

Christ's Love to the Believer Part 1

By John Durant (1620-1686)

Eph 3:19

I. The Text Opened

A. Ephesians 3:19

1. “And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God,” (Eph. 3:19).

a) The more like God we are, the nearer we are to perfection.

b) Knowledge, in this, is exceedingly precious.

(1) *It must necessarily be so, since it tends to perfection.*

(2) *Now, of all knowledge there is none so precious, nor so perfecting, as that which is divine.*

(3) *Of all divine knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ in the light of love is the most precious, as tending most to the perfection of our souls.*

(4) *Whatever other knowledge is in some way perfecting and precious, and therefore desirable, yet there is no knowledge which is so to be desired (at least by saints) as the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*

2. In this epistle Paul shares many precious petitions which he sends up to the Father of our Lord Jesus on behalf of the Ephesians.

a) And in our text, he adds that they might, “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.”

b) Having hinted in the first verse of this chapter that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Ephesians (who were Gentiles), and having also spoken of the excellency of the gospel and the warrant which he had to preach the same to them (which two things were great supporters of him in his sufferings), the apostle comes in the 14th verse to pray for the Ephesians that they might not faint at his tribulations.

(1) *Here are two reasons the apostle may have feared that the Ephesians might faint at the news of his tribulations.*

(a) 1. *They would likely feel sympathy.*

(i) *It is typical for saints to sympathize with each other in their tribulations.*

(ii) *And Paul on this ground might rightly think that the tidings of his imprisonment would be sad to these Ephesians.*

(a) *He might fear that out of their tender love, both to his person and preaching, that they would be overly sad with sympathy when they hear that now their preacher was in prison.*

(b) 2. *They may also experience fear lest they themselves might meet with the same sufferings.*

(i) *For what might they think? Is Paul in prison for preaching the gospel?*

(ii) *Then we may rightly fear the same for receiving the gospel.*

c) The Apostle asks the Lord for three things on their behalf, that they might not (on any ground) faint at his tribulations.

(1) 1. *Divine strength.*

(a) *That he would grant “according to the riches of his glory, that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man,” (verse 16).*

(b) *The apostle knew how weak the spirit of man is and how readily it can lose heart, unless God strengthens it.*

(c) *Therefore, he begs the Spirit of God (which is the power from on high) for their strengthening in the inner man, that they might not faint in their outward man.*

(2) *2. Christ’s inhabitation.*

(a) *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,” (verse 17).*

(b) *If anything will keep the heart from fainting it is Christ’s indwelling presence in the soul.*

(c) *Christ’s presence creates comfort, and there is no such fence against losing heart in the face of any fear as Christ in the soul.*

(d) *The inhabitation of Christ within will support the soul from despair at tribulation.*

(3) *3. The knowledge of Christ’s love.*

(a) *That they might, “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge,” as it is in the text.*

(b) *Paul knew well the power and efficacy of Christ’s love.*

3. So now you may gather up the apostle’s petitions into one prayer, and you may conceive him pouring out his heart after this manner: “Father of our Lord Jesus, since you are the God of all comforts, and comfort yours in all their tribulations so that they do not faint, promise to grant according to the riches of your grace that the Ephesians may not faint at my tribulations. And to this end, strengthen them by your Spirit of power in their inner man; fill them by the glorious presence of Christ dwelling in them; but above all, let them know the love of Jesus Christ which passes knowledge.”

a) But, why should he pray that the Ephesians might know that which he expressly says is above knowledge: the love of Christ which passes knowledge?

4. There are three things which may satisfy this concern as well as demonstrate the reasonableness of this request.

a) 1. I admit that the love of Christ is above knowledge, yet it is not unreasonable to desire to know it.

(1) *The fulfilling of divine precepts is above our power, and yet it is to be our endeavor.*

(2) *In the same manner, although the knowledge of Christ and his love is above our intellectual capacities, it should still be in our desires.*

(3) *The same infiniteness, which grace puts in the will, causes us to endeavor to pursue what we cannot attain perfectly.*

(4) *This grace instills in us a desire for the obtaining of that which cannot be obtained.*

b) 2. To know the love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge with reference to men as men, though not to saints as such.

