

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 276

BEATIFIC VISION

We shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:2

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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BEATIFIC VISION

276

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WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 John 3:2

IT is one of the most natural desires in all the world that, when we hear of a great and a good man, we should wish to see his person. When we read the works of any eminent author, we are accustomed to turn to the frontispiece to look for his portrait. When we hear of any wondrous deed of daring, we will crowd our windows to see the warrior ride through the streets. When we know of any man who is holy and eminently devoted to his work, we will not mind tarrying anywhere if we may but have a glimpse of him whom God has so highly blessed.

This feeling becomes doubly powerful when we have any connection with the man—when we feel, not only that he is great, but that he is great *for us*; not simply that he is good, but that he is good *to us*; not only that he is benevolent, but that he has been a benefactor *to us* as individuals. Then the wish to see Him rises into a craving desire, and the desire is insatiable until it can satisfy itself in seeing that unknown and hitherto unseen donor who has done such wondrously good deeds for us.

I am sure, my brethren, you will all confess that this strong desire has risen in your minds concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. We owe so much to none other. We speak of none so much; we hope and think of none so much. At any rate,¹ no one else thinks so constantly of *us*. All of us who love His name, I believe, have a most insatiable wish to behold His person.

The thing for which I would pray above all others would be this: forever to behold His face, forever to lay my head upon His breast, forever to know that I am His, forever to dwell with Him. Ay,² one short glimpse, one transitory³ vision of His glory, one brief glance at His marred, but now exalted and beaming countenance, would repay almost a world of trouble.

¹ **at any rate** – whatever the circumstances may be.

² **ay** – yes.

³ **transitory** – brief; lasting only a short time.

The earnest desire of the very best of men has been in the same direction. Job said, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26)—that was his desire. The holy psalmist said, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15). And most saints on their deathbeds have expressed their fondest, dearest, and most blessed wish for heaven, in the expression of longing “to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phi 1:23).

Heaven shall be ours, and all we ever dreamed of Him shall be more than in our possession—*we shall see Him as He is*.

By the help of God’s mighty Spirit, Who alone can put words in our mouths, let us speak first concerning *Christ’s glorious position—as He is*. Our minds often revert to Christ as *He was*, and as such we have desired to see Him. Ah! How often have we wished to see the babe who slept in Bethlehem! How earnestly have we desired to see the man who talked with the woman at the well! How frequently have we wished that we might see the blessed Physician walking amongst the sick and dying, giving life with His touch and healing with His breath! How frequently too have our thoughts retired to Gethsemane, and we have wished our eyes were strong enough to pierce through eighteen hundred and fifty years that part us from that wondrous spectacle that we might see Him as He was! We shall never see Him thus. Bethlehem’s glories are gone forever. Calvary’s glooms are swept away. Gethsemane’s scene is dissolved; and even Tabor’s splendors are quenched in the past. They are as things that were, nor shall they ever have a resurrection. The thorny crown, the spear, the sponge, the nails—these are *not*. The manger and the rocky tomb are gone. The places are there, unsanctified by Christian feet, unblessed, unhallowed by the presence of their Lord. We shall never see Him as He was. In vain our fancy tries to paint it, or our imagination to fashion it. We cannot, must not, see Him as He was; nor do we wish to, for we have a larger promise—*we shall see Him as He is*.

Come, just look at that a few moments by way of contrast, and then I am sure you will prefer to see Christ as *He is*, rather than behold Him as *He was*.

Consider, first, that we shall not see Him *abased in His incarnation, but exalted in His glory*. We are not to see the infant of a span long; we are not to admire the youthful boy; we are not to address the incipient man;⁴ we are not to pity the man wiping the hot sweat from His burning

⁴ **incipient** – in an initial stage of manhood.

brow; we are not to behold Him shivering in the midnight air; we are not to behold Him subject to pains, weaknesses, sorrows, and infirmities like ours. We are not to see the eye wearied by sleep; we are not to behold hands tired in labor; we are not to behold feet bleeding with arduous journeys, too long for their strength. We are not to see Him with His soul distressed; we are not to behold Him abased and sorrowful. Oh, the sight is better still.

We are to see Him exalted. We shall see the head, but not with its thorny crown. We shall see the hand and the nail-prints too, but not the nail; it has been drawn out once and forever. We shall see His side and its pierced wound too; but the blood shall not issue from it. We shall see Him, not with a peasant's garb around Him, but with the empire of the universe upon His shoulders. We shall see Him, not with a reed in His hand, but grasping a golden scepter. We shall see Him, not mocked, spit upon, and insulted; not bone of our bone in all our agonies, afflictions, and distresses; but we shall see Him exalted—no longer Christ the Man of Sorrows, the acquaintance of grief, but Christ the God-man, radiant with splendor, effulgent⁵ with light, clothed with rainbows, girded with clouds, wrapped in lightnings, crowned with stars, the sun beneath His feet. Oh, glorious vision! How can we guess what *He is*? What words can tell us, or how can we speak thereof? Yet whatever He is—with all His splendor unveiled, all His glories unclouded, and Himself unclathed—*we shall see Him as He is*.

Remember again: we are not to see Christ as He was—the despised and the tempted one. We shall never see Christ sitting in the wilderness while the arch-traitor says to Him, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Mat 4:3). We shall not see Him standing firmly on the temple's pinnacle, bidding defiance to the evil one who bids Him cast Himself down from His towering height. We shall not see Him erect on the mountain of temptation, with the earth offered to Him if He will but crouch at the feet of the demon. Nor shall we see Him mocked by Pharisees, tempted by Sadducees, laughed at by Herodians. We shall not behold Him with the finger of scorn pointed at Him. We shall never see Him called a drunken man—“a winebibber” (Mat 11:19). We shall never see the calumniated,⁶ the insulted, the molested, the despised Jesus. He will not be seen as the One from Whom we shall hide our faces, Who “was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3). Never shall these eyes see those blessed

⁵ **effulgent** – shining forth brilliantly; radiant.

⁶ **calumniated** – falsely and maliciously accused; slandered with harmful intent.

cheeks dripping with spittle; never shall these hands, while stained with infamy, touch that blessed hand of His. We shall not see Him despised of men and oppressed; but *we shall see Him as He is*.

Mark again—we shall not see Christ *wrestling with pain*, but Christ as a conqueror. We shall never see Him tread the winepress alone, but we shall see Him when we shall cry, “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” (Isa 63:1). We shall never see Him as when He stood foot to foot with His enemy, but we shall see Him when His enemy is beneath His feet. We shall never see Him as the bloody sweat streams from His whole body, but we shall see Him as He hath put all things under Him and hath conquered hell itself. We shall never see Him as the wrestler, but we shall see Him grasp the prize. We shall never see Him scaling the rampart,⁷ but we shall see Him wave the sword of victory on the top thereof. We shall not see Him fight, but we shall see Him return from the fight victorious and shall cry,

Crown Him! Crown Him! Crowns become⁸ the victor’s brow.⁹

Yet again—we shall never see our Saviour under His Father’s *displeasure*, but we shall see Him honored by His Father’s smile. The darkest hour of Christ’s life was when His Father forsook Him—that gloomy hour when His Father’s remorseless¹⁰ hand held the cup to His Son’s own lips and, bitter though it was, said to Him, “Drink, my Son—ay, drink”; and when the quivering Savior, for a moment, with manhood within Him—strong in its agonies for the moment—said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mat 26:39). Oh, it was a dark moment when the Father’s ears were deaf to His Son’s petitions, when the Father’s eyes were closed upon His Son’s agonies! “My Father,” said the Son, “Canst Thou not remove the cup? Is there no way else for Thy severe justice? Is there no other medium for man’s salvation?” There is none! Ah, it was a terrible moment when He tasted the wormwood and the gall! Surely darker still was that sad midday-midnight, when the sun hid his face in darkness, while Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). Believer, thou wilt never see that sick face; thou wilt never see that wan, wan¹¹ forehead; thou wilt never see that poor scarred brow; thou wilt never see those tearful eyes; thou wilt never see that pale, emaciated body; thou

⁷ **scaling the rampart** – climbing the enemy’s defensive wall in battle.

⁸ **become** – are suitable; are fitting for.

⁹ From the hymn “Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious” by Thomas Kelly (1769-1855).

¹⁰ **remorseless** – without mercy.

¹¹ **wan** – pale, faint, or drained of color.

wilt never see that weary, weary heart! Thou wilt never see that exceedingly sorrowful spirit, for the Father *never* turns His face away now. But what wilt thou see? Thou wilt see thy Lord lit up with His Father's light as well as with His own; thou wilt see Him caressed by His beloved Parent; thou wilt see Him sitting at His Father's right hand, glorified and exalted forever—*we shall see Him as He is*.

Perhaps I have not shown clearly enough the difference between the two visions—the sight of what He was and the sight of what He is. Allow me, then, a moment more, and I will try and make it clearer still.

When we see Christ as He was, how *astonished* we are! One of the first feelings we should have, if we could have gone to the Mount of Olives and seen our Savior sweating there, would have been astonishment. When we were told that it was the Son of God in agonies, we should have lifted up our hands with no speech in us at the thought.

But here, beloved, is the difference. The believer will be as much astonished when he sees Jesus' glories as He sits on His throne as he would have been to have seen Him in His earthly sufferings. The one would have been astonishment, and horror would have followed it; but when we see Jesus as He is, it will be astonishment without horror. We shall not feel terrified for one moment at the sight, but rather:

Our joys shall run eternal rounds,

*Beyond the limits of the skies and earth's remotest bounds.*¹²

If we could see Jesus as He was, we should see Him with *great awe*. If we had seen Him walking on the water, what awe should we have felt! If we had seen Him raising the dead, we should have thought Him a most majestic Being. So we shall feel awe when we see Christ on His throne; but the first kind of awe is awe compounded with fear, for when they saw Jesus walking on the water, they cried out and were afraid. But when we shall see Christ as He is, we shall say:

*Majestic sweetness sits enthroned upon His awful brow.*¹³

There will be no fear with our awe—but it will be *awe without fear*. We shall not bow before Him with trembling, but with joy; we shall not shake at His presence, but rejoice with joy unspeakable.

Furthermore, if we had seen Christ as He was, we should have had great *love* for Him; but that love would have been compounded with *pity*. We should stand over Him and say:

¹² From the hymn "From Thee, My God, My Joys Shall Rise" by Isaac Watts (1674-1748).

¹³ From the hymn "To Christ the Lord Let Every Tongue" by Samuel Stennett (1727-1795).

*Alas! and did my Saviour bleed, and did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?*¹⁴

We shall love Him just as much when we see Him in heaven—and more too—but it will be *love without pity*; we shall not say, “Alas!” but we shall shout:

*All hail the power of Jesus’ name; let angels prostrate fall:
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.*¹⁵

Once again—if we had seen Jesus Christ as He was here below, there would have been joy to think that He came to save us; but sorrow would have mingled with it to think that we needed saving. Our sins would have made us grieve that He should die, and “alas!” would burst from us even with a song of joy. But when we see Him, there it will be joy without sorrow; sin and sorrow themselves will have gone. Ours will be a pure, unmingled,¹⁶ unadulterated¹⁷ joy.

Yet more—if we had seen our Savior as He was, it would have been a triumph to see how He conquered—but still there would have been *suspense* about it. We should have feared lest He might not overcome. But when we see Him up there, it will be triumph without suspense. Sheath the sword: the battle is won. It is over now. “It is finished,” has been said. The grave is in the past; the gates have been opened; and now, henceforth¹⁸ and forever, He sitteth down at His Father’s right hand (Heb 1:3), from whence¹⁹ He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

Here, then, is the difference: *we shall see Him as He is*. We shall feel astonishment without horror, awe without fear, love without pity, joy without sorrow, triumph without suspense. That is the glorious position. *We shall see Him as He is*.

From “The Beatific Vision,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 2 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856), 57-61; in the public domain.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



Moses himself asked that he might see God (Exo 33:18-19).—C. H. Spurgeon

¹⁴ From the hymn “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed” (1707), by Isaac Watts (1674-1748).

¹⁵ From the hymn “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” by Edward Perronet (1726-1792).

¹⁶ **unmingled** – not mixed with anything else.

