

*“Entertaining the ‘Blessed Lodger’”:  
A Theology of the Holy Spirit in the  
Gospel Ministry of Richard Sibbes*

*“There is nothing in the world so great and sweet a friend that will do us so much good as the Spirit, if we give Him entertainment.” – Richard Sibbes*

**Rev. Charles R. Biggs**  
**ST/CH 872: Theology of Richard Sibbes**  
**Dr. Joel R. Beeke**  
**Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**  
**Grand Rapids, Michigan**  
**Fall 2015**

## Contents

Introduction to the Life of Richard Sibbes: <i>An Affective, Practical and Peaceful Preacher</i> .....	3
The “Blessed Lodger”: Theologian of the Holy Spirit <i>par excellence</i> .....	6
The Father’s Love in Christ: Sibbes’ Trinitarian Emphasis .....	8
The Primary Love of the Spirit: “Sibbes’ Focus on Christ” .....	11
The Ministry of the Spirit of Christ: “Entertaining the Holy Spirit” .....	17
Preaching in the Spirit: “Wooing Christ’s Bride” .....	22
Sanctification by the Spirit: Conformity to Christ-likeness.....	26
Regeneration by the Spirit: Freedom from Slavery.....	26
Transformed Affections and Desires .....	28
Strength and Power from the Spirit: Faith and Conflict .....	31
Prayer in the Spirit.....	33
Christ’s Presence in the Spirit through the Sacraments .....	34
Sealing of the Spirit: Assurance and Joy!.....	35
Comforted by the Spirit.....	38
Ending Well in the Spirit.....	40
Bibliography .....	44

## **Introduction to the Life of Richard Sibbes: *An Affective, Practical and Peaceful Preacher***

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was affectionately known as the “Sweet Dropper” as a preacher.<sup>1</sup> He has been distinguished among the Puritans as the “Heavenly” Dr. Sibbes because he was famous for his affective spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Affective spirituality is a focus on the affections or the desires as they are transformed by the Spirit of God motivating believers to joyful obedience in Christ. Sibbes’<sup>3</sup> primary emphasis as a preacher was the interior soul, a focus on the hearts, the affections, the desires of the soul toward God in Christ rather than an outward conformity to the law of God.<sup>4</sup> He did not undermine the law of God, but emphasized the law as it is written by the Spirit upon the heart that was promised to believers in Christ in the context of the Covenant of Grace (cf. Heb. 8:8-13).<sup>5</sup> Sibbes believed that the primary attention of the Christian ought to be on the love of God as He is revealed in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Sibbes emphasized the Work and Ministry of the Holy Spirit as a Christological reality in the believer’s life. His understanding of the Spirit of Christ’s work was Biblically-theologically united in his mind to the obedience and fruitfulness the Spirit would produce

---

<sup>1</sup> Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 179.

<sup>2</sup> Kapic, Kelly M. and Gleason, Randall C., Edited. *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Manuals for writers are not in agreement on whether to write plural “Sibbes” or “Sibbes’s”. In this paper, I will use “Sibbes”; <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/possessive-of-proper-names-ending-in-s/> accessed on December 1, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Patton Shelly, *Richard Sibbes: Early Stuart Preacher of Piety*, Ph.D. diss. (Temple University, 1972), 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> “[Sibbes stressed covenant as the] ground of the entirety of the Christian life both in justification and sanctification”; Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Patton Shelly, *Richard Sibbes: Early Stuart Preacher of Piety*, Ph.D. diss. (Temple University, 1972), 55-56. Shelly wrote: “Some earlier Puritans had emphasized the law of God and conformity to its precepts. The goal for which Sibbes strove was not external precision gained by following the law of God but *an internal holiness produced by the Spirit of God* (my emphasis). God’s love and mercy, not his law and judgment, ought to inspire the saint.”

in the believer united to Christ. This would fulfill the demands of the law, which is summarized as true love for God in Christ (cf. Rom. 13:8-10). The Spirit of Christ's ministry was to **convict**, lead to **confession**, **comfort** with forgiving love and mercy, and **conform** believers to Christ. This was not an undermining of God's holy law, but a different emphasis that Sibbes "contextualized" wisely in his time due to an imbalanced moralistic emphasis that sought to awaken apathetic people living in the covenant of grace in the national church.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the much moralistic preaching in his time, Sibbes had a wonderful reputation in the 1600s as one who preached "sweet, soul-melting Gospel-sermons" that refreshed the saints, awakened the apathetic, and encouraged the troubled. He was known for his very experimental ("experiential"), or practical sermons.<sup>8</sup> One of Sibbes' contemporaries, one Samuel Hartlib referred to Sibbes as "one of the most experimental divines now living".<sup>9</sup> Sibbes sought to have an eminently practical theology that always was applied to men's lives and experiences. Sibbes wanted to demonstrate that all theology about God and His salvation was relevant to all of life.<sup>10</sup> Sibbes would agree with the famous statement made later by the Rev. Dr. Robert Burns that Christian truth should be

---

<sup>7</sup> R. N. Frost, *Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace and the Division of English Reformed Theology*, PhD diss. King's College of the Univ. of London, 1996, 174-77. Frost emphasizes that Sibbes was not an Antinomian, but was ministering in a context that was rife with moralism, and so he emphasized the ministry of the Spirit from within men's souls. Dever wrote that modern scholarship has wrongly presented Sibbes as a central, "though unwitting, figure in the development of moralism, emphasizing sanctification at the expense of justification." Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 99. Dever rightly points out that "Sibbes was not...and unwitting representative of a nascent moralism. He was, rather, one of the last of the great Reformed preachers of England both to believe in theory and to know in practice an officially undivided covenant community," 134.

<sup>8</sup> Kapic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Bert Affleck, "Theology of Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)," PhD Diss., Drew University, 1969, 18. Affleck asserts that Sibbes' legacy to history is a theology relevant to life, a theology for the whole of life.

brought home to “men’s business and bosoms.”<sup>11</sup> Sibbes understood that Christians that are truly recipients of grace in Christ through the Spirit would be particularly *obedient* Christians characterized by fruitfulness and thankfulness.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Sibbes’ practical or “experiential” emphasis was to produce the obedience of faith that should be evident in a Christian’s life.

In his time, Sibbes was mightily used of God as a preacher. His preaching was powerful, yet peaceful in its aim. Judging from Sibbes’ affectionate sermons, it would be tempting to say that he did not have a polemical bone in his holy body. Though Sibbes was concerned with the truth of God, He was passionate about peace above all things. And God used him in this way. His powerful preaching awakened Cambridge from the spiritual indifference into which it had fallen after the death of William Perkins (1558-1602).<sup>13</sup> Sibbes labored and ministered in an atmosphere rife with polemical religious conflict, yet he was a peaceful man who made many friends.<sup>14</sup> He was described by contemporaries as an “able friend and minister of the Gospel” who sought to be characterized by preaching that emphasized peace more than polemics, comfort rather than conflict.<sup>15</sup> Sibbes believed in his historical time that the gospel of grace and comfort were most needed and must be stressed by the faithful minister in order to allure souls to Christ, to relieve souls from the weight of

---

<sup>11</sup> Cartwright, H.M. “Faith and Justification: Volume One of the *Works of Thomas Halyburton*.” The James Begg Society. Quote from [http://www.neshchristianresources.org/IBS/publications/info\\_haly1.html](http://www.neshchristianresources.org/IBS/publications/info_haly1.html), accessed November 21, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Sibbes wrote that believers’ whole lives under the Gospel should be characterized by fruitful and thankfulness demonstrated by obedience. From *Divine Meditations* in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862-1864); repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), VII:206. This edition of Sibbes’ complete works will be cited as *Works*.

<sup>13</sup> J. R. Beeke and R. J. Pederson. *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 534-35.

<sup>14</sup> Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Dever wrote: “[Sibbes] believed that “factions produce more factions”. Sibbes’ preaching was more concerned with “comfort than controversy”; Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 1.

unbiblical and imbalanced moralism. Sibbes humbly saw himself as a “voice crying in the wilderness” giving Gospel words of “comfort, comfort” to Christ’s beloved Israel (cf. Isaiah 40:1). Sibbes was truly a “blessed peacemaker” as our Lord Jesus says of the true sons of God (cf. Matt. 5:9).<sup>16</sup>

### **The “Blessed Lodger”: Theologian of the Holy Spirit *par excellence***

As John Calvin before them, the Puritans in general were “theologians of the Holy Spirit” who emphasized the importance of practical, “experiential”, or applied theology. The Puritans’ particular interest as those building on the truths of the Reformation of the Sixteenth century, was to reform hearts, sanctify minds, and to give worship to God that honored Him according to the teaching of Scripture. As the foundation of justification by faith had been laid by the faithful first generation of reformers, the Puritans built upon this foundation, seeking to stress the Holy Spirit’s work in sanctification. Puritan scholar and theologian J. I. Packer wrote: “The work of the Holy Spirit is the field in which the Puritans’ most valuable contributions to the church’s theological heritage were made.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet few among the Puritans had more of a practical emphasis on the Holy Spirit in his life and ministry than Richard Sibbes. Sibbes is rightly described as theologian of the Holy Spirit whose pneumatological emphasis had a strong Christocentric foundation and this shaped his total vision of ministry. For Sibbes, the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit was primarily concerned with Christ and His Gospel.<sup>18</sup> “Pneumatology, for Sibbes, is always

---

<sup>16</sup> Sibbes was described by historian Daniel Neal as a celebrated preacher, an educated divine, and a charitable and humble man who repeatedly underestimated his gifts. See Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 536.

<sup>17</sup> Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 179.

<sup>18</sup> Bert Affleck, “Theology of Richard Sibbes (1577-1635),” PhD Diss., Drew University, 1969, 391. Affleck wrote: “The work of the Spirit, for Sibbes, [is] a thorough-going Christocentric reality,” 18.

