

The Measure of Revelations

by John Fletcher

The sermon explores the nature of divine revelations, emphasizing the importance of spiritual readiness, faith, and the means of grace in experiencing God's presence.

Scripture: Psalm 42:1-2, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 5:6, John 14:21, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:8

Topics: "Divine Revelation", "Seeking God"

Description

John Fletcher explores the varying degrees of divine revelation experienced by individuals, emphasizing that God's manifestations are tailored to the spiritual state and capacity of each person. He explains that while some may receive overwhelming revelations, others may not, as God wisely considers our readiness and the potential for misuse of such gifts. Fletcher encourages believers to actively seek God through prayer, faith, and obedience, while also being patient and open to His timing and methods. He highlights the importance of recognizing and responding to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our pursuit of a deeper relationship with Christ. Ultimately, Fletcher reassures that God's grace and wisdom govern the measure of revelations granted to each soul.

Transcript

It is undeniable that some persons are blessed with clearer, stronger, or earlier manifestations than others; but why this is so, is one of the mysteries of God's Kingdom that shall not be explained until the day of judgment. In the meantime, the following reflections may possibly cast some light on the subject, and help you to affirm that the Lord does all things well.

1. Our Lord suits the manifestations of Himself to the various states of the Church. Under the Mosaic dispensation, which consisted much in externals, divine manifestations had-generally-some external circumstances. However, the Christian Church-being formed upon a more spiritual basis-is favoured with revelations of a more spiritual and internal nature.

2. The Lord considers us to be rational creatures, in a state of probation. Were he to indulge us with powerful, incessant, overwhelming revelations of Himself, He would be forcing us, rather than gently leading us, to repentance and obedience. Every day is not another day of Pentecost. Soon after the Son of God had seen the `heavens open', He was led into the wilderness to be tried by the devil; and so is His spouse after Him. Paul, by his observation that he was `not disobedient to the heavenly vision', and that he `kept his body under, lest he should become a castaway', intimates that his bright manifestation was

not of such continuance and force, and that he might have disobeyed as Jonah did in a similar situation. In fact, some have resisted bright manifestations in their day; in this connection, consider Cain, Judas, Balaam, Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Israelites who perished in the wilderness; and too many backsliders are resisting them now ! Even as there is a time of trial for faith, hope, and patience, there is also an abatement of the power which attends divine manifestations.

3. Our wise Redeemer proportions the means to the end. If the effect of a manifestation of His love is to be exceedingly great, the manifestation must be exceedingly bright. Suppose the burden of guilt and hardness, temptation and sorrow, under which one groans, is ten times greater than that which oppresses another, it is plain that the manifestation which is to remove the tenfold weight is to be ten times stronger. The same rule holds also with regard to sufferings and labours. The hotter the fight of afflictions which God's children are to go through, the stronger and brighter also is the celestial armour put upon them at the revelation of the Captain of their Salvation.

4. Neither can it be doubted that our good Lord, in fixing the degree of divine manifestation, has a particular respect to the state and capacity of the souls to whom He reveals Himself. The deeper that sinners mourn for Him the deeper He makes them drink of the cup of salvation at His appearing. Blessed are they that greatly hunger and thirst after righteousness; their souls are thereby greatly enlarged to receive the oil of gladness, and the wine of the kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those whose souls are as empty as the vessels of the desolate widow in the time of Elisha; when the heavenly prophet shall visit them, the streams of His fullness shall certainly flow according to the degree of their emptiness.

5. A skilful physician prescribes weaker or stronger medicines, according to the state of his patients; so does the Physician of souls. He weighs, if I may so speak, every dram of the heavenly power in the scales of goodness and wisdom. He knows what quantity of the heavenly cordial our spirits can bear, and will not-without the greatest care-put the strong wine of His powerful love into a weak vessel. He sees, that as some persons can stand - for a time -the sight of the noon-day sun, when others are hurt by the first appearance of a candle, so some Christians can bear the strong beams of His gracious presence, while others are almost overpowered by His fainter rays.

6. If some live and die without manifestations of the Redeemer's love and glory, the reasons of it may possibly be found in the depths of His justice and goodness. They grieve, and quench the Holy Spirit, who convinces the world of sin; and it is very fit they should not have him as a Comforter, whom they obstinately reject as a Reprover. Add to this, our Lord's ability to foresee how such people, if favoured with tokens of His more distinguishing condescension, would only abuse them (as Cain and the Pharisees did); knowing their intentions, He does not put them to the trial, nor allows them to add to their guilt by trampling mercy and love under foot. In other words, this seeming severity is, in fact, true kindness.

