

Created for Glory (Part Two)

Beholding the Glory of Christ renews and transforms the People of God

By Jay Wegter

Beholding the Glory of the Lord gives us insights into Christ's Obedience

In the covenant of redemption (the plan of salvation) conceived by Father, the Son binds Himself to suffer the wrath due His people. He glorifies God in doing so. In voluntarily taking this on, He exhibits and displays the Father's love. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

Christ's love for His sheep makes the salvation of the sheep His reward. To receive the reward of His obedience is to have **His obedience put on their account** (imputed to them—2 Corinthians 5:21). Think of it, the eternal Son of God in His obedience to the Father, undergoes a grievous 'crushing' by becoming a guilt offering—He does so that He might gain a 'seed' or offspring (Is 53:10-12). Can you begin to see how Christ's effectual purchase of the saints is linked to His glory? Paul refers to this gracious marvel of Christ purchasing a people for His own possession as, "**what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints**" (Eph 1:18b; see also Titus 2:14). To behold such a wonder so as to be deeply moved by it requires that the "eyes of our hearts be enlightened" by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:18).

Thus, the glory possessed by Christ in heaven is His absolute righteousness acquired during His state of humiliation—it is the righteousness needed for our salvation. It sprang from His obedience and suffering and self-sacrifice in our stead. Thus, the new covenant is about abundant forgiveness and righteousness acquired from Christ's state of humiliation. These blessings are intimately tied to the glory of the Lord. (Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory*, p. 96).

The joy set before Him is His mediatorial glory; the glory which describes His exalted state (Heb 12:2). The exalted Christ is both King and Priest; He rules and He mediates. In Christ's anticipation of His mediatorial glory, He was willing to endure the cross and disregard its shame (Heb 12:2). In the justification of believing sinners by the righteousness of Christ, the purpose of God in the display and extension of His glory is advanced (Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ; the Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*).

The effect of His mediatorial glory is *salvific* (He **secures** our salvation, "He obtained eternal redemption;" Hebrews 9:12). For the sinner who believes and repents, the sight of God's glory in the face of Christ *evicts* from the soul the darkness and the hostility that is inherent in original sin (Col 1:21-23) (the hymn writer refers to our alienation and deadness by original sin as: 'nature night'—*And Can It Be*, fourth stanza).

Christ assuming our human nature was a master piece of wisdom and a monument of free grace. He took our flesh upon Him that He might take our sins upon Him and so appease God's wrath. Whoever is our Advocate must also be our propitiation to pacify God (1 Jn 2:1; 4:10). Angels cannot be our propitiation; therefore, they cannot be our advocates (Watson).

He took our flesh that He might make human nature appear lovely to God and the divine nature appear lovely to man. Upon our fall from God in Adam, our nature became as odious to

God as vermin (rats and roaches) would be to us. Our sinful flesh was like a decaying corpse, loathsome to behold. God could not endure to look upon us. Christ taking our flesh makes this human nature appear lovely to God. Christ being clothed with our flesh makes the divine nature appear lovely to man.

In Christ, the divine and human nature are bonded together forever in one Person. This union of God and man equips Christ to accomplish through redemption, both God's glory, and our eternal good. There is boundless glory to be investigated in His Person and work as our Mediator (Ibid, p. 194).

By His obedience, Christ gained the 'equipment' necessary to save to the uttermost (Heb 7:24-25). Christ's obedience was perfect, voluntary, unto death; and exalting positive righteousness. All His obedience earned His exaltation (Acts 2:33-36; Phil 2:5-11). Christ's obedience in His condescension in taking on human nature, was to keep the covenant perfectly, to become subject to the penalty of the law, and to follow the moral and ceremonial law. By this obedience in His humiliation, He gained infinite merit for us (Biehl).

This merit is 'His equipment' or all-sufficient fitness to save. By the eternal covenant (counsels among the Persons of the Trinity, Heb 13:20), Christ laid down His life by His Father's command, resulting in the justification of believers (Jn 10:17-18). Dear friends, if we are to be renewed and transformed, then this is the glory we must keep beholding; that Christ, by His obedience, became a merciful, effectual, and sympathetic High Priest (Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16).