¹⁷ **unadulterated** – not weakened or corrupted in any way.

¹⁸ **henceforth** – from this time forth; from now on.

¹⁹ **whence** – from where.

SEEING GOD'S FACE FOREVER

Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

THE “blessed hope” of the saints is “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). Saved by grace, they exult “in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). God has called them by the gospel to His glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. This reminds us, as Donnelly said, that “heaven does not exist primarily for our sake...Heaven exists for God’s own glory.”¹ As we enter this subject, we do well to remember that we are considering the glory of the infinite God. Charles Spurgeon spoke for us all when he said, “I cannot say that I will speak of the glory, but I will try to stammer about it; for the best language to which a man can reach concerning glory must be a mere stammering.”²

Beholding God’s Glory Forever. The saints long for the privilege of gazing upon the beauty and majesty of God, and count enjoying God as their portion and inheritance. The hope of believers is that their God will come, and they will see His glory (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah foretells, “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty” (Isa 33:17). The manifestation of divine glory will transform and revive the world: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God” (35:1-2). Isaiah adds, “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it...Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:5, 9).³

God will grant His people to see His glory in His incarnate Son. Christ says, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). Manton said, “We shall see that person that redeemed us, and

¹ Edward Donnelly, *Biblical Teaching on the Doctrines of Heaven and Hell* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 77.

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 29:277.

³ The promise of Isaiah 40:5 is cited in Luke 3:6, for it had a partial fulfillment in the first coming of Christ. However, its complete fulfillment awaits the Second Coming, when God’s glory will be openly displayed to all the world.

that nature wherein He suffered so much for us.”⁴ Owen said that the knowledge that faith gives us of Christ now is “obscure, dark,” indirect, and “by glances,” but “vision, or the sight which we shall have of the glory of Christ in heaven, is immediate, direct, intuitive;⁵ and therefore, steady, even, and constant.”⁶ Boston said that believers will see “the all-glorious human nature of Christ, wherein the fulness of the Godhead dwells; not veiled, as in the days of His humiliation, but shining through that blessed flesh, that all His saints may behold His glory, and making that body more glorious than a thousand suns.”⁷

This seeing of Christ and God’s glory in Him is eternal life, granted by the sovereign will of God to those whom He gave to Christ (Joh 17:2-3). Irenaeus said, “[God’s] splendor vivifies them; those, therefore, who see God, do receive life...Men therefore shall see God, that they may live, being made immortal by that sight, and attaining even unto God...For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.”⁸

Christ will bring believers to a depth of knowledge of God unattainable in this life. Paul says, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12).⁹ “Face to face” alludes to the visible theophany¹⁰ granted to Moses, a foreshadowing of Christ’s coming in glory.

In the prophecy of the new creation, John writes, “They shall see his face” (Rev 22:4). The antecedent of the singular “His” is, oddly, both “God and...the Lamb” (v. 3), for the glory of God shines in the light of the Lamb (21:23). The “face” of the Lord is His manifest presence. His face is so glorious that the wicked will prefer to be crushed under mountains rather than confront it (6:16), and the old heaven and earth will dissolve before its splendor (20:11). Thus, God said to Moses—a godly man but one still stained by sin—“Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exo 33:20). However, the resurrected saints will see His face in absolute blessedness without a hint of

⁴ Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon John 17*, in *Works*, 11:103.

⁵ **immediate, direct, intuitive** – *immediate*: given at once, without anything in between; *direct*: the soul beholds Christ Himself, not through symbols or representations; *intuitive*: a simple, clear act of spiritual sight rather than a process of reasoning.

⁶ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:375-78.

⁷ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 450.

⁸ Irenaeus (AD c. 125-c. 202) – bishop of Lyons in Gaul; from *Against Heresies*, 4.20.5-7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:489-90.

⁹ The Greek can also be translated: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”

¹⁰ **theophany** – visible, audible, or other sensory appearance of God to people.

the curse (Rev 22:3). Their beholding of the shining of God's face will bring them the fullness of life, glory, and grace. Augustine called it "a certain surpassing vision that excels all the earthly beauties."¹¹

The Beatific Vision of God by the Soul in Christ. The saints' eschatological vision of glory in Christ is the means by which God will glorify His people to be like Christ. John says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). John elsewhere speaks of seeing Christ by faith (Joh 6:40; 11:9; 12:44-45), an inward vision that unites people to Christ's life and makes them like Him to some extent in this age (1Jo 3:6; cf. 3Jo 1:11). To "see" Christ is to possess and enjoy Him.¹² Here John speaks of seeing God's glory when Christ appears, indicating that this beholding of divine glory will bring God's children into their full glorification to become like Christ.

The vision of God is of the essence of eternal blessedness. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 90 says that the righteous "shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity."¹³

Someone might well ask how this can be, for all people will see Christ when He appears in the glory of the Father (Rev 1:7), but only believers will be glorified with Christ. The answer is that there will be an aspect of beholding God's glory in Christ in the age to come that will be reserved for those spiritually prepared to receive it.¹⁴ The same principle applies in this life, for increasing obedience welcomes increasing divine self-disclosure and communion with the triune God (Joh 14:21, 23). So it will be in the life of glory. Christ says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat 5:8). Similarly, it is written, "Follow [pursue] peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). All resurrected mankind will see Christ with their eyes, but only those cleansed within to have

¹¹ **Aurelius Augustine** (A.D. 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo Regius, North Africa; from *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 4.5, in *Works* I/14:69.

¹² **William Bates**, *The Everlasting Rest of the Saints in Heaven*, in *Works*, 3:45. Psalm 128:5 says, "and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem." Therefore, the man who sees God possesses all good things—life without end, eternal incorruption, undying happiness.

¹³ *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4:318.

¹⁴ **Theophilus of Antioch** (c. AD 169-183; d. c. AD 183-185), *Epistle to Autolytus*, 1.7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:91.

true holiness will apprehend and appreciate His glory by the inward vision of spiritual union and communion.

Sin and idolatry blind the minds of men and prevent them from seeing the glory of the invisible God in the visible works that He has made (Rom 1:19-23). The outward light of the gospel shines on unbelievers, but they are blind to the glory of God in Christ, which God enables His people to see by the inward light of the new creation in their hearts (2Co 4:4-6). This inward and transformative beholding of glory is by God's Spirit (3:17-18), Who unites believers to Christ in one shared life. The beholding of the Lord in the gospel is the seed of eternal glorification: "Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach" (Col 1:27-28). When Christ comes again, only those people in whom He dwells by the Spirit will have the eyes of the heart to perceive the invisible glory of God's infinite essence revealed by His outward glory. God may also grant them direct inward revelations of His majesty and love. This inward beholding will so unite them to Christ by the Holy Spirit that they will be transformed into His image. Thus, as we noted earlier, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2).

Theologians have spoken of this beholding of God as the "beatific vision," which, *in its essence*, is not "a vision of the eye" but "a clear and intuitive knowledge of God," a beholding not possible for pilgrims in this world but granted to the "blessed" in the heavenly homeland.¹⁵ God is infinite spirit, without a body, and hence invisible in His essence to all bodily eyes. But God will reveal Himself graciously to the soul, albeit according to man's limited capacity, for his everlasting blessedness.¹⁶ In theological terms, the vision of God consists of the knowledge of Him as fitting for mere image bearers, albeit for those who have arrived in glory, not pilgrims on the way. As Boston said, "They may touch the mountain, but cannot grasp it in their arms."¹⁷ Though the infinite God cannot be fully comprehended by a finite mind, He can be fully present and truly known, for "the incarnation of God's Son shows that the entire essence [of God] can be united with a finite creature,"¹⁸ as Walaeus said, but He is known by mere creatures only to the extent that God wills to make Himself known through His Son (Mat 11:27).

¹⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 395.

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:489.

¹⁷ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 456.

¹⁸ Johannes Polyander, Antonius Walaeus, Antonius Thysius, and Andreas Rivetus, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, 52.19-20 (3:595).

Blessed men and women will enter in measure into God's own joy in Himself. This joy will make all their suffering for Christ worthwhile. Simon Goulart (1543-1628) wrote,

The eternal and blessed life with God in heaven, accompanied by rest and unspeakable glory, is the goal of the faith of Christians. This is the harbor of their hope, the refuge of all their desires, the crown of their consolation that they will certainly enjoy, having escaped from the travails of this miserable and fleeting earthly life, indeed, from death itself...They will enjoy fully and completely the Lord their God, the fountain and inexhaustible treasure of all good things, Who will pour out on them all His goodness, His infinite joy, with which He will satisfy all their thoughts and desires.¹⁹

Bernard of Clairvaux²⁰ said, "Who can comprehend how great is the multitude of sweetness which is hidden in this short word, 'and God shall be all in all' [1Co 15:28]!...For He Who satisfies the soul's desire with good things, will Himself become to the reason a plentitude of light, to the will an immensity of peace, and to the memory an ever abiding eternity."²¹ Hence, the beatific vision is both an intuitive knowledge of God that satisfies the understanding and an experiential knowledge that satisfies the heart.²² William Ames said, "To 'see God,' in the phrasing of Scripture, does not signify either the sight of the eyes or the mere speculation of the intellect, but every sort of enjoyment of God inasmuch as it causes our blessedness."²³ As Johann Heidegger said, the beatific vision will be "no dry contemplation" but will involve the exercise of "the most pure love of God because no one can be blessed who does not love God and enjoy His love."²⁴

From *Reformed Systematic Theology: Church and Last Things*, Vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 1102, 1106-1112; used by permission.

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¹⁹ Cited in Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 297.

²⁰ **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer and theologian.

²¹ St. Bernard's *Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, sermon 11 (94-95), modernized.

²² Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 451.

²³ William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, 8.

²⁴ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *The Concise Marrow of Christian Theology*, 28.23 (209).

BEHOLDING CHRIST'S GLORY

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.—John 17:24

OBSERVE: Our work, or rather our happiness in heaven, mainly consists in the sight of Christ's glory: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). We see Him now under a veil, then in person: "Now we see but through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1Co 13:12).

Here I shall show: (1) What is this glory; (2) What it is to behold this glory; (3) Why our happiness lieth in it.

FIRST, WHAT IS THIS GLORY?

1. The excellence of His person. The union of the two natures in Christ's person is one of the mysteries that shall then be unfolded: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (Joh 14:20). [We will see] how He is the God-man in one person, and how the Father, Son, and Spirit are one. We were made to understand this mystery. God had happiness enough in Himself; He made creatures on purpose—angels and blessed men—to contemplate His excellence.

2. The clarity of His human nature. It is happiness enough to see Jesus Christ upon His white throne: "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:4). We shall be eyewitnesses of the honor that the Father puts upon Him as Mediator.¹ It will be a wonderful glory. We lack words to make it intelligible. The visible sun hath scarce the honor to be Christ's shadow. We may guess at it by His appearance on Mount Sinai, when He gave the law (Exo 19, compared with Heb 12:18-19); by the transfiguration, when the disciples were astonished (Mat 17:2); by the glimpse given to Paul, when a light from heaven shined round about him (Act 9:3). Paul was three days without sight and could neither eat nor drink; by those emissions of light and glory. "As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they

¹ **Mediator** – Christ comes between God and sinners to reconcile them.

went backward, and fell to the ground” (Joh 18:6). All these apparitions² were formidable, but in heaven they are comfortable. We are more able to bear it, the natural faculties being fortified; and we come to consider it as a glory put upon Him for our sakes.

SECONDLY, WHAT IS THIS BEHOLDING? It is either ocular³ or mental.

1. Ocular. Our senses have their happiness as well as the soul. There is a glorified eye as well as a glorified mind: “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7). He doth not mean *present* sense, and the present view of things—the life of faith is sometimes opposed to that. But now He meaneth our privileges in heaven. Job pointed to his eyes: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26-27). We shall see that person that redeemed us, and that nature wherein He suffered so much for us. God intendeth good to the body. He hath entrusted it with the soul, and the soul with so much grace that He will not lose the outward cask and vessel.⁴ There is a glory to entertain our eyes in heaven: not only the beautiful mansion and the glorious inhabitants (Joh 14:2-3), but the face of the Lamb. We shall be always looking on that book.

