

The Perfume of Love

by Thomas Watson

Love is the greatest of all virtues and the bond that holds the church together.

Scripture: Psalm 16:2, John 13:34, Romans 13:8, Ephesians 2:19, Colossians 3:14, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:14, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Christian Love", "True Discipleship"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches on the importance of fervent and pure love among Christians, emphasizing that love is a crucial grace that adorns true religion. He delves into the command, extent, manner, and degree of love, highlighting the need for genuine affection and zeal in loving one another. Watson provides arguments to enforce love, such as it being a command from God, the most excellent grace that seasons all actions, and a mark of true discipleship. He also explores how love sets a crown of honor on true religion, the necessity of love as a debt to be paid, and how love makes believers resemble God.

Transcript

The Perfume of Love

by Thomas Watson

"See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." 1 Peter 1:22

The Holy Scripture makes the love of the brethren the surest note of a man who shall go to heaven, 1 John 3:14. Christ and His Apostles beat much upon this string of love--as if this made the sweetest music and harmony in true religion. The consideration of this has put me upon this subject.

All the graces have their beauty--but there are some that more adorn and set off a Christian in the eye of the world, such as humility and love. These two graces, like precious diamonds, cast a sparkling luster upon religion. I have designed to speak of the last of these at this time, "See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." Love is a grace always needful, therefore never out of season, though too much out of use. My text, like the River of Eden, parts itself into four heads:

1. The command, "See that you love."
2. The extent of this love, "One another."

3. The manner of this love, "With a pure heart."

4. The degree of this love, "Fervently."

Love purely; that is--opposed to hypocrisy. Love must be with the heart. It must not be a 'mere complement', which is like a painted fire. Pretended love is worse than hatred.

Love fervently; that is--opposed to neutrality. Love must flame forth. It must not be as the smoking flax--but as a burning lamp. The Hebrew word for love imports an ardent and zealous affection; no water must quench it.

DOCTRINE. Christians must love one another cordially and fervently.

Colossians 3:14, "Above all these things, put on love." 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all things, have fervent love among yourselves." It is as if the Apostle had said, "Whatever you neglect--do not neglect this grace." Jerome reports that when John was old, he was said to be led up into the pulpit and there he repeated these words, "Little children, love one another!" Oh, that this grace of love were engraved as in letters of gold upon our hearts, by the finger of the Holy Spirit!

Here the question will be asked, "What is love?"

I answer, love is a sweet and gracious affection whereby we wish the good of another and promote his welfare as our own. Love is a sacred fire kindled in the heart by the Spirit, like that fire which came from heaven, 2 Chronicles 7:1. I shall endeavor to preserve this fire in Christian hearts, as the fire the vestal virgins kept in Rome, that it may not go out.

Arguments to Enforce Love

1. We must love by virtue of command. John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you--that you love one another." Love is both a new commandment and an old commandment. It is an old commandment, because it is a law written in the heart of man by the pen of nature as with the point of a diamond. And it is old because it is written in the ancient statutes and records. Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord."

Yet it is a new commandment because it is newly purged from pharisaical glosses. Before it was "love your neighbor," but now it is "love your enemy," Matthew 5:44. Here is a new comment upon an old law.

Love is said to be a new commandment because of a new edition. It came out of the new mint of the gospel, and was pressed by a new example. John 13:34, "As I have loved you"; so that it is not arbitrary but a duty. It is a new commandment and an old commandment.

2. We must love because of the excellency of this grace. It is a lovely grace. All the other graces seem to be eclipsed, unless love shines and sparkles forth in them. Faith itself has no beauty, unless it works by love. The tears of repentance are not pure unless they flow from the spring of love. Love is the jewel which Christ's bride wears; it is the diamond in the ring of graces. This is the grace which seasons all our actions and makes them savory. Love is like musk among linen--which perfumes it. So love makes all our pious services a sweet fragrance to God, Ephesians 5:2.

