

Of the Grace of Love.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love to God, its nature, and its manifestations, highlighting its role as the greatest of the three abiding virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, 1 Corinthians 13:13

Topics: "Love in Action", "The Grace of Love"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of love as the greatest grace following faith and hope, illustrating that love to God, Christ, and fellow believers is essential for a fulfilling Christian life. He explains that love is not only a command but also a natural response to God's goodness and grace, urging believers to love God wholeheartedly and to express that love through obedience and service to others. Gill highlights that true love manifests in various ways, including a desire for communion with God, a commitment to His glory, and a genuine affection for fellow believers, which is a reflection of Christ's love for us.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 9

OF THE GRACE OF LOVE

After faith and hope follows love; for in this order they stand, "now abide faith, hope, charity," or love, "these three" (1 Cor. 13:13), "but the greatest of these is charity," or "love;" not that it is of greater use than the other; faith is of more use to the believer himself, and such things are ascribed to it as cannot be ascribed to love; but love is more diffusive of its benefits to others, and is of a longer duration. Love, in order of nature, follows faith and hope, as the effect its own cause, as Dr.

Ames observes; for because by faith and hope we taste how good the Lord is, therefore we love him. Faith receives and embraces the promises of eternal life; and hope, on that, is entertained of enjoying it, and waits for it; hence flows love to God, who has promised it, and gives hope of it; faith spies it in the promise, and hope rejoices in it; and both attract the affections to God, the giver of it. Of which grace of love there are these three principal branches, and to be treated of, love to God, love to Christ, and love to the saints.

1.

Love to God, Jehovah, our God, the one Lord; "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might:" this is what God requires of his people, and enjoins as a command to be obeyed; and it is but reasonable service; "What doth the Lord thou God require of thee--but to love him?" and says Moses in his name, "I command thee this day, to love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:4,5; 10:12; 30:16), and this is the chief and principal, the first and greatest command, and entirely agreeable to the law and light of nature and reason.

In answer to the lawyer's question; "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Said our Lord, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:36-38), hence the apostle says, "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Concerning which love as a grace, for though it is a command to love, it is of grace to keep it, may be observed, 1a. First, on what account God is to be loved, and is loved by his saints. 1a1.

For himself; because of his own nature, and the perfections of it, which render him amiable and lovely, and worthy of our strongest love and affection; as these are displayed in the works of creation and providence, and especially of grace, redemption, and salvation; to all which the Psalmist has respect when he says, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name," nature, and perfections, "in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1), as God is great in himself, and greatly to be praised! great, and greatly to be feared; so great, and greatly to be loved, for what he is in himself; and this is the purest and most perfect love of a creature towards God; for if we love him only for his goodness to us, it is loving ourselves rather than him; at least, a loving him for ourselves; and so a loving ourselves more than him: indeed, such is our weakness and imperfection, that we cannot come at a view of the divine perfections, but by these means, through which they, and particularly his goodness and kindness, are made known unto us, and with which we are first and chiefly affected; yet hereby we are led into a view of his nature and perfections, and to love him for the sake of himself; which love, though it is not first in order, it is chief and ultimate, and comes nearest to the love which the divine Persons bear to each other, and to that with which God loves his people; which arises, not from any goodness shown to him, or received by him. 1a2.

God is to be loved by his saints as their "summum bonum," their chief good; yea, their only good, their all in ALL; and so to be only loved: "there is none good but one, that is, God;" God, Father, Son, and Spirit, the one Lord God, the object of his people's love; concerning whom they say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" (Ps. 73:25), and he may be loved by them as their portion now and hereafter, and as their shield and exceeding great reward; and yet their love to him not be mercenary. 1a3.

God is to be loved by his people for the blessings of his goodness communicated to them; he is the fountain of goodness to them; he is good, and does good, and therefore to be praised and loved, even for the bounties of his providence; he follows with his goodness, and daily loads with his benefits; but especially for the blessings of his grace, with which he blesses his chosen in Christ Jesus; as electing grace in him; predestination to the adoption of children by him; acceptance with God, in him, the beloved; redemption through his blood; forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; regenerating, quickening, calling, and sanctifying grace, and all things pertaining to life and godliness.

Which benefits bestowed, though they are not in quality the chief motives to love God, as before observed; yet they are in order first, and chiefly strike the affections, and stir them up towards the Lord. 1a4. The various relations God stands in to his people do and should engage their affections to him; for he is not only their faithful Creator and kind Benefactor in nature and providence; but in grace their covenant God and Father; and the direction to love him is usually, "Thou shalt love the Lord THY God;" and David heaps

up a variety of titles and characters, under which, and on account of which, he professed to love the Lord; "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength!" &c. (Ps. 18:1-3). 1a5.

What greatly influences the love of the Lord's people to him, and lays them under obligation to love him, is his great love to them (1 John 4:19), which love appeared in choosing them in Christ to eternal happiness, of his own free favour and goodwill; in the provision of Christ to be the propitiation for their sins; in the mission of him into the world for that purpose; in the free and full forgiveness of all their sins, for his sake; in drawing them to himself, in effectual calling, with his lovingkindness, having, for the great love wherewith he loved them, quickened them when dead in trespasses and sins; and in openly espousing them to himself in conversion, called, the "love" of their "espousals;" with all after manifestations of his love unto them. 1a6.

The examples of the saints in all ages might be urged as motives to love the Lord; as of Enoch, Noah, and others before the flood; of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph after it; with Joshua, Samuel, David, and others; but especially our Lord Jesus Christ, in human nature, who, in the exercise of this grace, as in others, is an example to us (John 14:31). 1b. Secondly, the subjects of this grace of love, in whom it is, by whom the Lord is loved, and how they come by this grace. 1b1.