Christology,” said one student of Sibbes. To put it in other words, Sibbes’ experiential theology is always “experiential Christology”<sup>19</sup> The Spirit loved to glorify Christ, and to take from Christ to bless His people united to Him by faith, and to conform them to His likeness (cf. John 16:12-14).

Richard Sibbes was very influential as a theologian of the Holy Spirit. Sibbes particularly and uniquely emphasized the entertaining of the Holy Spirit as a realization of all that the law of God required of man. While John Owen was the Puritan theologian who wrote the massive systematic works on pneumatology, Sibbes was the experiential, theologian of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Affleck wrote, “In order to catch the *living dynamic* of the doctrine of the Spirit in Puritan Theology, we must turn to the sermons of Sibbes (my emphasis). Sibbes’ sermons exhibit a pneumatology that is alive in its relevance to the experience of living persons.<sup>21</sup> “It appears...that a large influence in directing the Puritans’ attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was the preaching of Richard Sibbes...”<sup>22</sup> Sibbes’ emphasis was primarily devotional rather than controversial.<sup>23</sup> He had a reputation of gentleness as a theologian of the Holy Spirit who avoided controversies of his day as much as possible.<sup>24</sup> Dever wrote,

*Sibbes seemed to stand above the tumult of the times, to preserve the vitals and essentials of religion, that the souls of his hearers, being captivated with the inward beauty and glory of Christ, and being led into an experiential knowledge*

---

<sup>19</sup> Affleck, “Theology of Richard Sibbes,” 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen, D.D.*, Vol. III, *The Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Affleck, “Theology of Richard Sibbes,” 19. Affleck writes that Sibbes focuses on the work of the Spirit in his ministry in order to define the experiential relationship the Christian can have with God, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall. *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 535.

*of heavenly truths, their spirits might not evaporate themselves in endless, gainless, soul-unedifying, and conscience-perplexing questions.*<sup>25</sup>

---

## **The Father's Love in Christ: Sibbes' Trinitarian Emphasis**

For Richard Sibbes, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, was not merely for discussions in abstract theology, but was to be understood as the revelation of God so that men could have a relationship with God in Christ by His Spirit. This relationship in Christ would transform offensive and transgressing sinners into obedient sons, as believers were convinced of God's goodness and mercy held out to them in Christ. This "perfect love" would cast out all fear of judgment (1 John 4:18; cf. Rom. 8:1). Uniquely among his contemporaries, and even among Reformed theologians before and after him, "Sibbes emphasized the inherent community of the Trinity rather than follow the more common Reformed emphasis on God's simplicity and essential unity."<sup>26</sup> Kopic and Gleason write that in his time, "...Sibbes emerges as a seminal figure among a small but energetic band of Puritan ministers who pressed for a more Trinitarian and *relational version* of Reformed theology (my emphasis)."<sup>27</sup> Sibbes emphasized that "It is the life of the Trinity that the Spirit works in us".<sup>28</sup> The Triune God was foundational in Sibbes' pastoral ministry and theology because he sought to stress the obedient and holy submission of the believers' hearts to God, like each member of the Triune God submitted in love and honor to one another.

Richard Sibbes focused on the work of each Person of the Godhead as planning, executing, and applying redemption for the believer. He wrote: "Every person in the

---

<sup>25</sup> Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 41-42.

<sup>26</sup> Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> Affleck, "Theology of Richard Sibbes," 23.

blessed Trinity hath their several work. The Father chooses us and passes a decree upon the whole groundwork of salvation. The Son executes it to the full. The Spirit applies it, and witnesses our interest in it by leading our souls to lay hold of redemption in Christ”.<sup>29</sup> Sweetly, Richard Sibbes wrote that “In a word, the word *Father* is an epitome of the whole Gospel. All the promises therein contained are sealed up by and in this one word, God is our Father.”<sup>30</sup> “Sibbes...believed that God’s imminent, intra-trinitarian communion consisted of an eternally active love. This love overflowed to the creation as God’s centrifugal self-giving.”<sup>31</sup> This revelation of the Triune God was to ultimately comfort believers in their faith so that they could live joyful and hopeful lives in this present age. For example, Sibbes described predestination as a “delightful determinism” that revealed God’s love language to his people.<sup>32</sup> For Sibbes, biblical-theological teaching about the Triune God had a sweetness that was to warm a believer’s heart with the love of God.

As an example of Sibbes’ experiential emphasis and application of every truth of Scripture, he summarized the comfort that comes from this relationship with the Triune God in one of his final sermons that he preached. He wrote that

*All our faith is resolved at length into one God...there is God the Father offended, so there must be a God to satisfy that God, and there must be a God to reveal and apply that satisfaction...For our salvation, and to give us comfort, there is a necessity of three persons in the Godhead. The Father is offended, God in the*

---

<sup>29</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, V:439.

<sup>30</sup> Sibbes, *The Christian Work* in *Works*, V:25

<sup>31</sup> Kapic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 84-85. See also “*Richard Sibbes’ Theology of Grace and the Division of English Reformed Theology*,” PhD diss. King’s College of the University of London, 1996, 173ff. Frost wrote: “Sibbes...is characterized by the inherent self-love of the Godhead, who as a community of Father, Son, and Spirit, offers ‘a spreading goodness’ to the creation. In other words, God’s eternal love overflows to his creation, a belief that Sibbes drew from Jesus’ prayer of John 17.”

<sup>32</sup> H. P. Shelly, 137; Quoted in Dever, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 109.

*second person must satisfy offended justice and God in the third person must reveal and apply that satisfaction for comfort (my emphasis).<sup>33</sup>*

---

The Father reveals His mercy ultimately in the compassionate human face of Jesus Christ. When the Bible speaks of the “glory of Jesus Christ”, often this is meant God the Father’s free mercy in His glory revealed in Jesus Christ. Especially, in the believer’s fallen estate, the glory of God shines forth in his “mercy shining in Jesus”.<sup>34</sup> Jesus Christ is the “grace of God invested and clothed with man’s nature. When Christ appeared (cf. Titus 2:11), the grace and mercy and love of God appeared.”<sup>35</sup> The Father is no longer justly wrathful toward humanity in Christ, but rather merciful and gracious. Christ did not take the nature of angels, but took upon himself the nature of man (cf. Heb. 2:14-18). Christ and those whom He loves and represents before the Father are one, they are mystically united. This great, initiating work of the Father for our salvation, in the sending of His Beloved Son is fully manifested in the Father’s dignifying and advancing our nature in Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> “For in Jesus Christ God hath taken upon him that sweet relation of a Father...So that the nature of God is lovely in Christ, and our nature in Christ is lovely to Him.<sup>37</sup> “To think of God alone, it swallows up our thoughts; but to think of God in Christ, of God ‘manifest in the flesh,’ it is a comfortable consideration.<sup>38</sup> While fear should characterize the sinner who comes near to God in His holy presence, God in Christ by the Spirit makes for a comforting, loving, and benevolent Heavenly Father.

---

<sup>33</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons; from Christ’s Last Sermon in Works*, VII:346

<sup>34</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law in Works*, IV:240-41

<sup>35</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law in Works*, IV:240

<sup>36</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law in Works*, IV:242

<sup>37</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law in Works*, IV:242. Sibbes wrote “...But now that Christ hath taken our nature, it is become pure in Him, and beloved of God in Him...His nature is sweet to us in Christ; our nature is sweet to Him in Christ.” Sibbes, *Miracles of Miracles in Works*, VII:118

<sup>38</sup> Sibbes, *The Fountain Opened in Works*, V:484

Sibbes' imagination was captured by the reality of the Christian life as a love story between Father, Son, and Spirit, that seeks to save a people for His own. The history of redemption through the Covenant of Grace was a wonderful story that believers should understand themselves as a part, devised and planned just for their eternal enjoyment and comfort. The whole of the story of redemption was a "plot devised by the Blessed Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," said Sibbes.<sup>39</sup> Mark Dever notes the importance of Sibbes' understanding of Christianity as simply a "love story". God was essentially a husband to His people. Sibbes realized that "sensual language was a powerful metaphor for the love between God and soul".<sup>40</sup> This love was revealed in the covenant of grace, founded in Christ, with God in our nature intending to be gracious to sinners. The Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God clothed in our flesh, brings believers into fellowship with the blessed Trinity.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Primary Love of the Spirit: "Sibbes' Focus on Christ"**

Although Sibbes was a Triune Theologian, with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, he asserted strongly that the chief end of man, is "*to look to Christ*", or to be "*swallowed up in the love of Christ*". Ultimately, then, for Sibbes, the Father and Spirit desired to reveal Christ, and His mediating love to sinners in calling, regeneration, justification, sanctification and glorification. This goal to look to Christ has two elements, Sibbes taught: 1. That God might be glorified; 2. That believers might be happy. "And both these are attained by honoring and serving Him."<sup>42</sup> For Sibbes, the Triune theologian, God would be glorified through

---

<sup>39</sup> Sibbes, *The Fountain Opened in Works*, V:462

<sup>40</sup> Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 143.

