

Love in its Priceless Value and Unquenchable Strength

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"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement fame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Song of Solomon 8:6, 7

One of the surest marks of a new and heavenly birth is *love*; and one of the most certain evidences of alienation from the life of God is *hatred*. Do I speak thus decidedly merely as my own private opinion, which may be true or false, or do I utter it as a declaration in strict accordance with the oracles of God? What is the testimony of God himself on this point as revealed in the first Epistle of the beloved disciple? Does he not give love as an evidence of a new and heavenly birth? "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." (1 John 4:7.) And again "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." But what is also his testimony in respect of that counter-evidence which I have brought forward as a sure mark of alienation and death? "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (1 John 3:14.) And this fatal mark, this death-spot, will stand against a man in spite of all his false light and all his false profession; for "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now."

But though love in the heart is a scriptural, and therefore infallible mark of an interest in the love and blood of the

Lamb, and the sure fruit of a new and heavenly birth, yet the soul possessed of this indubitable evidence cannot always read the handwriting of God, though one might almost of it, say with this divine attestation in its behalf, that the Lord has himself "written the vision, and made it plain upon tables that he may run that readeth it."

Now there are several reasons why this evidence of grace is hidden in obscurity from the very eyes of its possessor.

1. Sometimes love both to the Lord and his people, for they rise and sink together, is in itself and to our apprehension *very faint and feeble*. It resembles in this the life of a babe that is ushered into the world in so feeble a state that it can hardly be pronounced whether it be alive or still-born. Or it may be compared, in this low condition, to a person taken out of the water, in whom for a time life seems as if extinct, and yet, by using due means, it may be and often is resuscitated. Thus the very feebleness of love, like the feebleness of life in a person drowned, obscures the evidence, though it does not destroy the reality of its existence.

2. Sometimes, again, love has to *conflict with many corruptions*. It is, in this state, like fire applied to damp stubble or weeds, as we see sometimes in the fields in autumn. When first lighted, and even for some time after, it often seems a matter of uncertainty whether the fire will be suffocated by the superincumbent mass of weeds, or whether it will burn up brightly into a flame. So in the heart of the child of God, there is so much opposition to everything good; so many weeds of guilt, filth, and corruption seem to lie as a damp, wet mass over the life of God in the soul, and the smoke is so confusing and blinding, that he can at times hardly believe he has or ever had any true spiritual love

either to the Lord or to his people.

3. Another reason is, that "*the carnal mind*" is still "*enmity against God*"; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Now as this carnal mind still continues in him unsubdued and unsubduable, its internal movements of enmity and rebellion hide or obscure the evidence that in the same bosom, in the new man of grace, there dwells heavenly love.

4. A fourth reason of the obscurity of this gracious evidence, not to mention others, is the *presence of guilty fear*; for where there is fear there is bondage, and where there is bondage there is torment; and this tormenting bondage, which can only be cast out by perfect love, seems to shut the eyes of the mind from seeing the faint spark of imperfect love which is in the heart in spite of the fear, the bondage, and the torment.

But though love in the heart of the child of God is often thus faint and feeble, though it has to struggle against so much opposition, and is so often damped by the corruptions incident to our fallen condition, through which, however, it strives to struggle, yet it is not the less love, and that, too, of a heavenly origin. As a proof that it is kindled by a divine hand and kept alight and alive by heavenly breath, we find that it is never extinguished in the heart to which it has been communicated, but goes on, like the smoking flax of which our Lord speaks, to burn, until at last it breaks forth into a bright and blessed flame; and then it is conspicuously manifested to itself and to others as the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

But whilst love is in this struggling state, seeking for some clear manifestation of its reality and power, and desiring, as

true love ever must desire, the presence of him whom the soul loves, it will be venting itself from time to time in earnest breathings that the Lord would himself decide the doubtful case by shedding it abroad more fully in the heart; and thus, by some conspicuous display of his all-conquering grace, settle all the difficulty. This breathing after some clear and conspicuous display of the Lord's love seems to be very much to be the utterance of the Spouse in the words before us. Warmed and impelled by the gentle flame of love, she breaks forth: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." Her desire, as here thus passionately expressed, was to be blessed with nearness to the Lord Jesus Christ; to lie, so to speak, as warm and as close in his bosom as a seal which is worn next the breast; and not only so, but to have some conspicuous display of this love, by seeing and feeling herself borne as if on high by being bound upon his right arm, and there worn, for ever worn, as a royal signet on a monarch's hand,—his jewel of ornament, his seal of authority, his ensign of power. She then goes on to explain, or rather to tell him, from the warmth of her own feelings, how strong love is. "Love," she says, "is strong as death;" nay, she adds, it is unquenchable, for "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." But tormented, as it were, with a fit of jealousy, which always is love's sure accompaniment, she cries out. "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." Yet once more falling back upon the fountain of eternal love, whence she drew all her own affectionate warmth, and feeling what a priceless blessing the love of Christ is, she utters this expression of her sense of its sovereignty and unpurchaseable nature: "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned."