2. There is mental vision or contemplation. The angels, who are not corporeal,⁵ are said “always to behold the face of our heavenly Father” (Mat 18:10). Angels have no eyes, yet they see God. When we are said to see God, it is not meant of the bodily eye; a spirit cannot be seen with bodily eyes. Therefore God is called “the invisible God” (Col 1:15). And seeing *face to face* is opposed to *knowing in part*: “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12). The mind is the noblest faculty, and therefore it must be satisfied in heaven, or else we cannot be happy. It is the mind that maketh the man; it is our preferment⁶ above the beasts that God hath given us a mind to know Him. Man is a rational creature, and there is as strong an inclination to knowledge in the soul as there is carnal pleasure to the beasts. Drunkards may talk of their pleasures and the gratifications of sense, but the pleasure and delight of the soul is knowledge. And besides this general capacity, believers have a particular inclination to knowledge by grace; therefore,

² **apparitions** – visible manifestations; appearances that can be seen with the eyes.

³ **ocular** – relating to sight or the eyes.

⁴ **He will not...cask and vessel** – metaphor for the human body; since God intends good for the body, He will not discard it.

⁵ **corporeal** – having a body; physical rather than purely spiritual.

⁶ **preferment** – elevation or advantage; the higher place God gives humans above the beasts.

that we may be completely happy, the mind must be satisfied with the sight of God.

THIRDLY, WHY DOES OUR HAPPINESS LIE IN BEHOLDING CHRIST?

1. **It is the cause of all our fruition⁷ in heaven.** Ocular vision maketh way for mental, and mental vision for complete holiness or conformity to God, and conformity for love, and love for delight, and delight for fruition.

[1] *Ocular vision maketh way for mental.* We go to heaven to study divinity in the Lamb's face: "They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:4). There is an assembly sitting round about the throne, and the Lamb is in the midst of them; there, by looking upon His face, they learn more of God. We need no other books than beholding His glory. We converse with Christ that we may know more of God. Thus we come to knowledge without labor and difficulty; Christ in His glory and eminency is Bible enough.

[2] *Mental vision maketh way for likeness and conformity to God.* Knowledge in this life changeth us: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col 3:10). Much more are we sanctified⁸ and made holy by the light of glory. The sight that we have of Christ in the gospel transformeth us: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Co 3:18). By looking upon Christ through the light of the Spirit, we are made like Him; but now in glory, when we see Him face to face, we are more like Him: "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). By conversing with God, Moses's face shined. As a mirror held up against the sun reflecteth the image and brightness of the sun, so the more we behold Christ, the more we do bear the image of the heavenly. Saith Basil,⁹ "He dyeth his own spirit with a tincture of glory."¹⁰

[3] *This light and conformity maketh way for love, that is, knowledge increaseth love.* As light is, so is love. Our affection is still according to the rate of our knowledge. In this world, love is but weak because light is imperfect. We love little because we know little: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou

⁷ **fruition** – full enjoyment and possession of God Himself as the believer's blessedness.

⁸ **sanctified** – set apart for God's use.

⁹ **Basil of Caesarea** (330-379) – Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia; influential Christian theologian and one of the Cappadocian Fathers.

¹⁰ Basil's metaphor for the soul being colored or transformed by the glory of God, as cloth takes on the dye into which it is dipped. From *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 9.

wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (Joh 4:10). And conformity is a ground of love.¹¹ It is the highest pitch of love to love God out of the communion of the same nature. The lowest love is to love Him out of interest, as the highest love is to love Him out of a principle of holiness—not because He is good and bountiful, but because He is holy.¹² When holiness is weak, love is imperfect. We wander and turn away from Him, and go a-whoring from Him, for there is some natural correspondence between us and the things of the world as long as flesh remaineth. But when we are perfectly holy, there is no correspondence between us and anything but God, and the saints and angels who partake with us of His image. And we love the creatures for the need we have of them, as well as the suitableness of them to us; but when we are likened to God in holiness and in happiness, we are above these wants, we are above all baits and snares, so that our love is entirely carried out to God.

[4] *Love maketh way for delight.* Can a man cleave to God and not rejoice in Him? Rejoicing in God is not only a duty but a reward: “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD” (Isa 58:14). The saints love God and delight in Him—in His essence and being—as much as in their own glory. This maketh heaven comfortable. It would be torment to a carnal heart to be always thinking of God and engaged in acts of love and service to God. But the saints delight in Him: they delight in His presence and in their own happiness because God is glorified in it. There is an inconceivable delight in seeing, knowing, and being beloved of God.

[5] *Delight maketh way for fruition.* For the more we delight in God, the more doth God delight in us and giveth us the actual fruition of Himself for our blessedness, so that we are fully satisfied. It is fruition that maketh us happy. We can only speak of it in general terms—the filling up of the soul with God, and of the “glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). We are in God, and God in us; as fire in iron that is red-hot, it seemeth all on fire. Thus can we prattle¹³ a little and darken counsel by words without knowledge (Job 38:2).

2. Backward again. Fruition maketh way for delight. We enjoy God to the full; therefore we delight in Him. We are bidden to rejoice in our pilgrimage: “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phi

¹¹ “Conformity...love” means likeness to God in holiness. The more the soul is shaped into God’s image, the more it loves Him.

¹² “highest pitch...He is holy” contrasts two motives: (1) loving God for His gifts (out of interest) and (2) loving God for His holiness. The second is “highest” because it is God-centered rather than self-centered.

¹³ **prattle** – talk weakly or childishly about things too great for us.

4:4). God hath made our work a part of our wages, to train us up by degrees. But now, when we come to heaven, we enter our Master's joy. It is our only work in heaven; painful affections¹⁴ have no more use. And joy maketh way for love; these mutual endearments pass between God and us to increase love. We delight in God; therefore we are never weary of Him. And love maketh way for likeness, and light for likeness. There is the most perfect imitation and resemblance of God because the most perfect love. And for light, there is light in this fire. Blunt iron, if it be made red hot, pierceth deeper than a sharp tool. We have but one object. And likeness maketh way for knowledge: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat 5:8). A dusky¹⁵ mirror doth not give a perfect representation. Ignorance is the fruit of sin. Man never knew less than since he tasted of the tree of knowledge. Holiness clarifies the eye: "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). There is little proportion between God and men, and therefore we do not know Him; when we are conformed to God, we are in a greater capacity to understand His nature. And then light, or mental sight, maketh way for ocular sight, that we may look upon Christ. It is a sweet employment to see the brightness of the Father's glory in Christ's face; there God is best seen at the rebound and by reflection. It is a delightful spectacle.

USE. To ravish your hearts with the contemplation of this happiness. Oh, what an affective sight is Christ's glory!

1. The sight itself is a privilege. Abraham had a sight of Christ's incarnation when it was a thing long after to come, and it filled him with joy: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (Joh 8:56). Simeon saw Him when He was a child, and then said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luk 2:29-30). Zaccheus climbed up into a tree to see Him (Luk 19:3-4). When He was grown up, then He went up and down as "the carpenter's son" (Mat 13:55). Many saw Christ in person that had no benefit by Him. So to see Him by faith and spiritual illumination fills the soul with joy: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1Pe 1:8). To know Christ by hearsay is lovely and glorious; but now what will it be to see Christ amid angels and blessed saints face to face? He is another manner of Christ than ever we thought Him to be! It is

¹⁴ **painful affections** – sorrowful inward emotions that have no place in heaven.

¹⁵ **dusky** – dim or unclear.

ravishing to behold Him in ordinances, but yet there is a veil upon His glory. Oh, that there should be such a glorious spectacle provided for us! It is God's own blessedness to see Himself and enjoy Himself.

2. That we are able to behold it, and that with comfort.

That we are able to behold it: The world is a dark place, and we are weak creatures. Our eyes now are like the eyes of an owl before the sun; we cannot take in a full representation of His greatness, nor bear the luster of His majesty. God is sometimes represented as dwelling in light to show the luster of His majesty: "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (1Ti 6:16). And sometimes as dwelling in darkness, as noting the weakness of our apprehensions: "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies" (Psa 18:11). We are dark creatures and can but guess; all is mystery and riddle to us. The children of Israel cried out, "Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die" (Deu 5:25). God is willing, for our sakes, to dwell in the heavens and fix His throne there; His glory would drive us to our wits' end. The very happiness of heaven would not be a mercy upon earth.

And then, that we may behold it with comfort. God in Christ is not formidable. Wicked men shall see Christ, but they shall see Him as a judge; but, saith Job, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27). Every time we look upon Christ, we have the liveliest and sweetest sense of God's love. It bringeth to remembrance His passion and sufferings. Wicked men shall see Him as a judge to their terror, as Joseph's brethren were ashamed to look on him—they could not hold up their guilty heads. But we come to behold our best and beloved friend, to see Him that laid down His life for us: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Joh 15:13). To see such a friend will be comfortable.

From *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 11 (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1873), 102-106, in the public domain.

Thomas Manton (1620-1677): English Presbyterian Puritan preacher; born in Lawrence-Lydiat, Somerset, England, UK.



SEEING GOD IN THIS WORLD

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647)

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.—Matthew 5:8

THE world, perhaps, saith concerning these who are so pure, strict, and nice,¹ and who dare not do anything against their consciences, [that] they are poor, ignorant, silly people; silly ignorant women, and the like. Well, as silly as they are, as ignorant as thou thinkest them to be in the matters of the world, yet *they shall see God*—they shall *know* God. Perhaps their knowledge is weak in other things, but this is the promise: “*They shall see God*”—they shall know Him.

Such as walk in purity in the world and dare not defile themselves as others do are subject to a great deal of wrongs in the world. The men of the world will be too wise, too cunning for them. Well, though worldly men do surpass them in cunning—because the godly have simple, plain hearts—this is their comfort: “Though I have not the cunning and craftiness to provide for myself in the world, worldly men with unclean hearts full of cunning and craft go beyond me. Yet this is the blessing of God upon me: I shall see His face!” *They shall see God.*

“**See Him.**” “No man hath seen God at any time” (1Jo 4:12)—that is, with bodily eyes. God is invisible (Col 1:15; 1Ti 1:17; Heb 11:27), and you must not think that He hath any shape or fashion like man or any creature. He is a spirit, an infinite and simple being. Therefore, He cannot be seen with bodily eyes. But “*they shall see God,*” that is, they shall *know* God by the eye of their understanding. They shall come to enjoy God, for so “seeing” is taken in Scripture:

They shall see God. They shall see Him here in this world; and the more clean their hearts are, the more sight they shall have of God; and they shall see Him hereafter in glory...*The sight of God is man’s blessedness.* That is our point.

By the “sight of God” is meant the *understanding* of God and of His counsels, ways, and will—those things concern our enjoyment of Him. The sight of God, I say, *is* man’s blessedness...Oh, what excellence there is in the sight of God—in the knowledge of God Himself.

¹ **strict and nice** – careful to obey God in all things and unwilling to violate conscience even in trivial things (*nice* does not mean “pleasant” or “kind” in this context).

It was a speech of Philip unto Christ: “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (Joh 14:8). Philip saith, “Do but show us the Father—let us see God—and it sufficeth² us. We have enough whatever becomes of us. Oh, may we but see the Father—it is enough.” And the great desire that Moses had in Exodus 33:18: “And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory,” that is, “Let me but see Thee, and it is enough for me!” Oh, the sight of God is a blessed thing! The sight of the infinite and glorious First Being of all things is the fountain of all good. Oh, how blessed it is!

They shall see God, and they shall see His counsels and will—all those counsels of God that do concern their eternal enjoyment of Himself. That is the meaning: *They shall see God* and know His mind. And they shall see God as *their* God. That must be taken into these three things:

First, they shall see God as the First Being of all things.

Secondly, they shall know the mind and the very heart of God—His will concerning them and their eternal estate.

Thirdly, they shall see God as *their* God—as having an interest³ in God, and in all His good, excellence, and glory...

They shall see God. They shall see the excellence, glory, majesty, and greatness of God, Who is the First Being of all beings and the Cause of all things. They shall know His mind and heart; and then they shall see all this as *their* good: “Here is my excellence, my glory, my happiness—it is in this God that I now behold.” This is the promise: *They shall see God*.

