world, that follows necessarily upon natural relations; and the same is in some degree in brutes themselves. There is also a love that arises from a society in sin, in pleasure, from a suitableness of humour in conversation, or of design as to political ends, to which heads you may reduce all the love in the world; but all these are utter strangers from this evangelical love. And therefore, when it was brought to light by the gospel, there was nothing so much amazed the heathen world, as to see this new love among Christians. It was even a proverb among them: 'See how they love one another.' To see persons of different sorts, different nations, tempers, degrees, high and low, rich and poor, all knit together in love, was the great thing that amazed the heathen world. And I shall shew you the grounds of it afterward.

You may likewise observe, that this love is the means of communion between all the members of the mystical body of Christ, as faith is the instrument of their communion with their head Jesus Christ. And therefore our apostle doth seven or eight times in his epistle join faith and love toge-

ther, as the entire means of the communion and fruitfulness of the mystical body of Christ. And in one place he hath so ordered his words, to shew their inviolableness and indissolubleness, that you must make a distribution of them to gather their right sense. It is in Philemon, ver. v. 'Hearing of thy love, and of thy faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and towards all the saints.' A man would think that both the objects relate to both the duties, faith and love towards Christ, and towards all the saints. But though Christ be the object of our love also, the saints are not the object of our faith: so that you must make a distribution of the words: 'Hearing of thy faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and of thy love towards all the saints.' But the apostle so places them to shew how indissoluble these things are, that they must go together; where the one is, there will be the other; and where the other is not, there that will not be. It is therefore the life, and soul, and quickening form of all duties that are performed among believers toward one another. Whatever duties you do perform, be they never so great and glorious, never so useful one to another, to any of the members of Christ; if they are not quickened and animated by this love, they are of no value to thy communion with Christ, and edification of the church. And men may perform many things that appear to be duties of love, without love. In the two verses before the text, saith the apostle, 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. But above all these things put on love.' So that all these things may be, yet not love. Those which seem to be the greatest and most effectual fruits of love whatever, yet they may be all without love. We may forbear without love, forgive without love, be kind to one another without love; and all this of no use, if above all these things, over and upon them, we do not superinduce love, if we be not quickened and acted by love. The truth is, he that shall read over the New Testament, especially those things which we have most reason particularly to consider in it, which are the special instructions and commands that Christ left unto his disciples when he was going out of this

world, would think this same love, whatever it be, is the sum and substance of all that Christ required of us, as indeed it is. And the apostle John, who lived long, and lived to see the Christian religion much propagated in the world, and very probably saw a decay of love, wrote his First Epistle almost to this very end and purpose, to let us know, that there was neither truth of grace, nor evidence of the love of God to us, nor of our love to God, unless there was fervent and intense love towards the brethren. Whatsoever we think of our profession, if there be not an intense love unto the brethren, we have neither the truth of grace, nor evidence of God's love to us, or of our love to God.

But you will say then, What is this love?

I answer briefly, It is a fruit of the Spirit of God, an effect of faith, whereby believers, being knit together by the strongest bonds of affection, upon the account of their interest in one head, Jesus Christ, and participating of one spirit, do delight in, value, and esteem each other, and are in a constant readiness for all those regular duties, whereby the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good of one another may be promoted.

I will a little open the description I have given of it, and so proceed.

1. This love, concerning which I speak, is a fruit of the Spirit: Gal. v. 22. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love.' There may be, and is implanted in some natures, a great deal of love, kindness, and tenderness, in comparison of others that are froward; but that is not the love here intended. That which renders it peculiarly gospel love, is its being the product of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Truly I cannot turn aside to every particular, to shew how we may know whether love be a fruit of the Spirit, or arising from our own natural inclination. But you must inquire into it upon those general rules that are given to discern and distinguish such things. This only I say, it is a fruit of the Spirit, a product of the Holy Ghost in us, or it belongs not to our work.