In unfolding, however, the spiritual and experimental

meaning of her warm and eloquent appeal to the Lord's love and pity, I shall rather depart from the order of the words in which she uttered it and as I have thus far explained it, and shall bring before you spiritual love under four distinct aspects as they look out upon us in the text.

I.—*First, Love in its priceless value:* "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

II.—*Secondly, Love in its unquenchable strength:* "Love is strong as death." "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

III.—*Thirdly, Love in its cruel accompaniment:* "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."

IV.—*Fourthly, Love in its sealed manifestation:* "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm."

I.—I have first, with God's help and blessing, to show you *Love in its priceless value*. The Spouse declares, and, in declaring it, gives expression to a feeling to which all who know anything of love human or love divine will set their seal, that "if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

i. Is this not true in *human* love? Can that be bought or sold, trucked away or exchanged, hawked about and haggled over at so much a pound, as so much saleable goods or merchandize? Is not love, even the faintest and feeblest that burns in a human heart, a possession so valuable and of a nature so peculiar that it cannot be purchased by any amount of earthly treasure?

1. Look, for instance, at *wedded love*. The foundation of all happiness in the married state must be mutual love between the husband and wife. For a woman, then, to sell herself for money to a man whom she does not love, or for a man to tie himself for life to a woman whom he dislikes or despises for a little gold dust or a lump of thick clay, in what can such mercenary bargains end, and justly too, but mutual misery? Even with much mutual love, it is not always easy to bear with each other's infirmities of temper, sickness, age, and other ills of life; but without love they must be an intolerable burden, especially when fancy paints what might or would have been the happy lot had another been the partner, and if grace be not at hand to furnish patience and submission to the present trial. But I am happy to say that I speak here not from experience, but from conjecture and observation.

2. Look, again, at the love which a *mother bears to her babe*. Is that a love to be bought or sold? Put into the poorest woman's arms a nobleman's heir: can she love it as she loves the offspring of her own womb? Why, the miserablest tramp that carries her crying babe under a cloak of rags loves it more than she would the heir of a peerage, could the one be substituted for the other.

3. Nor is it less true of that sincere and hearty love which subsists between *friends* who are warmly attached to each other upon any natural or spiritual ground; such love, I mean, as David speaks of in his funeral lament: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Sam. 1:26.) Is love like this to be bought or sold? All that Saul could have given David could not have purchased it. So we see, even of human love, that it is a treasure of such priceless value that it is not marketable; that it cannot be knocked down to the highest

bidder, or purchased by all the gold in the mines of California or Australia.

ii. But when turning our eyes from human we fix them on divine love, then we seem to stand upon still safer, surer ground in pronouncing with the Bride, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." For what is the love spoken of here? We may view it chiefly as *the love of Christ to his people*; and of that love the apostle prays that the Ephesians might 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." Now a love which has breadths, and lengths, and depths, and heights, and when all these have been explored and measured, still "passeth knowledge,"—can such a love as this be purchased by any amount of worldly possession? If a man would give all the substance of his house for the love of Christ, would it not be utterly contemned by him who is altogether lovely?

But to see the priceless value of this love, thus strongly and graphically expressed, let us glance at what it is *in itself*; and to do so more clearly, we will consider it under these two points of view:—We will view it first, as love divine, that is, love as flowing eternally out of the bosom of the Son of God as God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the glorious Trinity; and then we will view it as love, we will not say *human*, but one *peculiar* to our blessed Lord, as uniting a sacred humanity with his own eternal Deity.

Now in the blessed Trinity, the mind and will, and therefore love of the three Persons in the Godhead must be one and the same, or else they would be divided in will and affection. The love, therefore, of God the Father, the love of God the Son, and the love of God the Holy Ghost toward the people of

their eternal choice, must be one and the same, or there would be division in that essential attribute of the Godhead, love. In this point of view, the love of the Son to his people as God, is the same as the love of the Father and of the Holy Ghost: eternal, infinite, unchangeable.

But when we look at the love of Christ in a special manner as the love of him, who, in an incomprehensible yet most blessed manner, unites in one glorious Person Deity and humanity, then we come to a peculiar love; and this is the love of which our text speaks as unpurchased and unpurchaseable.

iii. But why should the love of Christ be of such priceless value? How and why should our blessed Lord love his people with a love so intense that if a man would give all the substance of his house for love like this, it would be utterly contemned? To gain some clearer view of the heavenly mystery, let us look at some of its distinguishing features. The love spoken of is the love of Christ to his Church. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25.)

