

Communion With Christ

by John Owen

Christ delights in his saints and communicates his secrets to them, and the saints delight in Christ and seek to know his mind and will.

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Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker discusses the duty of faithful watchmen to assist troubled souls and guide them to consolation. The speaker describes the condition of a soul that has had sweet enjoyment of Jesus but is now feeling his absence. The soul inquires after Jesus, asking for help and guidance. The speaker emphasizes the importance of waiting patiently for Christ's manifestation, even when all other means fail, and encourages the soul to hold fast to Jesus once he is found.

Transcript

Communion with Christ from the book Communion with God by Dr. John Owen. The communion begun, as before declared, between Christ and the soul is in the next place carried on by suitable consequential affections, affections suiting such a relation. Christ, having given himself to the soul, loves the soul, and the soul, having given itself to Christ, loves him also.

Christ loves his own, yea, loves him to the end. John 13 1. And the saints, they love Christ, they love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Ephesians 6 24.

Now the love of Christ in which he follows his saints consists in these four things. First, delight. Secondly, valuation.

Thirdly, pity or compassion and bounty. The love also of the saints to Christ may be referred to these four heads, delight, valuation, chastity, duty. Two of these are of the same kind and two distinct, as is required in this relation, in which all things stand not on equal terms.

1. The first thing on the part of Christ is delight. Delight is the flowing of love and joy, the rest in complacency of the mind, in a suitable, desirable good enjoyed. Now Christ delights exceedingly in his saints.

As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. Isaiah 62 5. Hence he calls the day of his espousals the days of the gladness of his heart. Song of Solomon 3 11.

It is known that usually this is the most unmixed delight that the sons of men are in their pilgrimage made partakers of. The delight of the bridegroom in the day of his espousals is the height of what an expression of delight can be carried to. This is in Christ answerable to the relation he takes us into.

His heart is glad in us without sorrow, and every day while we live is his wedding day. It is said of him, Zephaniah 3 17, the Lord thy God in the midst of thee, that is dwelling amongst us, taking our nature, John 1 14, is mighty, he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing, which is a full description of delight in all the parts of it, joy and exultation, rest and complacency. I rejoiced, he says, in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.

Proverbs 8 31. The thoughts of communion with the saints were the joy of his heart from eternity. On the compact and agreement that was between his father and him, that he should divide a portion with the strong, and save a remnant for his inheritance, his soul rejoiced in the thoughts of that pleasure and delight which he would take in them, when he should actually take them into communion with himself.

Therefore in the preceding verse it is said, he was by him as one brought up with him. The word taken actively signifies him whom another takes into his care to breed up and disposes of things for his advantage. So did Christ take us then into his care, and rejoiced in the thoughts of the execution of his trust.

Concerning them, he says, here will I dwell, and here I will make my habitation forever. For them he is chosen for his temple and his dwelling place, because he delights in them. This makes him take them so near himself in every relation.

As he is God, they are his temple. As he is a king, they are his subjects. He is the king of saints.

As he is a head, they are his body. He is the head of the church. As he is a firstborn, he makes them his brethren.

He is not ashamed to call them brethren. I shall choose out one particular from among many as an instance for the proof of this thing, and that is, Christ reveals his secrets, his mind, to his saints, and enables them to reveal the secrets of their hearts to him, an evident demonstration of great delight. It was Samson's carnal delight in Delilah that prevailed with him to reveal to her those things which are of greatest concernment to him.

He will not hide his mind from her, though it cost him his life, and not entertain him with things common and vulgarly known. And therefore I have chosen this instance from amongst a thousand that might be given of this delight of Christ and his saints. He then communicates his mind to his saints and to them only, his mind, the counsel of his love, the thoughts of his heart, the purposes of his bosom for our eternal good, his mind, the ways of his grace, the workings of his spirit, the rule of his scepter, and the obedience of his gospel.

