

“Affectionately Desirous of Him:

*The Power of Holy Affections for Holy Love and Holy Living in
the Writings of Richard Sibbes, Thomas Brooks, John Owen,
and Eminent English Puritans of the 17th Century”*

“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart”

-Psalm 119:32

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Affectionate Anointing

There is nothing in this world that will draw a person more vehemently to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to embolden them toward faithful obedience to Him than a heart full of love that is affectionately desirous of Him. There is a beautiful, Gospel example of this in Mark 14:1-9, that describes a woman (probably Mary of Bethany) who has one thing, one aspiration on her mind, and she pursues the Lord Jesus with all of her heart, and is affectionately moved to serve the Lord!

“And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” – Mark 14:9

The woman in Mark 14 pushed past social constraints for women of her day, entered a room full of men, and took the most expensive heirloom in her possession to break it lovingly, and poured the fragrant, sacrificial offering over the head of Christ. This was an affectionate anointing of devoted love to Jesus. She gave her all! What undivided and wholehearted devotion this woman had, to give herself and all she had unto the Lord Jesus in that way!? This woman desired Jesus more than anything else; she needed Him; she wanted Him; she wanted to serve Him. In fact, it was this woman’s affections for the Lord Jesus moving her to holy actions and devoted works that is still remembered today (Mark 14:9).

This woman doesn’t say a word, but her affections influenced by the Gospel love and holiness of her Savior, shows to us what affections can and will do when influenced, enamored and empowered by Jesus and His love: Our affections will desire, they will seek after, they will serve, and they will produce an abundance of good works (John 15:10; Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:7,14). This is a beautiful Gospel picture of what the Puritans taught us

concerning the affections. If our affections have been ravished by the Holy love of God, and the soul desires more of that love in Jesus Christ, then that soul will pursue Christ, His holiness, and heaven with earnest desire and desperate passion. The Puritans taught that a soul cannot get a true saving sight of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ by faith and remain neutral; God has saved us to be happy and holy, satisfied in Him.

Can we have this as Christians living today? Yes, we can have this kind of undivided, whole-hearted devotion! Only by the work of the Holy Spirit will we desire Christ and recognize our deep need, and emptiness apart from Him. Then we are able to begin to move toward Him in closer communion. When we learn to delight in Him, to please Him and to desire to be like Him, we will grow fuller and fuller, and desire to be with Him.

HOLY LOVE- To Know Christ

An Affectionate Desire to be Drawn and Ravished by the Bridegroom's Love

Believers are drawn by the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ. We are to be drawn and ravished by the Lord Jesus's love for us. The Savior delights to give Himself for His people and to His people. This will change the way we think about God and ourselves. It will change the way we live, what we think about, what we desire, and how we love God and others.

Holy Affections, Desires, and Passions: *"One Thing...that Will I Seek After..."*

The Psalmist says unto God: *"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after..."* (Psa. 27:4). The Psalmist's prayer to the LORD is his holy desire to delight in God. He desires nothing more than to seek after and fulfill this longing, or desire within him. What does he desire to do? He wants to dwell in God's holy presence, and to worship and adore God, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD all of his days, beholding God with eyes of faith.

He desires to meditate upon God in His holy presence. This is a desire to delight in God. This is a singular, undivided, wholly devoted desire that has been given to him by the Lord God Himself. In Richard Sibbes' (1577-1635) classic devotional sermon "*A Breathing After God*," which is an exegesis and application of Psalm 27:4, he described the loving affections of one seeking God as a "*breathing after God*" and he used these endearing and sweetly devoted terms to describe the soul's affections or longings that result in seeking after and finding contentment, joy, felicity, happiness, and satisfaction in God.

Sibbes described our affections that have been emboldened by the Holy Spirit as the "searchings of the heart" because the heart of men will seek until it finds rest and satisfaction; true "felicity" because in God true joy and happiness is found; "desire and expectation" because God is what our souls desire, and the One they were created to wait upon as servant-creatures dependent upon their Lord; "beating of the pulse of desires" because our heart beats for who we love the most; the "sweetest manner", a "sweet experience", "the sweet, alluring, beauty of God", "delightful and sweet", "ravished" to "relish spiritual things"; these terms Sibbes used to gloriously and affectionately describe our hearts' desires for God in Christ as given strength and direction by the Holy Spirit.¹

For the Puritans, our hearts' affections should cause us to desire after God, and do for God. Our affections should think sweet, loving, and beautiful thoughts of God (Phil. 4:8). They should delight our souls in the LORD (Psa. 37:4), to desire to singularly seek and "gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Psa. 27:4), to seek to behold the "power and glory" of God (Psa. 63:2), to behold the king in His beauty with spiritual eyes of faith (Isa. 33:17), to see

¹ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God* in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 2004), II: 210-48.

by faith that He is “altogether desirable” (Song of Solomon, 5:16 ESV), or “altogether lovely” (Song of Solomon, 5:16 KJV), to be “satisfied as with fat and rich food” in God (Psa. 63:5), to realize that God is our portion (Psa. 16:5), and that there is nothing else in heaven or upon earth that we desire more than God, and that it is good to be as near to Him as possible (Psa. 73:25, 28)! In God, we can find, by His grace and mercy, all of our desires fulfilled. We can behold, by faith, the sweet, alluring, beauty of God!

What are Holy Affections? More Than a Feeling—but Drawing, Possessing, Inclining, Pursuing...!

What are the affections? Are they our “hearts”? Are they are “wills”? Are they our “emotions”? Our affections include all of these, but our affections might be described more specifically as the intersection between the mind or understanding, and the heart and will of man. The mind is informed by truth; the mind should receive truth and understanding, from the light of God’s Word. The affections are warmed by this light as the truth is received into the heart. There is light, but there is also fire, or warmth. This motivates, or inclines our will toward the object of our desires, who is God, the Glorious Creator and Redeemer of our Souls! Our souls find what they are looking for and seeking in Him. John Owen (1616-1683) taught that our mind is the guide that leads the soul with light from God. He taught that our will is the governor who rules over the soul through conviction from the truth or light through the mind. By nature, the will is bent toward and inclined to evil “always and continually,” said Owen.² “True grace fixes the affections on spiritual things,” and produces a new bent “toward the spiritual” in regeneration.”³ He wrote: “Saving grace fills up the affections with spiritual things, fills the soul with spiritual love,

² John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), III: 238-39.

³ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, III: 240.

joy, delight...⁴ Owen taught that men's affections are increased and inflamed through meditation and this is a kind of circulation in them that will then intensify and focus the thoughts more intensely:

"...According as men's thoughts are exercised about them, their affections are increased and inflamed towards them. These things mutually promote one another, and there is a kind of circulation in them. Multiplied thoughts inflame affections, and inflamed affections increase the number of thoughts concerning them."⁵

To use a mechanical illustration to describe, the mind and affections are like two cogs or gears that fit together that then move the body into action in a particular direction, with a force, and a goal of obtaining what is sought after. John Owen, in his work on the Holy Spirit in sanctification says that the sanctifying work of the Spirit "inclines and disposes the mind, will, and affections, unto acts of holiness...to make us meet to live unto God...It does not only incline and dispose the mind, but gives it *power* (Owen's emphasis), and enables it to live unto God in all holy obedience."⁶

Affections are very similar to what we would call desires or passions of the heart. Affections cause our hearts to be inclined in a particular direction toward something or someone, and then when it is attracted and is fixed, it will be disinterested and even repulsed by anything that would hinder the obtaining of the desire. Affections incline our wills, move our souls toward something, place our spiritual lives on a certain trajectory, to pursue after passionately, and desire vehemently. Affections make us have a passion or desire after God, and to desire after God is to desire passionately to be like God. This is why

⁴ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, III: 240.

⁵ John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ-God and Man*, in *Works*, I:222.

⁶ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, III: 473.

that a truly converted person, one who has been influenced by the saving work and power of the Holy Spirit will demonstrate a certain degree of loving desire and passion to not only know God, but to be with Him and to commune with Him to know Him, and to serve Him, producing works for His glory. Antinomianism cannot long exist in the heart of a true Christian that desires passionately to know and serve God!⁷

Affections are like emotions in that there is an emotional element to them, and they cause the soul to feel a certain inclination and love toward something or someone. Holy affections move us to love, rejoice, seek delight, and rest in God from the heart. When speaking about our affections toward God they describe the soul's desire and inclination to love God, to meet with Him, to commune with Him, to have more of Him, to know that only God can ultimately satisfy and bring us complacent rest. Love is the "chief affection". John Owen wrote concerning love as a chief holy affection, that the "principle end why God endued our natures with that great and ruling affection [of love], that hath the most eminent and peculiar power and interest in our souls, was, in the first place, that it might be fixed on Himself—that it might be the instrument of our adherence unto Him...No affection hath such power in the soul to cause it to cleave unto its object, and to work conformity unto it."⁸ Our affections, when they are desirous of God in Christ, are never satisfied until they have obtained a certain degree of pleasure and communion with and in God.

⁷ For a recent excellent study of Antinomianism and its dangers for us, see Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2013), particularly pgs. 89-96.

⁸ John Owen, *Christologia*, in *Works*, I:150.