1. The Church, was, however, *given* him by the Father, and thus we may say that he loves her as his Father's peculiar and *express gift*. Thus the Lord addressed his heavenly Father in those touching words, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me....And all mine are thine and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." (John 17:6, 10.) Christ, then, loves the Church with conjugal love as being the *special gift* of his heavenly Father.

It was from all eternity the purpose of God the Father to glorify his dear Son, and to manifest him to all created intelligences both in heaven and in earth "as the brightness

of his glory and the express image of his Person." In accordance with this divine purpose, the Father determined to give him a people in whom he should be glorified, that every divine perfection might be brought to light, and shine conspicuously forth in the face of Jesus Christ. God being essentially invisible, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see," his glorious, or to speak more correctly, his gracious perfections are invisible too. It is true that "his eternal power and Godhead," as the apostle speaks, "are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20); but those inner perfections, those tender and gracious attributes such as his mercy, pity, lovingkindness, goodness, and truth, could only be made known as revealed in the face of his dear Son. He therefore gave him a Church to be his spouse and bride; united her to him by eternal covenant; prepared for him a body which he should in due time assume; and thus by coming forth from the bosom of the Father as his own Son, taking our nature into union with his own divine Person, our blessed Lord reveals and reflects every perfection of the Godhead. I often bring these things before you with the desire and intention that you may be well established in the truth, and thus not fall a prey to every error and heresy which come flying abroad on the wings of novelty. Jesus then loves the Church with all the peculiar love of a Husband as a most precious gift of his heavenly Father, that he may be glorified in her, and she may be glorified in him, and thus an eternal revenue of glory arise to his God and her God.

2. But again, he loves the Church as *his by purchase*. The Church sank in the Adam-fall in such depths of degradation and apostacy, such alienation from the life of God, such sin and guilt and misery as neither heart can conceive nor tongue express. The image of God in which man had been created was completely marred and defaced; all will or power

of recovery was utterly lost; and nothing seemed to await her but that flaming sword which should send body and soul to eternal destruction. Here, then, *redemption* was necessary, unless the Church should for ever lie under the guilt of the fall, and the chosen spouse of Christ perish with the rest of Adam's ruined race. But who was able to redeem her? Whom would God accept as the Goel? What price would he require? We need not ask. The Goel, the next of kin, is the Lord who has taken her flesh and blood; the price he has paid not less than his own heart's blood. And does not this make her doubly dear to the Lord, that as she was his by the Father's gift, she became as if doubly, additionally his by his own purchase? She was to him a costly gift, for after he had received her he could not for his honour's sake, his love's sake, let her go; no, though to redeem her cost him the deepest agonies of body and soul, pangs of grief which made ministering angels wonder, and his pure body to sweat blood at every pore.

3. But he loves the Church also as *his by conquest*. She was surrounded by foes—sin, Satan, death, and hell; and all these arrayed in arms against her with deadly hatred and destructive force. But every one of those foes must be subdued before she could rise up into the enjoyment of his eternal love. Our Lord fought the bloody battle for her. He fought against sin and overcame it by the cross; he fought against Satan, and by death destroyed him that had the power of death; and when he went up on high spoiled him and all his principalities and powers of their usurped dominion. He fought against death, and conquered the King of terrors by laying down his own life. He overcame the grave by lying in it; and vanquished hell by enduring its pangs on the tree. Thus the Church is his by fair conquest. He fought, he won, and she is the prize of the victory.

4. But she is his also *by possession*. He has redeemed her and bled for her; he has fought and conquered for her; and who shall say that he has not fairly won her? But to win is not to possess. It is in heavenly as in earthly courtship. To win the maid is not to possess the wife. If wooing win the heart, marriage secures the hand. So with the Lord and his bride. He wins by conquest; he woos by grace; but he secures by possession; for when he reveals himself in his beauty and glory, he gains possession of every affection of the believing heart. This, in a gracious sense, antedates the marriage, for *that* is not yet come, nor will until that great and glorious day when the sound shall be heard through the courts of heaven, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7.)