2. It is an effect of faith. So saith the apostle: 'Faith worketh by love.' How doth faith work by love? How doth faith set love on work? When it respects God's command requiring this love, his promise accepting it, and his glory whereunto this love is directed; then doth faith work by

love. And it is not the love we aim at, which we design and press upon you, if it proceed upon any other account but this, because Christ commands it, and promises to accept it, and because it lies in a tendency to his glory. Self may work by love sometimes; flesh, interest, or reputation may work by love, that is, by the fruit of it; but it is that love which faith worketh by, that we alone intend.

3. It is that love which doth knit together the hearts and souls of believers with entire affection one unto another. For the apostle tells us, Eph. iv. 16. speaking of that communion which the church hath by love, 'The whole body is fitly joined together, and compact, by that which every joint and part supplieth.' Now we can supply nothing to one another but by love, and from thence issues delight and esteem. 'All my delight,' saith he, 'is in the saints,' Psal. xvi. 2. 'and in them that excel in the earth.' And there is that valuation, that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren; that is, to be willing to expose ourselves to difficulties and dangers, our lives to hazard, yea, to lay them down, if the edification of the church so require. The martyrs of old did not lay down their lives for Christ personally only, but for Christ mystical; they not only laid them down in faith, but in love, love to the church. The apostle saith of all his afflictions, 'I fill up the measure of the afflictions of Christ, for his body which is the church.' He bore his afflictions out of love to the church, as well as out of faith and love to Christ personally, that there might be no offence, scandal, or temptation befall the church. That their faith might be confirmed and strengthened, was a great reason why the martyrs laid down their lives. And it should be so with us if we come to be called thereunto. This is that love which the Scripture speaks of, and not that careless, negligent, carnally influenced love which the world, I had almost said, nay, I will say it, which too many professors abound withal, and no more. And it was a task not for one sermon, but many discourses, to shew what are the duties that his love requires of us, and will put us upon; how it will influence all our walkings, direct us in all our ways, in our whole course and conversation, and all that we do.

It may be asked, seeing all believers are the objects of this love, How are we to exercise it towards them, since there

are few of them we know, and are acquainted withal, and that we have a satisfaction in their state and condition, that they are such; few, that we know their occasions, straits, and necessities?

I answer,

(1.) The whole mystical body of Christ being the adequate object of gospel love, of love in and by the Holy Ghost, it is indispensably required of us, that radically and habitually we have an equal love unto all believers, as such, unto all the disciples of Christ throughout the world. But this is accompanied with some limitations.

[1.] In the exercise of it, it will much answer the evidence that persons are interested in the mystical body of Christ. There are some whose vain opinions, and indeed corrupt practices, will exercise the most extensive charity to judge they belong unto the mystical body of Christ. Yet, according unto our evidence, so is our love to be.

[2.] There may be degrees in our love, especially as to delight and valuation, according as we see more or less of the image of Jesus Christ upon any believer; the likeness and image of Christ being the formal reason of this love.

[3.] The exercise of love must be determined by occasions and opportunities. But with these three qualifications, a man may pronounce he is no believer who hath not habitually and radically a love to all the believers in the world, so as to be inwardly concerned in their good and evil, and to be influenced unto prayer, compassion, delight, and joy, according as their state and condition doth require.

(2.) There is required an inclination and readiness to all acts of love towards all believers, as opportunity shall be administered. If we turn away our face from our brother, and hide ourselves from him, how dwells the love of God in us? If there be a real love in any of us of this kind, let it be but heightened and advantaged by an opportunity, it will break through difficulties, through reasonings, pleas of flesh and blood to the exercise of itself. As they that know any thing in this world, know that as the first great opposition of hell, the world, and corrupt nature, is against faith to God by Christ; so the next great opposition made against us, is against our love. If we do not understand this, we are unwise, and have not considered the various states and condi-

tions of things in this world; and how every moment things are presented unto us with a tendency to the weakening of love upon one account or other. But,

(3.) Our Lord Jesus Christ in infinite wisdom, tenderness, and condescension, hath provided us a safe, suitable, constant, immediate object for the exercise of this love. Having given so great a command as that of love, and laid so great weight upon it, he will not leave us at an uncertainty, how, or where, or when we shall exercise it; but hath directed us to a particular way wherein he will make a trial of our obedience unto the command in general; and this is, by his institution of particular churches. There are two great ends why Christ did institute a particular church, and they were to express the two great graces and duties that he requires of us.

