

Delighting in the Knowledge of God, Part Two

‘Access Points’ to delighting in the Knowledge of God (Eph 1:15-23)

By Jay Wegter

INTRODUCTION: It has been said that a swine has never seen a star. That is no doubt true, but it is not because porcine vision is vastly inferior to ours. In fact a pig’s vision is roughly equivalent to ours. The reason they don’t see stars is because they have no interest in stars. They simply were not created to seek out the majesty of the night heavens because they were not created to be worshippers. Mankind is created to worship. Therefore man is endlessly curious—he maps, explores, adores, investigates, composes, sings, lauds, wonders, and interprets. Humans were created to be enthusiastic spectators of God’s excellence.¹ You might say that inside of us is a little ‘radar’ turning—always looking for beauty, excellence, virtue, pleasure, and nobility. We’re looking for something outside of us greater than us which deserves our admiration, adoration, and reverence.

God has created us to find happiness in Himself—by pursuing Him as our object of desire. But that God-given yearning was perverted by mankind’s fall into sin. Romans chapter one tells us that since the entrance of sin we continue to worship, but that the object of our worship has changed from God to the creature and the creation. Every unregenerate person is subservient to created things because of the inescapable fact that what we worship we inevitably serve (**Rom 1:25**). Only by the gracious miracle of regeneration is a person delivered and restored to become a true worshipper of God.

Our text (Eph 1:15-23) is about finding our source of excellence in God.

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

When Paul wrote Ephesians one, he was opening up the topic of ‘transformed seeing’—that refers to the spiritual sight needed to behold the spiritual realities known as ‘things above’ (Col 3:1-2). Paul was not a pragmatic moralist, he didn’t commend morality solely for its practical advantages. No, he always anchored Christian duty and sanctification in heavenly realities. In his epistle to the Ephesians he sends us to the *heavenlies*—which is where we find our preeminent Savior and our matchless position in Him. Paul does so in order to instill in us *transformed seeing* (the perception of the spiritual realities we have in Christ). Paul knows that *transformed seeing* produces *transformed living*.

In both of Paul’s prayers in the book of Ephesians (1:15-23; 3:13-21) he is praying for supernatural sight and comprehension on behalf of believers. Transformed living (born of transformed seeing) includes a lifestyle of worship in which we function increasingly as a living sacrifice. That means that our faculties of thought, speech, and affection are devoted to Christ and focused on things above as our highest source of satisfaction (**Col 3:1-3**). Now as to this topic of delight

in God, it ought to be self-evident that we cannot have love and fond affection for what we do not know personally. And we cannot know personally what we have not beheld or perceived. Therefore, our exhortation, in keeping with the thrust of Ephesians is: “*stir yourselves to improve your spiritual sight. You were created to be a worshipper—therefore you cannot, NOT worship. Your heart refuses to live as a dry desert with no object of desire.*” This helps us understand why idolatry is actually perversion of true worship. For, the reason we are always on the lookout for excellence and always pursuing an object of desire is because God created us to experience happiness as the byproduct of that pursuit.

Our hearts know well our object of desire. Christ refers to one’s object of desire as a man’s ‘treasure’ (Mt 6:19-21ff.). Every man is always reviewing his treasure, adding to his treasure, speaking of his treasure, guarding his treasure, and is ultimately ruled by his treasure. No wonder Puritan John Howe referred to delight in God as “the top, middle, and foundation of true religion.” Jonathan Edwards offers a similar observation—namely that true religion consists primarily in the affections. And John Piper makes his entry on the topic, “Delight in God will take you from *duty to desire*; it will make you holy and it will enable you to love others supernaturally.”

I recall a story about the early 19th Century Scottish divine, Thomas Chalmers. He was a faithful expositor of the Word of God, but after five years of ministry he was distraught that his congregation was so cold and passion-less for spiritual things. Chalmers took a summer sabbatical. During times of extended prayer he asked the Lord to give the answer as to why the church members were so stagnant.

