

# Christ's Glory and our Sanctification

## *Why is it essential to be disciplined in the gospel?*

Adapted from *Christ's Pattern for His Church: Disciples making Disciples* by Jay Wegter

*Jonathan Edwards offers the scriptural insight that true spirituality is knowing, tasting, and seeing the beauty of God's holiness.* What sets the saint apart from all others is that he sees the glory or beauty of divine things. The Bible speaks of this glory as the central thing that makes God and His ways attractive—that lures humans in love to Him. This is the light that makes the Person of Christ so ravishingly beautiful, that He has drawn the hearts of millions to Himself for the last two millennia. This is the brightness that all saints see in comparison to which their own hearts appear filthy.<sup>1</sup>

*But, what does the church become when deprived of the regular revelation of Christ's glory? In the first place she becomes spiritually malnourished, for she was called into existence to glorify Christ and to commune with the Godhead by feeding upon Christ.* It is by the church's intake of Christ that she is able to manifest Christ. Without this *feasting* upon the things of Christ, she will experience declension (stagnancy). And, a decline into cold formalism and institutionalism is not foreign to any of us. For we have witnessed this same tendency toward lukewarm-ness in our own persons. We are all too familiar with the kind of spiritual chill that can come over the soul and numb its operations (as if we are saved by some impersonal presence) (Rev 2:4-5). But, when the glory of Christ is squarely in our frontal vision, we will be arrested by the pervasive reality that it is He who has purchased His church by His blood; He owns the church, He indwells the church by His Spirit, and He rules the church by His infallible Word. When believers forget that Christ owns, rules, and inhabits His church; there will be an inescapable pull in the direction of man-centeredness and man's methods.

*As disciple-makers we must know why the gospel as the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) is the indispensable key to ongoing holiness.* We must frequently meditate on the glory of Christ to be free from earthly cares and affections. *“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18). Only the saved see and savor the glory of Christ. God's glory in the face of Christ ought to be the aim of gospel preaching. **If we conceal the**

**glory of Christ, we cripple the sanctifying work of the Spirit who wishes to exalt Christ and reveal His glory to the saints.** Christ as revealed in the gospel is our *worldview*; we are to see all of life through Him—all of our purpose, direction, and hope emanates from Him (Col 2:8).<sup>ii</sup> Only a continual view of the glory of Christ will stir us up, and encourage us to watch and continually fight against the deceitful workings of sin. To experience the things of Christ’s glory has the power to make us want to do the things that please Him (1 Jn 3:2-3).

*The Puritans frequently dwelled upon this theme of seeing Christ’s glory as the only way to obtain holiness, comfort, and preparation for eternal life.* “The chief privilege in this life is to ‘see’ the glory of God in all His holiness displayed in Christ” (Owen, *The Glory of Christ*). Our sin, guilt, lust, cravings, insecurities, and desire for happiness—all combine to make our souls restless. But, Christ has everything the sinner needs. **In all things He is perfectly suited to all the needs and cravings of the immortal soul.** “All my springs are in Thee.”<sup>iii</sup> To believingly ‘see’ in the Son, God in our nature, dying and bleeding for us, eradicates our sinful fear and suspicion of God, and it sets us free to love one another. Fresh acts of faith in the gospel open up to the understanding Christ’s full sacrifice; for Christ is the essence of the gospel. “If I see Him who is the atonement to be God-man, then I see an offering so vast, and so extensive in its applications, that every crevice of the conscience must be reached.”<sup>iv</sup> “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14). Our daily need is to embrace the transforming truth of the gospel that Christ has set the believer free to commune and to serve.