Prayer is compared to incense, Psalm 141:2. Now incense, if it is laid on the altar and has no fire put to it, does not smell so sweet. The incense of prayer does not cast such a fragrant aroma, unless kindled with

this fire of love. Love is the badge and temper of a true saint. John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"; not if you work miracles--but if you love one another. By this garb, you are known to belong to Me, says Christ. Bernard calls love, the sweet dew which distills from a Christian, and refreshes all whom it drops upon. Love is the golden clasp which knits hearts; it is the cement which unites Christians together; it is the bond of perfectness, Colossians 3:14. If this bond is broken, all falls to pieces. Love is the fulfilling of the law, Romans 13:10. All the duties of the first and second table--piety towards God and equity towards our neighbor, are comprehended in this, "You shall love."

Oh, how sweetly does the Apostle Paul discourse and expound upon this grace! How he extols it! He plays as well the orator as the theologian; how he delineates this grace of love! How he pencils and draws it out to the life, in all its beauty and spiritual embroidery!

That he may extol this grace, first he does it exclusively. He shows that the most glorious things are nothing without it. 1 Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak with the tongues of men." If a man could speak in as many languages as Mithridates (of whom it is said he understood 22 sundry tongues), if he had the golden mouth of Chrysostom, if he could do with his oratory as the poets said Orpheus did with his harp, move the very rocks and stones--yet without love it would be nothing!

No, says the Apostle, "though I speak with the tongues of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal." Would it not be a noble thing to have the eloquence of angels? Yet this, without love, would be but the tinkling of the cymbal. To love as Christians, is better than to speak as angels.

"And though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge," verse 2. If a man's head were a library of all learning, if he could know all that is knowable, if he could, with Solomon, discourse from the Cedar in Lebanon even to the hyssop--and have not love, all is nothing. Knowledge without love makes a man no better than a devil.

"And though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains." Would it not be admirable to have the faith of miracles? To unhinge mountains, to cast out devils, to take up serpents, and drink poison, and not have it hurt us? Matthew 16:16. Yet "if I have not love, I am nothing." I am of no account with God. The miracles of faith, without the mystery of love, profit nothing.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor," verse 3. Suppose I give away all my estate to charity--yet without love it avails me nothing. It is like a lamp without oil.

"And though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it is nothing." The fire of martyrdom avails nothing, without the fire of love. Let a man come to church, pray, and read Scripture; yet if his heart burns in malice, it is but going to hell in more saint-like manner. "Oh, how precious a jewel," said Augustine, "is love! How rare a grace that, if this is lacking, all other things, though ever so glorious, are in vain!"

The Apostle sets forth this grace of love positively by deciphering its nature and excellency.

"Love is kind," verse 4. Love is a generous, bountiful grace. It is full of good works; it drops as the honeycomb.

"Love is not puffed up." Though it is bountiful, it is not proud. Love is a humble grace, like the violet. Though it perfumes the air--yet it hangs down its head. Love lays aside the trumpet and covers itself with

a veil. Love conceals its own worth, and says, as Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:11, "though I am nothing."

"Love seeks not her own," verse 5. The Apostle complains, Philippians 2:21, "All men seek their own," but love seeks not her own. This is a diffusive grace, and wholly spends itself for the good of others, 1 Corinthians 10:33. Love makes a private Christian a common good. Love is a grace which does not dwell at home; it goes abroad; it makes frequent visits; it looks into the condition of others and relieves them. Love has one eye blind to wink at the infirmities of others--and another eye open to spy their needs!

"Love is not easily provoked." It is not in a violent fit; it does not burn in anger. It is meek and calm, never taking fire unless to warm others with its gracious beams of mercy. It gives honey but does not easily sting.

The Apostle sets forth the excellency of this grace of love comparatively, by laying it in the balance with other graces, verse 13, "And now abides faith, hope, love; these three--but the greatest of these is love." He compares love with faith and hope, and then sets the crown upon love. Indeed, in some senses, faith is greater than love.

Faith is the cause of love; therefore, more noble; for, as Augustine said, though the root of the tree is not seen--yet all the beauty of the branches proceeds from the root. So all the beauty which sparkles in love, proceeds from the root of faith.