<sup>41</sup> Sibbes, *The Fountain Opened in Works*, V:482-83

<sup>42</sup> Sibbes, *The Christian's End in Works*, V:298; Quoted in Frost, "*Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace*," 44.

sinner believing upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the application of all of Christ's benefits by the Holy Spirit, would enjoy Him in intimate relationship. This is a summary of what the Westminster Divines would later write (after Sibbes' death in 1635) as the "chief end of man", "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."<sup>43</sup>

For Sibbes, looking to Christ had a transforming effect on the believers. Like John Owen after him, the emphasis was "looking on Christ" (cf. Heb. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).<sup>44</sup> Sibbes wrote of the transforming effect that looking to Christ has on believers. "The very beholding of Christ is a transforming sight...it is a transforming beholding. If we look upon him with the eye of faith, it will make us like Christ....When we see the love of God in the gospel, and the love of Christ giving himself for us, this will transform us to love God."<sup>45</sup> Sibbes wrote that by looking to the glory of God in Christ we see Christ as our husband, and that breeds a disposition in us to have the affections of a spouse.<sup>46</sup> We see Christ as our head, and that breeds a disposition in us to be members like him.<sup>47</sup> Sibbes encouraged growth in Christ by His Spirit through meditation on His Beautiful Person. Sibbes wrote that Christ is the most beautiful person, particularly as the mediator between the Father and sinners who brings

---

<sup>43</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, Question 1: "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."*

<sup>44</sup> John Owen taught often throughout his writings that believers can grow in their communion with God and in their sanctification through the experience of gazing on Christ by faith. See especially John Owen, *Mediations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, I:140; I:274-432; Also, *Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, in *Works*, VII:344-351.

<sup>45</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:14

<sup>46</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:12; Sibbes' preaching was clearly influenced by Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430), as well as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Sibbes had a "moderate mysticism" not an "ontological fusion" as taught by radical mystics but a "union analogous to human marriage". Frost wrote that this covenant-marriage or mystical marriage language placed Sibbes in company with many of the central figures of the Christian-mystical tradition who used marital imagery to describe spirituality. The mystical union emphasized that Christ and believers are one. Sibbes accentuated the benefits of this mystical union: "...With the same love that God loves Christ, he loves all his. He delights in Christ and all his, with the same delight....You see what a wondrous confidence and comfort we have hence, if we labor to be in Christ, that then God loves and delights in us, because he loves and delights in Christ Jesus." Quoted in Frost, *Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace*, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:271

peace and reconciliation. This loveliness and beauty of Christ is “especially spiritual”, Sibbes taught, meaning that it had spiritual efficacy to stir up the graces of Christ’s Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Quoting a spiritual father in the faith, Bernard of Clairvaux, he wrote, “When I think of Christ, I think at once of God, full of majesty and glory; and, at the same time, of man, full of meekness, gentleness, and sweetness.”<sup>49</sup> Consistently, as an affective, spiritual preacher, Sibbes primarily defined sin against God not using legal language, but with the relational language of marriage: “Any sin...was spiritual adultery and a breach of covenant with God”.<sup>50</sup> For Sibbes, sin was spiritual adultery against a glorious Husband who has laid down His life for His dear bride, and to be avoided because of love for Him.

In Sibbes’ rich and biblical Christology and Pneumatology there is no room for Antinomianism, or carelessness with regard to God’s law. If one is truly a believer, they will be becoming like Christ by His Spirit. The believer’s union with Christ demanded this understanding. This transformation would be one of both comfort and conformity. The Spirit’s work would comfort believers with the Father’s love in Christ, and they could boldly draw near to Him for help in their lives. This confidence in the Father’s love would dispel all of their fears, and they would love God as a Father. The Spirit would also conform believers to the likeness of Christ. Sibbes wrote that what the believers behold by faith in Christ, they would become. What a believer sees in the Savior would be a reality for them in their sanctification. Sibbes emphasized Christ as Savior first, then Christ as the believer’s example, but one could not be separated from the other any more than justification could be separated from sanctification in the true believer.

---

<sup>48</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:138

<sup>49</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:138

<sup>50</sup> Dever, “Richard Sibbes,” 115.

This priority or primacy on Christ first as a Savior was important for Sibbes' doctrine and explanation of sanctification in the believer (see more details below). For Sibbes, Christ is the Source of the Spirit for believers. If Christ is not understood first as Savior, then the Spirit will not sanctify. Believers only have the Sanctifying Spirit as a gift of the completed work of Christ for sinners (cf. Heb. 2:11ff). The Spirit that Christ had in his earthly life, He now has in fullness in his exaltation in glory. This same Spirit, the exalted Christ pours out abundantly and graciously upon His people. It is important to note that the emphasis for Sibbes is on the Spirit being particularly the Spirit "of Christ". This again accentuates Sibbes' pneumatology being Christological. Sibbes wrote briefly, yet deeply:

*...All is first in Christ, then in us...We have not the Holy Ghost immediately from God, but we have Him as sanctifying Christ first, and then us; and whatsoever the Holy Ghost doth in us, He doth the same in Christ first, and He doth it in us because of Christ...Whatsoever the Holy Ghost works in us, He takes of Christ first (my emphasis).<sup>51</sup>*

---

Sibbes wrote of this biblically rich Christological pneumatology throughout his works. He wrote elsewhere, "[The Lord Jesus Christ] hath the Spirit Himself eminently, and dispenses and gives the Spirit unto others; all receiving the Spirit from Him as the common root and fountain of all spiritual gifts."<sup>52</sup> Jesus Christ is the "man of the Spirit", and the one who pours out His Spirit on His Church.<sup>53</sup> "The gift of the Holy Ghost especially depends upon the glorifying ("glorification") of Christ. When [Christ] had fulfilled the work of redemption,

---

<sup>51</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:18

<sup>52</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:205

<sup>53</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:205-208

and was raised to glory, God being pacified gave the Holy Ghost as a gift of his favor (cf. Acts 2:32-35).<sup>54</sup>

For Sibbes, believers get all their rich spiritual blessings from Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3-14). As it was with Christ in His life, so believers can expect the same in Him by His grace. Christ was conceived by the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit, and sealed by the Spirit, so are believers in the same way. In fact, Sibbes summarized this by clearly teaching that “When we [believers] are knit to Christ by His Spirit, then it works the same in us as it did in him.” As Christ was conceived, anointed and sealed by the Spirit, so those in union with Him are conceived, anointed and sealed as well. Sibbes’ Christological focus was to accentuate all of the spiritual blessings for believers, to encourage them toward a closer communion with the Triune God, and a deeper, more assured salvation and sanctification. All grace that believers have is “from His fullness” received by us by the Holy Spirit (cf. John 1:16). Sibbes wrote: “From Christ, we have grace to know God’s favor towards us, grace for Christ-conformity, and grace to know privileges and benefits towards us...both favor and grace in us, and privileges issuing from grace, we have all as they are in Christ.”<sup>55</sup> All of the blessings believers have is because of Jesus Christ! All the promises of God are made to Christ first, then to us.<sup>56</sup> Sibbes taught that whatever privilege or blessing that believers enjoy such as justification, adoption, sanctification—any blessing from God the Father from grace to glory--should first be seen in Christ. He wrote: “Our election is in Christ first. He is chosen to be our head. Our justification is in Christ first. He is justified and freed from our sins being laid to his charge as our surety, and therefore we are freed. Our resurrection is in

---

<sup>54</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:209

<sup>55</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ in Works*, I:19

<sup>56</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion in Works*, IV:25ff

Christ first. We rise, because he is the ‘first-begotten from the dead.’ Our ascension is in Christ, and our sitting at the right hand of God in him first.

*All things that are ours, they are first his; what he hath by nature, we have by grace (my emphasis).<sup>57</sup>*

---

In fact, there is no blessing, nor immediate communion between the Father and believers except through Jesus Christ. “Christ is the Father’s, and we are the Father’s in Christ.”<sup>58</sup> God in our nature comes between the Father and us, and all things come from God to us in him...Out of Christ, there is no communion with God. He is a friend to both sides: to us as man, to him as God. All things come originally from the fountain of all, God.<sup>59</sup> All comes down from the Father through the Son to us by the Holy Spirit. “God doth all in Christ to us. He chooseth us in Christ, and sanctifies us in Christ; he bestows all spiritual blessings on us in Christ, as members of Christ. To Christ first, and through him, he conveys it to us.”<sup>60</sup> Christ’s human nature is the first temple wherein the Spirit dwells, and then we become temples by union with Him.”<sup>61</sup> Sibbes taught that if one was truly a believer in Christ then he would begin to look and act and live like Him in gentleness and humility. Sibbes would not have agreed with, nor fathomed the Antinomian way of thinking of a so-called “Savior” that did not become also the Sanctifier of the believer. If Christ was truly the Savior of the believer, then He was also the Sanctifier who transformed her.

---

<sup>57</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion* in *Works*, IV:26

<sup>58</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion* in *Works*, IV:32

<sup>59</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion* in *Works*, IV:33

<sup>60</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion* in *Works*, IV:33

<sup>61</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:414

## **The Ministry of the Spirit of Christ: “Entertaining the Holy Spirit”**

There is nothing good in man by nature. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to come and live within believers and to conform them to Christ’s likeness. The Holy Spirit is particularly the “*Spirit of Holiness*” (cf. Rom. 1:4); Christ’s Spirit is the cause of all holiness in the believer. Sibbes wrote, “That attribute the Spirit delights in is that of holiness, which our corrupt nature least delights in and most opposeth.”<sup>62</sup> Man was created by God with a desire by nature for holiness, and a desire for happiness. After the fall of man into sin and rebellion against God man still seeks after happiness, but the desire for holiness has been extinguished.<sup>63</sup> The Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in believers to oppose the flesh and fallen nature of man to produce Christ-likeness that brings deep and lasting happiness to the believer.

Sibbes wrote, “Let us labor to be in Christ that we may get the Spirit. It is of great necessity that we should have it (“Him”). Above all things next to redemption by Christ, labor for the Spirit of Christ, Sibbes persuaded believers.”<sup>64</sup> Sibbes taught that the primary ministry of the Spirit of Christ was to enlighten believer’s minds, to soften their hearts, to quicken their wills to faith and action, and to sanctify God’s people.<sup>65</sup> The Spirit’s ministry is a sanctifying ministry, but wonderfully relational as well. God communicates Himself to believers, and believers through the Spirit communicate their hearts back to Him. Without Christ, there could be no Holy Spirit for the believer; without the Spirit there could be no union with Christ and enjoyment of His benefits. Without the Spirit, there could be no real communion with God in Christ.

