

S E R M O N XVII.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH OF THE
EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS, Chap. iii. Ver. 17, 18, and 19.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and founded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

WE have the blessed apostle in this epistle, laying before the saints at Ephesus, a large and glorious view of the riches of free and sovereign grace. He was at the time he wrote this epistle, a prisoner for Christ. But though he was bound, the word of God was not bound. His prison was turned into a palace, he having here the presence of Christ. And here his heart was enlarged, and the Holy Ghost inspires and assists him to write an epistle to the believers in Christ Jesus, which contains in it the great and deep things of God. Having laid before the persons unto whom he wrote, the great

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articles of our most holy faith, and considered the fountain from whence all our spiritual blessings flow, namely, the free grace of God: he enters into a particular enumeration of those blessings and benefits. As first, our election in Christ. God, the Father, says he, chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world. He chose and appointed him, and set him up to be the great head of his body, the church; and he chose the elect in him, as members in him their head; and he blessed them in him, with all spiritual blessings. He accepted them in the beloved; and all to the praise of the glory of his own grace. He sent his Son to redeem his church, and to obtain for his people the forgiveness of their sins, through the shedding of his most precious blood; and he gives his Spirit unto his people, to reveal Christ in them, as their hope of glory. The apostle, having largely dwelt upon the riches of divine grace, and having taken a view of the miserable state and condition of mankind by nature; and how God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he had loved those saints at Ephesus, from everlasting, had quickened them from a death of trespasses and sins; does in this chapter, pray unto God for them, to the end that their hearts might be divinely and powerfully affected with these great and important truths. The words of our text, are a part of Paul's prayer, in which he prays like an apostle indeed: for he begs here for the greatest blessings, which believers can, in this life, enjoy, or God himself can bestow upon them. It may be said, that this is the greatest prayer which is

to be found in the New Testament, that of our Lord in the seventeenth of John only excepted. Before I enter upon the words now read, I would observe, that the apostle takes notice of the concern the whole trinity have in our spiritual interest and salvation. As they are jointly concerned in our salvation, so they are graciously pleased to discover their love and grace unto us, in their actings towards and upon us. The prayer which lies before us, for our consideration, is addressed unto God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this at once holds forth unspeakable comfort to believers in Christ, since he who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is our Father in him. Believers are God's adopted children. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.* The address is unto God, *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.* There is but one Father: all the saints in heaven and earth, belong to the same Father, even God. They are all born of the same Spirit: are all united unto the same head: they are all equally beloved of the Father: all equally accepted in the beloved: all built upon the same foundation, which is an eternal one, even Christ Jesus. They are all perfectly alike justified from all things, and clothed with the everlasting garment of Christ's righteousness. They are all washed in the blood of the Lamb; and are all freely pardoned, through the redemption which

is in Christ Jesus. They are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus, and they will all one day partake of the same eternal glory. They are all the objects of JEHOVAH'S delight, the purchase of his Son's blood; and God the Father has put on all the bowels of a Father's love and mercy, and will exercise them towards, and upon his beloved children in Christ Jesus. The apostle would have us to consider the relation, to the end that we may see that the Father's love towards us is in Christ, that he loved us in him, and upon his account; and that as he loved Christ as mediator before the foundation of the world, so as early did he love his people. *Thou hast loved them,* says Jesus unto his Father, *as thou hast loved me.* God, the Father, looks upon his people with the same delight, and views them with the same complacency as he does Christ himself; for he views them in him, and in him is well pleased with them. He rests in his love towards them, and joys over them with singing. He begs this blessing of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, that he would grant unto them according to the riches of his grace, and *the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.* He begs the Father that he would grant unto them, according to the riches of his glory, or, according to, and out of that rich, plenteous, and glorious fulness of grace and strength in Christ Jesus, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. Here we may observe, that the strengthening our inner man, or the spirit, or soul of man, which is the seat of grace, is the work of God

the Spirit: and that the way whereby he strengthens his people, is, by leading them to the fulness of grace and strength in Christ; by shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts; by applying the promises of the gospel; and by making the gospel itself useful unto them, causing them to go on from strength to strength. Now we come to the words of our text, in which are contained the following petitions.

First, That Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith.

Secondly, That they may be rooted and grounded in love, that is, in the love of God towards them, and 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. And,

Thirdly, the end hereof, which was, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God.