(1) *Indeed, the spirit of man is not able to know or search into the love of Christ, as that is above knowing.*

(2) *But the Spirit of Christ is able both to search into and to reveal his love.*

(3) *And though Christians as men cannot attain to the knowledge of the love of Christ by the light of reason, yet as saints by the light of faith they may, especially with the Holy Spirit “shedding it abroad” in their hearts, as Romans 5:5 states.*

- c) 3. The love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge in regard to perfection of degrees, not simply in regard to its parts.
- (1) *It is true, the perfect knowledge of Christ's love passes the understanding of men and angels (which is its glory).*
 - (2) *Yet in some measure it may be known (and it is our duty to know).*
 - (3) *For that which cannot be known perfectly in the highest degree may yet be known partially and in some measure.*
 - (4) *In this way the text may be cleared from the doubt propounded.*
5. Now, there are four ways in which I shall look on this scripture, and so speak to it.
- a) 1. As it includes the truth and reality of Christ's love to the saints.
 - b) 2. As it concludes the height and royalty, or transcendency of that love.
 - c) 3. As it holds out the apostle's desire that the Ephesians might know both.
 - d) 4. As it contains the ground of keeping up the Ephesian's hearts from fainting at Paul's tribulations, which is the drift and scope that Paul strives for in them.

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Four Doctrines to Consider in the Course of the Study:

1. There is love in Christ's heart towards all believers.
2. That love which Christ bears to believers is a transcendent love.
3. It is a thing of necessary concern for every Christian to know the transcendent love of Christ.
4. The spiritual knowledge of the transcendent love of Christ towards believers is of special efficacy to keep their hearts from fainting under any trouble.

B. The First Doctrine

1. I begin with the first, which might more fully be gathered from another text, yet because it will be a good foundation for the following discourse and is clear enough in this place, I shall briefly speak to it now, viz. DOCTRINE: there is love in Christ's heart towards all believers.
2. Paul would not pray that the Ephesians might know that which was not; things must exist so they can be known.
 - a) Nothing falls under the understanding until it first is something in being.
 - b) Love is the commanding affection of the soul, consisting in the expansion of the heart as it moves towards a person or thing in hopes and workings for its good.
 - (1) *Love is the queen regent in the soul, and it sits on the throne commanding everything.*
 - (2) *It is the centurion in the heart and has the same power over all the affections as the centurion has over all his servants.*
 - (3) *It consists in the expansion or stretching out of the heart.*
 - (4) *As hatred contracts and pulls inward, so love opens and dilates the heart.*
 - (5) *So that, when I say that there is love in Christ's heart towards all believers, I mean that the commanding affections of Jesus Christ are set on them, that his heart is open and stretched out to them, and that the hopes and workings of his soul are toward them for their good.*
3. By believers, in a word, understand that I am referring to all those who close with Christ as tendered in the gospel.

a) However, there are differences between believers in the degrees of their faith and the ways of their light, yet all agreeing in this, that they see themselves lost without Christ, and that God the Father freely tenders Jesus in the word of grace to them.

b) They then move toward him in the strength and sincerity of their souls to embrace him as he is tendered.

(1) *They are believers, all of them, who do this.*

(2) *Once done, Christ places no difference (as it is in Acts 15:9) between them, but burns in his heart with real love toward them all.*

c) For proof, I should bring all that cloud of witnesses which would gladly come and set a seal to this sweet truth.

(1) *Ask John, and he will witness that Christ loved him.*

(2) *He was indeed a heart-beloved believer; and of him it is often said that he was "the disciple whom Jesus loved."*

(3) *Yes, and John will witness for more than himself, he says Jesus loved him and all believers besides him.*

(4) *For speaking to them, Christ says he, "hath loved us," (Rev. 1:5).*

(5) *Call in Paul, and he will prove that Christ loves believers, for Christ loved him.*

(a) *And such was the love that Christ demonstrated to Paul that he professes that he could, no, did live on it. "I live," he says, "by the Son of God who loves me," (Gal. 2:20).*

(6) *Paul further bears record to this truth, and witnesses that Christ's love stretches forth itself to every believing soul, as we are, "more than conquerors, through him that loves us," (Rom. 8:37).*

(a) *Even the least believer, though but a babe, is able to lisp in the language of this love and tell you that there is a divine fire of love in Christ's heart, burning brightly towards believers.*

4. I shall now mention three demonstrations of the doctrine taken from the behavior of Christ towards believers, which will clear the idea of this cordial love to them.

a) 1. Christ's eye is always on believers, and he takes delight to look there where they are.