Faith is more excellent than love. Faith is a more beneficial grace to us; for by faith we are ingrafted into Christ and partake of all the blessings of salvation. Faith fetches into the soul--all the strength and riches of Christ! Faith puts upon the soul the embroidered robe of Christ's righteousness, in which it shines brighter than the angels. But, in another sense, love is greater than faith.

Love is greater than faith because love is a more visible grace than faith. Faith lies hidden in the heart, Romans 10:9. Love is more conspicuous and shines forth more in the life. Love reveals the soundness of faith, as the steady beating of the pulse shows the healthful temper of the body. Faith bows the knee to Christ and worships Him; love opens its treasures and presents unto Christ gifts, gold and frankincense.

Love is greater than faith in regard of continuance. 1 Corinthians 13:8, "Love never fails." We shall lay down our body of flesh, and see God face to face. Faith and hope shall be no more--but love shall remain. While we live here, we have need of faith, this is our Jacob's staff to walk with. 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith." But we shall set this staff shortly at heaven's door, and love alone shall enter within the veil. So you have seen the sparkling of this diamond, and thus does the Apostle no less elegantly than divinely set forth the beauty and orient luster of this grace.

3. The third argument pressing Christians to love is that this sets a crown of honor upon true religion. It renders the Gospel lovely in the eyes of the world. It was an honor to religion in Tertullian's time, when the heathens could say, "See how the Christians love one another!" Psalm 133:1, "Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" It is like precious ointment upon the head which runs down to the skirts of holy garments. Oh, what a blessed sight it is to see Christians linked together with the silver link of love! The church is Christ's Temple, the saints are living stones, 1 Peter 2:5. How beautiful is this temple when the stones of it are cemented together with love! It was said of the first Temple, that there was no noise of hammer in it; and oh, that there might be no noise of strife and division in God's church! Could we see unity and truth, like the vine and elm mutually embracing; could we see the children of Zion spreading themselves as olive plants round about their mother's table in an amicable and peaceable

manner; how would this adorn true religion and be a lure to invite and draw others to be in love with it! What is true religion, but a binding and knitting together of hearts! We are knit to God by faith--and one to another by love.

4. The fourth argument is the necessity of love. Love is a debt. Now debts must be paid. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another," Romans 13:8. The debt of love differs from other debts.

When a debt is paid, we receive an acquittance and are to pay it no more; but this debt of love must be always paying. In heaven we must be paying this debt, love to God and the saints; there is no discharge from this debt.

Other debts may be dispensed with. We forgive a debt sometimes, as that creditor did in the parable, Matthew 18:27, "The Lord of that servant was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt." But this debt of love is by no means to be dispensed with; it must be paid. If we do not pay this debt, God will come upon us with an arrest, and throw us into hell prison!

In civil debts between man and man, the more they pay, the less they have; but, in this debt of love, it is quite contrary. The more we pay, the more we have. The more grace from God, the more love to others. Love, like the widow's oil, increases by being poured out. By paying other debts we grow poorer--by paying this debt, we grow richer.

5. A fifth argument enforcing love, is that love makes us like God. "God is love," 1 John 4:16, a golden sentence. Augustine said, "The Apostle more commends love in this one word, 'God is love,' than Paul does in his whole chapter." As the nature of the sun is light, so God's nature is love. The three persons in the trinity are all love.

God the Father is love. John 3:16, "God so loved the world." That God should part with Christ out of His bosom, the Son of His love, and lay this jewel, as it were, to pawn for our salvation, oh, unparallel love! Never was such love shown to the fallen angels!

God the Son is love. How did Christ love His spouse when He died for her! His sides dripped blood--His heart dripped love! Such a vein of love was opened in Him, that our sins could not quench it. Love was the wing on which Christ flew into the virgin's womb. Christ incarnate--here was love covered over with flesh! Christ on the cross--here was a book of love laid open before us to read in!

God the Holy Spirit is love. His appearing in the likeness of a dove showed His nature. "The dove," said Pliny, "is an amicable creature; it is without gall." What are all the motions of the Spirit, but offers of love? Thus all the persons of the trinity are love; and the more we shine in the grace of love, the more we resemble the God of love.

