

## **The Abounding of Love in Knowledge and Experience**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 11, 1863

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:9, 10, 11

Have you ever, in reading the Epistles of the New Testament, observed what a spirit of prayer dwelt in the breast of Paul for the various churches and individuals to whom he addressed his weighty and powerful letters? And have you also remarked that not only was it his practice to pour out his heart in continual prayer and supplication for those churches which he had himself planted, such as those of Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica, and for those individuals, as Timothy and Philemon, to whom he was personally attached, and who might be considered his sons in the faith; but even those churches, such as that at Rome and at Colosse, which had never seen his face in the flesh, had as warm an interest in his Christian affection and as large a share in his petitions to God on their spiritual behalf? What an example for us! and it may be what a rebuke, when we compare our poor narrow heart with the large heart of this man of God, and our feeble and scanty petitions for the saints of the Most High with the flow of prayer and supplication that was ever gushing out of his breast.

But not only is there something very remarkable in the fact of Paul's earnestness before the throne for the spiritual edification of the churches of Christ, but the subject matter

of his petitions is as noteworthy as his prayerful spirit itself. Have you ever examined with any degree of attention the prayers which the apostle put up for some of the churches, and which he was not only inspired to offer on their behalf, but to put upon permanent record for our benefit and instruction? And have you ever compared your petitions for your own soul's growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, with the prayers which this man of God was led by the Holy Ghost to put up for the saints to whom he wrote? But to put this point to a closer test, I will give you three prayers of the apostle, which you may at your leisure look over, on which you may meditate, and which you may compare with the petitions and desires which from time to time, in favoured moments, rise up in your own bosom. These three prayers shall be, first, the prayer recorded at the close of the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:15-23); the second shall be the prayer contained toward the end of the 3rd chapter of the same Epistle (Eph. 3:14-19); and the third shall be the prayer we find put up by the apostle in the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians (Col. 1:9-12). My time will not admit of even touching on, far more of entering into, the subject matter of those prayers this morning. I wish I could do so, as they are full to overflowing of the richest, choicest spiritual matter; but you may consider them prayerfully and attentively at home, and thus seek to understand, feel, and realise what the mind of the Spirit is in them, and so be led to copy them, not in a cold, dry, formal manner, but from the communication of divine light and life through them to your soul.

In the words before us we have another prayer of this man of God, but which I shall not pass by as I have passed by the others; for it is my desire and intention this morning to lay its rich contents open before you, according to the ability

which the Lord may give me.

You will bear in mind that the apostle is writing to the church at Philippi, which you will recollect was a large and important city in Macedonia, in the North of Greece, where Paul and Silas were thrust into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks, and where there was that signal conversion of the jailer. (Acts 16:12-40.)

We come, then, now to his prayer for these Philippian saints, in which, if I mistake not, you will find four distinct petitions; and yet, though distinct, a blessed thread running through the whole, connecting them together as with a ray of divine light, and thus reflecting the grace and glory of God upon them severally and collectively. These four petitions are

I.—*First*, that their "love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."

II.—*Secondly*, that they "might approve things that are excellent," or, as we read in the margin, "try things that differ."

III.—*Thirdly*, that they "might be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

IV.—*Fourthly*, that they "might be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God."

I.—You will observe, first the *persons* to whom the epistle is written. This is of great importance, and for that reason I call your attention to it. If you will refer to the first verse of this chapter you will find that it is written to "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and

deacons." You see, therefore, that this epistle, like all the other epistles in the New Testament, was written to believers in Christ; that it was not addressed to the world at large, to the masses of the human race, to unbelieving Jew or unbelieving Gentile, but was specially addressed to saints and servants of the living God. Now though this church at Philippi has passed away, the Church of Christ has not passed away. There are still saints in Christ Jesus, and still Christian churches with their pastors and deacons. As, then, this epistle is a part of the inspired Scriptures, it still speaks to Christian churches, to believers in Christ Jesus, to the saints and servants of God. No truth can be more simple or more obvious than this; but how grossly has it been overlooked or perverted by applying to the world at large the doctrines and declarations, the promises and precepts which are the peculiar inheritance of the believing church of God. When, then, we read this epistle from this point of view, and see how all the promises and all the precepts, all the instruction, reproof, or admonition contained in it belong exclusively to the church of Christ, then we at once perceive how every word falls into its place. To read the epistles otherwise is something like looking through the wrong end of a telescope; one seeing one's face in water with a ripple over the surface; or taking a view of our features in a broken mirror, or one which represents them upside down. In a similar way, if we read the Epistles as if they were written to all the world, all is distorted; we fall into the grossest mistakes, and completely misunderstand the meaning of the Spirit.