Jonathan Edwards, often considered the “last of the great Puritans” (1703-1758), wrote in his excellent treatise *“On the Religious Affections”* making distinctions between passions, or mere emotions and what affections are:

“The affections and the passions are frequently spoken of as the same; and yet, in the more common use of speech, there is some difference...Affection is a word...that seems to be something more extensive than passion, being used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or the inclination...As all the exercises of inclination and will, are concerned either in approving and liking, or disapproving and rejecting; so the affections are of two sorts: they are those by which the soul is carried out to what is in view, cleaving to it, or seeking it; or those by which it is averse from it, and opposes it. Of the former sort are love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, complacency. Of the latter kind are hatred, fear, anger, grief, and such like.”⁹

Edwards described the affections as the “spring of all our actions” because from them flow all of our desire after God, His holiness, and our desire to serve Him wholeheartedly. Our affections incline our will toward or away from something or someone.¹⁰ Edwards teaches us that love is the chief of all the affections, or the fountain from which all our affections flow forth, particularly with regard to our relationship to God in Christ.¹¹

Here are some questions to ask our souls to better understand our affections and what we are moving toward and desiring to determine what direction our wills are inclined: *“What do I find to be most lovely in my life?” “What is trying to fill me?” “What is my heart desiring to feed on?” “What do I daydream about?” “What arouses the passions within me?” “What am I being drawn toward?” “When I am doing nothing else, what direction does my mind (and heart!) tend to move?” “What brings me happiness?” “Where do I seek joy?” “What*

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), I: 237.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, I: 238.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, I: 240.

things possess me?” “What has caused my heart to ‘thrill’, ‘exult’ and ‘hope’ in lately?” Is God your portion—your hope—your chief desire? (Psa. 16:5; 73:25).

There is a soul response to what we find most lovely, that draws our affections to it. There is a feeling and emotion, but more than that. Once we experience it, it begins not only to make us feel a certain way, it is more than an emotion, it has drawing power; it has a power to transform us, to assimilate us, it possesses us, and makes us live a certain way. As William Greenhill wrote in *‘Stop Loving the World,’* “When are affections are set on something, we love that thing.”¹² As John Bunyan (1628-1688) exulted in his excellent sermon *‘Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ,’*: “Oh, the heart-attracting glory that is in Jesus Christ, when He is discovered, to draw those to Him who are given to Him of the Father...There is a heart-pulling glory in Jesus Christ.¹³ If one is a Christian, desires are helpful to discover our spiritual state and level of maturity. Sibbes (1577-1635) wrote that desires issue from our affections, and they “show the frame of the soul more than anything in the world. He encouraged our souls to ask: “What is thy desire?” “What is the bent of thy soul?” Sibbes wrote “the bent and sway of the soul shows what a man is.”¹⁴

The Puritans were experts in understanding the workings of man’s soul. They understood that a soul must understand the truth of something, then be convinced of this truth’s beauty, then that will have an affect on the heart, and the soul, driving the will to incline itself toward the object. So it is with God in Christ. If the mind was satisfied and saturated with the truth of God, it would mean sanctification of the soul. As our Lord Jesus

¹² William Greenhill, *Stop Loving the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 8.

¹³ John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 73.

¹⁴ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 220-21.

prayed to the Father on the night of His betrayal: “*Sanctify them by the truth, your Word is truth*” (John 17:17). If the mind understands, and it understands by the help of the Holy Spirit that this is true and a truth that is good, then the soul will feel it, it will be affected by this understanding, and that will engage the affections to move and incline the will toward God; the soul will vehemently seek after God by the power of the Holy Spirit. As William Plumer (1759-1850) wrote:

“All knowledge which is unfelt and inoperative puffs up the mind and hardens the heart. It is better to have the workings of gracious affections than to be able to define them, or to speak ever so learnedly respecting them. The great use of a large part of divine truth is rightly to affect our minds and hearts, and so to control our practice.”¹⁵

To put it another way, truth received by the soul as true and good, should always be transformative. The truth as received by the power of the Holy Spirit is particularly “transformative truth”; it will not, it cannot leave the soul unchanged. As Richard Sibbes wrote thoughtfully as an example of Puritan thinking on the mind affecting the heart and the will of the soul of man:

“Desires are the issues of the heart. Thoughts and desires are the two primitive issues of the heart, the births of the heart. Thoughts breed desires. Thoughts in the mind or brain, the brain strikes the heart presently. It goes from the understanding to the will and the affections. What we think of, that we desire it, if it be good. So thoughts and desires, they immediately spring from the soul; and where they are in any efficacy and strength, they stir up motion in the outward man. The desires of the soul, being the inward motion, they stir up outward motion, till there be an attaining of the thing desired, and then there is rest...When motion comes once to rest, it is quiet (satisfied). So desire, which is the inward motion, it stirs up outward

¹⁵ William Plumer, *Vital Godliness: A Treatise on Experimental and Practical Piety* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1993), 7 (reprint from 1864).

motion, till the thing desired be accomplished, and then the soul rests in loving contentment, and enjoying of the thing desired.”¹⁶

The affections are powerful in this way. If possessed by God and ravished by His holiness, and satisfied in His love, then our affections will cause us to be motivated to seek Him, to pray to Him, to seek the means of grace, to love Him and others as ourselves, and to produce an abundance of good works for the glory of God. Affections have great power in compelling us to love and to serve God in order to please Him. Affections of gratitude and warm devotion to Jesus will move us to seek Him, to pray, to want to share ourselves with Him. Affections do not merely influence us, they incline our will towards what our soul thinks will bring us the most good. Our affections as they are drawn spiritually toward God and find satisfaction in His holiness, will find more desire and an earnest “breathing after” or “longing” or “seeking after” more of God and to please Him more and more!

We have affections that move us like this because we are made in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-28). God has built into our souls a desire for communion and fellowship with Him. As our forefather Augustine (354-430) said warmly about our hearts: *“Thou [O God] movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.”¹⁷* Similarly, Puritan forefather Richard Sibbes wrote that the soul is never at rest till it rests on Christ. Then it is afraid to break with Him or to displease Him, but it grows zealous and resolute, and hot in love...¹⁸

¹⁶ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 218.

¹⁷ Aurelius Augustine, Ed. Whitney J. Oates. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, in *The Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* 2 Vols. (New York, NY: Random House Publishers), 3.

¹⁸ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 69.

God has placed affections in our souls similar to His own affections. We were created to desire Him and to be satisfied in Him. As God delights in Himself as the Triune God, so He “built us” to delight in Him and find a similar complacency and felicity. Apart from God the soul can never be completely happy and content. The Book of Ecclesiastes is about the exploration of pleasure, work, and other good gifts of God given to man “under the sun”. The conclusion of the book is that one is to fear God and to keep His commandments, for it is only with God that humans can truly enjoy pleasure, work and other good gifts of God, because we will never be satisfied in them-- only in Him. The sage says to our souls today: *“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man”* (Eccl. 12:13b).

Our affections and desires are holy longings that desire after God, and increasingly want more from God, and can never be satisfied with anyone or anything other than God. Holy longings are described in Psalm 63:1-5:

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. ³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. ⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips...”

In Psalm 63, there is an earnest seeking after, a thirst that needs to be quenched, a strength that can only be obtained by God in His holy presence. The soul must have God. God and God alone will satisfy. When this desire is fulfilled to a certain degree and to a good extent the soul will be satisfied “as with fat and rich food,” and it will result in deep praise to God from the heart! (Psa. 63:5). Psalm 63:1-8 teaches us summarily that our souls will be satisfied in God (v. 5a), our mouths will be filled with praise for God because of deep joy in

the heart (v. 5b); our thoughts will mediate upon God at all hours (v. 6), and there will be deep and abiding joy (v. 7), because of our complete dependency or “clinging” to our God in Christ (v. 8).

The Savior Gives Himself to His Beloved Bride

Smitten, Tasting, Experiencing God’s Love in Christ

When we receive Christ Jesus by faith as our Glorious Savior and Dear Bridegroom, the soul’s affections and desires are capable of being smitten with Him, as in being in love. The Bible teaches us that Christ is our Bridegroom and we are His Holy Bride (Song of Solomon, 4:9-10; Isa. 61:10; 62:5; Hos. 2:19-20; John 3:29; Eph. 5:21-32; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:9). Jesus has purchased His Bride by His precious blood (Rev. 1:5b-7). Because God is our chief good “what better end to be in...than to behold God in the ‘beauty of holiness’, Sibbes asks the inquiring and hungry heart from Psalm 29:2: *“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”*.¹⁹ We want to behold our beautiful Bride.

Affections are revealed as our hearts seek to be satisfied and happy, and resting in God as our Holy Husband. Richard Sibbes in his affectionate and gracious sermon entitled *“The Spouse, Her Earnest Desire”* described fellowship and communion with the Triune God in these ways: Fellowship with God was a “sweet banquet”, a time for desires to be satisfied and for desires to be increased, a “sweet taste of the love of Christ,” a “longing desire”, “love tokens” from God, and a love that was “sweeter than wine”.²⁰ Notice the use of language of delicacies and delights, of food and drink and love and fellowship. Some of the sweetest of created pleasures and treasures from God are used to lift up our eyes and hearts to the

¹⁹ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 212.

²⁰ Richard Sibbes, *The Spouse, Her Earnest Desire After Christ*, in *Works*, II: 200-208.

Living God, in order to understand the joy and delight we can have in Him alone. Using the language that conjures up in our imaginations the aromas of a delightful banquet, the warm embrace and loving fellowship of friends and family, the morsels of delicacy that are tasty in our mouths and satisfying in our bellies, are beautifully described so our soul's will be affected as God's people to enjoy our Glorious Bridegroom and to see His loveliness in all of His beauty!