Now God reveals Himself and fulfills this promise in many ways—by an immediate revelation⁴ of Himself to the soul. For the soul of man is capable of an immediate joining⁵ with God. You will say, “God’s being and essence are infinite, and man’s soul is but finite.” Yet there may be an immediate conjunction between an infinite and a finite thing. As in the soul of Jesus Christ, Who was the God-man: His human soul was but finite—a created thing; and yet what a conjunction

² **sufficeth** – is enough or adequate, implying being satisfied.

³ **interest** – personal share in God; a covenantal claim upon Him as one’s own God, with a right to all His goodness and promises.

⁴ **immediate revelation** – God revealing Himself without created means—not through Scripture, providence, conscience, or ordinances, but by direct, spiritual knowledge of His eternal being. This is the full sight of God in glory: the beatific vision.

⁵ **immediate joining/conjunction** – The soul’s union with God’s being, produced by God’s immediate revelation of Himself (1Jo 3:2). This union is perfect in heaven, but believers experience a real, though inexpressible, beginning of it in this life.

Christ's soul had with His divine nature. For there was a hypostatic union⁶ between both soul and body of Christ and the divine nature. Therefore, the finiteness⁷ of the soul of man doth not hinder an immediate touch (as I may so speak) with the infinite being of God Himself. And it is capable of a more immediate revelation of God than we are able either to express or to conceive. But that shall be most hereafter⁸—the immediate revelation of God. Only in the present is there somewhat of the glory that shall be in heaven: it has begun here in the world.

And now, consider the union with God, or communion with God, that shall be in heaven. There is some degree of it here in this world; and so also the beatific vision of God. The very touch and nearness of the soul to the essence of God that shall be in heaven has some degree of it here in this world—in the sight of God—though we are not able to express it. As the eye of a man, though it sees other things, cannot see itself, so the soul of a man, though it acts upon God, cannot tell the manner of its acting. They cannot tell how they see God; but this they know—they see God otherwise than they ever did before. As that poor man said, “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (Joh 9:25). Many poor Christians are lowly, and women of simpler understanding, and others of deeper understanding; before this purity of heart, if you asked them what God was, they would say, “God is a Spirit, and He must be worshipped in Spirit and truth” (see Joh 4:24). They would tell you, “God is eternal, Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, infinitely wise, and infinitely holy.” Many that had good strong understanding could discourse of the attributes of God. Yet when their hearts come to be cleansed, and God reveals Himself to them, if you should ask them what they know of God now more than before, they cannot express it. They can only say, “We were blind, but now we see. We do see God in another manner than we ever did before.”

And besides this more immediate revelation of God to the soul, one who is pure in heart sees God in His works—in beholding the great works of God in the mirror of the creature, in the heavens, earth, and seas. It beholds God in another way than it ever did before. Oh, the glory of God that appears when it looks upon the rising of the sun, the moon and stars, the vastness of the seas, and the body of the earth. Perhaps such days as these, after the sermon is done, many of you will be

⁶ **hypostatic union** – The hypostatic union is the union of the divine nature and the human nature in the one holy person of Jesus Christ. He is truly God and truly man—two complete natures united without mixture, change, division, or separation.

⁷ **finiteness** – existence with limitations; a created nature in contrast to infinite.

⁸ **hereafter** – in the world to come.

walking up and down the fields; but what do you see? Why you see the green grass, other men walking up and down, and trees. But what of God do you see here? If you did walk merely to contemplate God appearing in His works, then it were another matter. When it looks upon the works of God, a spiritual heart gets through the work presently to God. It looks up to heaven and sees the God of heaven—the God of the earth and plants. “And this is my God; and the glory of God that appears in all the creatures, it is the glory of my God!” Indeed, when he goes abroad, he may see more land than his own, but I cannot see more land than is my Father’s.

And though God shines much in His works, yet He appears more clearly in His Word. And it is a good argument of one that is spiritual,⁹ when one can see more of the glory of God in the Word than in all the great works that were ever done in the world. If the Lord should carry a man or woman over all the world and show them all its countries; yea, carry them up to heaven and show them the sun, moon, and stars, and enable them to understand all their motions; and show them the seas and enable them to understand their motions—the ebbing, flowing, and vastness of that creature; and if they were able to understand the nature of all the plants, and the mysteries of all arts and sciences as Solomon did—yet having done all this, when they come to read the Word, they shall well say, “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96). “I see more in Thy Word than I do in all the book of nature. A few lines of Thy Word reveal more to me than all the book of nature besides.” This is a good argument of purity of heart. A pure heart goes and reads the Word and does not read it as other books, but sees the wisdom, the purity, and the authority of God there. The Word is not a sealed book to such a soul, but is open to it.

And then it sees God in all His ordinances. They are the mirrors by which it sees God—likewise the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, and all other ordinances. God comes into the soul, and the soul finds these to be but mirrors to represent God unto it.

And it sees God again in the saints. There is the image of God in the saints; there is the picture of God in the creature. But in the saints there is the living image of God, as the image of the father is in the child. The men of the world see little of God in the saints; but when their eyes come to be opened and their hearts purified, they cannot look upon any godly men or women without seeing much of the glory of God in them.

⁹ a good argument...spiritual – good sign or good evidence that one has a spiritual heart.

This makes them so love the communion of the saints because so much of God appears in them. Yea, and they see God in their own spirits more than ever before. There was nothing but darkness in their own spirits before; but now being sanctified, the presence of God is within them. They see God within them in their own hearts.

But above all that is here in this world, they see God in the face of Jesus Christ. There those who are of pure heart or spirit see the glory of God. In Hebrews 1:3, Christ is said to be “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” You have no such expression of all the angels in heaven nor of men in the world. It is true, man was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), but Christ is said to be the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person—the express image of the person of God. Therefore, Christ saith that no man can know the Father except by Him. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (Joh 14:6-7). There is no knowledge of the Father except by Jesus Christ—by the understanding of Jesus Christ. “Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Mat 11:27). “In [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:3, 9).

[This is] a very strange expression. It would not have been fitting for the mouth of any man, no, nor for any angel to have had such an expression as this: “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Yet it is true of Christ. The glory of God appears in Christ. If we may make a comparison of low things with high: as now, you cannot look upon the sun in its glory as in the firmament; but when the sun shines upon the water, there you may see the luster of the sun. So take God as He is in Himself, the infinite Creator of all things; as we are here in this world, our eyes do dazzle to behold God’s essence. We cannot behold it, or we are unable to express it at least.

But in Jesus Christ, we come nearest to beholding God in Him as God-man. There we may behold very much of the glory—yea, of the very face—of God. Therefore, you find that in the gospel, we are said to behold God with open face: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). He speaks of this by way of distinction from the Law; for then, we could understand but little of God. Indeed, in the Old Testament we find such an expression as this: “For there shall no man see me, and live” (Exo 33:20). But here in the New Testament you find this expression, that “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord”—with open face, not

needing a veil as Moses had, but with open face we behold the glory of God; yet still, it is as in a mirror.

The Word is one mirror, the ordinances are another, and the creatures are the thickest mirror. There is the Word, the ordinances, the saints, our own spirits; but the brightest mirror of all is Jesus Christ. Therefore in 2 Corinthians 4:6, it is said, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness”: All the knowledge of God that man hath before his conversion is as darkness. And God, when He comes to show Himself to the soul, doth as great a work as when He made the world. He did then command light to shine out of darkness. And what are the fruits of it? He hath shined in our hearts—not only in our heads but in our hearts—and it shines there *to give light*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

Mark these gradations:¹⁰ He hath shined in our hearts to give the knowledge of God, to give the light of the knowledge of God, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God—and all this in the face of Jesus Christ. Oh, the blessedness of the pure in heart who come to see God in the face of Jesus Christ! This is a mystery that none can understand, but those who have it (like the white stone of Rev 2:17). Those that do see God in Christ know what it is, and they would not for ten thousand worlds lose any one sight that they have of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But it is impossible for them to express it to others.

Oh, blessed are they that do thus see God! When God gives us a spiritual sight of Himself, there is as great a change, and it is abundantly more glorious, even more blessed than adding sight to a man who never had such a sense or adding reason to the beasts. It is a blessed thing to see God, and that we find in Scripture set out to us in many ways.

From “Sermon XXV or Wherein a Pure Heart Is Blessed,” and “Sermon XXVI or The Uncleaness of Heart Cause of Error,” in *The Saints’ Happiness* (London: W.

Greenhill; J. Yates; W. Bridge; W. Aderly; P. Nye; M. Mead, 1660),
404–405; 414–418; in the public domain.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647): Congregational preacher and theologian; born in East Anglia, East of England, UK.



As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.—*David, King of Israel*

¹⁰ **gradations** – rising stages of thought in a sequence.

SEEING CHRIST BY FAITH AND BY SIGHT

John Owen (1616-1683)

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.
—1 Corinthians 13:12*

FAITH and sight are the two spiritual powers of our souls (2Co 5:7). The view that we have of the glory¹ of Christ by faith in this world is like looking into a mirror (1Co 13:12). In a mirror we do not see the actual person but only an image of him [which] is imperfect.

The shadow or image of this glory of Christ is drawn for us in the gospel. There we behold Him as if we were seeing Him only in a mirror. We see only His image or representation. By using this picture of looking into a mirror, Paul declares the comparative imperfection of our present view of the glory of Christ. But this mirror that Paul talks about could also refer to something like a telescope, by which we are able to see things more clearly that are at a great distance from us. The gospel functions in this way. Without it we could never know anything of Christ at all. But in using it, we are still far from beholding the true dimensions of His glory.

This “seeing through a glass darkly” could also refer to words, especially to riddles or “dark sayings” (Psa 78:2). But the gospel itself is not dark or obscure; it is clear, plain, and direct. In the gospel, Christ is clearly set forth as crucified, exalted, and glorified. But Paul is not talking about how the revelation of Christ’s glory *comes to us*, but of the means or instrument by which *we come to understand* that revelation. This is our faith, which is weak and imperfect and understands the glory of Christ very imperfectly and with difficulty.

While on earth “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7; see also Song 2:9). There is, as it were, a wall between us and Christ. Christ looks at us through the windows of the ordinances of the gospel; and through the promises of the gospel, we get further views of Him. So our

¹ **glory** – the manifestation of God’s excellence: the outshining of His being, attributes, and worth; the radiance of His holiness, majesty, and beauty as revealed to creatures. In Scripture, “glory” refers not only to God’s intrinsic perfections but to the display of those perfections in His works, His presence, and especially in the person of Christ.

sight of the glory of Christ, which we have in this world by faith, is weak, transient,² imperfect, and partial. We are like Job, who said, “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him” (Job 23:8-9).

Now let us compare the sight of Christ’s glory that we have by faith with the vision of that same glory that we shall have in heaven. In heaven we shall no longer have merely an image—a representation of Christ such as we have in the gospel. We shall see Him, says Paul, “face to face” (1Co 13:12). “We shall see him as he is,” says John (1Jo 3:2). As a man sees his neighbor face to face, so we shall see the Lord Christ in glory, and not like Moses who saw only the “back parts” of God. In heaven our physical eyes will be cured (see Job 19:25-27).

But this vision we shall have of Christ in heaven will be chiefly intellectual. It is not, therefore, the human nature of Christ that is the object of heavenly vision, but His divine person. I have no idea what understanding and sight we shall have of the union of Christ’s two natures. But this I do know: in the actual sight of Christ, we shall see a glory in this union of His two natures a thousand times more wonderful than we can conceive. The glories of infinite wisdom, love, and power will be continually before us, and all the glories of the person of Christ Himself will be seen by us forever. So our eternal blessedness is that we shall always be with the Lord (1Th 4:17).

There will also be a subjective glory³ in us as we see the glory of Christ. John says, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be” (1Jo 3:2). Who can understand what glory will be ours when we behold this glory of Christ? How excellent then must that glory of Christ itself be! The actual sight of Christ is what all the saints of God desire in this life more than anything else: “to depart, and to be with Christ” (Phi 1:23); “to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2Co 5:8). Those who do not long for this sight of Christ’s glory as their highest joy are unspiritual and blind.

