

Love's Competition

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true pardon by God inevitably produces love in the believer's heart, and that the degree of this love varies among individuals.

Scripture: Luke 7:42-43, Isaiah 1:3

Topics: "God's Love", "Forgiveness", "Christian Love"

Description

In 'Love's Competition,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound connection between God's forgiveness and the believer's love. He emphasizes that genuine pardon naturally produces love, which varies in intensity among Christians. Spurgeon also warns those without love to examine their spiritual state, encouraging a heartfelt response to God's mercy. This devotional sermon challenges listeners to reflect on their love for God as evidence of true salvation.

Transcript

"Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, You have rightly judged." Luke 7:42, 43.

I REMEMBER seeing, somewhere or other, as a sign upon an inn, the words, "The First and Last." I do not know what that may happen to be among men, but I know that love is God's first and last. It is there that He begins with us in mercy—"We love Him, because He first loved us." His love at the first springs up like a fountain in the midst of a desert and freely flows along the wilderness to the unworthy sons of men. In the end, the result of that love is that men love Him—they cannot help it any more than the rock can prevent the echo when the voice falls upon it. Love is not a creature of law—it comes not on demand—it must be free or not at all.

It has its reasons why it springs up in our hearts, but it is not a mercenary thing which can be procured at such-and-such a price. It is not a matter of argument—it is not of itself an act performed as a matter of duty. Love is a duty, certainly, but it does not come to us that way—it comes to us like a roe or a young hart, over every mountain and hill, leaping and bounding. It comes not as a heavy burden dragged along an iron way. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be despised. Men do not make themselves love by a course of calculation—they are overtaken with it and carried away by its power.

When godly men consider and enjoy the great love of God to them, they begin to love God in return, just as the bud, when it feels the sunshine, opens to it of its own accord. Love to God is a sort of natural consequence which follows from a sight and sense of the love of God to us. I think it is Aristotle who said that it is impossible for a person to know that he is loved without feeling some degree of love in return. I do not know how that may be for I am no philosopher, but I am sure that it is so with those who taste the love of God. As love is the first blessing coming from God to us, so it is the last return from us to God—He comes to us loving—we go home to Him loving.

I. I intend to keep to my text and handle it red hot, by first noticing that IT IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED THAT PARDONED SINNERS WILL LOVE. "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" It is implied that the two debtors who had been frankly forgiven would both love their benefactor. The question was not, "Which of them will love him?" but, "Which of them will love him most?" So, then, I say, it is taken for granted in the text that those who are pardoned will love him who has so freely pardoned them. And this, first, because it seems most natural that where kindness is received gratitude should be felt.

This is so generally admitted that gratitude is found among the lowest and worst of mankind. "If you love them who love you, what thanks have you? For sinners also love those that love them." It is man-like to return good for good and ingratitude is looked upon most rightly as one of the basest of the vices. Why we find gratitude not only in men and women—intelligent creatures—but we find it in the very beasts of the field! "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib."

A dog that has received benefits from you will be attached to you and by every possible means will endeavor to show his affection! The ancients had many rare stories of the gratitude of wild beasts. You remember that of Androcles and the lion. The man was condemned to be torn to pieces by beasts, but a lion, to which he was cast, instead of devouring him, licked his feet because at some former time Androcles had extracted a thorn from the grateful creature's foot. We have heard of an eagle that so loved a boy with whom he had played that, when the child was sick, the eagle sickened, too. And when the child slept, this wild, strange bird of the air would sleep, but only then. And when the child awoke, the eagle awoke. When the child died, the bird died, too.

You remember that there is a picture in which Napoleon is represented as riding over the battlefield and he stops his horse, as he sees a slain man with his favorite dog lying upon his bosom doing what he can to defend his poor dead master. Even the great man-slayer paused at such a sight! There is gratitude among the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. And surely, if we receive favors from God and do not feel love to Him in return, we are worse than brute beasts! And so the Lord, in that pathetic verse in Isaiah, pleads against us, "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider." If we receive favors from God, it is but natural that we should love Him in return. Alas, that many should be so unnatural, so false to every noble instinct, so dead to the gratitude which goodness deserves!