Love like this certainly must be of priceless value. For if the Son of God laid down his precious life to redeem her from the power of sin, death, and hell, she must be of unspeakable value in his eyes; and the love which carried him through all this scene of woe must indeed be, as the apostle speaks, "love that passeth knowledge." If, therefore, a man would give all the substance of his house for this love, it would be utterly contemned. Does this not hold good even naturally? If a large estate, consisting of many thousand acres of land with a noble mansion upon it, were to be offered for sale in this neighbourhood, and a man went into the auction-room and offered £100 for the whole, would he not be hissed and almost kicked out of the room as drunk or insane? At any rate, would not such an offer be "utterly contemned" by the seller and by all who know anything of the value of the property? So we may say in a spiritual sense: if a man come before the Lord and say, "What is this love of thine to be sold for? Here is my body: shall I give my body to be burnt? Will that buy it?" "No;" has not the Lord already decided this

point by the declaration of the apostle, "Though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing?" "Shall I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, give all my property away in charity, go into a monastery, wear sackcloth, and be under strict rule of penance and silence all the rest of my life? Will not that buy this love?" "No," the Lord still replies, "It profiteth nothing." "It would be utterly contemned." "Shall I devote to obtain it every faculty of my mind and body, toil and toil after it night and day with a whole army of tears and cries: will not this help me to win at last this heavenly love?" "No," says the Lord; "even that would be utterly contemned." Not that any man really does this or attempts or means to do it, for all these exertions of the creature, could they be accomplished, would be not to win the love of Christ but to establish its own righteousness: and were a man to make such sacrifices out of a principle of love to the Lord, it would show that the Lord had touched his heart by his grace. But assuming that a man gave all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned.

iv. But this will be still more plainly seen if we take a glance at its peculiar and wondrous character.

1. This love is *infinite* as being the love of an infinite God. But what is man? A finite creature at the best, even were he not a defiled, polluted worm of earth. Then all he can offer is the offering of a finite creature; and can infinite love be purchased by a finite price?

2. Again, man's love is changeable. He cannot ensure, if he begin to love, that he will go on loving up to the end. Are there not a thousand objects to catch his roving affections, and have we not already had proof upon proof that human love is as fickle as the wind and as changeable as the

weather? Can he, then, buy immutable by changeable love? To say the least of it, the love of Christ to his people is from everlasting to everlasting, and all that man's love can be is just now and then a scrap of thought, or a struggling remnant of affection gathered up and thrown to the Lord as snatched from other objects and other purposes. If man will, then, attempt such a barter, need he wonder if it "be utterly contemned?" The Lord may well say to all such bargainers what he said of old to those who offered polluted bread upon his altar: "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 1:8.) Try your bargains with your fellow-men. Offer an Australian miner a rusty nail for his golden nugget. Offer the tax-gatherer a shilling for a sovereign.

3. But this love is *pure* and *holy*, because it is the love of him who is, in his divine nature, "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," and in his sacred humanity "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." (Exod. 15:11; 1 Peter 1:19.) But at the very best, all man can give is love stained and polluted with indwelling corruption. May we not, then, well come to the conclusion that "if a man would give all the substance of his house for this love, it would be utterly contemned?"

Who, then, is to have it? Who is to have any interest in, who is to win any possession of love like this? If it be beyond all price and all purchase, who of the sons of men can hope to possess it? To this we answer, *that* may be given as a boon which cannot be bought at a price. This is just the conclusion to which I wish to bring you, that being unpurchaseable this love is a *gift*, sovereign, distinguishing, and free—sovereign in its source, distinguishing in its objects, free in its disposal.

II.—But this description of the wondrous nature of the love of Christ brings us to our next point, which is to show *Love in its unquenchable strength*. "*Love is strong as death;*" "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*"

By these two striking figures the Holy Spirit sets forth the strength of the love of Christ. We will look at them separately.

i. The first comparison is taken from the *strength of death*. It is as if the blessed Spirit searched for a figure whereby to convey to our mind most strongly, clearly, and expressively the amazing strength of the love of Christ. How strong *death* is! How, like the scythe of the harvest-man, it never ceases swinging in its career, until it has mowed the whole crop down! How many generations, for instance, have lived in this ancient town since it was called by its present name! And where are they now? Mowed down by the strong arm of death. But not only here. Thousands, and millions, and myriads of millions have all fallen before this scythe since Adam fell. It will be too strong for every person here. You and I, and all who now breathe the vital air and tread this earthly ball, will sooner or later fall before this merciless, unsparing conqueror of the whole human race. Youth is strong, but how much stronger death often is; for it mows down the young as well as the old. Health may be strong, but death is stronger still; for how oft "one dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, when his breasts are full of milk and his bones are moistened with marrow." (Job 21:23, 24.) Medicine is strong; and yet how, in spite of all the aids and appliances of the medical art, death goes on to seize victim after victim, and lays them in the grave. Resolutions are strong; but O how death sweeps away all resolutions with the chilling blast of his lips, and tramples

down promises with his giant feet as the mower tramples down the weeds in the field as he mows down the corn before him. Who was stronger than Samson? But death was stronger than he, yea, stronger than the pillars of the house of Dagon which he pulled down over his head. Who was wiser than Solomon? Yet all his wisdom saved him not from the grasp of death. Who lived longer than the antediluvians—some more than 800, some than 900 years? And yet, when we read the number of their years, it seems as if at the end of every verse which records their age, death tolled their funeral knell. "And he died"—"and he died"—"and he died!" falls with hollow sound on the ear. Two only of all the sons of men since sin entered into the world, and death by sin, have escaped and proved stronger than he. One is Enoch, who "was translated that he should not see death, and was not found because God had translated him" (Heb. 11:5); and the other Elijah, who was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire.