In order to see the glory of Christ, our present physical eyes will be given a new power. Without this power we cannot see Him as He is. When He was transfigured on the mount, the disciples were bewildered rather than comforted (Mat 17:6). They saw His glory but said foolish things in response (Luk 9:30-33). This was because their present sight

² **transient** – lasting a very short time.

³ **subjective glory** – the glory produced *in us* as we behold Christ’s glory; the inward transformation and blessedness that arise from seeing Him in all His splendor.

could not behold the real glory of Christ. Similarly, when John saw the glorified Christ he “fell at his feet as dead” (Rev 1:17). Paul also fell to the ground (Act 26:13-14).

The church in this life is no way fit to have fellowship with Christ by direct sight, despite the grace imparted to it. Therefore, those who dream of His personal reign on earth before the Day of Judgement are talking nonsense unless they believe that all the saints will then be glorified also. This is why it is abominable to try to represent the glory of Christ by pictures and images.

The only thing for which we are presently suited is to have Christ dwell with us and in us by His Spirit. Under the Old Testament Christ’s glory was represented by fleshly ordinances. And while on earth His true glory was hidden by His human flesh. But now, says Paul, we know Christ no more according to the flesh, neither as they did under the Old Testament nor as they did in the days of His flesh (2Co 5:16). For when Christ left the earth, He sent His Spirit (Joh 16:7), by Whom the disciples had a clearer view of the glory of Christ than they could have had by beholding Him in the flesh. That is our condition today.

In heaven, the mind shall be freed from the darkness brought on it by sin. It will be a glorious aid to faith rather than a hindrance. Under the power of sin, the mind was completely unable to discern spiritual things rightly. This inability is to some extent removed by grace, so that those who were darkness become light in the Lord; they have a new spiritual light communicated to them. But in heaven the mind will have a clear, unclouded understanding and sight of the glory of Christ.

On earth our minds are also hindered by the flesh that is corrupt and subject to sickness, tiredness, and old age. But in heaven a new light—the light of glory—shall be implanted in the mind. Man has in him now a natural light enabling him to discern the things of man, an ability to know, perceive, and judge natural things. This is that spirit of a man, which is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of the heart (Pro 20:27). But this light does not enable us to discern spiritual things aright (1Co 2:11-15). So God gives a greater light, a supernatural light of faith and grace, to those whom He effectually calls to the knowledge of His glory in the face of His dear Son. This new light does not make the light of nature useless or redundant.⁴ Rather this

⁴ **redundant** – unnecessary.

new light directs it and guides it to fulfil its true purpose. Yet this light is of quite another nature.

But even this new light enables us to see the glory of Christ in this world only very imperfectly. But in heaven there shall be a supernatural light of glory added. And as the light of grace does not destroy or make redundant the light of nature but rather rectifies⁵ and improves it, so the light of glory does not destroy or make redundant this light of faith and grace, but makes it absolutely perfect. As by the light of nature, we cannot truly understand the light of grace, so by the light of grace we cannot fully understand the light of glory. The best idea we can have of this light of glory is that it perfectly transforms the soul into the image and likeness of Christ. This is how we are brought to rest and blessedness. Grace renews nature, and glory perfects grace. In this way, the whole soul is brought to its rest in God.

We have a picture of this in Christ's healing of the blind man (Mat 8:22-24). This man was completely blind. Then his eyes were opened, but he could not see clearly. He saw men like trees walking. But then, at the second touch, he saw clearly. So, our minds are blind. Grace gives them a partial sight of spiritual things. But the light of glory gives perfect sight and understanding.

The glorified body will also play its part. In our resurrected, glorified bodies we shall see our Redeemer with glorified eyes. We do not know what power and spirituality our glorified bodies will possess. But it is clear that they will play a part in our eternal blessedness. While still on earth, Stephen "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Act 7:55-56). If this is what he was enabled to see while still in this body, what power of sight shall we have in eternal glory?

Christ Himself indicated how great a privilege it was to see Him on earth (Mat 13:17). How much greater a privilege it is then to see Christ in eternal glory! These are some of the differences between our beholding Christ by faith here and by direct sight in heaven.

Here we often struggle. We who "have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23). The more we grow in faith and spiritual light, the more we groan for deliverance. The nearer we are to heaven and to Christ, the more earnest is our desire to be there and to be with Christ. Groaning implies a strong desire mixed with sorrow because we do not yet have what we long for. The desire

⁵ **light of grace...rectifies** – grace corrects, purifies, and restores the natural light of reason and conscience, setting it right where sin has distorted it.

has sorrow in it, but the sorrow has joy in it—like a heavy shower of rain falling on us on a spring day while we are in a garden. We get wet, but when we smell and see what the shower has done, we are happy even though we groan because we are soaked through! So, groaning shows we long to be delivered from our present state and to be lifted up to that heavenly, glorious state (see Rom 7:24).

In longing for this perfect sight of Christ, we can learn from the saints in the Old Testament. The sight that they had of the glory of Christ—for they also saw His glory obscurely through their ordinances and sacrifices—was weak and imperfect, even in the most enlightened believers. It was much inferior to what we now have by faith through the gospel. Yet they were encouraged to study and search diligently into what was revealed (1Pe 1:10-11). Nevertheless, what they learned was dark and confused. And the continuance of this veil on the revelation of the glory of Christ, while a veil of ignorance and blindness was upon their hearts and minds, proved the ruin of that church in its apostasy (2Co 3:7, 13-14). God promised to take away this double veil (Isa 25:7). And then they shall turn to the Lord; then they shall be able to behold clearly the glory of Christ (2Co 3:16).

But real believers among them desired and prayed for these veils to be removed so that “the Sun of Righteousness” should “arise with healing in his wings” (Mal 4:2). Their spiritual wisdom was outstanding. They rejoiced and gloried in the ordinances of divine worship that they did enjoy. Yet they longed for this removal, so that they might enjoy the reality they symbolized. But those who did not desire this, but trusted in their present institutions, were not accepted with God. Meanwhile those spiritually illuminated looked for the revelation of the whole mystery of the wisdom of God in Christ, as did the angels (1Pe 1:3; Eph 3:9-10).

So, there was more of the power of true faith and love under the Old Testament than is found among most Christians today. They saw the promises afar off,⁶ were persuaded by them, and embraced them (Heb 11:13). Simeon is a great example (Luk 2:28-29).

Our present darkness and weakness in beholding the glory of Christ is not like theirs. His glory is not hidden from us as it was under the Old Testament. Nor does our poor vision arise from the lack of a clear revelation of the person and office of Christ.

But it is hidden from us by the nature of faith itself in comparison with actual sight, and it is hidden by the way it is brought to us:

⁶ **afar off** – from a great distance.

“through a glass darkly” (1Co 13:12). That is, we see an image by faith only and not the reality. But in heaven all will be clear, and the sight of Christ will indeed be glorious. Now if Old Testament saints prayed and desired the removal of the divine ordinances of worship so that they could see the reality those ordinances symbolized, how much more should we pray and desire the removal of all weakness, all darkness, and of everything that now prevents us from seeing Christ in reality.

So, to sum up, there are three things concerning the seeing of the glory of Christ: there is the shadow, the perfect image, and the reality itself. Those under the law had the shadow. They did not have the perfect image (Heb 10:1). Under the gospel we have the perfect image, which they did not have. We have a clear, complete revelation and declaration of it in Scripture. But the actual enjoyment of the reality is reserved for us in heaven.

If, then, those under the Old Testament longed to be freed from their state of types and shadows⁷ to enjoy the glory of Christ represented to us in the gospel, how much more ought we to long for and pray to be delivered from our present state so that we may enjoy the reality in heaven.

Let us then examine ourselves. Do we long and desire to see the reality of Christ’s glory in heaven? Are we meditating on that perfect image of Christ’s glory given to us in the gospel? Or are we too filled with this world and its concerns? As believers, beholding the glory of Christ in the glass of the gospel, we are changed into the same image and likeness by the Spirit of the *Lord*. So those beholding the beauty of the world and the things that are in it through the cursed glass of self-love are in their minds changed into its image. But we have not so learned Christ Jesus.

From Puritan Paperbacks *The Glory of Christ*, abridged by R.J.K. Law
(The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1994), 100-108;
used by permission.

John Owen (1616-1683): English Congregational pastor, author, and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



⁷ **types and shadows** – the Old Testament ceremonies, sacrifices, and institutions that pointed forward to Christ. They were God-given symbols that prefigured the reality of Christ’s person and work but did not yet reveal Him openly.

A CONSTANT VIEW OF HIM

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

THE souls of true saints, when they leave their bodies at death, go to be with Christ, to dwell in the immediate, full, and constant view of Him.

When we are absent from our dear friends, they are out of sight; but when we are with them, we have the opportunity and satisfaction of seeing them. So while the saints are in the body and are absent from the Lord, He is in several respects out of sight. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing...” (1Pe 1:8). They have indeed, in this world, a spiritual sight of Christ; but they see through a glass darkly and with great interruption. But in heaven, they see Him face to face (1Co 13:12). “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat 5:8). Their beatific vision of God is in Christ, Who is that brightness or effulgence¹ of God’s glory (Heb 1:3), by which His glory shines forth in heaven to the view of saints and angels there, as well as here on earth. This is the Sun of righteousness, Who is not only the light of this world but is also the sun that enlightens the heavenly Jerusalem; by Whose bright beams it is that the glory of God shines forth there to enlighten and make happy all the glorious inhabitants.

“The Lamb is the light thereof,” and so “the glory of God” doth lighten it (Rev 21:23). None sees God the Father immediately,² Who is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible” (1Ti 1:17). Christ is the image of that invisible God, through Whom He is seen by all elect creatures. “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Joh 1:18), and manifested Him. None has ever immediately seen the Father but the Son; and none else sees the Father any other way than by the Son’s revealing Him. And in heaven the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb 12:23) behold His glory. They see the glory of His divine nature, consisting in all the glory of the Godhead—the beauty of all His perfections: His great majesty, almighty power, infinite wisdom, holiness, and grace. They see the beauty of His glorified human nature and the glory that the Father hath given Him as

¹ **effulgence** – bright shining.

² **immediately** – by the soul’s direct sight of God, not through any created form, image, or means.

God-man and Mediator.³ For this end, Christ desired that His saints might be with Him, that they might behold His glory (Joh 17:24). And when the souls of the saints leave their bodies to be with Christ, they behold the marvelous glory of that great work of redemption and of the glorious way of salvation by Him, which the angels desire to look into (1Pe 1:12). They have a most clear view of the unfathomable depths of the manifold wisdom and knowledge of God, and of the most bright displays of the infinite purity and holiness of God, which appear in that way and work.⁴ They see—in another manner than the saints do here—what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height of the grace and love of Christ appearing in His redemption (Eph 3:18-19). And as they see the unspeakable riches and glory of the attribute of God's grace, so they most clearly behold and understand Christ's eternal and unmeasurable dying love to them in particular. And in short, they see everything in Christ that tends to kindle, enflame, and gratify love, and everything that tends to satisfy them—and that in the most clear and glorious manner, without any darkness or delusion, without any impediment or interruption.

While in the body, the saints now see something of Christ's glory and love, as in the dawning of the morning we see something of the reflected light of the sun mingled with darkness. But when separated from the body, they see their glorious and loving Redeemer, as we see the sun when risen, showing his whole disk above the horizon by his direct beams, in a clear hemisphere and with perfect day.

When absent from the body, the souls of true saints go to be with Jesus Christ, as they are brought into a most perfect conformity to and union with Him. Their spiritual conformity begins while they are in the body. Here beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image (2Co 3:18); but when they come to see Him as He is in heaven, then they become like Him in another manner. That perfect sight will abolish all remains of deformity, disagreement, and sinful unlikeness, as all darkness is abolished before the full blaze of the sun's midday light. As it is impossible that the least degree of obscurity should remain before such light, so it is impossible that the least degree of sin and spiritual deformity should remain with such a sight of the spiritual beauty and glory of Christ, which the saints enjoy in heaven when they see that Sun of righteousness without a cloud.

³ **Mediator** – a go-between; one who intervenes between two hostile parties for the purpose of restoring them to a relationship of harmony and unity; See also *Free Grace Broadcaster* 183, "Christ the Mediator"; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴ **in that way and work** – in the way of salvation and the work of redemption.