But now observe the important conclusion which arises from this simple and undeniable truth—that it necessarily follows that the apostle, in the prayer in our text, assumes that those to whom he wrote were partakers of the grace of God, and as such of that eminent grace, love. He does not pray

that they might be put into possession of this heavenly gift and grace, as if they were destitute of it. On the contrary, he assumes that they were already in possession of it; for what would a saint in Christ Jesus be without love? A monster indeed. We hear sometimes of monsters in nature; of a lamb born with two heads, or six legs, or two hearts. So a Christian, a real Christian, without any love to Jesus Christ, or any love to the people of God, would be a monster in the Church of God. Grace has many painful, many lingering births; but the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all, never brought forth a monster from her teeming womb. Does not the apostle say, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal"—things without life giving sound"? (1 Cor. 13:1), and therefore without love. And does he not add, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"? (1 Cor. 13:2.) And if "nothing," I am no Christian—a cipher, a nonentity in the kingdom of God. If, then, there be no love, there is no heavenly birth; but where love is, there is regeneration and the evidence of it, according to John's testimony: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14.) A Christian, then, if such a person could exist, who had neither love to the Lord Jesus nor love to his brother would be a monster indeed—such an one as has never yet had birth or being in the kingdom of God.

But in the case of the Philippian saints, he not merely assumed that they were possessed of the Christian grace of love, but was assured of it from their "fellowship with him in the gospel," that is, their participation of the life and power, blessings and benefits of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the

love that they manifested towards him. Being thus assured, then, that they were possessed of the Christian grace of love—love to the Lord and love to his people, for both are included here, he prays for them that this love of theirs might abound. He could not bear the thought that it should be diminished, that its strength and volume should be impaired, and that it should dwindle from a flowing brook into a slender rill, as we sometimes see in summer after a long course of drought; still less, that it should "vanish away and be consumed out of its place," like "the stream of brooks" that so disappointed "the troops of Tema and the companies of Sheba." (Job 6:15, 20.) Nor did he wish that it should continue even at the same level, but that it should increase yet more and more, and flow on in an increasingly bountiful and blessed course.

But he prays, and this is the point to which I shall chiefly draw your attention, that this love "might abound yet more and more in *knowledge* and in all *judgment*;" as if this love were like a river which ever wants feeding with fresh supplies of pure fresh water, to keep it ever running. A river, you know, however wide or deep, would soon run itself out unless it were continually fed. So the love in a Christian's breast toward the Lord Jesus Christ and his people would soon run out, and leave nothing behind but ooze and mud unless fresh supplies of grace were continually pouring into it.

But the apostle expressly mentions what I may, perhaps, without impropriety, call two main *feeders* of this Christian love, for as a river cannot be sustained without feeding streams, so love in the soul of a believer needs to be continually fed.

i. One of these feeders of Christian love named in our text is "*knowledge*": "That your love may abound yet more and

more in knowledge." I shall therefore endeavour, as the Lord may enable, to show you how "knowledge" feeds love. But before I do so, in order to avoid all mistakes on my part and all misapprehensions of my meaning in yours, I must, at the very outset, draw a very important distinction between what is commonly called head knowledge and that spiritual, heavenly knowledge of which our text speaks. There is a knowledge of the things of God which a man may possess without a personal experience of the new birth; in fact, without any divine operation upon his soul whatever, or any participation of the grace of God. From reading the scriptures and hearing the preached Gospel, many attain to an intellectual knowledge of the truth who, as to any experimental, vital, saving acquaintance with it, are still in the very gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. A man may have the knowledge of an apostle and the worldliness of a Demas; be clear in head, and rotten in heart; may talk like an angel, and live like a devil; understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and be nothing but a hypocrite and an impostor. (1 Cor. 13:2.) In our day such characters abound in the churches. But distinct from this head knowledge, as distinct from it as heaven from hell, there is a most blessed spiritual knowledge of the things of God, with which the saints of God are favoured; and it is of this knowledge that the apostle speaks when he prays that their love might abound in knowledge; for you will find that the love of a Christian always abounds in proportion to his spiritual and experimental knowledge of the precious things which accompany salvation.

But observe further, that eternal life itself is intimately connected with the knowledge for which I am contending, and the nature of which I am endeavouring to explain. Did not our blessed Lord himself declare, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ,

whom thou hast sent?" (John 17:3.) Thus we see that eternal life itself is wrapped up in a spiritual knowledge of God and of his dear Son. And what is one of the leading promises of the new covenant, but that "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11.) It would, then, be a sad mistake, just because a few poor deluded creatures are puffed up with a little head knowledge, for us to overlook or despise that gracious knowledge of the Lord himself which is life eternal. Blessed Lord, may it be our increasing desire to know thee more and more by thine own gracious manifestations to our soul! Wasn't this Paul's longing? "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (Phil. 3:10.)

But again, if we look at the subject a little more closely, we shall see how every grace of the Spirit is fed by knowledge. Look, for instance, at *faith*. Is it not, as Hart says?

"Faith is by knowledge fed,  
And with obedience mixed."