These are sweet terms to describe a unique fellowship and communion with the Living God that is only possible through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners. Because of God's love for sinners in Jesus Christ, He has formally and finally betrothed Himself to us in love (Hos. 2:14-21). We are to respond as redeemed lovers (said with all reverence) to our Lord and Husband, with the quiet, gentle and content submission of a loving wife. Thomas Shepard (1605-1649) wrote of our desirous Bridegroom who is a match made in Heaven!: "Here is a match for you; choose Him, get your affections, if entangled [with worldly, mere created objects and things that do not satisfy], to come off if ensnared."²¹ Shepard, through his ministry to God's people, woos Christ's bride to Him, and speaks to her of "conjugal" or intimate love like between a husband and wife so that the bride would be enamored and smitten with the beauty of the Bridegroom.²² Shepard, as a faithful, spiritual "Best Man" or "Friend of the Bridegroom", preparing Christ's bride for her wedding day, entices Christ's Bride with these thoughts of Him in order to engage and quicken her affections to seek after Jesus. He said for her to meditate upon, and contemplate by faith Christ in the glory of His Person as God Man and Mediator between

²¹ Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 41.

²² Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 41. Shepard said "the main work of ministry is to woo for Christ."

God the Father and sinners; to remember that He makes love to you (perhaps what we might describe as seeking after us, or drawing us to Himself); to remember that Christ desires our love and seeks for it, and that He will love you if you love Him.²³

Once we taste of God's love in the Bridegroom, these desires are to a certain degree satisfied, and once satisfied, the soul desires much more of Him. Richard Sibbes wrote: "If there were but a taste, there would be a further desire of growth in that love. In fact, Christ will have the whole heart and the whole affections, or He will have neither heart nor affections. We are to be undivided in our hearts, and wholly devoted unto Him for His pleasure—for our pleasure!"²⁴

We are to "*taste and see that the LORD is good*" (Psa. 34:8). To be ravished by the love of Christ is to cause our souls to taste of the goodness of God. The Spirit of God causes the renewed soul in union with Christ to be nourished on spiritual things, and to savor or taste refreshment and be strengthened. This taste of divine things causes relishing, refreshing, reviving. Thomas Charles, a non-conformist Welsh minister (1755-1844) wrote:

"There is no image in the whole Bible, more frequently made use of to express the workings, affections, and desires of the new man after spiritual things than the craving of our bodily appetites after food and nourishment...And what proper food is to a hungry man, that, spiritual things, Christ and the blessings of the Gospel, are to the renewed soul...Hunger and thirst are the strongest of the bodily appetites. They are also unceasing and continually more and more craving and importunate (persistent) till we either eat or drink, or die....So are the new desires of the new man in Christ, after spiritual things: the grace of Christ, the favor of God, and conformity to His image. They are strong and unceasing, craving

²³ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 42.

²⁴ Richard Sibbes, *The Spouse, Her Earnest Desire After Christ*, in *Works*, II: 205-207.

after spiritual food with more and more importunity (persistence)—and nothing but this will satisfy.”²⁵

Holy Affections and Desires Rooted in the Triune God’s Electing Love

What will motivate us to seek this love in Christ? Simply, the motive to seek Him will begin when we realize His unending and untiring effort to seek us out and find us even while sinners—to condescend to live and die for us, even while His enemies (Rom. 5:6-11). His amazing and unbelievable love for sinners makes us love Him. The Bible teaches us that we love because God first loved us (1 Jo. 4:19). This love is an electing love that is rooted in eternity past in the affections and love of the Triune God. In other words, our love, affections, and desires that we have for God is because He first set His affections and desires upon us in Jesus Christ. John Owen wrote of this glorious divine love that makes the believing soul cry out: “How great is His goodness! How great is His beauty!”

“From the exercise of faith herein doeth divine love, love unto God, proceed; therein alone it is enlivened and inflamed...Under that representation of him alone can the soul cleave unto him with ardent love, constant delight, and intense affections.”²⁶

We are taught that before the foundation of the world, God the Father predestined us in Christ, and He chose us in Him to be His Holy Beloved and adopted children who would be characterized by holiness and blamelessness. “In love” He chose us in Christ (Eph. 1:3-5). This was because God desired to glorify Himself through us, in and through our affections and desire for Him! “*To the praise of His glorious grace*” in Jesus! (Eph. 1:6).

²⁵ Thomas Charles, Ed. Edward Morgan. *Spiritual Counsels: Selected from His Letters and Papers* (Banner of Truth Trust Reprint, 1993), 98-100. (first published in 1836).

²⁶ John Owen, *Christologia*, in *Works*, I: 243.

This love was made complete by the Eternal Son willingly taking our nature unto Himself in personal, permanent, and holy subsistence and union to live and die for sinners; to be raised for His own, and to be enthroned at God's right hand, having made purification for our sins (Heb. 1:3-4; 2:11-16). Jesus is the Glorious God-Man who was given a people by the Father (John 17), who would be His beautiful and holy Bride. The Holy Spirit unites the sinner through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and gives to us His love, and His joy, and fellowship with God, who pours out God's love into our hearts so that we get a "tang of the transcendent upon the heart" or taste of delight and joy in God's love in and through the means of grace He has provided for us to grow (Rom. 5:5).²⁷ God has loved us even before we were born! This is love that is so great, it can only be described as "so" as in "God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son..." (John 3:16).

This love of God stirs us up to seek after God, and His glory and honor, and or inward communion with Him from the heart.²⁸ This love is the fountain from which all the affections toward God flow. We are to be convinced by the Holy Scriptures, and through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit that we are loved in Jesus Christ. From this love, flows forth all of our desires to come nearer to God, find our all in Him, and to commune with Him, to be like Him. We begin to desire to love as He loves, to love what He loves and to hate and despise that which He hates and despises. Stephen Charnock describes God's holiness as the "rectitude or integrity of the Divine nature...in affection and action, to the

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Pilgrim's Regress*, 1933; quoted in J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 15. Lewis wrote: "That tang of the transcendent in the every day that hits the heart like a blow as one experiences and enjoys things, revealing itself ultimately as a longing not satisfied by any created realities or relationships, but assuaged only in self-abandonment to the Creator's love in Christ."

²⁸ Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 220.

Divine will...where he works with a becomingness to his own excellency.²⁹ To desire what God desires is holiness; because holiness “simply put, [is that] God unchangeably loves good and hates evil.”³⁰ The soul that has stirred by the love of God desires holiness as well.

Henry Scougal (1650-1678) wrote of this glorious and divine love:

“Love is that powerful and prevalent passion by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend. The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love: he who loveth mean and sordid things doth thereby become base and vile; but a noble and well-placed affection doth advance and improve the spirit unto a conformity with the perfections which it loves....The true way to improve and ennoble our souls is, by fixing our love on the divine perfections, that we may have them always before us....He who, with a generous and holy ambition, hath raised his eyes toward that uncreated beauty and goodness, and fixed his affection there, is quite of another spirit, of a more excellent and heroic temper than the rest of the world...”³¹

Nathanael Vincent said that to attend upon God “implies the fullest bent and inclination of heart....The heart now desires the enjoyment of fellowship with God, as infinitely more valuable than all other enjoyments. And this full bent of the heart mightily fixes it so that the stream of the affections is kept the better in one undivided channel.”³²

Holy Affections and Desires Are Holy-Spiritual Wedding Gifts of God to His Beloved Bride

Our God and Father is so very kind and merciful. The Lord Jesus Christ tells believers assuredly that it is the Father’s good pleasure to give His Kingdom to those whom He loves! (Luke 12:32). The LORD is a lavish and gracious Giver of all good gifts. In fact, every good

²⁹ Stephen Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 470; quoted in Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 76.

³⁰ Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 76.

³¹ Scougal, Henry. *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Heritage Books, 1996), 71.

³² Nathanael Vincent, *Attending Upon God*, 124-125 (commenting on Psalm 73:25, 28).

gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is absolutely no change (James 1:17). By nature our affections are tainted and marred by sin, deformed and depraved, along with our minds and wills. By nature, sin has kept us from seeing the bright and wonderful light of God, and we cannot feel the warmth of the truth, nor are we inclined to move toward God. But in our conversion, through the supreme power and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, our minds, wills, and affections are changed, and thus begins a transformative-sanctifying work that can increase as we grow in Christ. Holy Affections and Desires are given to us in our regeneration as a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit that is implanted in our souls. John Owen wrote:

“In the sanctification of believers, the Holy Spirit does work in them, on their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections, a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God; the substance or essence, the life and being of holiness does consist.”³³

The Holy Spirit in the hearts of God’s children is faithful to effectually stir up holy desires in the Christian. Words and actions may be hypocritical, and merely just seek to please God outwardly, but affections and desires from within, from the heart, are given by the Holy Spirit in our union with Christ.³⁴ John Preston (1587-1628) said that spiritual love, that is love given to the soul by the Holy Spirit, leads us to desire holy things for themselves. He describes the love given by the Holy Spirit as a fire: “...As fire begets fire, so doth love beget love.” He wrote elsewhere: “If thou be in Christ, there goes out a virtue from him that stamps upon thy heart this holy affection that breeds in thee this holy fire of love, so that

³³ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, III: 468-69.

³⁴ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 219.

thy heart cleaves to him, thou lovest him with as true, with as genuine, as natural and as sensible love as thou lovest any friend; as thou lovest any creature in the world.”³⁵

Edward Pearse (1633-1673) wrote in *“The Soul’s Espousal to Christ”* that the Spirit comes and works a “secret love and longing in the soul after Christ.”³⁶ Richard Sibbes wrote that spiritual conviction is the ground of practice. When the soul is convicted of the goodness of this or that thing, it moves toward it.³⁷ The understanding must be enlightened to know the truth of a thing, then it realizes that it is good; the soul then realizes that it is good for me, and then this moves a soul to see something as the best of all for one’s soul.³⁸ This is all the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul.