All spiritual revelation is by Christ. He is a true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. John 1 9. He is the day spring, the day star, and the sun, so that it is impossible any light should be but by him.

From him it is that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. And he shows them his covenant. Psalm 25 14.

As he expresses it at large. John 15 14 and 15. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth. But I have called you friends for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. He makes them as his friends and uses them as friends, as bosom friends, in whom he is delighted.

He makes known of his mind to them everything that his Father has committed to him as mediator to be revealed. Acts 20 24. And the apostle declares how this is done.

1 Corinthians 2 10 and 11. God hath revealed these things to us by his Spirit. For we have received him that we might know the things that are freely given us of God.

He sends us his Spirit as he promised to make known his mind to his saints and to lead them into all truth. And hence the apostle concludes we have known the mind of Christ. Verse 16.

For he uses us as friends and declares it to us. John 1 18. There is not anything in the heart of Christ in which these his friends are concerned that he does not reveal to them.

All his love, his good will, the secrets of his covenant, the paths of obedience, the mystery of faith is told them. And all this is spoken in opposition to unbelievers with whom he hath no communion. These know nothing of the mind of Christ as they ought.

The natural man receiveth not the things that are of God. 1 Corinthians 2 14. There is a wide difference between understanding the doctrine of the scripture as in the letter and a true knowing the mind of Christ.

This we have by special unction from Christ. 1 John 2 27. We have an unction from the Holy One and we know all things.

1 John 2 20. Now the things which in this communion Christ reveals to them that he delights in may be referred to these two heads. 1 Himself.

2 His kingdom. 1 Himself. John 14 21.

He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him, manifest myself in all my graces, desirableness, and loveliness. He shall know me as I am, and such I will be unto him, a Saviour, a Redeemer, the Chiefest of ten thousand. He shall be acquainted with the true worth and value of the pearl of price.

Let others look upon him as having neither form nor comeliness, as no way desirable. He will manifest himself and his excellencies unto them in whom he is delighted, that they shall see him altogether lovely. He will veil himself to all the world, but the saints with open face shall behold his beauty and his glory, and so be translated into the image of the same glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3.18. 2 His kingdom. They shall be acquainted with the government of his Spirit in their hearts. It is also with his rule and the administration of authority in his word, and among his churches.

Thus in the first place does he manifest his delight in his saints. He communicates his secrets to them. He gives them to know his person, his excellencies, his grace, his love, his kingdom, his will, the riches of his goodness, and the bowels of his mercy, more and more, when the world shall neither see nor know any such thing.

2 He enables his saints to communicate with their mind, to reveal their souls to him, that so they may walk together as intimate friends. Christ knows the minds of all. He knows what is in man, and needs not that any man testify of him.

John 2.25. He searches the hearts, and trieth the reins of all. Revelation 2.23. But all do not know how to communicate their mind to Christ. It will not avail a man at all that Christ knows his mind, for so he does of everyone, whether he will or not.

But that a man can make his heart known to Christ, this is consolation. Hence the prayers of the saints are incense, odors, and those of others are howling, cutting off a dog's neck, offering of swine's blood, and abomination unto the Lord. Now three things are required to enable a man to communicate his heart to the Lord Jesus.

First, assistance for the work, for of ourselves we cannot do it. And this the saints have by the Spirit of Jesus. Romans 8.26.27. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searches the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. All endeavours, all attempts for communion with God, without the supplies of the Spirit of supplications, without his effectual working in the heart is of no value, nor to any purpose. And this opening of our hearts and bosoms to the Lord Jesus is that in which he is exceedingly delighted.

Hence is that affectionate call of his to us, to be treating with him on this account. Song of Solomon 2.14. O my dove, that art in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. When the soul on any account is driven to hide itself in any neglected condition, in the most unlikely place of abode, then doth it call for this communication of itself by prayers to him, for which he gives the assistance of the Spirit mentioned.

Number two. A way in which to approach to God with our desires. This also we have by him provided for us.

