

## *THE POWER OF LOVE*

**This famous pamphlet appeared in London in September 1643, a year into the English civil war. It is usually ascribed to the London merchant and later “Leveller” leader, William Walwyn. The tract illustrates many of the most salient features of radical puritan thought from the period, and offers a clear example of the sort of divinity that contemporaries labeled “antinomian.” I have attempted to edit it down to a manageable size.**

### To Every Reader

For there is no respect of persons with God: and whosoever is possessed with love, judgeth no longer as a man, but god like, as a true Christian. What's here towards? (says one) sure one of the Family of love: very well! pray stand still and consider: what family are you of I pray? are you of Gods family? no doubt you are: why, God is love, and if you bee one of Gods children be not ashamed of your Father, nor his family: and bee assured that in his family, he regards neither fine clothes, nor gold rings, nor stately houses, nor abundance of wealth, nor dignities, and titles of honor, nor any mans birth or calling, indeed he regards nothing among his children but love. Consider our Savior saith. He that hath this worlds goods, and seeth his brother lack, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Judge then by this rule who are of Gods family; Look about and you will find in these woeful days thousands of miserable, distressed, starved, imprisoned Christians: see how pale and wan they look: how coldly, raggedly, & unwholesomely they are clothed; live one week with them in their poor houses, lodge as they lodge, eat as they eat, and no oftener, and bee at the same pass to get that wretched food for a sickly wife, and hunger-starved children; (if you dare doe this for fear of death or diseases) then walk abroad, and observe the generall plenty of all necessaries, observe the gallant bravery of multitudes of men and women abounding in all things that can be imagined: observe likewise the innumerable numbers of those that have more then sufficeth. Neither will I limit you to observe the inconsiderate people of the world, but the whole body of religious people themselves, and in the very Churches and upon solemne dayes: view them well, and see whether they have not this worlds goods; their silkes, their beavers, their rings, and other devices will testify they have; I, and the wants and distresses of the poor will testify that the love of God they have not. What is here aimed at? (says another) would you have all things common? for love seeketh not her own good, but the good of others. You say very true, it is the Apostles doctrine: and you may remember the multitude of believers

had all things common: that was another of their opinions, which many good people are afraid of. But (says another) what would you have? would you have no distinction of men, nor no government? fear it not: nor fly the truth because it suites not with your corrupt opinions or courses; on Gods name distinguish of men and women too, as you see the love of God abound in them towards their brethren, but no otherwise; And for that great mountain (in your understanding) government, 'tis but a molehill if you would handle it familiarly, and bee bold with it: It is common agreement to bee so governed: and by common agreement men choose for governors, such as their virtue and wisdom make fit to govern: what a huge thing this matter of trust is made of? and what cause is there that men that are chosen should keep at such distance, or those that have chosen them bee so sheepish in their presence? Come, you are mightily afraid of opinions, is there no other that you fear? not the Anabaptists, Brownists, or Antinomians? Why doe you start man? have a little patience, would you truly understand what kind of people these are, and what opinions they hold? If you would; bee advised by some learned man, and with him consult what hath learnedly been written of the most weak and vicious amongst any of them that could bee found, and make your conclusion (according to custom) that they are all such: but if you would free your selves from common mistakes concerning those your brethren, then acquaint your selves with them, observe their ways, and enquire into their doctrines your self, and so make your conclusion, or judge not of them; visit them, hear them out, stand clear from all prejudging: and then see what dangerous people they are that are generally so called: particulars being absurd rules of judging; for so the Turk is misled in his judgment of Christianity: and no marvel since he judgeth thereof by the doctrine and life of the most superstitious, Idolatrous, and vicious amongst them. Well, what next are you afraid of? for some men take delight to be under the spirit of bondage, and doe not think themselves in good estate except they be in fear: but come, fear nothing, you are advised by the Apostle to try all things, and to hold fast that which is good: to prove the Spirits whether they bee of God or not: 'tis your self must doe it, you are not to trust to the authority of any man, or to any mans relation: you will find upon trial that scarcely any opinion hath been reported truly to you: and though in every one of them you may find some things that you cannot agree unto, you will yet be a gainer, by discovering many excellent things that you as yet may be unsatisfied in, and by due consideration of them all perfect your own judgment. Reade the ensuing discourse impartially, and you will find the mind of him that hateth no man for his opinion; nor would have any man troubled for any opinion, except such, as make the blood of Christ ineffectual, or such as would destroy all that will not submit to their opinions; he seems to bee of the Apostles mind, that considered all other things in love: (and that in matters of moment too, even where some observed a day unto the Lord, & others not observed) He bids

