

The Characters Whom Christ Loves.

by Edward Payson

Christ loves those who love him with a strength of affection that is beyond human comprehension, and this love is the result of his relationship with them, his sacrifice for them, their union with him, their possession of his spirit, and their love for him.

Scripture: Proverbs 8:17, John 10:27, Romans 8:39, Ephesians 5:25, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Christ's Love", "Salvation"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the profound love of Christ for those who love Him, emphasizing the eternal existence and wisdom of Christ, the dignity of His character, the excellence of His instructions, and the promises and threatenings He gives to those who love and obey Him. Christ's love for His people is rooted in eternity, demonstrated through His sacrificial work for their salvation, and strengthened by their union with Him and their possession of His spirit and image. Those who love Christ are assured of His unwavering affection, as they rejoice in reciprocating His love and strive for perfect conformity to His perfect example.

Transcript

"I love them that love me."

Proverbs 8:17.

are the words of Christ. He who is styled the Word of God in the New Testament, calls himself the wisdom of God in the Old. Under this character he is represented as standing in the public places of resort, and soliciting the attention of all who pass by: Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. The motives which he sets before them to induce a compliance with his call are numerous and powerful. In the first place, he claims their attention on account of the endless duration of his existence.

I was set up, says he, from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When God prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the deep; when he gave to the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. In the next place, he claims attention on account of the dignity and excellence of his character: Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding; I have strength.

By me kings reign and princes decree justice; even all the judges of the earth. In the third place, he urges them to listen to his instructions because of their excellence, plainness, truth and utility: Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; my mouth shall speak truth. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness they are all plain to him that understandeth. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

In the fourth place, he urges them to love and obey his voice by promises on the one hand, and threatenings on the other: Blessed are they that keep my ways; for riches and honor are with me, yea durable riches and righteousness. I cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death.

Lastly, he urges them to love him on account of his long attachment to mankind, and his readiness to reciprocate affection; I was ever rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men: I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. The love which Christ here professes to entertain for those who love him, is an affection of a peculiar kind, entirely different from that general love which he feels for all his creatures; and infinitely more desirable.

There is a sense in which he loves even his enemies. He loves them with a love of benevolence, a love which leads him to mourn over them when they obstinately refuse to comply with his invitations. Thus we are told that, while on earth, he was grieved with the hardness of their hearts; and wept over rebellious Jerusalem, when he contemplated the miseries that were coming upon her. He also loves the holy angels with a love of complacency and delight because they bear the image and obey the will of his Father.

But, the love which he entertains for his people, is an affection of a still more tender and peculiar kind; an affection, the nature and extent of which can be learned only from a consideration of the causes which produce it. To state these causes, or, in other words, to show why Christ loves those who love him, is the principal object of the present discourse. 1. The foundation of that love which Christ feels for all who love him, was laid in eternity. All who now love him, together with all who ever will love him to the end of time, were given to him by his Father before the foundation of the world; to be his peculiar people.

God promised him in the covenant of redemption, that if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should have a seed and a people to serve him; and that his people should be made willing in the day of his power. No sooner were this people given to him, than he loved them with a peculiar love; for he who calls the things that are not, as though they already were, can love creatures who were not, as if they were already in existence. Suppose, my friends, that when God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah, twenty-five years before his birth, he had given them a picture containing an exact likeness of this son.

Would they not have immediately begun to love this picture of their future offspring; and would not their affection and their desire to see and embrace him have increased with every succeeding year? Something like such a picture of his future spiritual offspring, Christ has possessed from the first moment in which they were promised him by his Father. Their names are all written in his book of life; and their image has been ever present to the eye of his mind from that period to the present time.

Hence, long before they love him, nay long before they begin to exist, they are beloved by him with a strong and tender affection, or as the prophet expresses it, with an everlasting love. Their image has so

long dwelt in his mind, and so long been the object of his affectionate contemplations, that they have become, as it were, a part of himself, and he can no more cease to love them than he can cease to exist. All who are thus loved by Christ, because they are given him of his Father, will sooner or later return his affection; for, says he, all that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

For these he prays. I pray for them, says he, I pray not for the world but for them whom thou hast given me. These he will bring in. Other sheep, he said to his disciples, I have who are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice. These he will keep. My sheep, says he, never perish. My Father who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. Thus he knows his sheep, loves them, prays for them, and resolves to bring them home to his fold, before they love or know him. 2.