7. The Lord not only proportions the degree of His powerful appearance to the weakness of our souls, but also to that of our bodies. He knows what we are made of, and remembers that we are but flesh. If the natural sun (that glorious emblem of our Emmanuel) were to come close to our earth and shine as bright as possible, the insufferable blaze and heat would instantly blind and consume us. In simple comparison, if our bright Sun of Righteousness were to manifest His unclouded glory, or to appear without the tempering medium of His manhood, no flesh could support the sight. The brain, unable to bear the high operations of the soul, would snap; the heart of the wicked, swelled with intolerable pangs of fear, and that of the righteous, dilated by overwhelming transports of joy, would instantly burst. God, therefore, is aware that no man can see His face, without some dimming veil, and live. It was with this in mind that Manoah

and others, after the Lord had manifested Himself to them, showed anxiety for their human lives.

8. Perhaps this may help us to account for the reason why the Lord still hides His face from some of His sincere seekers. They sit begging by the wayside of His ordinances, and yet He does not pass by in such a manner that their spiritual sight is restored, in order that they might know Him. In all probability He designs for them a manifestation which is more bright than they are capable of bearing. When their hearts are strong enough for the heavenly vision, it will be granted to them; let them only wait for it. Let patience have her perfect work, and let faith in God's Word be tried to the uttermost; then, He that cometh, will come, and will not tarry; He will bring His reward with Him, and one moment of His presence will make them abundantly glad that they waited for an age. Were He to appear before they were prepared, by the humiliation of repentance and the patience of hope, they would be like those carnal Israelites, who-far from being able to commune with God-could not so much as speak to Moses (after he came down from the mount) without first obliging him to put a veil over his shining face.

APOSTOLIC REVELATIONS

Peter, James, and John, were-it seems-the foremost of the Apostles in spiritual strength and boldness; nevertheless, the manifestation which they had of Christ on the mount of transfiguration almost overwhelmed them. Their bodies sank under the weight of glory, and when they came out of their sleep (or trance) they could not recover themselves; they knew not what they said. This had happened previously to Daniel, and later to John the beloved Apostle, who, when he saw his Saviour with some additional beams of glory, fell at His feet as though dead. Paul not only lost his sight on such an occasion, but was near to losing his life-being unable to take any refreshment for three days and three nights. It is also generally supposed that Moses actually died under the overpowering displays of the Redeemer's love. Hence, we learn that God's way and time are best, and that we are to leave both to His gracious wisdom; He using the means by which He has promised to manifest Himself to those who diligently seek Him.

MAN'S PART IN THIS

If you desire to know the Lord in a more intimate way, you will need to use what means are available to you. The agent or author of every divine manifestation is the eternal God, one in three and three in one. The Father reveals His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ shows Himself, and the Holy Spirit freely testifies of Him. Nevertheless, the Scriptures-in general-attribute the wonder of divine manifestations to the blessed Spirit. No man can, experimentally, say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. It is His peculiar office to convince the world of righteousness, by enabling us to know the Lord our Righteousness in a saving way. 'He shall glorify me' said Christ 'for He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you'; and this He does, without any merit of ours, by the means which God has appointed, and which He enables us to use aright.

The means are both outward and inward; the outward are what the Church calls 'The Means of Grace' which are: particularly hearing or reading God's Word, partaking of the sacraments, and praying together with one accord for the manifestation of the Spirit as the early Christians did. These means are to be used with the greatest diligence, but not to be altogether trusted; the only proper object of our confidence is God Himself, who works all in all. It was not Moses' rod which parted the Red Sea, but that almighty arm which once divided water from water without a rod. Nevertheless, Moses could not throw his rod away, under the pretence of trusting in God alone, even as he could not rely on the mere instrument, as if divine power resided in it.