As the Scriptures teach, if we delight ourselves in God, He will give us the desires of our heart (Psa. 37:4). We should understand that it is our gracious Father in heaven, because of the love and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Spirit that these desires are placed in us. He gives, and we respond with desire, and then we pray and seek Him, and ask for these things to be fulfilled in us. We long to have these desires gratified, satisfied, fulfilled, but He has been gracious in giving them to us. Then, we await our great God and Savior for the blessing of Him hearing us and answering us. We *“wait upon the LORD,”* knowing He will strengthen our hearts (Psa. 27:14). We see this pattern of the Spirit’s work upon the soul in Psalm 27:8: *“You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”* The Lord commands the believer to seek His face. The believer in dependence and reliance upon the Holy Spirit does this, then the heart of the

³⁵ John Preston, *“Mount Ebal: A Heavenly Treatise of Divine Love,”* quoted in Gordon Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London, England: Epworth Press), 1957), 92.

³⁶ Edward Pearse, *Soul’s Espousal*, 31.

³⁷ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 70.

³⁸ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 70.

believer begins to desire this himself increasingly, and says: “Your face, LORD, will I seek.” This increases as the believer depends upon the Spirit to do God’s will!

We must understand that we cannot see nor feel the love of God without the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit to our souls. The Holy Spirit must grant to the soul our spiritual senses; these are truly “Holy-Spiritual senses” because the Spirit renews our natures, and implants in our souls the inclination and disposition to “see and enter the Kingdom,” to seek it and experience it! (John 3:3ff). We must have spiritual eyes and spiritual taste buds given by the Spirit to be able to relish and enjoy spiritual things. As the Scriptures teach us:

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” - *ESV 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 (emphasis mine).*

And the Apostle Paul prayed regularly for believers that their spiritual eyes might be opened from their hearts, their “inner man” so that they could fathom the unfathomable love of God in Christ Jesus:

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” - *ESV Ephesians 3:14-19 (emphasis mine).*

Regeneration is a gift from the Triune God, and is all because of His sovereign initiating power and grace. Coming to Christ must be “inward and real” not coming merely with the feet, but the affections of the heart, with an eye to look on Christ, a hand to grasp Him, a

mouth to feed upon Him, and feet to bring us near to Him.”³⁹ Coming to Christ is a motion or activity of the soul. This is all because of God’s grace to sinners.⁴⁰

Richard Sibbes wrote that the Spirit of God must help us to see the beauty of God.⁴¹ The Spirit of God will show us more of our deformity, and our sins, and our need for more of Christ and His holiness. Our souls will be attracted to, and desire more communion with God in our union with Him by faith. There will be a desire or nearer communion with God by His Spirit, to have more knowledge and affection, more love and joy and delight in the best things daily. The Spirit of God will work a taste and relish, and a longing after the things of God.⁴²

These affections and desires that are given to us by God distinguish us from hypocrites, and enable to reach a higher level of assurance of our faith. Sibbes wrote: “There are no characteristics better distinguishing a Christian from a hypocrite (who merely displays outward love for God), than those that are inward affections.”⁴³ Thomas Neast asked how we might know our love for Christ was sincere, and he wrote that one way was that “the soul knows that it is undone and empty without him.”⁴⁴ In other words, the soul “can’t live without Him” as we would say in our modern speech; the soul is spiritually smitten—“sick with love”-- this is very literal in our experience in that our soul’s once they taste of the goodness and loveliness of Christ, must have more! John Owen wrote that a true Christian

³⁹ John Brinsley, *Three Links of the Golden Chain*, pg. 29; Quoted in J. R. Beeke, *Puritan Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 513-14.

⁴⁰ Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 514.

⁴¹ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 238.

⁴² Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 247

⁴³ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 211.

⁴⁴ Rev. Thomas Neast, “What are the Characters of a Soul’s Sincere Love to Christ? And How May that Love to Him be Kindled and Enflamed?” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:175.

should have the “most intense affections of our souls on the Person of Christ, being overcome until we are sick with love. He wrote importantly that the normal, growing Christian has “constant motions...toward Him with delight and adherence.”⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards wrote in his excellent sermon “*A Divine and Supernatural Light*,” that a man who has had the work of the Spirit upon his soul has,

“...A sense (taste) of the gloriousness of God in his heart...a sense (taste) of the loveliness of God’s holiness....Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense (taste) of that loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace.”⁴⁶

We can be thankful to God for this gift, because when we act upon them through prayer, they can be increased.⁴⁷ Richard Sibbes wrote that if God gives the desire, He means to give the thing desired—therefore pray earnestly for it!⁴⁸

One way that we can grow in our affections toward God and His Holiness revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ is to stay fixed and focused in our communion with God through prayer until we experience a taste, or sense an enjoyment, or ravishment of our hearts, deep in our souls as we engage in our duties. Thomas Brooks wrote of John Bradford

“...That he could not leave a duty until he had found communion with Christ in the duty; he could not give off (quit) a duty until his heart was brought into a duty frame; he could not leave off confession until he had found his heart humbled and melted under the sense of his sin; he could not give over petitioning until he had found his heart taken with the beauties of the things desired, and strongly carried out (“carried away”) after the

⁴⁵ John Owen, *Christologia: Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*, in *Works*, I:167.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, in *Works*, II: 16-17.

⁴⁷ Richard Sibbes, *The Spouse, Her Earnest Desire After Christ*, in *Works*, II: 207.

⁴⁸ Richard Sibbes, *Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 225.

enjoyment of them. Neither could he leave thanksgiving until he had found his spirit enlarged....⁴⁹

John Owen wrote that sincere love and delight in Christ brings believers to rejoice with 'joy inexpressible and full of glory!' (1 Pet. 1:8). Those who reach this experientially high level of assurance and joy in Jesus,

"...Discovered that in Christ which made their hearts leap within them, and all their affections to overflow with delight and joy...This is to stir up our hearts unto in all mediations of the grace of God, and not to rest until we find them affected, satisfied, and filled with holy complacency."⁵⁰

It is very important to stress that there is an important experiential element in obtaining a taste of God's goodness in our duties and privileges such as prayer and the seeking after God in worship and means of grace.⁵¹ We are to expect great things from God, and to seek Him until our hearts are merry with the reality and truths of how God is revealed to us in Holy Scripture. Our souls are responding with delight—we are delighting in the LORD! This may not happen every time we go to perform our duties in the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is good to experience these things, and ask each time for the Holy Spirit to be pleased to give them. It motivates us to want to have more of Jesus, and thus also to be more like Jesus.

John Owen wrote encouraging believers to nourish their minds and hearts with contemplations and mediations upon God's truth, then to nourish our affections like our faith, similar to how we nourish our bodies. This experiential nourishment will bring to the

⁴⁹ Thomas Brooks, *The Necessity, Excellency, Rarity, and Beauty of Holiness*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), IV: 148.

⁵⁰ John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, III: 318.

⁵¹ The experiential element might be called "the 'tang' of the transcendent in the everyday that hits the heart," as C. S. Lewis aptly put it! Quoted in Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 31.

soul deep joy, assurance of our faith, and a confident, immovable heart when it is established by experience of God's love in Christ:

“The heart is immovable, when it is established by experience, when we find a substance, a reality, a spiritual nourishment proposed unto us. Now, how can this be obtained unless we are conversant in our mind's about them? Unless we dwell in our thoughts and affections upon them? For thereby do we taste and find how good the Lord is in this work of grace.”⁵²

Thomas Shepard wrote: “Labor to find out the true sweetness [in Christ's love]...a man's affections, like streams, must run some way...It is a rule in theology, stop the affections from running to the creature, and in a sincere heart it will run unto Christ.”⁵³ What an encouragement to growth, in that the believer seeks after God as He commands, then find rest and pure delight, being touched in His affections, and being transformed, desiring more of God and more of what He can do for the soul in healing, rest, satisfaction, and warm fellowship!

John Owen wrote of this experiential element in our seeking to have our souls affected and influenced by the beauty of God in Christ. He warned about only having a notional or mental or intellectual knowledge of God in Christ, but to be affected in our hearts by it:

“The affecting power of it upon our hearts is that which we should aim at. Wherein does the blessedness of the saints above [in heaven] consist? Is it not herein, that they behold and see the glory of God in Christ? And what is the effect of it upon those blessed souls? Does it not change them into the same image, or make them like unto Christ? Does it not fill and satiate them with joy, rest, delight, complacency, and ineffable satisfaction? Do we expect, do we desire, the same state of blessedness? It is our present view of

⁵² John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, III: 316.

⁵³ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 94.

the glory of Christ which is our initiation thereinto, if we are exercised in it, until we have an experience of its transforming power in our souls.⁵⁴

John Owen, always the eminently practical believer and pastor, gave to us a summary of how we might contemplate and meditate upon Christ, so that He would dwell in our thoughts and affections. He taught that we are to engage in “intense prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation”; to diligently study God’s Word to behold Christ by faith; to have a sincere love and delight in these things revealed by God’s Spirit until our hearts are affected and we rejoice with *‘joy inexpressible and full of glory’* (1 Pet. 1:8); these meditations and contemplations ought to be attended with thankfulness and praise.⁵⁵

Sibbes taught how our affections can be bent in the direction of God. He taught that we should be warmed in our hearts with love of Him.⁵⁶ This will produce great confidence in the soul before God. The Christian will seek to pray because he has found sweetness in it.⁵⁷ Experience is vital in growing in our affections and desires for God.⁵⁸ We inform and strengthen our affections toward God by scripture, then by experience, and there will be a personal, experiential discovery that “it is good for me to be near to God” (Psa. 73:28). Sibbes wrote: “Discovery of what is truly good has a drawing force upon the will.”⁵⁹ J. I. Packer wrote that “true religion claims the affections as well as the intellect.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I: 307.