They themselves shall not only shine forth like the sun, but shall be as little suns without a spot. For then is come the time when Christ presents His saints to Himself in glorious beauty: “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph 5:27) and having holiness without a blemish.

Then the saints’ union with Christ is perfected. This also has already begun in this world. The *relative* union is both begun and perfected at once, when the soul first being quickened by Him closes with Christ by faith. The *real* union, consisting in the vital union and that of hearts and affections, has begun in this world and is perfected in the next. The union of a believer’s heart to Christ is begun when it is drawn to Him by its first discovery of divine excellence at conversion. And consequent on⁵ this drawing and closing of his heart⁶ with Christ, a mutual vital union with Christ is established, through which the believer becomes a living branch of the True Vine, living by a communication of the sap and vital juice of the stock and root;⁷ and he becomes a member of Christ’s mystical body, living by a communication of spiritual and vital influences⁸ from the Head, by a kind of participation of Christ’s own life.⁹

But while the saints are in the body, there is much remaining distance between Christ and them. There are remainders of alienation, and the vital union is very imperfect; consequently, so are the communications of spiritual life and vital influences. There is much between Christ and believers to keep them asunder: much indwelling sin, much temptation, a heavy-molded frail body,¹⁰ and a world of carnal objects¹¹ to keep the soul away from Christ and to hinder a perfect union. But when the soul leaves the body, all these clogs and hindrances shall be removed, every separating wall shall be broken down, and every impediment taken out of the way—all distance shall cease. The heart shall be wholly and perfectly drawn, and most firmly and forever attached and bound to Him by a perfect view of His glory. And the vital union shall then be brought to perfection: the soul shall live perfectly

⁵ **consequent on** – following from; as a direct result of.

⁶ **closing...heart** – a Puritan expression meaning “embracing Christ by faith.”

⁷ **communication...root** – as sap flows from the root to the branches, Christ imparts spiritual life to His people (John 15:1-8).

⁸ **communication...influences** – Christ’s imparting or bestowing grace, spiritual life, and spiritual nourishment to the believer.

⁹ **participation...life** – the believer’s union with Christ, by which Christ’s life, grace, and power are spiritually shared.

¹⁰ **heavy-molded frail body** – weighed down with bodily weakness.

¹¹ **carnal objects** – worldly attractions.

in and upon Christ, being perfectly filled with His Spirit and animated by His vital influences—living as it were only by Christ’s life, without any remainder of spiritual death or carnal life.

Departed souls of saints are with Christ, as they enjoy a glorious and immediate communion and converse¹² with Him.

The most intimate communion becomes¹³ the relation that the saints stand in to Jesus Christ. It especially becomes that most perfect and glorious union into which they shall be brought with Him in heaven. They are not merely Christ’s servants, but His friends (Joh 15:15), His brethren and companions (Psa 122:8). Yea, they are the spouse of Christ. They are espoused or betrothed to Christ while in the body; but when they go to heaven, they enter the King’s palace, their marriage with Him is come, and the King brings them into His chambers indeed. Then they go to dwell with Christ constantly, to enjoy the most perfect converse with Him. Christ conversed in the most friendly manner with His disciples on earth. He admitted one of them to lean on His bosom; but they are admitted much more fully and freely to converse with Him in heaven. Though Christ is there in a state of glorious exaltation, reigning in the majesty and glory of the sovereign Lord and God of heaven and earth, angels and men, yet this will not hinder intimacy and freedom of communion, but rather promote it. For He is thus exalted, not only for Himself, but for them. He is instated in this glory of Head over all things for their sakes, that they might be exalted and glorified. And when they go to heaven where He is, they are exalted and glorified with Him. They shall not be kept at a more awful distance from Christ, but shall be admitted nearer and to a greater intimacy. For they shall be unspeakably more fit for it, and Christ shall be in more fit circumstances to bestow on them this blessedness. Their seeing the great glory of their Friend and Redeemer will not awe them to a distance or make them afraid of a near approach;¹⁴ but on the contrary, He will most powerfully draw them near, encourage them, and engage them to holy freedom. For they will know that it is He that is their own Redeemer, beloved Friend, and Bridegroom—the very same that loved them with a dying love and redeemed them to God by His blood (Rev 1:5). “It is I; be not afraid” (Mat 14:27). “Fear not...I am he that liveth, and was dead” (Rev 1:17-18).

And the nature of this glory of Christ that they shall behold will be such as will draw and encourage them; for they will not only see infinite

¹² **converse** – intimate exchange of presence, love, and fellowship.

¹³ **becomes** – fits with; is fitting with.

¹⁴ **afraid of a near approach** – the fear of drawing near to Christ.

majesty and greatness, but infinite grace, condescension, mildness, gentleness, and sweetness equal to His majesty. For He appears in heaven not only as the Lion of the tribe of Judah but as the Lamb in the midst of the throne (Rev 5:5-6). He shall be their Shepherd to feed them and lead them to living fountains of water (Rev 7:17), so that the sight of Christ's great kingly majesty will be no terror to them, but will only serve the more to heighten their pleasure and surprise. When Mary was about to embrace Christ, being full of joy at the sight of Him again alive after His crucifixion, Christ forbids her to do it for the present because He was not yet ascended. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Joh 20:16-17). As if He had said, "This is not the time and place for that freedom your love to Me desires; that is appointed for heaven after My ascension. I am going thither. And you, My true disciples, shall, as My brethren and companions, soon be with Me in My glory. And then there shall be no restraint. That is the place appointed for the most perfect expressions of complacence¹⁵ and endearment¹⁶—full enjoyment of mutual love." And accordingly the souls of departed saints with Christ in heaven shall have Christ as it were unbosomed¹⁷ unto them, manifesting those infinite riches of love towards them that have been there from eternity: and they shall be enabled to express their love to Him, in an incomparably better manner than ever they could while in the body. Thus they shall eat and drink abundantly, and swim in the ocean of love, and be eternally swallowed up on the infinitely bright, and infinitely mild and sweet, beams of divine love—eternally receiving that light, eternally full of it, and eternally compassed round with it, and everlastingly reflecting it back again to its fountain.

From *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974), 28-29; in the public domain.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational preacher and theologian; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony, USA.



¹⁵ **complacence** – delighted approval; joyful love that takes pleasure in the goodness of the beloved.

¹⁶ **endearment** – tender expressions of affection that draw two parties into closer love.

¹⁷ **unbosomed** – openly revealing the deepest thoughts and affections; showing one's heart without concealment.

A PURE HEART WILL SEE CHRIST

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.—Matthew 5:8

HEART-PURITY is the only jewel you can carry out of the world. Hast thou a child or an estate in which thou delightest? You can carry nothing out of the world (1Ti 6:7). Purity of heart is the only commodity¹ that can be transported with comfort. This is what will stay longest with you. We usually love those things that last longest; we prize a diamond or a piece of gold above the most beautiful flower because the flower fades. Heart-purity hath perpetuity;² it will go with us beyond the grave. But how shall we attain heart-purity?

Look often into the Word of God. “Now ye are clean through the word” (Joh 15:3). “Thy word is very pure” (Psa 119:140). God’s Word is pure—not only in the matter of it, but in the effect because it makes us pure. “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). By looking into this pure crystal, we are changed into the image of it. The Word is both a mirror to show us the spots of our souls and a laver to wash them away. The Word breathes nothing but purity: it irradiates the mind; it consecrates the heart.

Go to the bath: There are two baths that Christians should wash in.

1. *The bath of tears.* Go into this bath. Peter had sullied³ and defiled himself with sin, and he washed himself with penitential⁴ tears. Mary Magdalene, who was an impure sinner, stood at Jesus’ feet weeping (Luk 7:38). Mary’s tears washed her heart as well as Christ’s feet. O sinners, let your eyes be a fountain of tears; weep for those sins that are so many that they have passed all arithmetic. This water of contrition⁵ is healing and purifying.

2. *The bath of Christ’s blood.* This is that “fountain opened...for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). A soul steeped in the brinish⁶ tears of repentance and bathed in the blood of Christ is made pure. All the legal washings and purifications were but types and emblems representing

¹ **commodity** – thing of value.

² **perpetuity** – the quality of lasting forever.

³ **sullied** – damaged his spiritual purity.

⁴ **penitential** – expressing sorrow for sin.

⁵ **contrition** – deep, sincere heart-sorrow for sin.

⁶ **brinish** – salty, like seawater.

Christ's blood—this blood whitens the soul.

3. *Get faith.* It is a soul-cleansing grace: Having purified their hearts by faith (Act 15:9). The woman in the Gospel who but touched the hem of Christ's garment was healed—a touch of faith heals. If I believe that Christ and all His merits are mine, how can I sin against Him? We do not willingly injure those friends whom we believe love us. Nothing has greater force or efficacy upon the heart to make it pure than faith. It will remove mountains—the mountains of pride, lust, envy. Faith and the love of sin are inconsistent.

4. *Breathe after the Spirit.* It is called the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). It purgeth the heart—as lightning purgeth the air—that we may see what a purifying virtue the Spirit hath.

5. *Take heed of keeping company and socializing⁷ with the wicked.* One vain⁸ mind makes another; one hard heart makes another. The stone in the body⁹ is not infectious, but the stone in the heart¹⁰ is. One profane spirit poisons another; beware of the society of the wicked.

6. *If you would be pure, walk with them that are pure.* As “the communion of saints” is in our creed,¹¹ so it should be in our company. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Pro 13:20), and he that walketh with the pure shall be pure. The saints are like a bed of spices; by intermixing ourselves with them, we shall partake of their savoriness;¹² association begets assimilation;¹³ sometimes God blesseth good society to the conversion of others.

7. *Wait at the posts of wisdom's doors.* Reverence the Word preached. The Word of God, sucked in by faith, transforms the heart into the likeness of it (Rom 6:17). The Word is a holy seed (Jam 1:18), which, being cast into the heart, makes it partake of the divine nature.

8. *Pray for heart-purity:* Job propounds the question,¹⁴ “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” God can do it. Out of an impure heart, He can produce grace. Pray the prayer of David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psa 51:10). We should pray for heart-purity *fervently*. It is a matter that we are most deeply concerned in: without

⁷ **socializing** – close association; habitual fellowship.

⁸ **vain mind** – foolish and morally careless mind.

⁹ **stone in the body** – like a kidney stone, painful but not contagious.

¹⁰ **stone in the heart** – a heart spiritually hardened by sin and highly contagious.

¹¹ **Apostles' Creed** – early Christian confession summarizing the core beliefs of the church, used for teaching and public worship.

¹² **partake of their savoriness** – share in their spiritual goodness and godly influence.

¹³ **association begets assimilation** – people you spend time with shape who you become.

¹⁴ **propounds the question** – presents or sets forth the question plainly.

holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Our prayers must be with sighs and groans (Rom 8:26-27). There must not only be elocution, but affection.¹⁵ Jacob wrestled in prayer (Gen 32:24). Hannah poured out her soul (1Sa 1:15). We often pray so coldly—our petitions even freezing on our lips—as if we would teach God to deny us. We pray as if we cared not whether God heard us. O Christian, be earnest with God for a pure heart. Lay thy heart before the Lord and say: “Lord, Thou Who hast given me a heart, give me a pure heart. Let Christ’s blood be sprinkled upon me; let the Holy Ghost descend upon me. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Thou Who biddest¹⁶ me give Thee my heart, Lord, make my heart pure, and Thou shalt have it.”

THE BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF SEEING GOD EXPLAINED. These words are linked to the former, and they are a great incentive to heart-purity: *the pure heart shall see the pure God*. There is a double sight that the saints have of God:

1. In this life. It is a spiritual sight by the eye of faith. Faith sees God’s glorious attributes in the mirror of His word; it beholds Him showing forth Himself through the lattice of His ordinances.¹⁷ Thus Moses did see Him Who is invisible (Heb 11:27). Believers see God’s glory, but it is veiled—they behold His back parts (Exo 23:33).