The Scottish pastor was hit with a life-changing impression: “Thomas, you are preaching to the mind, the will, and the conscience, but not to the affections!” Well he returned to his parish and penned his most famous sermon, “The Expulsive Power of a new Affection.” In that sermon Chalmers unfolded the biblical truth that idols of lust won’t budge unless they are displaced by a higher affection. His message was not lost on his hearers or upon his fellow pastors. His emphasis on the role of the affections in true religion began a new chapter of lasting fruitful ministry.

What Chalmers and other ministers have discovered was that the clearer your view of God (specifically who God is toward you in Christ), the more strength you will have against sin and the greater motive to release and smash your idols. Nothing is a more powerful influence in your life than to know you are beloved of God and to feel that in your whole soul.

Chalmers explains that the practical moralist attempts to displace the love of the world from the heart by showing its unworthiness. But because of the constitution of our nature, the moralistic way is altogether incompetent and ineffectual. Only by setting forth a more worthy object will it avail to expel an inferior one. Chalmers observes that when affection or love sees its object at a distance, it is desire. While under the control of desire, the soul pursues a path of activity toward gratification. If the object is not gained, it results in pain, abandonment, and fatigue for the ineffectual efforts.

The ascendant power of a second affection will do what no forcible exposition (or display of unworthiness) of the first object can do. Notes Chalmers, a naked demonstration of folly won’t kill the charm of the first object. One must address to the eye of the mind another object with an attraction powerful enough to dispossess the influence of the first object. Only this will engage him in the prosecution in interest and hope, as exhibited toward the former object.ⁱⁱ

This stamps the word, “impotence” upon all moral and pathetic declamation about the insignificance of the world. Railing against the dissipation associated with the world does not change the heart. A man will not consent to the misery of being without an object of affection merely because it has been displayed as frivolous and fugitive. He would rather voluntarily submit himself to torture. To be without desire and exertion toward an object of affection is to be in a state of discomfort and violence to our nature. We were designed to worship; therefore we cannot live with the heart as a dry salt waste with no object of affinity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Only a superior object can displace the power of a previous reigning affection. You cannot rid a man of desire for an inferior object by destruction; it must be by substituting another superior object of desire. None of our tastes disappear by the process of natural extinction. What is to be destroyed must be dispossessed—one taste gives way to another (a superior taste) in order to lose power as a reigning affection.^{iv} By way of example, boys' appetites are replaced by manlier tastes. I think of the five year old boy who pleaded with his parents that no girls should be allowed to attend his birthday party because "they are so boring." At five girls were a bore, at sixteen the young man cannot stop thinking about girls. Youthful pleasures are supplanted by the idol of wealth. Love of wealth can be supplanted by the love of honor influence, recognition and political power.

Desire for an object which exerts a more powerful preference must be there in order to tear the soul away from its first adhesion. Grasping and desire is the tendency of the human heart; the heart must hold an object. Heart and soul without any object of affinity is desolate, void, and vacant; it is an intolerable misery if left just with the burden of its own consciousness (this will be part of hell's desolation to be totally without diversions and objects of desire that may be pursued).

Because we are made for God, Chalmers cautions that over-indulged fleshly hedonism leaves the heart an arid desert. The heart revolts against its own emptiness, usually pursuing its idols with even more slavish resolve. The soul refuses to live with an inner wasteland—it refuses to live empty, having no object of desire.^v I am reminded of Jesus' kingdom parables in Matthew chapter thirteen. *Spiritual sight* allows those who believe the gospel to 'see' the incomparable wealth of the kingdom which Jesus describes as 'treasure hidden in a field,' and as 'the pearl of great price'.

Moralistic preaching is powerless to evict the idols of the heart. The moralist seems to be oblivious to man's created nature. He tries to dispossess without cooperating with the heart's created mechanism; for the heart is created to love and hold with affinity that which it regards to be excellent. Nature abhors a vacuum in the affections. The natural man loves nothing above the horizon of this world. Therefore it is absurd for the moralist to pass sentence on every 'inmate' of the natural man's bosom without substituting another love in its place.