It is not of men, nor is it in men naturally; it is not in any natural man, who is in a state of nature and unregeneracy; such are "lovers of pleasures," sinful lusts and pleasures, "more than lovers of God;" yea, some of them are described as "haters of God;" and, indeed, the carnal mind, in every man, is enmity against God, not only an enemy to God, but enmity itself; which denotes how great and intense, and what a rooted and implacable enmity there is in a carnal man to God, and all that is good: nor is there any love in the people of God themselves before conversion; they are "without God," without any knowledge of God, and love to him; they are alienated from God, and from the life of God, and have no desire after him, nor of communion with him; but are "enemies in their minds," in the temper and disposition of them; and which is shown by their "wicked works;" and in this state they were when Christ died and shed his blood for them, to make peace and reconciliation for them, (Col. 1:20,21; Rom. 5:10), which circumstance greatly illustrates the love of God in the gift of his Son to them (1 John 4:10). 1b2.

The grace of love is of God; he is the efficient cause and author of it, as he is of every grace; the apostle John expressly says, "love is of God," of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; it is of God the Father, who is the God of all grace, and so of this (1 John 4:7), and "love with faith," are wished for "from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:23), and it stands in the first place among the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), it is wrought in the soul in regeneration, when other graces are, and is an evidence of it; for "every one that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4:7), and a man cannot love God until he is regenerated, and renewed in the Spirit of his mind, and is made a partaker of the spiritual circumcision of the heart, which is necessary to it, and which is promised (Deut. 30:6), this grace only appears with other graces, and when they do; there can be no love to God where there is no knowledge of him; according to that known phrase, "ignoti nulla cupido;" where there is knowledge of him, especially of him in Christ as gracious and merciful there will be love to him (1 John 4:7,8), where ignorance is there is no love; but it appears where knowledge is, and it accompanies faith: both spring from the same abundant grace (1 Tim. 1:14), faith, hope, and love go together (1 Cor. 13:13), as the subject of love is a regenerate man, the seat of it is the heart, not the head, nor the tongue, but the heart; it lies not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and true love to God is a love of him with all the heart, soul, and strength. 1c.

Thirdly, how, in what way and manner, love to God manifests itself. 1c1. In a desire to be like him; one that loves another endeavors to imitate him; and such that love the Lord are followers of him, as dear children, beloved ones, and walk in love, and are obedient ones, and desirous of being holy, as he is holy, in all manner of conversation; nor can they be thoroughly satisfied and contented until they awake in his likeness. 1c2. In making his glory the supreme end of all their actions; as this is God's end in, all he does in providence, who makes all things for himself, his own glory; so in all things in grace, they are all directed to the glory of it; nor will he give, nor suffer to be given, his glory to another; wherefore, in imitation of him, they that love the Lord, do all they do, whether in a natural and civil sense, or of a religious and spiritual kind, whether praying, or reading, or hearing, or preaching, their end is, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11). 1c3.

In desiring of, and delighting in, communion with God; longing to appear before God, and enjoy his presence in his courts; thirst for him as in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, that they may see his power and his glory in his sanctuary; this is the one thing uppermost in their minds, and which they seek most importunately for, that they may behold the beauty of the Lord in his temple; if God lifts but up the light of his countenance on them, this puts joy and gladness into their hearts, more than the affluence of all earthly things can; and if they are indulged with communion with him, they exalt and glory, saying, "Truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). 1c4.

In a carefulness not to offend him, by sinning against him; "ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10), and they will show their hatred of it, and endeavour to avoid it, and even to abstain from all appearance of it; and when opportunity offers, and they are solicited by temptations to sin, argue, as Joseph; "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9), against God, who has loved me, and I am under such great obligations to love him again? 1c5. In grief, when he has withdrawn himself, and in a diligent seeking after him until he is found; when he hides his face, and withdraws his gracious presence, a soul that loves God is troubled at it, and complains of it, as the church did; "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me!" and therefore such a soul, with Job, expresses its concern to know where it could find him, and takes for it a course like his, goes forward and backward, to the right and left, where he used to work, and was wont to be seen (Job 23:2,8,9). 1c6.

In parting with and bearing all for his sake, leaving their own people and father's house, country, and kindred, as Abraham did, to go where he directs; saying as Ruth said to Naomi, "Whither thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thou God shall be my God:" and such that love God are willing to endure all hardships for his sake, to suffer reproach, persecution, and distress of every kind, rather than forego their profession and enjoyment of him. 1c7.

In a regard to his house, worship, and ordinances; they that love the Lord love the habitation of his house, the place where his honour dwells; his tabernacles are amiable and lovely; a day in his house is better than a thousand elsewhere; it is no other, in their esteem, than the gate of heaven, and, like the disciples on the mount, think it good for them to be here, and are for making tabernacles to abide in. 1c8. By a value for his word, his gospel, and the truths of it. They that love the Lord receive the love of the truth; not only the truth, but a love of it, an affection for it; it is more to be desired by them than gold, and is more to them than thousands of gold and silver; it is more esteemed of by them than their necessary food; they find it, and eat it, and it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts; the feet of them that bring the good tidings of it are beautiful unto them. 1c9.

In love and affection to the people of God; who are, with those that love the Lord, the excellent in the earth, in whom is all their delight; as they love him that begets, they love those who are begotten of him, and bear his image; and they are taught of him to do this in their regeneration, and which is an evidence that they have passed from death to life, and are born again. 1c10. By a disesteem of all things in comparison of God: to love the world, and the things of it, in an immoderate manner, is not consistent with the love of the Father, or with profession of love to him; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God; and a man cannot be a friend of the world and a lover of God; no man can serve two masters God and mammon; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or hold to the one and despise the other. 1d.