Gratitude should surely arise when the benefit is surpassingly great. Surely love must spring up with the greatest force and freedom when favors are far above the common run of blessings—when these favors are not such as are confined to time and to the body, but when they reach to eternity and bless the soul. When favors are of such weight as the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of the soul from wrath to come I would stand and sing to the fountain of the heart as Israel did in the wilderness, "Spring up, O well; sing you unto it: The princes dug the well."

And has not our great Prince who has been struck upon the cheek dug this well by giving us, through His free Grace and dying love, to taste of full remission and of complete pardon of our guilt? Shall we not, must we not love the Redeemer in return? I call common ingratitude worse than brutish—but to have sin forgiven and not to love God—in this case where shall I go for a word? I must call it devilish. It were worse than infernal to receive a deliverance from guilt so great, from punishment so justly terrible and not to love the Lord, through whom it is given to us! Oh, love the Lord, whose mercy endures forever! If, indeed, you have tasted of that mercy, you must love Him. It cannot be otherwise—you are bound to God by bonds of love and these draw you, by a secret but irresistible force, to love the Lord in return!

And moreover, not only is this natural and necessary, because of the greatness of the mercy, but the Grace of God always takes care that wherever pardon is given love shall be ensured—for the Holy Spirit co-operates with the work of Christ. And if we are cleansed from the stain of our former evil through the blood of Christ, we are renewed and changed in the spirit of our minds by the Holy Spirit. He does not take away our sin and then leave us that old heart of stone, insensible, ungrateful—but as He gives us a garment of righteousness He gives us a heart of flesh. The Spirit works in us a degree of love at the same time that He creates the first look of faith.

And soon our faith increases and then He works in us more and more of that love to Christ by which we cling to Him. This love works in us a hatred of sin and a spirit of obedience whereby we yield ourselves up to the service of Him who has bought us with His precious blood. You know that it is so, Brothers and Sisters. Where pardon comes, delight in God comes with it. You know that God does not divide His gifts and give justification to one and sanctification to another—the Covenant is one—and the blessings of the Covenant are threaded on the one string of infinite wisdom, so that when there comes the washing in the blood, there comes also a cleansing with water by the Word.

The Holy Spirit washes us from the power of sin as the blood of Christ cleanses us from the guilt of sin. Where sin is forgiven, there must be love to the God who forgave it because the Spirit of God makes sure work upon the heart of the Believer—and one of his first works is love. I need not argue this further because all Christians know this as a matter of fact—where there is no love there is no pardon. You cannot be pardoned and not love God as a result of His loving forgiveness! What was the very first emotion that you and I felt when we had a sense of guilt removed? We felt joy for our own sake, but immediately after, or at the same instant, we felt such intense gratitude to God that we loved Him beyond all expression!

We have sometimes been half afraid that we do not love God as much, now, as we did at that moment, though I trust that the fear is groundless. But at that moment there was nothing too hot or too heavy for us to have attempted on behalf of Him who had taken the burden from off our shoulders. We would have said at that moment, "Here am I, send me," if it had been to prison, or to death! Oh, the joy of those first days! They are rightly called the days of our espousals. And what love we had then! We were willing to leave all for Christ's sake. We snapped fond connections at His command. Truly, like Israel of old, we would have gone after our God into the wilderness—yes, after our Savior into the grave!

Nothing could have kept us back or have caused us to wander from Him, then. Do you not remember how you used to long for Sundays to hear of Jesus and praise His name with His people? If there was a weeknight service, you were

always there, though no one persuaded you to go. Then, any corner in the Meeting House was good enough for you. Now, perhaps, you need a very soft cushion to sit upon. You sat, then, in a straight-backed pew and did not know it!

Now, you need very tender dealing and the preacher must mind that he interests you by illustrations and poetical allusions. But then the Gospel, itself, interested you! And however dull the preacher might have been, you were so willing to hear about Jesus and to know of His love, that there you were—eager to hear the most humble evangelist!

Wisdom did not need to press you into her house, for you were earnestly waiting at the posts of her doors, glad to hear even the footsteps of those who came in and out. Oh, those were brave days! I hope that we have braver days now. But, for certain, as sure as we knew our pardon, we felt that we loved the Lord with all our hearts.