It is totally unnatural to leave nothing in the room of the heart. Moralistic preaching is not strong enough to pull down strongholds. "BE GOOD!" "TRY HARDER!" "MAKE MORE SACRIFICES FOR THE KINGDOM!" "HAVE PASSION FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS!" To utter these exhortations for their own sake cannot do it. To think that moral admonishments can dislodge heart idols is to imagine that moral absolutes contain their own incentives for obedience—this kind of preaching shows a great naiveté about man's nature. What can subdue the moral nature of man? We must address to the mental eye (the 'eyes of the heart') the worth and excellence of the latter so that the old is done away with (all things new). This is the Apostle Paul's great purpose in Ephesians—it is *transformed seeing* for Paul not only prays for increased spiritual sight in his readers, but also presents to their eyes of faith the desirability of heavenly things.^{vi} Lewis Sperry Chafer (a founder of Dallas Theological Seminary) was wont to say, "If men preach less against the world and more about who believers are in Christ and they will voluntarily release their compromises with the world."

Only the love of Christ in the gospel makes a man "revolt" against his former love of the world. How does one obliterate present affections? A moral revolt must take place in the affections that causes a man to rebel against his love of the world. There is charm in effectually preaching the gospel. The love of God and the love of the world are rival affections. They are irreconcilable, they cannot dwell in the same bosom. The heart with only the world yet in front of it cannot reduce itself to an empty wilderness. *Transformed seeing* is required in order to release old affections. The heart is constituted so that an old affection is only expelled by a new one. A radical change must take place in man's character for him to love God more than the world (**1 Jn 2:15-17**).

The “crucifixion” of the old man is a most fitting description of this radical change. Only the cross can produce a change this deep. Paul attributes to the power of the cross the fact that the world is *crucified to him and he to the world (Gal 6:14)*. In the gospel God is displayed so that we may love God, have confidence in Him, and approach Him through our Mediator. He shines His glory on us in the face of Christ and freely grants full pardon and gracious acceptance. The *Spirit of adoption* is poured in; we are delivered from the tyranny of our former desires. As sons of God we reciprocate God’s love to us. “We love, because He first loved us” (**1 Jn 4:19**).

Regeneration by the Spirit implants a new heart with new affections, and justification gives a believer right-standing before a righteous God. Thus, salvation is the greatest moral and spiritual achievement conceivable. Therefore, it is simply not enough to display the destructive consequences of sin, the deceitfulness of the heart, the follies of society, and the stench of corruption—for these facts will not eradicate the sinful *inmates* from the heart. New objects of desire displayed and exhibited to a new nature is what transforms believers. “. . . beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [believers] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (**2 Cor 3:18**).

Only a faithful expounding of the gospel testimony can avail. The good news of the gospel is the only instrument that can cast out the love of the world. The recesses of our nature can only be conquered by being made new creatures in Jesus Christ. The display of God’s wondrous economy of grace in Christ is the only way to reclaim a sinful world to Himself. By feeding their affection for God believers keep their hearts in love with God, they shut out the love of the world, they place no confidence in the flesh, and they renounce earthly things (**Jude 21**). Only a new affection can expel the impulsive power of the old affection (that old affection being the love of the world—**1 John 2:15-17**).

Why do people keep old affections? The answer is that new affections are out of view and beyond sight because of unbelief. The solution to this spiritual myopia (near-sightedness) was to both preach repentance AND preach the affections. This was understood by Edwards and Chalmers, and a host of other faithful believers. God’s truth in the gospel raises new affections though Spirit-enabled *spiritual seeing*. Therefore, *transformed seeing* raises our spiritual eyes above the horizon of this world to behold and pursue eternal things: “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (**2 Cor 4:17-18**).