If we have no knowledge of the Lord, how can we believe in him unto life eternal? Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1.) But how can I hope in things of which I know nothing, or have an evidence of the unseen realities of eternity if I am completely ignorant of them? This was not the faith of Abel who offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, for he knew a more acceptable way; nor of Enoch, who walked with God; nor of any of the ancient worthies who "saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." Does not Paul say, "I know whom I have believed?" (2 Tim. 1:12.) If, then, I know not the things that faith brings into my heart,

how can I be said really and truly to believe in them? So with *hope*. A good hope through grace is fed by knowledge, for as faith regards the present, so hope regards the future. Abraham believed God's promise, and against hope believed in hope of its fulfilment. (Rom. 4:18.) But his hope as well as his faith was founded in his knowledge of God's faithfulness. So how can I hope in that which I know not? If I know not Christ, how can I hope in him? If I know not his grace, how hope in it? If I know not his love, how take anchor in it? for if my anchor is entered into that within the veil, I must know something of him who ever sitteth there.

But *love* is especially the effect of knowledge; for our love, according to our text, is to abound yet more and more in knowledge. Love, we know, is a fruit of the blessed Spirit. As then the Lord the Spirit is pleased to open up the precious truth of God to the soul, love embraces what the Holy Ghost reveals. Thus there is a knowledge of the only true God by the teaching of the Spirit. By this teaching he reveals himself to the soul; sheds abroad his love in the heart; brings his mercy near; discovers his grace; unfolds his faithfulness; shines forth gloriously in the Person and work of his dear Son, and thus makes himself effectually and experimentally known "from the least to the greatest" of them. (Jer. 31:31.) And the more we know him, the more we shall love him, for he himself is love, and to love him is but a reflection of his own image.

So with respect to our *blessed Lord*. The more we know him the more we shall love him. The more we know of his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us, the more we shall love him as a suitable and all-sufficient Mediator; the more we know of his atoning blood as revealed to, and sprinkled upon a guilty conscience, the more we shall love him as

having shed that precious blood to redeem us from the lowest hell; the more we know of his righteousness, the more we shall see how adapted it is to our needy, naked condition, and the more we shall love him for having suffered in our place and stead; the more we know of his dying love, the more we shall love him for the display of that love. Does not the apostle pray that we "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?" (Eph. 3:18, 19)

But I may add that the more we know also of *ourselves*, of our desperate case, of our ruined condition, of our miserable state as poor lost sinners; the more we know of the evils of our heart and what we deserve as having broken God's holy law, and as having so continually backslidden from him; and the more we see his forbearance and long-suffering, his loving-kindness and tender pity to us, in spite of all our base deserts and shameful requitals, the more we shall see in him to love. The more, too, we know of his grace, the more we shall value it; and the more we know of his glory, the more we shall fall in love with it. Thus as these precious things are opened up more and more clearly to our spiritual understanding, and sealed more powerfully by a divine witness upon our heart, the more warmly are they embraced in love, and the more is the soul conformed to the divine image; for "the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10); and "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) To behold this glory is the very blessedness of the gospel, and the choicest treasure which God can bestow: "For 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.)

And as we love the Lord we shall love *his people*; for "every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." (1 John 5:1.) Let us not, then, deceive ourselves. Where there is love to Jesus, there will be love to those who are his by redemption, his by regeneration, and his by personal possession. The more, too, that we see and the more that we know of the beauty and blessedness of the Lord of life and glory, the more we shall love his image as we behold it visibly marked in his dear people, and the more we shall cleave to them as being Christ's with tender affection. It is our dim, scanty, and imperfect knowledge of God the Father in his eternal love, and of the Lord Jesus Christ in his grace and glory, which leaves us so often cold, lifeless, and dead in our affections towards him; and with the declension of love towards the Head comes on decay of love towards his members. If there were more blessed revelations to our soul of the Person and work, grace and glory, beauty and blessedness of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is impossible but that we should more and more warmly and tenderly fall in love with him; for he is the most glorious Object that the eyes of faith can see. He fills heaven with the resplendent beams of his glorious Majesty; and has ravished the hearts of thousands of his dear family upon earth by the manifestations of his bleeding, dying love. So that if we love him not, it is because we know him not. If, then, to those who know him he makes himself precious, it is evident that just in proportion to our personal, spiritual, experimental knowledge of him will be our love to him.