Christ loves those who love him, because he has done and suffered so much for their salvation. You need not be told, my friends, that we naturally love and prize any object in proportion to the labor and expense which it costs us to obtain it. How highly then must Christ prize, how ineffably must he love his people. How dear did their salvation cost him. He purchased them with his blood. To win their love and effect their redemption, he exchanged the height of glory and felicity for the depths of wretchedness and degradation.

At an infinitely less expense he could have created thousands of worlds. Nor is this all. From the birth to the death of his people, he watches over them with unremitting attention. Every hour and every moment, they need and experience his watchful care. He forgives their sins, alleviates their sorrows, sympathizes in their trials, heals their backslidings, wipes away their tears, listens to their prayers, intercedes for them with his Father, enables them to persevere, and accompanies them through the valley of the shadow of death.

All this care and attention naturally tends to increase his love for them. If a shepherd becomes affectionately attached to a flock, which he has long fed, guided and protected; if a mother loves, with increasing tenderness, a sick child who, for a long period, needs her pity and care; with what an inconceivable strength of affection must our great Shepherd love his sheep for whom he has done and suffered so much, and whom he feeds, guides and protects with such unceasing vigilance in their journey through the wilderness of this world?

If his love was originally sufficiently strong to bring him from heaven to earth, and carry him through such an unparalleled series of toils and sufferings, what must it be now, when he has so much more cause to love them? If it was stronger than death, even before he died for them, who can conceive of its strength since he has arisen and ascended to heaven? For this, among other reasons, his love for them must be greater in degree, and of a different kind from that, which he entertains for the angels of light.

He loves them, indeed, but he never died for them; he never sympathized with them in affliction; he never watched over them for years with unceasing attention, nor led them by the hand through such a world as this. He loves them; as a parent loves a child that enjoys vigorous and uninterrupted health; but he loves his people, as parents love a child that has often been sick, and at the point of death. He loves them, as the father in the parable loved his elder son who had ever been with him; but he loves his people as the same father loved the returning prodigal, who was dead and alive again; who after being lost was found.

And perhaps we are warranted, from this parable and those which precede it, to conclude that there is more joy in heaven over one of our fallen race who repents, than over ninety and nine of these blessed

spirits who need no repentance. 3. Christ loves those who love him, because they are united to him by strong and indissoluble ties. That a most intimate and lasting union subsists between Christ and his people, is evident from numerous passages of Scripture. This union is sometimes compared to that which subsists between the bridegroom and the bride.

Fear not, says he to his church, for thy Maker is thy husband. Sometimes it is compared to the union between the branches and the vine. I, says he to his disciples, am the vine; ye are the branches. Sometimes it is shadowed forth by the connection between the head and the members. Christ, says the apostle, is the head of the church, and we are members of his body, his flesh, and his bones. In other places it is compared to the union between the soul and the body. Ye, says St.

Paul to believers, are the body of Christ. And again, he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Lastly, this mysterious union is described in still stronger terms by our Saviour as resembling that which subsists between himself and his Father. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, says he, dwelleth in me and I in him. To the same purpose he prays, that all his disciples may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

The expressions here employed to describe this union are the strongest which language can afford, and sufficiently show that it must be a union of the strongest and most intimate kind. The bond of this union, on our part, is faith; but the union itself is formed by the appointment of God, who has constituted Christ and his people one great body, and by the Spirit of Christ which dwells in the hearts of all believers. As the numerous branches of the vine are one with the root, because the same vital principle is common to both; or as the different members of our bodies are one because they are actuated by the same soul, so Christ and his people are one, because the same infinite Spirit dwells in them all and binds them together.

Hence the afflictions of the church are called the afflictions of Christ; and hence we are told, that in all their afflictions he is afflicted, and that whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. How strong then must be the love of Christ for his people! They are not only his brethren, his sisters, his bride, but his members, his body; and he consequently loves them as we love our members, as our souls love our bodies. Nothing can be stronger than the language of St.