you walk in love, as Christ hath loved you, and gave himself for you, an offering and a Sacrifice; you that love your brother so poorly, as that you cannot allow him the peaceable enjoyment of his mind and judgment would hardly lay down your life for him; let brotherly love continue, and let every one freely speak his mind without molestation: and so there may be hope that truth may come to light, that otherwise may be obscured for particular ends: plain truth will prove all, sufficient for vanquishing of the most artificial, sophistical error that ever was in the world; give her but due and patient audience, and her persuasions are ten thousand times more powerful to work upon the most dull refractory mind, then all the adulterate allurements and deceivings of art. What is here published is out of fervent love to the Communion of Christians: that they might taste and see how good the Lord is. In whose presence there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Wherefore rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice: and let your song bee always. Glory be to God on high, in earth peace, good will towards men. Let truth have her free and perfect working, and the issue will bee increase of believers: let faith have her perfect working, and the issue will bee increase of love: and let love have her perfect working, and the whole world will be so refined, that God will be all in all; for he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, in whom, ever fare you well, and bee cheerful.

[The body of the text begins here; it is framed as a sermon or meditation on Tit. 2. ii, 12. *The grace (or love) of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, & godly in this present world.* The selection below begins about mid-way through the body of the pamphlet]

I have presented this woeful condition of all mankind under the law, thus sadly and truly, because I find generally men doe not seriously consider the bottomless depth of the misery from the which they are redeemed: I am not a preacher of the law, but of the gospel; nor are you under the law, but under grace: the law was given by Moses, whose minister I am not: but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, whose minister I am: whose exceeding love, hath appeared: and because I would have you fully to see and consider his love, therefore did I shew the woeful condition, from which only by his love you are delivered.

Another principle I shall pray you to consider, is that God loves nothing but what is pure and holy, without spot or blemish: so as it is a vain and delusive doctrine, to say that God passes by our daily infirmities, accepting our wills for our performances: our desire to be obedient to his Commandments, for obedience: for where there is the least defect, God hates for that very defect, and loves not but where there is perfect holiness and righteousness: which makes this truth appear, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. It is a sad favor that the law ever did unto mankind, to make his sin appear out of measure sinful, stopping every mans mouth, admitting no plea or excuse on mans behalf; And yet it is so natural to think that he is still bound to doe something for obtaining the love and favor of God, that you will find it is the hardest thing in the world to free your selves from it, though it be the grossest Antichristian error that ever was, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain; It is such an error that until it be removed out of your minds, it will be but labor lost to endeavor to work any truth upon your minds; and I have much cause, to fear your minds are tainted therewith, because our public catechisms, books, and Sermons are for the most part corrupted therewith, so as we suck this error in even with our very milk, and it becomes one substance with many of us even to our old age; It was so in the Apostles times, as may be seen in Acts the 15, from the 5. verse to the end of the chapter, where you shall find that some that believed affirmed that it was necessary to circumcise, and to keep the law: but you will find by the story it was their error; Also in the second to the *Corinthians*, the third to the end, where you shall find the law styled the ministration of death, written in tables of stone (which was the 10 Commandments) and verse the 11. to be done away, and a more glorious ministration to take place and remain: and yet the breeding of the Jews being under the law, (though they did believe the coming of *Christ*) yet still (even to that day the Apostle wrote) their minds were blinded, and the veil remained at the reading of the old Testament, which veil is done away in *Christ*. These things (beloved) you are to consider seriously, for that until you doe undoubtedly see your selves not to be under the law, no not in the least respect, you cannot see your selves to be under grace: that is, in the favor and love of God, until when you cannot with sound judgment affirm, that which my text affirmeth, that is, that the love of God hath appeared: for he that in any measure conceiveth himself to be under the law, doth not clearly discern the love of god: for that veil is before his eyes; you all give credit to the word of God: let S. Paul then be your guide to lead you out of this sad Ægyptian bondage who knew all things that concerned the law, yet cries out, I account all things as loss and dung, that I may be found in Christ, not having my own (or mans) righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God in him: make it your own cases by sound consideration, for ye are all justified freely by his grace through the redemption

that is in Jesus Christ: your fears, nor sins, nor doublings, cannot alter that condition which Christ hath purchased for you, for though the sting of death be sin, & the strength of sin be the law, yet thanks be unto God, for he hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ: so as you may all boldly say, Oh death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory? And that none of you may doubt of his exceeding love, and your perfect reconciliation with God ...