(1) *The eye is a sweet star always shining over the hearts and houses of those whom we love.*

(2) *The proverb tells us that where we love, there we look.*

(3) *Observe that Christ's eyes are towards believers.*

(a) *Will you listen to Christ's love in its language? "Let me see thy countenance," he says to the believer, "for it is lovely," (Song of Songs 2:14).*

(4) *Such is the pleasure that Christ takes in beholding believers that he seems to live on their looks and speaks as if he were ravished with their sight.*

(5) *"Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes," (Song of Songs 4:9).*

(6) *How can we question Christ's love to believers when his eyes are fixed on them to such a degree that their sight ravishes his soul?*

(a) *Rest in this, O believing soul!*

(b) *Christ's delight in looking on you demonstrates his love to you.*

(c) *He peeps through the lattices to declare his love (Song of Songs 2:9).*

(d) *His eye is on them and his heart is taken with them if their eye is on him.*

b) 2. Christ's tongue speaks his love to believers.

(1) *The tongue is love's trumpet; the breathings of the heart fill the lips with sounds of love.*

(a) *Believers, Christ's tongue reveals his heart.*

(b) *His lips speak his love to you.*

(c) *How often has Christ spoke sweetly to your soul?*

(i) *O believer! Can you not tell by his speaking what is in his heart?*

(d) *How near your heart do those words of your Savior go?*

(e) *"If any thirst, let him come and drink freely."*

(f) *Does not his heart open as a fountain of love in these words?*

(g) *He speaks so kindly when he says, "if you thirst, come and drink."*

(h) *And as Christ's tongue trumpets out love when he speaks of believers, consider the high epitaphs that he adds to believers' names when he speaks of their persons!*

(i) *Consider his language of love when he speaks of his spouse, "thou art fair," he says, "thou art fair, thou hast doves eyes; thy hair is as a flock of goats, thy teeth are like a flock of sheep; thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, thy neck like the tower of David," (Song of Songs 4:1-4).*

(j) *As believers declare their love to Christ by speaking highly of him, so Christ declares his love to believers by speaking highly of them.*

(k) *If believers call him the Lily of the Valley, he calls them the lily among thorns.*

(l) *Christ's love will not permit him to speak of them in base language.*

(i) *In this way the lips of your Lord, O believers, are a demonstration of his love to you.*

c) 3. Christ's actions seal this truth and strengthen the demonstration of the doctrine.

(1) *If there were nothing but the eye or the tongue, it might be feared that the love expressed by them was either insincere or fond.*

(2) *But actions that back them up, seal the truth and prove that his love is not complementary but cordial.*

(3) *If love is only in the lips, it is without life and may be suspected as counterfeit.*

(4) *See the actions of Jesus Christ, where we see that they strive to excel and exceed his words in the declaration of his love to believers.*

5. Consider how Jesus Christ manifests himself and his secrets to believing souls, which demonstrates the truth of his love.

a) The Lord Jesus unveiled himself to believers; the secrets of his heart are with them.

(1) *Christ tells his disciples that he would manifest himself to them (John 14).*

(2) *The men of the world are strangers to Christ's affections, and so to his secrets.*

(a) *Carnal people do not know the mind of the Lord because he does not love them.*

(b) *But we, Paul says, we who are beloved by Christ have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).*

(c) *As Father loves the Son and declares it by this, that he shows him all things which he does (John 5:10), in like manner the Son loves believers and actually demonstrates it by declaring all things, (i.e., all these secrets which were needful for them to know), that he heard of the Father (John 15:15).*

(d) *The secrets of Christ's cabinet-counsel are with those whom he loves.*

6. Christ often takes believers to his house and feasts with them.

a) This is how we deal with our friends, and thus we declare to them our love.