How strong, then, that love must be which is as strong as death; yea, in a sense, stronger still, for our blessed Lord's love was even stronger than death, for it was not overcome by it, but rather overcame it. Nay, he proved himself, as the Lord of life, not only stronger than death, but stronger than death's Master, for "through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Heb. 2:14.) On the cross he grappled with death, and by dying overcame him who had overcome all; and then rising triumphantly from the grave, proclaimed the victory won, of which he had spoken in anticipation: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." (John 11:25, 26.) Thus the blessed Lord took the sting out of him who had stung all to death; and robbed him of his victory who, as the King of terrors, had erected his throne of conquest over slaughtered millions.

But there is another death over which the Lord's love triumphed, for his love being "strong as death," is stronger than *all* deaths, and that is, death in *sin*—the alienation of fallen man from the life of God as the consequence of the fall. But how strong is that death! How death in sin, alienation from the life of God, holds thousands and tens of thousands in its fast embrace; and is so strong that nothing can break it up but the power of God, through our blessed Lord's mediation, quickening the dead soul, and thus overcoming that death in sin which holds fast in chains all the human race.

But there is a third death—and his love is stronger than that also—I mean *eternal death*—what the scripture calls "the second death," even full and final banishment from the presence of God into that dreary abode of everlasting woe "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." But the love of Christ is stronger even than that, for he endured the wrath of God in his own Person on the tree, and by enduring the miseries of the second death under the hidings of his Father's countenance, proved that love in his bosom was stronger than the very pangs of hell. How strong, then, must be that love which is stronger than death temporal, stronger than death spiritual, stronger than death eternal!

But by her description of love, "as strong as death," we may understand the Bride to express the strength of her own love to the Lord as well as that of his to her, for she speaks of a peculiar quality of all love that is really divine. Now as her love is a reflection of his, as such it is of divine origin; for "love is of God" (1 John 4:7), and is "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 5:5.) *Her* love, therefore, is strong as death natural, and we may say stronger, for death that will destroy the body cannot destroy the soul, nor the love of God which has been shed abroad in it. Yea, it is

stronger than death spiritual, for it lives and loves in spite of it now; and than death eternal, for it will triumph over it in the resurrection morn.

ii. But the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of the Bride, uses another figure to set forth the insuperable strength of love divine. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

Two ideas are, in fact, couched under these words. 1, That of *fire*, which many waters cannot quench; 2, Of *life*, which many floods cannot drown. Let us look at each separately.

Our blessed Lord came into this world on an errand of love. "Then said I, Lo! I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me," the book written by the finger of eternal love] "to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7.) But in the execution of this will he had to wade through deep waters. Hear his own dolorous cries as he waded through them, and well nigh sank under them! "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul." (Psa. 69:1.) It was not an easy conquest that the Lord gained over sin, death, and hell. He had to endure what no heart can conceive or tongue express; for as the prophet speaks, "The Lord laid on him," or, as we read in the margin, "made to meet on him," "the iniquities of us all." (Isa. 53:6.) Thus, as a mighty flood, all the iniquities of God's people were made to meet on the head of Jesus. Here "deep called to deep at the noise of God's waterspouts;" here the innocent sufferer cried out, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Psa. 42:7.)

But we will consider these "waters" a little more closely and distinctly.

1. First view the *waters of affliction* in which our blessed Lord

had to wade, as it were, up to his very neck. From the manger to the cross, from Bethlehem to Calvary, what was our Lord's life but a scene of constant affliction and sorrow? "He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Grief and our blessed Lord were intimate friends—bosom companions, never separated until the dying cry, "It is finished!" proclaimed to heaven and earth that the work of salvation being accomplished, grief was gone, and now nothing remained but "the joy set before him for which he endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. 12:2.)