---

<sup>62</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:412

<sup>63</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:413

<sup>64</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:212

<sup>65</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:413

*All the communion that Christ as man had with God was by the Holy Ghost; and all the communion that God hath with us, and we with God, is by the Holy Ghost: for the Spirit is the bond of union between Christ and us, and between God and us.*<sup>66</sup>

---

Sibbes wrote that “God communicates Himself to us by His Spirit, and we communicate with God by His Spirit. God does all in us by His Spirit, and we do all back again to God by His Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> Sibbes wrote: “There is nothing in the world so great and sweet a friend that will do us so much good as the Spirit, if we give Him entertainment.”<sup>68</sup>

The Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to conform believers to the obedience of Christ as a Holy friend with whom to walk and talk in fellowship together. So for Sibbes, “entertaining the Spirit” is being careful and cautious not to grieve the Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 4:30), but to put it positively, it is to subject ourselves to Christ as Lord and *kind king* as believers. It is treating the Spirit as a kind friend as well as a king (cf. Malachi 1:6) who has brought glorious and holy fellowship from the Father and the Son to redeemed sinners (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14). Sibbes wrote summarizing his understanding of entertaining the Spirit:

*...There is the obedience of faith, and the obedience of life. When the soul is wrought to obedience, to believe, and to be directed by God, then the Holy Spirit is given in a farther measure still. The Holy Ghost is given to them that obey, to them that do not resist the Spirit of God....the Spirit is given to them that obey the sweet motions of it...If we have the Spirit of Christ, let us labor to subject ourselves unto it. When we have any good motion by the ministry of the Word, or by conference, or by reading good things (as holy things have a savor in them...)...Oh, give way to the motions of God's Spirit! (my emphasis)<sup>69</sup>*

---

The obedience that the Holy Spirit equips believers with is no mere morality, or outward show of behavior, but an inward disposition of particularly “cheerful obedience”. The

---

<sup>66</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ in Works*, I:17

<sup>67</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ in Works*, I:17-18

<sup>68</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:431

<sup>69</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ in Works*, I:24-25

believer was to be stirred up by the Spirit, motivated by the love of God in Christ that would encourage them to obey the Savior who has loved them and laid down His life for them. Sibbes was cautious to avoid bare moralism that was an unbiblical error of his time. Sibbes emphasized that believers' love because they have first been loved by God in Christ (cf. 1 John 4:11-19). Sibbes wrote pastorally for believers to understand that the love of God must be the believer's motivation in all that they do for God if it be true, Christian obedience:

*Whatsoever we do else, if it be not stirred by the Spirit, apprehending the love of God in Christ, it is but morality...What are all our performances if they be not out of love to God? And how shall we love God except we be persuaded that he loves us first? ...The gospel breeds love in us to God...working a blessed frame of sanctification, whereby we are disposed to every good duty.<sup>70</sup>*

---

“Let the Spirit dwell and rule in us,” captures in summary what it mean for Sibbes for believers to entertain the Spirit of God.<sup>71</sup> Sibbes sweetly called the Spirit the “Blessed Lodger that ever we entertained in all of our lives.”<sup>72</sup> For Sibbes, that entertaining meant to welcome with hospitality and nurture our friendship with the indwelling Spirit.” This relationship with the Holy Spirit as the believer's holy guest was subject to a *deepening and ever-intensifying growth* in the love and peace of God. The more the believer sought to let the Spirit guide, comfort, conform, edify, and guard the soul from sinning, Christ would desire by His Spirit to develop more maturely and deeply. Sibbes wrote, “Christ desires

---

<sup>70</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:24

<sup>71</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:25

<sup>72</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:25

further entertainment in his church's heart and affection, that he might lodge and dwell there."<sup>73</sup>

Entertaining the Holy Spirit also meant for Sibbes a further subduing of sinful corruption in the soul, and an enlarging of God's grace and comfort in the heart:

*Let us remember that grace is increased, in the exercise of it, not by virtue of the exercise itself, but as Christ by his Spirit flows into the soul and brings us nearer to himself, the fountain, so instilling such comfort that the heart is further enlarged. The heart of a Christian is Christ's garden, and his graces are as so many sweet spices and flowers which, when his Spirit blows upon them, send forth a sweet savor...Therefore keep the soul open to entertain the Holy Ghost, for he will bring in continually fresh forces to subdue corruption, and this most of all on the Lord's day (my emphasis).<sup>74</sup>*

---

Because the souls of believers were still contaminated by sin, they were to trust Christ to further subdue the corruption, thus enlarging the believer's heart, and making the soul a more pleasant and holy place for Christ to dwell. This was to be obtained by prayer to God in Jesus' name. Entertaining the Spirit meant for Sibbes never to grieve the Holy Spirit of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:30). Sibbes plead with God's people: "Oh give him entrance and way to come into his own chamber, as it were to provide a room for himself."<sup>75</sup> Believers can grieve the Spirit when they resist his teaching, direction, strengthening, and/or comfort from Him.<sup>76</sup> When believers receive the delight and comfort brought to them by the Spirit, they entertain his motions of grace and comfort toward them, but when they refuse Him, they grieve Him, and sin against Him.<sup>77</sup> Sibbes taught realistically that the best of believers

---

<sup>73</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:58

<sup>74</sup> Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* in *Works*, I:75

<sup>75</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:236

<sup>76</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:415; Sibbes gave advice on specifically how to avoid the grieving of the Spirit. 1. Let believers submit our souls entirely to the Spirit of God as Divine Governor. 2. Let believers walk perfectly ("precisely") in obeying the Spirit in all things.

<sup>77</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:415

are prone to grieve the Spirit. Believers who have the Spirit of God within them know experientially that there is an enmity within and without against the workings of the Spirit.<sup>78</sup>

Sibbes taught that believers should remember that the Spirit is a Spirit of *Holiness* and so he “is grieved with unclean courses, with unclean motions and words and actions.”<sup>79</sup> The Spirit is a Spirit of *Love* and so he is grieved when believers cherish malice or corruption against other Christians. “He will not rest in a malicious heart who is the Spirit of Love.”<sup>80</sup> There must not be any rottenness or malice that is practiced and performed in the hearts of believers. The Spirit is a Spirit of *Humility* and wheresoever He is, there is humility. Those that are filled with vain and high thoughts, proud conceits, and self-centeredness grieve the Spirit of God.<sup>81</sup> The Spirit of God is especially grieved by spiritual wicked sins such as pride and high-mindedness, perhaps even more so offended than by sins against the body, Sibbes taught. Grieving the Spirit can also be a disregard of a well-informed, Biblically-enriched conscience. Sins against conscience can grieve this wonderful Spirit if Christ, and “lay a clog upon Him” as Sibbes says colorfully.<sup>82</sup>

The primary goal of the Christian life is to please Christ, and to enjoy comfort in Him, being equipped with gifts for loving service by the Holy Spirit.<sup>83</sup> We can grieve the Spirit and not properly entertain His sweet and comforting work in and through us when we are distracted by worldly things, and prefer creaturely, created things, more than “His motions

---

<sup>78</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:414

<sup>79</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:236

<sup>80</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:237

<sup>81</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:237

<sup>82</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:237

<sup>83</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:414

leading us to holiness and happiness”.<sup>84</sup> When the mind is troubled with much (as Martha? Luke 10:38-42?), then the Spirit is grieved. Especially in our time, believers ought to heed the wisdom of Sibbes here:

*...When the soul is like a mill [or loud industrial warehouse], where one cannot hear another, the noise is such as takes away all intercourse. It diminishes of our respect to the Holy Spirit when we give way to a multitude of business (what we would call “busyness”); for multitude of business (“busyness”) begets multitude of passions and distractions; that when God’s Spirit dictates the best things that tend to our comfort and peace, we have no time to heed what the Spirit advises. Therefore we should so moderate our occasions and affairs, that we may be always ready for good suggestions. If a man will be lost, let him lose himself in Christ and in the things of heaven...(my emphasis).<sup>85</sup>*

---

Because the primary office of the Spirit is to “set out Christ, and the favor and mercy of God in Christ,”<sup>86</sup> let believers never slight the good news of Christ in the Gospel. Let God’s people receive God’s grace in Christ as He is held out to them, especially in preaching. Sibbes counseled that eagerness to hear God’s Word preached by God’s called, gifted and ordained ambassadors was a primary way to make “way for God in the heart” and so he said: “Give [the preachers] entertainment.”<sup>87</sup> Sibbes emphasized not only the work of the Spirit within the believer, but the Spirit’s work through the means appointed by God, particularly preaching.