*We have no life in ourselves. The saints are dependent upon God for continual communication of His goodness and power to them.* The Son of God is the ‘Agent’ through whom comes everything needed by the saint (“everything pertaining to life and godliness,” 2 Peter 1:3). Christ continues to supply spiritual life, grace, and strength to His redeemed people. The goodness, grace, life, light, mercy, and power which are the origin of the new creation are all of God’s origin. It pleased the Father that the fullness of God’s divine nature should be in Christ as Head of the church (Col 1:17-19; 2:10ff). These qualities in Christ are communicated from Him to His church—He makes them available to the church (John Owen). Thus, this revelation of Christ in the gospel is our ‘food’—and,

without a steady diet of Christ as He is displayed to the saints in the gospel, the church cannot fulfill her mission of *knowing Him, becoming like Him, and making Him known*. Is it any wonder then that growing believers need to be disciplined in the gospel in order for them to mature spiritually?

***The power of Christ's love received has an effect upon our lives of enabling us to bear fruit for the glory of God.*** We must not be content to think of the love of Christ in a general way. Instead, we must dwell upon God's wisdom, goodness, and grace shown in eternal acts of His divine nature and pity—all given to us in Christ (John Owen). The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. When He (Christ) comes and shows Himself amidst our meditation and communion with Him, He brings with Him peace, comfort, joy, and assurance. Christ's intent is that we *'feast'* with Him by means of these spiritual refreshments (Rev 3:20). *How are we to receive these things? Look on the glory of Christ by faith. Meditate on the glory of His unique nature—His humbling of Himself to come into the world—His present high position in heaven—His love and grace.* Our hearts will be spiritually affected in some degree by His constraining love—which is the source of all our spiritual comforts and power. Christ knows perfectly the eternal blessedness which will be enjoyed by those who habitually believe in Him (Christ gives *abundant life*, John 10:10) (John Owen).

***The church cannot maintain its fervency apart from communion with Christ. This revelation of Christ in the gospel is the source of our ongoing transformation.*** We can say we believe the promises about the eternal glories of heaven, but where is the proof of our faith if we do not experience the beginnings of the enjoyment of these spiritual blessings here and now? (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1: 3-9). In order to do so, we must take a steady view of Christ's glory—and seek Him with all our heart. In this way alone will the believers who collectively make up the church recover from coldness and stagnancy. Christ's glory alone will bring us back to joy—back to love in *our hearts, in our souls, and in our relationships* (Owen). Through biblical discipleship in the gospel, the growing saint comes to see this spiritual vitality through the glory of Christ as the *normative* course for the believer, and not exceptional.

***Only those who are committed to beholding the glory of Christ now are truly pressing on to that perfect view of the glory of Christ in heaven. Believers who***

***are delighted to see the glory of Christ experience Christ's transforming power.***

Those who make it their full purpose of heart to behold His glory will be changed into His image (2 Cor 3:18). When our trust in Christ as He is freely given to us in the gospel is constantly exercised, virtue proceeds from Christ to purify our hearts, increase our holiness, strengthen our graces, and fill us with joy—at times joy inexpressible filled with glory (1 Pet 1:8). Christ's glory beheld quickens the understanding at the same time as His love is communicated to the heart. Why does this sanctifying experience fail to characterize so many professing Christians? The answer is that they have never been taught to behold the glory of Christ. As a consequence, the comforts for which they long are sought for in sources other than Christ. Here is the crux of the issue, Christ imparts *joy, peace, hope, and comfort* as we exercise faith in Him as our 'Source Person'—in other words as the source of these blessings. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13). Paul does not say 'pray harder for these blessings', no, he states that these soul-strengthening comforts found in Christ are freely experienced as a result of *believing*. Again, in discipleship, maturing believers are to learn from other believers what it means to continually live upon Christ as one's life source.

***At salvation the Spirit of God grants the believing sinner an eternal relationship with the Triune God through Christ. Our walk in the Spirit is to be characterized by diligently caring for this relationship which has been graciously granted.***

Many believers need to rethink their definition of salvation because it is common to conceive of salvation as a kind of spiritual commodity rather than what it really is—a relationship of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:14-21). To be in possession of eternal salvation is to be a partaker of a relationship graciously granted by the Spirit of God. Sanctification involves diligently caring for that relationship given. God's saving grace is relational from top to bottom—from start to finish. This fact is crucial to our progress in sanctification. For, there is a carnal tendency to so fully isolate the work of Christ from His Person, that we are left with an impersonal body of merit as our 'savior' while neglecting loyalty and devotion to the Person of Christ Himself. Thus, discipleship involves guiding and helping one another learn to care for, and maintain their relationship with the Lord.<sup>v</sup> That is the core of the Great Commission: "teaching them to observe [obey] all that I commanded" (Mt 28:20a). For, obedience to Christ is love and loyalty to His Person. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves

Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (Jn 14:21).

