

Christ Dwelling in the Heart by Faith

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, September 26, 1867

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Ephesians 3:17-19

There are no blessings like spiritual blessings; no mercies like heavenly mercies; and no favours like the good will of him that dwelt in the bush. We desire to be thankful to God for providential favours; we desire to feel gratitude for the daily bread we eat, the daily raiment we wear, the measure of health and strength given to us to perform our daily duties, the bed on which we nightly lie, the kind friends by whom we are surrounded, the many lifts and helps, under trying circumstances, which we have received, and the various ways in which the Lord from time to time has conspicuously, and often unexpectedly, appeared to deliver us out of difficulties, or to grant us timely aid when every other door seemed shut and every other hand closed. For these instances of God's providential kindness, we desire to thank him; and most ungrateful should we be if we were so unmindful of his many mercies towards us, as a God of providence, as to let them lie altogether buried in oblivion. Indeed, humanly speaking, no surer way could we take of closing for the future the Lord's hand against us, than to pass by, with cold unthankfulness and unbelieving neglect, the tender care which he has shown to us in providing for every needful want, and never suffering us to be in circumstances in which we have not seen more or less of his outstretched

hand as displayed on our behalf. It is in this point especially, that the children of God differ from the children of the world; that the one through faith see, or desire to see, God in every thing, and the others through unbelief see God in nothing.

But giving all their value to, and acknowledging the hand of God in the gifts of his providence, we may still say, What are all these temporal favours, these providential blessings, compared with spiritual favours and heavenly blessings? The highest favours in providence for the most part perish in the using. The food is soon eaten; the raiment soon worn out; the money is soon spent; and we are ready for a fresh supply to perish in the same way. At least they are for time, not for eternity; they are meant to take us happily and honourably through life, but when life closes they close too. We may indeed look forward to the same kind hand to provide for our children when we ourselves shall no more want the bread that perisheth; but as regards ourselves, we shall want no further help when we have been brought safely to the end of our journey. Not so, however, with spiritual blessings. They, from their very nature, far exceed all providential mercies; for as the soul is greater than the body, as eternity is greater than time, as heaven is greater than earth, and as the life to come is greater than the life that now is, so do spiritual blessings exceed all temporal; so does the favour of God in grace excel all the favour of God in providence.

It is chiefly in this point that the blessings promised in the New Testament so far excel the blessings promised in the Old. Under the Old Testament dispensation, temporal blessings were mostly spoken of and promised. We have striking examples of this in the blessings pronounced upon their children by the ancient patriarchs. For instance, where good old Isaac blesses Jacob, thinking he was Esau, he says: "God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the

earth, and plenty of corn and wine: let people serve thee, and the nations bow down to thee." (Gen. 27:28, 29.) I do not mean to imply that spiritual blessings were not couched under temporal, and that there is not a gracious and experimental meaning in "the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine;" but their primary and literal meaning is certainly a promise of temporal blessings. Even when the ancient patriarch sends Jacob to Padan-aram, and again blesses him as Jacob, he says: "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham." (Gen. 28:3, 4) So when Jacob on his expiring bed blesses the twelve patriarchs, we find that very many, if not the greater part of those blessings, are of a temporal nature. Speaking even to Joseph, his beloved son, he says: "Who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb." (Gen. 49:25.)

But let not this circumstance either surprise or stumble us. Let us bear in mind that it was the very character and genius of the old dispensation to deal much in temporal blessings. The grand and glorious truths of the gospel were not then brought to light. The law was a system of obedience; and this obedience was secured by setting before the people both temporal blessings and temporal curses. To those who hearkened unto the voice of the Lord it was said, "Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket, and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou

comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." (Deut. 28:3-6.) But to those who did not hearken unto his voice it was said, "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out." (Deut. 28:16-19.)

But when we come to the New Testament dispensation and the blessings held out under the new covenant to believers, little or no mention is made of temporal blessings. The first, highest, and most eminent place is given there to spiritual blessings, and temporal blessings occupy only a second place. This is in accordance with the words of our Lord, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33.) So that whilst under the old dispensation, temporal blessings held the foremost; under the New Testament dispensation, temporal blessings hold only a second place. This suits the genius, character, and spirit of the new dispensation, of the gospel of the grace of God which hath brought life and immortality to light, and by setting forth and revealing the Son of God in his grace and glory, blood-shedding, sufferings, death, resurrection, and present intercession as the great Object of faith, sinks as it were into insignificance of all those temporal blessings, which compared with what he has in himself and has to bestow upon us, are but the trifles of a day. We find, therefore, very few temporal blessings promised in the New Testament. The path there traced out for the redeemed to walk in, is not to be blessed in their basket and in their store, but rather through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God. No special blessings are promised on their kine and their flocks for

doing the will of God, nor any temporal prosperity declared to be the reward of obedience. On the contrary, persecution, poverty, contempt, loss of all things for Christ's sake, a rough and thorny path in providence and abundance of trials and afflictions are held out as the appointed portion of the followers of the Lamb. Nor are they to desire or seek worldly prosperity. The language of the Apostle is, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content;" and he declares, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. 6:9.)