[1.] The first end why Christ did institute a particular church was, that his saints together might jointly profess their faith in him, and obedience to him. And we have no other way of doing it: he hath tied us up to this. A blessed way! You shall this way, saith he, jointly profess your faith in me, and obedience to me, or no way.

[2.] The next great end why he did institute a particular church was, that we might have a direct exercise of his other great command, and of that other great duty of love to believers. I will try you here, saith Christ, I require this of you indispensably, to love all the saints, all believers, all my disciples. You shall not need to say, you must go far, this way, or that for objects; I appoint you to such an order, as wherein you shall have continual, immediate objects of all that love which I require of you. When God gives commands that great things turn upon, and are general, he gives some particular instance wherein he will have our obedience tried to those commands. When he gave the great command at first in the state of innocency, he tried them in the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. The Lord Jesus Christ hath given us this great command of love, and hath plainly declared, that if we love not one another, we are not his disciples. I will give you an instance whereby you may be tried, saith he, cast you into such a society by my order and appointment, as wherein you may have immediate objects for the exercise of love, to the utmost of

what I do require. If we find a person that is orderly admitted into church-society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love, as if we saw him lying in the arms of Christ. We walk by rule; he hath appointed us to do so. Let none then pretend that they love the brethren in general, and love the people of God, and love the saints, while their love is not fervently exercised towards those who are in the same church-society with them. Christ hath given it you for a trial: he will try your love at the last day by your deportment in that church wherein you are. The apostle tells us, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, will never love God whom he hath not seen.' I am sure I may say, he that exercises not love towards the brethren whom he doth see in that relation wherein Christ hath appointed him to exercise love, loves not the brethren whom he doth not see, and that he hath not that peculiar relation to, and acquaintance withal. The great Lord and guide of his church binds it upon all our spirits and consciences; it is our life, our being. I declare unto this congregation this day, I witness and testify unto you, that unless this evangelical love be found acted, not loosely and in general, but among ourselves mutually towards each other, we shall never give up our account with joy unto Jesus Christ, nor shall we ever carry on the great work of edification among ourselves. And if God be pleased but to give this spirit among you, I have nothing to fear but the mere weakness and pravity of my own heart and spirit. This is the great way Christ hath given us to exemplify our obedience unto that great and holy command of love to his disciples; and great weight is laid upon this duty.

II. The next thing I am to speak to, is to shew you the grounds why this love is so necessary: 'Before all these things have love: I shew you a more excellent way,' and that is love. There would be no end if I should insist long upon the grounds and reasons of this duty. I will give you some of them that are of weight and importance unto me. Do but carry this along with you, that what I speak about love, is to be exercised first among ourselves, and then to have emanations upon all opportunities and occasions to the whole mystical body of Christ throughout the world.

