

Motives Unto the Love of Christ.

by John Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving Christ due to his mediatory acts and the benefits we receive thereby, and highlights the reality, purity, and constraining power of Christ's love.

Scripture: Exodus 20:2

Topics: "Love Of Christ", "Christian Faith"

Description

John Owen emphasizes the profound motives for loving Christ, highlighting that our love for Him should stem from both His nature and His actions on our behalf. He explains that God commands us to love Him, reminding us of the benefits we receive through Christ's mediatory work, including His incarnation, death, and intercession. Owen argues that true faith in Christ naturally produces love, and that neglecting to meditate on His love and sacrifice leads to ingratitude. He asserts that the love of Christ is unique and undeserved, compelling a reciprocal love from us. Ultimately, Owen calls believers to deeply engage with the love of Christ, as it is foundational to genuine Christian faith.

Transcript

The motives unto this love of Christ is the last thing, on this head of our religious respect unto him, that I shall speak unto.

When God required of the church the first and highest act of religion, ¹⁶²the sole foundation of all others -- namely, to take him as their God, to own, believe, and trust in him alone as such, (which is wholly due unto him for what he is, without any other consideration whatever,) -- yet he thought meet to add a motive unto the performance of that duty from what he had done for them, Exod. xx. 2, 3. The sense of the first command is, that we should take him alone for our God; for he is so, and there is no other. But in the prescription of this duty unto the church, he minds them of the benefits which they had received from him in bringing them out of the house of bondage.

God, in his wisdom and grace, ordereth all the causes and reasons of our duty, so as that all the rational powers and faculties of our souls may be exercised therein. Wherefore he doth not only propose himself unto us, nor is Christ merely proposed unto us as the proper object of our affections, but he calls us also unto the consideration of all those things that may satisfy our souls that it is the most just, necessary, reasonable and advantageous course for us so to fix our affections an him.

And these considerations are taken from all that he did for us, with the reasons and grounds why he did it. We love him principally and ultimately for what he is; but nextly and immediately for what he did. What he did for us is first proposed unto us, and it is that which our souls are first affected withal. For they are originally acted in all things by a sense of the want which they have, and a desire of the blessedness which they have not. This directs them unto what he hath done for sinners; but that leads immediately unto the consideration of what he is in himself. And when our love is fixed on him or his person, then all those things wherewith, from a sense of our own wants and desires, we were first affected, become motives unto the confirming and increasing of that love. This is the constant method of the Scripture; it first proposes unto us what the Lord Christ hath done for us, especially in the discharge of his sacerdotal office, in his oblation and intercession, with the benefits which we receive thereby. Hereby it leads us unto his person, and presseth the consideration of all other things to engage our love unto him. See Phil. ii. 5-11, with chap. iii. 8-11.

Motives unto the love of Christ are so great, so many, so diffused through the whole dispensation of God in him unto us, as that they can by no hand be fully expressed, let it be allowed ever so much to enlarge in the declaration of them; much less can they be represented in that short discourse whereof but a very small part is allotted unto their consideration -- such as ours is at present. The studying, the collection of them or so many of them as we are able, the meditation on them and improvement of them, are among the principal 163 duties of our whole lives. What I shall offer is the reduction of them unto these two heads: 1. The acts of Christ, which is the substance of them; and, 2. The spring and fountain of those acts, which is the life of them.

1. In general they are all the acts of his mediatory office, with all the fruits of them, whereof we are made partners. There is not any thing that he did or doth, in the discharge of his mediatory office, from the first susception of it in his incarnation in the womb of the blessed Virgin unto his present intercession in heaven, but is an effectual motive unto the love of him; and as such is proposed unto us in the Scripture. Whatever he did or doth with or towards us in the name of God, as the king and prophet of the church -- whatever he did or doth with God for us, as our high priest -- it all speaks this language in the hearts of them that believe: O love the Lord Jesus in sincerity.