While, then, we desire to be grateful to God for his providential mercies, let us bear in mind that as believers in the Son of God we should look for the fulfilment of spiritual promises rather than temporal; and if, indeed, God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, we should fix our eyes and heart upon them, and beg of God to fulfil them in us, rather than desire or expect any larger amount of temporal blessings than shall take us honourably to our journey's end.

These thoughts seem connected with the prayers of the apostle Paul, put up by him for the saints to whom he writes. You will find in none of them any allusion to temporal blessings. The whole desire of his heart is for spiritual mercies to be granted them. Take for instance the prayer of the apostle for the church of God at Ephesus, which we have in the chapter before us, and observe how, when he was upon his bended knees before the Lord, and his heart went out in supplication for the church to which he was writing, he makes no request for any temporal favour, or any providential blessing; but he says: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would

grant you"—what? health, strength, worldly prosperity, a large measure of temporal blessings? No. But what? "to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." These are the blessings prayed for by the man of God. Let me seek this evening, then, with God's help and blessing, to unfold the blessings spoken of in our text. I think we shall find that for the most part they are three.

I.—The *first* is, that Christ might *dwell in their hearts by faith*.

II.—The *second* is, that they might be *rooted and grounded in love*.

III.—The *third* is, that they might "*comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God.*"

These three blessings I shall endeavour to open up, to the best of my ability, and lay before you this evening, for indeed they are most sweet and suitable, and if they are fulfilled in our happy experience, we shall hold providential blessings with a loose hand, as seeing and feeling how inferior they are to them, both for time and eternity.

I.—The first is, "that Christ *may dwell in your hearts by faith.*"

When God bade Moses speak unto the children of Israel that

they should bring him an offering of gold and silver, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and other similar offerings for the construction of the tabernacle which was to be erected in the wilderness, he said, "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." God wished, so to speak, to dwell visibly among the people of his choice; and therefore he bade Moses erect a tabernacle according to the pattern shown him upon the mount, that in that tabernacle, he might come and manifest his visible glory. Every part, therefore, of that tabernacle was designed and constructed that it might be visibly inhabited by God. Its very materials were choice and precious, and they were put together with exquisite skill by Bezaleel and Aholiab, whom God himself specially taught and "filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." (Exod. 31:3.) But it was especially in the most holy place, on the mercy seat, between the cherubims, that God visibly dwelt in the shekinah or cloud of glory. This beautiful tabernacle represented the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and was thus a representation, in type and figure, of the pure humanity of our gracious Lord, in which all the fulness of Deity dwells, as shadowed by the dwelling of God in the temple in the shekinah or cloud of glory upon the mercy seat.

But what was thus represented in type and figure to the children of Israel, we now have in its divine and blessed reality. The human nature of our gracious Lord is therefore said to be, "a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands"—"the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man." (Heb. 7:2, 9:11.) And it is because our gracious Lord took our nature into union with his own divine Person, and by his precious bloodshedding and death put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, that God can dwell with man. That

God could dwell with man, astonished Solomon, the wisest of men. To unravel this mystery surpassed all that wisdom which God had given him, and all that largeness of heart which was even as the sand that is on the sea shore. (1 Kings 4:29) His wisdom was too little, his understanding too small, his largeness of heart too narrow, to comprehend that mystery, when he cried out, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27.) But this mystery is solved by the incarnation of our blessed Lord. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

But, O, what a depth of wisdom and grace is couched in this mystery of godliness—nothing less than the meeting together of God and man; for if our blessed Lord had not come forth from the presence of his heavenly Father, to take our nature into union with his own divine Person, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, God and man could never have met. But they can, and do now meet in the Person and work of Jesus. God, therefore, can now say, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." When, then, the apostle prays, in our text, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, it is upon this ground, that God having promised to dwell with his people, there is a place provided in which Christ may dwell, and that is the regenerated heart.

