

LOVE FOR CHRIST

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:17).

More than any other writer in the New Testament John dwelt upon the subject of love. He had grasped the hand, looked into the eyes, listened to the voice, and felt the throbbing of the heart of Christ as he pillowed his head upon the bosom of the Saviour. Then he exclaimed, "We love him, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19).

I. Why Should We Love Christ?

1. Because of what He has done for us.

(1) He loved us when we were lost sinners.

Romans 5:8 says: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We rebelled against Him, and yet He cared for us enough to die for us. Sinners rebel against Christ and say, "I will not have this Man to rule over me. I will go my own way, regardless. I reject His authority." Yet, in spite of this, the Lord Jesus still loves them.

(2) He paid the penalty for our sins.

We had sinned and the punishment of hell was awaiting us, but the Lord Jesus took the penalty of our sins upon Himself, went all the way to Calvary and died in our stead. Why wouldn't we love Him?

(3) He sent the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins.

Using the gospel of Christ, the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sins, convinced us of our need of the Saviour, and persuaded us to repent of our sins and to believe on Christ.

(4) He saved us from our sins.

John 1:12 says: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." When we received Him, He forgave our sins, saved our souls, gave us eternal life and wrote our names in the Lamb's book of life. Isn't that enough to cause us to love Him?

2. Because of what He is doing for us.

(1) He is forgiving our sins daily.

When Christ saved us He did not make it impossible for us to sin thereafter. We still have the carnal nature. Satan still tempts us and we often yield to his temptations. This hurts and grieves the Lord Jesus, but in love He says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). It is truly wonderful that we have the privilege of going to Him in penitence and confession and of receiving His loving forgiveness. Then we can sing, "Nothing between my soul and the Saviour." What a grand and glorious feeling when we know that our sins are forgiven, and that there is not anything

between us and the Saviour! When we feel the weight of our sins, are truly sorry for them, confess them to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness, in love He forgives us and puts a new song in our hearts. That should cause us to love Him dearly.

- (2) He is strengthening us for living victoriously.

Living in a sinful world, we cannot live victoriously in our own strength. We need help from above, the help that the Lord alone can give. Often we think we can get along by ourselves and without the help of the Lord, but when we attempt it we always stumble and fall. That is why it is always wise and best for us to reach up for the nail-pierced hands of Christ. He alone can help us over the rugged ways of this pilgrim journey.

- (3) He comforts us in our sorrows.

Many of us know what sorrow is. We have experienced numerous heartbreaks. When these experiences come to us, as His obedient followers, we call upon Him and He comforts us.

3. Because of what He is going to do for us.

- (1) He is going to come back for us.

Christ said: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-2). If the Lord tarries a while before coming back, we know that we shall die. For those of us who are Christians, that will mean that our souls will go to be with the Lord Jesus, and our bodies will be placed in the graves. We shall be "absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Then, when Christ returns the body will be raised, the soul and the body will be reunited, and salvation will be complete. But, the Lord Jesus may come while we are still living. If so, all Christians will be "caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17). Knowing that Christ will take His followers to be with Him forever should cause us to love Him for it.

- (2) He is going to make us like Himself.

Philippians 3:21 tells us: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

- (3) He is going to reunite us with our loved ones.

Many of our loved ones, those nearest and dearest to us, have already gone to be with the Lord. When the Lord takes us home our loved ones will meet and greet us, and we shall never be separated again. We shall be with Him and with them forever. That alone should cause us to love Him wholeheartedly.

II. How Should We Love Christ?

The way in which we love Him determines the degree to which we love Him. How then should we love Christ?

1. Gratefully.

When we received Christ as our Saviour, our minds and hearts were filled with thankful wonder because of what He had done for us. As the Holy Spirit made Christ real to us as our substitutionary sinbearer and Saviour, our response to Him began to express itself in exclamations of upsurging gratitude. Nothing more fittingly voices our feelings than the words of the little chorus,

"Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold!"

Our gratitude caused us to marvel with Paul who said: "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

Loving Christ gratefully should continue throughout the Christian life, becoming truer and deeper as our mental apprehension of the cross enlarges. The more discerningly we penetrate the profound meaning of that redeeming sacrifice, the more does our gratitude abound, so that the older believer even more than the younger is "lost in wonder, love and praise." Notwithstanding this, however, this loving Christ gratefully is more characteristic of the one who has recently become a Christian.

Can we, or dare we even try to subdue our irrepressible testimony?—

"He found me with a burden,
And He lifted it from me;
He found me bound and fettered,
And from sin He set me free.
He found me in the darkness,
And He made His light to shine.
Can you wonder that I love Him,
This Saviour-Friend divine?"

Christ is our "refuge" in every emergency; and our "strength" in every encounter with evil; and our "very present help" in every trouble.

Our experience is the same as that of the hymn writer who said:

"He is not a disappointment,
He is all-in-all to me;
Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer,
The unchanging Friend is He.
He has won my heart's affection,
For He meets my every need.
He is not a disappointment,
For He satisfies indeed."

2. Adoringly.

By this we mean loving Christ, not merely because of what He has done for us, or because of what He is now doing for and means to us, but because of what He is in Himself. Pure love is the noblest outreach of which the human heart is capable; and Christ is the most transcendently loveable One upon which it can spend itself. In Him are sheer infinitudes of perfect moral excellence and beauty.

On earth He lived the most compellingly beautiful life ever seen. He was the purest, noblest, strongest, tenderest, loftiest, humblest, kindest, most patient, sympathetic and virtuous character ever clothed with human nature. He so lived that He willingly died for those who least deserved it.

Oh, what an ineffable Object of adoration Jesus Christ is! Turn to the hymn-book and let some of the rapturous expressions of adoration there tell you what Christ means to the contemplation of the dedicated soul.

"Jesus I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art.
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power
Thou hast made me whole."

Bernard of Clairvaux's yearning delight in Christ breathes itself through his oft-sung lines:

"Jesus the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest."

Soon after the spirit of Lydia Mueller, daughter of the saintly and famous George Mueller, founder of the Bristol Orphan homes, had slipped away from the tired body, there was found by her bedside a verse which she had written shortly before:

"I have seen the face of Jesus;
Tell me not of ought beside.
I have heard the voice of Jesus;
All my soul is satisfied."

Oh, that we may be so taken up with our Lord that we love Him as we should! In these days we are cursed by a restless hurry which unfits the mind for meditation and communion. Many think they are cramming more into their lives by what they call "our wonderful modern speed", when what they are really doing is crowding out those things which most enrich life. We need not envy the restless speeders; we may rather pity them. This is the age of science, invention, mechanics, swift mobility, and superficiality. Our Lord calls His people away from the merciless, non-stop whirl of the outer world, to quiet, secret, unhurried trysting with Himself. He has lovely secrets to tell those who wait long enough.

3. Absorbingly.

Adoration is a worshipful contemplation of Christ, and a complacent delight in Him; but it is not an active appropriation or absorption of Him. This absorbing kind of love says to Christ,

"I cannot breathe enough of Thee,
Thou gentle breath of love.
More fragrant than the myrtle tree,
The rose of Sharon is to me,
The balm of heaven above."

God grant that we may reach the point where the soul says to Christ, in the words of David, "Thy love to me is wonderful, passing the love of women" (II Samuel 1:26). We must now have Him, or life is not real life. We simply cannot afford to do without Him. We shall not want to try to do so, if we truly love Him. We shall find ourselves saying to Him, "Life is dark without Thee. Death with Thee is bright."

You and I should strive to be in that inner circle of those who love Christ absorbingly.