I would first consider this petition, *that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* Now, here it must be observed, that the apostle is praying according to the elevation of his own spirit. He is praying for those who were believers; and he is praying for the greatest blessings God could possibly vouchsafe, or bestow, upon them in this life, or they could possibly attain. It is, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. Now here let it be observed, that the blessing prayed for, is for Christ to dwell in the hearts of believers. And by Christ's dwelling in the heart, is meant his personal indwelling there. Indeed, the whole blessed trinity dwell in the saints. The Father is said to dwell

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in us, John i. 4, 12, 13. *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us: and, hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.* And verse the 15th. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* Now it is evident that this refers to God, the Father, for he is spoken of in the intermediate verse, the 14th, *Who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world;* and the apostle speaks of God as distinct from Christ. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, that is, Christ, God dwelleth in him—*who? the Father. The Spirit likewise dwells in believers. Rom. viii. 11. *He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* And you see that Jesus Christ likewise dwelleth in believers. This you have in our text: *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith:* so that all the three divine persons dwell in believers. Now here let us inquire, what it is to have Christ thus dwelling in the heart by faith. Jesus Christ dwells in the heart, as a king in his palace, to rule and protect; and, as a master in his family, to provide for his people; and as their life, to quicken them. Christ dwells not in their heads and tongues, but in their hearts. And this is, where no good dwells but himself and his grace; where sin dwells, and where he is often slighted, opposed, and rebelled against; and the means by which he dwells there, is faith. To have Christ dwell in the heart, is to have a spiritual sight of him, a spiritual knowledge of him, which makes him precious, and present unto the soul. It is a spiritual sight of him, such sight and knowledge,

as let down Christ into the soul, or heart, and affect all there. It is to have the heart cleave wholly unto him for salvation. To be affected with the glories of his person; with his wondrous love, grace, and mercy; with his sorrows and sufferings, his blood and righteousness. There is a threefold union between Christ and his church. The first is relative, whereby we are said to be his, and he ours; thus he is called the husband, and the church his spouse: and, before husband and wife company together, there is such a relation made by marriage, that the husband may be in one place, and the wife in another, so that there can be no communion between them, while yet they are husband and wife: so is the union between Christ and his people,—as complete, says Dr. Goodwin, in the relation of it, before he acts any thing upon them, though he be in heaven and they on earth, as if they were in heaven with him. The second is, an actual inbeing of his person in his people, which is as the soul dwells in the body: for as the soul is the principle of life, and actuates, and quickens the whole body, so Jesus Christ is the principle of all spiritual life, and dwells in his people; and he dwells in them, to make, and keep them alive to God; and he is their life, as truly as he is their righteousness. Hence the apostle says, *Christ liveth in me*. The third is, by way of object. When by faith we view Christ as the visual faculty views an object, and as the sight of a person introduces an idea of him into the heart or mind of another; so Christ, as the object of faith, is said to dwell in us. Take the whole of Jesus Christ, what-

soever you know of him, and learn of him, to act faith upon, and herein to view him : thus Jesus Christ is let down into your souls, and hereby he dwells in you, making impressions on your souls, according to what you know of him ; and he doth accordingly work in you dispositions towards, and adorations of him. The life of the tree is in the root : Jesus Christ is the root of the righteous ; and as the life of the root is diffused into all the branches, so Jesus Christ, dwelling in the heart, quickens, enlightens, and enlivens the soul. It is not so much the believer's life, as Christ's living in him, which produceth all the acts of spiritual life. Christ is said to dwell in the heart by faith, because faith takes in those spiritual discoveries of Christ, which the Holy Ghost makes by the word. And Christ may be said to dwell in the heart, when faith is exercising itself upon, and is cleaving unto him. Faith is to the soul, what the eye is to the body : and Jesus Christ is the great object of faith. As he dwells in the heart by faith, so he enlightens the understanding with the knowledge of his glorious person. The will chooses him for its everlasting portion ; the heart loves him, and cleaves unto him ; the conscience rests perfectly satisfied with him ; and the outward and inward man, submit to the sceptre of his grace. And here we may justly admire the mercy. What an astonishing favour is this, believers, to have Christ dwelling in us, who is the light of heaven, and the song of paradise ! Happy, inexpressibly happy is the soul that can say, *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me !*

I go on to consider, secondly, the next petition in this prayer, which is, that they may be *rooted and grounded in love*. Here I would inquire, what love the apostle would have them rooted and grounded in, and answer, it must be the love of God. A love, which is everlastingly fixed upon the persons of his people in Christ Jesus, and which never varies; and the saints are brought to know this love of God in Christ towards them, by the Holy Ghost. He discovers unto them the nature, the freeness, the fullness, and the blessings of it: and he, by leading them into communion with God in Christ, discovers unto them their personal interest therein, and sheds this love abroad in their hearts, and warms their souls with it. The love of God is the root and foundation of salvation; it is immovable. And the people of God stand in need of being rooted and grounded in the knowledge of it. In order to be rooted and grounded in it, we should carefully attend to what the Scriptures reveal concerning it: and by the Scriptures we learn, that God's love towards us, in his dear Son, springs from his own sovereignty, without any motive or cause in us; and that it is continued towards us, not upon the account of what we are, but upon the account of our union with Jesus Christ, which can never be destroyed. For the Father chose us in Christ from everlasting; and he loved us in Christ from the days of eternity. And therefore, nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now, because the people of God, through the workings of their legal hearts, and through the