Paul on this subject. No man, says he, ever hated his own flesh, but loveth and cherisheth it even as the Lord does the church; plainly implying that we may as soon cease to love and cherish our bodies, as Christ to love and provide for his people. 4. Christ loves those who love him, because they possess his spirit and bear his image; in one word, because they are holy. Similarity of character always tends to produce affection, and hence every being in the universe loves his own image whenever he discovers it.

Even children become more dear to their parents, when they resemble them; and our nearest relations are beloved with increased affection, whose dispositions and opinions and pursuits correspond with our own. Especially does Christ love his own image in his creatures, because it essentially consists in holiness, which is of all things most pleasing both to his Father and himself. But all who love Christ bear his image. He has no children or friends who do not resemble him; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.

If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, created anew after his image in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. And though the image of Christ in his people be at first imperfect, yet the love which they entertain for his person and character, constantly tends to increase the resemblance, since we

naturally imitate those whom we highly love and revere. By contemplating his glory, as displayed in the gospel, they are gradually changed into the same image from glory to glory.

They love what he loves; they hate what he hates; they pursue the same objects that he pursues. They are not of the world, even as he is not of the world. They learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart, and to cultivate that charity which seeketh not her own. Like him their principal concern is to glorify God and finish the work he has assigned them. Like him they pity, forgive, and pray for their enemies; and like him they are tenderly solicitous for the salvation of sinners.

In a word, Christ, as the apostle expresses it, is formed in them. And as those who love Christ will obey his commands, and as he commands his disciples to be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect, so they are constantly aiming at a perfect conformity with this perfect pattern. That this conformity to his image and obedience to his commands, are pleasing to Christ and excite his affection, is evident from his own language. I have not called you servants, says he, to his disciples; but I have called you friends; and then are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

The fruits of holiness thus produced by his people on earth, imperfect as they are, are on some accounts more pleasing to him even than those produced by the angels in heaven. Holiness in heaven is like flowers in spring or like fruit in autumn when they are expected; but holiness in a world so depraved as this is like fruit and flowers in the depth of winter; or like the blossoms and almonds of Aaron's rod, which proceed from a dead and sapless branch. When the delicious fruits of southern climes can be made by the gardener's skill to flourish in our northern regions, they are far more admired and prized, than while growing in rich abundance in their native soil.

So when holiness, whose native land is heaven, is found in the comparatively frozen and barren soil of this world, which lieth in wickedness, it is viewed by celestial beings with peculiar pleasure and agreeable surprise. Lastly; Christ loves those who love him, because they rejoice in and return his affection. It is the natural tendency of love to produce and increase love. Even those whom we have long loved on account either of their relation to us, or of their amiable qualities, become incomparably more dear to us when they begin to prize our love and return it.

Hence it is easy to conceive that Christ loves his people because of their love to him. And if he so loved them before they existed, and even while they were his enemies, as to lay down his life for their redemption, how inexpressibly dear to him must they be, after they become his friends! To this, the apostle alludes when he says, if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. It is indeed utterly impossible to conceive the immeasurable extent of his love to those who are thus reconciled to him.

Well might the apostle say, it passeth knowledge. He feels none of those jealous fears respecting the sincerity of his friends, which men are prone to entertain, and which often interrupt their friendship for each other. No; he knows that his people love him, and he knows how much they love him. He knows that he is precious to their souls, more precious than the air they breathe, than the light of heaven. He knows that they love him better than father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister, son or daughter, yea far better than their own lives; and that for his sake they are ready to renounce and forsake them all.

He knows that his love sweetly constrains them to live to his service, and that they rejoice when they are counted worthy to suffer pain and shame for his name. He knows that they look upon him as their Redeemer, their Friend, their Shepherd, their Physician, their Advocate, their Wisdom, their Strength, their

Life, and their All; that the enjoyment of his presence and favor constitutes all their felicity; that they consider no earthly affliction comparable to his absence or displeasure, and that the weakness of their love to him is their constant grief and shame.