***When we are saturated with the gospel we are in the best position to commune with Christ and with one another.*** By ‘gospel saturation’ we mean that the child of God is continually feeding on the Word of His grace, the gospel—always affirming the great exchange (the guilt transfer) which took place in Christ taking our place so that we might enjoy shared life with Him now and forever.<sup>vi</sup> In the Gospel of John chapter six, our Lord’s discourse concerning His flesh and blood addresses our great need as spiritually famished souls facing death and hell. ‘Eating His flesh and drinking His blood’ is a graphic metaphor for believing in Christ and His atoning work. For, in bringing our soul’s needs to Him, we feed upon Him who is ‘the bread of life’ (6:48). No sinner is able to sustain his own life—eternal life and fellowship with God are found only in Christ who is our sustenance. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me” (Jn 6:56-57). As we continue to commune with Christ through daily reliance upon the gospel, we are *abiding in Him* as John 6:56-57 states. As Jerry Bridges reminds us in his excellent books on the gospel,<sup>vii</sup> it is at this juncture where believers become stalled in their growth, they imagine that the gospel is solely to grant them entrance into the Christian life, and not the source of their fellowship, strength, sanctification, sustenance, and growth.

***God’s grace is so much more than merely His remedy for sin. Grace is God’s commitment to complete the process which He began in each of His children (Phil 1:6; Jn 17:19-24). Our progress in grace means connecting our desires to God’s purposes.*** This process stays on schedule best when we have a discipler who functions as a spiritual mentor who can show us how to live upon Christ, and how to grow past blockages to our sanctification. We make forward progress as we continue to release our personal agendas in order to be controlled by what God wants. Our discipler helps us with this process.<sup>viii</sup> Paul reveals the very heartbeat of a disciple-maker when he says the following about the Galatian believers, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). Even amidst their heresy, the apostle’s tender heart comes through.

***Real transforming change takes place when we learn to embrace our Redeemer and His assets and all He is.*** Lasting change must be rooted in the cross of Christ and in His promises to conform us to His image.<sup>ix</sup> The gospel drives our fellowship with the Lord and our service and sanctification. The gospel keeps displaying Christ: all He is, all He is toward us, and all we are in Him. Therefore, only the gospel can keep our ***upward face*** (Godward intimacy), ***inward face*** (heart affections), and ***outward face*** (service and spiritual fellowship) balanced. Our natural tendency is to have these ‘faces’ out of balance. For some, lack of balance comes in the form of constant introspection and self-examination (*inward*). For others it is busy-ness for God without much communion with Him (*outward*). The gospel draws us back to intimate fellowship with Christ. As we abide in Him, our progress in sanctification will actually show up in our opportunities to minister to others. This is great news—for Christ tells us that fruit-bearing is a function of His words abiding in us and us abiding in Him (Jn 15:4-5).<sup>x</sup>

***Christ’s exaltation and glory must be regularly ‘seen’ by the eye of faith in order for us to progress in our sanctification (2 Cor 3:18).*** Just as a devoted wife loves to see her own beloved husband honored. So also, the church, the bride of Christ thinks with eagerness about seeing her King being exalted above the nations at His glorious second advent.

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 (Eph 1:19-23).

