

Church History (40): Christopher Love

In coming to Christopher Love, we come to one of my personal favorites. Fewer Puritans were able to explain deep theological truths in simple and practical terms. We will consider his education and ordination, his arrest and death, and his ministry and sermons.

I. Christopher Love

1. *His education and ordination.* Born 1618 in Cardiff, Wales, 170 miles west of London, Christopher was the youngest child and son of his parents old age (his mother was fifty years old when he was born). "Love's family was not a church-going one; in fact, young Christopher was fifteen years old before he ever heard a sermon" (Kistler).¹ "At the age of fifteen, he went to hear William Erbury, vicar of St. Mary's in Cardiff. His wife later wrote how Love reacted to that sermon: 'God met with him and gave him such a sight of his sins and his undone condition that he returned home with a hell in his conscience.' His father noticed his son's depression and locked him in a room on the second floor of the house to prevent him from attending church the next Sabbath. Love tied a cord to the window, slid down it, and went to church. His earlier convictions deepened and he was soon converted" (Beeke).² "Though his father consented to sending him to Oxford, he did it in displeasure, withholding any financial aid; and, during his abode at the university, he was supported partly by his mother, and partly by Mr. Erbury" (Brook).³ While at Oxford, Love studied under the eminent Puritan Christopher Rogers, earning a bachelor's degree in 1639. In 1640, he was expelled from Oxford for non-conformity, refusing to subscribe to the canons of Archbishop Laud. This led him to London, where he served as chaplain to Sheriff Warner. "He met the sheriff's ward, Mary Stone, the daughter of a London merchant; he married her, and the Loves had five children: two girls who died early in life, and three boys. The last son was born thirteen days after Love's death and died seven months later" (Beeke).⁴ He was allowed to return to Oxford in 1643, where he received his master's degree in 1645. "Love was finally ordained as a Presbyterian in 1645, at St. Mary's Church in London. After three years, he became minister of St. Lawrence Jewry. He earned a great reputation for his eloquence and vigor in preaching. He was one of the youngest members of the Westminster Assembly, but he was not very active in the proceedings" (Beeke).⁵ Love labored at St. Lawrence, from 1649 till his death in 1651.

2. *His arrest and death.* "Christopher Love was arrested on May 2, 1651. Two priors and three soldiers came to take him at four o'clock in the morning. He was committed to the Tower of London on a charge of high treason" (Kistler).⁶ Other ministers, such as Thomas Watson, Thomas Manton, William Jenkyn, and Thomas Case were also arrested. "These were arrested by Oliver Cromwell's forces for alleged involvement with the Presbyterians of Scotland who were raising money for the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II" (Beeke).⁷ Love, and other staunch Presbyterians, often preached against the Independents (Congregationalists) and were not silent about their disagreement of the execution of Charles I. "King Charles I was beheaded by Parliament for crimes of treason against his own people. Oliver Cromwell, a Presbyterian who turned Independent, became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth; but there were many who still believed that God has appointed kings and man could not dethrone them. Christopher Love was among those, as would be expected of a staunch Presbyterian. While Cromwell ruled England, the Scots courted Charles's son, Charles II, and sought to re-

¹ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 6

² Joel Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 396

³ Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3:117

⁴ Joel Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 396

⁵ Joel Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 397

⁶ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 55

⁷ Joel Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 397

establish him as ruler of all the British Isles. If that meant building an army to take England back, so be it" (Kistler).⁸ All of the ministers claimed they had no formal involvement with the Presbyterians in Scotland, and all of them but Love was released. Why love alone was retained and eventually executed is unclear. Some have suggested it was because Love was also a Covenanter. "As a Covenanter, he swore to uphold the Solemn League and Covenant; and since Charles II took the same oath, Love was a staunch supporter of the King's position, if not his person" (Kistler).⁹

On June 20, 1651, Love was brought before the high court of justice, and had the following charges read: "That he, the said Christopher Love, as a traitor and an enemy of this commonwealth and free state of England, and out of a traitorous and wicked design to stir up a new and bloody war, and to raise insurrections and rebellions within this nation, hath, at several times in the years 1648, 1649, 1650, and 1651, in London, and at other places within the commonwealth of England, together with the persons mentioned above, traitorously and maliciously combined, contrived, and endeavored to stir and raise up forces against the present government of this nation: that he hath traitorously and maliciously declared and published Charles Stuart, eldest son of the late king, to be king of England, without consent of parliament: that he hath traitorously and maliciously invited and assisted the Scots to invade this commonwealth of England."¹⁰