The consideration of what Christ thus did and doth for us is inseparable from that of the benefits which we receive thereby. A due mixture of both these -- of what he did for us, and what we obtain thereby -- compriseth the substance of these motives: "Who loved me, and gave himself for me" -- "Who loved us, and washed us in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God" -- "For thou wast slain, and hast bought us unto God with thy blood." And both these are of a transcendent nature, requiring our love to be so also. Who is able to comprehend the glory of the mediatory acting of the Son of God, in the assumption of our nature -- in what he did and suffered therein? And for us, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive, what we receive thereby. The least benefit, and that obtained by the least expense of trouble or charge, deserveth love, and leaveth the brand of a crime where it is not so entertained. What, then, do the greatest deserve, and thou procured by the greatest expense -- even the price of the blood of the Son of God?

If we have any faith concerning these things, it will produce love, as that love will obedience. Whatever we profess concerning them, it springs from tradition and opinion, and not from faith, if it engage not our souls into the love of him. The frame of heart which ensues on the real faith of these things is expressed, Ps. ciii. 1-5, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who

redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Let men pretend what they will, there needs no greater, no other evidence, to 164prove that any one doth not really believe the things that are reported in the Gospel, concerning the mediatory acting of Christ, or that he hath no experience in his own soul and conscience of the fruits and effects of them, than this -- that his heart is not engaged by them unto the most ardent love towards his person.

He is no Christian who lives not much in the meditation of the mediation of Christ, and the especial acts of it. Some may more abound in that work than others, as it is fixed, formed and regular; some may be more able than others to dispose their thought concerning them into method and order; some may be more diligent than others in the observation of times for the solemn performance of this duty; some may be able to rise to higher and clearer apprehensions of them than others. But as for those, the bent of whose minds doth not lie towards thoughts of them -- whose hearts are not on all occasions retreating unto the remembrance of them -- who embrace not all opportunities to call them over as they are able -- on what grounds can they be esteemed Christians? how do they live by the faith of the Son of God? Are the great things of the Gospel, of the mediation of Christ, proposed unto us, as those which we may think of when we have nothing else to do, that we may meditate upon or neglect at our pleasure -- as those wherein our concernment is so small as that they must give place unto all other occasions or diversions whatever? Nay; if our minds are not filled with these things -- if Christ doth not dwell plentifully in our hearts by faith -- if our souls are not possessed with them, and in their whole inward frame and constitution so cut into this mould as to be led by a natural complacency unto a converse with them -- we are strangers unto the life of faith. And if we are thus conversant about these things, they will engage our hearts into the love of the person of Christ. To suppose the contrary, is indeed to deny the truth and reality of them all, and to turn the Gospel into a fable.

Take one instance from among the rest -- namely, his death. Hath he the heart of a Christian, who doth not often meditate on the death of his Saviour, who doth not derive his life from it? Who can look into the Gospel and not fix on those lines which either immediately and directly, or through some other paths of divine grace and wisdom, do lead him thereunto? And can any have believing thoughts concerning the death of Christ, and not have his heart affected with ardent love unto his person? Christ in the Gospel "is evidently set forth, crucified" before us. Can any by the eye of faith look on this bleeding, dying Redeemer, and suppose love unto his person to be nothing but the work of fancy or imagination? They know the contrary, who "always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. iv. 10. As his whole "name," in 165all that he did, is "as ointment poured forth," for which "the virgins love him," Cant. i. 3, -- so this precious perfume of his death is that wherewith their hearts are ravished in a peculiar manner.

Again: as there can be no faith in Christ where there is no love unto him on the account of his mediatory acts; so, where it is not, the want of it casteth persons under the highest guilt of ingratitude that our nature is liable unto. The highest aggravation of the sin of angels was their ingratitude unto their Maker. For whereas, by his mere will and pleasure, they were stated in the highest excellency, pre-eminence, and dignity, that he thought good to communicate unto any creatures -- or, it may be, that any mere created nature is capable of in itself -- they were unthankful for what they had so received from undeserved goodness and bounty; and so cast themselves into everlasting ruin. But yet the sin of men, in their ingratitude towards Christ on the account of what he hath done for them, is attended with an aggravation above that of the angels. For although the angels were originally instated in that condition of dignity which

in this world we cannot attain unto, yet were they not redeemed and recovered from misery as we are.