⁵⁵ John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, III: 316-18.

⁵⁶ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 75,77.

⁵⁷ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 78.

⁵⁸ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Resolution*, in *Works*, VII: 86.

⁵⁹ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Resolution*, in *Works*, VII: 86.

⁶⁰ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 32. Having the affections for God that the Bible describes will also give confidence in one’s assurance of God’s love, see Burgess, *Faith Seeking Assurance*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 5-6.

HOLY LIVING- To Be Like Him- *The Bridegroom is Delighted in the Bride!*

An Affectionate Desire to Behold Him, to be Like Him, and to Enjoy Pleasure in Him

God calls His Beloved “to be Holy as He is Holy”; the goal of our desires is holiness (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). We want to be like Christ. We must remember that in tasting and seeing the Lord is good, and enjoying the experiential element, that we do not forget the end goal is to glorify God *and to enjoy Him*. We are to this most faithfully by seeking to obey Him and live for Him by His grace. To put it in the words of Ephesians 2:10: “*We are God’s workmanship to do good works which God created us to do in Christ Jesus,*” in reliance upon His grace. We should not forget that the Holy Spirit’s main ministry is not to give thrills but to create in us Christ-like character.⁶¹ In fact, Stephen Charnock wrote that becoming holy like Christ is the “splendor of all the Divine attributes, so it is the flower of all a Christian’s graces, the crown of all religion.”⁶² It is important for us to remember that becoming like Christ is the prime way of honoring God...The application...of holiness has a Christological focus.”⁶³

The Puritans desired for us to desire and know God, and to commune with Him, and to be spiritually thrilled by Him, but their main focus was on becoming like Christ. The purpose of our being ravished, and learning more of God’s love, and tasting that He is good, and asking the Spirit to “bend our affections” toward Jesus was so that we could grow in our maturity. The Puritans were like the Redwood trees of California,⁶⁴ towering spiritually over all the Church’s forest. The Puritans were mature in their holiness, and wanted God’s

⁶¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 31.

⁶² Stephen Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 529; quoted in Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 77.

⁶³ Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 77.

⁶⁴ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

people to possess this same maturing holy character for the glory of God. J. I. Packer writes that the Puritans “exemplified maturity, and they had integrated lives committed to glorifying God and growing in holiness.”⁶⁵ Arguably, the most important way the Puritans taught growth in holiness and sincere obedience to Christ was through communing with the Persons of the Triune God, and particularly by faith meditating on the beauty and grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ with eyes of faith. The Puritans encouraged believers to “keep their eyes on Jesus” the Author and Perfector of our faith! (Heb. 12:1-2).⁶⁶

The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*” This means that there are degrees of transforming glory whereby the soul is changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ through gazing with eyes of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to seek to grow in to maturity into our Head who is Christ (Eph. 4:11-16), to seek to be like Jesus in our lives, and to make our calling and election sure by increasing by degrees in our qualities and Christ-likeness through faith (2 Pet. 1:3-11). The Puritans taught this was primarily obtained by looking to Christ.

Jonathan Edwards wrote: “The least glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ does more to exalt and ennoble the soul” than anything else in this world. “This knowledge is that which is above all others sweet and joyful...This light gives a view of those things that are immensely the most exquisitely beautiful, and capable of delighting the eye of

⁶⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 23.

⁶⁶ See Isaac Ambrose, *Looking to Jesus... ()...*

understanding. This spiritual light is the dawning of the light of glory in the heart.”⁶⁷ In fact, J. I. Packer wrote that “to get the love of Christ in focus changes one’s whole existence.”⁶⁸ As we behold Jesus in His glory and loveliness and beauty, our affections are ravished and our desires deepened for Him, so we desire to be like Him. We want to have the same loveliness and beauty He possesses. We desire Him to think of us as more lovely. We want God to say “*You are my Beloved...in whom I am well pleased*” not merely in our justification, or being made right with God in our union with Jesus in His holiness, but also in our sanctification, because we are more increasingly taking on a glorious family resemblance in Him by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. As the Rev. Thomas Doolittle said: “Love produces assimilation.” To love Christ is to desire to be like Him!

John Owen taught that beholding Jesus in His beauty, loveliness and holiness was the principal exercise of our faith. He said that this beholding of Jesus in His glory was “one of the greatest privileges and advancements of believers, both in this world and unto eternity”.⁶⁹ He wrote that “our apprehension of this glory is the spring of all our obedience, consolation, and hope in this world.”⁷⁰ The beholding Christ by faith will prepare us spiritually for heaven in growing us up in maturity and holiness of life.⁷¹ The looking to Christ with spiritual eyes of faith will grow us and mature us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Owen wrote: “No man can by faith take a real view of this glory, but virtue will proceed from it in a transforming power to change him ‘into the same image,’ 2 Cor. 3:18.”

⁶⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, in *Works*, II: 17-18.

⁶⁸ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 13.

⁶⁹ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I: 286.

⁷⁰ John Owen, *Christologia*, in *Works*, I: 243.

⁷¹ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I: 291.

As the soul is fixed and focused in its thoughts and contemplations on Christ, it will become increasingly holy, serene, and spiritual.⁷²

John Owen taught that having a spiritually-mindedness that was constantly focused on the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ by faith would help us to live in restful peace in the midst of a hostile world where afflictions, persecutions and the allurements of the world, flesh and the devil still seek to tempt us and frustrate our gaze and diligent faithfulness to Christ alone:

“Were our minds fixed on [the love of the Father for sinners, the mediation of Jesus Christ, His Person and Work] as they ought, how would the glory of them cast out our cares, subdue our fears, sweeten our afflictions and persecutions, and take off our affections from the fading, perishing things of this world, and make us in every condition rejoice in the hope of the glory that shall be revealed!”⁷³

Owen taught that spiritual mediation of this kind on the loveliness and beauty of Christ as He is revealed to us in Holy Scripture will assimilate our minds and souls unto that which is the object of it, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18. He wrote:

“A constant believing contemplation of the glory of God in this salvation by Christ, will change the mind into the image and likeness of it, and that by various degrees, until we attain unto perfection, when ‘we shall know even as we are known’. Accustoming of our minds unto these things will make them heavenly; and our affections, which will be conformed unto them, holy.”⁷⁴

⁷² John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I: 292.

⁷³ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6 Vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), III: 313.

⁷⁴ John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, III:314-15.

We desire to commune with, or spend time with God. Communion or fellowship is the mutual exchange of spiritual benefits between God and His people based on the bond between them in Christ. This is God's communication of Himself to us, and our communion of ourselves to Him in our union with Christ. God gives Himself to us; we give ourselves back to Him in love and obedience and delight. This is enjoying God in each Person of the Godhead. The Godhead is personal—not an “abstract collection of attributes”. The communion must be in and through Christ.⁷⁵

Holiness and Happiness

A human being made in God's image is made for happiness, and the soul of man will persistently seek after and pursue happiness. Richard Sibbes wrote that happiness is desirable by all men, and naturally grafted in every man; it is “the center of all the searchings of his heart and the turnings of his life.”⁷⁶ Tragically, because of the fall, and the sinful rebellion of man against God, men will seek to find happiness in all the wrong things and people. Only the regenerated Christian can understand and fathom that happiness is found in God alone. Brooks wrote: “Only to a true Christian, by a supernatural light, is discovered both the right object, and the right way to felicity.”⁷⁷

A human being can never be convinced of God the Father's goodness, nor see the beauty of God in Christ unless He is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and made alive while yet dead. A human being can never see, and thus never be satisfied and drawn in their affections toward Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit. But once the soul is regenerated, it can

⁷⁵ John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, II: 8; quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 102-103.

⁷⁶ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 211.

⁷⁷ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 211-12. See also Jonathan Edwards, *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine*, in *Works*, II: 12-17,

only be happy in this holiness; it can only be truly satisfied and happy as with “fat and rich food” (Psa. 63:5) in Christ, enjoying a degree of holiness with Him.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) wrote that a soul can never be truly happy until they are truly holy.⁷⁸ Because man was created for God, and because God is holy, man can never know true happiness until He is like God. Man’s soul was to reflect God, and to rest in God, and to be satisfied with God. There is nothing in this creation that was designed to take the place of God and bring full satisfaction and enjoyment in the soul, but God. Therefore, one cannot be truly happy unless one is truly holy—that is, to be like God. In fact, having this likeness to God restored to the soul in Christ is one way we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37-39).

The soul in Christ can never be miserable and empty with God in Christ. Thomas Brooks wrote, “If you have holiness nothing can make you miserable; but if you lack holiness, nothing can make you happy.”⁷⁹ Holiness is its own reward, says Thomas Brooks. Holiness gives to the soul blessed “sights, sweet tastes...secret love-tokens...comfort and joy.”⁸⁰ Sibbes wrote elsewhere God is goodness itself. He is all excellency, beauty, and goodness. Nothing can make us happy but drawing near to God. The more we are convinced of God’s goodness, the better we are; for God’s goodness tasted and felt by the soul, does ennoble it, as a pearl set in a gold ring makes it the more rich and precious.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 246.

⁷⁹ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 300.

⁸⁰ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 174.

⁸¹ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 71.

