No. 10.

On the Love of God.
Matth. XXII, 37. (38.) Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

It was one of the numerous errors and abuses of the Jews, to substitute a partial, selected obedience for the spirit and principle of duty. They were willing to persuade themselves they could satisfy the requisitions of God, and yet reserve a large portion of their affections for the claims of human and of vice. One of the effects of this corrupt inclination was the belief common among them at the time of the Savior, that he, who should choose some single precept of the law, and adhere to it with scrupulous fidelity, would find in this scanty exercise of duty, a sufficient atonement for his sins, as well as for his neglect of the other positive commands of Jehovah. With such an opinion, with such views, it would naturally grow into a custom to apply to their leaders and guides, their Doctors, Rabbis, for advice on...
coming the selection of that precept, which was to enquire all the zeal of obedience, that they could share. Thus one of those, whose business it was to study and explain the law, came to Jesus with this question: "Rabbi, what is the great commandment in the law?" undoubtedly expecting, that from the answer, he should be able to discover what were the peculiar opinions, views & partialities of the new teacher. But the application been made to the artful and schematic instructors of the Jews, one of them, we may suppose, would have bid the enquirer of obscure things, which, in the formalities of the sabbath, another would have told him of the supreme sufficiency of the law of sacrifices; and from a third, he might have learned to be satisfied with that periodical obedience, which consisted in travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate the national festivals. But not thus superficial, accommodating a particle was the answer of Jesus. Instead of flattering that hypocritical spirit, which is willing to wear the appearance of virtue in the easiest terms, he pointed to a sacred, sublime, animating principle—a principle as extensive, as it pure, in its influence, a principle, that lies at the foundation of all that is noble, generous, holy, in our thought, pursuits, desires, which is indeed the root of good affections, conveying nourishment to the buds of virtues from the sap of piety. Jesus insuflated, not external actions of ceremonial observances, but the love of God, a vigorous, commanding love, concentrating purposes sing the genius of the power & faculties of man.

The precept, which the Saviour selected to recommend on peace, is drawn from the law of Moses, in which it stands forth prominently and surrounded with the impressure solemnity of divine authority. It must, however, have appeared new and extraordinary to those, who were unblest with the light of revelation, whose views were incapable of such elevation. It is true, there were among the philosophers, those who maintained that what they called the "first & greatest of all," should be the supreme object of affection. But this was merely an ideal from imagination cloaked in the mould of speculation. It was like a beautiful statue of ice. If wanted the freshness, warmth, & animation of reality. Accordingly we find, in the most celebrated moralists of antiquity, no precept enforcing the unoffe
love of Deity. It was for a divine teacher to place this primary duty on that full and strong light, with which it should ever be surrounded. It belongs to the gospel, to have cultivated the devotion of the heart, to have established a principle pure in its origin, correct in its deep and permanent in its effects.

1. Let us first consider what it is that we mean by the love of God.

The mutual affections of individuals for each other depend on causes indefinitely numerous, and are modified and combined into various forms, by all the complicated relations of personal interest, interest of persons, or by the feelings which habits of intercourse, or local attachments have generated. When we are said to love any of our fellow creatures, it seems to convey the idea of an attachment, reciprocal connection between their interests with our own, of something in the one which shapes and directs the happiness of the other. We are delighted to find one who is willing to enter into our feelings and purposes, to participate in our habits of thought, to sympathize in our emotions; and we view them in the scene of softened light, thrown around them by the partiality of affection. Friendship is indeed frequently founded on a high regard for qualities in themselves amiable, but our esteem for these is, by the necessity of our condition, so mingled with the influence of situation, fortune, interest, and other circumstances independent of the consideration of moral merit, as to communicate something of impropriety or selfishness to almost any modification of our affections.

But the love of God is in its nature free from those imperfections, which it so oftentimes us pain to see interwoven with feelings that constitute the noblest bonds of attachment in society. It retains and expands whatever is amiable of its own, while it excludes all that is degrading or unworthy. It is a pure stream which never becomes discoloured or turbid by passing through a contaminating soil. The love of God is not the love of qualities, but the love of character, perfect in its degree, or soundless in their extent. If qualities of a character, or are stamped in glowing colours on every object that meets the eye, in every capacity of enjoyment, on all the resources of our intellectual sensibilities. The love of God is the love of goodness, that goodness which fills and
animates all around us) within us, and is reflected in bright radiance from the thousand monuments of divine mercy which encompass the path of life. Our knowledge of God can be nothing more than the knowledge of His attributes. 