Now I want to make a little practical use of this inference from the text. That pardoned souls love their pardoning God is a great Truth and a very solemn one in its bearings upon us at this time, for there are persons in this house of prayer who were never forgiven—and we are sure of that unhappy fact since they do not love God. Their sins must be still upon them because they have not the token of pardon, inasmuch as they have no love to Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh, listen to me, you that do not love God and yet, perhaps, dream that you are saved! Are there not some here that seldom think of God—who do not care if a day, a week, a month, a year should pass over their heads—and yet they have no thought of the Almighty Judge of all the earth?

They receive His mercies but they do not thank Him! They feel His power but they do not fear Him! "God is not in all their thoughts." O my Hearer, if this is your case, you do not love Him—for if we love any person we are sure to think of him! Thoughts fly that way in which the heart moves. I do not say that we are always thinking of those we love—but I do say that our thoughts will fly that way when they can. You know at sunset where the crows live. Perhaps all day long you are unable to tell for they may fly from one plowed field to another to find their meat. But watch when night comes on and when they are free from other obligations and wish to find rest—they fly straight to those tall trees where they have built their nests.

A man may, in the busy time of the day, think about 50 things—but let him be free from pressing labor and care— and he returns to his love as birds fly to their nests at night! His thought flies to Jesus because Jesus is the home of his heart. If your hearts love God your thoughts will run to Him as the rivers run to the sea. Yes, and often in the very middle of business the man who loves his God will be speaking with Him! He may not interrupt the conversation and those in the shop may not know what is on his mind, but his heart will be up above the mountains where the angels dwell, communing with the great Father of lights! But where there is no thought of God, there is no love to Him.

Are there not many who never do anything for God? He has made them and He preserves them, and yet they never make Him any return by way of willing action designed to give Him pleasure. I may put it to some of you—did you ever do anything distinctly for God in all your lives? What? Not so much as once? Ah, me, a man so curiously made by the Divine finger—displaying infinite skill in every blood vessel, nerve and muscle that is necessary for his life and motion— and yet he has never thought of the Great One who has set all this machinery in motion and keeps it in action! To live only by God and yet to live without Him! Strange!

Can there exist a man who never does anything for his God who is constantly doing so much for him? If so, I would say to such a one—"You have never been pardoned for you do not love God since you never think of Him and do nothing for Him." Some men evidently do not love God for they have no care about anything that concerns Him. They do not refrain from sin because sin would grieve God. The idea of grieving God, perhaps, has not crossed their minds— so they vex the Holy Spirit most thoughtlessly. But, ah, if you love anyone, you will not likely cause him grief—you will not do the evil thing which he hates.

He that loves God will often have a check put upon him and feel that he cannot do this great wickedness and sin against God. To sin against God is the greatest of sin and the essence of sin. The venom of sin lies there. This makes sin so exceedingly sinful that it is against the God of Love. But if you never felt that, then you do not love Him and, for certain, you are not forgiven. Look at others—they do not love God, for they do not care for His house where His people meet. They seldom come to the meeting for worship, and if they come it is from some other motive than to meet with God. They do not care for His day. Sundays are very dreary in London, so they say. There is nothing to interest them for they have no interest in the great Father, or His Incarnate Son—they have no desire to hear of Him or to praise Him, or to pray to

Him.

They do not care for His Bible though it is a world of delights and comforts. The Bible is perfumed with the love of God but they perceive not its fragrance. The Savior's face is to be seen reflected in almost every page and yet some think that the Bible is more dull than an old almanac and though they must keep it in their house—for it is respectable to have a copy of it—yet to read it and to read it with pleasure—why, that has never happened to them! Nor is there any likelihood that it ever will unless they get made anew. Nor do they care for God's people. In fact, they like a quiet joke against Christian people and sometimes, if they can see faults in them—and, oh, how readily they may!—they report those faults with considerable exaggerations and feel pleased to eat up the faults of God's people as they eat bread!