1. It is necessary, because it is the great way whereby

we can give testimony to the power of the gospel, and our witness to the Messiah, the Christ that was sent of God. The great thing we have to do in the world, is to bear witness unto God's sending Christ into the world for the work for which he came. How shall we do this? He himself shews us, John xvii. 21. 23. 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' And again, ver. 23. 'I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the world may know that thou hast sent me.' Jesus Christ lays the weight upon this, that the world may be convinced that God hath sent him. How shall this be evidenced? saith he, if all believers are one it will be evidenced. There is, I acknowledge, another principle of the oneness of them that believe, by a participation of that one Spirit of the Father and the Son, whereby we come to be one in the Father and the Son. But that is not the whole oneness; nay, I do not think it is at all the oneness here intended: and my reason is this, because it is perfectly invisible and imperceptible unto the world; and he prays for such a oneness as may convince the world, that the world may see that they are one, and so believe that God had sent him. It is no oneness but that whereof love is the bond of perfection, the life, and soul, and spirit of it, that will give conviction unto the world that God hath sent Christ. And if this be not eminent in us, we do what lies in us to harden the world in their unbelief. Persons that profess the gospel, some way or other, have framed unity and uniformity to themselves, and neglecting this oneness of love under them, hath been the greatest means of hardening the world in unbelief. What great matter is there in this, saith the world? I can make such a union when I list; it is but making such and such laws about outward observations, and tie men to the observance of them. But the union of love no man can give but Jesus Christ. And why will this convince the world that God hath sent Christ when the disciples do so love one another? Where lies the argument? From what topic do you argue to prove God hath sent Christ, because his disciples do so love one another? It lies in this, as I told you before, when sin entered, the bond of all union and perfection among the

creatures was quite broken by the loss of love; the whole world was irrecoverably cast under envy, wrath, 'hateful, and hating one another.' Nothing under heaven, no means in us could retrieve men unto love again, to pure spiritual love. God sends Christ to retrieve this loss, to bring in a new creation, to bring things into order, to renew the world, and the face of things. That glorious part of the work wrought in the heart of man, is invisible; that which is visible is love. The world sees here a new union brought forth among Christ's disciples, such as is not in the world, nor of the world, such as the world doth not partake of; by this they know that God hath sent Christ to do this great work. The care, kindness, condescension, love, delight, and concernment we have in one another, as members of the mystical body of Christ, exemplified in our peculiar church relation, is the great testimony we give to the world that God hath sent Christ, and they will be forced to see, or say at last, A glorious work is done upon these persons 'that were foolish and disobedient, living in divers lusts and pleasures, hateful, and hating one another;' a glorious work hath been done by the Son upon them, and we profess it is from Christ, from God's sending him for this end and purpose.

2. We have no evidence that we ourselves in particular are the disciples of Christ without it. John xiii. 34, 35. 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' I have a little inquired why this command of love is here and in other places called a new commandment. I told you before when sin entered into the world, envy and hatred entered with it, and it is continued upon the same account. 'Whence come wars and fightings,' saith the apostle, 'is it not from your lusts that war in your members?' In the first revelation God gave of himself in the law, he commanded love. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us so, that we are commanded to 'love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.' Whence then is this command so often called a new commandment? 'A new commandment I give you, That ye love one another,' saith he.

There are divers reasons of it.

(1.) I judge one may be this, That under the law God did indulge that carnal people in sundry things wherein they came short of the royal law of love, by reason of the hardness of their hearts. When Christ comes and gives this command in its full extent, it was a new command. Again,

(2.) They were carnal, and did not see the spirituality of the command. And the truth of it is, you hear so little of it in the Old Testament, and so much of it in the New, that Christ may justly call it a new command. Besides,

(3.) At the time when he came, there were cursed expositions of the law that went current in the whole church, which had overthrown the whole duty of love between the brethren and members of it; as you may see in our Saviour's vindicating of it, Matt. v. But Christ coming to take off all indulgence to carnal men, by reason of the hardness of their hearts, and to take away the darkness that was upon their minds, whereby they could not see the spirituality of the command, and to remove those false expositions that were put upon the law corrupting the command; he calls it a new commandment.

(4.) Above all these, there is one reason more for it, which lies here in the words I before read unto you: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you love one another.' The reason why it was a new commandment was, because there was no quickening, enlivening example of it, to express the power of love, under the Old Testament. This was reserved for Christ. He comes and gives that glorious instance of love in his condescension in all that he did, and in all that he suffered. He shews that there was something in love that they never before had an instance of in the world. Whence the command for love lies thus: 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus: That you love one another, as I have loved you.' And then it is a new commandment indeed, which it was not before. 'Hereby,' saith he, 'men shall know that ye are my disciples;' if the great example I have set you, the great command I have given you, and the great work I came into the world about,

was to renew love; by love men will know that ye are my disciples, and not else. We have no other way to evidence ourselves to be disciples of Christ. Men's parts, gifts, wisdom, will not do it; if there be no love, the world has no reason to conclude that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. It is that wherein the communion of saints doth principally consist. There is great talk about communion of saints, and certainly it is a great thing. We may observe it had a place in all the ancient creeds of the church: where they profess to believe in God, in Christ, and in the Holy Ghost, they profess also to believe the communion of saints, which shews it to be a thing of great importance.