prevalency of unbelief, are apt to call in question their interest in God's love, especially in times of darkness and temptation, it is necessary for them to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge and belief of God's love towards them in his dear Son, to the end that they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God towards them. Comprehend it they cannot, but by the light and teaching of the Holy Ghost; and the way and method of his teaching, is by the word. He shines upon the Scriptures and opens the understandings of his people, that they may know the glorious truths contained in them. The Holy Ghost, who searches all things, yea, the deep things of God, has been pleased to reveal the love of the Father and the Son, in all its glorious fullness and freeness in the word. And by the word, and by his own sacred light and teaching, he directs the hearts of his people into the love of God; and makes such clear and blessed discoveries of it unto them, as fill their souls with joy unspeakable and full of glory. This love is here said to have breadth, and length, and depth, and height, in it. If we view the breadth of it, it is to all the elect in all ages, and in all places. The length of it reaches from eternity to eternity. It was from eternity in the heart of God towards his people. It never had beginning, and it never will have end. That it was from everlasting, appears from their being chosen in Christ, for they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. And God's love towards them is said to be an everlasting love.

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I have, says JEHOVAH, loved thee with an everlasting love. The apostle tells us, that nothing can separate us, believers, from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The love of God is the fountain, from whence all our blessings and blessedness flow, and this love triumphs over all our sins and miseries. When this love is revealed unto us, and shed abroad in our hearts, it makes a marvellous change and alteration in us, but it makes none in JEHOVAH; for his love, his great love, wherewith he loved us, was the same from before all worlds, before it was manifested unto us, and it continues to be the same unto us, whether we have the comfort of it, or not. It is as free, as full, as boundless, as bottomless, and as perfect now, as it will be when we are in heaven. God will not love you, believers, more, nor better, when you are in glory, than he does now. And, I may add, it is a greater thing to believe this love, than to enjoy it; for every believer upon earth, believes more of it, than he will ever enjoy of it, even in heaven. Here below, the people of God find his love in its discoveries and manifestations unto them, to be as Ezekiel's vision of the holy waters; which were first to the ankles, then reached to the knees, next to the loins, and then became a great river which could not be passed over. And so in heaven, the saints will be sailing over the boundless and bottomless sea of God's love, throughout eternity, and will never find a shore. But they will prove it to be as boundless, infinite, and incomprehensible, as Godhead itself. If we survey the breadth of God's

love, it extends to all the elect, in every age, in every place, in every state and case. It encircles and covers them: as for its depth, it is to saints in the lowest state of life; and in its height, it will bring them to an exalted state, and to eternal glory. Now, it is faith only which has a view of this wonderful love. All the discoveries which the Holy Ghost makes unto us of the love of the Father, and of the love of Christ, are in the word and by the word: and we are brought to a spiritual discernment thereof by faith. The Holy Spirit enables us by faith to view, with wonder, the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, of God's love in Christ Jesus towards us. God's love appears in the gift of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The love of Christ appears in giving himself: he gave himself for us: he loved his people from the days of eternity: he rejoiced from everlasting in the habitable parts of his earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. The love of Christ brought him down from the highest heavens; and out of his infinite love, he clothed himself with our nature, and was made in the likeness of man; and his sufferings, his agony, and bloody sweat in the garden, the crown of thorns which he wore, and the wrath and curse which he endured, when he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, made it evidently appear, that his love was stronger than death, and such as many waters could not quench. Its heights, and lengths, and depths, and breadths, fully appear in the everlasting gospel. The love of Christ broke out in full splendour, and blazed

forth in a most stupendous manner, when he hung upon the cross as the sacrifice for sin. The efficacy of Christ's love will be felt upon earth, in the hearts of his people, until time shall be no more; and it will be enjoyed by the saints in heaven, throughout the ages of eternity. *The love of Christ*, the apostle says, *passeth knowledge*. The love of Christ, to his church and people, is a special and peculiar love. It is the wonder of angels, who are nonplussed what to think or say of it. It is the wonder of saints in glory, who are full of the praises of it. And it is the wonder of saints upon earth: it is viewed by them, and esteemed by them to be wonderful love. Indeed, a chain of holy wonders appears in it. The person of Christ is wonderful, God and man united in one Christ. The work of Christ is wonderful: God in our nature, living, obeying, suffering, and laying down his life for us. The victory which Christ obtained over sin, Satan, death, and hell, is wonderful! Sin is conquered by our Immanuel. Sin, which has been the cause of every evil; which had its entrance into our world by means of the first man's transgression, bringing eternal damnation upon millions and millions of mankind sinners, and would defy all the armies of the living God: yet, this accursed enemy is conquered, for the elect, by the Almighty Conqueror, Christ Jesus. This victory over sin is alone reserved for Christ. It will not, nor can it, die by any other hand. To vanquish it, is the summit of his glory as Mediator; and hence his highest title, the memory of which he bears