John 14.5 and 6. Thomas saith unto Jesus, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, no man cometh unto the Father but by me. That way which we had of going to God at our creation is quite shut up by sin. The sword of the law, which hath fire put into it by sin, turns every way, to stop all passages, to communion with God.

Jesus Christ has consecrated a new and living way for the saints, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. Hebrews 10.20. He has consecrated and set it apart for believers, and for them alone. Others pretend to go to God with their prayers, but they come not nigh him.

How can they possibly come to the end who go not in the way? Christ only is the way to the throne of grace. None comes to God but by him. By him we have access in one spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 2.18. These two things, then, the saints have for the opening of their hearts at the throne of grace, assistance and a way, the assistance of the Spirit, without which they are nothing, and the way of Christ's mediation, without which God is not to be approached 3. Boldness to go to God. The voice of sinners in themselves, if once acquainted with the terror of the Lord, is, Who among us shall dwell with the

devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Isaiah 33.14. And no marvel, shame and trembling before God, are the proper issues of sin. God will revenge that carnal, atheistical boldness which sinners out of Christ do use towards him.

But we have now boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, we may draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith. Hebrews 10.19.20. The truth is, such is the glory and terror of the Lord, such the infinite perfection of his holiness, that on clear sight of it he will make the soul conclude that of itself it cannot serve him, nor will it be to any advantage. But add to the fierceness of his destruction once to draw nigh to him.

It is in Christ alone, and on the account alone of his oblation and intercession, that we have any boldness to approach to him. And these three advantages have the saints of communicating their minds to the Lord Christ, which he has provided for them, because he delights in them. To touch a little by the way, because this is of a great importance, I will instance in one of these, as I might in every one, that you may see the difference between a spiritual revealing of our minds to Christ in this acceptable manner, and that praying upon conviction which others practice.

And this shall be from the first, namely, the assistance we have by the Spirit first. The Spirit of Christ reveals to us our own wants, that we may reveal them unto him. We know not what we should pray for as we ought.

Romans 8, 26. No teachings under those of the Spirit of God are able to make our souls acquainted with their own wants, its burdens, its temptations. For a soul to know its wants, its infirmities, is a heavenly discovery.

He that hath this assistance, his prayer is more than half made before he begins to pray. His conscience is affected with what he hath to do. His mind and spirit contend within him.

There especially, where he finds himself most straightened, he brings his burden on his shoulders, and unloads himself on the Lord Jesus. He finds, not by a perplexing conviction, but a holy sense and weariness of sin, where he is dead, where dull and cold, wherein unbelieving, wherein tempted above all his strength, and where the light of God's countenance is lacking. In all these a soul has a sense of, by the Spirit, an inexpressible sense and experience.

Without this, prayer is not prayer. Men's voices may be heard, but they speak not in their hearts. Sense of want is a spring of desire, natural of natural, spiritual of spiritual.

Without this sense, given by the Holy Ghost, there is neither desire nor prayer. Secondly, the expressions, or the words of such persons, come exceedingly short of the laboring of their hearts, and therefore in and after their supplications. The Spirit makes intercession with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered.

Some men's words go exceedingly beyond their hearts. Did their spirits come up to their expressions? It were well. He that hath this assistance can provide no clothing, that is, large and broad enough to set forth the desires of his heart.

And therefore, in the clothes of his best and most fervent supplications, such a person finds a double dissatisfaction in them. 1. That they are not a righteousness to be rested on, that if God mark what is in them amiss, they cannot abide the trial. 2. That his heart in them is not poured out, nor delivered in any

proportion to the holy desires and laborings that were conceived therein.

Though he may in Christ have great refreshment by them, the more they, the saints, speak, the more they find they have left unspoken. 3. The intercession of the saints thus assisted is according to the mind of God, that is, they are guided by the Spirit to make requests for those things to God, which it is his will they should desire, which he knows to be good for them, useful and suitable to them, in the condition in which they are. There are many ways in which we may know when we make our supplications according to the will of God.

