

A Discovery of
Glorious Love

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John Durant



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*To the Right Honorable
Robert Earl of Warwick*

My noble lord,

I presume your lordship well knows that Christ's love is our soul (and therefore sole) life. Then (and indeed not till then) do we live when we enjoy divine love. Our bosoms cannot breathe forth the breath of life before Christ breathes in the breath of love.

Indeed, it's the misery of most that they are strangers to this truth. To speak to many of the Lord Jesus, and to tell them of a life in love above what sense feels, and of a comfort, a glory, a happiness flowing from thence, far surmounting what sight sees, is a mystery that they cannot perceive (nor indeed believe), for 'tis foolishness unto them. Not only did the news-mongers at Athens count this to be news that they never heard of, but even the philosophers there themselves accounted Paul's preaching of these things a strange doctrine.

But I hope I may, without either falseness or flattery, say that your honor is well acquainted with these things as experimentally knowing that all your honor, joy, and felicity lies in this: that you know the love of Christ passing knowledge.

And this is one ground of this dedication of these ensuing sermons. But it's not the only ground. For I desire by this also to declare to the world, and yourself, how sensible and mindful

I am of those obligations that your honor has laid upon me, not only by your owning of and respect unto my person but (which I prize most) my ministry.

His person is above my praise whose pen has blotted the common way of dedications. But his ground was, because for the most part they only flatter. And yet he allows for dedications when the argument of the book agrees with the person whom it's dedicated to. The consideration of this I hope (as has been hinted) will secure me from his or others' censure.

Besides, I know, there is a difference between flattery and gratitude. Though the one is odious as a vice, yet the other is amiable as a virtue. And 'tis at this that I have aimed in this dedication.

I know that the bare remembrance (however grateful) of favors received is no requital. But yet, though it serves not to remunerate the favor, yet 'twill to vindicate the benefactor, that he has not ill bestowed his benefits.

My lord, if I say that I cannot requite all your favors, it's no more than all know. And if I say that Christ can, it's no more than I know you believe and I desire. 'Twill be no overexalting of Christ's love, nor any diminution unto your favors, if I say that the least grain of love from Christ to you will abundantly compensate all the weight of your love to me. And this, my lord, is not only my prayer but my belief in your behalf.

I shall not trouble your lordship with many words. Only let me have leave to sound in your ear two words of the Lord Jesus. The one was a word of prophecy, the other of advice.

His word of prophecy was, "The love of many shall wax cold." It's your duty to search, and 'twill be your honor to find, that there is no fulfilling of that in your soul. But, alas, who can say that he does not see too great a fulfilling of this in himself! Oh, the decay of love, zeal, activity, and appearance in the things of Christ that is everywhere! It's a thing that

calls for bloody tears that besides the abounding of iniquity in enemies there is such waxing cold of love in friends. I have sometimes thought Christ spoke this prophecy (as Paul did his rehearsal) weeping.

Christ's word of advice was this: "Strengthen the things that remain," that are ready to die. It's well that under spiritual decays we have anything that remains (happy are they who have not lost all). It's wisdom to strengthen that which languishes (holy are they who strive to do this, and the following sermons may be helpful herein). If the Spirit lays this truth upon our hearts, that Christ loves us with a transcendent love, 'twill at once make us bleed for coolings and burn—yea, blaze—afresh with the fire (internally) and flames (externally) of love to Christ, His people, His truths, and His designs.

But I have gone beyond my intentions, though I hope not beyond your acceptance. Permit me to add that I am in the number of those who both praise and pray for you, and profess to be much obliged to you. I shall trouble you no further, save with the sincere subscription that I am, my lord,

Your honor's singularly obliged soul's servant,

John Durant

To His Beloved Friends

To his beloved friends, the godly inhabitants of the town and port of Sandwich particularly, the congregation over which the Holy Ghost has made my reverend brother (Mr. Francis Prentice) overseer:

Beloved in Christ,

However those who are in the world may account the ensuing sermons riddles and paradoxes, yet to you (whom I hope Christ has taken out of the world) they are experienced truths. It's true you know them already, for I have preached them to you. But that you might have them in remembrance I have been willing to print them for you—and yet not for you only but for as many as believe in the Lord Jesus.