Beholding the Glory of the Lord deepens our confidence in Prayer

The glory of the Lord centers upon the priesthood of our crucified and risen Savior. As High Priest, Christ intercedes for the weakest believers and for the sins of believers (Jn 17:20) (Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, p. 178). Thomas Watson, the most readable of the Puritans states, Christ freely pleads our cause, He takes no fee. The Lord is full of sympathy and tenderness as our merciful High Priest (Heb 2:17). He has shed His blood to purchase life and salvation for the elect; and if they should not be saved, He would lose His purchase (Ibid, p. 180).

Says Watson, when we pray, we need to fix our eye chiefly on Christ's intercession. We have a 'friend in the court of heaven' who speaks a good word for us. He pursues and follows our cause in heaven. This ought to animate and encourage us in prayer. If we came in our own name in prayer, it would be presumption. But, Christ intercedes for us in the force and efficacy of His own blood. Christ shall judge the world (Jn 5:22), but because He intercedes for His own, they shall be absolved (Rom 8:32-34) (Ibid, p. 182).

Will Christ condemn those for whom He prays? Believers are His spouse (Eph 5:25-27). Will He condemn His own spouse? We see here the constancy of Christ's love to the elect, He not only died for them, but intercedes for them in Heaven (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:24-25). When Christ was done dying, He was not done loving. He will never cease praying until His petition that His people be with Him in glory is granted (Jn 17:24). This should cause us to consider the sad condition of the unbeliever, he has none in heaven to speak a word for him. To be shut out of Christ's prayers is to be shut out of heaven (Jn 17:9) (Ibid, p. 183).

Christ is the source of our 'bold and confident access to God (Eph 3:12). The pure Godhead is terrible to behold (Jer 30:21; 1 Tim 6:15-16). In our mortal state, we could not see

the Godhead and live. But, Christ clothing Himself with our flesh makes the divine nature more amiable and delightful to us (2 Cor 4:6). We need not be afraid to look upon God through Christ's human nature. A custom of old among shepherds was to clothe themselves with sheepskins to be more pleasing to the sheep. Christ clothed Himself with our flesh that the divine nature might be more pleasing to us, that the sight of God might be delightful and not terrifying and formidable (Watson, p. 194). For, the reconciling power of the cross makes us acceptable to God and the cross makes God beautiful to us.

In the new covenant, all has been changed—the veil has been rent and through it, believers have an unobstructed view of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And with this vision comes assurance of atonement, satisfaction, access to God, peace of conscience, liberty, and eternal life. If these spiritual riches are to be testified to your own soul as your eternal possessions, then you must make it a habit to behold the glory of the Lord! This Christ glory is a living and self-communicating power, transforming both those who mediate it (preach it), and those who receive it—from glory to glory into the likeness of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18) (Vos, p. 97).

You don't have to climb up to heaven to see that the sun is there—you are bathed in its warmth and brightness. You do not need to go into heaven to see if Christ is interceding for us. For, we behold Him in the Word interceding, and we can look into our own hearts. Are they quickened and inflamed in prayer? Can we cry "Abba, Father?" By this interceding of the Spirit who dwells within us, we may know Christ is interceding above for us. Faith is an act of recumbency, of reclining upon Christ, our 'new and living way' of access (Watson, p. 184).

Faith throws itself into Christ's arms. It says, "Christ is my priest, His blood is my sacrifice, His divine nature is my altar, and here I will rest" (Heb 13:10ff.). This faith is seen by its effects. It is a refining work and a resigning work. It purifies and refines. If Christ appears for us in heaven, then we must appear for Him on earth. He is not ashamed to carry our names on His breast. Shall we be ashamed of His truth? He lays out all His interest for us at the throne of grace. We must lay out all our interest for Him. Spend and be spent for Christ's glory. Let your heart study for Him, your hands work for Him, your tongue speak for Him (Mt 10:32-33). If Christ be an advocate for us in heaven, we must be His agents on earth acting vigorously for Him in every sphere. In a word, love your intercessor (1 Cor 16:22) (Watson, p. 185).