Perspecitons, and when we meditate on these attributes, dwell on these perfections, all contemplation turns into devotion. I thought becomes affection; then it is that we have an impressive, invigorating love of God. It is not for man to talk of the nature of essence of Deity; it is his business, if it is all he can do, to observe with reverence the workings of His power, to mark with grateful emotion the manifestations of His mercy, and growing of expanding on the view: 'I do believe must be his moral obligatory, who can be engaged in words of employment, without contract to love the object, presented in such definite, fresh, and lovely colors (Now, there are those whose idea of the love of God is something different from this). (those, with whom it is an indefinite passion for an indefinite object, with whom it is) but in the name for transport, fervor, ecstasy. But as there is danger, on the one hand, of submerging minds to degrading aims, of slothful dispersions, so on the other, the caution is not entirely unnecessary, to beware that we do not make such representations of the duties and feelings which religion requires, as will be found to be impracticable or inconsistent with the constitution of human nature. (He who is taught the necessity of self-nihilation, and is being constantly absorbed in the fervent love of God.) 

Perhaps regard the duty in any form as the dream of an enthusiast, may be led to suspect the religion which is supposed to inculcate such virtue. Such views of the love of God are unquestionably cherished, because the appeal is commonly refused to certain (as far as I could adopt them), who will doubt whether they are consistent with the most profound piety? But, may it not be feared, that their advocates have too much disregarded the reality: have not sufficiently considered man as he is, as religion, rightly understood, would make him to be?

The love of God, then, my sir, is not the love of some illusory speculation, some extern form created by imagination; it is grounded all pleasure, all bliss. It is the love of every thing that most deserves the object of love. It is the love of excellence, note of more abstract excellence, but as embodied in the universe, as stamped on nature.
impressed in the bustliness of Providence, and
the moral government of God. It is an affection
emanating from our nature, and naturally excited by the
various circumstances in which we are placed. Do you
love all that is beneficent, amiable, generous, exalted
in human vertue? Give these qualities a boundless
extent, an omnipresent, omnipotent energy, attach them
in short to the idea of God.

2. We proceed to consider some of the influences
of the contemplation of the love of God.

From this sublime affection we derive that
tranquil confidence, those well adjusted feelings, for which
the heart may look in vain to meaner objects. They
are the climate of the
wounded, broken spirit, and the native element
of the soul, in its best moments of purity and
adoration. The character of our affections and prin-
ciples is almost entirely formed and directed by the
nature of the objects which occupy our thought
with most frequency and delight. It is perfectly
susceptible, that truths can be oftener presented
to the mind, without exciting in a greater or less
degree the influence which appropriately be
longs to them. While they are considered in this
various relations, on all their peculiarities of
preference or importance, they become so mingled
and interwoven with the whole mass of our thought
as to form constituent parts of our mental sensa-
tions. In no case, does this general prin-
ciple operate in a more noble and salutary
fact, than when it is animated by the love of
God. I know not, how any one can rise from
the contemplation of the perfections of God,
- as it is this which generates the love of them
who concentrates in himself all these perfec-
tions - without a more refined purity of senti-
ment, a more ardent aspiration of noble and
elevated desire, a more thorough contentment of
what is low and trivial, than any other form
of thought can communicate. Can you hear
the "renunciation of Heaven," not feel the pres-
ence of God? While you listen to the song of
the morning stars and the joyful shouts of the sons
of God, shall the chord of your heart vibrate
with no corresponding sound? It cannot be. Wh
ever we have God, "its own divinity, that stirs within
us," elevating while it soothes, refining while
it animates. The fulness of the satisfaction
which springs from such a state of mind as
such a tone of feeling, will appear in its op-
fiecy to appease the impious regrets of life, to mitigate the pain, to calm the disquietude, which may be excited by the objects and passions of this world. The man, whose heart is thoroughly imbued with the love of God, is no longer the prey of circumstances or the sport of events; his happiness depends not on those ever varying fumes over which he can have no control, but is the balance of this mind, safely deposited in an exalted, spiritual condition amidst the vicissitudes of the world. His heart, as the sanctuary, where the sunshine of God's spirit loves to rejoice, and shall all little disappointments and imaginary ills of life be allowed to enter there. I introduce the light of cheer that hallows residence. Let us not suppose that the love of God (like the philosophy of the Stoics) pretends to increase happiness, by enfeebling sensibility; or that those are us above the world, only by making us unfit to live in it. It does not teach us, in the night of sorrow, to close the slow stream, to make a light of tears, like the slovenly, to make a light of joy, while all is cold sorrowless. On the contrary, it gives sublimity and warmth to charity; it stamps a more vivid complexion of a more constant energy on all our social passions. But, while it quickens our taste for all that is amiable of endearing in the intercourse of life, it abhors the presence of pain in the sentiments of confidence of the joy. Thus we see how closely the love of God is connected with our personal interest, how it points to the safest and shortest road to permanent happiness; how it renders important distrust, 5 passages, etc.; how it endows all that constitutes the nobility of dignity of character.