He knows that they prefer him to themselves, that they wish for a heavenly crown only that they may throw it down at his feet; and that the principal reason why they desire heaven is, that they may see and serve and praise him, and ascribe all the glory of their salvation to him. And how then can he refrain from loving those who thus love him; whom he has himself taught to love him. With what unutterable emotion of mingled pity, sympathy, and love must he look down on those who are thus attached to him in the midst of a rebellious world, and who for his sake are denying themselves, taking up the cross and striving to follow him in defiance of all the inward and outward opposition which they are called to encounter?

Hear what he says to such: I know thy works. I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation which shall come on all the earth, and I will cause thine adversaries to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Thus have I attempted to state the principal reasons why Christ loves those who love him.

He loves them because they are given him by his Father; because he has done and suffered much for their salvation; because they are united to him in the most intimate and indissoluble manner; because they possess his spirit and bear his image; and because they rejoice in and return his affection. Either of these causes alone would induce him to love them with a strength of affection, of which we can form no conception. What then must be the degree of love produced by all these causes united?

He only can tell, who knows the Son even as the Son knows him. The love of Christ passeth knowledge. Its heights and depths, its length and breadth, are unsearchable by finite minds. IMPROVEMENT. 1. This subject may enable everyone to answer the important question, does Christ love me? This is a question which all true Christians will frequently, and anxiously ask, and which many of them feel unable to answer in a satisfactory manner. When they consider the spotless purity of Christ, and his hatred of sin, and their own exceeding sinfulness and unworthiness, they are ready to exclaim, how is it possible that he should love us?

O that he were on earth, that we might ask him this question, or that some kind angel would favor us with a glimpse of his book of life, or assure us that we are the objects of his love. But these wishes are needless. Say not in your hearts, Who shall ascend up into heaven, to ask whether Christ loves us; for the answer to this question is near you even in your hearts. If you love Christ he loves you. If you are his friends, he is most certainly yours. Were he now on earth, and should you ask, Lord, canst thou condescend to love us? he would answer your question by another, and say as he did to Peter, Lovest thou me more than these worldly objects around you?

Look into your hearts then, my friends, for an answer to this question. Can not some of you reply, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Thou knowest that, notwithstanding our coldness, our ingratitude, and numberless imperfections, the desire of our souls is still to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name? If you dare not say this, can you not venture to say, we know that Christ is just such a Saviour as we need; the way of salvation by him is exactly suited to our circumstances; we know that his yoke is easy, and his burden light; and that it appears to us above all things desirable to obey his commands, and imitate his example; we know that we love all who love him and bear his image; and that it

gratifies us to hear him praised and extolled; we know that his presence alone renders us happy, and that in his absence nothing affords us consolation?

My friends, if you can truly say this, you need not wish for Christ to come and assure you of his love. He has already done it; he has done it in the words of our text; and you may feel more assured of it than if you had heard it asserted by a voice from heaven.. Unworthy as you are, he loves you infinitely more than you can conceive; and will continue to love you while eternity shall last. Away, then, with your doubts and anxieties. Dismiss every fearful anxious thought; listen not to the suggestions of unbelief, but believe the words of Christ, and open your hearts to admit the consoling enrapturing assurances of his love.

Come to his table, as to the table of a friend, who will give you a cordial welcome, and not as to the table of a master of whom you are servilely afraid? Why should you hesitate or fear to do this? Do you not invariably find that, when you feel the fullest assurance of his love, you are most engaged in his service; and that, on the contrary, when you doubt it, your hands are weakened, and your hearts discouraged! If this be the case, it is at once your duty, your interest, and your happiness to believe, to be certain, that you love Christ, and that he loves you; and in proportion as you believe this, will be your progress in the Christian race.

This St. Paul well knew, and therefore, when he wished Christians to be filled with the fullness of God, he prayed that they might. know the love of Christ. If any of you still doubt, and wish for more satisfactory evidence, the preceding observations may teach you how to obtain it. In proportion as your love to Christ increases, so will your evidence of his love to you increase. All your doubts arise from the weakness and inconstancy of your love. Labor and pray, therefore, that your knowledge of Christ may be increased, and his love shed abroad in your hearts.