On Friday night, the 4th of July, 1651, twenty-four men voted to pass sentence on him for his execution. He was sentenced to die "as a traitor and public enemy to the Commonwealth and free state of England." "The sentence pronounced, Mr. Love said, 'My lord, I have received of death in myself that I should not trust in myself, but in God which raises the dead. And my lord, though you have condemned me, neither God nor my own conscience does condemn me.' He was then taken to the tower. Great intercessions were made to the parliament for the preservation of his life. His wife presented one petition or probably more in the most moving language and he presented no less than four himself. Several parishes in London presented their petitions to the house of commons as did upwards of fifty ministers, but all that could be obtained was the delay of his execution for a month" (Brooks).¹¹ Love himself said in his defense: "I have been called a malignant and apostate; but God is my witness, I never carried on a malignant interest: I shall retain my covenanting principles; from which, by the grace of God, I will never depart. Neither am I an incendiary between the two nations of England and Scotland: but I am grieved for their divisions. But as to treason, I do not know any act of mine proved against me, that brings me under any one act now in existence. I never wrote any letter nor sent any letter to any of the Scots' nation; yet I confess their proceedings with the king are agreeable to my judgments. For I thought that if the king and Scots became united, it would advance the cause of God, the interests of true religion, and the good of the nation."¹²

On the day of his execution, Love was given opportunity to speak on the scaffold on Tower Hill. After "putting off his hat two times to the people," he said: "I am made this day a spectacle unto God, angels, and men; and among men I am made a grief to the godly, a laughing stock to the wicked, and a gazing stock to all, yet, blessed be my God, not a terror to myself. Although there is but little between me and death, yet this bears up my heart: there is but little between me and heaven. There is but two steps between me and glory. It is but laying down upon the block, and I shall ascend upon a throne."¹³ Love

⁸ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 50

⁹ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 187

¹⁰ Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3:123

¹¹ Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3:127

¹² Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3:125

¹³ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 108

then addressed his charges and closed with some exhortations. "Concerning my charge, it is black and hideous, many things falsely suggested, hardly a line of it true. I never wrote letters to the King, Queen, Church or state of Scotland. I never received any letters written to me either from the King, or from the Queen, or from the Church or State of Scotland. I never collected, gave, or lent one penny of money either to the King, Queen, Church or State of Scotland."¹⁴ He then turned to "the inhabitants of this city." "1. Let me beg you to love your painful and your godly ministers. 2. Submit yourselves to church government; that would lay a curb and restraint upon your lusts. 3. Take heed of those doctrines that come under the notion of 'new light.' Those doctrines you ought to suspect as to whether they are true, which the broachers of them say are new, for truth is as old as the Bible. 4. Bewail your great loss which you have in the taking away of so many ministers out of your city. 5. Take heed of engaging in a war against your brethren of the Scottish nation. For my part, I have opposed the tyranny of a King, but I never opposed the title. Take heed what you do."¹⁵ "Christopher Love then laid himself down upon the scaffold, with his head over the block; and, stretching forth his hands, the executioner severed his head from his body at one blow" (Brooks).¹⁶ He thus entered his reward on August 22, 1651 at the age of thirty-three. Mary Love married Edward Bradshaw two years later in 1653, giving birth to four additional girls and two boys. She died on May 14, 1663.

During his four months of imprisonment, Love received and wrote dozens of letters. Most of these came from other ministers and His wife Mary. Four of Love's letters to Mary have survived, and two of hers to him. We shall briefly consider them (in summary form) in the order they were written. Mary Love wrote her husband on July 14, 1651: "Before I write a word further, I beseech thee think not that it is thy wife but a friend now that writes to thee. I hope thou hast freely given up thy wife and children to God, who hath said in Jeremiah 49:11, 'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in Me.' Thy Maker will be my husband, and a Father to thy children...I dare not speak to thee, nor have a thought within my own heart of my unspeakable loss, but wholly keep my eye fixed upon thy inexpressible and inconceivable gain. Thou leavest but a sinful, mortal wife to be everlastingly married to the Lord of glory. Thou leavest but children, brothers, and sisters to go to the Lord Jesus, thy eldest Brother. Thou leavest friends on earth to go to the enjoyment of saints and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in glory. Thou dost but leave earth for heaven and changest a prison for a palace...And when thou layest down thy precious head to receive thy Father's stroke, remember what thou sadist to me: Though thy head was severed from thy body, yet in a moment thy soul should be united to thy Head, the Lord Jesus, in heaven...Farewell, my dear. I shall never see thy face more till we both behold the face of the Lord Jesus at that great day."¹⁷