The love of God has likewise a tendency to assimilate us to the Being whom we love. It affords one of the surest guides to the practice of that principle, which the Saviour enjoined, or it is said, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." The understanding is awed into profound reverence when we attempt to send our thoughts through that infinite expanse, and lies between man's soul and Maker. But we do not always emulate others by doing the same actions, where the stations, powers are different; but by conducting ourselves within our province, in the same temper, by the same dispositions, and the same tenors. For the same dispositions must be that alone which lies in general traits of character; a resemblance indeed at best weak and remote, but such as the imperfection of humanity will admit. If we love God with that sincerity of devotion,
and the earnestness of his love, an atonement for the neglect of moral duties, who boasts that his soul is filled with the aspirations of heavenly desire, while it is the favorite residence of the lowest spirits, the most passions. Let no one, then, love God, if he love not virtue; for these affections are inseparably connected; and only the attempt to disturb their sacred and harmonious union.

3. The question then becomes deeply interesting and important: how may we best promote the love of God in our hearts? I answer, by marking the character of God, the subject of frequent and solemn reflection. Though it is not uncommon for the affections to be the

fluence on the workings of mind, yet it will be found, that impressions of the mind gave them, and permanent bias to the affections. Our love of any object is usually preceded by the belief, suggested by experience or observation, that it possesses those amiable qualities which spontaneously excite the regard of kindness, or that goodness, in some of its various forms, is one of the prominent characteristics. There are moral qualities in objects naturally fitted to excite love, as certain forms, the

potency are to give pleasure. Nor in our idea of

Duty, all those qualities are harmoniously com-
lined, while they are sublimed to perfection, expanded through infinity. Of the most exalted faculties of angels or of men will ever find in contemplative natures subjects of admiration, more en
cements to the utterance of gratitude and delight. Consequently, the minds devoutly we study, the more correctly we know the manifester of God's character, the more sure the guide, and permanent will be those choice affections which guide the soul to Duty. (It is perhaps to gross apprehensions or ignorance of the Divinity, that we may ascribe the want of so exalted a prin
ciple as the love of God, in the treating of the affairs of the Roman monks.) How could they love Deities, who had all the weaknesses, passions, sorrows, with but fars of the virtues of their own? (Revolutionary, my faith has unceasingly de
tended the means of moral improvement; multipli
ed the sources of happiness to the virtuous and

friends, by representing the divine character as an object of unwrinkled confidence; sublime affec
tion. It has taught us, wherein those feelings

which constitute all that is dignified, permanent in the felicity of man, may coexist with tran
scendental, could I, for a moment believe that the

who dwell in the heavens, is indifferent to our

welfare, that he looks with unceasing on our evil.
full lives of leaves us to struggle and toil by ourselves, the short alternately of good and ill, without the life of his regard, whose heart would ever know the warmth of love or the kindling of devotion to the Almighty! But nay! man has different frames and exigent presents. We are instructed to say, “Christ is also our life in heaven.” Let us, in the parental character, that character with most powerfully exciteth every portion of reverence or affection, that God has been pleased to reveal himself to man, and it’s ends, the appellation of Father, that the Son has constantly addressed his God, even God, the teaching of performing on his followers the value of this filial relation. Are we then the children of a Father’s parent, and do we not feel the full force of the Apostle’s assertion, “be that loveth not, knoweth not God.”