- (1) *And this is how Christ deals with his, “the king has brought me into his chamber,” (Song of Songs 1:4).*
- (2) *“Nay he has brought me into his banqueting house,” (Song of Songs 2:4).*
- (3) *When David would declare his love to Barzillai, he said, “come you with me, and I will have you feed with me at Jerusalem,” (2 Sam. 19:33).*
- (4) *Christ often speaks in this way to declare his love to believers, “come thou to me, poor soul, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.”*
- (5) *Christ declares his love not only by inviting and bringing believers to his house, but also by coming to theirs; he stands at their door and knocks, and if they will only open, he will enter (Rev. 3:20).*
- (6) *If they love him so much as to let him in, he will come and declare his love by dwelling with them (John 14:23), and he will feast with them in their house, i.e. in their hearts.*
- (7) *And because he comes to show his love, he will prepare the feast at his own cost. “He has gathered his myrrh with his spice,” for this purpose (Song of Songs 5:1).*
7. Christ unites himself to believers, and by doing so demonstrates that he loves them.
- a) Affection begets union.
 - b) Augustine defined love to be the juncture of two in one: love makes one of two.
 - (1) *It is said of Jonathan and David that their souls were knit together (1 Sam. 18:1).*
 - (2) *Christ and believers are knit together, and it is Christ’s love which makes the knot.*
 - (3) *It is more than a moral union between Christ and believers.*
 - (4) *They are not only his friends and brethren, but his spouses and members.*
 - (5) *If he is the head, they are the body; and if he is the vine, they are the branches.*
 - (6) *The union between Christ and believers is nearer than that of the vine and branches even, for no branch can be said to be in the vine, and the vine in it.*
 - (7) *But of believers it is said, Christ is in them, and they are in him.*
 - (8) *This union demonstrates the truth of Christ’s love to believing souls.*
 - (a) *I shall now make a word of application, and then conclude this point.*
 - (b) *There are three uses about which I will speak, viz. a use of information, comfort, and counsel.*

III. The Text Applied

A. Three Uses

1. Use I. The point informs us of the sweetness of Christ to all the saints.
 - a) O how sweet, how kind, how gracious Jesus Christ is to believers, to consider them and to set his heart on them!
 - b) Believers, the Lord loves you, is he not then sweet to you?
 - c) Fall on your faces believers!
 - d) You were once strangers to Jesus Christ, but you have found grace in his eyes; your names are written on his heart in letters of love.
 - e) Well may you say that Christ is sweet, seeing he loves such strangers as you were.
 - f) The King of Israel is surely sweet in setting his love on you, who were strangers to Israel.
 - g) O how happy are you, poor believer, in being the object of the Lord’s love!

h) The lowliest believer may raise up a very high structure of happiness upon the corner stone of Christ's love.

(1) O how blessed you are in your beloved, and how sweet he is to you!

(2) For he has a fire of love burning in his heart forever towards you!

2. Use 2. It is very comforting to believers that Christ loves you!

a) Does it not revive your hearts, my brethren, to hear that he who is the Lord of life and glory in himself, is a Lord of grace and love to you?

b) Jesus Christ who has written on his garments, "Lord of Lords," has also written upon his heart his love to his own.

c) If you can only see how near you are to Christ, how highly he prizes you, how dearly he loves you, I should not need to bid you rejoice, or be glad, or be of good comfort.

d) Objection: If only I could see that Christ loved me, but I doubt it otherwise.

(1) Answer: Do not doubt it (O believing soul) but be confident, and in that confidence be comforted: Christ loves you, and that (as we shall show afterwards) with a transcendent love.

(a) Though your faith may be small, yet Christ's love to you is true.

(2) The Lord so loves you that he will not leave you.

(3) Or if he does for a time, he will not always.

(4) Christ's bowels burn with love, and that fire, however smothered for a time, will break out in a flame at last.

(5) Christ's love is like himself, immutable and unchangeable.

(6) Love is Christ's life.

3. Let this counsel believers, that since the Lord Jesus loves them so, they should walk worthy of his love.

a) Believers, live as the objects of Christ's love.

b) Advance his kingdom, embrace his counsels, love all his members, be abundant in his work and service.

c) In all things show that Christ's love to you has a constraining power in you.

d) Do not let Christ say, "I gave you counsel, and you rejected it; in love I gave you commandments, and you transgressed them."

(1) Seeing as Christ loves you, love him; and if you love him, keep his commandments.

(2) Considering that Christ loves you, submit yourselves accordingly.

(3) If he calls, come. If he bids you go, go.

(4) If his kingdom is advancing, join in the work, for it is he that loves you.

(5) If his Spirit counsels you, accept it, for it comes from love.

(6) In a word, in all things live as those who indeed are beloved of Christ.

(7) And let your carriage be obedient, kind, and loving to him who stoops so low as to love such poor creatures as you and me.

(8) And if any ask why you love and labor for Jesus Christ, tell them, it is because you love him.

(9) Then add that if they only knew how much Christ loves you, they would ask instead, "why then do you love him so little, or not do more for him?"

(10) But if they demand, how does Christ love you?

(11) Tell them that question is unanswerable. Indeed say, he loves you truly and transcendentally.

(12) Tell all the world how he loves you, tell them that his love surpasses your knowledge and understanding, for it is a love that is beyond knowledge.