Lack of love to the children argues lack of love to their Father. "He that loves Him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of Him." We know that we love God when we love His children. But if in your heart there is no such love to His children, to His Book, to His day, to His house, or to His service, you may rest quite certain, my Friend, that your guilt still clings to you. You are not pardoned and God will require that which is past and call you to account. For every secret thing He will bring you into judgment and for every idle word that you have spoken He will take reckoning of you.

Ah, how sad it is that when I am longing to speak joyously about the love that arises out of pardoned sin, I am compelled, for pity's sake, to turn aside to give a warning to many who, having no love to God, prove by that fact that they have never been forgiven! So I leave the first point. It is supposed in the text and taken for granted that all pardoned sinners will love Him who has pardoned them.

II. But now, secondly, IT IS SUGGESTED IN THE TEXT THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES IN THE DEGREES OF LOVE TO GOD. "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most." These words evidently show that some persons love God more than others and that, albeit there must be a sincere love to God in all pardoned sinners, yet there is not the same degree of love. Love is evidently a Divine Grace which is not stereotyped and cast in a mold so as to be the same in every case and at every time.

Love is a thing of life—it is, therefore, a thing of growth. It is certainly so in our own selves. There was a time when we did not love God so much as we do now. And I grieve to say that there are even now times when we do not love God so much as we once did, for we grow cold and backsliding. Love is not like a

piece of cast iron, fixed and set. It grows and has its times of budding, flowering and leaf-shedding. It is like a fire—at one time it may burn low and at another time it may be blown up to a very vehement heat. Love rises and falls—I speak not of God's love to us—but of our love to God. It has its ups and downs, its summers and its winters, its flood tides and its ebbs. And if we find a change in love in the same heart, we are not at all astonished that it should differ in different hearts!

Besides, we know that there are differences in love because there are differences in all the other Divine Graces. Faith—some men have much faith. God be thanked that there are men of strong faith still on the face of the earth! But there are others who have a faith which, though a true faith, is a very weak one. It is a trembling faith. It cannot walk the waves with Peter, but it can sink with him and it can cry out for deliverance. Faith, in some Christians, seems to be a very feeble affair. As I said the other day, they hardly know whether it is faith or unbelief. Their cry is, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief," as if they had made a mistake in calling it faith at all for it was so mixed with unbelief.

It is not always such an infant Grace, for there are strong Believers who have turned to fight the armies of the aliens—men who have borne their cross without impatience and their testimony without cowardice—men who have conquered sin and lived in holiness and brought glory to God. Faith, like a ladder, has its lower and its higher rounds. Faith has its dawning, its noon, its shade. We are sure that it is so, for we have observed it in ourselves and seen it in others. We have seen it great and we have seen it little. The practical point I would reach is just this. Let us look, first of all, to our love in its sincerity. What if my love may not be compared with yours as to degree? Yet the Lord grant that I may truly love Him.

Peter could not say that he loved Christ more than others, but he did say, "You know all things; You know that I love You." A little pearl is a pearl as much as a great one, though every one of us would sooner have the greater pearl. There is the Queen's image on a four-penny piece as certainly as there is upon the sovereign—though we would all prefer the golden coin! There is the image of God on all His people's faith and love, whether great or little. The main thing with the coin is to be sure that it is genuine metal. So, if love is real love, that is the main point. Do you love the Lord with all

your heart? If so, strive to have more love but do not fling away what you have, for you would thus despise what the Spirit of God has worked in you.

Endeavor also, dear Friends, to have growing love. Do not be satisfied to be today what you were 12 months ago. I am afraid that some Christians do not grow much. I am very glad when I see them grow downward when they are rooted in humility, when they have truer views of themselves than they ever had and a deeper sense of their indebtedness to God. That is good growth. Try to have, however, a love that grows so that you may more forcibly love Jesus Christ than you did in days that are past. Say to yourself, "Well, if I have ever so little love, it shall be practical love, I will show it. I will be doing something for my Lord."

The woman, by whose means this parable was called forth, loved Christ so that she brought her alabaster box of ointment and anointed His feet and washed them with tears—and wiped them with the hair of her head. And one of the best ways to make love grow is to use all the love you have. Is it not so with merchants and their money? If they want to increase their capital, they trade with it. If you want to increase your love to Jesus, use it! Do not merely talk about it but actually serve Him under its sweet constraint. It is a very poor Christianity that consists in sitting still and dreaming and never attempting any practical service for Jesus, our Lord.