I shall instance only in one, that is, when we do it according to the promise, when our prayers are regulated by the promise, we make them according to the will of God. So David, in Psalm 119.49, remembers the word upon which thou hast caused me to hope, he prays and regulates his desire by the word of promise, in which he had trusted. But yet men may ask that which is in the promise, and yet not have their prayers regulated by the promise.

They may pray for what is in the promise, but not as it is in the promise. So James says some ask and receive not, because they ask amiss, that they may spend it on their lusts. 4. Though the things which God would have us ask be requested, yet if not according as he would have us do it, we ask amiss.

Two things are required that we may pray for the things in the promise, as they are in the promise. First, that we look upon them as promised, and promised in Christ. That is, that all the reason we have, whence we hope for attaining the thing we ask for, is from the mediation and purchase of Christ, in whom all the promises are yea and amen.

This it is to ask the Father in Christ's name. God is the Father, the fountain, and Christ is the procurer of them. Secondly, that we ask for them, for the end of the promise, not to spend it on our lusts.

When we ask pardon for sin, with secret reserves in our hearts to continue in sin, we ask the choice of mercy of the covenant to spend it on our lusts. The end of the promise, the apostle tells us, 2 Corinthians 7.1, having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. When we ask what is in the promise, as it is in the promise, to this end of the promise, our supplications are according to the will of God.

This is the first conjugal affection that Christ exercises towards believers. He delights in them, which that he does is evident, as upon other considerations innumerable, so from the instance given. And return, hereunto, for the carrying on of the communion between them, the saints delight in Christ.

He is their joy, their crown, their rejoicing, their life, food, health, strength, desire, righteousness, salvation, blessedness. Without him they have nothing, in him they shall find all things. Galatians 5.14 God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He hath from the foundation of the world been the hope, expectation, desire, and delight of all believers. The promise of him was all, and it was enough, that God gave Adam in his inexpressible distress, to relieve and comfort him. Genesis 3.15 Eve perhaps supposed that the promised seed had been born in her firstborn, when she said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.

And this was a matter of her joy. Genesis 4.1 Lamech, having Noah given to him as a type of Christ, and salvation by him, cries out, This same shall comfort us concerning our work, and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed. Genesis 5.29 He rejoices in him who is to take away

the curse, by being made a curse for us.

When Abraham was in the height of his glory, returning from the conquest of the kings of the east, that came against the confederate kings of the vale of Sodom, God appears to him with a glorious promise. Genesis 15.1 Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. What now could a soul more desire? Alas, he cries, as Reuben afterward, upon the loss of Joseph.

The child is not, and whither shall I go? Verse 2 Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? Thou hast promised, that in my seed shall all the earth be blessed. If I have not that seed, ah, what good will all other things do me? This it is said, that he rejoiced to see the day of Christ. He sought, and was glad.

John 8.56 The thoughts of the coming of Christ, which he looked on at the distance of two thousand years, was a joy and delight of his heart. Jacob, blessing his sons, lifted up his spirit when he comes to Judah, in whom he considered the Shiloh to come. Genesis 49.8-9 And a little after, worried with the foresight and consideration of the distresses of his posterity, this he diverts to for his relief, is that great delight of his soul.

I have waited for thy salvation, O God, for him who was to be the salvation of his people. But it would be endless to instance and particulars. Old Simeon sums up the whole.

Christ is God's salvation, and Israel's glory. Luke 2.30-31 And whatever was called the glory of old, it was either himself or a type of him. The glory of man is their delight.

Hence Haggai 2.7 He is called the desire of all nations. Him whom their soul loves and delights in, they desire and long after. So as the saints delight in him made a description of him by way of eminence.

Malachi 3.1 The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. He whom ye seek, whom ye delight in, is the description of Christ. He is their delight and desirable one, the person of their desire, to fix on something in particular.