Beholding the Glory of the Lord is essential to our spiritual Health

It is the experimental knowledge of Christ's love and glory that gives us the disposition to love one another, and to bear one another's burdens (Phil 3:7-11). His love gives us the disposition to please and obey our Heavenly Father. His precepts give us the specifics of how to please God; He directs our love by His precepts. We must understand that our being "in Christ" is our strength. Our union with Christ is vital, living, transformative, and organic; it is not merely federal representation (Rom 5:17-19). The mind of Christ is available, the might of Christ is available—we don't have to fulfill a single command by ourselves, in our own strength. We operate in the realm of His grace full and free (Rom 5:1-2) (Wegter, *Christ's Pattern*, p. 35).

Paul gives us our pattern—for he joins the power of God in the cross of Christ with the believer's response of diligence and consecration. The power of the message of the cross believed produces consecration and devotion to Christ (Gal 2:20). Our ministries must be

characterized by both *proclamation* and *practice*, by *exhibiting* the supremacy and glory of our Savior and by *exhorting* believers to follow Him without limits or reservations (Rom 12:1-2).

Bare principles and moral injunctions will not produce lasting change in the listener. In the final analysis, our most impassioned pleas for our listeners to live righteously, to try harder, to stop sinning—must be joined to the display of the glory of Christ—or the flesh will conclude by default that *in itself* are the resources necessary for victory. We must preach to our hearers what we preach to ourselves—namely that Christ is the Divine Architect, and Source Person of the new man (Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:20-24) (*Christ's Pattern*, pp. 37-38).

Jonathan Edwards offers the scriptural insight that true spirituality is knowing, tasting, and seeing the beauty and glory of God's holiness. As we behold the glory of Christ we become increasingly acquainted with Christ's righteousness which has been imputed to us; our 'wardrobe of grace' (Thomas Goodwin). What sets the saint apart from all others is that he sees the glory or beauty of divine things. The Bible speaks of this glory as the central thing that makes God and His ways attractive—that lures humans in love to Him. This is the light that makes the Person of Christ so ravishingly beautiful, that He has drawn the hearts of millions to Himself for the last two millennia. This is the brightness that all saints see—in comparison to which, their own hearts appear filthy. Thus, the greatest gift to believers is that Christ is designated: "the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6) (G. R. McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards on Revival, Spiritual Discernment, and God's Beauty," *Reformation & Revival* 6:1 Winter 1997).

Only those who are committed to beholding the glory of Christ now are truly pressing on to that perfect view of the glory of Christ in heaven. Believers who are delighted to behold the glory of Christ experience Christ's transforming power now. Those who make it their full purpose of heart to behold His glory will be changed into His image (2 Cor 3:18). What is this transformation? *Answer:* when our trust in Christ is constantly exercised, virtue proceeds from Christ to purify our hearts, increase our holiness, strengthen our graces, and fill us with joy—at times, "joy inexpressible filled with glory" (1 Pet 1:8). Christ's glory beheld quickens the understanding at the same time as His love is communicated to the heart.

Beholding the Glory of the Lord equips the Church to fulfill her Mission

The Church thrives only when Christ has preeminence in all things. Christian people are right and correct when they hunger to hear how perfectly suited Christ is for their every need (Heb 7:26-27). Our personal teaching, preaching, and disciple-making must hold Him before Christian people. Set Him before them as their glorious "Source Person" (2 Pet 1:3) and it will cause them to hunger for Him, feed upon Him, yearn to be like Him, and obey Him in fulfilling the Great Commission. Our strength and energy for obedience is the Person of Christ. He is to be preeminent and central in all of ministry. He is to have first place (centrality) in everything (1 Cor 2:1-3) (Hywell Jones in Wegter, *Christ's Pattern for His Church*, p. 35).

What does the church become when deprived of the regular revelation of Christ's glory? In the first place, she becomes spiritually malnourished, for she was called into existence to glorify Christ and to commune with the Godhead by feeding upon Christ (Jn 6:53-57). It is by the church's intake of Christ that she is able to manifest Christ. Without this *feasting* upon the things of Christ (His glory), she will experience declension. Decline into cold formalism and

institutionalism is not foreign to any of us. For we have witnessed this same tendency toward lukewarm-ness in our own persons. We are all too familiar with the spiritual chill that can come over the soul, numbing its operations (Rev 2:4-5) (Wegter, *Christ's Pattern*, p. 43).