He that thinks that he will quietly enjoy religion all alone will soon find that he has very little of it to enjoy—for doubts and fears will breed in swarms in a stagnant atmosphere. Where there is none of the blessed wind of activity, there will soon be mists and damp—perhaps foul gas and fevers. And if you have but little love at present, cry to God to give you a more intense love and, though I have said that to use your love is a good way to increase it, yet there is something still better, and that is to know more and feel more of the love of Christ to you. If you exercise, you will increase your sense of warmth—but it will be a far surer thing if you get where the sun shines with equatorial heat—so other means are good but to get near to Jesus is best of all. In proportion as you live close to the glorious central sun of the love of Christ, you will, yourself, be warm.

I was about to compare the heart of my Lord to a volcanic mountain constantly streaming with the burning lava of love. Oh, that my soul could but get that fire-stream poured into it to set the whole of my nature on fire and consume me in the flame-torrent of love! You see that it is suggested in the text that there are differences in the degrees of love and there let us leave it, for we must come to the third point.

III. Thirdly, THE TEXT PUTS TO US A QUESTION, "WHO WILL LOVE HIM MOST?" I want to introduce the question to you by saying that it is a very interesting one. After what the Lord has done for us, one takes pleasure in thinking what will come of it. One likes to think of the farmer's harvest. After all that plowing and sowing, what will come of it? It is interesting to begin to calculate the crop and to anticipate the shouts of harvest home.

Now, what will come of infinite love—the supreme act of God's heart to men? What will come out of the gift of His Only-Begotten Son and the putting away of sin through the death of Jesus? What will men do for God after this? How much will they love Him? It is an interesting question. What have you to say upon it? And it is a personal question which the Lord puts to each one of us. You know He put it to Simon. "Tell Me," He said, "which of them will love him most?" And He puts it to us to consider it, to turn it over and to give our own verdict because there may be some blunder in our heart which this question is meant to set right—and the thoughts which the enquiry will cause in the spirit are meant to correct our judgments.

Therefore do not put it aside, but try now to answer it as the Lord puts it. It is a practical question—"Which of them will love him most?"—for everything in conduct depends upon love. Where there is much love, there is sure to be much service in proportion to the strength. Give us a Church that loves Christ Jesus much—you will have mighty Prayer Meetings! You will have a holy membership! You will have liberal giving to the cause of Christ! You will have hearty praising of His name! You will have careful walking before the world! You will have earnest endeavors for the conversion of sinners! Missions at home and abroad will be set on foot when love is fervent.

When the heart is right, everything is likely to be right. But when the heart goes wrong, oh, what a fatal thing it is! A disease of the heart is looked upon as the worst of mischiefs that can happen to a man. One old doctor of my acquaintance used to say, "We can do nothing with the heart." God keep us from a diseased heart—a fatty degeneration of the heart, or an ossification of the heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ! The question asked in the text is, however, a somewhat limited one. It is this. The question is not, "Who in all the world will love Christ most?"—but who out of two

persons, in whom there is no particular difference of character, but only this one difference—that the one owes 500 pence and the other 50—which out of these two will love Christ more?

We will suppose that they are equally tender of heart and equally regenerate and that they do know, each of them, certainly, that his debt has been discharged. The only difference between them is that one has been a grosser sinner than the other. And the question asked is, "Which of those two will love the Savior most?" It is a very simple question, too, not at all hard to answer—for even this Simon, the Pharisee, who, like the rest of the Pharisees, was very badly instructed, yet, nevertheless, could see his way to answer the question correctly. So he answered, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." And the Lord replied, "You have rightly judged." Thus I have set before you the question.

IV. And so, lastly, IT IS EXPECTED THAT WE GIVE A REPLY. And I wish for myself—and therefore wish the

same for you—that each one of us may say, "I am the man that ought to love the Lord Jesus most and, by His Grace, I will surely do so." The most indebted should love most. Have we not here many 500-pence debtors? Some of my dear Brethren, here present, were, among outward sinners, the very chief—men who could drink and swear and lie—ringleaders in everything that was evil.