It was Peter's care to perpetuate those things by writing that he preached by word so that, albeit his hearers knew, yet they might be established in the truth. Certainly next to the knowing of truths is the establishment in them, which some, wanting, are gone aside after airy vanities.

'Tis true, your establishment primarily and causally depends on the Spirit. But yet, secondarily and instrumentally, it is attained unto by the Word. For therefore it was that Peter wrote (as he says in 2 Peter 1:12), and surely his writings were

words. And yet the words of Christ were not bare letter. No, they were spirit and life. And the truths of Christ held forth by any, according to the measure of the gift received, are as truly Christ's words now as when He was here on earth, else how could Paul say that Christ came and preached to the Ephesians and was evidently crucified before the Galatians (as 'tis in Ephesians 2:17 and Galatians 3:1), neither of whom heard of Christ till after His ascension. I hope it will be no pride, but a grateful and necessary witness to the grace of Christ, if I say I have both spoken and written the truth as it is in Jesus and as the Spirit has given utterance. Yea, and that in a measure also I can say that those things that I have heard and seen I have declared unto you, that your joy might be full.

I know nothing so directly tending to both the truths and fullness of a saint's joy (of which I account myself obliged to be a helper) as the knowledge of the love of Christ. Now this is the subject I treat. And this I desire to put you in remembrance of, as knowing nothing more strong and constraining unto duty than joy springing forth of this well of salvation.

I shall not trouble you with a large epistle. Four words only in this public view I shall leave with you as my witness unto Christ in some present truths now denied that I desire may never be a witness against you.

1. That Jesus whom we preach, and whose love we declare, is the same Christ still—that is, the same God in man's nature (which is the choice thing in Him capable of being anointed and so of making Him Christ). He that ascended is the same that descended, and He that descended is the same also that ascended (as it is in Ephesians 4:9–10). He still retains the human nature that He once took and so is still not only the same God, but man. It's true, the manhood or flesh of Christ is now glorified, but 'tis not annihilated. His body is made

glorious, but still 'tis in body. The Man is set down on the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

2. This Jesus shall come again in the same manner in which He ascended. As He was visible (even to the eyes of the flesh) when He went away, so shall He be seen in like manner coming again (Acts 1:10–11). He is not so swallowed up in Spirit that He is gone out of the flesh. But albeit His all and only presence is now in Spirit, yet He shall come again, and all eyes shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth, as it is Revelation 1:7. Whoever shall say these Scriptures are not to be taken in the letter (I know I have the mind of Christ if I say in this) does not have the Spirit.

3. Till this coming again we are to wait for Him and upon Him in the spiritual and yet external observation of the ordinances of the gospel. And in them we are to expect, and shall find, the sweet and spiritual incomes of Himself in discoveries of that love of which I treat.

4. In the day of Christ's coming again, those ministers will be found blessed who as faithful and wise stewards shall be found giving the household their portion of meat in due season. And these saints will be blameless who in that day shall be found exercised in, and yet living above, the observation of preaching, fellowship, prayers, and breaking of bread, which Christ has commanded to be kept up till He come.

And now, beloved, what is the panting of my spirit for my own soul, for yours, and for all the saints? Is it not that the morning of that day would dawn? Is it not that the shadows would fly away and that the dayspring from on high might again (in the glory of Christ [God and man]) visit us? Surely these are the daily groanings of the Spirit in me. But with these

there is also a mixture of sighs. Oh, that the Spirit would make us diligent, that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless! And, oh, that we may be counted worthy to escape all these things that (in part are already) come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Yea, and, oh, that when the Lord shall call us to an account concerning the oracles, the ordinances that He has committed to us, we may be found, first, neither as having defiled them with our own inventions, nor, second, as disesteeming them upon pretense of our attainments. No, nor, third, to have made them our rest and confidence. But I shall sigh the rest in secret. I beseech you believe that my heart underwrites this, that I am

Yours, entirely affectionate in the
love and labor of the gospel,

John Durant

To the Reader

In these sermons I presume you will perceive the plainness of man. And my prayer is that you may likewise perceive the power of the Spirit. The time of their preaching was some eleven years since, even the noon of the day of England's trouble. At that time they were accounted seasonable.