In that pattern of communion with Jesus Christ which we have in the Song of Solomon, this is abundantly insisted on. The spouse tells us that she sits down under his shadow with great delight. Canticles 2.3 In this delight, to be vigorous and active, she manifests several ways in which we should labor to find our hearts in like manner towards him.

1. By her exceeding great care to keep us company and society, whence once she had obtained it. 2.7 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the rows and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my soul till he please. Having obtained sweet communion with Christ, described in the verses foregoing, of which before, here she expresses her delight in it, and desire of the continuance of it.

And therefore, following on the allusion formerly insisted on, she speaks as one would do to her companion, as one that had rest with one she loved. I charge you, by all that is dear to you, by the things you most delight in, which among the creatures are most lovely, all the pleasant and all desirable things that you can think of, that ye disturb him not. The sum of her aim and desire is, that nothing may fall out, nothing of sin or provocation happen, that may occasion Christ to depart from her, or to remove from that dispensation in which he seemed to take that rest in her.

O stir him not up until he please. That is, love itself in the abstract, to express earnest affection, for so that word is often used. When once a soul of a believer has obtained sweet and real communion with Christ, it looks about him, watches all temptations, all ways in which sin might approach to disturb him in his enjoyment of his dear Lord and Saviour, his rest and desire.

How does it charge itself not to omit anything, not to do anything that may interrupt the communion obtained? And because the common entrance of temptations, which tend to the disturbance of that rest and complacency which Christ takes in the soul, is from delightful diversions, from actual communion with him, therefore is desire strong and active, that the companions of such a soul, those with whom it does converse, would not, by their proposals or allurements, divert it into any such frame as Christ cannot delight nor rest in. A believer that has gotten Christ in his arms is like one that has found great spoils, or a pearl of price. He looks about him every way, and fears everything that may deprive him of it.

Riches make men watchful, and the actual sensible possession of him, and whom are all the riches and treasure of God, will make men look about them for the keeping of him. The line of choicest communion is the line of the greatest spiritual solicitousness. Carelessness in the enjoyment of Christ, pretended, is a manifest evidence of a false heart.

2. The spouse manifests her delight in him by the utmost impatience of his absence, with desire still of nearer communion with him. CHAPTER VIII SIX Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm, for love is strong as death. Jealousy is cruel as the grave.

The coals thereof are coals of fire, which have the most vehement flame. The illusion is doubtless from the high priests of the Jews, in a spiritual representation of the church before God. He had a breastplate, which he is said to wear on his heart, Exodus 28.29, in which the names of the children of Israel were engraven, after the manner of seals or signets, and he bare them for a memorial before the Lord.

He had alike also upon his shoulders, or on his arms, verses 11 and 12, both representing the priesthood of Christ, who bares the names of all his before the Father and the Holy of Holies, Hebrews 9.24. Now the seal on the heart is near, inward, tender, love and care, which gives an impression and image on the heart of the thing so loved. Set me, saith the spouse, as a seal upon thine heart. Let me be constantly fixed in thy most tender and affectionate love.

Let me always have a place in thine heart. Let me have an engraving, a mighty impression of love, upon thine heart, that shall never be obliterated. The soul is never satisfied with thoughts of Christ's love to it.

Oh, that it were more, that it were more, that I were as a seal on his heart, is its language. The soul knows, indeed, on serious thoughts, that the love of Christ is inconceivable, and cannot be increased, but it would feign work up itself to an apprehension of it. And therefore she adds here, Set me as a seal upon thine arm.

The heart is a fountain, but close and hidden, The arm is manifestation and power. Let, saith the spouse, thy love be manifested to me in thy tender and powerful persuasion of me. Two things are evident in this request.