What is the solution? We must know why the gospel as the glory of Christ is the indispensable key to ongoing holiness. We must frequently meditate on the glory of Christ to be free from earthly cares and affections. Only the saved see and savor the glory of Christ. Beholding God's glory in the face of Christ ought to be the aim of gospel preaching in the church. If we conceal the glory of Christ, we cripple the sanctifying work of the Spirit who wishes to exalt Christ and reveal His glory to the saints (Jn 16:14-15). Christ as revealed in the gospel is our *worldview*; we are to see all of life through Him—all of our purpose, direction, and hope emanates from Him (John Piper, *God is the Gospel*).

Only a continual view of the glory of Christ will stir us up and encourage us to watch and continually fight against the deceitful workings of sin. To experience the things of Christ's glory has the power to make us want to do the things that please Him (i.e. build up one another).

Seeing Christ's glory is the only way to obtain holiness, comfort, and preparation for eternal life. The chief privilege in this life is to 'see' the glory of God in all His holiness displayed in Christ (Owen, *The Glory of Christ*). Our sin, guilt, lust, cravings, insecurities, and desire for happiness—all combine to make the soul restless. Christ has everything the sinner needs. In all things, He is perfectly suited to all the needs and cravings of the immortal soul. "All my springs are in Thee" (Ps 87:7) (A. A. Bonar, *The Person of Christ*).

To believingly 'see' God in our nature, dying and bleeding for us, eradicates our sinful fear and suspicion of God, and it sets us free for a corporate love of one another. Faith in the gospel opens up to the understanding Christ's full sacrifice, for Christ is the essence of the gospel. "If I see Him who is the atonement to be God-man, then I see an offering so vast and so extensive in its applications, that every crevice of the conscience must be reached" (Bonar).

We have no life in ourselves. The saints are dependent upon God for continual communication of His goodness and power to them. Christ continues to supply spiritual life, grace, and strength to His redeemed people (He is "Source Person"). The goodness, grace, life, light, mercy, and power which are the origin of the new creation are all of God's origin. It pleased the Father that the fullness of God's divine nature should be in Christ as Head of the church (Col 1:17-19). These qualities in Christ are communicated from Him to His church—He makes them available to the church. And in Him we are complete ('full') (Col 2:10). (John Owen). This revelation of Christ in the gospel is our 'food'—without a steady diet of Christ as He is gloriously displayed to the saints in the gospel, the church cannot fulfill her mission.

The power of Christ's love received has an effect upon our lives of enabling us to bear fruit for the glory of God. We must not be content to think of the love of Christ in a general way. Instead, we must dwell upon God's wisdom, goodness, and grace shown in eternal acts of His divine nature and pity—all given to us in Christ. In other words, beholding the glory of the Lord involves contemplating Christ's *fitness to save to the uttermost* (John Owen). The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. When He comes, and shows Himself amidst our meditation upon His glory and communion with Him, He brings with Him

peace, comfort, joy, and assurance (Rom 15:13). Christ's intent is that we *'feast'* with Him by means of these spiritual refreshments (Rev 3:20).

How are we to receive these things? Look on the glory of Christ by faith. Meditate on the glory of His unique nature—His humbling of Himself to come into the world—His present high position in heaven—His love and grace (Heb 4:14-16). Our hearts will be spiritually affected in some degree by His constraining love—which is the source of all our spiritual comforts and power. Christ knows perfectly the eternal blessedness which will be enjoyed by those who believe in Him (Jn 10:10) (John Owen).

Is it time for a 'glory checkup'? The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. Without a steady diet of Christ as He is displayed to the saints in the gospel, the church cannot fulfill her mission. This revelation of the glory of Christ in the gospel is the source of our ongoing transformation. We can say we believe the promises about the eternal glories of heaven, but where is the proof of our faith if we do not experience the enjoyment of these spiritual blessings here and now? (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1: 3-9). We must take a steady view of Christ's glory—and seek Him with all our heart. In this way alone will the believers who collectively make up the church recover from stagnancy. Christ's glory alone will bring us back to joy—to love in *our hearts*, in *our souls*, and in *our relationships* (Owen).