2. In the life to come. This glorious sight of God is meant in the text, “They shall see God.” A pleasant prospect! Divines call this the beatific vision. At that day the veil will be pulled off, and God will show Himself in all His glory to the soul, as a king on a day of coronation shows himself in all his royalty and magnificence. This sight of God will be the heaven of heaven. We shall indeed have a sight of angels, and that will be sweet; but the quintessence¹⁸ of happiness, and the diamond in the ring will be this: *we shall see God*. If the sun is absent, it is night for all the stars. The angels are called stars (Job 38:7). But it would be night in heaven if the Sun of Righteousness did not shine there. It is the king’s presence that makes the court. Absalom counted himself but half alive unless he could see the king’s face. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” This sight of God in glory is,

(1) *Partly mental and intellectual*. We shall see Him with the eyes of our mind. If there is not an intellectual sight of God, how do the “spirits

¹⁵ **elocution...affection** – prayer must not be mere words (*elocution*); it should be Spirit-wrought, Word-informed, heartfelt wrestling with God (*affection*).

¹⁶ **biddest** – commands.

¹⁷ **lattice of His ordinances** – an image from Song of Solomon 2:9 meaning God shows Himself partially through His appointed means of grace—Word, prayer, sacraments.

¹⁸ **quintessence** – purest or most perfect form of something.

of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23) see Him?

(2) *Partly corporeal*.¹⁹ Not that we can behold the bright essence of God with bodily eyes. God is a spirit (Joh 4:24) and, being a spirit, is invisible (1Ti 1:17). He cannot be beheld by bodily eyes: “whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1Ti 6:16). A sight of His glory would overwhelm us; this wine is too strong for our weak heads. But when I say our sight of God in heaven is corporeal, my meaning is, we shall with bodily eyes behold Jesus Christ, through Whom the glory of God—His wisdom, holiness, mercy—shall shine forth to the soul. Put a back of steel to the mirror, and you may see a face in it; so the human nature of Christ is as it were a back of steel, through which we may see the glory of God.²⁰ In this sense that scripture is to be understood, “With these eyes shall I see God” (Job 19:26).

Setting forth the excellence of the beatific vision. Now concerning this blessed sight of God, it is so sublime²¹ and sweet that I can but draw a dark shadow of it. We shall better understand it when we come to heaven. At present I shall only lay down these nine aphorisms.²²

1. Our sight of God in heaven shall be a transparent sight. Here we see Him “through a glass darkly” (1Co 13:12). But through Christ we shall behold Him in a very illustrious manner; God will so far unveil Himself, and show forth His glory, as the soul is capable to receive. If Adam had not sinned, it is probable he should never have had such a clear sight of God as the saints in glory shall. “We shall see Him as he is” (1Jo 3:2). Now we see Him as He is not. He is not mutable, not mortal. There we shall see Him as He is—in a very transparent manner: “Then shall I know, even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12), that is, clearly. Doth not God know us clearly and fully? Then shall the saints know Him—according to their capacity—as they are known. As their love to God is, so their sight of God shall be perfect.

2. This sight of God will be a transcendent sight—it will surpass in glory. Such glittering beams shall sparkle forth from the Lord Jesus as shall infinitely amaze and delight the eyes of the beholders. Imagine what a blessed sight it will be to see Christ wearing the robe of our human nature, and to see that nature sitting in glory above the angels. If God be so beautiful here in His ordinances—Word, prayer, sacraments; if there be such excellence in Him when we see Him by the eye

¹⁹ **corporeal** – bodily; having a real, physical form.

²⁰ **back of steel** – the solid backing of a mirror; Watson’s image for Christ’s human nature, through which the glory of God is made visible to us.

²¹ **sublime** – of such grandeur and beauty as to inspire admiration or awe.

²² **aphorisms** – brief and concise statements.

of faith through the telescope of a promise,²³ oh, what will it be when we shall see Him face to face! When Christ was transfigured on the mount, He was full of glory (Mat 17:1-13). If His transfiguration was so glorious, what will His inauguration²⁴ be? What a glorious time will it be, when—as it was said of Mordecai—we shall see Him in the presence of His Father, arrayed in royal apparel with a great crown of gold upon His head (Est 8:15). There will be glory beyond hyperbole;²⁵ if the sun were ten thousand times brighter than it is, it could not so much as shadow out this glory. In the heavenly horizon we shall behold beauty in its first magnitude²⁶ and highest elevation. There we shall “see the king in his beauty” (Isa 33:17). All lights are but eclipses compared with that glorious vision.

3. This sight of God will be a transforming sight. “We shall be like him” (1Jo 3:2). The saints shall be changed into glory. As when the light springs into a dark room, the room may be said to be changed from what it was, the saints shall so see God as to be changed into His image (Psa 17:15). Here God’s people are blackened and sullied with infirmities,²⁷ but in heaven they shall be as the dove, whose wings are covered with silver²⁸ (Psa 68:13). They shall have some rays and beams of God’s glory shining in them, as the crystal, by having the sun shine on it, sparkles and looks like the sun; so the saints, by beholding the brightness of God’s glory, shall have a tincture²⁹ of that glory upon them. Not that they shall partake of God’s very essence, for as the iron in the fire becomes fire, yet remains iron still, so the saints by beholding the luster of God’s majesty shall be glorious creatures, yet remain creatures still.

4. This sight of God will be a joyful sight. “Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance” (Act 2:28). After a sharp winter, how pleasant it will be to see the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2) displaying Himself in all His glory! Doth faith breed joy? “In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). If the joy of faith be such, what will the joy of vision be? The sight of Christ will amaze the eye with wonder and ravish the heart with joy. If the face of a friend whom we entirely love doth so

²³ **see Him...promise** – faith looks at God through the telescope of His promises—it is real sight, but at a distance.

²⁴ **His inauguration** – Christ’s public enthronement and full unveiling of His royal glory.

²⁵ **glory...hyperbole** – no exaggeration can reach that glory.

²⁶ **first magnitude** – the language of astronomy for the brightest stars.

²⁷ **blackened...infirmities** – stained and defiled by remaining sin and weakness.

²⁸ **wings...silver** – poetic image of purity and brightness.

²⁹ **tincture** – trace or reflection.

affect us and drive away sorrow, oh, how cheering will the sight of God be to the saints in heaven! Then indeed it may be said, “Your heart shall rejoice” (Joh 16:22). And there are two things that will make the saints’ vision of God in heaven joyful.

(1) *Through Jesus Christ the dread and terror of the divine essence shall be taken away.* Majesty shall appear in God to preserve reverence, but majesty clothed with beauty and tempered with sweetness to excite joy in the saints. We shall see God as a friend—not as guilty Adam did, who was afraid and hid himself (Gen 3:10), but as Queen Esther, who looked upon King Ahasuerus holding forth the golden scepter³⁰ (Est 5:2). Surely this sight of God will not be formidable,³¹ but comfortable.

(2) *The saints shall not only have vision, but fruition;³² they shall so see God as to enjoy Him.* We shall so see God as to love Him, and so love Him as to be filled with Him; the seeing of God implies fruition. “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat 25:21)—not only behold it, but enter into it. “In thy light shall we see light” (Psa 36:9): there is vision. “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11): there is fruition. So great is the joy that flows from the sight of God, it will make the saints break forth into triumphant praises and hallelujahs.

5. This sight of God will be a satisfying sight. Cast three worlds into the heart, and they will not fill it; but the sight of God satisfies: “I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15). Solomon saith, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing” (Ecc 1:8). But there the eye will be satisfied with seeing: God and nothing but God can satisfy. The saints shall have their heads so full of knowledge, and their hearts so full of joy, that they shall find no want.

6. It will be an unwearable sight. Let a man see the rarest sight that is, he will soon be cloyed.³³ When he comes into a garden and sees delicious walks,³⁴ fair arbors, pleasant flowers, within a little while he grows weary; but it is not so in heaven. There is no surfeit,³⁵ we shall never be weary of seeing God, for the divine essence being infinite, there shall be every moment new and fresh delights springing forth from God into the glorified soul; the soul shall not so desire God, but it shall still be full; nor shall it be so full, but it shall still desire; so

³⁰ **golden scepter** – symbol of royal favor and welcome.

³¹ **formidable** – causing fear or dread; something that makes one shrink back.

³² **fruition** – full enjoyment; possessing and delighting in what is seen.

³³ **cloyed** – wearied or overfilled by too much of a good thing.

³⁴ **delicious walks** – delightful, pleasant garden paths.

³⁵ **surfeit** – excess that leads to weariness; being overfilled or tired of something.

sweet will God be, that the more the saints behold God, the more they will be ravished with desire and delight.

7. It will be a beneficial sight. It will tend to the bettering and advantaging of the soul; some colors, while they delight the eyes, hurt them, but this intuition³⁶ and vision of God shall better the soul and tend to its infinite happiness. Eve's looking upon the tree of knowledge did prejudice her sight; she afterwards grew blind upon it.³⁷ But the saints can receive no harm from the inspection of glory; this sight will be beatific.³⁸ The soul will never be in its perfection till it comes to see God; this will be the crowning blessing.

8. This sight of God shall be perpetuated. Here we see objects a while, and then our eyes grow dim, and we need spectacles; but the saints shall always behold God. As there shall be no cloud upon God's face, so the saints shall have no mote in their eye; their sight shall never grow dim, but they shall be to all eternity looking on God, that beautiful and beatific object. Oh, what a soul-ravishing sight will this be! God must make us able to bear it; we can no more endure a sight of glory than a sight of wrath; but the saints after this life shall have their capacities enlarged, and they shall be qualified and made fit to receive the penetrating beams of glory.

9. It will be a speedy sight. There are some who deny that the soul is admitted to the sight of God immediately after death. I shall make good the assertion that the saints shall have an immediate transition and passage from death to glory. It appears that the soul of a believer immediately after death goes to God: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luk 23:43). That word, to me, shows clearly that the thief on the cross was translated to heaven, for there Christ was. And the other word—*today*—shows that the thief on the cross had an immediate passage from the cross to paradise; so that the souls of believers have a speedy vision of God after death. They shall see God.

From "Discourses upon Christ's Sermon on the Mount" in *Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Blackie, Fullarton, & Co., 1829), 259-271; in the public domain.

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England, UK.



³⁶ **intuition** – spiritual insight or perception.

³⁷ **she...blind on it** – her looking brought spiritual harm; she became spiritually blind.

³⁸ **beatific** – imparting perfect blessedness; belonging to the joy of seeing God.

THE MATCHLESS VISION

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

And they shall see his face.—Revelation 22:4

IN the beatific vision it is Christ Whom faithful souls see; further, it is His face they behold. They shall not see the skirts of His robe, as Moses saw the back parts of Jehovah (Exo 33:18-23). They shall not be satisfied to touch the hem of His garment or to sit far down at His feet where they can only see His sandals—but *they shall see His face*. By this I understand two things. First, they shall literally and physically—with their risen bodies—look into the face of Jesus. Secondly, spiritually, their mental faculties shall be enlarged, so that they are enabled to look into the very heart, soul, and character of Christ—to understand Him, His work, His love, His all in all, as they never understood Him before.

They shall literally, I say, see His face, for Christ is no phantom. Though divine in heaven—and therefore spiritual—He is still a man, and therefore material like us. The very flesh and blood that suffered upon Calvary is in heaven: the hand that was pierced with the nail, now at this moment, grasps the scepter of all worlds; the very head that was bowed down with anguish is now crowned with a royal diadem; and the face that was so marred is the very face that beams resplendent amidst the thrones of heaven. We shall be permitted to gaze into that selfsame countenance. Oh, what a sight! Roll by, ye years; hasten on, ye laggard¹ months and days; let us but once behold Him—our Beloved, our hearts' care, Who redeemed us to God by His blood (Rev 5:9), Whose we are, and Whom we love with such a passionate desire that to be in His embrace we would be satisfied to suffer ten thousand deaths! They shall see Jesus.