He wrote to her on the next day, July 15, the day he expected to be executed" "My Dearest Beloved, I am now going to my long home, yet I must write thee a word before I go hence and shall be seen no more. It is to beg thee to be comforted in my gain and not to be troubled in thy loss. Labor to suppress thy inward fears now that thou art under outward sorrows. As thy outward sufferings abound, let thy consolations in Christ also abound. I know thou art a woman of a sorrowful spirit. My time is short; I have but a few words of counsel to give thee, and then I shall leave thee to God who cares for thee and thine. 1. While thou art under desertions, labor rather to strengthen and clear up thy evidences for heaven than question them. 2. Remember a faith of adherence or reliance on the Lord Jesus brings thee to heaven, though thou lack the faith of evidence or assurance. 3. Labor to find that (and more also) in God which thou hast lost in the creature. 4. Spend not thy days in heaviness for my death. If there were knowledge of things below or sorrow in heaven, I should grieve to think my beloved should mourn on

¹⁴ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 112-113

¹⁵ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 120-122

¹⁶ Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3:125

¹⁷ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 1-3

earth. 5. Lie under a soul-searching ministry. I know thou art not a spongy hearer, sucking in foul water as well as fair, God has given thee a good understanding, to be able to discern things that differ. As the mouth tastes meat, thy ear trieth words. 6. Be conversant in Christian meeting and much in the exercises of mortification, in fasting and prayers, yet have respect to the weakness of thy body and thy present condition."¹⁸

Mary wrote him again on August 21, 1651, the day before his execution. "My Heavenly Dear: I call thee so because God hath put heaven into thee before He hath taken thee to heaven. Thou now beholdest God, Christ and glory, as in a glass; but tomorrow, heaven's gates will be opened and thou shalt be in the full enjoyment of all those glories which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither can the heart of man understand. God hath now swallowed up thy heart in the thoughts of heaven, but ere long thou shalt be swallowed up in the enjoyment of heaven...O lift up thy heart with joy when thou layest thy dear head on the block in the thought of this: that thou are laying thy head to rest in thy Father's bosom which, when thou dost awake, shall be crowned not with an earthly fading crown but with a heavenly eternal crown of glory. And be not discouraged when thou shalt see a guard of soldiers triumphing with their trumpets about thee, but lift up thy head and thou shalt behold God with a guard of His holy angels, triumphing to receive thee to glory. Be not dismayed at the scoffs and reproaches that thou mayest meet with in thy short way to heaven, for be assured that God will not only glorify thy body and soul in heaven but He will also make the memory of thee to be glorious on earth!"¹⁹

Love responded the next morning. "From the Tower of London, August 22, 1651. The Day of My Glorification. My Most Gracious Beloved: I am now going from a prison to a palace. I have finished my work. I am now to receive my wages. I am now going to heaven where are two of my children, and leaving thee on the earth where are three of my babes. Those two above need not my care, but the three below need thine. It comforts me to think two of my children are in the bosom of Abraham and three of them will in the arms and care of so tender a godly mother. I cannot write more, but I have a few practical counsels to leave with thee: 1. Keep under a sound, orthodox and soul-searching ministry. Oh, there are deceivers gone out into the world, but Christ's sheep know His voice and a stranger will they not follow. 2. Bring up thy children in the knowledge and admonition of the Lord. The mother ought to be a teacher in the father's absence. 3. Pray in thy family daily, that thy dwelling may be in the number of the families that call upon God. 4. Labor for a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5. Pour not on the comforts thou lack, but on the mercies thou hast. 6. Look rather at God's end in afflicting than at the measure and degree of thy affliction. 7. Study the covenant of grace and the merits of Christ, and then be troubled if thou canst. Thou art interested in such a covenant that accepts purposes for performances, desires for deeds, sincerity for perfection, the righteousness of another, that of Jesus Christ, as if it were thine own. Oh, my love! Rest, rest, then, in the love of God, in the bosom of Christ. 8. Swallow up thy will in the will of God. It is a bitter cup we are to drink, but it is the cup our Father hath put into our hands. 9. Rejoice in my joy. To mourn for me inordinately argues that either thou enviest or suspectest my happiness. The joy of the Lord is my strength; oh, let it be thine also. 10. Refuse not to marry when God offers you a fair opportunity; but be sure you marry in the Lord, and one of a good disposition, that he may not grieve you, but give you a comfortable livelihood in the world."²⁰