Richard Sibbes wrote “there was planted in man by nature a desire of holiness, and a desire of happiness...”⁸² Love and delight carry the soul with them...”⁸³ He wrote, “Delight is most transcendent for pleasantness...God in Christ...is delightful and sweet...God be never so beautiful in Himself, if He be not beautiful to us in Christ, and in His Church.”⁸⁴ Let us gaze on the beauty of God in Christ, such as the mercy and love in Christ, the grace and love in Christ. Sibbes wrote affectionately that if we would see the glory of God, it appears most in God’s grace, mercy, and lovingkindness as it is revealed in Christ (Ex. 34:6).⁸⁵

The Rev. Thomas Neast wrote that love as an affection is “much easier to be felt than expressed”.⁸⁶ He wrote of the grace and delight in seeing Christ in His glory and the transforming change that works on our affections: “When the believing soul, having taken a view of the excellencies of God, and its own sweet relation to Him as a gracious Father, is carried forth in a holy rapture and exultancy of spirit.”⁸⁷ “The love of the soul to Christ in sincerity is not any one indivisible act or habit, but a holy frame of spirit, made up of many gracious inclinations, carrying the whole soul along with it unto Christ, for union and communion with Him.”⁸⁸ “Where love to Christ is sincere,” the Rev. Neast wrote, there is much more than a mere intellectual knowledge of it, but rather, “there has been some sensible impression, taste, and feeding on the Father’s love to the soul in Him.”⁸⁹

When our affections are drawn in love to Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Gospel, there will be a humble and reverent admiration, and “admiring love”. This will bring a

⁸² Richard Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, IV: 412-13.

⁸³ Richard Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, IV: 419.

⁸⁴ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 229-30.

⁸⁵ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 230.

⁸⁶ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I:169.

⁸⁷ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 172-73.

⁸⁸ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 174.

⁸⁹ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 176.

refreshing delight to the soul, a “delighting, rejoicing love.”⁹⁰ Quoting Thomas Aquinas, the Rev. Neast said that the nature of love lies in much delight. He wrote that “you cannot love your Lord, but you will find your heart ravished with delight in Him.”⁹¹ The Spirit is even jealous of our affections, and he will have “nothing set up in the heart above God,” said Richard Sibbes, this was one of the gracious works of the Spirit upon the believer’s heart.⁹² This is true happiness for the human being bearing God’s precious image.

Yet not all find this happiness that every soul is longing for! What makes Jesus so lovely, so glorious and beautiful to some—and yet so reprehensible to others. We know that “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men” (Isa. 53:2b-3). Jesus in His glorious Person came to His world, and it did not know Him, He came to His own people, but His own people did not receive Him (John 1:10-11). Jesus is “wonderful”! He is altogether lovely! What makes Him so lovely and beautiful? His Holiness. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the exact imprint of His Holy Nature (Heb. 1:3); Jesus is God in the flesh, the glorious One, and when we have seen Him we have beheld the glory of the Father (John 1:14-18, 14:9).

His holiness is beautiful and desirous to those who are in Him, who desire to be like Him, whose affections have been inclined toward Him, who love Him, and cherish Him. But for the unregenerate and the sinful, those who reject God from their hearts and seek after mere created things to satisfy their longings and fulfill their needs, Jesus is reprehensible. Jesus is reprehensible, even offensive, because they hate holiness, and they hate the light

⁹⁰ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 176-77.

⁹¹ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 177.

⁹² Richard Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, IV: 436.

that exposes their sins. “Men loved evil rather than light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19).

Only holy people can desire to look on holiness; only people who have been made alive in Christ by His Spirit can desire after Christ and His holiness. Although Jesus cloaked His glory and divested Himself of His glorious privileges as God in the Incarnation (1 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:6-8), nevertheless, He is glorious in His humanity, and beautiful as the perfect and holy man, desirous to all those who are redeemed and desire holiness. As Jonathan Edwards (), considered the “last of the great Puritans” said: “All the spiritual beauty of His human nature: His meekness, lowliness, patience, heavenliness, love to God, love to men...compassion...all is summed up in His Holiness.”⁹³

Jesus is beautiful and glorious because He is the image of the invisible God, the visible form of the Holy Father clearly revealed. Therefore, his character that is revealed in His love to the Father and to other sinners, His meekness, devotion, kindness, humility, all of his characteristics are holy and reveal what holy people can aspire to by His Holy Spirit. Thomas Watson (1620-1686) wrote, “Faith is an assimilating grace....Looking on a bleeding Christ causes a soft bleeding heart; looking on a holy Christ causes sanctity of heart; looking on a humble Christ makes the soul humble.”⁹⁴

The Rev. Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707) wrote that the signs of true love to God include (1) Unfeigned desires to be like Him: “*Love produces assimilation*”; (2) A hearty desire to be united to Him, to have Him with you; “Nothing is more social and gregarious in its nature

⁹³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*. Ebook (Dover Publications, 2013), Kindle Location, 3124-139.

⁹⁴ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 219. Quotes in Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, Ebook, Kindle Location 19574-590.

than love”; (3) Your great care to please Him; “If you love me, keep my commandments...”; (4) The love that we bear unto His image; we love His likeness in others.”⁹⁵

This will only be desired by those who know Him savingly, and have come to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psa. 34:8). Edwards taught that only saints and angels can truly appreciate God’s holiness fully manifested and revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This sight and gaze on this beautiful holy man will melt our hearts and begin to make them humble like His. The only place in Holy Scripture where Jesus speaks of Himself and His character is when he says: “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). This is “Altogether Lovely” (Song of Solomon, 5:16) as a clear revelation of God’s holiness, of what all men were created to be as image-bearers.

A sight of this glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, this beautiful humility and meekness will “melt and humble the hearts of men, wean them from this world, draw them near to God, and effectually change them,” Edwards wrote experientially.⁹⁶ A glimpse and experience of this holiness found in Jesus received by faith in the believer will humble the soul and wean the soul from all other competitive, created glories that compete for Jesus’s love and affection.

Edwards wrote that true spiritual understanding is possible only for a believer, and it is tasting God’s goodness in Christ. True spiritual understanding is

“...A cordial sense of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and

⁹⁵ Rev. Thomas Doolittle, A. M., “Assurance is Possible,” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:261.

⁹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, Ebook. Kindle Location, 3221-233.

knowledge of things in religion, that depends upon and flows from such a sense.”⁹⁷

This sense that Edwards speaks of distinguishes true Christians from mere hypocrites. The sense, or taste that one has in Christ of God’s beauty and holiness in Christ is more than a mere notional or mental or intellectual knowledge of God in Christ; it is experiential; it is the kind of knowledge that “surpasses knowledge” as the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 3:17-19.

Holy people are affected and attracted by holiness, especially when it is beheld in Christ. The more one beholds the loveliness and beauty of Christ’s attractiveness, the more one desires and is attracted to this holiness. The more holiness gets a taste of, and see some increase in one’s soul, so one increasingly wants and desires and prays for more holiness!

As Thomas Brooks wrote, “A holy man...can never be holy enough.”⁹⁸ “To be a holy person is to know a holy Christ, to be in love with a holy Christ...”⁹⁹ Holiness is the excellency of all a man’s excellencies, and was the first suit that ever was put upon the back of man’s nature.¹⁰⁰ Holiness will render you most beautiful and amiable like your Savior!¹⁰¹ Holiness will make inflame a man to pursue it more and more:

“The beauties of holiness do so affect him and inflame him, that he cannot but desire to be more and more holy. Lord, saith the soul, I desire to be more holy, that I may glorify thy name more, that I may honor my profession more, and that I may serve my generation more. Lord, I desire to be more holy, that I may sin less against thee, and that I may enjoy more of thee; I would be more holy, that I may be more prevalent with thee, and that I may

⁹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, Ebook. Kindle Location, 3347-359.

⁹⁸ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 107-108.

⁹⁹ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 129.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 163, 169.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 169-71.

be more victorious over all things below...A man desires more holiness, so a man of holiness earnestly prays for more holiness (Psa. 51:2,7)."¹⁰²

As we are increasingly attracted to Jesus's holiness, we will desire to be with Him more, to enjoy Him, to enjoy Him, to rest in Him, to have a foretaste of our heavenly fellowship. We will desire to meditate upon His love, and to ponder Jesus's love and grace to us in His Personal Grace as well as His Purchased Grace as John Owen taught in his wonderful work on *'Communion with God'*.¹⁰³

Owen used very tender and intimate terms to describe the biblical relationship believing souls have in their union with Christ, using the imagery of a Bridegroom and a Bride. He said that believers' communion with the Son of God is to know that, "Christ makes himself over to the soul, to be his, as to all the love, care, and tenderness of a husband; and the soul gives up itself wholly unto the Lord Christ, to be his, as to all loving, tender obedience.... 'Poor Harlot,' saith the Lord Christ, 'I have bought thee unto myself with the price of mine blood; and now, this is that which we will consent unto—I WILL BE FOR THEE, AND THOU SHALT BE FORE ME, and not for another..."¹⁰⁴ Owen described the beauty of Christ that believing souls should look on with eyes of faith to increase their love:

"This is the Beloved of our souls, 'holy, harmless, undefiled;' 'full of grace and truth;' full, to a sufficiency for every end of grace,--full, for practice, to be an example to men and angels as to obedience, --full, to a certainty of uninterrupted communion with God, --full, to a readiness of giving supply to others, --full, to suit him to all the occasions and necessities of the souls of

¹⁰² Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 108.

¹⁰³ John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:47-48, 263; quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 108-109. "Personal grace" was focused on the Person of Jesus Christ as Mediator, in His offices of Prophet, Priest and King, both in His estates of humiliation and exaltation. "Purchased Grace" focuses on the completed work of Jesus Christ for sinners to bring justification before God, adoption into God's family, and sanctification unto glory.