The continual mindfulness of Christ of the soul is having its condition still in his eye, engraven on his arm, Isaiah 49, 15 and 16, with the exalting of his power for the preservation of it, suitable to the love of his heart. Unto it, in a manifestation of the hidden love and care of the heart of Christ to the soul, being made

visible on his arm, or evident by the fruit of it. This is that which she would be assured of, and without a sense whereof there is no rest to be obtained.

The reason she gives of this earnestness in her supplications is that which principally evinces her delight in him. Love is strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave, or hard as hell. This is the intendment of what is so loftily set out by so many metaphors in this and the following verse.

I am not able to bear the workings of my love to thee, unless I may always have society and fellowship with thee. There is no satisfying of my love without it. It is as the grave that still says, Give, give.

Death is not satisfied without its prey. If it have not all, it hath nothing. Let what will happen.

If death has not its whole desire, it has nothing at all. Nor can it be withstood in its appointed season. No ransom will be taken.

So is my love. If I have thee not holy, I have nothing. Nor can all the world bribe it to a diversion.

It will be no more turned aside than death in its time. Alas, I am not able to bear my jealous thoughts. I fear thou dost not love me, that thou hast forsaken me, because I know I deserve not to be beloved.

These thoughts are hard as hell. They give no rest to my soul. If I find not myself on thy heart in arm, I am as one that lies down in a bed of coals.

This also argues a holy greediness of delight. 3. She further manifests this by her solicitousness, trouble, and perplexity, in his loss and with drawings. Men be well to loss of that whose whole enjoyment they delight in.

We easily bear the absence of that whose presence is not delightful. This state of the spouse is discovered. Canticle 3 1-3 By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth.

I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways. I will seek him whom my soul loveth.

I sought him, but I found him not. To watchmen that go about the city found me. To whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It is night now with the soul, a time of darkness and trouble or affliction.

Whenever Christ is absent, it is night with a believer. He is a sun. If he go down upon them, if his beams be eclipsed, if in his light they see no light, it is all darkness with them.

Here, whether the coming of the night of any trouble on her made her discover Christ's absence, or the absence of Christ made at night with her, it is not expressed. I rather think the latter, because setting that aside, all things seem to be well with her. The absence of Christ will indeed make it night, dark as darkness itself, in the midst of all other glowing consolations.

But is the spouse contented with this dispensation? She is upon her bed, that is, of ease. The bed indeed sometimes signifies tribulation, Revelation 2.22. But in this book, everywhere, rest and contentment. Here is not the least intimation of any tribulation, but what is in the lack of Christ.

But in the greatest peace and opportunity of ease and rest, a believer finds none in the absence of Christ. Though he be on his bed, having nothing to disquiet him, he rests not, if Christ his rest be not there. She

sought him, seeking of Christ by night, on the bed, that is, alone, in immediate inquest, and in the dark, hath two parts, searching of our own souls for the cause of his absence, secondly, searching the promises for his presence.

First, the soul finding not Christ present in his wanted manner, warming, cherishing, reviving it with love, near to it, supping with it, always filling it thoughts with himself, dropping myrrh and sweet tastes of love into it, but on the contrary, that other thoughts crowd in and perplex the heart, and Christ is not nigh when inquired after, it presently inquires into the cause of all this, calls itself to an account, what it hath done, how it hath behaved itself, that it is not with it as at other times, that Christ has withdrawn himself, and is not nigh to it in the wanted manner. Here it accomplishes a diligent search, it considers the love, tenderness, and kindness of the Lord Jesus, what delight he takes in abiding with his saints, so that his departure is not without cause and provocation. How saith it, have I demeaned myself, that I have lost my beloved? Where have I been wandering after other lovers? And when the miscarriage is found out, it abounds in revenge and indignation.

Secondly, having driven this to some issue, the soul applies itself to the promises of the covenant, in which Christ is most graciously exhibited to it, considers one, ponders another, to find a taste of him, it considers diligently if it can see the delightful countenance and favor of Christ in them or not. But now, if, as it often falls out, the soul finds nothing but the carcass, but the bare letter in the promise, if it comes to it as to the grave of Christ, of which it may be said, not in itself, but in respect of the seeking soul, he is risen, he is not here. This amazes the soul, and it knows not what to do.