6. A sixth argument enforcing love, is from the sweet relations we stand in one to another. We are fellow-citizens, Ephesians 2:19; we all expect one heaven. We shall shortly live together, and shall we not love together? We are soldiers of the same army, 2 Timothy 2:3; ours must be the fight of faith, not the fight of contention. Our strife must be who shall love most! We are branches of the same vine, and shall we not be united? We are stones of the same building, and shall we not be cemented with love? Nay, we are brethren. Acts 7:26, "Sirs, you are brethren, why do you wrong one to another?"

Practical Application

USE 1. I might here take up a lamentation and steep my words in tears, to consider the decay (I almost said "the funeral") of this grace among Christians. The fire of brotherly love is almost ready to go out. Instead of the fire of love, we see the wildfire of contention. I have read of one Vitalis who hazarded his life to rescue his distressed friend; but surely such Vitalises are dead in this age. The text says, "See that you love one another." But our times are a bad commentary upon this text. How Christians reproach, censure, and malign one another! The text says, "love fervently," but they hate fervently. Instead of the bond of love, behold the apple of strife! We live in the frigid zone, "the love of many waxes cold." Many live as if they had been born upon the mountains of Bether, the mountains of division, and as if they had been baptized in the waters of Meribah, the water of strife.

Do the wicked unite? Nay, do the devils unite? There was, in one man, a legion of demons, which is, according to Varro, seven thousand six hundred twenty two. Shall there be more harmony among devils than among Christians! For these divisions among the godly, there are great thoughts of heart. Oh, Christians! Turn your hot words--into salt tears! How do the enemies of true religion insult us, to see not only Christ's coat torn--but His body torn! For these things let our eyes run down with tears.

Consider the evil consequence, where love is lacking. The absence of this grace brings forth divisions, and they are dangerous. For divisions bring a reproach and scandal upon true religion; they make the ways of God evil spoken of, as if religion were the fomenter of envy and sedition. Julian, in his invectives against the Christians, said that they lived together as tigers, rending and tearing one another. And shall we, by our animosities and contentions, make good, Julian's words? Lack of love will make others afraid to embrace the Christian faith.

Divisions advance Satan's kingdom. The devil has no hope but in our discords. Chrysostom observes that, in the city of Corinth when many zealous converts were brought in, Satan knew no better way to dam up the current of religion, than by throwing in a bone of contention and dividing them into parties. One was for Paul and another for Apollo--but few for Christ.

USE 2. Be exhorted to cordial and fervent love. "See that you love one another." Oh, that this sweet spice might send forth its fragrant aroma among Christians! Oh, that the Lord would rain down some of these silver showers of love upon the hearts of Christians, which are, for the most part like the mountains of Gilboa, which have none of this heavenly dew upon them! They say of the stones of the temple, that they were so closely cemented as if there had been but one stone in the temple. It is to be wished that the hearts of Christians were so sweetly cemented in love, as if there were but one heart.

Let me commend this grace of amity and love to Christians. You are members of the church of God; you bear Christ's name. You wear His garb; therefore, you must be soldered together in affection. It is a sad omen when the joints of the same body are loosed, and the knees shall smite one against another.

If yet men will live at variance, nourishing a viper in their bosoms, I shall offer two things to their serious consideration.

1. An unloving person is an unregenerate person. Titus 3:3, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." It is as if he had said, "Before grace came, we were filled and ready to burst with this poison of malice." The Apostle, describing a natural condition, calls it the gall of bitterness. A malicious person is of no kin to God, for God is love. He knows nothing of the Gospel savingly, for it is a Gospel of peace. We read in Scripture of the bond of peace, Ephesians 4:3 and the bond of iniquity, Acts

8:23. Him whom the Gospel has not bound in the bond of peace, Satan has bound in the bond of iniquity.