¹⁰⁴ John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:56.

men, --full, to a glory not unbecoming a subsistence in the person of the Son of God, --full, to a perfect victory, in trials, over temptations, --full, to an exact correspondency to the whole law, every righteous and holy law of God, --full to the utmost capacity of a limited, created, finite, nature, --full, to the greatest beauty and glory of a living temple of God, --full, to the full pleasure and delight of the soul of His Father, --full to an everlasting monument of the glory of God, in giving such inconceivable excellencies to the Son of Man.”¹⁰⁵

The more we are with God in communion with Him, we desire Him more, and we desire to be freer and freer from the pollution of our sins. Although we are united to Christ by faith, and there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, nevertheless, we struggling with remaining indwelling sin. If we keep our communion with God, our desire for holiness can only increase. Sibbes wrote that as we increase in our desires for God and in our holiness, then turn our desires in prayer for further mortification and freedom from indwelling sin. “As many desires as we have, let them be so many prayers; turn our desires into prayers to God.”¹⁰⁶ Our prayer ought to be: “Spirit of God, make me love the best things—give me an appetite and hunger for the best things!”

Richard Sibbes wrote that love was the “first-born affection.” Love breeds desire of communion with God that causes joy and rejoicing in Him, and then the heart of man will pant after God as the deer pants after the water springs (Psa. 42:1).¹⁰⁷ Sibbes taught that there was a movement toward, or inclination driven by love that brought joy, and then obedience.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, II: 66. Scripture cited in Owen: John 1:14, 16; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 2:21; Matt. 3:17; Heb. 2:18, 7:25.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 222.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints' Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 69.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints' Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 70.

Sibbes encouraged believers to have a holy eyesight, that is, a spiritual eyesight given by the Holy Spirit to see the beauty and glory of Christ. How can we see the beauty of God? Spiritual senses, spiritual eye-sight and spiritual taste.¹⁰⁹ Sibbes wrote that the Spirit must help us to see the beauty of Christ through the ordinances, to shine on us in the face of the Son. He wrote: “Of sight comes love. David had spiritual eyes, and he desired to feed his spiritual eye-sight with the best object that could be, for therein is the happiness of man.”¹¹⁰ We can strengthen our spiritual senses through prayer, and through meditating on God’s goodness and love to us in Jesus Christ.¹¹¹ We desire to confess with the Psalmist:

“But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.” - ESV Psalm 73:28

Satan, the flesh and the world would have us to think hard thoughts about God, but we are to ‘labor’ as Christians to present the Father and the Son “sweetly to our meditations”.¹¹² We need to be convinced that God is good, and then allow this to be felt and tasted by the soul, wrote Richard Sibbes.¹¹³ We ought to meditate upon the Triune God in our salvation to “prompt and feed desire”, reveling in the fact that God the Father sent the Son who was willing to stoop “down to our human nature”.¹¹⁴ Sibbes encouraged believers to labor to be near to God.¹¹⁵

Holy Pleasing and Serving God

In union with Christ Jesus, there is nothing that the Christian desires more than to please His Heavenly Father. We live our lives making it our “aim” to please Him (2 Co. 5:9). Once

¹⁰⁹ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 238.

¹¹⁰ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 237.

¹¹¹ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 238-39.

¹¹² Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 239.

¹¹³ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 71.

¹¹⁴ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 72-73.

¹¹⁵ Richard Sibbes, *The Saints’ Happiness*, in *Works*, VII: 73.

the sweetness of Jesus's love is tasted and experienced to a certain degree, this love will manifest itself in obedience (John 15:14: Our Lord says: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*"). Thomas Shepard wrote: "...The [satisfied and holy] soul will return in all fruitful obedience to the Lord, when he receives the sweet of the love of the LORD."

The Christian knows that God His Father has elected Him in love, and "so" loved Him that He has graciously sent His Beloved Son to live and die in His nature, to be raised in His nature, and to be enthroned and exalted in His nature—and all for Him. The Christian cries out: "*If God didn't spare His own son but freely gave Him up for me, how will He not with Him graciously give me all things?!*" (Rom. 8:32). The maturing Christian who has attained a degree of assurance is convinced of the Father's love, and the grace found in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit to grant the hearts' desires. And the Christian longs to live for God and to please Him. Henry Scougal (1650-1678) wrote:

"The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the Divine perfections, which makes the soul resign itself wholly unto Him, desiring above all things to please Him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with Him, and being ready to do or suffer anything for His sake, or at His pleasure. Though this affection may have its first rise from favors and mercies of God toward ourselves, yet doth it, in its growth and progress, transcend such particular considerations, and ground itself on His infinite goodness..."¹¹⁶

Thomas Shepard (1605-1649) wrote "That He loves me...fetches warmth and life into my heart....Love Christ, and you will never be weary of doing for Christ (emphasis mine)...What kindles love so much as this comprehending knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and

¹¹⁶ Henry Scougal. *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Heritage Books, 1996; reprint), 55.

His love, this will make a man a burning beacon of love, make a man melt into love.”¹¹⁷ The Rev. Samuel Lee encouraged believers to pray (preaching upon Matthew 6:6) because God is our Father, and we can freely come to Him in our prayers and give our cares to Him as His dear children. He said that this prayerful time of communion will produce deeper affections toward God that will result in more prayer and good works for God. He said: “Bosom-communion flows from bosom-affection.”¹¹⁸

Holy love makes one do holy works. This love makes us want to be more holy, but also gives us a deeper and heartfelt desire to serve Christ in order to please Him. Thomas Brooks wrote: “Holy love is very laborious. Nothing makes a Christian more industrious, painstakingly diligent in the service and ways of God, than holy love.”¹¹⁹ Brooks wrote:

“Holy love will make us to pray and to praise, it will make us wait and work, it will provoke souls to study Christ, to admire Christ, and to live to Christ, to lift up Christ, to spend and be spent for Christ, and to break through all difficulties that it may come nearer to Christ, and cleave closer to Christ.”¹²⁰

As we grow in Christ, we desire to delight in Him and to serve Him wholehearted. We make it our aim to please Him. The maturing Christian realizes increasingly more and more that He was “created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand for him to walk in” (Eph. 2:10). The maturing Christian who is being dazzled by the beauty and influenced by the love of God will realize that she is possessed of Christ to be pure and zealous for good works, and that this, too, is the good news of the Glorious Gospel: We are redeemed by His love to serve Him with passion:

¹¹⁷ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Books, an imprint of Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 61.

¹¹⁸ Rev. Samuel Lee, “How to Manage Secret Prayer, that it May Be Prevalent with God to the Comfort and Sanctification of the Soul.” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), II: 177.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 120-21.

¹²⁰ Thomas Brooks, *ibid.*, IV: 121.

***“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works”** (emphasis mine).*

- ^{ESV} **Titus 2:11-14**

A Desire to be with Him- To See Him Face to Face

An Affectionate Desire for the Bridegroom to Consummate the Marriage and to Welcome Us Home!

The Christian life is a pilgrimage; it is a journey home. In this life, we will experience tribulation (John 16:33; Acts 14:22), because we live redemptive-historically situated in the wilderness, journeying home to the New Heavens and the New Earth, but living in a fallen world of sin and misery, fraught with dangers, difficulties, temptations and trials (1 Cor. 10:1-13). Here we must watch and pray, we must let nothing draw our affections off God in Christ; we must struggle in dependence and full reliance upon the Holy Spirit who is with us as the comforting presence and sustaining power of Christ. We have been redeemed, but we await a Heavenly City, a Heavenly Country as our inheritance in Christ, where we will live in bliss with the Triune God for all eternity (Heb. 11:13-16; Rev. 19-22).

Although we are now in the wilderness, living between our redemption from slavery to sin, death and the devil (Heb. 2:14-18; Eph. 2:1-3), we will arrive safely at home, because Jesus lives to ever pray and intercede for us, and is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless, holy and complete when we arrive in heaven (Heb. 2:11; 7:24; 10:10,14; Jude 24-25; Eph. 1:4-5). When we arrive home, we shall see Jesus face to face, and we will come to the completion of our sanctification process in Him. When we see Jesus our Bridegroom face to face this will culminate and consummate in the complete satisfaction of

all of our soul's desires! Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to the praise of HIS glorious grace, in our redemption!! (Eph. 1:3-14). When we arrive home, Jesus, our Precious Savior, and Glorious Bridegroom, will welcome us as the Bride that He has redeemed, and bought, and transformed by His Spirit. When we see Him with our eyes, we will be transformed fully and completely to be like Him! We are lovely in His sight now, but when we look upon Him and behold Him, we will be made beautiful and fully holy like Him. The Bible teaches us that it is this longing and desire of seeing Him face to face, and being made completely like Him that motivates us to holiness and purity in Him now:

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” – 1 John 3:2-3

As we travel on our pilgrimage now, knowing He is with us, our ever-loving, ever-faithful Immanuel, God “with us”, so we long to get home. As the Puritan forefathers taught us, we are to have “heaven in one eye” throughout our earthly pilgrimage, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith (Hebrews 12:1ff)!¹²¹ We long to see the place that Christ has been preparing for His Beloved Bride. In fact, with the Holy Spirit, or in the Spirit, we cry together: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:17). Sibbes wrote “This life is a life of desires and longings, the marriage with Christ shall not be consummated until heaven.”¹²² J. I. Packer wrote in his wonderful book *A Quest for Godliness*: “Basic to their [the Puritans] pastoral care was their understanding of the Christian’s present life as a journey home, and they made much of encouraging God’s people to look ahead and feast their hearts on what

¹²¹ J. R. Beeke and R. J. Pederson. *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xxiii.