The matter of them is some gospel light of the glorious love of Christ, and this makes me think they can never be unseasonable.

The manner of their delivery was (as it ought to be) not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in the simplicity and plainness of the gospel.

The end was and is, next to Christ's glory, your good (O believer!), whoever you are. And if this is not attained, I must cry out, "I have labored in vain!" And two requests I have unto you.

The first is that you charitably cover the failings of the preacher. Remember the heavenly treasure of the gospel is in earthen vessels.

The second is that you carefully correct the errors of the printer, which by reason of my absence from the press could not be avoided.

If to these two you will over and above add your prayers for me, that I may still be enabled from an experimental knowledge of gospel truths to publish the same unto poor souls, you will do more than requite me for my pains in this, even oblige me to a publication of some other papers. In hope whereof, I subscribe myself

Yours in the sincerity and strength of gospel love,
John Durant

CHAPTER 1

The Truth of Christ's Love to Believers

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.
—EPHESIANS 3:19

Knowledge is the perfection of the rational creature. It is that whereby we come, as the philosopher speaks, to partake of divinity, to be like unto the deity. God is light and knowledge, and the more we partake of it the more like we are Him. Now by how much the likelier we are unto God, by so much the nearer we come up to perfection.

Knowledge is exceedingly precious. It must be so since it tends to perfection. Indeed, as Aquinas said of seeing, “Though the object of sight is mean in itself yet the very act of seeing is sweet.” So also he determines of knowing, that however the object is low and poor, yet the very act itself of knowledge is high and precious.

Now of all knowledge there is none so precious, nor so perfecting, as that which is divine. Other knowledge (human) can make us perfect only as men. This knowledge (divine) gives us a perfection as saints.

But of all divine knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ in the light of love is most precious, as tending most to the perfection of our souls. As there are degrees of luster in the

heavenly lights, so there are degrees of glory in divine truths. Every star in the firmament has a glorious light, but the light of the sun exceeds them all in glory. And every truth (which is as a star in the heaven of divinity) has a peculiar excellence in it, and the knowledge thereof is precious. But Jesus Christ (who is as the sun in divinity's heaven) has a transcendent excellence in Him, and to know Him far more tends to the perfection of our souls than the knowledge of any or all divine truths besides. Therefore it is that Paul accents this knowledge with an excellence in Philippians 3:8: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." And certainly Paul might well say this, for albeit he had attained the knowledge of other things, yet without this he had been at a loss in point of soul-sacred perfection. So that however other knowledge (as being some way perfecting and precious) is desirable, yet there is no knowledge that is so to be desired, at least by saints, as the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But although the sun is the most glorious of the heavenly lights, yet mortals receive more comfort by its heat than by its light. In like manner, though the knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most transcendent of divine truths, yet our souls receive more sweetness by the warmth of His love than by the luster of His light. As Moses could not see the glory of God and live, and yet must die unless he saw His grace, even so our souls cannot see the luster of the bright beams of Christ's glory and live (we must die ere we can behold that), yet notwithstanding we must see the light of the bosom love of Jesus or else we die. If this light does not dawn upon our bosoms, if this knowledge does not shine into our hearts, we shall sink and die in our souls, especially if we are in fear of any troubles.

Hence it was that the apostle Paul, among the rest of those precious petitions that he puts up to the Father of our Lord

Jesus on behalf of the Ephesians, lest they should faint at his tribulations, he adds this, that they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

I shall briefly give you the context, that it may give some light to the text.