### **Preaching in the Spirit: “Wooing Christ’s Bride”**

For Richard Sibbes, the work of preaching was a very important aspect of Christ’s ministry to his church. The word and Spirit go together. If believers will have the power

---

<sup>84</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:416

<sup>85</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:422

<sup>86</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:420

<sup>87</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:426

and comfort of the Holy Spirit, then they must “attend upon the Word”.<sup>88</sup> Godly preaching of the Word of God in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was the primary means of the Spirit’s activity more than the historical organizational continuity of the church; this was at the heart of Sibbes’ vision of the church.<sup>89</sup> Sibbes taught that ministers are Christ’s mouth.<sup>90</sup> Christ speaks through them, and “they use all kind of means that Christ may be entertained into their hearts.”<sup>91</sup> The Spirit of God gives life, and is the “soul of the word” that Christ uses to knock at the doors of men’s hearts.<sup>92</sup> Christ comes into the heart by the Spirit and “*it is a special entertainment that he looks for*”<sup>93</sup> from his people so that their love and joy may grow, and the believer delight more deeply in Christ.<sup>94</sup> Sibbes encourages believers to “labor to hold Christ, to entertain him,” “let us desire that he would rule in our wills and affections”.<sup>95</sup> Jesus comes to the hearts of believers to spread his treasures in preaching, to “enrich the heart with all grace and strength, to bear all afflictions, to encounter all dangers, to bring peace of consciences, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>96</sup> Sibbes likens the Word and the Spirit to veins and arteries in the body. The veins have arteries, that as the veins carry the

---

<sup>88</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:428

<sup>89</sup> Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 93. Dever writes insightfully that Sibbes’ “Ecclesiology was clearly subordinated to soteriology in a way Roman Catholics and later dissenters have found largely impossible to imitate.” This does not mean that Sibbes did not consider ecclesiology important, but that his emphasis was one of a focus primarily on the Gospel in building Christ’s church and extending His kingdom. Sibbes in his time took a centrist, moderate position with regard to ecclesiology, but was deeply a faithful Puritan in his soteriology. Sibbes’ emphasis and stress as a minister was on seeking to unite believers through the Gospel first and foremost. Sibbes is an important figure to consider and imitate in times of great division and controversy in the church (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22-26).

<sup>90</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:61

<sup>91</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:61

<sup>92</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:62

<sup>93</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:64

<sup>94</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:64

<sup>95</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:66

<sup>96</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:67

blood, the arteries carry the spirits to quicken the blood. Sibbes wrote: “It is a blessed thing when the Spirit in the ordinances and the Spirit in our hearts meet together.”<sup>97</sup>

In preaching, the hearts of sinners must be addressed by the power of the Spirit through the Word of God. In fact, faith was a response first of the affections to receive a gracious Savior, and then a motivation to move one’s will toward obedience. For faith to be real in a sinner’s soul, the sinner had to be regenerated and resurrected by a powerful working of God’s Spirit through the Word. The will could not choose or follow Christ where the affections did not lead. The heart of man had to be made new by God’s grace, and therefore the preacher was to practice wooing the sinner’s heart to God in Christ, showing His love and willingness to forgive sinners to come to Him. To put it in a different way, faith for Sibbes, was not a mere human act-of-the-will but a response to God’s divine wooing” by the Spirit to Christ.<sup>98</sup> Sibbes referred to preachers as “friends of the Bride” and described their primary calling as committed “to bring Christ and his Spouse together”.<sup>99</sup> Sibbes wrote that it is not sufficient to merely preach theological truths about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but that to truly preach is to “break open the box that the savor may be perceived by all,” and to make known these truths with an application of them to the use of God’s people, that they may see their interest or need of them in their daily lives. For Sibbes’ the primary goal of the preacher was to allure the sinner to the kindness of God in Christ. As he summarized it in his introduction to *A Bruised Reed*, “The main scope of [preaching], is, to allure us to the entertainment of Christ’s mild, safe, wise, victorious government (“rule”), and to leave men naked of all pretences why they will not have Christ rule over them, when

---

<sup>97</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:428-29

<sup>98</sup> Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 82.

<sup>99</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:38. “There must be an alluring of them, for to preach is to woo,” *A Fountain Opened* in *Works*, V:505

we see salvation not only strongly wrought, *but sweetly dispensed in Him...* (my emphasis).”<sup>100</sup>

Sibbes encouraged believers in the covenant, privileged to be exposed to the ministry of the Word, to hear the ministerial voice as the very voice of Christ through his word. “Let us think that God speaks to us in the ministry, that Christ comes to woo us, and win us thereby.”<sup>101</sup> Sibbes wrote that one of the main end of the calling of the ministry is “to lay open and unfold the unsearchable riches of Christ; to dig up the mine, thereby to draw the affections of those that belong to God to Christ.”<sup>102</sup> Sibbes taught that preachers should preach “as if Christ Himself were here a-preaching”.<sup>103</sup> Sibbes taught that the minister of the word in the pulpit and the Spirit of God in the heart together bring the soul to faith in Christ and the pursuit of holiness.

Preaching was also designed by God to capture the imaginations of God’s people. The imagination must be awakened by the Spirit of God through the ministry of the preacher if the understanding is to be properly engaged.<sup>104</sup> Sibbes described preaching colorfully as “The putting of lively colors upon common truths”.<sup>105</sup> The preacher was to seek by the help of the Holy Spirit to bring alive to men’s imaginations the beauties of God’s grace and truth in Christ. Imaginations were to be captured and captivated by God to move the soul’s affections to love God and draw near to Him in Christ. Sibbes wrote: “Now, the reason why imagination works so upon the soul is, because it stirs up the affections answerable to the

---

<sup>100</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works*, I:40

<sup>101</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:68

<sup>102</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:142

<sup>103</sup> Shelly, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 206.

<sup>104</sup> Shelly, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 218-19.

<sup>105</sup> Shelly, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 210.

good or ill which it apprehends...”<sup>106</sup> Sibbes taught that a preacher should through the working of the Spirit, grant hearers a “gospel imagination”: A sanctified “fancy” or imagination will make every created thing or person a ladder up to heaven to gaze at the grace and glory of God in Christ.<sup>107</sup>

## **Sanctification by the Spirit: Conformity to Christ-likeness**

### **Regeneration by the Spirit: Freedom from Slavery**

“There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”<sup>108</sup> Sibbes uses the imagery of slavery to describe the unregenerate person. Those who are unregenerate believe that they are free, but they are bound in deep and dark slavery to sin. Sibbes wrote: “There is no man but he is a slave till he be in Christ; and the more free a man things himself to be, and labors to be, the more slave he is...A man till he be in Christ is a slave; not of one man or of one lord over him, but he hath so many lords as he hath so many lusts.”<sup>109</sup> We are to go to Christ for His Spirit to be set free from this slavery, to continue to seek him to be gradually and increasingly freed from this bondage. Sibbes taught that Christ through His Spirit gives believers freedom or liberty from the tyranny of sin, and more particularly liberty from the

---

<sup>106</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict in Works*, I:179

<sup>107</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict in Works*, I:185. Sibbes wrote: “...Our best way (to fill our imaginations with truth) is to propound true objects of the mind to work upon, as, 1. To consider the greatness and goodness of Almighty God and his love to us in Christ. 2. The joys of heaven and the torments of hell. 3. The last and strict day of account. 4. The vanity of all earthly things. 5. The uncertainty of our lives, etc. From the meditation of these truths the soul will be prepared to have right conceits of things, and discourse upon true grounds of them, and think with itself that if these things be so indeed, then I must frame my life suitable to these principles. Hence arise true affections in the soul, true fear of God, true love and desire after the best things, etc. The way to expel wind out of our bodies is to take some wholesome nourishment, and the way to expel windy fancies from the soul is to feed upon serious truths.” Quoted in Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict in Works*, I:181

<sup>108</sup> Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed in Works*, I:47

<sup>109</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:215-17

just anger of God, and the slavery of Satan, who he calls “God’s executioner”.<sup>110</sup> Christ liberates souls from the terror of conscience, the fear of death, hell, and the judgment.<sup>111</sup>

Christ’s redeemed people are now obedient servants in Christ. God has freed us from sin in Christ freely serve Him with joy! Sibbes wrote (similar to Martin Luther before him earlier in the 16<sup>th</sup> century): “Shall God become a servant, and shall we that are servants think much to serve our fellow-servants? Let us learn this lesson, to abase ourselves; we cannot have a better pattern to look unto than our blessed Saviour. A Christian is the greatest freeman in the world; he is free from the wrath of God, free from hell and damnation, from the curse of the law; but then, though he be free in these respects, yet, in regard of love, he is the greatest servant. Love abaseth him to do all the good he can; and the more the Spirit of Christ is in us, the more it will abase us to anything wherein we can be serviceable.”<sup>112</sup> Sibbes writes eloquently of the great freedom Christ has given to believers:

*The Spirit discovers the state of bondage we are in by nature, and it discovers withal a more excellent condition; and as it discovers, so likewise the Spirit of God brings us to this state, by working faith in that that Christ hath done for us. Christ hath freed us by his death from the curse of the law, from the wrath of God, from death and damnation, and the like. Now whatsoever Christ hath done the Spirit works faith, to make this our won by uniting us to Christ. When Christ and we are one, his sufferings are ours, and his victory is ours, all is ours.*<sup>113</sup>

---

From this regeneration and gift of faith by Christ’s Spirit, there then comes renovation of the soul. This is the “well-ordering of the heart,” a great work of the Spirit. As Sibbes wrote: “The greatest and hardest work of a Christian is least in sight, which is the well-ordering of

---

<sup>110</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:216

<sup>111</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:216

<sup>112</sup> Sibbes, *A Description of Christ in Works*, I:9

<sup>113</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:221

his heart.”<sup>114</sup> Once the believer has been clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ because “God hath satisfied God”<sup>115</sup> there is freedom from the slavery of sin. The same Spirit who assures the believer of pardon of sin, also sanctifies the redeemed sinner.<sup>116</sup> “Where the Spirit is of sanctification, it breaks the ruling power of sin.”<sup>117</sup>

### **Transformed Affections and Desires**

Affections were very important for *Heavenly* Dr. Sibbes. For Sibbes, knowledge of Scripture was very important, but not as important as the knowledge informing the affections and warming the heart. Sibbes wrote, “Many men labor only to unfold the Scriptures, for the increasing of their knowledge that they may be able to discourse, whereas the special intent of the ministry is to work upon the heart and the affections.”<sup>118</sup> “Sibbes’ heart-based anthropology...held that spirituality is the fruit of supernaturally transformed affections that would always satisfy the demands of morality but never rely on them as guideposts.”<sup>119</sup> Sibbes wrote that “We glorify God when we exalt him in our souls above all creatures in the world, when we give him the highest place in our love and in our joy, when all our affections are set upon him as the chiefest good.”<sup>120</sup> “Sibbes clearly understood that duty can only be sustained if it is supported by the motivation of desire.”<sup>121</sup> Sibbes wrote, “A man may ask his desires what he is.” Shelly summarized this saying, “The test of a man is his desires which tell him what he really is.”<sup>122</sup> “A Christian is

---

<sup>114</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict* in *Works*, I:185

<sup>115</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:220

<sup>116</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:221

<sup>117</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:221

<sup>118</sup> Shelly, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 74.