But what is the meaning of Christ's dwelling in the heart? Does it mean that Christ dwells there locally; that he leaves his glorious habitation on high, his Father's presence, and comes in his bodily presence into the breast of the sinner? Not so. The heavens have received him until the time of the restitution of all things. He never leaves the place of his glory. He sat down for ever at the right hand of God; and

therefore Christ no more comes locally and bodily into a sinner's heart, than he comes locally and bodily into a consecrated wafer. This is very plain from the language of the apostle, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts *by faith*"—not by his bodily, but by his spiritual presence. It is in this way that he dwells in the heart by faith,—not by coming from heaven in his bodily substance, but by coming into the soul by the power of his spiritual presence; and this as received by, and made known unto living faith.

i. But how does he dwell by faith? This I hope to explain in a manner consistent with the word of God and the experience of the saints.

1. He dwells first in the *understanding*, to which he is an illuminating light. When we are in nature's darkness and death, there is a veil of unbelief over our heart. Christ is not seen nor known; the gospel of his grace and glory is veiled from our eyes. Though Christ is the same in himself, for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, we see him not, know him not, believe in him not. But when the Lord quickens the soul into divine life, then the veil is taken away; and though for a long time we may be very ignorant of Christ, struggle in the mud and mire of legal conviction, scarcely know anything of the gospel or our interest in it, yet after a time there is sure to be a breaking in of divine light upon the mind to show us the way of salvation through the blood and obedience of God's dear Son. As this light comes from God himself, for in his light do we see light, it is a fulfilment of the words of the apostle, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) Jesus Christ is the true and proper Son of God, and as such, is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person." Now it is only in

the gospel that we can see or know the glory of God in the face, (or, as the word might be rendered, in the Person) of Jesus Christ. When, then, a sacred light beams upon the gospel; when you receive the truth and with it the love of the truth, into your heart; when you see, as with new eyes, and hear, as with new ears, what a blessed message the gospel brings to you, even to you; when you believe its sweet tidings as addressed to, and suitable to your case and state; when you receive it in unction and power as a word of God to your soul, then a holy, warm, and blessed light is cast into the understanding. It then becomes an enlightened understanding; and in that enlightened understanding, Christ, as the only true light, dwells by faith. The apostle, therefore, prays for the Ephesians, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:18,) and for the Colossians, "that they might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," yea, even "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" (Col. 1:9, 2:2.) When the Lord sent Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles it was "to open their eyes, (that is instrumentally,) and to turn them from darkness to light." (Acts 26:18.) "He that received the seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it." (Matt. 13:23.) When such prayers are made for it, and such blessings attached to it, it is nothing but ignorance and want of experience which can make us despise an understanding heart. How blessedly does John speak of it, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (1 John 5:20.) To have this understanding heart, then, is to have the veil taken away, and know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true; and the effect of the veil being taken away is, that "we with open (or, as the word

should be rendered, "unveiled,") face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." (2 Cor. 3:18.)

God bade Moses receive from the people oil for the light, and to set up a candlestick with seven lamps, ever burning with this oil, to illuminate the holy place. This light was typical no doubt of the Holy Spirit, but as it is only by his own gracious light that the Lord Jesus is made known, we may still say, that as Christ dwells in the heart by faith, faith giving him a place in the bosom, he dwells in the enlightened understanding of his saints, in the gracious light of his own manifestations. Have you not seen at times wondrous beauty in the gospel? Has not a sacred light shone, from time to time, upon the holy page, when it testified of Christ? Have you not seen wondrous glory in a free gospel,—a gospel that saves the sinner, and yet magnifies and glorifies the justice of God; a gospel that reconciles every apparently jarring attribute, brings justice and mercy to kiss each other, and makes God to be just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus? Now that light whereby you saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ was gospel light; and as Christ came into the heart in the glory of that light, he may be said to dwell in the shining light of his own grace.

You may complain, and often bitterly complain, of the darkness of your mind, and it may seem at times as if you never had any true light to shine into your soul. But I would have you carefully observe these two things, 1. first, that the very cause of the darkness which you feel is, the presence of light. The apostle, therefore, says: "But all things that are reprov'd, (margin, "discovered,") are made manifest by light, for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." (Eph. 5:13.) Apply these words to your case. Is there not something in you that discovers to you your darkness, and

not only discovers, but reproveth it, and makes it manifest as a thing to be condemned? This secret something is light, for "whatsoever doth make manifest is light." And as you not only see it, but feel and mourn under it, it is the light of life which the Lord promised those should have who follow him.

2. But observe, secondly, that whenever a little light dawns in again upon your soul, in that light you again see the same grace and glory in Christ which you saw in him before. Now, what a proof this is that Christ dwells in the heart by faith, and that the light in which we see him, is the light wherewith he hath enlightened our understanding and himself dwells in it.