Fourthly, the nature and properties of the love of God; what it is, or should be. 1d1. It is, or ought to be, universal; a love of all that is in God, and belongs unto him; of all his attributes and perfections, of one as another; not of his goodness, grace, and mercy, and of him for them only; but of his holiness, justice, and truth; and of all his commandments, which are all to be respected, attended unto, and obeyed, (Ps. 119:127,128), and it is a love of all the truths and doctrines of the gospel, of whatsoever is contained in the Scripture; every word of God is pure to them that love the Lord; and all the words of his mouth are plain and right, and nothing froward or perverse in them.

And this love extends to all the people of God, of whatsoever class, rank, degree, or denomination (Eph. 1:15). 1d2. It is, or ought to be, superlative: what exceeds all other love, or love to all other persons and things; as there is none like the Lord for greatness and goodness, so there is none to be loved like him, none in heaven nor in earth, neither angels nor men; not the greatest personages, and those of the most amiable qualities and characters; nor those in the nearest relation, as father, mother, husband, wife, &c. 1d3.

It is, or ought to be, hearty and sincere; a love without dissimulation; not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth; it is required to be with "all the heart," in the most cordial manner; and "with all the soul," the powers and faculties of it, the affections being wholly engrossed and swallowed up in love to God; and "with all the might," or "strength;" with all the strength of grace, or spiritual strength a man is possessed of. 1d4. Should be constant; such is the love of God to his people, he rests in his love towards them; such is the love of Christ to them; who, "having loved his own which are in the world, he loves them to the end," immutably and invariably: the love of God's people falls short of this; it is variable and inconstant in its acts and exercises, though its principle remains. 1d5.

It is imperfect in the present state, as every grace is: knowledge is imperfect; "we know but in part;" and faith is imperfect, and hence an increase of it is desired; and so is love, it sometimes waxes cold, through the prevalence of corruption, the force of temptation, and the snares of the world; and lukewarmness and indifference takes place, until there is a reviving of it through a fresh stream of love from God. 12d6. It may be increased, and sometimes is, the apostle prays for an increase of it, and he thanks God for it that it did abound (1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 1:3), which though it refers to love to the saints, is equally true of love to God, which increases the one as the other. 1d7.

This grace of love, like others, can never be lost; though it may wax cold, it does not sink to nothing, and though it may be less, and abated, and grow weak, as to the ardency and fervency of it, it is not lost; yea, will abide when other graces have dropped their exercise, which is one reason why it is said to be the "greatest" (1 Cor. 13:13 it never fails (1 Cor. 13:8). 1e. Fifthly, The happiness of such that love the Lord. 1e1. They are loved by him; "I love them that love me;" not that their love is the cause of the love of God to them; his love is prior to theirs, and is the cause of that; but such that love the Lord, greater manifestations

of his love are made to them, and more instances of it shown; the secrets of his heart's love are disclosed unto them, that is shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit, and they are directed into it, and led more largely into a view of interest in it; which to enjoy is a great blessing; for "his lovingkindness is better than life" (Ps. 63:3). 1e2.

They are known of God; "if any man love God, the same is known of him" (1 Cor. 8:3), is taken notice of by him, owned and acknowledged as his; and to whom he makes himself known, uses him familiarly, and favors him with communion with himself, and knows his soul in adversity, supports him in it, and delivers out of it; the knowledge he has of him is special, peculiar, and distinct, and is joined with love and affection to him; "the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19). 1e3.

They are preserved by him; "the Lord preserveth all them that love him" (Ps. 145:20), and the same is made use of as an argument to love him (Ps. 31:23), since the Lord takes them under his special care, and preserves them from every enemy, from hurts and dangers, from sin, Satan, and the world, and from a final and total falling away from him, by means of any of them; he preserves them in Christ, and preserves them safe to the coming of Christ, and to his kingdom and glory. 1e4.

They have many instances of mercy, kindness, and respect shown them; for "the Lord is a God showing mercy unto thousands of them that love him" (Ex 20:6), hence David thus prays for himself; "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name" (Ps. 119:132). 1e5. All things that occur unto them in the present life are for their good, and work together for it (Rom. 8:28), even all afflictions and adverse dispensations of providence, as well as more prosperous ones; either for their temporal good, as in the case of Jacob, who thought all things were going against him, when they were all working for him; or for spiritual good; for the trial and increase of grace, of faith, patience, &c. (Rom. 5:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Jam. 1:2), and always for their eternal good (2 Cor. 4:17). 1e6.

Great things are laid up and reserved for them that love the Lord, to be enjoyed hereafter, even things inconceivable, and which are expressed by the highest enjoyments in this life, and which vastly exceed them; by a "crown" and "kingdom" they are now made "heirs" of (1 Cor. 2:9; Jam. 1:12 2:5). 2. Love to Christ is another eminent branch of the grace of love; for he is not only a distinct divine Person in the Godhead, but stands in an office capacity, as Mediator, Redeemer, and Saviour of his people; and has given various surprising proofs and instances of his love to them; and therefore it is not to be wondered at that he should be represented in the Scriptures in so distinguished a manner as the object of their love; and he being so well known to be the object of the love of saints, and so deserving of it, the church only describes him by this periphrasis, "him whom my soul loveth;" without naming his name; supposing that everyone she conversed with knew who she meant (Cant. 3:1-3), and very frequently she calls him, "My beloved," without any other description of him (Cant. 1:13,14 2:16).