As a man that has a jewel of great price, having no occasion to use it, lays it aside as he supposes in a safe place. In an agony and an extremity of want, going to seek for his jewel, he finds it not in the place he expected, and is filled with amazement, and knows not what to do. So is it with the pearl of the gospel.

After a man has sold all that he has for it, and enjoyed it for a season, then to have it missing at a time of need, it must needs perplex him. So was it with the spouse here. I sought him, she says, but I did not find him, a thing which not seldom befalls us in our communion with Christ.

But what does she do now? Does she give over and search no more? Nay, but she says in verse 2, I will arise, I will not so give over, I must have Christ, or I die. I will now arise, or let me arise, and go about this business. She resolved to put herself upon another course, a more vigorous inquest.

I will arise and make use of other means besides those of private prayer, meditation, self-searching, and inquiring into the promises which she had insisted on before. It carries first resolution, and a zealous, violent casting off that frame into which she had lost her love. I will arise, I will not rest in this frame, I am undone if I do.

So sometimes God calls his church to arise and shake itself out of the dust. Abide not in that condition. Secondly, diligence.

I will now take another course. I will leave no way unattempted, no means untried, in which I may possibly recover communion with my beloved. This is a condition of a soul that does not find the wanted presence of Christ in his private and retired inquiries, dull in prayer, wandering in meditations, rare in thoughts of him.

I will not bear this frame. Whatever way God has appointed, I will in his strength vigorously pursue, until this frame be altered, and I find my beloved. This is a condition of a soul that does not find the wanted presence of Christ in his private and retired inquiries, dull in prayer, wandering in meditations, rare in thoughts of him.

I will not bear this frame. Whatever way God hath appointed, I will in his strength vigorously pursue, until this frame be altered, and I find my beloved. Then the way she puts herself upon is to go about the city, not to insist upon particulars, nor to strain the parts of the allegory too far.

The city here intended is the city of God, the Church, and the passing through the broad and narrow streets. It is a diligent inquiry that the spouse makes, and all the paths and ordinances given unto it. This, then, is the next thing the soul addresses itself to in the want of Christ.

When it finds him not in any private endeavors, it makes vigorous application to the ordinances of public worship, in prayer, in preaching, in administration of the seals, doth it look after Christ. Indeed, the great inquiry the souls of believers make in every ordinance is after Christ. So much as they find of him, so much sweetness and refreshment have they in no more, especially when, under any desertion, they rise up to this inquiry, they listen to every word, to every prayer, to find if anything of Christ, any light from him, any life, any love, appears to them.

Oh, that Christ would at length meet me in this or that sermon, and recover my poor heart to some sight of his love, to some taste of kindness. The solicitousness of a believer in his inquest after Christ, when he finds not his presence, either for grace or consolation, as in former days, is indeed inexpressible. Much of the frame of such a heart is couched in the redoubling of the expression, I sought him, I sought him, setting out an inconceivable passion and suitably industrious desire.

Thus being disappointed at home, the spouse proceeds. But yet see the event of this also. She sought him, but found him not.

It does sometimes so fall out, all will not do. They shall seek him, and not find him. They shall not come nigh him.

Let them that enjoy anything of the presence of Christ take heed what they do. If they provoke him to depart, if they lose him, it may cost them many a bitter inquiry before they find him again. When a soul prays and meditates, searches the promises in private, when it is with earnestness and diligence, attends all ordinances in public, and all to get one glimpse of the face of Jesus Christ in all in vain, it is a sad condition.

What now follows in this estate? Verse 3. The watchman found me, and so on. That these watchmen of the city of God are the watchmen and officers of the church is confessed. And it is of sad consideration that the Holy Ghost does sometimes in this book take notice of them on no good account.