(Beloved) God by the power of his Word hath begotten so full assurance of these things in me, as that thereby he hath made me an able Minister of the New Testament: not of the Letter, (or the Law) but of the Spirit: for the Letter killeth, but the Spirit (that is the Gospel) giveth life. Nor doe I see any cause why any of you here present should so much as doubt your salvation; I am a Minister of reconciliation, and am thereby bound to tell you (for woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel, as in the 2 Cor. 5. 19.) that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation; Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you to be reconciled unto God; for he hath made him to be sin for us, that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; so as (however we may vainly conceive to our own prejudice) God considers us not as we see our selves full of sin, full of iniquity, but as we should consider our selves, agreeable to all these passages of his blessed Word, fully and perfectly washed from all our sins by the blood of his Son (which every one of us doe believe, though we doe not consider) and then with unspeakable joy we shall see that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son: that we are justified freely by his grace: that for our lost righteousness of the Law, we are made the righteousness of God in him: having peace of conscience and joy in the holy Ghost, by whose word these blessed truths are declared unto us. Are these things so indeed, doth God accept me a poor miserable sinner, as righteous in his sight, and freed from sin, from all sin? Hear still the Word of God, he hath borne our sins in his body on the tree, and it is the blood of Christ that cleanseth thee from all sin: he by his one oblation once offered, hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction, and sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and if we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. This work of your redemption and reconciliation with God was perfected when Christ died: and nothing shall be able to separate you from his love then purchased: neither infidelity, nor impenitency, nor unthankfulness, nor sin, nor any thing whatsoever can make void his purchase: no, though with the Jews you should deny the Lord that bought you: so powerful was his bloodshedding, and of so full value for discharging of all our debts, past, present, and to come; so infinite is his

goodness, so free is his love, and so abundantly happy is our condition, though many of us have been too too ignorant thereof: and for want of this knowledge many of us have walked very uncomfortably, spending our time in fasting, weeping, and mourning; in praying, reading, and hearing, and in performance of other duties, as you call them, and all to get Christ: our fear distracts our judgments, that wee consider not what the Scripture sets forth unto us: if we did, wee should see apparently that it sets forth salvation wrought and perfected for ever: to whom doth it manifest the same? to sinners, to the ungodly, to all the world: a work perfected, depending on no condition, no performance at all. What would people have to give peace to their minds? you doe wrong your selves through nice distinctions: the word of God is given to declare these truths, and that he is our peace: the word of God you doe believe, and so cannot but be comforted, the only end for which it is preserved unto you: that you might read, and know, and understand your blessed condition: for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God: and you are to look for no other testimony: nor are you to doubt your selves: for though your present comfort depends upon your believing this word, yet the work of Christ depends not on your believing: and though you should not believe, yet he is faithful and cannot deny himself to be your redeemer, your peace-maker, your Savior. Men are not pleased except salvation be proved to be very difficult to be obtained, it must still depend either on our believing, or doing, or repenting, or self-denial, or Sabbathkeeping, or something or other, or else man is not pleased: too easy? good God! that free love should be suspected; that because it is easy to be had, we should put it far from us; why, God knew full well thou wert dead, he considered that thou wert but dust; suppose he had required any thing of thee, without which thou shouldst have no part in Christ, what a sad case hadst thou been in? go thy ways, and with cheerfulness possess his infinite love, and declare unto thy brethren what the Lord hath done for al our souls; tell them that the love of God bringing salvation hath appeared, teaching us to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. And I shall desire to know of all that hear me this day, whereof some may happily be addicted to the corruptions of this world: for our times though we call them times of light, yet do abound with gluttony, drunkenness, and whoredome, usury, pride, oppression, and all kind of wickedness, such as is not to be named amongst Christians, (what shall I say to these things? it will be in vain for me to reprove you for them: for men never reform their vices, till first their judgments be well informed, and then they kindly reform themselves) ...