Cant. the apostle Peter, after having made mention of the appearing, of Jesus Christ, adds, "Whom having not seen, ye love" (1 Pet. 1:8), and for himself, he could appeal to Christ, as the omniscient God, and say, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17). Concerning which love to Christ the following things may be considered, 2a. First, on what accounts Christ is to be loved, and loved, by them that know him and believe in him: and there are many things in him and belonging to him which engage their love and affections to him.

And he is to be loved, 2a1. Because of the excellencies of his Person: as the Son of God, his glory is the glory of the only begotten of the Father; he is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his

Person; is equal to God, and in the glorious and lovely form of God; the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in him; every perfection in Deity is to be found in him; and therefore has everything to attract the love of his people to him; hence one of the ancients said, "Est aliquid in Christo formosius salvatore;" there is something in Christ more amiable, more lovely, and more beautiful than the Saviour. 2a2.

Because he is the beloved of his Father, his dear Son, the Son of his love, the darling and delight of his soul, always by him, near to him, as one brought up with him, carried in his bosom, in which he lay, and was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; all which is expressive of his tender affection for him, and the inexpressible pleasure he took in him before the world began; and which he further declared by putting all things into his hands, and showing him all he did; which instances our Lord makes mention of himself, as proofs of his Father's love to him (John 3:35 5:20), and when he was here on earth, in human nature, both at his baptism and at his transfiguration on the mount, he declared, by a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5), yea, he loved him because he laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:17), all which most strongly move and excite the saints to love him. 2a3.

Because of the fulness of grace in him for the supply of their wants; it is a very considerable branch of the glory of Christ, as Mediator, and which recommends him as such, that he is "full of grace and truth;" as the fulness of Deity in him renders him an object worthy of the highest love, as a divine Person; so the fulness of grace it pleased the Father should dwell in him, as Man and Mediator, cannot fail of recommending him as suitable to indigent sinners, and of raising in them an high esteem of him, as a most lovely Person, and of attracting their affections to him, (Ps. 45:2; Cant. 5:10). 2a4.

Because of his precious names and titles; his "name" in general, "is as ointment poured forth," which diffuses a most sweet savour, alluding to his name, Messiah, which signifies "anointed;" and from whom the saints receive the "anointing," the graces of the Spirit, which are his "ointments," good and savory, "and therefore do the virgins love him" (Cant. 1:3), who receive all their grace and beauty from him, which makes them amiable and lovely to him. His name Jesus, a Saviour, so called because he saves his people from their sins, is a delightful sound in their ears; as is also, "the Lord our Righteousness," by whose righteousness they are justified before God, and become perfectly comely in his sight (Matthew 1:21; Jer. 23:6), and every other name and title of his in (Isa. 9:6). 2a5.

Because of the offices he bears, so useful and beneficial to his people; he is the "Mediator" between God and men, the day's man between them both, who has brought them together, and reconciled them; the "Surety" of the better Testament, who engaged to be a ransom for them, to pay their debts, to bear their sins, and make satisfaction for them, and to bring them to God, and set them before him; their "Prophet," to teach and instruct them, and enlighten in the knowledge of saving truths; their "Priest," to make atonement for their sins, and to intercede for their persons; and their "King" to rule over them, protect and defend them; and who would not fear and love one so great and respectable! 2a6.

Because of the relations he stands in to them: he is their everlasting Father, who has the most affectionate concern for their welfare; he is the most tender "Husband," who nourishes the church as his own flesh, and for whom he gave himself a sacrifice; he is the most kind and loving Brother, was born for the adversity of his brethren, and to bring them out of it, and is not ashamed of his relation to them; he is a most faithful "Friend," a friend that loves at all times, that sticks closer than a brother; no wonder that the church, after she had described him at large, should break forth in such an exulting and affectionate strain; "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" (Cant. 5:16). 2a7.

Because he has all blessings in his hands for them; peace, pardon, righteousness, and eternal life; and God has blessed his people in him with all spiritual blessings; has given them grace in him, even all the blessings of grace, before the world began; and has made him to them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; so that he is their ALL in ALL, and therefore it is not to be wondered at, that he should be the object of their highest love. 2a8. Particularly, because he is their Saviour and Redeemer, who assumed their nature, in order to die in their room and stead, and became the author of eternal salvation to them, and who saved them, and gave himself for them, to redeem them from all iniquity, and out of the hand of every enemy, and has by his blood obtained eternal redemption for them, and who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his blood, and has procured the remission of them, as well as cleansing from them; and on all accounts they have reason to love him, and sing his new song of redeeming grace, "Worthy is the Lamb!" &c. (Rev. 1:5; 5:9). 2a9.

Nor does his love cease here, nor the obligations on his people to love him; for he appears in the presence of God for them, and ever lives to make intercession for them, and is their advocate with the Father, in consequence of which various blessings of grace descend upon them. 2a10. He will appear a second time, without sin, to the salvation of them that look for him; and his appearance is to be looked for, it being a glorious one; and is itself to be loved; and much more the Person, who shall appear in so much glory, and so much to the advantage of those that love him; for a crown of righteousness is laid up, and will be given to them "that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). 2b.

Secondly, the spring's and causes of love to Christ. 2b1. It does not arise from nature; men in a state of nature are without Christ, without any knowledge of him, and affection for him; they see no form, nor comeliness, nor beauty in him, wherefore he should be desired by them: and this is not only the case of openly profane and carnal sinners, but even of some who have some notion of religion and sacred things; and yet ask, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" what peculiar charms, excellencies, and beauty are there in him, which give him a preference to all others?