Plainly chapter 5, 7 they turn persecutors. It is a duty indeed of faithful watchmen to take notice of poor, troubled, deserted souls. Not to keep at a distance, but to be willing to assist.

And a truly pressed soul on the account of Christ's absence cannot cover its love, but must be inquiring after him. Saw he him whom my soul loveth? This is my condition. I have had sweet enjoyment of my blessed Jesus.

He is now withdrawn from me. Can you help me? Can you guide me to my consolation? What acquaintance have you with him? When you saw him, how did he manifest himself to you, and wherein? All these laborings in his absence sufficiently discover the soul's delight in the presence of Christ. Go one step further to the discovery that is made of him once again, and it will yet be more evident.

Verses 4 and 5. It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, and so on.

First, she tells you how she came to him. She found him. What ways and by what means is not expressed? It often so falls out in our communion with Christ.

When private and public means fail, and the soul hath nothing left but waiting silently and walking humbly, Christ appears, that his so doing may be evidently of grace. Let it not at any time give over in this condition. When all ways are passed, the summer and harvest are gone without relief, when neither bed nor watchman can assist, let us wait a little, and we shall see the salvation of God.

Christ honors his immediate absolute acting sometimes, though ordinarily he crowns his ordinances. Christ often manifests himself immediately, and out of ordinances, to them that wait for him in them, that he will do so to them that despise them. I know not.

Though he will meet men unexpectedly in his way, yet he will not meet them at all out of it. Let us wait as he hath appointed. Let him appear as he pleases.

How she deals with him, when found, is nextly declared. She held him and would not let him go, and so on. They are all expressions of the greatest joy and delight imaginable.

The sum is, having at length come once more to an enjoyment of sweet communion with Christ, the soul lays fast hold on him by faith. To hold fast is an act of faith, refuses to part with him any more, in vehemency of love. Tries to keep him in ordinances in the house of its mother, the church of God, and so uses all means for the confirming of the mutual love between Christ and her.

All the expressions, all the allusions used, evidencing delight to the utmost capacity of the soul. Should I pursue all the instances and testimonies that are given hereunto, in that one book of the Song of Solomon, I must enter upon an exposition of the greatest part of it which is not my present business. Let the hearts of the saints that are acquainted with these things be allowed to make the close.

What is it they long for, they rejoice in? What is it that satisfies them to the utmost, and gives sweet complacency to their spirits in every condition? What is it whose loss they fear, whose absence they cannot bear? Is it not this, their beloved, and he alone? This also they further manifest by their delight in everything that peculiarly belongs to Christ as his in this world. This is an evidence of delight, when for his sake whom we delight in, we also delight in everything that belongs to him. Christ's great interest in this world lies in his people and his ordinances, his household and their provision.

Now in both these do the saints exceedingly delight for his sake. Take an instance in both kinds in one man, namely David. Psalm 16 verse 3 In a saint's any excellent or the noble of the earth is all my delight, my delight in them.

Christ saith of his church that she is his Hepzibah. Isaiah 62 My delight in her. Here saith David of the same, Hepzibah my delight in them.

As Christ delights in his saints, so do they in one another on his account. Here saith David is all my delight, whatever contentment he took in any other persons, it was nothing in comparison of the delight he took in them. Hence mention is made of laying down our lives for the brethren, or any common cause in which the interest of the community of the brethren does lie.

Secondly, for the ordinances consider the same person. Psalm 42 Our such plentiful testimony throughout, as we need no further inquiring, nor shall I go forth to a new discourse on this particular. And this is the first mutual consequential act of conjugal affection in his communion between Christ and believers.

He delights in them, and they delight in him. He delights in their prosperity, hath pleasure in it, they delight in his honor and glory, and in his presence with them. For his sake they delight in his servants, though by the world contemned, is the most excellent in the world, and in his ordinances is the wisdom of God, which are foolishness to the world.

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