<sup>119</sup> Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 81.

<sup>120</sup> Sibbes, *Meditations* in *Works*, VII:186

<sup>121</sup> Kopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 82.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Shelly, “*Richard Sibbes*,” 70.

what his heart and inward man is.<sup>123</sup> Sibbes, following his forefather in the faith, Augustine of Hippo, said: "...Let us ask our affections what we are, as Austin writes excellently in his book *De Civitate Dei*. '**Ask thy heart of what city thou art**'."<sup>124</sup>

Sibbes taught that holy desires come from "a taste of sweetness in communion with Christ".<sup>125</sup> Affective knowledge [is] a knowledge with a taste."<sup>126</sup> Sibbes said that God looks upon a soul as he desires. God values men by their desires.<sup>127</sup> "Our desires are holy if they exercised about spiritual things...Desires show the frame of the soul more than anything."<sup>128</sup> "Love is the first-born affection that breeds desire of communion with God."<sup>129</sup> Sibbes' anthropology "held that the mind and will are merely instruments of the affections."<sup>130</sup> In contrast to William Perkins before him, with a focus on the will as the ground of morality, Sibbes focused the affections on Christ.<sup>131</sup> "...Because knowledge and affection mutually help one another, it is good to keep up our affections of love and delight by all sweet inducements and divine encouragements; for what the heart likes best, the mind studies most. Those that can bring their hearts to delight in Christ know most of His ways."<sup>132</sup> Sibbes emphasized that what Christ was doing in the soul of the Christian presently was most important. He wrote: "What He did for me is of significance, but what He does in me is of far greater consequence. Against both errors of moralism and Antinomianism in his time,

---

<sup>123</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:49

<sup>124</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:123

<sup>125</sup> Sibbes, *Christ is Best in Works*, I:338

<sup>126</sup> Sibbes, *The Fountain Opened in Works*, V:478

<sup>127</sup> Sibbes, *The Spiritual Favorite in Works*, VI:98

<sup>128</sup> Sibbes, *Meditations in Works*, VII:187

<sup>129</sup> Sibbes, *Meditations in Works*, VII:68; quoted in Frost, "*Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace...*," 117.

<sup>130</sup> Kavic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 89.

<sup>131</sup> Frost, "*Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace...*," 175-77.

<sup>132</sup> Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed in Works*, I:89

Sibbes confidently taught that grace surely leads to holiness”.<sup>133</sup> If one was truly a Christian, one’s actions would follow one’s affection.<sup>134</sup> If there be a true love for Christ in the heart that has been wrought by the Holy Spirit, Sibbes wrote that “it will discover itself in the outward man, one way or other.<sup>135</sup> Our actions will show that our “calling and election is sure” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3-9-11).

*If there be any affection of love and piety to God, there will be eyes lifted up, knees bended down, and hands stretched forth to heaven.*<sup>136</sup>

---

***Our lives will show what are hearts are truly like.*** If a person truly has the Spirit of Christ, then they will do their duties with joy, and this will be evident to themselves and to all! Sibbes wrote, “So it will be with Christians: the more spiritual they grow, the more lightsome (“carefree, merry”) and courageous [they will become]; the more strong, the more lively, and vigorous to all duties.”<sup>137</sup> “He is the best Christian that is the most reverent Christian, the most careful Christian, most jealous over his own heart. Usually those are the richest in grace.”<sup>138</sup> Sibbes wrote that God hath made the soul for a communion with Himself, which communion is especially placed in the affections, which are the springs of all spiritual worship. When the affections are well ordered, when we are fit to have communion with God, to love, joy, trust, to delight in him above all things. The affections are the inward movings of the soul, which then move best when they move us to God, not from him. They are the feet of the soul, whereby we walk with, and before God.”<sup>139</sup> Sibbes pastorally emphasized the strength of holy affections against afflictions and sufferings. If

---

<sup>133</sup> Shelly, “Richard Sibbes,” 68.

<sup>134</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:110

<sup>135</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:110; “You can’t keep a good soul down,” Sibbes might have thought!

<sup>136</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:110

<sup>137</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:213

<sup>138</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:423

<sup>139</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul’s Conflict in Works*, I:159

the believer has affections wrought upon with the love of Christ by the Spirit, they will not be discouraged, nor their zeal be quenched or damped. He wrote, “Where is any love to Christ, the love of Christ is of a violent nature. It sways in the heart... ‘The love of Christ constraineth us,’ (2 Cor. 5:14).<sup>140</sup> “Where the love of Christ is...labor is no labor, suffering is no suffering, trouble is no trouble.”<sup>141</sup> Sibbes pleaded with Christians to labor to have larger affections by the working of the Spirit of Christ:

*Labor...therefore, every day more and more to have larger and larger affections to Christ. The soul that loves Christ, the nearer to Christ the more joyful it is...happiness is there, where the soul enjoys the thing loved.*<sup>142</sup>

---

### **Strength and Power from the Spirit: Faith and Conflict**

There is a great warfare in the Christian life. The Christian life is not free from combat, but a liberty “enabling us to combat”. The Spirit sets the believer free to “fight the battles of the Lord against our own corruptions, not freeing us from it.”<sup>143</sup> Sibbes encourages believers that the greater the strife and conflict against sin, the greater the work of the Spirit in the believer’s life.<sup>144</sup> He encourages believers with the reason why there is a conflict when he wrote: “[The Spirit of Christ] could subdue sin all at once if God saw it good; but God will humble us while we live here, and exercise us with spiritual conflicts.”<sup>145</sup> The believer will ultimately grow stronger in this faith through the conflict, and be fully freed from sin at the Consummation. “*It is a liberty to fight, and in fighting to overcome at last.*”<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict* in *Works*, II:122

<sup>141</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict* in *Works*, II:126

<sup>142</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict* in *Works*, II:126

<sup>143</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:221-22

<sup>144</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:222-23

<sup>145</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:222

<sup>146</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel* in *Works*, IV:222

Sibbes emphasized the importance of faith and growing stronger in the faith as a believer so that joy and comfort will increase. Sibbes wrote: “Faith is an awakening grace. Keep that awake, and it will keep all other graces waking.”<sup>147</sup> There is a kind of “omnipotency” in faith as the woman who touched Christ’s garment found in her healing, ‘*O Woman, be it unto Thee as thou wilt*’, Christ assured her.<sup>148</sup> Sibbes describes faith as “an empty hand, that goes to Christ to draw from him what it hath need of.”<sup>149</sup> Faith takes us to Jesus Christ and draws forth all of the rich, spiritual resources we need from Him. Though believers are taught to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:6), nevertheless, there is an important sight that faith has. Faith has eyes because the Spirit creates and works in believers spiritual senses. We are taught to “behold” in the Scriptures the reality and glory of God by faith.<sup>150</sup> There are degrees of sight for the believer, Sibbes taught. There is the sight of God in the creatures: “The heavens declare the glory of God,” etc. There is a sight of God’s goodness and mercy and intention toward believers in His will, in His word and in His promises. There was a sight of Christ when He was in the flesh. And there is a sight in faith. This sight of faith will give way to sight of our senses in glorified bodies when believers are perfected in heaven, as they behold Christ face to face.<sup>151</sup> “Faith is expressed by beholding, by knowledge; for indeed faith is nothing but knowledge with application,” Sibbes wrote.<sup>152</sup> He meant that to have knowledge that God and Christ were received by believers, and that they possessed eternal life (cf. John 17:3), this meant that all of God’s promises belonged to them. If a believer could possess by faith the promises of God in

---

<sup>147</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:52

<sup>148</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:99

<sup>149</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:99

<sup>150</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:249

<sup>151</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:250

<sup>152</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV: 250

Christ, then these could feed their faith, and see with knowledge one's circumstances more clearly, and particularly know confidently that all of God's ways are good toward his own.<sup>153</sup> Sibbes gives very practical advice to the believer when he taught that one can get the clearest sight of the grace of God to build one's faith through the Word and Sacraments, not superstitious crucifixions and pictures of Jesus!<sup>154</sup>

### **Prayer in the Spirit**

In order to grow as Christians, prayer was extremely important. The believer's faith looks to the promises of God and His nature, not to present circumstances.<sup>155</sup> Sibbes taught believers to pray and labor for an abundance of the Spirit of God. "Pray for the Spirit above all things. It is the life of our life, the soul of our soul..."<sup>156</sup> The Spirit will keep the soul watchful and awake, alertly seeking after Christ. Prayer for more of the Spirit would be possible, as the believer enjoyed the Spirit's working in her, and sought to cooperate with the Spirit's ministry and actions toward the soul. "Prayer doth exercise all the graces of the Spirit. We cannot pray but our faith is exercised, our love, our patience; which makes us set a high price upon that we seek after, and to use it well."<sup>157</sup> As believers, our needs are made real by circumstances, and are means through which God teaches the believer of their utter dependence upon His strength. This brings a believer to a need for prayer. Sibbes encouraged believers to "labor for absolute dependence upon Christ, with a poverty of spirit in ourselves."<sup>158</sup> The reason why Christ may allow the believer to feel their need and

---

<sup>153</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:250-51

<sup>154</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:252

<sup>155</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:116

<sup>156</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:52

<sup>157</sup> Sibbes, *Meditations in Works*, VII:187

<sup>158</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:116

even his comforting presence, is to purge the believer of self-confidence and pride.<sup>159</sup> Sibbes says with much encouragement to the forlorn believer, “When [Christ] gives us a spirit of prayer, it is a pledge to us, that he means to answer us.”<sup>160</sup> Sibbes asked with conviction: “Shall any man...think to have anything without prayer, when all things were conveyed to the Son of God by asking?”<sup>161</sup> God is near to all who call upon Him. Those who are most near to God are those who pray. Sibbes wrote that “those most near to God when their understandings, affections, desires, trust, hope, faith, are busied with God.”<sup>162</sup> Through this “busying oneself with God” the Spirit casts a luster and shine upon a believer’s soul.