2. But view the expression, "waters," as signifying *opposition* made to the flame of love, for the idea evidently is of water being naturally opposed to fire and used to quench it. The bride then seems to seek for a figure which shall express the insuperable strength of love against all opposition; and she therefore compares it to a hidden fire which burns and burns unquenched and unquenchable, whatever be the amount of water poured upon it. Thus the figure expresses the flame of holy love which burned in the heart of the Redeemer as unquenchable by any opposition made to it. In this sense we may view the *coldness, deadness, and unbelief of his people*, as opposing the love of Christ. How soon is earthly love cooled by opposition! A little ingratitude, a few hard speeches, cold words or even cold looks, seem often almost sufficient to quench love that once shone out warm and bright; and how often, too, even without these cold waters thrown upon it does it appear as if ready to die out of itself. But the love of Christ was unquenchable by all those waters. Not all the ingratitude, unbelief, or coldness of his people could quench his eternal love to them. He knew what the Church was in herself, and ever would be; how cold and wandering her affections, how roving her desires, how backsliding her heart! But all these waters could not extinguish his love. It still burnt as a holy flame in his bosom,

unquenched, unquenchable.

But the words will apply also to *her* love as well as to *his*, for as many waters could not quench the love of Christ, so many waters cannot quench love to Christ. Her love, like his, has many waters cast upon it; sometimes from the world—that worldly multitude without and within, which is compared to "many waters" in the description of "the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet," whose judgment John was called to see (Rev. 17:1); sometimes from the *opposition in her carnal mind* to all good, which as water to fire, is opposed to the holy flame of spiritual love which would burn in her bosom.

iii. But the Holy Spirit uses even a stronger term than waters to set forth the opposition made to the love of Christ. It is as though he would intensify the expression by bringing forward a figure of still deeper import. "Neither can the *floods* drown it." The idea expressed here is that of a life so strong that all the floods that swell and roar and rush tumultuously over it cannot drown it. There is life in love; an undying, indestructible life. Thus the eternal life of Christ was in his eternal love; and as this life could not die, this love could not be drowned. But look at the floods which swept over it!

I. View first the dreadful *wrath of God* which our blessed Lord had to endure in the garden. Hear him crying, "Let this cup pass from me," as if it were filled with such intense bitterness that he shrank from it in dismay. Who can conceive the floods of intolerable wrath which burst, so to speak, upon his sacred head, when upon the cross, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, he had to endure the ire of God due to them all? Who can realise any just or adequate idea of the intolerable pangs of hell which those sins merited and which he endured; or the dreadful displeasure of God as manifested in the withdrawing from him of the light of that countenance,

in which he had never before seen anything but ineffable complacency and infinite love? How the distress and agony endured by the blessed Lord are expressed by him in the words of that Psalm which so peculiarly sets forth his sufferings, "I sink in deep waters, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (Psalm 69:2.) The "deep mire where there is no standing" is the same as "the horrible pit and miry clay" spoken of in Psalm 40., and signifies that overwhelming sense of the wrath of God under which he sank as into a deep and horrible pit of miry clay to which there was no bottom.

2. View, again, with me, *Satan* flooding our blessed Lord with every kind of abominable temptation. We read of Jesus being "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15.) He must, then, have felt all the weight and power of the temptations of Satan in all points, as indeed we know he did in the wilderness. But though these floods rolled with awful weight over his soul, they did not and could not drown the life of his love.

3. But view also the floods of ungodly men which often make us afraid, but did not daunt his holy heart nor damp his blessed confidence. David, personating the Lord in his suffering character, says, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." (Psalm 18:4, 5.) But in this extremity he cried to the Lord and obtained deliverance: "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears." (Verse 6.) So our blessed Redeemer, "when he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, was

heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7); and thus these floods did not drown the life of love in his holy soul.

Nor can they drown the life of love in a believer's heart. It is as true of the love of the Church to Christ as of the love of Christ to the Church, that many floods—floods of opposition, trial, temptation, inward and outward ungodliness—which would sweep away every vestige of earthly love, cannot quench the flame or drown the life of love that is really divine.

III.—But we have now to view Love in its *cruel accompaniment*: "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."

i. Jealousy is for the most part the accompaniment of love; and the warmer the love the hotter the jealousy. Where there is no love, there is no jealousy; but where love exists, jealousy is for the most part its invariable companion. As it is in human, so in divine love: jealousy is ever the accompaniment of love divine.

1. View it, then, first, as being in the very heart of Christ; for love being in the heart of Christ, jealousy will be there too. But in his case it is not mixed with sin and infirmity, as in us, but is a holy jealousy, which we may rather call zeal. Thus we read of the Lord being "clad with zeal as a cloak" (Isa. 59:17); and the Church asks him, "Where is thy zeal and thy strength?" (Isa. 63:15.) Nay, we find God speaking of himself, not only as zealous but jealous: "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exod. 20:5); he declares that "his people provoke him to jealousy" (Deut. 32:16); and that he "stirs up jealousy like a man of war." (Isa. 42:13.) This zeal or jealousy our blessed Lord eminently felt. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:17.)

