

DISCOURSE XX.*

YOU have been minded of, and instructed in, the nature and benefit of our love to God; and I shall take occasion thence a little to mind you of the love of Christ unto us, the love in an especial manner which he shewed in dying for us, which is, that we are here gathered together to remember and celebrate, not barely the death of Christ, but that which is the life of that death, the love of Christ in his death. And I would ground it on that which the apostle speaks in

ROM. v. 5, 6.—*The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.*

This is that which I know you all long for, and prize above life; ‘the loving-kindness of God is better than life.’ Why so? For, says he, ‘when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.’

An apprehension of the love of Christ as dying for us ungodly creatures, is that which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Do not let your minds go upon uncertainties. When the Holy Ghost gives you a due apprehension of Christ’s love in dying for ungodly sinners, as we are, then is this love shed abroad in our hearts. The apostle there proceeds to shew how great this love was in that Christ died; he died, not for good men, and righteous men, and for friends, but he died for the ungodly, for sinners, and for enemies. This was great love indeed. We are here to remember that love of Christ wherewith he gave himself to death for us, when we were enemies, and would have continued so to eternity, had he not loved us and given himself for us.

Brethren, if we barely remember the love of Christ in the way of an ordinance, and our hearts be not powerfully affected with it, we are in danger of being disadvantaged by our attendance. Pray remember it; you know how plainly I use to speak on these occasions; I say, we have frequent opportunities of remembering the love of Christ in dying

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for us, in this ordinance representing of it; but if our hearts be not powerfully influenced and affected by it, we shall be losers by the frequency of ordinances.

I will add one word more; according as our hearts are affected with the love of Christ, so will be our love to Christ, and no otherwise. And truly, even that faith which discovers too much selfishness is very dangerous. If we come here to act faith, to look for no other effect of it, but what evidence and sense we have of the pardon of our own sins, how our consciences may be quieted and cleared, faith ends in self; it is dangerous, lest it should be only a branch from, and commensurate with, convictions. True faith acting itself on Christ in this ordinance will work by love unto Christ: I would not say, principally, or in the first place; I know poor creatures are apt to look after themselves, and their own relief; but it will so work also: and truly, brethren, this it will not do, we shall not have faith working by love towards him, unless we have some sense of the love of Christ on our hearts.

How shall we know, whether our hearts are under the powerful influence of the love of Christ in dying for us? Why, the love of Christ in dying for us has three properties with it, which will have an influence on our souls, if we are affected with it.

1. It has a transforming power, property, and efficacy with it. They are plain truths I am speaking, but of great concern to our souls, to know whether we are affected with the love of Christ or not. If we are rightly affected with it, I say, it will transform and change our whole souls in some measure into the likeness of Christ. How so? I will tell you in the most familiar manner I am able; if you are affected with the love of Christ, it lays hold upon, and possesses your affections; the affections being possessed, stir up many thoughts; thoughts are the very image of the soul, represent it, to shew you what the soul is: and those things concerning which your thoughts do most abound, that carries the frame of the soul. Let a man profess what he will, if his thoughts are generally conversant about earthly and worldly things, he has an earthly and worldly mind; and if thoughts are conversant about sensual things, he has a sensual and carnal mind; for whatever he may outwardly

say, as he thinks so is he; there is the image and likeness of the soul.

Now if we are affected with the love of Christ, it will beget in our souls many thoughts of Christ, in our lying down and in our rising up, in our beds, in our ways, on our occasions, as well as in ordinances. If indeed our hearts are affected with the love of Christ, our thoughts of Christ will abound; and those thoughts will work again on our affections, and conform our souls more and more unto the image of Jesus Christ. That man who thinks much of the earth, because affected with it, his soul is like the earth; and that man who thinks much on the love of Christ, because he is affected with it, his soul is like Christ.

If it has not been thus with us, brethren, in our preparation for this ordinance, or at any time, that thoughts of Christ have not abounded, verily there has been a failing in us. Let us strive for the future to amend it, that we may find the love of Christ begetting in us many thoughts of him, working upon our affections, and with a transforming power change the frame of our souls into his own likeness.

Again, 2. The love of Christ, if we are affected with it, has an attractive power: John xii. 23. 'And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' I cannot stay to shew you the drawing power and efficacy there is in the love of Christ when dying on the cross; but this I will say, it is that which converted the world of all that did believe. It was the love of Christ, set forth in his death as one crucified for them, that drew all men unto him. When I am lifted up, when I have accomplished, manifested, and evidenced the unspeakable love which I have for the sinful sons of men, in being lifted up for them, I will draw them unto me. If you have a true sense, brethren, of the love of Christ in dying for you, it will draw your souls unto him. Cant. i. 4. 'Draw me, we will run after thee.' I do not now speak to you about the first drawing of Christ, which is as unto believing; I hope Christ has so drawn all our souls; but the following efficacy of the love of Christ to draw souls that do believe nearer unto him. Whoever is sensible of this attractive power of the death of Christ, it will have this efficacy upon him, it will have adherence and delight; it will cause him more to cleave to Christ. The soul will cleave to Christ

with delight that is affected with the attractive drawing power of his loving-kindness in his death. There is a great deal in that word, Cleave unto Christ with love and delight, with the best of our affections and dearest of our valuations, to cleave to him with trust, and to him alone. I do but remind you of what you know, that you may reduce it into practice. Pray in this ordinance, labour to have such a sense of the drawing power of the love of Christ in his death, that you may resolve to cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, to cleave unto this Christ who has thus loved us.

3. Whenever we are affected with the love of Christ, it is accompanied with a constraining power: 2 Cor. v. 14. 'The love of Christ constraineth us,' and that constraint is unto obedience; it constrains us to judge that we ought to live to him who died for us. It is a blessed thing, brethren, to walk in our obedience under a sense of the constraining efficacy of the love of Christ. Take but this one word to discover to you, whether you walk in your obedience under a sense of the constraining power of Christ, it comprehends all others; 1 John v. 3. 'His commandments are not grievous.' When a soul works out of love, what it doth is not grievous. And the inward and outward commands of Christ will be grievous to all that are not under the constraining power and efficacy of his love.

I have no more to say but only to tell you, that we should labour to have our hearts affected with the love of Christ in this ordinance. I have shewed you the danger, if it be otherwise; and given you some ways to examine your hearts, whether they are so affected or not. The Lord grant that where they are, it may be increased; and where they are not, that God would renew it by his Spirit in us.