2. Uncharitableness is a leaven, which sours the whole lump, 1 Corinthians 5:8.

Uncharitableness sours your good qualities. Naaman was an honorable man, a mighty man in valor--but he was a leper, 2 Kings 5:1. Like a dead fly in the ointment, it spoiled all the rest. So it may be said that such a man is a man of abilities, a man of great moral endowments; he is just, affable, temperate--but he is a leper. He is not a loving person. He pays everyone their own--but there is one debt he will not pay, though he rots in hell for it--namely the debt of love. This is a brand of infamy upon him.

Uncharitableness sours your good duties. You pray and come to church--but refuse to be tied in a knot of love. What profit is there of all your seeming devotion? We are bid to lift up pure hands without wrath, 1 Timothy 2:8. The unloving person does not lift up pure hands in prayer--but leprous hands, bloody hands. 1 John 3:16, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer!" Prayer, said Chrysostom, may be compared to a fine garland. The hands which make a garland must be clean; just so, the heart which makes a prayer needs to be clean. Wrath and anger sully and defile a Christian's prayers--and will the Holy God touch them? The unloving man poisons his own prayers--and will the Lord accept a poisoned sacrifice?

Oh, that all this might at last persuade us to cordial and fervent love! Let us turn all our censuring into praying! Let us pray to God that He would quench the fire of contention, and increase the fire of brotherly love among us. Let us pray that the Lord would heal our schisms, and repair our breaches; that He would make us like the cherubim with our faces looking one upon another. Let us pray that God will make good that promise that we shall serve Him with one heart, and that this may be the golden motto written upon our churches, "One heart and one way."

It exhorts us that, as we would be amicable to all, so especially that we would love those who are of the household of faith--namely the people of God, Psalm 16:2. We must love as God loves, He loves those most who are like Him. He loves piety, though it is espoused to poverty. So must our love run out especially to those who have the image and superscription of God upon on them. Joseph loved all his brethren--but he loved Benjamin the most. The people of God must have a Benjamin's portion of our love.

The saints are called jewels, Malachi 3:17, which we must love and prize; they are called the apple of God's eye--to show how tender they should be in our eye. The saints are partakers of the divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4, not by an incorporation into divine essence--but by a conformity to the divine likeness. These we must love, with a love of delight and delight. These are near allied to Christ by faith; they are of the blood royal of heaven; these must be higher in our thoughts and deeper in our affections than others.

When I say the saints must have the largest share in our love, I mean not all who call themselves saints, such as under a mask of holiness commit sin, hypocritical saints--but such as the Scripture calls saints, such as excel in virtue and grace, Psalm 16, such as walk humbly with God, Micah 6:8; such as have something of Christ in them. These saints, we must place our entire love upon. Indeed, there is that in them which may excite and draw forth love; they have the beauty of inner holiness, and they have an interest in the unspotted holiness of Christ, which may be a sufficient loadstone to draw our love to them.

But what shall we say to those who, instead of loving the people of God because they are saints--hate them because they are saints! As Tertullian says, "the very confession of the name of a Christian was enough to bring them into an odium, and was laid against them as a matter of crime!" It was said of Aristides that he was banished out of Athens because he was just. Sanctity is the thing that is reproached

and hated in the world. Wicked men, panther-like, would tear the picture of God drawn in the new man! Let one have all kinds of accomplishments, learning, morality, piety--though men will love him for his learning and morality, they will hate him for his piety. Holiness has become a crime!

The serpent is known by his hissing. They are the seed of the old serpent that hiss at true religion. Let me speak my mind freely. There is generally among men a secret antipathy against the power of godliness. They are for some shows of devotion; they keep up a form of religion--but such as have a spirit of zeal and sanctity shining in them--the hearts of men rise against! Let me tell you, there is not a greater sign of a rotten and devilish heart--than to hate a man for that very thing for which God loves him--namely, his holiness!

It is a high affront to abuse the King's statue. What vengeance shall they be counted worthy of, who malign and do all that they can--to tear in pieces the image of the living God! Oh, take heed of this! Hating the grace of the Spirit comes near to despising the Spirit of grace.

To conclude, let us plead with God for the spirit of amity and unity--that we may love one another; especially that we may be endeared in our affections to those who are of the family of God and whose names are enrolled in the Book of Life.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-watson/the-perfume-of-love/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net