A radical change in our thinking will take place when we are corporately staggered by the 'glory story'—namely that God Himself is 'on mission' and has called the church to be on mission with Him. Prior to entering a discipleship relationship many believers may have felt no obligation to share their faith and make disciples. But, when a person enters a relationship of biblical discipleship, it is normal for them to believe they are sent on mission. For, God's glory story in Christ is designed to be lived out by His Body on earth. The glory of the Lord is intended to captivate us, and to thereby harness our gifts, talents, and service for the mission of God (*Christ's Pattern*, p. 65).

Beholding the Glory of the Lord lets us see the Destiny of the Church

The saints are not just detached observers of God's glory; for God not only displays His glory to them, but communicates His glory to them so that they become vessels of that glory (2 Thess 2:13-14). The Son is glorified in the creature by communicating Himself to the creature—so we are ultimately made like Him in holiness (Biehl).

The Bride will find her completeness in Christ—her perfections are communicated to her by her Savior so that ultimately, she has not spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). This is the great goal for which Christ gave Himself for her. “. . . just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25-27).

When we behold the glory of the Lord, it sharpens our focus on the destiny of the church. Through the act of beholding His glory, Christ's purpose of cleansing, sanctifying, perfecting, and presenting the church to Himself will increasingly animate our affections (Eph 5:26-27). It will renew us and consolidate our energies in the direction of our sanctification so that Christ's goal for His people will increasingly become our goal (a church “without spot or

wrinkle”). Beholding His glory motivates His people to holy living (see also 2 Pet 3:14-18).

Let us consider further what these words mean that Christ gave Himself to glorify His church, “[so that she will have] **no spot or wrinkle** or any such thing; but that she would be **holy and blameless?**” (5:27). Or, in the wording of another NT text, “. . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be **holy and blameless** before Him, in love” (Eph 1:4). This blameless state is known as ‘**gaining the glory of Christ**’ (2 Thess 2:14).

What does it mean that the church shall be ‘holy and blameless’? The sheer weight of this promise of Christlikeness is beyond our comprehension. For, the redeemed in heaven will have become vessels for the communicable attributes of God. The saints have to be glorified in order to experience the unbroken communication of God’s glory to them. Being glorified, means that having these virtues (or communicable attributes) through Christ is the only way to enjoy God perfectly in glory (Biehl). The communicable attributes of God include: love, joy, peace, knowledge, wisdom, purity, holiness, righteousness, etc.

By way of illustrating the greatness of this change which we must undergo in order to become be vessels of Christ’s glory, consider the following. What would have to take place in order for a terrorist to become a medical missionary? Or, for a ruthless slave trader to become a hymn writer? Well, in the second example, it did take place! What a testimony to the grace and glory of Christ that slave trader, John Newton became the author of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

We are seeing that God’s plan to extend His glory by giving Himself to sinners through Christ is a plan filled with boundless riches. For, believers are constantly renewed out of the experience of enjoying and possessing God. Enjoying God has a transforming effect. The veritable power of God is demonstrated in initially making man like Himself (Genesis 1:27). But, those who dwell together in the holy companionship of the new covenant grow like each other. This is a deep mystery. It has caused God’s gift of Himself to us to assume even the form of the incarnation, in which He became flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bones—so also in the opposite direction; it makes us believers partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:3)—putting upon our souls God’s image and superscription (2 Thess 2:13-14) (Vos, p. 21).

In opening this truth further, we affirm in the gospel that in the incarnation, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ becomes like us, except for sin. But, as stated—this goes in both directions, for in the work of redemption, by transformation and glorification, we become like Jesus (Rom 8:29-30). Oh, wonder of wonders, the church’s eternal, perfect, unbroken communion with God arises out the Son being made like us, and us being made like the Son (Eph 3:14-21; 5:25-27). Christ assumed the perfect image of God in order to redeem us (Col 1:15). His glory is linked to His being made like us, that we might ultimately be made like Him.

We have seen that feeding on the glory of Christ fits us for prayer, communion, worship, hope, and service. Just as the Israelites in the wilderness did not grow their own food, but merely gathered the manna, so also, it the privilege and duty of the saint to gather his soul’s daily food that his spirit might be fully nourished on the glory of the Lord.