that he should be made sin for us that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; me thinks these and the like considerations should be powerful in your minds, that your spirits should even burn within you, until you

found out some way to express your thankfulness for so great, so infinite love. I cannot suspect the most vicious man in the world, but that hearing these things his heart will make strict enquiry, what he shall render unto the Lord for all his benefits? and his heart once moving in thoughts of thankfulness will instantly be inflamed with love, which in an instant refines the whole man. God is love, and love makes man God-like; and henceforth let me pray you to mark the workings of love in your own souls, and you shall find that when your long accustomed corruptions (by which you have wounded your own consciences, and brought dishonor to God, and reproach to the holy name of Christians) doe tempt to the like abominable actions, your love to God that so freely hath loved you, will be so prevalent with you, that you will resolve rather to lose your lives then to show your selves so basely ungrateful: the vanities you have delighted in will become odious unto you: all your labor will be that your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ, nay you will shun the very appearance of evil: and if your brother offend you in any kind whatsoever, you will find no difficulty to forgive; if you doe, doe but think of the love wherewith Christ hath loved you, and nothing can be imagined so abominably injurious but you will gladly forgive. And if you have this worlds goods, and that brother lack, you will rejoice that you have an occasion and means to make known unto the world how powerfully the love of God dwelleth in you: you will be able to doe all things through love that strengthens you. Love will be as a new light in your understandings by which you will judge quite otherwise of all things, then formerly you have don; the vanities and superfluties which in the beginning of my discourse I reckoned up unto you, will seem odious unto you, and you will no longer fashion your selves like unto this world, but will walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ: you will no longer mind high things, but make your selves equal to men of low degree: you will no longer value men and women according to their wealth, or outward shews, but according to their virtue, & as the love of God appeareth in them: nay if you be studious in this work of love, nothing will be more dear unto you then the glory of God (who hath so infinitely loved you) so as you will be most zealously opposite to whatsoever is opposite unto God, you will find it nothing to hazard your lives for God, in defense of his truth from error; in defense of your brother or neighbor from oppression or tyranny: love makes you no longer your own but Gods servants, and prompts you to doe his will in the punishment of all kind of exorbitances, whether it be breach of oaths, breach of trust, or any kind of injustice in whomsoever, and to be no respecter of persons; nor will any ones greatness over-sway or daunt your resolutions, but you will be bold as Lions, not fearing the faces of men: you will when need requires, that is, when tyrants and oppressors endeavor by might and force to pervert all Laws, and compacts amongst men, and to pervert the truth of God into a lie, interpreting his sacred word as patron of their unjust power, as if any unjust power were of God,

and were not to be resisted: I say, such insolencies as these will inflame your zeal, and set you all on fire manfully to fight the Lords battle, and to bring into subjection those abominable imaginations and ungodly courses of men: your judgments will be so well informed, as you will know these things are by God referred unto you, and you will not resign them up to him, but willingly sacrifice your lives and fortunes, and all that is near and dear unto you, rather then suffer his name to be so blasphemed, or your innocent brethren, or your wives and children to become a prey to wicked and blood-thirsty men. The politicians of this world would have religious men to be fools, not to resist, no by no means, lest you receive damnation: urging Gods holy Word, whilst they proceed in their damnable courses; but (beloved) they will find that true Christians are of all men the most valiant defenders of the just liberties of their Country, and the most zealous preservers of true Religion: vindicating the truths of God with their lives, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men: making thereby the whole world to know that true Christianity hates and abhors tyranny, oppression, perjury, cruelty, deceit, and all kind of filthiness; and true Christians to be the most impartial, and most severe punishers thereof, and of all kind of wickedness, of any men whatsoever.

Great is the power of love, for love makes men to be of one mind: and what can be too strong for men united in love? and therefore I shall warn you to mark and consider those that make divisions amongst you. I pray mistake me not, I doubt you are too apt in this case to make a wrong application: I do not mean that you should mark those, that are different from you in judgment, with any ridiculous or reproachful names: but my advice is that you mark those that make divisions amongst you, and those are they that have invented a name of reproach for every particular difference in judgment: and in their public Sermons and private discourses, endeavor might and main to keep at the widest distance, and by odious tales and false imputations make you irreconcilable: nay make you even ready to cut one another's throats; or by this division prepare you for your common adversaries to cut both yours and theirs too; difference in judgment there will be, until love have a more powerful working in our hearts: we should therefore like wise men at least bear with one another's infirmities: love will cover all that can be called infirmity; but resolved malice love it self will punish. Such opinions as are not destructive to humane society, nor blaspheme the work of our Redemption, may be peaceably endured, and considered in love: and in case of conspiracy against our common liberty, what a madness is it for men to stand in strife about petty opinions? for who are all those that are so much railed at by our common Preachers? who are they say they? why, they are the most dangerous Anabaptists, Brownists, and Separatists: that are enemies to all order and decency, that cry