### **Christ’s Presence in the Spirit through the Sacraments**

God has given His Church the Sacraments as means to sanctify them, but they must be empowered by the Spirit bringing the presence of Christ to His beloved bride. The sacraments, without the power of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ, are “dead ordinances”.<sup>163</sup> Sibbes wrote: “The most powerful means that ever was ordained for our good will be dead and heartless if [Christ] be not there by His Spirit to put life into it.”<sup>164</sup> Sibbes encourages believers to pray and desire that Christ would join his Spirit to make them effectual for the sanctification of God’s people.<sup>165</sup> “We ought to come to the

---

<sup>159</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:116

<sup>160</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:117

<sup>161</sup> Sibbes, *A Christian’s Portion in Works*, IV:25

<sup>162</sup> Sibbes, *The Saint’s Happiness in Works*, VII:73

<sup>163</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:211

<sup>164</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:211

<sup>165</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:211

ordinances in a dependence upon Christ for a blessing upon them, and for his presence in them...<sup>166</sup>

*....For [Christ] is food for the hungry soul, and requires nothing of us but good appetites; and this will make us desire His love and presence.*<sup>167</sup>

---

### **Sealing of the Spirit: Assurance and Joy!**

Sibbes, along with other Puritans emphasized the importance of the Bible's teaching of the sealing of the Holy Spirit upon the believer's soul (cf. Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Rom. 4:11; 2 Cor. 1:22). Sibbes, as well as eminent Puritan (later) contemporaries Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), and Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) believed that assurance of faith comes by the Spirit testifying "immediately and intuitively" of God's everlasting love to him, of his election, sonship, and inheritance.<sup>168</sup> Sibbes distinguished between the office or function of the Spirit as a seal given in regeneration to a sinner and the work of the Spirit in applying that seal to the believers' consciousness.<sup>169</sup> The Spirit of God is holy in Himself, and makes believers holy. After he has wrought holiness in believers, Sibbes taught that he "seals and confirms us in that act of grace, until the day of our glorious redemption (cf. Eph. 4:30). "Sealing" by the Spirit was defined as "not only a witnessing to us, but a work upon us and in us, carrying the image of him that sealeth us; whereby we are not only assured of the good promised to us, but fitted for the receiving of it."<sup>170</sup> Consistent with His pneumatological theology founded upon the Person and Work of Christ, Sibbes taught that

---

<sup>166</sup> Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel in Works*, IV:211

<sup>167</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:126

<sup>168</sup> Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 184.

<sup>169</sup> Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 538.

<sup>170</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:432-33

Christ was first sealed, then believers after Him in their union and ongoing communion with Him.<sup>171</sup>

Sibbes taught that the believer was sealed by the Spirit, and this sealing was to bring Christ's word and truth to the hearts of his people, making it effectual to be believed as a source of strength and comfort. He wrote: "To those that are gracious [those recipients of God's grace in Christ], [the word of Christ] will be effectual when the Holy Ghost comes to seal it further upon their hearts.<sup>172</sup> One can hear the word, and go away and forget it (cf. James 1:23-25), but the sealing work of the Spirit is eventually making that word effectual. "Perhaps the word we hear is not effectual for the present; it may afterwards, many years after, when God awakes our consciences."<sup>173</sup> The Spirit seals God's promises to the believer by confirming these promises experientially upon the heart.<sup>174</sup> The promises of God become real or "sure" to the believer. The Spirit gives the believer confidence that she belongs to the Lord.<sup>175</sup> The Spirit grants the believer's soul hope and confidence that they truly are the children of God, and the this seal also sanctifies and "leaves upon the soul the likeness of Jesus Christ..."<sup>176</sup>

Sibbes also taught that there are degrees of sealing, enjoyed by the believer according to the gracious good and sovereign will of the Father toward the believer. Sibbes promised great hope for the growing fruitful believer when he wrote: "Joy and strong comfort come

---

<sup>171</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:433

<sup>172</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:111

<sup>173</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:111

<sup>174</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:434

<sup>175</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:435

<sup>176</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:438

from a superadded seal of the Spirit.”<sup>177</sup> This superadded seal, or growth in grace and the knowledge of God’s love can happen in the midst of trials and persecutions particularly, when the believer’s soul has edification, encouragement, and “sweet feelings of joy” in the midst of hardships and difficult, trying circumstances.<sup>178</sup> As one grew in their sanctification, the believer would reach the joy and confidence of assurance of their faith in Christ, and His precious love for them. They would be able to say: **“He is mine; I am his,”** with a heart full of love. As Sibbes wrote, “Assurance is faith full grown and come of age...”<sup>179</sup> Joy would be one of the glorious fruits of the Spirit’s sealing as well. Not only would the believer enjoy assurance, but one of the blessed fruits of this would be great joy. As Sibbes wrote, “Joy is the constant temper which the soul should be in. ‘Rejoice evermore,’ (1 Thess. 5:16).”<sup>180</sup> “Peace and joy are two main fruits of the Kingdom.”<sup>181</sup> Having the presence of the Spirit in a special way would be like a dear friend who sticks by closer than a brother, bringing God the Father’s love down into the bosom of the believer, through the grace of Christ:

*...The Spirit hath a distinct witness by way of enlarging the soul; which is joy in the apprehension of God’s fatherly love....sometimes immediately by way of presence; as the sight of a friend comforts without help of discourse.*<sup>182</sup>

---

The work of salvation, sanctification and sealing is the whole work of the Triune God toward redeemed sinners.<sup>183</sup> Sibbes wrote: [The Spirit of God] raises up “our souls in the assurance of [redemption], and by breeding and cherishing sweet communion with Father

---

<sup>177</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:439

<sup>178</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:439

<sup>179</sup> Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 180.

<sup>180</sup> Sibbes, *The Soul’s Conflict in Works*, I:157

<sup>181</sup> Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed in Works*, I:46

<sup>182</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:440. Goodwin distinguishes between “discursive” and “intuitive” in the sealing of the Spirit; a promise is highlighted, believed and brings grace and joy, for example; see Packer, *Quest*, 185. See also S. B. Ferguson, *Owen on the Christian Life*, pgs. 117-121.

<sup>183</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed in Works*, V:439

and Son, who both of them seal us likewise by the Spirit.”<sup>184</sup> The sealing of God by the Spirit can lead to greater, more intimate communion with God for the believer, as well as to lead to a more profound and confident assurance of God’s love for the believer in Jesus Christ. The believer is to pray for an increase in sealing, because this, too, is a gracious work of the Spirit, as the soul depends upon Him for all the spiritual growth and resources in Christ Jesus.<sup>185</sup> Essentially, sealing is another word for assurance in the theologically practical preaching and experience of Richard Sibbes.<sup>186</sup> Sinclair Ferguson writes that “among the Puritans there was almost universal agreement that the significance of [sealing] lay in an *assurance* produced by a subjective experience of the Holy Spirit, often *after* conversion (his emphasis).<sup>187</sup>

### **Comforted by the Spirit**

For Sibbes, to live for Christ was first for God’s glory, and then for the believer’s comfort.<sup>188</sup> “Christ never comes [to the believer by the Spirit], but He increases grace and comfort.” “Let us be stirred up to have communion with Christ, by this motive [that Christ increases grace and comfort when He draws near], that we shall have an increase of a further measure of grace.”<sup>189</sup> “The Spirit gives no comfort but by the word.... If it be God’s comfort, assure thyself God would have his word to make way unto it,” Sibbes wrote. He said that in times of discouragement the believer must question his own soul about the

---

<sup>184</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:439

<sup>185</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:439-42

<sup>186</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:454

<sup>187</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 116-121. Ferguson explains further that the Puritans were “faced with the lack of assurance in the lives of true Christians,” and they “tended to associate the ‘seal of the Spirit’ with the conscious experience of full assurance which often comes at a later point in the development of faith in Christ,” 117. John Owen disagreed with Sibbes on his understanding of sealing. He wrote: “Assurance may come with the gift, but it is not to be equated with it. The seal is not any particular operation of the Spirit, but the gift of the Spirit himself.” Packer summarizes John Owen’s position on this; see *Quest for Godliness*, 188.