But this betrays their ignorance of Christ, and want of true affection for him (Cant. 5:9). 2b2. But it is owing to the abundant grace of God in regeneration; an unregenerate man is destitute of it; "If God was your Father," says Christ to the Jews, their Father by adoption, of which regeneration is the evidence, "ye would love me; for everyone that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (John 8:42; 1 John 5:1). Whoever loves God, who has, of his own good will and abundant mercy, begotten him again to a lively hope of a glorious inheritance, loves Christ also, who is begotten of him, though in an higher sense, and who is the firstborn among many brethren.

Faith in Christ, and love to him, commence together; and both flow from the same grace and favour (1 Tim. 1:14), none but true believers in Christ sincerely love him; "faith works by love; to them that believe he is precious" (Gal. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:7), and none but such who by an eye of faith have seen his glory, fulness, and suitableness, truly love him; for, 2b3. Love to him is owing to a special revelation of him, in the effectual calling; when God calls a man by his grace, he reveals his Son in him, and to him, in the glories of his person, and the riches of his grace; when he sees the King in his beauty, and is enamoured with him, he appears to him white and ruddy, a perfection of beauty, the chiefest among a thousand thousand, none like him among all the men on earth, nor among all the angels in heaven; he is in his esteem, "altogether lovely," beyond all compare, beyond all expression; all things are reckoned loss in comparison of the knowledge of him. 2b4.

Love to Christ arises, not only from a view of his loveliness; but also from a sense of his love, which passes knowledge, from a feeling sensation of it, shed abroad in the heart, which causes love again. This was the case of the sinful woman mentioned in the gospel, who loved much because much love was shown her, in the forgiveness of her sins, through the blood of Jesus; and this is the experience of all the saints; "we love him because he first loved us," in taking the care and charge of us, in assuming our nature, and in dying in our room and stead. 2b5.

This love is more and more heightened and increased through knowledge of union to him, and through communion with him; the church, sitting under the shadow of Christ with great delight, and his fruit sweet to her taste, and being brought by him into his banqueting house, with his banner of love displayed over her, served much to draw forth her love to him, and make her even sick with it; and especially being brought "into his chamber" by him, filled her with joy and gladness, and caused her to remember his love more than wine; and she observed this as the effect of it, "the upright love thee" (Cant. 1:4; 2:3-5).

Thus John, the beloved disciple, being indulged with leaning on the bosom of Jesus, not only had a greater manifestation of Christ's love, but more strongly expressed his love to Christ. 2c. Thirdly, how, in what way and manner, or in what instances, love to Christ shows itself. 2c1. In a regard to all that are his, and belong to him; "His mouth is most sweet" to such, and he is "altogether," or "all of him, lovely," in his person, in his offices, and in his people; his promises are like apples of gold in pictures of silver; the words of his mouth, the doctrines of his grace, are sweeter than the honey or the honeycomb; the ministers of the gospel, who bring the glad tidings of salvation, are beautiful and lovely; his saints are the precious sons of Zion, and comparable to fine gold; his ways are ways of pleasantness, his tabernacles amiable, and his ordinances delightful. 2c2.

In keeping his commandments; "If ye love me," says Christ, "keep my commandments;" this is the strongest and clearest proof of love; he that, from a principle of love, "keepeth them, he it is," says Christ, "that loveth me;" others may talk of their love to Christ; but he is the man that truly loves him (John 14:15,21). 2c3. In a carefulness not to offend him, and cause him to depart from them; thus solicitous was the church, and therefore fearful lest any offence should be given, and occasion his removal from her (Cant. 2:7). 2c4.

In a jealousy of his love, lest he should not love them at all; or should not love them so much as another, or another more than they; "Jealousy is cruel as the grave," fearful,[1] distressing, and insatiable (Cant. 8:6). 2c5. In a desire of, and delight in, his company; this delight is very great; "I sat down under his shadow," under the shadow of his ordinances, enjoying his presence in them, "with great delight" (Cant. 2:3), and this desire is very vehement, strongly expressed with great ardor and fervency, and the presence of Christ is importunately sought after (Isa. 26:9). 2c6.

In grief and concern, when he has withdrawn his presence. "In his favor," in his gracious presence, and under the smiles of his countenance, "is life," a soul is alive and comfortable; but if he withdraws himself, and the manifestations of his favour, it is death, it kills, it is intolerable; "My soul failed," swooned away, "when he spake," or at the parting word (Cant. 5:8). Mary, at our Lord's sepulchre, not finding him there, with an heart full of grief, and ready to break, burst out in a passionate manner, with tears, "They have taken away my Lord!" (John 20:13). 2c7.

In a strict search and inquiry after him until found; so the church, when she had lost her beloved, sought him first on her bed, in her chamber, and private retirement; then in the city, the assembly of the saints, in

the "streets" and "broad" places, in the public ministry of the word and ordinances; and then of the "watchmen," the ministers of the gospel personally; and throughout the whole of the search the inquiry was, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" and in an after similar case; when, through her sleepiness, slothfulness, and ingratitude, he withdrew from her; which, when she perceived, she sought him, but could not find him; she called to him, but received no answer; she met with ill usage from the watchmen, but this did not deter her from going in quest of him; she lighted upon the daughters of Jerusalem, in her search of him, whom she charged, that if they found her beloved, that they would tell him, that she was sick of love for him (Cant. 3:1-3; 5:6-8). 2c8.

In expressions of joy upon finding him; as the church in the above case; "It was but little," says she, "that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him, and would not let him go:" and in the other case how does she exult in the close of her account, upon finding him; "This is my beloved, and this is my friend!" (Cant. 3:4 5:16). Cant., after our Lord's absence by death, from his disciples, when he rose again, and showed himself to them, it is said, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20), and so it is when Christ has withdrawn himself from his people, and they see him again by faith, they are filled "with a joy unspeakable and full of glory!" and there is great reason for such joy on finding him; for he that finds him, "finds life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord" (Prov. 8:35). 2c9.