ii. But the apostle tells us of another feeder, if I may use the expression, of this divine love; and that is "*judgment*," or, as the word properly means, "*feeling*." I shall adopt, therefore, the marginal reading, as giving not only the more literal but a more scriptural and experimental meaning than that in the

text. It is there rendered "*sense*," that is, perception or feeling, or, to use a more comprehensive word, "experience." Thus our love is to abound not only in knowledge, which is the foundation of it, because, as I have already shown, if there is no knowledge of the Lord there can be no love to the Lord or his people, but also "in all feeling," in all sense, in all experience. Spiritual knowledge, therefore, and experimental feeling are the two feeders of Christian love; the two streams, as it were, that run side by side out of the very throne of the Most High, and meet and melt into that boundless river, love. It is, therefore, by this union of knowledge and experience, of divine light and heavenly life, of the Spirit's teaching and the Spirit's testimony, of truth in the understanding and of feeling in the affections, that love is maintained in the soul, and flows out towards the Lord and his people. Do you not see, therefore, now still more plainly how the spiritual knowledge for which I am contending differs so widely from that carnal, intellectual, barren head knowledge which I was condemning? The one is a flowing river, the other a stagnant pool; the one fertilises the heart, and makes it fruitful in every good word and work; the other leaves it a barren swamp, in which creeps and crawls every hideous thing, and out of which ever rise miasma, disease, and death. See also how the union of knowledge and experience as sustaining love distinguishes the work of the Spirit from every imitation of it. Where there is the true work of the Spirit, there will be gracious knowledge and experimental feeling. You may have feeling without knowledge—that is wrong; you may have knowledge without feeling—and that is wrong. Feeling, as mere feeling, is no certain mark of real religion. Have the Catholics no feeling when they kiss and weep over their crucifix? Had the Jewish women no feeling who "sat weeping for Tammuz"—their beautiful god Adonis, whose untimely fate they thus mourned? (Ezek. 8:14.) Have Arminians no feeling when

they are, as they say, "shaken over hell" one half hour, and burst forth into shouts of "Glory, glory," the next? What! no feeling in natural religion! Why, in feeling is much of its very life blood. To be melted by a funeral sermon is to some what being melted by a tragedy is to others; and the pulpit has its accomplished actors to stir the passions as well as the playhouse. Thus we see that feeling, as feeling, is no sure test of grace; for there are natural feelings in religion as well as spiritual—the repentance of Ahab as well as the repentance of Peter, the joy of the stony ground hearers as well as "joy in the Holy Ghost." But these feelings are worthless, nay worse, as being awfully delusive, when they have no foundation in grace or the true knowledge of God.

But now let me show you what is the experience, or, as the apostle calls it, "sense," which feeds and maintains the grace of love. To explain this more clearly, let me observe that there is a kind of analogy or resemblance between spiritual feeling and natural feeling, spiritual sense and natural sense, and this in a variety of ways.

1. There is first, then, a spiritual *sight* given to us at regeneration which is analogous to our natural sight. How full the Scriptures are of this new spiritual sense—this believing eye. "For judgment," said our gracious Lord, "I am come into this world, that they which see not might see." (John 9:39.) Paul was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes" (Acts 26:18), according to the prophecy, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened." (Isai. 35:5.) So Paul prays, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened." (Eph. 1:18.) But I need not multiply passages to prove what is so plain. Now just see what an inlet the eye is, not only to knowledge but to *feeling*. If we see some object to move our pity, how instantaneously the heart feels what the eye conveys. Love, we know, chiefly enters through the eye, and is so fed by

sight that absence from the beloved object is almost its only cure. So in a spiritual sense, divine love enters through the eye, and is fed by repeated sight of the beloved Object. In this way we learn first to love our blessed Lord. It is now as in days of old, as John testified: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:5.) The light is still shining, but the darkness of men's natural minds comprehendeth, or receiveth it not. Why? Because "their minds are blinded." (2 Cor. 3:14.) But now see the difference in those that are "born of God." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) Why did they behold his glory? Because the Lord had given them sight, and thus revealed himself to their believing eyes. And by those who believe, Jesus is still to be seen, for "by faith we see him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27.) This was beautifully unfolded by the Lord himself to his sorrowing disciples: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:18, 19.) And again, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21.) Thus we see that it is by the manifestations of the Lord to the soul that he is seen and loved. And does not love, therefore, abound in proportion to the sense of sight, for the more he is seen the more he must be loved?

2. But again, there is in grace as well as in nature a spiritual *ear*. What an inlet is hearing to the acquisition of all natural knowledge. Look, for instance, at those who are born, as it is called, deaf and dumb. They are not really dumb, though called so, for all their vocal organs are as perfect as ours. But they cannot use them so as to form intelligible language, for

no sound has ever reached their mind; and what they have never heard they cannot imitate. We have our deaf-mutes in the religious as well as the natural world, who cannot speak the language of Canaan, for they have never heard it spoken into their heart; and we have those once deaf who now hear, and that by the power of an Almighty "Ephphatha." (Mark 7:34.) Thus there is a spiritual sense of hearing analogous to the natural sense of hearing. And does not Scripture confirm this? "As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me." (Psa. 18:44.) "Hear, and your soul shall live." (Isa. 55:3.) "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17). As, too, the ear is an inlet of knowledge, so it is an awakener of feeling. If we hear any glad tidings, how the heart leaps for joy; if we hear any gloomy tidings, how the heart sinks in sorrow. So when the Lord speaks a word of reproof, the heart sinks in grief; when he gives a word of encouragement, it leaps with exultation. "My sheep," says Jesus, "hear my voice." (John 10:27.) But what feeds love more than the accents of his voice? How he speaks in the promises, the invitations, the exhortations, and the precepts of the Gospel; and how every word that he speaks is precious, for, as the Spouse says, "His mouth is most sweet;" and again, "It is the voice of my beloved" (Song 5:2-16); and once more: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it." (Song 8:13.) But what would that voice be to kindle and maintain love if there were no ear to hear it? How musical are the accents of those we love! How often they linger in the memory as melancholy echoes of the past!