<sup>188</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons from Christ’s Last Sermon* in *Works*, VII:337

<sup>189</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:29

causes of discontent. He must charge himself to trust God and His Word, recognizing that with the Spirit as his indwelling comforter, there is no good reason to be discouraged.<sup>190</sup> Sibbes wrote “...The Spirit in the word conveyeth the seeds of grace and comfort from one to another. It draws out what sweetness is in the spirits of men, and makes them fragrant and delightful to others.”<sup>191</sup> The Spirit of comfort is the Spirit of truth, and so God comforts men’s souls through the truth. Sibbes captured believers’ imaginations when he described the Word of God, especially as it is preached as the “breasts of consolation”. The Holy Spirit comforts primarily by bringing God’s Word to our remembrance.<sup>192</sup> Sibbes wrote that God gives believers “sanctified understandings and affections; and then works on them by sanctified truths.”<sup>193</sup> For instance, the Spirit comforts believers in the love of the Father towards them. He speaks: “God is my best friend that will never forsake me.”<sup>194</sup> Sibbes wrote often of the important of believers experiencing the love of the Father, and never doubting the goodness of God towards them. He wrote,

*...The more we are convinced of God’s goodness, the better we are; for God’s goodness, tasted and felt by the soul, doth ennoble it, as a pearl set in a gold ring maketh it more rich and precious.*<sup>195</sup>

---

Sibbes wrote that “Men may speak comfort, but it is Christ’s Spirit than can only comfort.”<sup>196</sup> Sibbes described a man near to God as one with a “comfortable heart” that is, a

---

<sup>190</sup> Beeke and Jones, “Richard Sibbes on Entertaining the Holy Spirit,” in *A Puritan Theology*, 582.

<sup>191</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened in Works*, II:9

<sup>192</sup> Sibbes, *Divine Meditations in Works*, VII:200

<sup>193</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons; from Christ’s Last Sermon in Works*, VII:343

<sup>194</sup> Sibbes, *The Saint’s Happiness in Works*, VII:68

<sup>195</sup> Sibbes, *The Saint’s Happiness in Works*, VII:71

<sup>196</sup> Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed in Works*, I:39; A characteristic sampling of Sibbes’ emphasis and his sweetness as preacher can be found in his introduction to *The Bruised Reed*, one of his finest sermons addressed to comfort God’s people: “God hath laid up all grace and comfort in Chirst for us, and planted a wonderful sweetness of pity and love in his heart towards us...Men may speak comfort, but it is Christ’s Spirit that can only comfort.” *Works*, I:38-39.

heart that is defined by the peace and comfort of God in Christ.<sup>197</sup> Sibbes encouraged believers to think of God's work particularly in redemption to encourage and bring comfort to the soul. He wrote that believers should think on God not as judge, but as Father, and seeing him "stooping down to our human nature, to take both it and our miserable condition upon himself, and see our nature not only suffering with Christ, but rising, nay, now in heaven united to God."<sup>198</sup> Sibbes knew that this would bring "inestimable comfort" to every believer's heart.

Sibbes knew that a holy life was sure to bring great comfort for the believer, especially at the end of one's life. He wrote,

*The righteousness of Christ entitles to heaven; and the righteousness of a holy life shows my title unto comfort...Therefore let us labor first for an interest in Christ's righteousness, and then for the righteousness of a holy life.*<sup>199</sup>

---

As Sibbes set the example for others at the end of his own life, he encouraged believers to rest in the promises of God as they are given in Christ, to meditate upon them, and to keep grace in exercise.<sup>200</sup>

## **Ending Well in the Spirit**

Heaven for Sibbes was the home to see Christ face to face and live with Him eternally, it was also the perfection of grace begun in this world. The hope of true and lasting happiness could only be found in Christ in heaven; Sibbes wrote: "To be with Christ is to be the spring

---

<sup>197</sup> Sibbes, *The Saint's Happiness in Works*, VII:78

<sup>198</sup> Sibbes, *The Saint's Happiness in Works*, VII:72

<sup>199</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons; from Christ's Last Sermon in Works*, VII:355

<sup>200</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons; from Christ's Last Sermon in Works*, VII:354

head of all happiness.”<sup>201</sup> Sibbes encouraged the saints: “Let us help ourselves with setting the glory to come before our eyes. Like Moses, let us keep our eyes on Him who is “invisible” (cf. Heb. 11:27). Though the Christian life is fraught with discouragements, the believer can rest hopeful in the glory is coming in Christ!<sup>202</sup> Sibbes encouraged and comforted saints that “A Christian’s last is his best.”<sup>203</sup> Although this life could be fraught with much sufferings and frustrations in Christ, nevertheless, the Spirit of God could gladly and sovereignly bring comfort in the midst of the difficulty, and especially at the end. As the Apostle Paul taught in the second letter to the Corinthians, though the outward man wastes and wears away, the inward man is being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The last part of the Christian’s life is best because it is the time when she shall behold Christ face to face and shall become like Him in every way (cf. 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Cor. 12:13; John 17:24).

But Sibbes emphasized that the growing, flourishing, obedient Christian must seek the things above where Christ is seated at God’s right hand (cf. Col. 3:1-3). Throughout the believer’s life, there should be a steady focus on heaven, and a lifting up of one’s mind to behold by faith the glory of Christ the King. Sibbes wrote to believers, reminding them of the reality of death that loom on every man’s horizon: “There is no man’s soul comes into heaven, but his mind is there first.”<sup>204</sup> Another way of putting this is if Christ is preparing a place for the believer, the believer should be preparing themselves for the place. Sibbes wrote: “The life of a Christian is an honorable, a comfortable, sweet life...It requires the

---

<sup>201</sup> Sibbes, *Christ is Best* in *Works* I:339

<sup>202</sup> Sibbes, *Bowels Opened* in *Works*, II:99

<sup>203</sup> Sibbes, *Christ is Best* in *Works*, I:341

<sup>204</sup> Sibbes, *Christ is Best* in *Works*, I:341

most care and watchfulness of any life in the world, being the best life. It is begun here, and accomplished in everlasting life in heaven.”<sup>205</sup>

Through the power and glory of Christ in His resurrection, death has become a path through which believers finish their earthly pilgrimage, and come into their Heavenly Kingdom and full inheritance laid up for them, safe and secure, in the Lord! Death is the passageway or door through which grace is perfected in glory. Sibbes asked: “What is glory but the perfection of grace. Grace indeed is glory here, but it is glory with perfection of grace. Grace indeed is glory here, but it is glory with conflict.”<sup>206</sup>

In Sibbes’ last two sermons on Christ’s last sermon (from John 14:1: “Let not your hearts be troubled...”), Sibbes put into practice the disposition of his blessed Savior. As Jesus Christ was thinking of his disciples first who would be left behind and needed encouragement although He was going the way of death on the cross, so Sibbes faithfully by God’s Spirit continued to point souls to the love of God in Christ to bring them comfort. Like the Apostle Paul before him who had fought the good fight, and was ready for his departure, so Sibbes was also ready by God’s grace for his. To the end of his life, through his final two sermons, Sibbes was constantly focused on the comfort that comes from the Father to believers in Christ through the Holy Spirit. One of his last comments was sweetly,

*What can come from a father but what is sweet? ...What can make a Christian uncomfortable when He has the Spirit of Christ...Comforts that are digested are they that work...Warm the heart with these, and see if any petty thing can cast you down!*<sup>207</sup>

---

<sup>205</sup> Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed* in *Works*, V:431

<sup>206</sup> Sibbes, *Christ is Best* in *Works*, I:340

<sup>207</sup> Sibbes, *Last Two Sermons; from Christ’s Last Sermon* in *Works*, VII:356

Sibbes's own will and testament, dictated on July 4, 1635, the day before his death, commences: "I commend and bequeath my soul into the hands of my gracious Savior, who hath redeemed it with his most precious blood, and appears now in heaven to receive it."

Izaak Walton (1593-1683) wrote in memory of Sibbes:

*Of this blest man, let this just praise be given,*

*Heaven was in Him, before he was in heaven.<sup>208</sup>*

---

CRB

---

<sup>208</sup> Quoted in Beeke and Jones, *Entertaining the Holy Spirit*, in *A Puritan Theology*, 574.

## Bibliography

- Affleck, Bert. "Theology of Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)," PhD Diss., Drew University, 1969.
- Beeke, J. R. and Jones, Mark. A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012.
- Beeke, J. R. and Pederson, R. J. Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006.
- Beeke, J. R. and Derek W. H. Thomas. The Holy Spirit and Reformed Spirituality. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013.
- Butler, Dom Cuthbert. Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life. New York: Dover Publications, 2003.
- Chan, Simon K. H. "The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599-1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety." PhD Diss., Cambridge University, 1985, Magdalene College.
- Davies, Andrew A. "The Holy Spirit in Puritan Experience," in *Faith and Ferment*. London: Westminster Conference, 1982.
- Dever, Mark E. Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. John Owen on the Christian Life. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987.
- Frost, Ronald Norman. "Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace and the Division of English Reformed Theology." PhD diss. King's College of the University of London, 1996.
- Gilson, Etienne. The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard. Transl. by A. H. C. Downes. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940.
- Jones, R. Tudor. "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990).
- Kapic, Kelly M. and Gleason, Randall C., Edited. The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Kaufmann, Milo. The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation. New Haven, CT, 1966.
- Inge, William. Mysticism in Religion. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948.

- McGinn, Bernard. The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism. New York, 2006.
- Miller, Perry. The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century. Harvard Univ. Press, 1983.
- Nuttall, Geoffrey F. The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Packer, J. I. A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990.
- Pettit, Norman. The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Rooy, Sidney H. The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition: A Study of Representative Puritans: Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, John Eliot, Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Edwards. Grand Rapids, MI, 1965.
- Shelly, Harold Patton. "Richard Sibbes: Early Stuart Preacher of Piety," PhD. Diss., Temple University, 1972.
- Sibbes, Richard. *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D. Master of Catherine Hall, Cambridge; Preacher of Gray's Inn, London*. Edited, with "Memoir", by the Rev. Alexander Grosart. 7 vols. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983.
- Tamburello, Dennis E. Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Underhill, Evelyn. Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness. New York, Noonday Press, 1955.
- Wakefield, Gordon. Puritan Devotion: It's Place in the Development of Christian Piety. Epworth Press, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism," *Theology*, LXXVIII (Oct. 1975).
- Watkins, Owen C. *The Puritan Experience*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.
- Yuille, J. Stephen. *Puritan Spirituality: the Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007.