Wherein doth it consist? There are three things in it: (1.) The fountain and spring of it; (2.) The profession and explanation of it; (3.) The formal reason and life of it.

(1.) The fountain and spring of the communion of saints lies in their common participation of one Spirit from the one head Jesus Christ. And you may as soon form a good society among dead men, as work a communion among professors, where it is not fundamentally laid in a common participation of the same Spirit with the head Christ.

(2.) This communion is expressed principally in the participation of the same ordinances in the same church. This is the great expression of the communion of saints.

(3.) The life and formal reason of this communion, which derives strength from the fountain, and communicates it into that expression and profession, lies in love.

Truly I have a little jealousy upon my spirit, that churches have been apt to place their communion too much, if not solely, in the participation of the same ordinances, depending upon the same pastor and teacher, joining together in the celebration of the same sacred institutions. Friends, this is but the expression of our communion, and it may be without any real communion. There may be a communication in the same ordinances, without any communion of saints; you know it is too much in the world. If we be not acted and influenced by this love in all we do, there is no communion. So far you are faithful unto your station in the church of God, so far you discharge your duty

and act as living members of the church, as you find love acting in you towards one another, and no farther. Your utmost diligence in attending unto order, your constant attendance at the celebration of ordinances, your dependance on the doctrine and instructions afforded in the church, may all be without communion of saints. When you have all this, it is love makes this communion, that is the life and formal reason of it; as you may see in the place before quoted, Eph. iv. 15, 16. 'But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' It is the greatest and most glorious description of the communion of saints, that we have in the Scripture. It begins in love; 'Speaking the truth in love:' and it ends in love; 'Edifying itself in love.' And it is also carried on by love. There is the fountain and spring of this communion, that lies in the head, in our relation unto, and dependance upon, Christ the head. If we hold not the head, we can have no interest in this communion. But it is not enough there be a head, there must be 'a growing up into him in all things who is the head. We shall never carry on the work of communion, unless we grow up into Christ, by express dependance on him, deriving life and strength from him, and returning all unto his praise and glory as our head, being thereby brought nearer, and made more like unto him. The exercise of faith in these things, is our growing up into Christ. Suppose then we go thus far in the business of communion; we hold the head by faith; and by the exercise of faith and obedience grow up into the head; What is next? 'From whom the whole body is fitly framed together.' There will be such supplies from the head Christ, being thus held and grown up into, as will communicate such variety of gifts and graces as shall suit the body, and every member one to another. But how are believers cast into church-union and order? I will not say how they are not: I know what attempts there are in the world. I will plainly tell you how they are. It is by the various communications of Christ the head unto them all, fitting and suiting them to one another.