In **Psalm 49**, the spiritual dullness and blindness of unregenerate men is compared to the baseness and profaneness of *‘the beasts that perish’ (v. 12)*. Unsaved individuals are caught up in temporal things—that is where their hope is invested. “*They set their minds on earthly things*” (**Phil 3:18-19**). By contrast, the granting of God’s sovereign mercy in regeneration opens up loveliness, glory, delight, and joy in the things of eternity. Unbelief cannot see (so as to feel) the love of God in sending His Son into the world. But one Spirit-enabled, amazed look at God’s love in sparing not—one believing look at His tenderness, and the sufficiency of the atonement causes the sinner to pass from a state of nature to godliness. This Spirit-enabled transformed seeing becomes the new direction of the saint, making him a *rock builder* (who builds upon and savors the words of Christ) and no longer *sand builder* (**Mt 7:24-29**).

True discipleship is driven by delight in the Lord. Doctrine and demand (the demand of true discipleship) are brought together by desire and delight; that is how a true disciple is made! Without desire and delight, the religious professor will never rise to devotion to Christ. He will remain in a state of legal working and performance Christianity, antinomianism, or dead orthodoxy.

The Christian’s battle to live as an overcomer is the successful effect produced by the greatness of the cause—the cause of our success is a moral resurrection (by means of the new birth) to the truths and precepts of Christianity. The glorious and wonderful object displayed in the gospel pacifies the

sinner's conscience and purifies his heart—removing its enmity (**Col 1:20-22**). It is the love of the world that continues to mar the heart and the conscience of the unregenerate. The reason why is due to the fact that every lust of the flesh is filled with hostility toward God's moral majesty (**Rom 8:5-8**). Only a pure affection can cast out the impure affection. The love of evil is expelled by the love of God. Jonathan Edwards chides his fellow ministers for falling back upon moralistic preaching while refusing to address the affections. Edwards' admonition is certainly wise counsel for pastors today: *the renewed affections are given to us by God for the purpose of true religion! It's deplorable that preaching today is NOT aimed at the affections. Overflowing gratitude for God's mercies issues forth in hatred of sin.*^{vii}

The matchless grace of God in the gospel makes us new creatures with new desires, thus we must preserve the freeness of the gospel offer. The freer the gospel, the more satisfying the gospel is. Grace is according to godliness (or the source of godliness). By contrast, if you hold God to be a *pensioner* to be paid back, "do this and live," (as under law), it will issue forth in fearfulness. The "debtor's ethic" (a term coined by John Piper to describe the *pensioner* view) says in effect, "God has done this much for you, you ought to do your all for Him." But, the "debtor's ethic" is inadequate to elicit a selfless motive of abundant gratitude. The redeemed sinner is already battling a flesh which is attracted to legal working (note the Galatian heresy: perfection of the flesh through law-keeping). The Christian life must never be presented as a *legal bargain* in which the believer is seeking to *square things* with his Maker. Repentance is sometimes falsely described in this way as a legal bargain, as if when the sinner's level of willingness to release his idols reaches 'critical mass' then the Lord is willing to save him. Piper notes that the "debtor's ethic" mentality is actually driven by self-centeredness, not the desire for God's glory.

The "command to eternal life" is to 'come and buy without money and without cost' (Is 55:1ff.). Pure divine grace delivers the crushed conscience from the *hand of justice*, and delivers *the heart from its ungodly tenants*. Once awakened by grace, the heart sees its new moral existence and it overflows with gratitude as a result. The quickened heart is also a remorseful heart—through repentance it deplors the sin it once treasured, and it treasures the God it once evaded. Don't add conditions to the gospel, don't raise a shred of legality in presenting the gospel or you will raise distrust between God and man.^{viii} When you place legal conditions upon the gospel, you take away its power to melt and conciliate. The redeemed sinner is under a mighty moral transformation when he is under the belief that he is saved solely by sovereign grace, he is thereby constrained to offer his heart a devoted thing and to deny ungodliness.