In pushing through all difficulties to enjoy him, as the church did; who, in search of Christ, exposed herself to the insults, blows, wounds, and depredations of the watchmen: so souls at first conversion, when their first love, the Dove of their espousals to Christ, is warm and ardent, like Israel of old, go after him "in a wilderness, in a land not sown," in very discouraging circumstances, through much reproach, tribulation, and affliction, from the world, and others. 2c10.

In parting with and bearing all for Christ's sake; in leaving relations, friends, and former companions, houses, lands, and everything dear and valuable, standing in competition with him: in denying themselves in every view, sinful self, righteous self, and civil self; taking up the cross cheerfully, and following him; and even loving not their lives unto death for his sake; Christ is the pearl of great price in their esteem, and they are willing to part with all things, and suffer the loss of all, that they may enjoy him. 2d.

Fourthly, the nature of this love. 2d1. Universal; all of Christ, as before observed; for he is all lovely; his person, his people, his word and ordinances, his precepts, and his promises. 2d2. Superlative; "He that loves father or mother more than me," says Christ, "is not worthy of me," &c. (Matthew 10:37), and the same holds good of any other person or thing; there is none in heaven nor in earth to be loved like him; he is the chiefest among ten thousand. 2d3. Hearty and sincere; such who truly love Christ, love him "in sincerity," or "in incorruption" (Eph. 6:24), with a love that cannot be corrupted, with a love unfeigned, and without dissimulation; such was Peter's love to Christ, who could appeal to him as omniscient for the truth of it. 2d4.

Warm and fervent; such as "many waters" of sin, "temptation, and affliction, cannot quench;" floods of the same, more forcible, "cannot drown;" and from which, "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword, cannot separate" (Cant. 8:7; Rom. 8:35). 2d5. It should be constant, as Christ's is to us, who loves at all times, and to the end: but, alas! other objects present, and other lovers are followed after for a time; yet true love is not totally and finally lost; first love, though left for a while, is revived and restored; and the first husband is returned unto and abode by. 2d6.

It is very grateful and well pleasing to Christ; "How fair is thy love," says he, "my sister, my spouse; how much better is thy love than wine!" (Cant. 4:10), he remembers the first love of his people, the love of their espousals, the kindness of their youth, when forgotten by them: what made him put the question so often to Peter, Lovest thou me? One reason, among others, might be, because it was pleasing to him to hear him say, and so strongly aver it, that he loved him. 2e.

Fifthly, the happiness of those that love Christ. 2e1. They are loved by him: "I love them, that love me," says Wisdom, or Christ (Prov. 8:17), that is, he continues to love them, and makes greater manifestations of himself, and of his love to them; and so he himself explains it, when speaking of those that show their love to him, by keeping his commandments; he says, "I will love him, and manifest myself unto him;" and this he shows by his frequent love visits to them, and by his prayers and preparations for them, that they may be with him where he is, and behold his glory. 2e2.

They are blessed who love Christ; as a curse, an "anathema, maranatha," is wished to those who love him not; so "grace," the best of blessings, is desired for those who love him in sincerity (1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 6:24). 2e3. It is expressed prayer-wise, that it might be, and it is a prayer of faith, that it shall be; "Let them that love him, be as the sun when it goeth forth in his might" (Judges 5:31) for light, splendor, and glory; as they are when clothed with the sun, and when the Sun of righteousness arises upon them with healing in his wings, and as they will be when they shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. 2e4.

Those that love Christ, he, as he has promised, "Will cause to inherit substance" (Prov. 8:21), even a better and a more enduring substance than is to be enjoyed in this world, riches of grace, and riches of glory, durable riches and righteousness. 3. Another branch of the grace of love is, love to men. 3a. First, the objects of it; men. 3a1. Angels are indeed objects of love; not the evil angels, because of their wickedness and apostasy from God, and because of their mischievous nature, continually seeking to do hurt to the persons of men, their souls and bodies, their properties and estates, as much as in them lies, and as far as they have leave; but good angels, who are very amiable, because of the excellencies of their nature, their holiness, wisdom, and strength, in which they excel; they belong to the family in heaven, and are of great use to saints on earth; are ministering; spirits to the heirs of salvation; though they are not to be worshipped by good men, being their fellow servants; yet they are to be loved, being friendly to them, and wish their welfare, and rejoice at it: they expressed their joy at the good will of God to men, shown in the incarnation of Christ for them; and there is joy among them whenever a sinner is converted and repents; besides, the saints will be like them in the resurrection, and will join them in the worship of God, and in communion with him for ever.

But, 3a2. It is with men, the branch of love under consideration is concerned; and, indeed, all men are to be loved; for this is the second great commandment, "Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself;" and all mankind are neighbours; they are all the offspring of God, and near akin to one another, being all of one man's blood; nay, not only those that are kind and neighborly, are to be loved, but even our very enemies; so Christ has taught us by his precept; "I say unto you, love your enemies;" and by his example, in praying to his Father, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do!" (Matthew 22:39,40; 5:44; Luke 23:34), nay, we are directed to show kindness to them, and heap favors upon them, and thereby overcome their evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21). 3a3.

The peculiar objects of this branch of love now to be treated of are good men, the saints and people of God; who are, 3a3a. Called brethren; not in a natural but spiritual relation, the brethren of Christ, and brethren one of another; who are brethren and partakers of the same heavenly calling, or are in the same

church state, and are called the "brotherhood," and therefore should love as brethren (1 Pet. 2:17 3:8). Hence this love has the name of Philadelphia, or brotherly love (Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:1). 3a3b.