Though the Lord works by means, in general, He ties Himself to none of them, and sometimes works without any. The same Spirit which fell upon Cornelius while Peter preached, fell upon Peter on the day of Pentecost, without any preaching. And the same Lord who opened Lydia's heart by the ministry of Paul, opened the heart of Paul by the sole exertion of His own power. From this we learn that, whilst on the one hand we must not, like the profane and the extremists, tempt the Lord by neglecting the use of any of the means He has appointed, so on the other hand, we must beware of confining God to particular means, times, and places, in the way that the bigoted and superstitious do. Remember that when we are cut off from all outward means, it is our privilege to wait for the immediate display of God's arm, in the use of the inward means.

Concerning these inward means, the first is to believe that there will be a performance of the Lord's promise, and that He is both willing and able to manifest Himself to us, in a way that He does not do to the world; this is the very root of prayer, fervency, hope, and expectation ! Without the action of this preparatory faith, the soul droops and becomes an easy prey to despondency, vanity, or sloth. Where this talent is buried, the Lord seldom works. 'Believest thou, that I am able to do this for you?' is generally the first question He puts to the seeker's heart. If it is answered in the negative, He can do no great miracle, because of this unbelief. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Paul was blessed with a revelation of the Son of God, without any previous desire or expectation of it. In him and some others it could be said that 'I was found of them that sought Me not; I was manifested to them that asked not after me.' However, in general - where the gospel is preached-the Lord will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do this; and if He visits any with conviction, as He did Paul, it is only to make them pray as that Apostle did, until He manifests Himself by the Holy Ghost, in consolation and love.

The second inward means by which one may encourage the manifestation of Christ is resignation as to the particular manner, time, and place of it. Through patience, as well as faith and prayer, we inherit the promised blessing. Some, trusting in their carnal wisdom and intellect, mark out the way in which salvation must come to their hearts; but the Lord generally disappoints these proud seekers, for believers are not born 'of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' The Jews expected the Messiah, and in this they were right; but they expected Him in their own way, and here they stumbled and fell. While they looked for a mighty conqueror who would come to make them great, they overlooked the lowly Prince of Peace, who came to make them good; and-finally-they crucified Him as a base imposter. This disposition is in us all by nature; hence Christ is commonly rejected in the Spirit by Christians, as He was in the flesh by the Jews. We would have Him come in order to give us an idle rest, but He appears with the intention of teaching us to deny ungodliness and to fight the good fight of faith; this we do not find palatable. Our nature wants us to step up into a throne at once, but Christ offers first to nail us to the tree and to crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts; from this, we shrink as from the grave. We expect to be carried at once to the top of Mount Tabor, to see unutterable glory; He leads us to Gethsemane to watch and to pray, or else to Calvary to suffer and to die with him; at this we recoil, and do not choose to know Him. Our impatience dictates that He shall instantaneously turn our midnight into noon-day; but instead of manifesting Himself quickly like the meridian sun, He may, perhaps, appear only as the morning star. This defeats us; we despise the day of small things and do not consider that so meagre an appearance is worthy of our notice and thanks.

If you, reader, ever seek a personal knowledge of Jesus, never stop seeking Him until you witness your sun going down no more. However, in the meantime, never slight the least ray of the heavenly light; the least of these may open into the broad day of eternity. Cease from your own false wisdom, and become as

a little child, or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven, nor see the King in His beauty.

The third and last inward means that I would recommend, is a tender regard for the reproofs of the Spirit. This means a constant attention to the drawings of the Father, obedience to the calls these have to secret prayer, together with a fear of depending upon such duties and not solely upon the faithfulness of Jesus. Whoever follows these directions-according to the grace given to himwill, of course, cease from outward evil and do-as he can-the little good his hands find to do. This is a better way of waiting for the revelation of Christ, than to lie down in dejection and hopeless unbelief. All those who sullenly bury their own talent, and wilfully retain the accursed thing, complain in vain that their Lord makes long tarrying. They obstinately grieve His convincing Spirit and then absurdly clamour (because He does not reward them for it) for the comforts of His heavenly presence. Let us not be so unreasonable. Let us strive to enter in at the strait gate, remembering that many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able. However let us strive lawfully, not making for ourselves a righteousness of our own seeking by our manner of knocking and striving. The sun does not shine because we deserve it through drawing back our curtains, but because it is in its nature so to shine. Jesus visits us, not because of any merit in our prayers or striving, but for His own sake - because His truth and compassion fail not. Free grace opens the door of mercy, not to works and merit, but to want and misery. That you and I may knock and press in, with all other needy, penitent, believing sinners, is the earnest wish of a heart which prompts me to write as I have done.

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