Man either operates by the channel of the senses or the channel of faith, only the latter leads to delight in God. Believers *navigate* by faith in the Word of His grace; this enables them to release temporal objects to behold superior objects. This is the *spiritual seeing* Paul sets forth in Ephesians. By the love of God in the gospel, we die to the present world and live to a lovelier world (although at a distance for the present). Says Chalmers, by the love of God in the gospel, a new affection expels the old, all without doing violence to the constitution of man's moral nature.^{ix} We keep the love of the world out of the heart by the love of God. We keep our hearts in the love of God by building ourselves up in our most holy faith (**Jude 20**). Faith works love, and faith works by love (**Gal 5:6; 1 Tim 1:5**). It is by gospel faith that the love which fulfills the law is admitted to the heart (**Rom 13:8, 10**). The ability to love supernaturally is the result of being born of God—it is due to a gracious work of regeneration which causes us to apprehend God's love for us (**1Jn 4:7-8, 19**).

Our theme from Ephesians centers upon the truth that God is known by means of the way in which He saves us—by His sovereign grace and mercy in applying Christ's propitiation to His elect. The chief object of our meditation is our relationship with God as it is settled in Christ. "Our theology is that of a crucified God who is 'Lamb' and 'Husband' to us forever—who in His infinite purity said to us in our filthiness, 'Live! Live!' He saw the mystery of iniquity in my heart and still betrothed me and

adopted me.”^x (See the allegory of the abandoned newborn in **Ezekiel 16**.) Salvation imparts a gracious covenant relationship which is to control our lives—our purpose is to *press on to know the Lord* in worship and devotion by means of considering His saving work towards us (**Phil 3:12**).

In this article, and in part three of this series we are going to gaze upon the Lord through three “portholes,” or access points found in Paul’s first prayer in Ephesians chapter one. The three access points are: the *hope of His calling (1:18)*, *His inheritance in the saints (1:18)*, and *His power toward us who believe (1:19)*.

In Ephesians 1:15-16 Paul is thanking God for His intervening grace in the life of the Ephesians. The content of Paul’s prayer is an extension of the praise he has offered for God’s sovereign grace as he ‘catalogues’ ‘*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*’ (**v. 3**). The apostle is expressing his gratitude to God for divine intervening grace in the life of his readers, the Ephesians. His prayer of thanksgiving is the recognition that God’s saving grace is exemplified in their faith, love and spiritual progress. Key in understanding the heartbeat of Paul’s first prayer in Ephesians is that he is asking on behalf of folks who are already believers. He wants them to go on in their knowledge of the Lord. For, the knowledge of God transforms us by degrees—thus growing in your knowledge of Christ is indispensable to your progress toward maturity (**2 Pet 3:18**).

Paul’s prayer of intercession concerns the accomplishment of God’s purpose in the lives of these believers, namely that they would grow in the knowledge of the Lord (**1:17; 2 Pet 3:18**). That is God’s will for us as well. This prayer is a model for us in our apprehension of the knowledge of God. ***In our appropriation of this prayer, we begin by drawing near to God and asking Him to give us ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ in order to know Him better.*** This request centers upon the necessity of having our capacity for *spiritual seeing* heightened. Our posture in this prayer is overflowing thanksgiving for God’s gracious self-disclosure: i.e. the wondrous truth that He sovereignly initiated the relationship with us. As we pray, we bear in mind that God grants our requests solely on the basis of the merits of Christ.

What is the means necessary to achieve the goal of knowing God better? Answer: The granting of a spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17). When Paul refers to the *knowledge* of the Lord, he uses the strengthened form of the Greek word ‘know’, *epiginosko*. This intensified word, ‘know’ means to be personally familiar with and conversant with the object of knowledge. But, it goes without saying that the Christian is dependent upon the Spirit of God to reveal more of the Lord and His ways to us. The Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God. It is His blessed task, His ministry, to unfold them through the Word to us (see **1 Cor 2:9-16**). He continually gives light—His ministry is to illuminate spiritual truth, giving us understanding and captivating our affections. It is only by His work that we can we know God better and experience delighting in the knowledge of God.