down all learning and all government in the Church, or Common-wealth. (Beloved) to my knowledge these things are not true of any of them: it is true, they cannot do all things so orderly and decently as they would, because they are hunted into corners, and from one corner to another, and are not free to exercise their consciences, as had they liberty they might, and would; And as for learning, as learning goes nowadays, what can any judicious man make of it, but as an Art to deceive and abuse the understandings of men, and to mislead them to their ruin? if it be not so, whence comes it that the Universities, and University men throughout the Kingdome in great numbers are opposers of the welfare of the Common-wealth, and are pleaders for absurdities in government, arguers for tyranny, and corrupt the judgments of their neighbors? no man can be so simple as to imagine that they conceive it not lawful, or not useful for men to understand the Hebrew, Greek, or Latin; but withal, if they conceive there is no more matter in one language than another, nor no cause why men should be so proud for understanding of languages, as therefore to challenge to themselves the sole dealing in all spiritual matters; who (I say) can blame them for this judgment? they desire that a mans ability of judgment should be proved by the clear expression of necessary truths, rather than by learning: and since the Scriptures are now in English, which at first were in Hebrew, Greek, or Syriack, or what other language; why may not one that understands English only, both understand and declare the true meaning of them as well as an English Hebrician, or Grecian, or Roman whatsoever? I, but says some politick learned man, a man that doth not understand the Original language, cannot so perfectly give the sense of the Scripture, as he that doth: or as one that makes it his study for ten or twenty years together, and hath no other employment: every man being best skilled in his own profession wherein he hath been bred and accustomed. I did well to say some politic learned man might thus object: for indeed what is here but policy? for if it be as such men would imply, I pray what are you the better for having the Scripture in your own language: when it was lock'd up in the Latin tongue by the policy of Rome, you might have had a learned Friar for your money at any time to have interpreted the same: and though now you have it in your own language, you are taught not to trust your own understanding, (have a care of your purses) you must have an University man to interpret the English, or you are in as bad a case as before but not in worse; for, for your money you may have plenty at your service, & to interpret as best shall please your fancy. Let me prevail with you to free your selves from this bondage, and to trust to your own considerations in any thing that is useful for your understandings and consciences: and judge more charitably of your brethren, & understand what learning is, and to mark those that cause divisions among you, and you shall find that they are learned men, & not unlearned. The learned man must live upon the unlearned, and therefore when the

unlearned shall presume to know as much as the learned, hath not the learned man cause to bestir his wits, and to wrangle too when his Copy-hold is in such danger? I pray what was the cause that Demetr. and the Craftsmen cried out, great is Diana of the Ephesians, whom al Asia and the world worship? was it the love to the goddess or her worship? no, we find it was their covetousnesse and particular gain? What is it else to cry out, great is learning, great are the Universities, who shall answer an adversary? (money answereth all things) ambition, covetousness, disdain, pride, and luxury are the things aimed at: and if it be not so, by the fruits you shall certainly know. As for government, those that are accused are not guilty, for they are enemies only to usurpations, and innovations, and exorbitances in government: indeed they are haters of tyranny, and all arbitrary power, but no other: and therefore those that falsely accuse them, are they that cause and foment divisions amongst you: therefore mark them, and be not deceived by their dissembled insinuations to hold you in division, whilst they have opportunity to make a prey of you. You know there are Wolves in Sheep's clothing: be wise as Serpents, able to discover them, innocent as Doves, gently bearing with the infirmities of the weak, having nothing in more esteem then love: thus you will answer love with love: that henceforwards your own souls may constantly witness to your selves (what this Scripture expresseth) *That the love of God bringing salvation to all men hath appeared, teaching you to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world:* Now unto him that hath loved us, and washed away our sins in his own blood, be praise and glory for ever, Amen.