Blessed be God that such have been here led to Jesus! We heard the other night a dear Brother tell us of what he used to be. With modesty and shamefacedness he mentioned how great his sin had been—but his sin was put away—he was pardoned and he knew it! And he rejoiced in it. Such a man must say, "I will love Him most." Where there has been overt sin, palpable, undeniable—where the outward character has been defiled and stained with it—forgiveness involves us in deep obligation to grateful love. You may stand in the front rank and love Jesus most.

But I am not going to let you rise to that eminence of obligation, or rather sink to that depth of indebtedness without having a struggle for it myself. Some of us take that place of eminent obligation on another ground and yet it is the same ground—for while some of us were never openly profane, or drunken, or immoral—we have to confess the equal greatness of our sin on account of our offending against light and knowledge.

We sinned greatly against early convictions, against a holy training, against a tender conscience, against singular favors received from God—and therefore with shame we begin to take the lowest place—acknowledging that to us belongs the greatest debt of grateful praise to God. When I was preaching once, I said—and I meant it—that I should be the deepest debtor to Divine Grace that ever entered the gates of Glory—and I ventured to say—

"Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing, While Heaven's resounding mansions ring, With shouts of Sovereign Grace."

It was in a country place and as I came down the pulpit stairs many clustered about me to shake hands. And one old lady said to me, "You made one great blunder in your sermon." I said, "My dear Soul, I dare say I made a dozen. I am a great blunderer." "No," she said, "but you said that you would sing the loudest when you get to Heaven—but you shall not, for I owe more to Divine Grace than you possibly can. I was once a great sinner and I have had much forgiven. And therefore I shall praise God more than you." I did not yield the point, but I held my tongue. I could let her be first and yet take the same place myself! As I went down the aisle many friends declared that they would not give way to me in that point and that they ought to praise God more than I, for they owed Him more.

It was a happy controversy! It reminded me of Ralph Erskine's, *Contention among the Birds of Paradise*, where he represents the saints in Glory, each saying that he shall lie the lowest and shall praise the most sweetly the infinite love of God. I think that there are grounds upon which some here, who have been kept from everything which is outwardly evil, may, nevertheless, feel that inwardly they are 500-pence debtors—and so, when the question is asked, "Which will love Him most?" they will say, "Why, I! I was not so honest as some of those wicked fellows. I did not dare to say all they said, nor to be openly vile as they were—but I was quite as bad at heart and if I dare have had my full swing—I should have been as base as they were."

But I do not think that the spirit of the parable is exhausted by either of these cases. I think it includes more. There are some who evidently have not had more forgiven than others as to outward sin. On the contrary, they have been prudently brought up from their childhood and yet for many a year they have been foremost in service and have been special lovers of the Lord. Though by no means great offenders in their unconverted state, they are certainly great saints now—they are intense in their service, consistent in their character, fervent in their love. How is it that some who shout

that they have been snatched from the burning and according to their own statement were the very chief of sinners—and make a great trumpet-blowing over their own conversion—yet do not love the Lord Jesus one half so much as these dear, quiet souls who never went into open sin?

I take it the reason is this. Our estimate of sin is, after all, the thing which will create and inflame our love. If a man thinks sin to be exceedingly sinful and feels it to be so, he has a deeper sense of his indebtedness than the man who may have committed grosser vices but has never seen them in their real blackness—as they appear in the light of God's Countenance. Too many Believers know little of what it is to be amazed and astounded at the heinousness of their transgressions. Why, time was with me—and is now—when, if I had inadvertently spoken a word that was not exactly true, it cost me more pain to think of what was only a hasty error than it has cost many men to repent of their cursing and swearing!

I am sorry to say it, but I believe that some make a glory of their shame and dare to brag of what they used to be. They stand up and make confession without a tear in their eye, or a blush on their cheek. Such testimony ought never to be heard for it is a positive creator of evil in the minds of those that hear it! I am sorry to have to say it but I know that it is so. Testimonies are published which are inducements to vice and tend to make men immoral, rather than to make them turn to God! In certain circles he is treated as a hero who can prove that he has been a great rascal. It was not thus that the prodigal was received by his father—he never hung up his old rags as a trophy!