Yet the spiritual sight will be sweeter still. I think the text implies that in the next world our powers of mind will be very different from what they are now. We are—the best of us—in our infancy as yet, and know but in part; but we shall be men then, we shall “put away childish things” (1Co 13:11). We shall see and know even as we are known; and amongst the great things that we shall know will be this greatest of all—we shall know Christ. We shall know the heights, depths, lengths,

¹ **laggard** – slow, lingering, or dragging behind when it ought to move quickly.

and breadths of the love of Christ that *passeth* knowledge (Eph 3:19). Oh, how delightful it will be then to understand His everlasting love; how without beginning, or ever the earth was, His thoughts darted forward towards His dear ones, whom He had chosen in the sovereignty of His choice, that they should be His forever! What a subject for delightful meditation will the covenant² be, and Christ's suretyship engagements³ in that covenant when He undertook to take the debts of all His people upon Himself, to pay them all, and to stand and suffer in their room! And what thoughts shall we have then of our union with Christ—our federal, vital, conjugal oneness!⁴ We only talk about these things now, we do not really understand them. We merely plough the surface and gather a topsoil harvest, but a richer subsoil lies beneath. Brethren, in heaven we shall dive into the lowest depths of fellowship with Jesus. *We shall see His face*, that is, we shall see clearly and plainly all that has to do with our Lord. This shall be the topmost bliss of heaven.

In the blessed vision the saints see Jesus, and they see Him clearly. We may also remark that *they see Him always*; for when the text says, "They shall see his face," it implies that they never at any time are without the sight. Never for a moment do they unlock their arm from the arm of their Beloved. They are not as we are—sometimes near the throne, and soon afar off by backslidings—sometimes hot with love, and then cold with indifference; sometimes bright as seraphs,⁵ and

² **covenant** – Differing views exist among those who believe in God's eternal purpose of salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Some believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in (1) a Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity among the members of the Godhead, which is the foundation for (2) a Covenant of Grace that is made in history between God and His elect (i.e., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Nehemiah Coxe, etc.). Of those who hold this view, some believe that it is between the Father and the Son, while others include the Holy Spirit. However, others believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in only one Covenant of Grace, which has an *eternal* aspect between the members of the Trinity and an *historical* aspect between God and His elect (i.e., Edmund Calamy, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Gill, Benjamin Keach, etc.). For helpful discussions on this subject, consult Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, Reformation Heritage Books, 237-278; J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016); David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Bought Her*, Crossway Books, 201-223.

³ **suretyship engagements** – Christ's voluntary covenant commitments as the Surety of His people, undertaking to satisfy every obligation required for their salvation. By these engagements He fully answers for their debt and secures their final glory.

⁴ **federal, vital, conjugal oneness** – Christ is covenant Head and Representative of His people; believers are in living union with Christ through the Holy Spirit; this union is presented as Christ as the husband and the church as His bride, emphasizing a union of love.

⁵ **seraphs** – highest angelic beings who worship God as the "burning ones" (Isa 6:2).

then dull as clods—but forever and ever they are in closest association with the Master, for *they shall see His face*.

Best of all, they see His face as it is now in all its glory. John tells us what that will be like. In his first chapter he says, “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow” (Rev 1:14), to mark His antiquity, for He is the Ancient of days. “And his eyes were as a flame of fire...and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Rev 1:14, 16). Such is the vision that the redeemed enjoy before the throne: their Lord is all brightness, and in Him there is nothing to weep over, nothing to mar His glory. Traces of all the griefs He once endured are doubtless there upon that wondrous face; but these only make Him more glorious. He looks like a lamb that has been slain and wears His priesthood still; but all that has to do with the shame, the spitting, and the slaughter has been so transformed that the sight is all blissful, all comforting, all glorious; and in His face there is nothing to excite a tear or to beget a sigh.

I wish my lips were unloosed and my thoughts were free that I could tell you something more of this sight, but indeed it is not given unto mortal tongues to talk of these things. I suppose that if we were caught up to see His face and should come back again, yet we should have to say like Paul that we had heard and seen that which it was not lawful for us to utter (2Co 12:4). God will not as yet reveal these things fully to us, but He reserves His best wine for the last. We can but give you a few glimpses, but O beloved, wait a little, it shall not be long ere you also shall see His face!

We may understand the words *they shall see his face* to contain five things. They mean, first, *certain salvation*. The face of Jesus Christ acts in two ways upon the sons of men: with some it is a face of terror—“From whose face the earth and the heaven fled away” (Rev 20:11). It is written concerning Him, “Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap” (Mal 3:2). A sight of Christ’s face will be to the ungodly eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord. But if there are some men who shall see His face—who shall sit down and delight themselves in gazing upon the face of the great Judge upon the throne—then those persons are assuredly saved; they are abiding the day of His coming; they are dwelling with the eternal flame without being consumed; they are resting on the bosom of our God Who is a consuming fire; and yet, like the burning bush of old, though glowing with the glory, they are not consumed by the heat. O happy men, who can live where others must expire; who can find their heaven where a

carnal world must eternally find its hell! This is the first thing in the text. *They shall see his face*; then they are everlastingly safe.

The second privilege is, they shall have a *clear knowledge* of Him. I have dwelt upon that thought before, and merely mention it to complete the summary. To look into the face of Christ signifies to be well acquainted with His person, His office, His character, His work. So, the saints in heaven shall have more knowledge of Christ than the most advanced below. As one has said, the babe in Christ admitted to heaven discovers more of Christ in a single hour than is known by all the divines of the assemblies of the church on earth. Oh yes, our catechisms and our creeds, and even our Bible—all these reveal but very little of what we shall discover when we shall see His face.

Our text implies also *conscious favor*. Was not that the old benediction, “The Lord lift up His countenance upon you”? He has lifted it up upon the glorified, and they see it world without end. Here it is our joy of joys to have the Lord smiling upon us, for if He be with us who can be against us? If we know that He loves us, and that He delights in us, it mattereth not to us though earth and hell should hate us, and men cast out our names as evil. In heaven, then, they have this to be their choice privilege. They are courtiers who stand always in the Monarch’s palace, secure of the Monarch’s smile. They are children who live unbrokeably in their Father’s love, and know it, and rejoice to know it evermore.

The fourth privilege involved in the text is that of *close fellowship*. They are always near to Jesus. They are never hoping that they are with Him, yet fearing that they are not; they have none of those inward struggles that make life so unhappy to some of us.

But they see His face and are in hourly communion with their Lord. Perfect spirits are always walking with the Lord, for they are always agreed with Him. In glory they are all Enochs, walking with God. There forever and forever they lie in the bosom of Jesus in the nearest possible place of communion with Him Who redeemed them with His blood.

And this involves a fifth privilege, namely, *complete transformation*. They shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is. If they see His face, they shall be “changed...from glory to glory” (2Co 3:18) by this face-to-face vision of the Lord. Beholding Christ, His likeness is photographed upon them; they become in all respects like Him as they gaze upon Him world without end.

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, August 1868,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.



WAKING WITH HIS LIKENESS

John Owen (1616-1683)

THE view we have here by faith of the glory of Christ is gathered from Scripture in bits and pieces. These bits and pieces must be brought together in our minds so that we may have a clear idea of the glory of Christ. We do not have great visions of the glory of Christ as Isaiah had under the Old Testament, and as John had on the isle of Patmos (Isa 6:1-4; Rev 1:13-16). We do not need them. They would not help us. “We have a more sure word of prophecy,” says Peter (2Pe 1:17-19). One of those who did receive these glorious visions cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isa 6:5). The other “fell at his feet as dead” (Rev 1:17). In this life we are unable to bear such glorious visions of Christ. And as we do not have glorious visions of Him, neither do we have any new revelations of His glory by direct inspiration. Scripture is our only blueprint of the glory of Christ. Only *in* Scripture and only *by* faith can we behold the glory of Christ while still in this life.

Nor does Scripture give us an entire picture of the glory of Christ in a single place. Nor can it do so. If all the lights in our heavens were concentrated into one, it would not help us see better. Instead, it would blind us. So divine wisdom distributed the light into sun, moon, and stars, each giving out its own measure of light to enlighten the world. So, if the whole glory of Christ and all that belongs to that glory had been concentrated into one description, it would have been too much for our minds to take in. We would have been confused and bewildered rather than enlightened. So God has distributed the light of Christ’s glory through the whole firmament of the Scriptures. Each part gives off its own light for the building up of the church’s faith. One part of Scripture describes His person and glory clearly and plainly, whereas other parts present it in allegories conveying a heavenly sense of them to the minds of believers. Yet other parts describe His glory in terms of His love, His humbling Himself for our salvation, His exaltation, and His power. As one star differs from another in glory, so God revealed the glory of Christ under the Old Testament types and shadows, and more fully under the New Testament. Glorious testimonies to these things are planted in all parts of Scripture. So we ought to study Scripture to find out all that is revealed to us of the glory of Christ, as did the prophets of old (1Pe 1:11).

Those who make gilded images of Christ only “feed on ashes” and hold “a lie in their right hand.” In Scripture, Jesus Christ is clearly set before us as crucified (Gal 3:1). So also by Scripture we see Him exalted and glorified. And it is the wisdom of faith to gather together all the descriptions of Christ’s glory in Scripture so that faith may more clearly behold Him.

But in heaven we will always see the whole glory of Christ, and we shall be enabled by one act of the light of glory to understand it as only a glorified creature in heaven can. The vision that we shall have of the glory of Christ in heaven, and of the glory of the immense God in Him, will perfectly transform us into the image of Christ. When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1Jo 3:2).

When, at death, the soul departs from the body, it is immediately freed from all weakness, disability, darkness, doubts, and fears. The image of the first Adam will then be abolished. All physical weaknesses and infirmities will have gone forever. This necessarily follows death, in order that we may enter that blessed state. The first entry into immortality from mortality is a step towards eternal glory and into eternal rest. The great evil—*death*—thus becomes the means of freeing us from all the remains of evil in us. It is by virtue of the death of Christ alone that the souls of believers are freed by death from the presence of sin and all the effects that sin had wrought on their bodies; and being freed, their souls flourish and expand to their fullest extent.

But it is not so with the wicked. Death to them is a curse, for it plunges them into eternal misery and pain. They will be forever deprived of all the comforts they had in this world. Their souls, separated from their bodies, will be continually troubled and harassed by all those evil passions which filled their minds with corrupt fleshly lusts. They look for relief by death in vain.

The “spirits of just men” (Heb 12:23) are freed by death from their mortal bodies not yet glorified. All the powers of their souls and all the graces in them—such as faith, love, and delight—are immediately set free, and enabled constantly to be exercised for the glory and praise of God in Christ.

The purpose of these powers was to enable us to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we are freed from the hindrance and burden of the body, they can now fully exert all their powers to the glory of God and the enjoyment of Him forever. And when the body is fully redeemed by its resurrection, it shall be so purified, sanctified, and glorified that it will no longer be a hindrance and a burden to the soul.

Instead, it will be a blessed instrument for the soul's highest and most spiritual activities.

Our eyes were made to see our Redeemer and our other senses to receive all that He communicates to us, according to their capacity. Just as the bodies of the wicked shall be restored to them, to increase and complete their misery in their sufferings, so shall the bodies of the just be restored to them to heighten and complete their blessedness.

These things prepare us for eternal glory. The soul will not be brought into the presence of Christ without a new power enabling it to behold Him in the full, blazing light of His glory. Faith ceases, for we now no longer behold His glory by faith. The light of glory now replaces faith.

When sin entered the world, God said in grief, upbraiding man for his foolishness, "Behold, the man is become as one of us" (Gen 3:22). But when grace has done its glorious work, He will say in love and delight as He sees the perfect restoration of His image in man, "Behold, man has indeed become like one of us." This is the great result of the light of glory.

This sight of Christ's glory is called the "beatific vision" because it gives perfect rest and blessedness to those who have this sight of Christ. God in Christ constantly works in glorified souls and communicates His grace to them. All creatures must eternally live—even in heaven—in dependence on Him Who is the eternal fountain of being, life, goodness, and blessedness to all. As we cannot keep ourselves alive for one moment without divine power in us, so in the glorified state we shall depend eternally on divine power and goodness being communicated to us for our eternal blessedness. We have no idea how this is done in heaven, even as we have no idea how God communicates His grace to us here on earth. His ways are shrouded in mystery (Joh 3:8).

While we are still on earth, faith, beholding the glory of Christ, will give us a foretaste of future glory. There is no glory, no peace, no joy, no satisfaction to be found in this world compared to what we get from that weak and imperfect view that we have of the glory of Christ by faith. Thus while we are still in this world, faith gives us such a foretaste of future blessedness in the enjoyment of Christ as may continually stir us up to say with the psalmist, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15).

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