A spirit of wisdom and revelation is vital because there is nothing more important than knowing God. Your experimental knowledge of God is the one thing you will bring to glory. Your delight in the knowledge of God is your strength (Neh 8:10). Growing in the knowledge of the Lord is to be our consuming passion: “Let us press on to know the Lord” (Hos 6:3).

V. 18 – “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” The prayer is for the *insight* needed to grasp certain truths that are ***revealed by the Spirit***. The “eyes of the heart” is a fitting metaphor. The Spirit reveals, but we must have certain faculties enlightened in order to receive and grasp what He reveals. The heart of the saved man ‘sees’ what the five senses cannot see. Our physical eyes need light in order to operate, and the eyes of our heart need spiritual light in order to function. The Apostle uses a perfect participle to describe the Spirit’s work of *enlightening* the eyes of the heart. The use of the perfect tense suggests that the enlightenment of our heart’s ‘eyes’ continues as an abiding reality so as to produce a life-transforming result.

Paul frames the object of the Ephesians' knowledge (which the Spirit will enable them to recognize) as *three questions*. The **FIRST truth** to be revealed in order to know God better comes from the question, “**What is the hope of His calling?**”(v. 18). *‘Calling’ is a salvation term describing God’s sovereign power in bringing us to Himself—to be called is to be saved (1 Cor 1:26)*. The hope of one’s calling is that aspect of salvation for which we are waiting—what we are looking forward to in the future. That *hope* refers to life in the new heavens and the new earth in the presence of God (**Rom 5:2; Eph 5:27; Col 3:4**). In our generation we are immersed in a culture which almost never reflects upon eternity. This is why we need urgent help from God in order to be able to *know the hope to which you have been called*. Only then will we be able to navigate with eternity’s values before our spiritual eyes. It is very common today for professing believers to have vague and general thoughts of God, of grace, and of Christ. In our pursuit of the knowledge of God through spiritual seeing we move from vague thoughts to specific heart-ravishing thoughts. When God answers our prayer for *a spirit of wisdom and revelation and enlightened ‘eyes of the heart’*—He is providing specific heart-thrilling, delight-filled content to our hope. But again, we are not passive in receiving this answer to prayer. The Spirit reveals by means of diligent study and meditation upon the Word of God. The psalmist was utterly deliberate in his intent to meditate on Scripture: *‘I will meditate on the glorious splendor of God’s majesty’ (Ps 145:5)*.

Regarding the specific content of our hope—redemption has a result, a consummation. Your right-relatedness to the Trinity through Christ has a very clearly defined goal or destination, it is ultimate conformity to Christ at the moment of glorification. The hope to which we were called is designated, *‘gaining the glory of Christ’ (2 Thess 2:14)*. Our election before the foundation of the world is aimed at this goal—we were *“chosen that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love” (1:4)*.

The more fixed your hope is on the final goal and outcome of redemption, the more direct and resolute will be your walk towards that goal. Perfect conformity to Christ in glory is our necessary ‘fitness’ to please, worship, and enjoy God perfectly. All history is moving towards this event in which the sons of God are *presented publicly to the rational universe* (that is before the holy angels). The entire creation is poised for this event—*‘the revealing of the sons of God’ (Rom 8:18-25)*. It is a soul-ravishing thought that God has synchronized our public presentation as the sons of God with the remaking of the universe into the new heavens and the new earth (see **Romans 8:18-25**).

The goal of redemption is not adequately described as simply the absence of sin, death, and sorrow and a new immortal body. The consummation of redemption will be the enjoyment of *God in Christ communicating Himself to us without interruption forever*. Regarding the bliss of the eternal state, Howell Harris notes, “It is eternal love attending you: it is Christ given to be your life, light, and blessedness without cessation. And it is the redeemed enjoying God and pleasing God perfectly.”^{xi} In glory the Church will be a spotless reflection of the character of the Godhead—God’s communicable attributes will have reached maturity in her—she will be as much like God as creatures can possibly be. Through Christ the *new humanity*, as glorified image-bearers, will perfectly reflect the moral majesty of God. Relations within the society of the redeemed will reflect the excellence of relations within the Trinity (perfect love, honor, deference, goodness, humility, wisdom, and truthfulness).