But this zeal or jealousy the Bride calls "cruel as the grave." O how cruel the grave is, has been, and ever will be, as long as there is a grave left on earth to swallow up in its devouring maw the remains of a fondly loved object of affection! How cruel the grave seems to be that swallows up the beloved husband or the fond, affectionate wife; the blooming daughter in the flower of youth and beauty, or the brave, manly son in the very prime and vigour of life. How cruel the grave that often separates lovers when perhaps the wedding day has been fixed. All is fond anticipation, but death comes; the cruel grave opens its mouth, and the intended bride or bridegroom is stretched in that gloomy abode. O how cruel the grave is—sparing no age or sex, pitying no relationship, divorcing the tenderest ties, and triumphing over all the claims of human affection. But jealousy is as cruel as this cruel grave. How can this be true? What cruelty can there be in jealousy comparable to the cruelty of the all-devouring grave? Its cruelty consists in this, that nothing but the removal of the rival can assuage its torments. "Jealousy," says Solomon, "is the rage of a man; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance." (Prov. 6:34.) Take this feature then first as regards the Lord's jealousy. There are rivals to the love of his heart—the world, sin, and self. The Lord's jealousy, therefore, burns against them. Any favour shown to the rival is injustice to the true lover; jealousy, therefore, must and will put it out of the way. Thus if the Lord take away from us any portion of this world's good, strike a deadly blow at our sins, or cut off the right arm of self, it is but like a jealous lover stabbing a rival and letting out his heart's blood on the pavement. Still, as coming in this severe way, the stroke seems cruel, though really dealt in mercy. Thus Job complained, "Thou art become cruel to me." (Job 30:21.) So the Lord says, "I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the

chastisement of a cruel one." (Jer. 30:14.)

But there is something more said about this jealousy: "The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." What a tormenting passion is jealousy! tormenting to its miserable possessor, and tormenting to all within its reach and influence! A jealous wife! can there be a greater trial to a husband? How Abraham, how Jacob suffered under this house scourge, when Sarah was jealous of Hagar and Rachel of Leah! And many a good man has had to endure almost a life of misery from the same cause, scarcely daring to look or speak for fear of this home torment. Truly "its coals are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame."

But the jealousy in our text seems to be rather a godly jealousy, as the apostle speaks of himself: "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy." (2 Cor. 11:2.) So sometimes a holy, godly jealousy burns very hot in a Christian's bosom. "The coals thereof are coals of fire," which hath not an ordinary but "a vehement flame." It is literally, in the original, "the flame of God;" that is, it is a flame which has God for its author and God for its end; and as such it will burn up everything contrary to God and godliness. If you love the Lord with any warmth of holy affection and godly jealousy, and are pining for some manifestation of his love, you will be jealous of everything which intercepts the beams of his favour; and your jealousy will burn with a vehement flame against everything which makes the Lord hide from you the light of his countenance. If you loved a person very much, but were doing something which sadly grieved his heart, and he in consequence felt it necessary to carry himself coldly towards you, would you not put away that thing, whatever it were, which intercepted his love? It might cost you a great sacrifice, and there might be a hard struggle between the love of self and the love of the individual; but jealousy would come to your help, and with its vehement

flame would burn up that which hindered the affection of the beloved object and intercepted its expression; and this in proportion to your love, for the more loved the object, the more vehement is the flame of jealousy to burn up everything which comes in the shape of a rival. Don't you think if a young woman was warmly attached to a young man and he to her, and he saw something in her which made him act coldly towards her, she would if she knew it avoid that conduct which damped or restrained his love? But suppose that she saw him inclined to pay attention to another, would not her jealousy make her still more decided to win back his affection at any cost or sacrifice? Thus though jealousy has its torments, it is not without its benefits.

So, though the Church here was languishing and complaining, yet the very expression of her jealousy, showed there was a depth of affection in her heart which could not be satisfied, but by some personal manifestation of the Lord's presence and love. This made her jealous of all or any who were enjoying what she longed for. Do you not sometimes feel the same?

When, for instance, you learn that the Lord has blessed, say, a dear friend of yours, under some sermon which you heard too, and yet did not bless you; sent the word with power into his heart, and sent you home barren and wretched, was it not almost like Rachel looking at Leah with a fine babe in her arms and she a barren stock? What jealousy, with its coals of fire and its vehement flame, tormented your mind! But if it is all one to you whether you hear the word with power or not, if you can sit and sleep under a sermon with all the coolness possible, and never feel jealousy over yourself or jealous against another more favoured than you, what does it show? That you have not a grain of love toward the blessed Lord, for had you a particle of love, you would have a grain of

jealousy with it; and one grain of jealousy would burn like a live coal in your bosom, and make you dissatisfied with everything but the Lord's presence and manifested blessing to your own soul.