O Brothers and Sisters, when we talk about what we were, we had better veil our faces! Our former follies are things to be confessed to God in secret—and if they must be spoken in public, to the praise of Divine Grace—there must be a careful avoidance of anything like boasting, for it is a shame even to speak of the things that were done of them in secret. When there is really a deep sense of sin, there is a holy, delicate way of speaking of it. Old sins are not to be talked of as an old soldier should his crutch and shows how fields were won. A crimson blush is the best color to wear when we speak of our lost estate. To talk smilingly of injuries done to the delicacy of our own conscience—of awful injuries done to others by foul example—is not to glorify God but to enthrone vice!

And, dear Friends, I believe that some whom God has preserved by preventing Grace from going into great sin, will, nevertheless, love Him most because they have a clearer view than others of what it cost in

order that they might be pardoned. Happy are they who remember well the griefs of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane—

"There's never a gift His hand bestows But cost His heart a groan."

Oh, if your heart dwells on Calvary, where falls the crimson shower of Christ's most precious blood—if you gaze intently upon the wounds of Jesus till you die into the death of the Crucified—then do you love Him much! It is well to have the soul torn with anguish because—

"It cost HIM cries and tears To bring us near to God: Great was our debt, And He appears To make the payment good."

Remember, in proportion as you estimate the Sacrifice, you will love Him who was the Sacrifice for sin. Brothers and Sisters, I hope you all love Christ Jesus more than I do, for I would have Him possess the highest love of every human heart—and yet I will not be willingly excelled by any one of you in a competition of love to Jesus. I will run my very best that no man take my crown

But supposing, dear Friends, any of you do love Him most—then show it just as that woman did who brought the alabaster box of precious ointment. If you love Him most, do most. Do everything that is humanly possible, quickened by the Spirit of God. If you have done much, do 10 times more! Never talk of what you have done, but go on to something else. An officer rode up to his general, and said, "Sir, we have taken two guns from the enemy." "It is well," said the general, "Take two more." If you have most love to Christ, do most spiritual good to men. Yet do something distinctly for Jesus.

It is a blessed token for good when our work among men is not so much for the sake of sinners as for love of Jesus. When we love the Brethren it should be because they belong to Christ. It is sweet to serve the Lord Christ Himself. See how the holy woman offered homage distinctly to her Lord—tears for His travel stains—hair to wipe His feet, ointment

to anoint His flesh. Do your choicest and best for Jesus, for Jesus personally. Try to do it most humbly. Stand behind Him. Do not ask anybody to look at you. Do it very quietly. Do it feeling that it is a great honor to be permitted to do the least service for Jesus. Do not dream of saying, "I am somebody. I am doing great things. I do more, even, than Simon the Pharisee. Come see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts."

Jehu talked in that fashion—but he was good for nothing. Do your personal part without seeking to be seen of men. Do it self-sacrificingly. Bring your best ointment. Pinch yourself for Christ. Make sacrifices—go without this and that to have something which you can do Him honor. Do it very penitently. When you serve Him best, still let the tears fall on His feet, mingling with the costly ointment. The tears and the ointment go well together. Mourn your guilt while you rejoice in His Grace. Do it continuously. "This woman," said Christ, "since I came in has not ceased to kiss My feet." Do not leave off loving Him and serving Him. Do it on and on and on—however much the flesh may ask for respite from service. Do it enthusiastically. See how she kissed His feet—nothing less than this would express her love!

Stoop down and kiss and kiss again those blessed feet which traveled so far in love for you! Throw your whole soul into your deed of love. "Why," they will say, "Mrs. So-and-So is enthusiastic! She is quite carried away by her zeal." Let it be true more and more! Never mind what the cold-hearted think, for they cannot understand you. They will say, "Ah, that young person is too fast by half." Never mind. Be faster still! Wise people cry out, "He has too many irons in the fire." But I say to you, heat up the fire! Get all the

irons red hot and hammer away with all your might! With all your strength and energy plunge into the service of your Master! If you love your Master, you can best show your love by ardent service. The Lord bless you with the utmost degree of love, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— Psalm 18.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/love-s-competition/>

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