Thus will you soon be enabled to say with Peter, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. 2. If Christ loves those who love him, then he will love those most who are most ready to return his affection, and to do all things, to suffer all things for his sake. My Christian friends, do you wish for a large share of Christ's love; for a distinguished place in his affections? Then instead of shrinking from the cross, press it to your hearts, and like the first disciples rejoice when you are counted worthy to suffer for him.

Afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions, are the honors and preferments of Christ's earthly kingdom; for if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; and the greater our sufferings, the brighter will be our crown, the more exalted our thrones. Every one who forsakes father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands, for Christ's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and in the world to come, everlasting life. Be not contented then with giving Christ few and small proofs of your affection; but labor to love him as he has loved you, and be as willing to suffer for him, as he was to suffer for you.

Should you love him more than all the saints and angels, his love would still infinitely surpass yours. Be persuaded then to give him all your hearts. Are you not sometimes ready to wish that you had a thousand hearts to give him, a thousand tongues to speak his praise, a thousand hands to labor in his service? And will you then withhold any part of what you already possess? No; give him all, for all is infinitely less than he deserves; and the more you give him, the more will you receive. 3.

How happy are they who love. It has been often and justly observed, that to love, and to be beloved by a deserving earthly friend affords the greatest happiness which the world can give. What happiness then must they enjoy, who love and are beloved by the infinite fountain of love,-God's eternal Son, the brightness of his glory, the possessor of all power in heaven and earth; source of every thing amiable and

excellent in the universe. What pure, ineffable, exalted delight must they find in communion with such a friend; and what indescribable benefits must they receive from his love!

What can created minds conceive of, what can the heart form a wish for, beyond the friendship of such a being? Nay, what creature could have dared to raise his wishes so high, had not God himself encouraged us to do it? O, it is too, too much; not too much indeed for God to give, but far too much for man to deserve. But in vain do we attempt to give you adequate ideas of the happiness resulting from the love of Christ. It is one of those things, which it is impossible for man to utter; and the joy which it produces is a joy unspeakable.

If any would know it, they must learn it, not from language, but from their own experience, for language sinks under the weight of a subject, which it was never intended to describe. We can only say that, to love and be beloved by Christ, is the very essence of heaven. 4. The truths we have been considering afford most powerful motives to induce sinners to love Christ. Benevolent, pitiful, and compassionate as he is, he cannot, at present, my impenitent hearers, but view your characters with abhorrence and disgust.

Even now he looks round about upon you with anger, being grieved for the hardness of your hearts. He knows that you do not love him, He sees that you do not comply with his invitations, or obey his commands. He seldom if ever, hears a prayer from your lips. He sees that you refuse to comply with his dying request, that you are even now about to turn away from his table, where his people commemorate his dying love. How then can he love you. How can he but be displeased and grieved, to see himself and the blessings he offers thus slighted and despised.

Still, however, he waits to be gracious. He once more sends you terms of reconciliation. And what are the terms? He requires your love. Be his friends, and he will be yours. And can you hesitate respecting a compliance? Shall infinite loveliness offer to love perfect deformity, and shall perfect deformity refuse to love infinite loveliness? My friends, think again of his offers. Are they reasonable? Are they not more than reasonable? Even your fellow worms will not love you unless you return their love.

And can you then expect, that your offended Creator and Redeemer, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will love you on easier terms; will love you while you persist in grieving, neglecting and provoking him? My friends, you ought not to expect this. You cannot expect it. Will you not then comply with his terms? Look at him again. You will find his portrait, his likeness, the very picture of his heart in the gospel. Study it attentively. See what majesty and meekness, what dignity and tenderness; what glory and condescension, what grace and sweetness, there is in every feature.

See infinite power, unsearchable knowledge, unerring wisdom, boundless goodness, --see all the fullness of the Godhead, veiled in flesh and coming down from heaven to win your affections. This is he who says, I love them that love me. My friends, how can you forbear to love such a being. Methinks you could not but love him though hell should be the consequence. How then can you refuse, when heaven will be the reward.

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