***Christ’s dominion over the cosmos is for the benefit of believers. God gave Him to be Head over everything ‘to the church’ (1:22) (i.e. for the sake of the church).*** Christ’s supremacy involves the subjection of all powers to Christ (principalities, powers, and all creation). Paul’s point is that Christ’s headship over the cosmos (the universe) is for the eternal glory of the Godhead, and for the benefit of His people who gather around Him in fellowship. By means of Christ’s

comprehensive authority, He is ‘building His church’ (Mt 16:18). As Conqueror, He gives grace to His people.<sup>xi</sup> How amazing, our Lord’s cross and empty tomb are at once both the price, and the guarantee, or warranty of a coming eternal Kingdom, of a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). Thus, to regularly meditate upon the glory of Christ in the gospel is to be animated by ‘Kingdom consciousness’—and that is a highly sanctifying activity. Just as Peter states: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” (2 Pet 3:13-14). The apostle is stating that living in light of our Lord’s coming Kingdom now involves being a sort of people characterized by “holy conduct and godliness” (3:11). In Daniel’s Kingdom prophecy the Lord promises that the saints will receive the Kingdom and possess it forever, for all ages to come:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. . . . But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come (Dan 7:13-14, 18).

At His second coming, Christ will accomplish the future total conquest of the rulers of the world and every physical kingdom. Christ must continue His reign (millennial) until all of His enemies are conquered (Rev 20-21).

Then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:23-28).

***This future aspect of Christ being subjected to the Father must be viewed in light of the administration process in which the world is brought from its sin and***

***disorder into order by the power of the Son.*** Christ died and was raised and accomplishes all of the will of the Father. In the economy of the Godhead at the end of time, the Son turns His ruling authority over to God the Father, the supreme administrative Head. All this is to be done so that God will be recognized by all as sovereign, and He, the triune God will be supreme (Rev 22:3-5).<sup>xii</sup>

***Our lofty topic; ‘the glory of Christ and the believer’s sanctification’ would not be complete without an element of ‘how to’ in regard to appropriating these transforming truths. Here are a number of suggestions:***

- 1) Meditate on passages which deal with Christ’s exaltation and glory:  
Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:22-24ff.; Acts 2:25-36; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28  
2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6; Ephesians 1:19-23; Colossians 1:15-21; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-3, 8-13; 2:5-9; Revelation 1:12-18; 5:8-14.
- 2) Keep matching Christ’s wealth with your spiritual poverty. Christ was given to answer in Himself your weakness, brokenness, and defilement (Rev 3:18).
- 3) Glorify God in His giving Christ to provide everything we are not. For, He is our covenant, our cleansing, our right-standing, our adoption, our eternal life, our Great High Priest, our heavenly citizenship (see Hebrews 7:20-28).
- 4) Understand that your communion with the Godhead is a function of utilizing Christ for the reasons God gave Him (to be your righteousness). And, as you live upon your Mediator, His character is progressively formed in you.
- 5) Realize that there is a degree of trauma in consenting to continually receive Christ’s unconditional agape love. For, we can’t barter for His love, or merit it—there is nothing in us that attracted His love. Thus, His love thrills and humbles—for, we are objects of His sovereign pity, but beloved objects.
- 6) Know that in Christ all of the Father’s purposes are being fulfilled (Eph 3:8-12). In Christ God perfectly accomplishes together His own glory and our highest good. In Christ the two ends are joined in one flawless accord.

End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards on Revival, Spiritual Discernment, and God’s Beauty,” *Reformation and Revival* 6:1 Winter 1997

<sup>ii</sup> John Piper, *God is the Gospel*

<sup>iii</sup> A. A. Bonar, *The Person of Christ*, p. 51

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, pp. iii-v, 8

<sup>vi</sup> Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, p. 66

<sup>vii</sup> Jerry Bridges, see: *Transforming Grace; The Pursuit of Holiness; Growing your Faith; The Discipline of Grace*



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<sup>viii</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer*, pp. 41, 43, 49

<sup>ix</sup> Lane/Tripp, *How People Change*, p. 193

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, p. 245

<sup>xi</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 145-147, 150-151

<sup>xii</sup> W. Harold Mare, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2 N.T., Kenneth L. Barker & John Kohlenberger III eds., pp. 651-652