3. *His ministry and sermons.* "Fifteen volumes of Love's sermons were published by Edmund Calamy, Matthew Poole, and others shortly after Love's death" (Beeke).²¹ "As a pastor he was prolific.

¹⁸ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 97-98

¹⁹ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 84-85

²⁰ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 100-105

²¹ Joel Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 400

While little of his material was published in his lifetime, after his death his sermons were printed by those Puritan ministers who were friends and admirers" (Kistler).²² Among the sermons printed were 27 sermons on the Combat Between the Flesh and the Spirit (1654); 17 sermons on The Christian's Growth in Grace (1652); 10 sermons on Heaven's Glory (1653); 7 sermons on Hell's Terror (1653); 5 sermons on The Forgiveness of Sin (1657); 17 sermons on The Dejected Soul's Cure (1657); 10 sermons on Mortification (1654); 13 sermons on Christian Zeal (1653); 17 sermons on Man's Natural Condition (1658); 16 sermons on Election and Effectual Calling (1653); 15 sermons on Christ's Ascension and Second Coming from Heaven (1657); 15 sermons on A Christian Directory, or, How to Live in Every Condition of Life (1654); 10 sermons on A Christian's Duty and Safety in Evil Times (1653). "When one remembers that Love's ministry was confined to a space of only about six years, the amount of material he produced is quite astounding" (Kistler).²³

"In the collection of books that once belonged to Jonathan Edwards, there is a copy of Love's work on hell, *Hell's Terror*. Comparing Edwards' sermons on hell and Love's sermons on hell, one can see that Edwards was impressed with the keen insights of Love into this ominous subject" (Kistler).²⁴ Love entitled his series of sermons: *Hell's Terror, or A Treatise on the Torments of the Damned as a Preservative Against Security*. His text was Matthew 10:28, "But rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." After a brief explanation of his text, Love examined his topic under sixteen "Queries about Hell." "1. Is there a hell or not? 2. Why there must be a hell? 3. What is this hell wherein the bodies and souls of wicked men shall be tormented? 4. Are there degrees of torments in hell or not? 5. Is it good to hear sermons about hell? 6. Where is hell? 7. What are the torments of the damned in hell? 8. Are the torments of the damned eternal or not? 9. Can eternal torments stand with the justice of God? 10. Shall most men or women be tormented in hell? 11. How can the vast number of the damned stand with the mercy of God? 12. Is there any place of torment after this life for the souls of men and women to be tormented in besides hell? 13. Did Jesus personally descend into hell, this place of torment, yes or no? 14. Is there properly fire in hell or not? 15. When did God make hell? 16. What is meant by the part of the damned's torments in hell, that they shall have a worm of conscience that shall never die and which shall gnaw their conscience forever?"²⁵

"Query 8. Are the torments of hell eternal or not? Shall they last forever or shall they have an end? The torments of the damned are eternal torments. And to prove this I shall give you both Scripture and reason. For Scripture, the fire is called unquenchable fire (Matt.18:8, eternal fire that torments the wicked (Jude 7), everlasting torments that shall last forever (Matt.25:4), everlasting destruction (2Thess.1:9), and everlasting contempt (Dan.12:2). Now put these together and these Scriptures will clearly evidence that the torments of the damned must be everlasting torments." "But now for reasons to prove this, I shall name a few. First, these torments must be eternal because the justice of God, which they have wronged by their sins, can never be satisfied. But till the justice of God is satisfied, the wicked must be tormented. Luke 12:59. The wicked shall be in hell till they have paid the utmost mite. Now, if he cannot pay God His due and make God amends for the sins he has done, he must so long lie in hell. Second wicked men will sin to all eternity; therefore their torments must be eternal. As long as there is sin in a man, the Lord will torment that man; for sin and punishment cannot be severed. Sin is like oil and God's wrath like fire. As long as you cast oil upon the fire, the fire cannot cease burning. As long as sin is in a man's nature, a man cannot be free from suffering. Revelation 14:11: 'The smoke of their torments shall ascend forever and ever.' The wicked sin in hell forever and, therefore, forever shall be punished. Thirdly, the godly shall be in everlasting joy: therefore the wicked shall suffer eternal

²² Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 38

²³ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 41

²⁴ Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love*, 41

²⁵ Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:555-664

torments. Their conditions shall be quite contrary to one another; the torments of the one shall last as long as the joys of the other. As the one is for the glory of God's grace, so the other is for the glory of His justice. The wicked in hell continually sin against God, yet they have never a heart to repent of the sins they commit against God; therefore forever must they be punished. The God who damns a wicked man is an eternal God; therefore the punishment must be eternal. 'As long as there is a God, so long there shall be a hell,' said Chrysostom. Isaiah 33:14: 'Who can stand before the everlasting burnings?'"²⁶

"Query 9. Seeing the torments of the damned are eternal torments, can it stand with God's justice to damn man forever for sinning but for a time? To answer this therefore, I shall resolve it affirmatively; that it is just with God to condemn a man to eternity though he sins but for a little time in this world. 1. Punishment is not to be estimated by the length of time wherein the fault is in doing, but to be proportioned to the nature of the act. For instance, suppose a man being angry with another may give him a deadly wound in the twinkling of an eye. That man may be in prison all his life though the act was done in a minute's time. Now, if man may be punished a long time according to the act, will you straiten God? Shall God be straitened of that in which men have liberty? If a man for doing an act in an hour may be punished all his life, and man may do it, shall not God also? 2. Because Sin is against an infinite God. Now sin being committed against an infinite majesty, it deserves an infinite punishment to be inflicted. You know in the same act, the punishment is greatened or lessened according to the person against whom the act is done. If you give a blow to an ordinary man, this may only amount to some petty suit and some small fine to be paid; but if you give a blow to a prince, you may endure the rack or imprisonment for life, because the person is eminent against whom you offended. If sin were against person, it would not have been just in God to inflict extraordinary punishment; but sin being against that God who is infinite and eternal, therefore it may be just with God that infinite torments should be inflicted. Seeing wicked men sin against God who is the chief good, who is an infinite person, by divine right, therefore, the punishment of evil may be inflicted upon them to all eternity."²⁷

"3. Should man live forever, he would sin forever. And therefore, God seeing this disposition in man, He may justly damn man forever, though he sins but for a time. Man sins his eternity, therefore God may punish his eternity. Man sins as long as he can; therefore God will punish as long as He can. If man will forever sin, it is just with God to give him a curb, give him a check, and make him ever to suffer. 4. Though wicked men can sin no longer upon earth, yet after they are dead, they carry their very sins into hell with them. There they go on in sinning still and repent not. There they increase their blasphemies still and their provocations against God still, more than they did upon earth. Now put all these together, and you can no way tax God's justice for giving hard measure to wicked men, nor any way fasten cruelty or injustice upon your Maker. 5. Last, wicked men by sinning have lost an infinite good and opposed an infinite good. Therefore they must endure an infinite evil. Seeing the wicked despise the infinite grace and infinite mercy of a God, and the infinite merits of a Christ, and the infinite tenders of grace from God, therefore they are justly involved into infinite punishment. You have received infinite kindness from God, kindness without number; if you sin against these infinite mercies, it is just with God to punish you with infinite torments for the nature of your punishment to be correspondent to the nature of your offense. It is the speech of an ancient author that were there ten thousand hells, and ten thousand times more torments in those hells than there is, it were not enough to make amends to the justice of God for man's sins. Wicked men, did they endure ten thousand times more than they do, cannot satisfy and make God amends for the wrong they have done Him by sinning. And therefore, it is no way unjust to damn man forever, though he lives but awhile to sin here."²⁸

²⁶ Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:598-601

²⁷ Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:608-610

²⁸ Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:610-611