Now all of this is to fulfill God’s vision (dream if you will)—for He has never desisted from the goal He announced originally in Genesis to make man in His image and likeness. What is His dream? It is to have an eternal temple to dwell in. Not a temple made of inanimate things, but a temple of living stones. That is how God describes the redeemed in Christ, the saints—*“as living stones* that are growing together, being fitted together, being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit; a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (**Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:5**).

Heaven is not an eternal *vacation*—it is an eternal *vocation*; for beholding God’s glory will be the source of our bliss. Randy Alcorn observes in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, “Heaven will be a place of rest and relief from the burdens of sin and suffering, but it will also be a place of great learning, activity, artistic expression, exploration, discovery, camaraderie, and service.”^{xii}

At the consummation the ages, the aim of redemptive history shall be realized (as announced by an angel who is filled with wonder and joy)—“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them” (Rev 21:3). There’s an old Chinese proverb, “*fish and guests smell after three days.*” If we are careful about who stays in our home for an extended period of time, how much more do you think God cares about who His *eternal* human companions will be? This should give us some insight into our tests and trials, for they keep surfacing where our affections lie. God is wise to test us (**1 Pet 1:6-7ff.**). Testing exposes our loyalties, and our dross, and it reveals the genuineness of our faith. Affliction shows us what we really love—it makes us choose, causing us to declare our allegiances—it detaches us from the love of the world and anchors our hope more securely to God as our true ‘home.’

When Puritan pastor Richard Baxter went house to house visiting church members, he always asked his parishioners this question, “***Do you see all of life as preparation for the next life?***” Only if one can say ‘yes’ is that person truly in touch with the hope of his calling.^{xiii} Thought of heaven is a ‘litmus test.’ It has been said of the Apostle Paul, ‘His religion was supremely the religion of heaven.’

CONCLUSION: To appropriate Paul’s prayer in Ephesians chapter one means that we will take action, not being content to walk with our spiritual eyes half-closed. We will stir ourselves to focus on things above, and not as vague abstractions, but as treasure we possess which we truly cherish and which delights our souls. We will confess that we have allowed the cares of life to obscure our view of heavenly things. And we will repent of walking by sight and not by faith (**2 Cor 5:7ff.**).

Spiritual seeing produces true knowledge—a growing knowledge of the Lord. We believe in order to better understand. Through Scripture meditation, we focus the eyes of our heart so as to take increasing delight in the Lord. As Chalmers has stated so well—only when we are resolved to dwell upon our spiritual blessings in Christ will we cease to be mesmerized by old affections. *We must constantly inform our hunger for excellence on the excellency of God, that He is wonderfully separated from the world, and He is redeeming a people who are wonderfully separated from the world. When we emphasize the infinite distance between God and the creation, we are glorifying Him* (Jeremiah Burroughs).^{xiv}

End Notes:

ⁱ Walter Chantry sermon on true worship at Banner of Truth Conference, Point Loma Nazarene College, 1993

ⁱⁱ Andrew Blackwood, compiler, *The Protestant Pulpit*, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” by Thomas Chalmers, Baker Books, pp. 50-62

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Blackwood on Chalmers, pp. 50-62

^{vii} Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, pp. 51-52, 55

^{viii} Hywel Jones

^{ix} Blackwood

^x Edward Morgan, *The Life and Times of Howell Harris*, p. 194

^{xi} Morgan, *The Life and Times of Howell Harris*

^{xii} Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, p. 36

^{xiii} Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA, 1656, r.p. 1979

^{xiv} Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints’ Treasury*, pp. 10-11