Disciples and followers of Christ; such who have learned Christ, and have learned to deny themselves, and to take up the cross and follow him; these, as they should love Christ, so likewise one another (John 13:35), and the least instance of love and kindness shown to such on account of what they are, is exceeding pleasing to Christ (Matthew 10:42). 3a3c. Believers in Christ, who are called the household of faith, partakers of the grace of faith, and embrace and profess the same doctrine of faith, these are to be loved, and special kindness shown unto them (Gal. 6:10; Titus 3:15), the little ones who believe in Christ he is so tender of, and has such a special regard unto, that he would have no offence given unto them; but signifies, it would fare ill with those who should give it (Matthew 18:6). 3a3d.

Children of God, who are such by adoption, to which they are predestinated, and which they receive through and from Christ, and of which regeneration is the evidence, and the Spirit of God the witness; and who become apparently so by faith in Christ Jesus, and being children of the same Father, ought to love one another (1 John 5:1,2). 3a3e. They are described as saints, who are the objects of this grace of love; who are called to be saints, and are called with an holy calling, or sanctified by the Spirit of God, and have principles of grace and holiness wrought in them, and live holy lives and conversations; and frequently does the apostle speak in commendation of the churches for their "love unto all the saints" (Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4). 3b.

Secondly, the nature of this grace of love, as exercised towards the saints. 3b1. It is wrought in regeneration. Men in a state unregeneracy are destitute of it; "the world hates" those that are "chosen out of" it, and called; and that because they are so; yea, one part of the character of God's elect before conversion is, "hateful, and hating one another;" in regeneration, and not before, men are "taught of God to love one another;" and this is an evidence of their regeneration, (1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 3:14). 3b2.

This grace is very largely described (1 Cor. 13:1-13), for though our translators have rendered the word "charity" throughout, for what reason it does not appear, it should be "love;" for it is manifestly distinguished from alms deeds, or relieving the poor and distressed, which the apostle supposes may be, and yet this grace be wanting; by which he seems to understand love to the saints; without which, he suggests the greatest gifts of knowledge are nothing, and all pretensions to, and professions of, religion are in vain: those who are possessed of it, "suffer long," bear and forbear much, are "kind" to their fellow creatures and fellow Christians; "envy not" the superior gifts and graces of others; "vaunt not" over those supposed inferior to them; and are not "puffed up" with their own attainments; "do not behave unseemly," in a haughty, supercilious, and contemptuous manner to those in connection with them; "seek" not their "own" things, pleasures, profits, honours, and to exalt themselves above others; are not "easily provoked" to wrath against those that offend them; "think no evil" of others, give not way to groundless jealousies and surmises; "rejoice not in iniquity," in committing it themselves, nor in seeing it done by others; not in lies, nor in any false representations of things; but "rejoice in the truth," in hearing and telling truth of others; "bear all things," all reproaches, insults, and indignities, with patience and meekness; "believe all things" of good report in fellow Christians, not giving credit to evil spoken of them, without sufficient reason; "hope all things," the best concerning them, and that what is of ill report is not true of them; "endure all things," the ill treatment and ill manners of others, with much mildness and gentleness. 3b3.

It should be universal; "Love to all saints;" for which some churches are commended, before observed; whether they be weak or strong believers, more or less knowing Christians, they are to be cordially

"received" into the love and affections of the saints; and be they of whatsoever name and denomination in religion, they may, provided they appear to be Christ's, and bear his image; and let their worldly circumstances be what they will, no respect, as to affection, is to be had to persons; one in a Christian assembly with a gold ring, and in goodly apparel, is not to be preferred to a poor brother in mean raiment, as James directs (Jam. 2:1-3). 3b4.

It should be fervent (1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8), and every method should be taken and means used to blow up the flame of love, and to keep it alive; it is a sign of bad times, and of things going ill in religion, when "the love of many waxes cold" (Matthew 24:12). 3b5. It should be, and where it is right it will be, unfeigned and sincere; so the apostle calls that love which springs from an heart purified under the influence of divine truths, by the Spirit, "unfeigned love of the brethren" (1 Pet. 1:22), it is love without dissimulation, real and cordial; not "in word" and "in tongue" only, but "in deed" and "in truth" (1 John 3:18). 3b6.

It is an active and laborious grace, by which the saints "serve one another," both in things temporal and spiritual (Gal. 5:13), hence we read of the "work and labour of love" (1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10), it not only works and is busy, and continually exercises itself in doing good, but it labours at it, and yet is not weary of well doing. 3b7. The manner in which, or the exemplar according to which, it is to be exercised is, as Christ has loved his people; this is what he himself has enjoined, that is the argument and motive inducing to an observance of it (John 13:34; 15:12), yea, the apostle John, carries this pattern of love to such a degree, that as Christ has shown his love to his people in laying down his life for them; they are to show theirs in laying down their lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). 3b8.

It is a very excellent grace; after the apostle had exhorted, to "covet earnestly the best gifts," he adds, "yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31), something more excellent than the best external gifts, both ordinary and extraordinary, he had before been speaking of; and by the connection of the words with the following chapter, it appears to be the grace of love, which, 3b8a. Is the greatest of all the graces (1 Cor. 13:13), because it is more diffusive of goodness and kindness, and so more beneficial to others, though the other graces may be more useful to a man's self; and because of its long duration, even as to the exercise of it, which will be throughout an endless eternity; for "charity," or "love, never faileth" (1 Cor. 13:8). 3b8b.