3. In a similar way a spiritual *taste* is analogous to the natural taste. "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3); "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psa. 34:3); "How sweet are thy words to my taste," yea, "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." (Psa.

119:103; 19:10.) There is a tasting of the milk and honey of the gospel, and it is by tasting the sweetness of this milk and honey that we know its preciousness. What would even our natural food be if there were no taste? But how savoury it becomes when taste comes in to share the feast as well as appetite for the food. Be hungry for the bread of life; be amongst those whom our Lord has pronounced blessed as hungering and thirsting after righteousness, then how sweet the bread; how precious the milk; how savoury the meat spread on the Gospel table! Then we can respond to the Lord's gracious invitation: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." (Song 5:1.) Does not, then, a spiritual taste feed love both to the banquet and to the Lord of the banquet? Be assured that the reason why the word of God is often so tasteless, is because we have either no appetite or a depraved one.

4. But again, there is a spiritual *handling* analogous to the natural sense of touch. This, we know, is eminently the sense of *feeling*, as distinguished from the other senses. How do we naturally know whether objects are hot or cold? By the sense of touch. So it is in grace: there is a handling of the Word of life, as John speaks in that remarkable passage, where he mentions in the compass of one verse three of the spiritual senses which I am seeking to explain. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life." So the Lord said to his disciples, "Handle me and see" (Luke 24:39); and still invites us by the prophet, "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." (Isa. 27:5.) Did not the woman with the issue of blood touch the hem of Jesus's garment, and was she not at once made whole? So "the whole multitude sought to touch him, for there went virtue out of him and healed them all." (Luke

8:47; 6:19.) Does not embracing feed love? How the fond mother embraces her babe! After a long absence how lovers embrace each other; and how every embrace renews affection! How the women at the sepulchre "held Jesus by the feet," as if they could not, would not let him go! And so says the Bride: "I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house." (Song 3:4.) Truly here is feeling, and love abounding in feeling in every sense of the word.

5. Again, there is the spiritual *smell*, for as all the senses have their analogy in grace, there is the spiritual smell to correspond with the natural organ. Do we not read: "Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is an ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee." (Song 1:3.) But how could the virgins smell the savour of his good ointments, unless they had a spiritual nose? Isaac knew something of this spiritual sense when he said "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." (Gen. 27:27.) Is it not said also of our gracious Lord? "All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia" (Psal. 45:8); and when he gave himself for us it was "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." (Eph. 5:2.) But how can we smell the sweet-smelling myrrh that drops from his lips if we have no spiritual smell? (Song 5:13.)

Thus we see how all these spiritual senses—sight, hearing, tasting, feeling, and smelling feed love; and therefore the apostle prays that it may abound yet more and more, not in knowledge only, but in all those spiritual senses which are exercised to discern both good and evil. If I see the Lord, I shall love him; if I hear the Lord, I shall love him; if I taste the Lord, I shall love him; if I feel the Lord, I shall love him; if I smell the good ointments of the Lord, I shall love him;

and that in proportion to the keenness of my sight, my hearing, my taste, my touch, and my smell.

This, then, is the peculiar blessedness of living experience, that it goes hand in hand with gracious knowledge to sustain heavenly love; and that Christ is the end and Object of both; the end and Object of all saving knowledge, and the end and Object of all true experience; for in this as in every thing else, he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

II.—But I pass on to consider the next petition of the apostle for his Philippian brethren, which indeed is closely connected with that already handled: "*That ye may approve things that are excellent,*" or, as the margin reads, "*try thing that differ.*"

I shall adopt both readings, and take the latter first. "That ye may try things that differ."

i. A Christian in walking through this world has many things upon which he is continually called to exercise his spiritual judgment. He is not to be led blindfold by others, even by his best friends or most trustworthy counsellors; nor must he trust to himself for wisdom and direction; still less must he be altogether heedless of the steps that he takes. Sin and Satan are continually laying snares for his feet; and therefore he is to walk circumspectly and cautiously lest he be entangled in them. He will find too that the more he desires to walk in the fear of the Lord, the more will a great variety of cases ever come before his mind, of which, unless he try them, he cannot ascertain the real worth or value. Now these ever-varying circumstances are spoken of in the margin "as things that differ."