What do they then themselves herein? They are of two sorts, either joints or other parts. May be they are joints, that is, either officers, or principal members, who by reason of their gifts, yield a supply to the communication of the effects of those gifts and graces they have received, carrying on farther this supply that is received from the head. What shall become of the other members? Not only the joints, but every part doth so, according to the measure of each. The graces and gifts of Christ cast every member into what part it bears. Let none of us choose our own part in the house of God. The graces and gifts of Christ cast us into each part, or joint, and from thence do we supply, according to the measure of that part: and no more is required of us. But how shall we do this? Why, saith he, *ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ*, 'Speaking the truth in love.' The plain meaning of which is, That whatever we do in declaring, or obeying the truth; in preaching, or in a way of duty, we do it all in love. It is not merely speaking, or declaring, but it is a doing whatever we do in obedience to the truth. Whatever your concern is in the truths of the gospel, let love be acted in it; and that is the means whereby you convey your supplies from every joint and part unto the whole. Truth requires our pity, compassion, admonition, exhortation, forbearance, and the like; do it all in love, saith he. How then? 'The body will be increased, and edify itself in love.' It is all love. I have sometimes thought that *ἐν ἀγάπῃ*, 'in love,' may be taken for *διὰ ἀγάπης*, 'by love:' 'Shall edify itself by love.' But take it as we have rendered it: 'Edify itself in love;' that is, love in the body shall be increased, and where love is increased, there the body is edified. A church full of love, is a church well built up. I had rather see a church filled with love a thousand times, than filled with the best, the highest, and most glorious gifts and parts that any men in this world may be made partakers of. Could they go beyond and exceed all we aim at or desire; could they 'speak with the tongues of men and angels; it is ten thousand times more for the glory of God, and our own comfort, to be a company of poor saints, who are filled with love, than with those of the highest attainments, without it. We neither give testimony unto the world that God sent Christ, nor evidence that we are his

disciples, nor do we contribute any thing to the edification of the church, unless God give us to act this grace of love in an abundant measure. Whatever our gifts and parts are, and whatever our wisdom is, such things are apt to puff us up, if this love abound not in us; we shall be thorns in the sides of one another, and shall contribute nothing unto the real, spiritual edification of the church. The apostle hath not only laid this down, but so disputed it in the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, that I shall not insist upon it. 'Though I could,' says he, 'speak with the tongues of men and of angels, yet if I have not love, I am but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,' that make a little pleasant noise that comes to nothing. I would wind up all arguments with this; If we have not love, we have no grace. He that loves him that begets, will love them that are begotten. If we love not the brethren, the love of God doth not dwell in us. It is not our outward order and form, nor our duties, nor any thing we do, or can do, will evidence that we have any thing of the grace of God in us, if we want this grace of love.

III. Having spoken thus far of the nature of evangelical love, and of the reasons of its importance, I would willingly say something to press it upon your hearts and mine own.

The whole issue of this day's work which you have called us unto, under the care and kindness of Christ, depends wholly upon this one instance of our discharging ourselves in this one duty of love. I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that professors have of late been wonderfully harassed with sharp invectives, and bitter rebukes for their want of love; and yet I cannot observe there is any fruit of it, or any advantage made by it. And the reason of it seems to be, because all those invectives have been managed upon this principle; If you will do so and so, if you will come up to such and such practices in things of religion, if you will go thus far, and thus far, if you will leave off these and those institutions and ways wherein ye walk; then you have love; if not, you have none at all. And what hath been the fruit hereof? New divisions, new animosities, new rendings and tearings, without the least appearance of any improvement of love whatsoever. I

should be very sorry that any man living should outgo me in desires, that all that fear God throughout the world, especially in these nations, were of one way as well as of one heart. I know I desire it sincerely; but I do verily believe, that when God shall accomplish it, it will be the effect of love, and not the cause of love. It will proceed from love, before it brings forth love. There is not a greater vanity in the world, in my weak apprehensions, than to drive men into such and such a way, and then suppose that love will be the necessary consequence of that way; to think that if by sharp rebukes, by cutting, bitter expressions, they can but drive men into such and such practices, that then love will certainly ensue. We see the contrary all the world over, that those who do most boast and glory in bringing all to uniformity of practice, have least love among them. You may see it in the papal church, they have obtained their end in driving all into a uniformity in practice, and yet the members of it are fighting with, and tearing one another. It is a vain supposition to think to bring men to such a way, whether they will or no, and then to love whether they will or no. I know not truly any way that any who fear God do walk in, though some are nearer the truth than others, which in itself is an obstruction of love. I profess if I did, I would fly from that way, as from a pest-house, or any thing that was mortally destructive; because I know the end of all Christ's institutions is to increase love. Some may be nearer the truth than others, some are so, but if any way doth really in itself obstruct love, without farther consideration, without debating whether it was right or wrong, I would leave that way, for I know it is false. But for persons to reflect upon any institutions of Christ, such as particular churches are, and will be proved to be, as though they were hinderances of love, argues a great unskilfulness in the ways of God, if not ill will towards them. Nay, they are appointed of Christ for this end, that we may first exercise that love which he commands immediately towards one another, that so we may learn to exercise it towards all believers throughout the world. Pray let us not be overtaken with any such apprehension that we cannot exercise love, until we come to such and such a way of agreement,

and so put off the duty till we have no opportunity or ability to exercise it; but let us address ourselves to it in our present state and condition.