Consider for a moment the goodness of the Deity. Surely on this subject we need not seek excitements to reflect gracious gratitude; for it is a reason the heart is enforced in all the multiplied forms which present themselves in every thing that we see. Every thing we know. To the man, whose moral sensibility is delicate, whose soul is habitual & active, all native assumes a body of looks, or lines, or speaks. He hears the goodness of God announced in the accents of every breeze, sees it descending in highest radiance on every sunbeam. When we view the numerous worlds rolling over our heads, as it were the great Apeles of nature, declaring that the hand which made them is divine; how natural is the thought suggested itself to the royal poet of Israel, “what is man that God is mindful of him? Yet thou is not neglected. Man finds the resources of happiness in all around him & from him. By what can not fail to strike the most careless observer, as a mark of pure benevolence. The gratifications of our are annexed to the dimensions of necessity or utility. The production of the good seems everywhere the effect of design. It is not a fortuitous result in the sphere in which we can never calculate; it is consequence of established laws, the effect of means adapted to an end. That being, therefore, whatever is the production of good, must possess the essential principle of benevolence. But these provisions for the subject’s enjoyment of animal existence are but a small part of the blessings of Heaven. Has not God given us mind, the crowning gift, which includes all that will ultimately deserve the name of happiness? To whom, but God, do you owe that intellectual being, those thoughts which mander through the mind expanding as they move of confessing sức light at every point of their indefinite progress? Here are these social affection, which give to existence so much of its charm is to instil so much
of its strength and love. It is God, who has confided it to us in the interchange of friendship, a community of happiness who has made the exercise of good affections by making them their own heritage. It is a sublime voice too which speaks in the terrifying warnings and the animating encouragements of consequence. But more than all, it is God who has given us this gift. From God we receive him who was sent to be the Saviour of the world. Of this blessing it is not in our power to appreciate the value, because we have been educated in the midst of its influences, we have been cheared and guided by it, and right. We will only ask you, my son, to consider what would have been our situation, had we been compelled to seek the rules of duty amid the abstract, confused, opposing speculations of the heathens, who could give no sanction to the last precepts, defective as they must have been. We renew to you, to consider what must have been our feelings of mankind, if the groan of death, in the heaviness of its terror, had not been checkered by the hope of life and the remembrance of the darkness of the grave? What had we been, if the star in the east had never arisen to dispel the gloom and guide us to brighter worlds on high? Such are some of the obvious evidences of the necessary goodness of our heavenly Father. How many powerful persuasive proofs might be added by the observation of personal experience of every individual. In what way, then, can you more surely fix your increase of love of God, than by such contemplations on the exhibition of His world's designs, especially when you reflect, that in the very pleasure which attends the exercise of these grateful emotions, you find a new mark of the benevolence that beams who claims the homage of the heart? From this view of the subject, we learn the importance of forming correct views of the character of God. We cannot have a Bawdy, to whom we ascribe not the qualities, or are fitted to exist a cherished love. Like Jacob, we must burn all our strange gods under the oak of Shechem, before we can set our altar to the God at Bethel. Thus, my son, we have noticed the nature of love of God, its influence, the means by which it may be promoted. We have seen that it is the more enthusiastic of feeling the reality of assurance, not the mysticism of fanatical devotion, but a rational, enlightened, well-regulated, principle, animating the mind in the practice of virtue, strengthening it to resist of overcome temptation in its most alluring forms, produced by the most amiable and engaging views of the character of our Heavenly Parent. It is an elevated, sublime, princ
He sought to act on the highest interests and best happiness of society, and at the least of death, it will surely be a reflection full of animation. Gladness to the man of devotion, that his residence for eternity will be in the more immediate presence of that God, whom it has been his delight to love presence on earth.
At Mr. Griswold's, in the afternoon, Nov. 22d, 1818.
At Salem, Dec. 20th, 1818, forenoon.
At Mr. Oakes's, Feb. 14th, 1819, forenoon.
At Joel's, March 21st, 1819, afternoon.
At home, Aug. 8th, 1819, forenoon.
At home, Oct. 30th, 1821, forenoon.