¹²² Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in Works, II: 228.

is to come.”¹²³ Believers ought to meditate upon the glories that are to be revealed to us in Christ, and then in us and for us in Christ as heirs of all of His wonderful blessings. This can affect our hearts with deep love, desiring to be good stewards of our time and seeking to please Him with the gifts and grace He has given to us.

Heaven in our destination—where Christ is now—and this is the home we long for. The soul that has tasted God’s goodness in Christ doesn’t want heaven merely as His reward, but His reward is God in Christ, and He wants Christ first, before all things, without the taint and hindrance of sin upon His affections, preventing him from loving Christ as much as he can imagine, and would like to (Psa. 16:5; Rom. 7:25; 1 Cor. 2:9). For the believing, mature soul, heaven is heaven, because His Beloved Bridegroom Christ is there. Richard Sibbes wrote so beautifully: “It is the presence of God that makes all things sweet and comfortable. What makes heaven to be heaven, but because God is there?”¹²⁴

We should ponder this future grace to be revealed to us each day of our lives here to motivate us to more love, and more holiness, and consistent service for Him! John Owen wrote that the best preparation for the glory we shall be exposed to in eternity, is by gazing now upon the glory of Christ in preparation of heaven. This spiritual desiring through mediation upon Jesus as He is revealed in His Person and Work will transform us and prepare us for heaven as Jesus prepares heaven for us. He wrote:

“For if our future blessedness shall consist in being where He is, and beholding His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than in a constant contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the

¹²³ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 334.

¹²⁴ Richard Sibbes, *A Breathing After God*, in *Works*, II: 228.

Gospel, unto this very end, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory.”¹²⁵

As we behold Christ by faith now in our communion with Him, we will long to have our conjugal love consummated in heaven. Our communion with Him will make us cry out the more vehemently for His return. We desire to see Him face to face increasingly more. This will help us to be sober-minded, and watchful, and constantly looking to the skies to behold His glory (1 Pet. 4:7; Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:32-39; Rev. 1:5ff).

Speaking of only human experiences that are lovely and enjoyable, when a Bridegroom here on earth is engaged to be married, he plans, prepares, longs for the day of marriage and consummation with his beautiful bride. This earthly experience is a shadow, a prototype of the Heavenly Marriage and the wonderful, eschatological consummation that is to be revealed by Christ to His Bride! (Psa. 45; Eph. 5:21-32). It is our privilege and duty in Christ Jesus, to long and look forward to this Great Day, the Wedding Supper of the Lamb where all will be rejoicing and bliss (Rev. 19). Shepard wrote that it is the Christian’s duty to be “constantly and continually ready to meet Christ and to enjoy communion with Him. Because we are betrothed (espoused) to Christ, we ought to be in a constant and continual readiness to meet Christ, and to have immediate communion with Him.”¹²⁶

In the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* in Matthew 25, we are taught that those who are full of expectation for the return of the Bridegroom are those who are truly full of the Holy Spirit, and are being matured under His influences to be preparing and ready and watchful and alert without distractions from dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life (Matt.

¹²⁵ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I: 275.

¹²⁶ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 68-69.

25:1-13; Luke 21:34). The believing and watchful soul of the bride should possess both desire and hope as she awaits the return of the Bridegroom! Thomas Shepard wrote that there are two affections of the soul that chiefly look to a good absent: desire and hope. Hope is like the eye that goes out and looks and desire is like the feet that runs out and longs. By hope and desire, we go forth to meet the Bridegroom.¹²⁷

The more the believer's affections are drawn to Christ, and long to be with Him for all eternity, the more He will vehemently, and even violently (Matt. 11:12: "*the violent take it by force!*") will seek heaven above all things. The soul smitten by love for Christ has "set its mind on things above where Christ is at the right hand of God because it knows that when Christ appears, then glory will be consummated! (Col. 3:1-4). It longs for heaven so much, that it cannot rest on this journey in complacent and contented satisfaction until it embraces Christ in heaven. Sibbes wrote: "For the soul of a Christian, like Noah's dove, cannot rest in any glory here, till it return to the ark, till it come to the enjoyment of perfect glory, and have blissful communion with Christ forever and ever in heaven."¹²⁸

As we love Christ sincerely as Mediator here on our journey hom, we shall see Him as our treasure that must be obtained. There will be an increased and longing desire to be ever closer to Him.¹²⁹ Rev. Neast wrote that a true and longing love for Christ will never be languishing but always be growing as it feeds on Christ; gains confidence of access to

¹²⁷ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 112.

¹²⁸ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides' Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 536.

¹²⁹ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 182-83.

Christ, and to God the Father through Him.¹³⁰ As we grow in His love and His likeness so we will learn to cry with the Psalmist from the heart:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” - ESV Psalm 73:25

Christ will become our chief desire, the chief longing of our hearts, as we grow in God’s grace and love. We will say: *“Deus meus est omnia”* or more particularly to our Great Savior and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ we will cry out: *“Christus meus est omnia!”* or *“Christ is my all!”*¹³¹ The Rev. Neast said it is a proper motto of a love-sick soul to cry: *“None but Christ.”*¹³²

When it seems our hearts are growing dull or apathetic, let us remember Richard Sibbes’ advice:

“When you find your hearts dull and cold, and inactive to do good. Then fetch fire...from the Second Coming of Christ, from the love of God in Christ, from the love of His appearance. Oh, rouse up and quicken your hearts with such considerations.”¹³³

Why do we desire for Christ to return? Sibbes wrote “A good stream has a good spring; so must our desires.”¹³⁴ The Church’s desires is love; she loves Christ and desires Him to ‘come quickly’ (Rev. 22:17). True desires are swelling desires, breaking down opposition. True desires are restless desires, always in motion, until they empty themselves. True

¹³⁰ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 78-79.

¹³¹ Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 182-83.

¹³² Thomas Neast, *ibid.*, I: 183.

¹³³ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides’ Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 555.

¹³⁴ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides’ Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 543.

desires (like streams) get bigger and bigger, they are growing desires.”¹³⁵ Those that desire the coming of Christ, said Sibbes, exercise themselves much in holiness; “they exercise themselves in the beginning of heaven here on earth.”¹³⁶

But we are not home yet, and so let us be careful that our hearts not grow cold as we await; let us be alert, watching dissipation and drunkenness and distractions from the cares of this life that seek to take our affections of Christ and place them on the world, or something fleshly (Luke 21:34). Shepard wrote: “Spiritual defilement and disobedience to God is a forsaking of the husband, a total secret forsaking of Christ.”¹³⁷ Jesus tells the Church at Ephesus in the Book of Revelation that they had lost their “first love”: “...Thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4). The kind and gracious Lord Jesus Christ calls them to repentance, to return to the service that they had before they fell away into sin where their hearts were engaged and desirous of things other than Christ.

This reminds the soul that Christ is our first love, and there are works that follow in pleasing Christ as our “First Love”, but there are also many things that compete for this primacy of place, and the soul must be aware of this. Holy love is to remember that Jesus is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega of our salvation who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His precious blood and has made us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father (Rev. 1:5-6). Shepard poignantly asked professing believers: “Where is your heart? Have you not lost your love, your first love?The soul is prepared to meet Christ...if the soul has lost its affections [for Christ], it recovers them from the creatures who stole them

¹³⁵ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides' Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 544.

¹³⁶ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides' Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 551.

¹³⁷ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 65.

away from Christ.”¹³⁸ Nathanael Vincent said that when Christ “comes to consummate the marriage, then you shall everlasting embraces and uninterrupted pourings out of love from Him...You shall sit down in the full enjoyment of all forever.”¹³⁹

This is fullness of joy, and satisfying rest in Jesus Christ. Sibbes wrote: “The more we have Christ in us, the more shall we desire His coming to us. Let us desire and labor to have...our affections [filled up] with love and delight [by the Spirit of Christ now]...”¹⁴⁰

Coming as Bridegroom, Shepard wrote:

“All our sinful deformities will be taken away, and He shall adorn His Bride in perfect beauty. Jesus will openly acknowledge His Bride and declare His love for her before the world. He that has made it His glory to confess Christ in a holy life, Christ will confess him before God and the angels, and so before all the world. Jesus will say: ‘I have given them that glory, united them, and made them flesh of my flesh, that the world may know thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.’ Christ has been desiring after them in glory (John 17:24), now, their desires being fulfilled...now He rejoices with exceeding joy...He shall rejoice over you with loud singing!”¹⁴¹

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

- Zephaniah 3:17

“...And so we will always be with the Lord.”

- 1 Thessalonians 4:17b

Because we have this great hope in Christ Jesus, let our affections burn hot in vehement passion for Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us seek to be affected from deep within our hearts, so that we, in light of His abundant goodness and grace, because of His glorious

¹³⁸ Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 72.

¹³⁹ Nathanael Vincent, *Soul's Espousal*, 202.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Sibbes, *The Brides' Longing*, in *Works*, VI: 552.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, 514, 515, 517.

beauty and majestic grace, we might offer to Him our most perfect sacrifice! Because He was broken for us, and in love laid down His life for us, let us offer up to Him our most valuable possession—our very selves—and let us, with the woman in Mark 14, give our hearts to Him, in undivided and wholehearted devotion to our Loving Bridegroom! Let us seek to gaze at His beauty by faith (Isa. 33:17; Heb. 12:1-2), becoming like Him, and learning to love Him more increasingly, and serving Him with all that is within us—for His glory, and our enjoyment.

Amen.

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