In all the crowd of evil and wicked men that the world is pestered withal, there are none, by common consent, so stigmatised for unworthy villainy, as those who are signally ungrateful for singular benefits. If persons are unthankful unto them, if they have not the highest love for them, who redeem them from ignominy and death, and instate them in a plentiful inheritance, (if any such instances may be given,) and that with the greatest expense of labour and charge, -- mankind, without any regret, doth tacitly condemn them unto greater miseries than those which they were delivered from. What, then, will be the condition of them whose hearts are not so affected with the mediation of Christ and the fruits of it, as to engage the best, the choicest of their affections unto him! The gospel itself will be "a savour of death" unto such ungrateful wretches.

2. That which the Scripture principally insisteth on as the motive of our love unto Christ, is his love unto us -- which was the principle of all his mediatory actings in our behalf.

Love is that jewel of human nature which commands a valuation wherever it is found. Let other circumstances be what they will, whatever distances between persons may be made by them, yet real love, where it is evidenced so to be, is not despised by any but such as degenerate into profligate brutality. If it be so stated as that it can produce no outward effects advantageous unto them that are beloved, yet it commands a respect, as it were, whether we will or no, and some return in its own kind. Especially it doth so if it be altogether undeserved, and so evidenceth itself to proceed from a goodness of nature, and an inclination unto the good of them on whom it is fixed. For, whereas the essential nature of love consisteth in willing good unto them that are beloved -- where the act of the will is real, sincere, and constantly exercised, without any defect of it on our part, no restraints can possibly be put upon our minds from going out in some acts of love again upon its account, unless all their faculties are utterly depraved by habits of brutish and filthy lusts. But when this love, which is thus undeserved, doth also abound in effects troublesome and chargeable in them in whom it is, and highly beneficial unto them on whom it is placed -- if there be any such affection left in the nature of any man, it will prevail unto a reciprocal love. And all these things are found in the love of Christ, unto that degree and height as nothing parallel unto it can be found in the whole creation. I shall briefly speak of it under two general heads.

(1.) The sole spring of all the mediatory acting of Christ, both in the susception of our nature and in all that he did and suffered therein, was his own mere love and grace, working by pity and compassion. It is true, he undertook this work principally with respect unto the glory of God, and out of love unto him. But with respect unto us, his only motive unto it was his abundant, overflowing love. And this is especially remembered unto us in that instance wherein it carried him through the greatest difficulties -- namely, in his death and the oblation of himself on our behalf, Gal. ii. 20; Eph. v. 2, 25, 26; 1 John iii. 16; Rev. i. 5, 6. This alone inclined the Son of God to undertake the glorious work of our redemption, and carried him through the death and dread which he underwent in the accomplishment of it.

Should I engage into the consideration of this love of Christ, which was the great means of conveying all the effects of divine wisdom and grace unto the church, -- that glass which God chose to represent himself and all his goodness in unto believers, -- that spirit of life in the wheel of all the motions of the person of Christ in the redemption of the church unto the eternal glory of God, his own and that of his redeemed also, -- that mirror wherein the holy angels and blessed saints shall for ever contemplate the divine excellencies in their suitable operations; -- I must now begin a discourse much larger than that which I have passed through. But it is not suited unto my present design so to do. For, considering the growing

apprehensions of many about the person of Christ, which are utterly destructive of the whole nature of that love which we ascribe unto him, do I know how soon a more distinct explication and defence of it may be called for. And this cause will not be forsaken.

They know nothing of the life and power of the gospel, nothing of the reality of the grace of God, nor do they believe aright one article 167 of the Christian faith, whose hearts are not sensible of the love of Christ herein; nor is he sensible of the love of Christ, whose affections are not thereon drawn out unto him. I say, they make a pageant of religion, -- a fable for the theatre of the world, -- a business of fancy and opinion, -- whose hearts are not really affected with the love of Christ, in the susception and discharge of the work of mediation, so as to have real and spiritually sensible affections for him. Men may babble things which they have learned by rote; they have no real acquaintance with Christianity, who imagine that the placing of the most intense affections of our souls on the person of Christ -- the loving him with all our hearts because of his love -- our being overcome thereby until we are sick of love -- the constant motions of our souls towards him with delight and adherence -- are but fancies and imaginations. I renounce that religion, be it whose it will, that teacheth, insinuateth, or giveth countenance unto, such abominations. That doctrine is as discrepant from the Gospel as the Alkoran -- as contrary to the experience of believers as what is acted in and by the devils which instructs men unto a contempt of the most fervent love unto Christ, or casts reflections upon it. I had rather choose my eternal lot and portion with the meanest believer, who, being effectually sensible of the love of Christ, spends his days in mourning that he can love him no more than he finds himself on his utmost endeavours for the discharge of his duty to do, than with the best of them, whose vain speculations and a false pretence of reason puff them up unto a contempt of these things.