It is an evidence of a man's being born again; "Every one that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4:7; 3:14), and this is the grand criterion of a true disciple of Christ (John 13:35). In Tertullian's time the heathens knew the Christians by their loving attitude toward one another in public, and would point unto them and say, "See how they love one another!"[2] such times are now to be wished for. 3b8c. It is called the "bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14), which perfectly knits and unites the saints together, and keeps the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; it is the perfect bond of the church and its members; of the saints to one another, and of their several graces. 3b8d.

Without this, a profession of religion is an empty and useless thing; and the strongest expressions of regard unto it, speculative notions about it, and boastings of it, are insignificant (1 Cor. 13:1-3). How super excellent therefore must this grace be! It is in vain to talk of love to God and love to Christ, where this is wanting (1 John 4:20). 3b8e. It is the exercise of this grace which makes the communion of the saints with one another delightful; "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity!" the Psalmist compares it, for its cheering and refreshing nature, to the precious ointment poured on Aaron's head, and to the dew of Hermon, and that which fell on the mountains of Zion (Ps. 133:1-3), and it also tends greatly to their edification in church fellowship; "Charity," or "love, edifieth;" the body, the

church, being united to Christ the head, and the members of it fitly joined together, "maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love" (1 Cor. 8:1; Eph. 4:16). 3b8f.

It is one part of the saints spiritual armor; "The breastplate of faith and love" is a good defence against the enemy, who cannot easily get an advantage where this piece of armor is carefully and constantly made use of; it makes the church of Christ as terrible as an army with banners; the love and union of saints to one another, is their great security against the common adversary; like the bundle of sticks in the fable, which, while bound together, could not be broken, but when separated were easily snapped asunder. 3c.

Thirdly, how, in what manner, and wherein this grace of love to one another manifests itself. 3c1. By praying with and for one another; hence when our Lord taught his disciples to pray, he directed them to pray to God as their common Father; saying, "Our Father, which art in heaven;" thereby teaching them, that they were to pray for one another even for all saints, and that constantly and fervently (Eph. 6:18), which availeth much, and tends to godly edification. 3c2. By bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), and this is done by assisting and relieving each other in distress, as much as in us lies, by sympathizing with each other in trouble, as the members of a natural body do, rejoicing with them that rejoice, and weeping with them that weep. 3c3.

By forbearing and forgiving one another; as God, for Christ's sake, and as Christ also has forgiven them (Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:31,32; Luke 17:3,4). 3c4. By rebuking and admonishing one another in love. Sin known, should not be suffered to lie upon a brother, without reproving for it; this is not kindness to him; "Open rebuke is better than secret love" (Prov. 27:5,6), but then such rebuke should be given in love, and with much tenderness; which is most likely to be kindly received and to succeed; "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness," &c. (Ps. 141:5), when such who are overtaken in a fault are restored in the spirit of meekness, this shows tenderness and brotherly love. 3c5.

By endeavoring to establish one another in the doctrines of the gospel, and of increasing light and knowledge; which is called, "building up themselves in their most holy faith;" which is done by praying and conversing together, often speaking one to another about divine things; not disdain to receive instruction even from inferiors; thus Aquila and Priscilla expounded in a private manner the way of God more perfectly to Apollos, a public teacher; which he attended to. 3c6.

By exhorting and stirring up one another to the several duties of religion, both public and private (Heb. 10:24,25). 3d. Fourthly, there are various arguments and motives which may be made use of to excite to the exercise of this grace of love. 3d1. It is Christ's new commandment; so he says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another;" which yet, as the apostle John says, it was both old and new (John 13:34; 1 John 2:7,8), an old commandment, being founded upon the original law of God; a new commandment, being not only an excellent one, especially as now delivered out, since excellent things in scripture are often called new ones, as a new song, &c. but because of the new edition of it under the gospel dispensation, and being given forth anew by Christ the lawgiver, in his house, called therefore, "The law of Christ," which is the law of love; and having a new pattern and exemplar of it, and a new move and argument added to it, mentioned by Christ himself; "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34; 15:12). 3d2.

The love of God and Christ should engage unto it; the love of God in the mission and gift of his Son to die for us, and become the propitiation for our sins; "Beloved," says the apostle, "if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11), and the love of Christ in giving himself for us, an offering and a

sacrifice to God, to atone for our sins; "Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us," &c. (Eph. 5:2). 3d3. The relation the saints stand in one to another, is a reason why they should love one another; they are members of the same body, and should have an affection and sympathy for one another; as the members in a natural, so they in a spiritual way; they are children of the same Father, and belong to the same family, and are all brethren; this is the argument Moses used with the Israelites at variance (Acts 7:26). 3d4.

The comfort and joy of ministers should be an argument with saints to mutual love; it is with the greater pleasure they pursue their studies and labour in their ministrations, for the good of souls, when peace and love are cultivated among them; but when it is otherwise, it is greatly discouraging and distressing to them, and they go on heavily in their work; for where envying and strife are, there is confusion, and every evil work; which is very disagreeable, and makes uncomfortable; yea, the comfort of the saints themselves, and their edification are hereby greatly hurt; wherefore both with respect to ministers and people, the apostle exhorts to love and unity (Philemon 2:1,2 2; Cor. 13:11), and that "brotherly love continue;" for the love of God and Christ continues; nothing can separate from it; they love to the end: the relation of saints continues; being once the children of God, and brethren of Christ, and of one another, they always remain such, and in the family, in the house of God, where they abide, and from whence they are never removed; and if brotherly love continues not, churches cannot continue long; a house divided against itself cannot stand; the church at Ephesus was threatened with a removal of the candlestick, or church state, unless they repented, because they had left their first love. ENDNOTES:

[1] "Res est solliciti plena timoris amor." Ovid.

[2] Apolog. c. 39.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/of-the-grace-of-love/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net