Sometimes we have to try our *own experience*. We know that

there is a false experience; a natural faith, a delusive hope, and a pretended love; for we see an abundance of these deceptions everywhere around us. We have, then, to try our own faith, hope, and love to see if they be genuine. Does my experience bear marks of a divine character? Is my faith the gift of God? Is my hope a good hope through grace? Is my love the fruit of the Spirit, or sparks of my own kindling? Do I love in word or in tongue, or in deed and in truth? What has the Lord communicated to my soul? Does my religion bear marks and evidences of being the fruit of his own grace? This is trying things that differ, for we know what a wide difference there is between a true experience and a false one.

Again, my *motives* at different times greatly differ: they are then to be tried. Some motives are good, others bad; some natural, others spiritual: some will bear the light, others will not. I must try my motives, then, for the value of actions depends almost wholly on their secret springs.

My *words*, too. As a preacher, I must try my words, whether they are like Naphtali's, "goodly words" (Gen. 49:21); whether they are consistent with the truth revealed in the word: whether they are agreeable to the experience of God's saints. So our words in private; we have to try them over. Were they spoken in the fear of the Lord? Were they light and trifling, or words of gravity, sobriety, and consistency?

So our *thoughts*: we have to try them, whether they are evil or good, carnal or spiritual, gracious or ungodly.

So our *spirit*: for we must try our own spirit as well as that of others. Is it the spirit of a Christian, or the spirit of the world? Is it a meek spirit or a proud spirit? a godly spirit or an ungodly spirit? a forgiving spirit or an unforgiving spirit? a

becoming spirit or an unbecoming spirit? We have to try our spirits in this way, or we shall make sad mistakes, perhaps disgrace our Christian profession, or wound our own conscience and the conscience of others. I cannot do with a reckless Antinomian spirit, or that spirit of levity and frivolity, hardness and audacity, which in our day passes off both in pulpit and pew for strong assurance, but which I call strong delusion or daring presumption.

In a similar manner we have to try our ways generally, whether they are consistent with the gospel; whether our life, conduct, and conversation become our profession, and whether we are living to the glory of God. It is awful work to be so blinded and hardened by the devil, as never to weigh up matters how they stand in the sight of God, the great Searcher of hearts. But what is our standard, for we must have one to judge righteous judgment? We have two: the one is the infallible word of God which tries all things, and must be the grand court of appeal; the other is our own experience; the dealings of God with our soul, the teachings of God in our own breast. And by these two things—the word of God externally, and the life of God internally, we have to "try things that differ." Now if our words and works, spirit and conduct, will not bear these two tests, they are unsound; and how then will they stand the heart-searching eye of him with whom we have to do?

But now see the connection between this and the first petition. As our love abounds in knowledge and all sense, we are put into a position to try things that differ; for love is very keen sighted. What sharp eyes it has! How it reads people's faces; how it interprets looks; what significations it puts upon little actions; and how quick-sighted to gather information from a glance of the eye or a curl of the lip. And love has something very tender and feeling about it. There

must be feeling where there is love, for as it is a passion that takes such entire possession of the breast, and is so very sensitive, it is anxious to try what makes for or against it. So it is in divine love. It will take and weigh matters as God would have them weighed by trying things that differ; for love's keen eyes will soon see what God approves of, and what he disapproves. Now as this spiritual judgment is exercised, there will follow upon the decision which love gives an *"approving of things that are excellent."*

ii. This necessarily follows upon trying things that differ, and coming to a right decision upon them; for both an enlightened judgment and a loving heart concur in this approval. When, then, we have tried contending circumstances in these two balances, then we cannot only stamp upon that which is good the mark of excellence, but can seal it as such with our loving approval. There is a seeing the light and hating it, as Milton represents Satan telling the Sun how he hated his beams; and there are those of whom we read that "they rebel against the light." (Job 24:13.) But love approves of all that shines in the light of God's testimony. Whatever God has revealed in the word, whatever he has planted by his own hand in the soul, bears the stamp of its great Author. As, then, we are favoured with spiritual knowledge, and blessed with spiritual sense, we approve things that are excellent because they are of God. There is no mark of depravity greater than putting good for evil and evil for good, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. It is the last issue of human wickedness, first to confound good and evil, and then deliberately prefer the latter. This was the climax of the sins of the Gentile world, that "knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." As distinct, then, from these awful characters the saint of God will approve things that are

excellent. Let us see some of these excellent things of which he deliberately approves.

1. The *love of God* in the gift of his dear Son, is the most excellent of all his adorable attributes in the estimation of love. "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God," said one of old. (Psa. 36:7.)

2. Nor less excellent is the *grace* of love in the heart which flows from the manifestation of the loving kindness of God. The apostle, therefore, says to the Corinthians: "And yet I show unto you a more excellent way"—the way of "charity," or love. (1 Cor. 12:31.)