2. But Christ dwells not only in the enlightened understanding: he dwells also in *the living conscience*. He makes the conscience tender in his fear; he, when he has convinced it of the evil of sin, purges and cleanses it from guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God. He moves in it, and acts upon it, reveals to it his precious blood, bids it open to receive his word, and bids it close itself against all error. He makes it move in accordance with his precepts, softens it into contrition and godly sorrow for sin; heals it when wounded, binds it up when broken, comforts it when cast down, and soothes it when, like a crying child, it would lie weeping in his arms, or upon his lap. Thus by making the conscience tender, and applying his precious blood to remove guilt and filth from it, he softens and conforms it to his own suffering image. As it is in the conscience that the life of God seems chiefly to dwell, we may say of Christ's indwelling presence, that, as he dwells in the understanding by his own divine light, so he dwells in the conscience by his own divine life.

3. He dwells, also, in the *renewed will*. The *will* is an eminent and important part of the new man of grace; and it is one of

the first parts of our renewed mind on which the Lord acts with divine power; for the ancient promise was, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psa. 110:3.) In fact, until thus made willing, we have neither will nor power to believe in Christ, or to receive him into the heart as our Lord and God. As, then, he dwells in the heart by faith, he bows our will to the will of God; he makes us choose the things of which God approves, and hate the things which God abhors. He makes us willing to suffer affliction, persecution, and shame for his namesake, and gives a desire to know the will of God and do it. Thus, as he dwells in the understanding by divine light, and in the conscience by divine life, so he dwells in the will by a divine power.

4. But he dwells chiefly, or at least most sensibly, in the *affections*; for it is to them, and in them that he specially reveals his love; and by the word "heart" we generally mean the affections as distinguished from the intellect. Faith worketh by love. When, therefore, the hand of faith stretches itself forth to take hold of Christ, as brought near by the revelation of the Spirit, it gives him a place in the breast, for it seats him on the throne of the heart, and thus he dwells in the affections by the power of his love.

If you have followed me in my explanation of this heavenly mystery, you will see how Christ dwells in the heart by faith; that he dwells in the enlightened understanding by the power of his light, in the tender conscience by the power of his life, in the renewed will by the power of his grace, and in the affections by the power of his love. Thus where there is light in the understanding, life in the conscience, strength to do and suffer in the will, and love in the heart, there you have the best and clearest of all evidences that Christ dwells in the heart by faith.

But I want you to observe particularly those two words "*by faith.*" The expression shows so clearly and beautifully what this indwelling of Christ is; that there is nothing in it visionary, fanatical, enthusiastic, wild, or delusive; but that it is a sober, solid, though a divine reality; a mystery, and yet not mystical, above reason, yet not contrary to reason, but, as the word means, a heavenly secret made known to the soul by the power of God, and revealed to faith. Our blessed Lord, therefore, said to his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 13:11.)

Now may I not ask you, if these things be true, What do you know of Christ as the Son of the Father in truth and love? What do you know of any discoveries of his Person and work, blood and righteousness? Have you ever seen him by the eye of faith as the risen and glorious Mediator between God and man? Has the Lord the Spirit ever wrought a living faith in your soul to receive him as God has testified of him in the word? Bear this in mind, that all that we know of Christ is by the word of truth, and that all revelation of Christ is through the word and in harmony with it. It is not by visionary appearances that we see Christ, or by wild delusive words sounding in the sky that we hear Christ. But we see and hear him when we believe that he is all that God has said of him, and receive what God has testified concerning him. Did not God testify of him, when he said from heaven itself, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased?" Where do we read this testimony but in the word? It is thus that we set to our seal that God is true, as John the Baptist said, "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." (John 3:33.) It is in the word that God has testified of his death, of his resurrection, of his exaltation, of his present mediation as the great high Priest over the house of God. We have no other means of knowing these divine verities. Faith,

then, receives God's testimony in the inspired word; and as faith receives God's testimony, the eye of faith is enlightened to see, the ear of faith is opened to hear, the hand of faith is strengthened to embrace, and the foot of faith enabled to draw near to the Son of God; and thus by a believing eye, a believing ear, a believing hand, and a believing foot, all engaged in receiving the Christ of God, Jesus makes himself known, and comes to dwell in the heart by faith.

Now, if he dwell in the heart by faith, he will often be in our thoughts, in our meditations, in our affections, in our desires, in the movements of our soul Godward. We shall find that without him we can do nothing; without his precious blood we must perish in our sins; without his glorious righteousness we must die in our transgressions; without his strength made perfect in our weakness, we have no strength to fight, nor power to walk. We thus find sometimes by his presence, and sometimes by his absence, that he ever is and ever must be to us what he is held forth in the Scriptures, as our all in all. When, then, Christ makes himself known and precious; when he reveals himself in his glorious gospel, and faith is given to us so to look unto him, so to believe in him, so to hang upon him, and so to cleave to him with purpose of heart, then he may be said to dwell in the heart by faith; for we can do nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing without faith. Without faith the word of God is a barren wilderness to us; without faith no doctrine is sweet, no promise has power, no precept force or application. Faith must be in operation in the soul upon the testimony of God in order that Christ may be made known and precious. As then faith receives the testimony, believes what God hath said of Christ, feels the power of truth concerning Jesus, as revealed in the Scriptures, in proportion to our faith is Christ made precious. Take Christ out of our religion, and what is it worth? A religion without Christ, without faith in Christ,

without hope in Christ, without a knowledge of Christ, what must we say of it? Tekel, weighed in the balance and found wanting; Ichabod, there is no glory in it. But faith that has Christ for its object, subject, end, and all—a faith which deals with the blood of Christ as putting away sin, with Christ's righteousness as justifying a naked soul, with his dying love shed abroad in the heart,—this is the faith of the elect of God: this is the faith which overcomes the world, triumphs over death and hell, and the end of which is the salvation of the soul. This is the faith of which the apostle speaks, when he prayed that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith.

II.—But let me now pass on to the next point which I proposed to consider, as the second blessing prayed for by the Apostle: "*Being rooted and grounded in love.*" What is a Christian without love? And yet how many so-called Christians do we find, who are as unloving as they are unlovely. How many do we find professing to be children of God who, if they be judged by their actions, know nothing really of love to Christ, or to the people of Christ; how many to whom, if we weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary, Jesus was never precious, who have never loved the brethren, nor shown any proof of that love by their conduct toward them. But a Christian without love is like a Christian without faith; he is an anomaly in the church of God; God will not own him, though he may profess to love him. What is God's own testimony upon this point? "If a man say, he loveth God, and hate his brother, he is a liar; for he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" O that we knew more of this precious grace of love! O that the love of God were more shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and that we might know more what it was to love the brethren with a pure heart fervently.

Our text speaks of "being rooted and grounded in love." Let me endeavour to open the mind of the Spirit here. He employs two figures, both of them highly significant.

i. "*Rooted* in love." The idea is of a tree planted in a rich and fertile soil, and taking a strong and deep root in it. Look at the figure. View a tree, a shrub, or a fruit tree, in a gardener's nursery. How strong, how green, how healthy it looks. What is the reason? It is because it has a good, deep taproot, and is planted in a rich, fertile, and suitable soil. What an affinity there is between the root of a tree, and the soil in which it buries itself. How the soil seems to love the root, and the root seems to love the soil, and how the root seems to penetrate and spread itself into every part of the soil, so as to get out of the ground all the juice, sap, moisture, and fertility, which it can possibly draw into the stem and branches. But now, look at a tree, of the same natural species, planted in an unkindly soil, a gravelly, sandy spot, with no depth of earth. How that tree will dwindle; how sickly it will soon become; how stunted the branches, how faded the leaf; how starved and wizened the fruit. Why is all this? It is not the fault of the tree, but the fault of the soil. But now let that tree be removed from this poor and gravelly ground and be transplanted into a deep, rich, and suitable soil, how soon a change will come over it. How strong soon will be the stem, how vigorous the branches, how clean the bark, how green the leaf, how full the blossom, how rich the fruit. Why? Because the tree has found a soil into which it can burrow and penetrate, and suck up all that richness of the ground which, entering into it through the root, gives it health, and strength, and fruitfulness. Now love is that deep, rich, and fertile soil, and the Christian is the tree planted in it. Job says: "The root of the matter is found in me." By this we may understand that his religion, which he calls "the matter," for it is the most important matter with which we

can have to do, had a root to it. Thus there will be a root to your religion if you have a right religion; and if the root of your religion is planted in the rich and fertile soil of love, there is the same affinity between the root of your religion and the soil, as there is between the root of a healthy tree and the fertile ground in which it grows. O how, when the Lord is pleased in any way to favour the soul with his presence and power, and thus makes himself known and precious, it finds love to be a blessed soil in which to root; how deep that soil is now found to be, how rich, and how every fibre of the soul finds, so to speak, room in which it can spread itself, and draw up into its own substance that grace which makes it fruitful in every good word and work.

It may seem at first sight, perhaps, a little doubtful whether the apostle means here by love, the love which we have to Christ, or the love which we have to the people of Christ. It may, indeed, include both, for they are the same love, and ebb and flow, wax and wane together. But looking at the context, I understand him chiefly to mean the love which we have toward the Lord himself; for that is a deeper, richer, and more fertile soil than love to his people. Now, as a tree when firmly and deeply rooted resists every storm, and is not blown down, so it is with a Christian who is rooted in love. He may have many inward storms of unbelief, infidelity, doubt, and fear, and many outward storms, such as persecution, loss, reproach, and shame for Christ's sake. But as the very storms make the tree take deeper and stronger root in the soil, so the very storms that blow upon him will make him take deeper root in the love of Christ.

ii. But I must pass on to consider the other figure, "*grounded*." The figure is changed here. The apostle now takes the idea of a building, which needs a strong and solid foundation on which to rest, if it is to stand; and the stronger

and heavier the building, the more solid must be the foundation to support it. We are building for eternity, not for time. Whether we shall be happy for ever, or miserable for ever, in heaven for ever, or in hell for ever, *that* is the ground on which we are building. Now, we want a rock, not sand, for our support; we want a foundation so firm and solid, that the building erected upon it may stand every storm. But where shall we find such a foundation? God himself shall tell us: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isai. 28:16.) Christ, then, is this foundation, this rock, as he himself said to Peter, "On this rock will I build my church." But when we build upon Christ, as the rock, we build on him as having loved us, and given himself for us, and as this love is the foundation of our hope when we rest firmly upon it, we may be said to be "grounded in love."

But there is something more than this in the word "grounded." It seems to signify what is meant by the expression "settled," as applied to a building, and thus to correspond with the word "rooted." We therefore find the apostle elsewhere speaking, "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." (Col. 1:23.) Every new building has to settle upon its foundation that it may rest more fully and firmly upon it. Thus, as there is a being rooted in love, so there is a being grounded and settled in love; and they resemble each other in this point, that as the root lays hold of the soil, so the building by settling down upon it lays hold of, and becomes more firmly united with the foundation. In newly built houses we often see rents and cracks in the walls or ceiling. This often arises from the weakness of the foundation, which, giving way in some part, lets down and

thus dislocates as it were the building. But where the foundation is solid rock and the house well built, though every house must settle down on the foundation, it will do so without rents and cracks, and settle down as a firm, compact whole. So in grace. The soul that is built up in Christ will settle on Christ, but without rent, crack, flaw, or fissure. The meaning therefore of both the figures is much the same, each pointing out that union of the soul with the love of Christ, by which it grows in him as with a root, and by which it is strengthened and settled, as cleaving more and more closely to him as the foundation.

III.—But we now come to that last and grand blessing which the apostle unfolds in such majestic language: "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

How he seems to labour for words to set forth the love of Christ; and how he prays the Ephesian saints, and not they only, but all to whom the epistle comes, should be able to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of this love.

i. The word "comprehend" here means rather to apprehend, and I almost wonder that our translators did not so render it, for it is precisely the same word which is so translated, and rightly translated, in the Epistle to the Philippians. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12.) The distinction between the two words is simple enough, for we may apprehend what we cannot comprehend.

"To comprehend the great Three-One,

Is more than highest angels can."

But we can apprehend it, believe it, and receive it, though we never can comprehend it. A finite intelligence like man never can comprehend the infinite love of Jesus, but he may apprehend it by faith. By "apprehend" we mean simply take hold of. Thus, when a criminal is arrested by the strong hand of the law, he is said to be apprehended, that is, taken hold of by the officer. So when we say "a person is of quick or dull apprehension," we mean that he takes hold of an idea with greater or less readiness. In this sense we may apprehend, that is, take hold of, embrace, realise, and enjoy what we could never comprehend with our finite understanding. And it is this taking hold of and embracing what is beyond all comprehension, that the apostle meant when he prayed that the Ephesian believers might "apprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." That very last expression shows that he did not mean comprehension, but apprehension; for if this love surpass all knowledge, how can it be comprehended?

1. But what is the *breadth* of Christ's love? Look at all the saints of God; view them scattered over all the face of the earth, and see how the love of Christ spreads itself over them all. Or look at ourselves; look at the sins, backslidings, and many grievous transgressions in thought, word, or deed of which we have been all guilty, and the remembrance of which often pains and distresses our conscience. Now we want something that shall spread itself over all these backslidings and sins, so as to cover and hide them from the eyes of infinite justice. We know, indeed, that it must be Christ's righteousness which alone can do this; but there is a covering of love as well as a robe of righteousness. So Ruth, when she lay at Boaz' feet, begged of him to spread the skirt

of his raiment over his handmaid, for he was the Goel or "near kinsman," and to spread the skirt of his raiment over her was a token that he would redeem the mortgaged estate, and marry her, that there might be an heir to it. Similarly in the case of the child cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day when it was born, we read: "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." (Ezek. 16:8.) Is not this outcast child a representation of our state by nature? and when we see and feel it, do we not desire that the love of Christ should spread itself over us, that he would enter into covenant with us, and call us his? Viewed, therefore, spiritually and experimentally, the breadth of Christ's love not only means its vast extent, broad as the sea, spreading itself like a mighty wave over all the elect of God, but also personally spreading itself over our souls and all that is in them.

2. But this love has *length* as well as breadth. And what is the length of this love? It reaches from eternity to eternity. It knew no beginning; it can know no end; for it is, like its divine Author, eternal; so that it stretches itself out, not only over all the things of time, and over all those who are born in time, but it stretches itself over all the saints of God unto a never ending eternity. This is the length. You will remember that when David smote Moab, "he measured them with a line, even with two lines measured he, with one to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive." (2 Sam. 8:2.) Taking this act of David as typical and emblematic, we may view the line of life as the line of love; and O, if this line of light and love has been stretched over us, it will remain so stretched through all eternity. It will therefore continue stretched over us, not only through what remains to us of

time; but through the grave and after the grave; for as the line of love had no beginning, so it will have no end. This line, therefore, as stretched over the church of God from eternity to eternity, will land safe in glory every vessel of mercy. You may fear sometimes how it may be with you in a dying hour; how you may feel in the swellings of Jordan. But you have seen saints whom you have known, blessedly supported in that trying season; you have seen how, when nature failed, the line of Christ's love was still over them, and in what sweet confidence they passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death, leaning on the bosom of eternal love.

3. But it has *depth*, as well as breadth and length. Do you ask how deep it is? I answer, that it must go as deep as the deepest sunk of God's saints, in order to reach him. Look for instance at David in the depth of his sin and crime, and of his grief and sorrow on account of it. Christ's love must go as deep as that to pardon, forgive, and blot it out. Look at Hezekiah on his bed of languishing, when all his sins stared him in the face, and God seemed about to make an end of him. See how he turned his face to the wall and wept sore. That love must be as deep as his guilty fears, and come down to him in his low and lost estate to lift him up and out of it. Look at Heman, when he said, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou has afflicted me with all thy waves." (Ps. 88:6, 7.) And again, "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: when I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off." (Ps. 88:15, 16.) The love of Christ must be as deep as his afflictions and distracting terrors to support him under them, and deliver him from them. Look at Jeremiah in the low dungeon, when he sank in the mud and mire, and would, but for the interposition of Ebed-Melech, have expired bodily in

that cruel jail. Hear him saying, "Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon." (Lam. 3:54, 55.) But hear him also say, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, fear not." (Lam. 3:57.) Did not the love of Christ come down to him in the low dungeon to bless and comfort him? Look at Jonah, when in the belly of the whale, and in his own fears and feelings in a deeper belly still, for he said he was in the very belly of hell; yet so deep was the love of Christ, that it reached him down in the belly of hell. As that love touched his heart, he cried "Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." By that look he was brought out, and joyfully shouted, "Salvation is of the Lord." So that, however low the saint of God may sink; however deep his trials, temptations, sorrows, and castings down may be, there is a depth in the love of Christ that can go lower than he. Do we not read "underneath are the everlasting arms?" And if the everlasting arms are "underneath," they must be lower than any sins or sorrows which the saints of God may feel or fear. Here is *depth*.

4. And this love has "*height*." But how high shall this love be? No less high than the courts of heaven; for He who has this love in his bosom, is now in heaven at the right hand of God; and, therefore, the love of Christ is as high as an exalted Jesus. As this love, then, in its depth went down to the gates of hell, so in its height it mounts to the gates of heaven; and, as in its low stooping, it plucked sinners from a deserved hell, it will bear them up to an undeserved heaven. Nay, even here, those who in conviction of sin have had a foretaste of hell, in the consolations of this love have also a foretaste of heaven.

Now this is the love of Christ, in which the apostle prays that we may be "rooted and grounded," so as to embrace it with

every faculty of our soul,—a love which has breadth to spread itself over every sin; length to last to all eternity; depth to come down to the least and lowest, most tried, distressed, and afflicted of the family of God; and height to take every saint to bliss who is interested in it.

This is the love which the apostle prayed the Ephesian saints might apprehend and know.

ii. And yet, when he had exhausted language in opening up this wondrous subject, he adds, "*which passeth knowledge.*" This eminent saint, who had been in the third heaven, and there saw glorious sights, and heard unspeakable words, though he exhausted human language to set forth the surpassing excellency of the love of Christ, comes at last to this point: "It passeth knowledge." Indeed it must pass knowledge. Is it not infinite? What measure, then, can be assigned to the love of Christ? If Christ be God, and as such, the equal of the Father, his love is as infinite as Deity. Our love is the love of the creature; the love of God is as great as Deity, as infinite as the self-existent I Am; it must needs therefore pass knowledge. You may wonder sometimes—and it is a wonder that will fill heaven itself with anthems of eternal praise—how such a glorious Jesus as this can ever look down from heaven upon such crawling reptiles, on such worms of earth,—what is more, upon such sinners who have provoked him over and over again by their misdeeds. Yes, that this exalted Christ, in the height of his glory, can look down from heaven his dwelling place on such poor, miserable, wretched creatures as we, this is the mystery that fills angels with astonishment. But it is the glory of Christ thus to love; it is his special glory to take his saints to heaven, that they might be witnesses of his glory and partakers of it. Therefore, it is not because we are such crawling reptiles, that we are such undeserving creatures,

that we are so utterly unworthy of the least notice from him, we are to put away all this matchless love from us, and say, "Can Christ love one like me? Can the glorious Son of God from heaven his dwelling place cast an eye of pity and compassion, love and tenderness upon one like me, who can scarcely at times bear with myself; who see and feel myself one of the vilest of the vile, and the worst of the worst? O, what must I be in the sight of the glorious Son of God?" And yet, he says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." This love has breadths, and lengths, and depths, and heights unknown. Its breadth exceeds all human span; its length outvies all creature line; its depth surpasses all finite measurement; and its height excels even angelic computation.

Now this is the very reason why this love is so adapted to us. We want a love like this: a love to spread itself over us, to come down to our lowest depths; a love that can land us safe in heaven. A love short of this would be no love at all. We should exhaust it by our sins if this love were not what it is here represented. Long ago we should have out-sinned this love, and drawn it dry by our ingratitude, rebellion, and misdoing. But because it is what it is, love so wondrous, so deep, so long, so broad, so high; it is because it is what it is that it is so suitable to every want and woe.

Do you want to know this love, to have it shed abroad in your heart, revealed to your soul, brought into your spirit with a divine power, that you may taste it, handle it, and enjoy it, walk in the light of it, that it may be your daily companion, that you may feed your soul with sweet meditation upon it, enjoy it as your chief blessing here, and the foretaste of your portion hereafter? Then don't put it away from you, as if because you are so undeserving it can never reach your case. The apostle not only prayed that the

Ephesian believers might be able to comprehend it, lay hold of it, embrace it, and realise it, but says "with all saints," that is, in common with all saints, because this is the portion of all the saints, the experience of all the saints, what God reveals unto and makes known to all saints. If, then, we are amongst the saints of God we shall, with them, apprehend more or less of this wondrous love of Christ which passeth knowledge. And this will evidence and prove to ourselves and to others that we are truly and really saints.

iii. He then adds, "that ye might be *filled with all the fulness of God.*"

The apostle does not mean here by the fulness of God, that infinite fulness which is in God himself, for how can a poor, limited bosom, a narrow heart, receive all this fulness of God? But he means, to be filled with all that fulness of love and mercy which God can give, so as to make the heart full to overflowing. You must see yourself that it is not possible for all the fulness of God to come into a human heart. But he can so fill it with a sense of his goodness and love, as manifested in Christ, as to fill it with all that fulness, love, joy, and peace, of which it is capable in this time state.

But I must hasten to the end, though, on a subject so vast, I have only dropped feeble and scattered hints.

May I not, then, briefly ask you, Is not this prayer of Paul's a most suitable petition for us also? Is it not full of desires for the best of all possible blessings? And is the man a Christian who has not some feeling toward, longing after, and desire for, the manifestation of these blessings to his soul? What do you ground your hopes for eternity upon? Why do you expect to go to heaven? On what are you building for eternal life? Your works or Christ's works; your power to love Christ, or

Christ's love to you? what you have done for God, or what God has done for you? Do you hang upon free grace or free will; on what Christ is, as revealed in the word, or what you think you can do to gain God's approbation by some works of your own? Now, when the Lord teaches his people by his Spirit and grace, he humbles them, lays them low in the dust, and then when he has brought them down, he makes them see and know more or less of the preciousness and suitability of his dear Son; and letting down a measure of his love into the heart, draws forth love toward him who is the altogether lovely, and thus seals salvation upon their conscience with a divine power.

The Lord bless the word that I have spoken this evening in your ears. It is precious truth, if you are able to receive it; and if you have received it in the love of it, you will find that the more you know of the love of Christ by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the more precious it will be. And I may add, that the more we shall make it manifest by our love to the people of God, and by walking with them in unity and affection, that we are not ignorant of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, but know something of it for ourselves in its divine and blessed reality.