(2.) This love of Christ unto the church is singular in all those qualifications which render love obliging unto reciprocal affections. It is so in its reality. There can be no love amongst men, but will derive something from that disorder which is in their affections in their highest actings. But the love of Christ is pure and absolutely free from any alloy. There cannot be the least suspicion of anything of self in it. And it is absolutely undeserved. Nothing can be found amongst men that can represent or exemplify its freedom from any desert on our part. The most candid and ingenuous love amongst us is, when we love another for his worth, excellency, and usefulness, though we have no singular benefit of them ourselves; but not the least of any of these things were found in them on whom he set his love, until they were wrought in them, as effects of that love which he set upon them.

Men sometimes may rise up unto such a high degree and instance in love, as that they will even die for one another; but then it must be on a superlative esteem which they have of their worth and merit. It may be, saith the apostle, treating of the love of Christ, and of God in him, that "for a good man some would even dare to die," Rom. v. 7. 168 It must be for a good man -- one who is justly esteemed "commune bonum," a public good to mankind -- one whose benignity is ready to exercise loving-kindness on all occasions, which is the estate of a good man; -- peradventure some would even dare to die for such a man. This is the height of what love among men can rise unto; and if it hath been instanced in any, it hath been accompanied with an open mixture of vain-glory and desire of renown. But the Lord Christ placed his love on us, that love from whence he died for us, when we were sinners and ungodly; that is, every thing which might render us unamiable and undeserving. Though we were as deformed as sin could render us, and more deeply indebted than the whole creation could pay or answer, yet did he fix his love upon us, to free us from that condition, and to render us meet for the most intimate society with himself. Never was there love which had such effects -- which cost him so dear in whom it was, and proved so advantageous unto them on whom it was placed. In the pursuit of it he underwent everything that is evil in his own

person, and we receive everything that is good in the favour of God and eternal blessedness.

On the account of these things, the apostle ascribes a constraining power unto the love of Christ, 2 Cor. v. 14. And if it constrains us unto any return unto him, it doth so unto that of love in the first place. For no suitable return can be made for love but love, at least not without it. As love cannot be purchased -- "For if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned," Cant. viii. 7, -- so if a man would give all the world for a requital of love, without love it would be despised. To fancy that all the love of Christ unto us consists in the precepts and promises of the Gospel, and all our love unto him in the observance of his commands, without a real love in him unto our persons, like that of a "husband unto a wife," Eph. v. 25, 26, or a holy affection in our hearts and minds unto his person, is to overthrow the whole power of religion -- to despoil it of its life and soul, leaving nothing but the carcass of it.

This love unto Christ, and unto God in him, because of his love unto us, is the principal instance of divine love, the touchstone of its reality and sincerity. Whatever men may boast of their affectionate endearments unto the divine goodness, if it be not founded in a sense of this love of Christ, and the love of God in him, they are but empty notions they nourish withal, and their deceived hearts feed upon ashes. It is in Christ alone that God is declared to be love; without an apprehension whereof none can love him as they ought. In him alone that infinite goodness, which is the peculiar object of divine love, is truly represented unto us, without any such deceiving phantasm as the workings of fancy or depravation of reason may impose upon us. And on him doth the saving communication of all the effects of it ¹⁶⁹depend. And an infinite condescension is it in the holy God, so to express his "glory in the face of Jesus Christ," or to propose himself as the object of our love in and through him. For considering our weakness as to an immediate comprehension of the infinite excellencies of the divine nature, or to bear the rays of his resplendent glory, seeing none can see his face and live, it is the most adorable effect of divine wisdom and grace, that we are admitted unto the contemplation of them in the person of Jesus Christ.

There is yet farther evidence to be given of this love unto the person of Christ, from all those blessed effects of it which are declared in the Scripture, and whereof believers have the experience in themselves. But something I have spoken concerning them formerly, in my discourse about communion with God; and the nature of the present design will not admit of enlargement upon them.

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