The apostle, having hinted in the first verse of this chapter that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, and having also upon that spoken something of the excellence of the gospel and the warrant that he had to preach the same unto them (which two things were as two great supporters of him in his sufferings), he comes in the fourteenth verse to pray for the Ephesians, that they might not faint at his tribulations. Now there might be a double ground of the apostle's fear why the Ephesians might faint at the news of his tribulations.

The first ground is sympathy. It is usual with saints to sympathize each with others in their tribulations. And Paul upon this ground might rightly think that the tidings of his imprisonment would be sad to these Ephesians; and perhaps he might fear that out of their tender love, both to his person and preaching, they would be overly sad, by sympathy, to understand that now their preacher was in prison.

Second, he might fear that left to themselves they might meet with the like sufferings. For what might they think? Is Paul in prison for preaching the gospel? Then surely may we fear the like for receiving the gospel.

It is commonly seen that the receivers of gospel truths suffer as well as the revealers. And certainly we shall be accounted as faulty for our faith in, as Paul is for his preaching of, the gospel. This peradventure they might argue, fear, and faint. Therefore the apostle bends his knees to Him who alone is able to keep from and support in faintings: "To the Father of our Lord

Jesus.” And three things he begs on behalf of the Ephesians that they might not (upon any ground) faint at his tribulations.

1. Divine strength: That He would grant according to the riches of His glory, that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (verse 16). The spirit of man, the apostle knew, was weak, and so would faint unless God strengthened it. Therefore he begs the Spirit of God (which is the power from on high) for their strengthening in the inner man, that they might not faint in their outward man.

2. Christ’s inhabitation: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,” said he in verse 17. If anything will keep up the heart from fainting, it is that indwelling of Christ with the soul. Christ’s presence creates comfort, and there is no such fence against fainting under any fears as Christ in the soul. The inhabitation of Christ within will support the soul from its faintings at tribulation for Christ without.

3. The knowledge of Christ’s love: That they might know the love of Christ that passes knowledge, as it is in the text. Paul well knew the power of Christ’s love, and the efficacy thereof, this way. So that now you may gather up the apostle’s petitions into one prayer, and you may conceive him pouring out his heart after this manner:

Thou Father of our Lord Jesus, since Thou art the God of all comforts, and comfortest Thine in all their tribulations so that they faint not, vouchsafe to grant according to the riches of Thy grace that the Ephesians may not faint at my tribulations. And to this end, strengthen them by Thy Spirit of power in their inner man; fill them by the glorious presence of Christ dwelling in them; but above

all, let them know the love of Jesus Christ which passeth knowledge.

Thus you see by the context, the drift, and scope of the text. But before I speak any further to it, I must clear one thing, which perhaps may be an occasion of doubt, and that is the seeming unreasonableness of this part of Paul's prayer. For, some may say, what reason is there that Paul should pray for that which he hints is impossible? Why should he pray that the Ephesians might know that which he expressly said was above knowledge? "The love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

Though we admit the love of Christ is above knowledge, yet 'tis not unreasonable to desire to know it. For look, although the fulfilling of divine precepts is above our power, yet, notwithstanding, it is to be in our endeavor. In like manner, although the knowledge of Christ, of Christ's love, is above our intellects, yet it may be in our desires. The same infiniteness that grace puts in the will, making it endeavor to fulfill that which it cannot, nay, yea, also puts on the desire for the obtaining of that which cannot be obtained.

But to know the love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge with reference to men as men, not unto saints as such. Indeed, the spirit of man is not able to know or search into the love of Christ (that is above its knowledge). But the Spirit of Christ is able both to search into and to reveal His love. And though Christians as men cannot attain to the knowledge of the love of Christ by the light of reason, yet as saints by the light of faith they may, especially the Holy Ghost (in the meantime) shedding it abroad in their hearts, as it is in Romans 5:5.

The love of Christ may be said to be above knowledge in regard of its perfection of degrees, not simply in regard of its parts.