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written in his name *JESUS*; *for he shall save his people from their sins.* Therefore, the apostle Paul, his chief herald, proclaims this victory with a world of solemnity and triumph. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Sin is, by our Jesus, who is almighty, put away. It is removed from the persons of his people. It has been imputed unto him, and borne by him in his own body on the tree. He has destroyed the power of it by his dying: so that by the death of Christ and his sacrifice, sin is put away out of the sight of God, and cast, as it were, into the depth of the sea; yea, swallowed up in the red sea of his blood. It cannot damn those for whom Christ suffered: nor can it reign in and over those in whose heart Christ dwells. The blood of Christ cleanses from the guilt and filth of sin; and the Spirit of Christ subdues and conquers the reign, power, and dominion of sin. Christ has conquered Satan: *for he was manifested for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* He has wounded this dragon, and triumphed over all the powers of darkness, over principalities and powers, and eternally spoiled them: he has taken the prey from the mighty, and the lawful captive he has delivered. He has likewise conquered death and hell; and, as the conqueror, he has the keys of death and hell. *I,* says Jesus to the beloved John, *am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.* Christ's love, when viewed

by faith, in the light of the word, and by the light of God's spirit, is such, so great, so free, so full, so boundless and infinite, that it passeth knowledge. The saints upon earth cannot fully comprehend it, and yet the apostle is praying for them, that their knowledge of it, which was imperfect, might be increased—that they might know more of it—believe more of it; and be going on diving deeper and deeper into it.

This brings us, thirdly, to view the last petition in this prayer, which is great indeed: *That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.* What a petition is this! It contains all that God can bestow, or his saints enjoy. Now, by it we are not to understand, the full comprehension of the Divine Being, nor a full knowledge of his infinite and divine perfections; but rather, a being filled with such a view of God, as our Father in Christ Jesus, as might produce peace in our consciences, and love in our hearts; arising from the apprehension we have of him in his well-beloved Son. Indeed, here it is that the glory of God shines forth—in the person of Jesus. In Jesus, as the head of his body the church, it hath pleased the Father, that all fulness should dwell, and it dwells in him for the use of his members. Now we may be said to be filled with the fulness of God, when the soul has a satisfying view of God's love and grace; when it has views of God's pardoning mercy, and of the plenteous redemption of Christ; when the soul is led to view the rich grace of the covenant of life and peace which is between the Father and the Son, and is led to see God in all his divine persons and perfec-

tions engaged for his people, and made over unto them in the everlasting covenant; and when by faith we are enabled to see, that the Father's boundless love is towards us; that the Son's salvation, with all its blessings, was wrought out for us, and belongs unto us: that the Holy Spirit, with all the fulness of grace, will be in us in time, and in eternity, as the fountain of endless comfort and joy. When also we see and are fully persuaded of our election by the Father, of our salvation by the Son, and of our regeneration by the Holy Ghost, we may be said to be filled with all the fulness of God. To be filled with the fulness of God, is to have a blessed and spiritual view of the glories of divine grace; of the eternal and matchless glories and excellencies of Jesus Christ; and from what we see and behold of him in the light of the Spirit, to have our hearts powerfully drawn after him—our souls resting confidently upon him—our hearts powerfully persuaded of our everlasting justification in his righteousness, and of our eternal pardon, through his most precious blood-shedding; so when our hearts are truly happy in God's love in Christ Jesus, and we are filled with all joy and peace in believing: this is to be filled with the fulness of God. And in heaven we shall be perfectly filled with all the fulness of God. There we shall know as we are known, and be filled with the knowledge of God. Like vessels, we shall be plunged into the ocean of free grace; and as vessels of mercy, we shall be ever singing the praises of grace: admiring the grace of the eternal Father in our election, the grace of the eternal Son in our redemption, and

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the grace of the eternal Spirit in our conversion and sanctification. There God will be unto us all in all. The apostle concludes his prayer in a most wonderful manner, and stops the mouth of unbelief. Should the weak believer say, how shall I, or how can I expect to attain to such high privilege, or to the enjoyment of such transcendent blessings? Hear, and your weak faith must be encouraged. *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*