IV.—But time admonishes me to proceed to our fourth point, *Love in its sealed manifestation*: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm."

The Spouse could not be satisfied with knowing that love was strong as death, and being perfectly convinced that many waters could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it; still less could she be satisfied with cruel jealousy and being burnt and consumed in that most vehement flame. She wanted a sealed manifestation of this love to her soul, and therefore breaks out, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm."

In opening up these words, let me take a few scriptural illustrations to show the mind and meaning of the Spirit in using the figure of the seal.

i. In ancient times, pen, ink, and paper, such common implements with us, were little known. Seals, therefore, were much used for various purposes not now required, and being thus constantly needed, were often worn upon the wrist or finger. The Spouse, therefore, using the figure, begs of the Lord to "set her as a seal upon his heart, and as a seal upon his arm," that she might have those precious things revealed to her heart and conspicuously displayed, which are signified by her figurative language.

1. A seal in Scripture sometimes signifies a thing that is *secret* or hidden from view. Thus we read of a book that is "sealed," which "men deliver to one that is learned, saying,

Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed." (Isa. 29:11.) To understand this, we should bear in mind that books in ancient times were not divided into pages, but were written on a long continuous roll, and that when rolled up a seal was sometimes put on its end, of which the consequence was, that it could not be opened, and thus its contents were completely concealed, and the whole locked up under a seal of secrecy. Thus the Lord's love is a hidden, a secret love. Nor can this love be known, as being hidden in the bosom of Christ, until revealed to the soul; but when inwardly and experimentally revealed, then the seal is opened and the book read; and in that book every line is then seen to be dipped in blood and love.

2. But a seal also has another meaning in Scripture; it signifies what is *secure as being closed up*. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." As water is very scarce and precious in the East, the proprietor of a well often secured it from being stolen by rolling a large stone to the mouth, and putting a seal upon it for surer preservation. Thus when Pilate told the Pharisees to secure the sepulchre of the Lord that the disciples might not steal his body away, "they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch." (Matt. 27:66.) In that sense, therefore, sealing signifies security. Thus the Bride longed to see and feel her eternal security stamped on Christ's heart and openly displayed on Christ's arm.

3. In another sense the figure of a seal is used to mean *ratification, attestation*; as we ratify a deed by putting our seal to it. So we read of the "sealed evidence" of the purchase of the field, which Jeremiah in the prison bought of his uncle's son. (Jer. 32:14.) This is spiritually the sealing "witness of the Spirit to our spirit, that we are the children of

God" (Rom. 8:16); and is spoken of by the apostle in these words: "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1:13.)

Now in these three senses, the Spouse cries, "Set me as a seal upon thine *heart*." The bride longed to be near to Christ's heart, to have, as it were, her name deeply cut on his breast. There is an allusion here to the ephod of the High Priest under the law which was suspended on his shoulders by two onyx stones, bearing the names of the tribes of Israel, six on each stone. But besides this, he wore also a breastplate, in which there were twelve precious stones, four in a row, and on each, "like the engravings of a signet," was cut the name of a tribe of Israel. (Exod. 28:11, 21.) So our great High Priest bears engraved on his heart the names of his dear people; and in allusion to this, the bride says, "Set me as a seal on thine heart" that I may be presented before the throne as worn on thy bosom before the Lord continually.

ii. But she also says, "*Set me as a seal upon thine arm*." The King's seal was very precious in his eyes and those of his subjects. Thus, speaking of a wicked king of Israel, the Lord says, "Though Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer. 22:24); and so again, "O Zerubbabel, my servant, I will make thee as a signet" (Hagg. 2:23), that is as precious and valuable as a king's seal. We may well understand that a signet in those days, being the king's seal to ratify and attest every deed, was peculiarly valuable, as stamping it with royal authority, and without which it could not be valid. Thus Joseph had the King's ring put on his hand, to stamp all his acts in the King's name and by his authority. For the signet was usually worn on the arm as a kind of bracelet, that it might be more conspicuous than a ring on the finger. Thus the bride says, "Set me as a seal upon thine arm openly and

visibly, that I may not only be borne on thy bosom as a sweet pledge of love there, but worn on thine arm as enjoying some conspicuous manifestation of thy love." Nothing, then, could satisfy her but these two choice blessings—the one inward, the other outward; the one in Christ's heart, the other on Christ's arm—love in all its secret reality, love in all its conspicuous manifestation.

Now can you enter at all into the language of our text? Have you any of the feelings expressed in it? Have I given utterance this morning to any secret thoughts of your mind, any warm desires of your soul? If I have, the Lord add the blessing.