3. *Grace* in its sovereignty, fulness, blessedness, and superaboundings over the aboundings of sin, is so excellent in itself as glorious to God, and so excellent to us as suitable to man, and adapted to every want and woe of the sinner, that it is worthy of our warmest approval. But when shall I really approve of the excellency of gospel grace? When I know it, and when I feel it; for then my love will abound in knowledge and in all sense. Then I really understand its blessedness; then I not only feel its sweetness, but I try the things that differ, salvation by grace and salvation by works. I see the excellency of the former; I see the delusion of the latter, and I approve of that which is excellent.

4. By the same "knowledge" and the same "sense," I look at *the saints* of God, and I find them to be what the Lord has himself pronounced them, "the excellent of the earth." (Psa. 16:2, 3.) But how few there are who really approve of the saints of God, as the excellent of the earth, or believe them to be what the Lord calls them, "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:3), to preserve it from putrefaction, and "the pillars of the earth," upon which the Lord "hath set the world," that it might not fall into ruin. (1 Sam. 2:8.) Instead of approving of

and delighting in them, how most despise, hate, and persecute them. And why? Because their eyes are not illuminated by a ray of divine light to see their excellency, nor their hearts touched by divine grace to love it. For what is their excellency? Not in the creature: there is no excellency there. But this is their excellency, that they have the mind and image of Christ. This is their excellency, that Jesus is seen in them. We have seen the excellency of Jesus; we have admired his beauty, fallen in love with his grace, and been delighted with his glory. Now when we see the image of Jesus reflected in the hearts of his people, we must approve of it as well as love it because it resembles him. When you see a real Christian, one who is meek and humble, tender, broken, and contrite, with a heart full of faith, hope, and love, walking in the fear of God; desirous to know his will and do it; submissive under affliction; spiritually minded, and adorning the doctrine by a godly life, don't you approve of that man as one of the excellent of the earth? And when you see a man in a profession of religion proud and obstinate, worldly and covetous, boasting and presumptuous, full of self-exaltation and self-conceit, light and trifling, carnal and earthly minded, in adversity unsubmitive to the will of God, in prosperity determined to have his own will and way, don't you disapprove of that man and what you see in him, as being contrary to the mind of Christ and the image of the suffering Son of God? It must be so, if you have a right understanding of the things of God. If divine light has enlightened your mind, divine life quickened your heart, and you love the Lord and his people, you must approve of the things that are excellent. For they are so commended to your conscience that you can no more do otherwise than you can tell a deliberate lie, or call black white. And as you approve of them, you will disapprove of every thing which is contrary to, or falls short of this excellency. Now this is what distinguishes us from the world and the spirit of it and from

all whose eyes are blinded by the god of this world—that whilst they approve of the things God abhors, we approve of the things that God loves. Here is the mind of Christ; here is the teaching of the Spirit giving us in some measure to see as Christ sees, to feel as Christ feels, to love as Christ loves, and to approve as Christ approves. We shall never go far wrong so long as we are approving the things that are excellent, and seeking, as the Lord may enable, to know the will of God and do it. But directly that we lose sight of this spiritual standard and set up the opinion of men, then our eyes get blinded, our hearts hardened, our consciences benumbed, and instead of approving the things that are excellent, we may gradually and insensibly drift into the very spirit of ungodliness.

III.—But now comes our next and third petition, "that ye may *be sincere and without offence* till the day of Christ." Sincerity is the very life-breath of a Christian. If he is not sincere, he is nothing. I was speaking just now of a monster in Christianity, and I said that a Christian without love was a monster indeed. But I may go farther, and say that a Christian without sincerity could not exist.

i. But what kind of sincerity does our text mean? A man may be sincere, that is naturally sincere, and yet be altogether out of the secret of divine teaching. Was not Paul sincere when he went to Damascus, breathing threatenings and slaughter against the saints of God? But he was sincerely wrong. The only sincerity worth the name is what the apostle calls "godly sincerity" (2 Cor.1:12), that is, a sincerity wrought in the heart by the power of God. The original word in our text is very striking: it signifies a sincerity which may be judged or examined by the light of the sun, as distinguished from that insincerity and deceitfulness which, like the bat and the owl, creep into the dark corners.

Christian sincerity will bear the light of the sun, and in fact it is a ray out of the Sun of righteousness which creates it. A man cannot be really and truly sincere in the sight of God who has not divine life in his breast. It is the light of life in his soul that makes him sincere in a spiritual sense before God.