I shall close all with two or three cautions against things that may be hinderances in the diligent practice of this great duty I have been speaking of unto you.

1. Let us take heed of a morose, sour, natural disposition. If it doth not hinder many fruits of love, yet it sullies the glory of its exercise extremely. Some good persons have so much of Nabal in them, that blasts the sweet fruit of love which comes from them; it is soured with something of an ill disposition, that hath no life or beauty in it. It is a great mistake to believe that grace only subdues our carnal corruption, and doth not change our natural temper. I believe grace changes the natural temper, and ennobles it; it makes 'the leopard to lie down with the kid,' and 'the bear to eat straw with the ox,' as it is promised; it makes the froward, meek; the passionate, patient; and the morose, benign and kind. And we are to apply grace to these ends and purposes; and not to humour and please ourselves, as though such things are our natural disposition. Grace comes to alter our natural dispositions, that are unsuited to love, and indispose us for it. We are apt to excuse ourselves and one another, and hope that Christ will do so too, because this or that is much from our natural temper. Pray let us not act thus; our natural tempers are to be cured by grace, or it hath not its perfect work upon us.

2. Take heed of such hinderances of love, as may attend your peculiar state and condition. I would speak to them who have the advantage of riches, wealth, honour, reputation in the world, which encompass them with so many circumstances, that they know not how to break through them to that familiarity of love with the meanest member of the church, which is required of them. Brethren, know the gospel leaves all your providential advantages entirely unto you, whatever you have by birth, education, inheritance, estate, titles, places, it leaves the entire enjoyment of them. But in things which purely concern your communion together, the gospel lays all level; there is neither rich nor poor, free nor bond in Christ, but the new creature. Therefore we are so expressly commanded by the apostle James,

chap. ii. that we should have no particular respect in the congregation to persons upon the account of outward advantages. We all serve one common Master, the same Lord; and he is such a Lord, that when he was rich in all the glory of heaven, he became poor for our sakes. And let me beg of you that are rich, to remember this common Lord and Master; and let not your outward advantages therefore keep you at a distance from the meanest, the poorest saint that belongs unto the congregation. If they do, your riches are your temptation, and your place a disadvantage, which you must labour to break through.

Something also might be said to the poorest and lowest sort, who have their temptations too to keep them off from the exercise of love. But I shall waive it.

3. Lastly, Take heed of satisfying yourselves, all of you, with the duties of love, without looking after the entire working of the grace of love. You here that are joined with us this day, have had for a long time so great a light and instructor, that I doubt not but you are acquainted with all the duties of love that are required of you in your especial relations wherein you stand, and that you have been found in the practice of them. I only mind you to take heed, that you be spirited with the grace of love; that which proceeds from faith, and is acted in you by the Holy Ghost; that which gives you delight in, and a dear esteem and valuation of the saints, and creates a cheerfulness and readiness in you for the performance of all these duties.

I thought to have given you many other directions; but I must conclude. If God be pleased to imprint any thing from this word upon our hearts and spirits, we shall have cause to rejoice in it. However remember thus much, that you were begged and entreated, as you regard the glory of God, the honour of the gospel, and the edification of this church (which of two is now become one), concerning which you must all in your places give an account, as well as I in mine; and as you have any respect unto the ministry of him whom God hath set over you, that all is wound up in this one duty of love; which if God please to increase, and make intense among us, I no way doubt but he will prosper this day's work of our union.