But now see the connection of this petition with the preceding. So far as we are sincere, we shall try things that differ and approve things that are excellent. We shall be able to bring our religion out to the test, as we hold up a piece of cloth to the light that the sun may shine upon it and show us if there are any moth-holes, any thin, worn-out places, any fraudulent material. This is not like keeping damaged goods in the back shop; or drawing customers into some dark corner of the counter to pass Yorkshire shoddy off for West of England broadcloth. We should be able to bring our religion out of our heart in all its length and breadth, and hold it up to the beams of the sun to see ourselves and let others see too whether the material of which it is made be sound or rotten. It may have a very good surface, be nicely smoothed over, and yet the material be as rotten as Jeremiah's "old cast clouts," or the worn-out clothes of the Gibeonites. (Jer. 38:2; Josh.9:5.) O, to be truly sincere and have the heart made honest in the fear of God, that we may appeal to him, "Thou God seest me," and with the Psalmist, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me." (Gen. 16:13; Psa. 139:1.) This religion will stand the light, as our gracious Lord said: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." (John 3:20, 21.)

ii. But the apostle adds, "and *without offence* till the day of

Christ." The word means literally to cause any to stumble over our crooked ways, words, or works, and thus conceive a prejudice against the religion we profess. It is a sad thing to put a stumbling-block in the way of any person, especially an inquirer after truth, or open the mouth of an enemy. There was an express prohibition in the Levitical law against putting a stumbling-block in the way of the blind. (Lev. 19:14.) And O what a solemn thing it is for a Christian so to act as to put a stumbling-block before those who are naturally blinded by prejudice against the doctrines of grace. Our blessed Lord pronounced against such a solemn woe: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matt. 18:7.) The desire, therefore, of the Christian is to be "without offence," that is, without causing any justly to stumble at his words, ways, or work; but to live before God and man with that uprightness, tenderness, consistency, and general conduct becoming the gospel, that none shall take real cause of offence against the truth of God by seeing in him practice unworthy of his profession. We shall not indeed be able to avoid giving offence in the usual sense of the word, for nothing is more offensive to the world than vital godliness; and the Lord warned us that we should be hated of all men for his name's sake. But the meaning of the word is not to give legitimate cause of offence so as to stumble sinners or stumble saints, and bring a reproach upon our holy religion by words or works unbecoming our Christian profession; and that "until the day of Christ," when the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed. When I am gone I hope that no one when he sees my tomb in the Cemetery may be able to kick his foot against my gravestone, and say, "Here lies a drunkard; here lies an Antinomian; here lies a covetous wretch; a bad husband, a bad father, and a treacherous friend; a pretended minister, who preached one thing and practised another, and disgraced instead of

adorning his profession of the Gospel."

IV.—The last petition, on which I must be very brief, falls in well with the three preceding: "Being filled with *the fruits of righteousness*, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

The apostle desired that they might be trees well loaded with Gospel fruit. You will bear in mind that it was a prayer for them; he does not say that they were thus abundantly fruitful; but it was his desire that they might be. As a gardener, when he walks in his garden in the autumn and looks at his trees, examines them chiefly with a view to their fruit; and if among them he sees one with scarcely any crop, says, with a sigh, "Ah, how few pears or plums there are this year upon this tree of mine!" But if he pass on to the next and see it well loaded, it gladdens his heart. So to go into the garden of the Church and see on one tree only two or three berries upon the top of the uppermost bough, on another mildewed leaves or withered branches, and only a wizened plum or a half-ripe pear here and there—this is not a pleasant sight to the spiritual gardener. But to see the trees of the Lord's own planting "filled with the fruits of righteousness," and every grace and fruit of the Spirit brought forth into a blessed exercise—this is a sight indeed to cheer and comfort his heart. This is the sight the apostle longed to have his eyes gladdened with, that when he came again to Philippi to visit the church planted there by his instrumentality, he might see all the members with the elders and deacons filled with the fruits of righteousness—internal, such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, and every external fruit of the Spirit adorning their life and conversation. He would gladly see their leaf fresh and verdant, their stem healthy and strong, their branches free from blight or mildew, and a blessed crop loading every bough. And all this he knew would be "by Jesus

Christ," by his presence and power, his Spirit and grace, and all would redound "unto the glory and praise of God;" as the Lord himself said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:8.)

Now can we find anything in our soul corresponding with the desires thus beautifully expressed for the Philippian Church by the pen of the man of God? But bear in mind that the Philippians were not necessarily all the apostle prayed they might be. Grace, indeed, could make them so; and as far as they were under its power and influence, their desires for themselves would be the same as those here expressed for them. But can you join heart and hand with these earnest petitions, and first, from the bottom of your heart, desire your love to abound more and more in divine knowledge and gracious experience? This will form a solid foundation for the other petitions, and for an earnest request to the Lord of all grace that he would drop every one of these rich blessings into your soul. Then you certainly have already the fulfilment of the second petition, if not of all the rest; for you "approve things that are excellent." If you seem to fall short, and we all fall short of being "filled with the fruits of righteousness," yet so far as we are Christians at all, there is a being "sincere," and a desire to give no just cause of offence to friend or foe. At any rate, we feel that there is no wilful turning away the ear, nor hardening the heart, nor stifling the conscience against the power of the word. These things may encourage us still to present our petitions before the throne, ever bearing in mind that the Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and by granting our desires and manifesting himself to our souls, can even in this time state fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory.