

Christ's Glory in the Church

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"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20,21)

There is a rule to which I must draw your attention; a rule whereby the ability of God may be apprehended by us. Unless we come under this rule we shall never understand how God can supply all our needs according to His riches in glory. The rule is in the last member of this twentieth verse, "according to the power that worketh in us." If you say that you believe God can do everything, have you any standard or rule by which you may say that? One may appeal to the Bible and say, believing that, "I cannot but believe God can do all things." That is most true, that is a good rule and it is good that men observe it. O! that England once more might return to Holy Scripture, that every one of you not born again might have that rule in your own minds and stick fast to it, that good to yourselves, your families, and to the nation can be wrought according to the testimony of the word of God. Might it please God to say one thing to you, that He can, and will punish sin, and if you die in sin He can and will punish you; that He is able to sustain you in being through eternity and fill you with that punishment which your sins deserve. God make you think of this, sinner, make you believe it and fear Him.

There is another rule, different and more intimate, and that is the rule of a personal experience. "according to the power that worketh in us." This shows that those for whom this prayer is offered, the people of God, have in their own hearts a rule whereby they can say they believe the Lord can do more for them than they are able to ask or think. Has God put that rule in us? Do we know that He can save us from sin because He has forgiven sin? That He can hold converse with worms because He has graciously spoken to us; that He can deliver out of snares because He has delivered us; that He can make us well acquainted with Christ because we have had some acquainting of that divine Person given to us, some hints, some touches of His graciousness? This is "the power that worketh in us." Can we say we believe that He can raise us up from all the bad and low conditions and states of mind into which we fall, because He has raised up already from time to time? Mind this rule. It is not speculation; it is not notion, it is experience. I can say, some of you can say, He can melt our hearts with love because He had done it in us, and He can do more than this. We can say He can bring us into intimacy with Himself beyond all that we have ever asked or thought, because in some measure He has already granted that intimacy to us. What He has done in us says He can do more than this. What He has spoken to us according to that word, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit," (1 Cor. 2:9,10) and what He has revealed says He can reveal more. If you stood on the

edge of this ocean; if your feet have been led by it; if the eye of your faith has looked somewhat upon it, look at a distance and seen this ocean flowing, the ocean of grace and of salvation and of love, then you can say: I believe God can bring me into that, make me swim in it and bring me into it eternally so that I shall never be able to pass it. It will be a river too, yes, in the language of the scripture, "A river that cannot be passed over."

He is a good man who has in him this inward rule, this rule of the Holy Spirit's indwelling and teaching and operation. This tells us that true religion is no cold picture but a living thing in the heart; that it is God coming to and taking up His abode in a sinner, teaching, leading, speaking, anointing, helping and sealing; and that what He has done He can exceed beyond our requests. Meditate on this. Go to Him as you can with this rule in your heart and experience, and with this petition: Do again for me, and do more for me that Thou hast done, more than I can ask, more than I can think.

"Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." The church is composed of regenerate persons, called and chosen and faithful. The first gospel church we are told about in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. After the three thousand had been converted, had gladly received the words of Peter and had been baptized they were added unto the church. Then, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," and very soon we read of the number being five thousand, and multitudes being added. A church is a congregation of the faithful. A visible church is a church gathered into one place, not a national church but a church gathered into one place. It is composed presumably of true believers, persons who have received the grace of God not in vain and have been brought in the providence of God into one place, having their hearts attracted each to the other and united first in spiritual union, and then in the bonds of visible church fellowship. We read of the churches in Galatia, the church at Ephesus, the church in Corinth, the church in Thessalonica, and so on.

We read in the Book of the Revelation of seven churches, seven golden candlesticks, this representing the church of Christ perfected from time to time in the holy dealings of the Holy Spirit, and in the all wise and all powerful providence of God. Christ walks in a church. We see Him walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks; His eyes were open and were as flames of fire to search; His feet were as if they burned in a furnace to try; His voice was full of majesty as the sound of many waters to alarm, to command, to control; and out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword, that is, the word of the living God Himself speaking.

The presence of Christ gives consistency and strength and beauty and glory to the church. No church is living, though it may have a correct form, though it may have all true orthodoxy, it cannot be a living church if Christ is absent. Are we a living church? Is His gracious presence with us? I do not speak now of individuals, I believe there are individuals and many of them in this congregation with whom Christ is, to whom He has spoken, with whom He has walked. These, if they were taken to a desert place, away from all christian fellowship, from the ministry and from the bible itself, these would live, these would have the presence of God. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," belongs to individual members of the invisible church, it will stand to the end; but when you come to a collective body, then the question is prompted, is He with us as a church? May the Lord give an answer for His great name's sake, in this church.

In such a church as I have mentioned there is to be glory to God, and this glory is by Jesus Christ and it is to continue, "throughout all ages, world without end, Amen." What is this glory? It is the glory of God's grace; the riches of the glory of His grace; the riches of the glory that His people have when they have a real hope, the hope of His calling. This glory is the indwelling of the Trinity; the Father walking in the church; the Son walking in the midst of the churches; the Holy Spirit making the church His temple. This is a true church that has the Trinity in it. Every church of Christ believes in the Trinity. Every church of Christ believes in the Eternal God, the Eternal Father, the Eternal Son and the Eternal Spirit, one God subsisting in three persons in the mysterious relationship that is in that great word, "Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

This glory is in a church in particular ways, as first, of life in Christ Jesus. O! the glory of spiritual life in a sinner, how it is destined to put its foot upon corrupt nature. O! the glory of this life that tramples under foot the power of this world. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4) The glory of this life is that it shows itself in hunger for God, hunger and thirst after righteousness. Yes, and if we should degenerate as a church, if we should become as that church did of which the Lord says, "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth" then the knowledge of the Trinity will die away from us; and woe to any church from which that knowledge has died. Beware, dear friends, of the weakening of the faith of the living God; of the weakening of your apprehension of the Trinity, the ever blessed Jehovah manifesting Himself according to scripture; beware of that, for this text applies to the church, "Thy God thy glory." "Awake, awake; put on strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments." (Isa. 52:1) It is said, "The glory of the Lord is risen upon thee," (Isa. 60:1) and that must be the glory of God in Christ. Do you get communications from God? Do we as a people, living, professing christians, get communications from God? Is he silent to us, or does He speak? The glory of a church is the glory of God's presence, that wonderful presence that can never be explained, that is felt; that wonderful presence that some know, that brings intimacy, and conformity to the will of God and the very image of God.

Secondly, the glory of divine grace is manifested in the operations of the Holy Spirit; and these operations are sovereign. The continual conviction of our own ruin in Adam and by our own foolishness and sinning, will never die from the visible church. The healthier an individual is and the healthier a church is, the more his conviction of indwelling sin and the law in the members is felt, the more powerful does it work, for the Holy Spirit does convince us. Why, you young people, young in the fear and ways of God, you may think you know enough of sin. You know enough for the moment, enough to make you sick of self, enough to make you flee to the Lord Jesus, and that is great; but as you grow and as you increase in knowledge, you will increase in sorrow. Solomon's language will be true in you, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," for as you increase in knowledge of yourself you will increase in sorrow that you are such a sinner. I believe I knew something of my heart more than 50 years ago now, but I did not know much; I did not know myself half as much I know myself today, and one result was that I did not flee to the Saviour half as much as I am obliged to flee now. I have not the dread of hell today as then, but the dread of falling into sin, of falling a prey to the evils of my own heart; this is with me. Every living church will have sorrow in this, and this is the sorrow that there is in each member a quarrel with God, a natural enmity to God. Down must you go that Christ may be lifted up! You must decrease that He may increase. You must see yourself that you may value a

sight of Him; you must see the ugliness of sin and believe there is nothing uglier, nothing to be called evil in the whole world but sin, and then, how you will value the Lord Jesus!

There will be also the remedy for the malady; the Saviour for sinners; the Mediator for the dumb; the Intercessor for those who cannot take their own cases in hand. The Spirit of Christ will receive of His things and show them to faith. O! what a people of God you have where you have a revealed Christ. When heart joins to heart, when faith in one and faith in another and faith in the body will be running out in fervent desires and in constant errands to the throne of God's heavenly grace to the person of the Lord Jesus. There will be the shoes of "the preparation of the gospel of peace." "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes O prince's daughter!" it is said in the Song of Solomon. How beautiful are the Lord's people in Christ; their experience is beautiful. Yes, she is beautiful within. "The king's daughter is all glorious within," (Ps. 45:13) in the operations of the Holy Spirit. Faith pleasing God; love running out to Him; hope casting anchor in Him; patience waiting for Him, and humility taking the lowest place. This is the internal beauty of the church. The badger's skin covering all the beauty of the temple hid that beauty from the eyes of a stranger, but God was there and He saw the beauty. You may have a rough exterior but if you have that internal beauty of the Holy Spirit you have a great deal. "Her clothing is of wrought gold," the righteousness of the Lord Jesus that both justifies and beautifies. This is the glory of God.

God's glory is also in that He bears patiently with His children who are so wayward and barren and so prone to wander from Him. They are so prone to keep Him out when He comes at night with His locks filled with the dews of the night and says, "Open to Me, My sister, My love;" (Songs 5:2) so prone to say "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Yet He bears with such people. Some of us are obliged to confess that this has been our conduct, our treatment of our best Friend and yet He has patiently borne with us and turned again with double love. This is the glory of God that He bears with His erring backsliding people.

It is the glory of a church and of an individual child of God, that the Lord Jesus does hold communion, and does communicate to His people of His love and His mercy and His word. Yes, there is an intimacy, and though I know but little of it, I would not part with that little for the world. When sometimes in secret you are seeking the Lord; confessing to Him your felt unworthiness, barrenness, and ignorance and bemoaning your sinfulness, does He not graciously whisper some kind word? Does He not, now and again, touch you with the finger of His love? Does He not bid you look to Him, because all your fruit is found from Him? When you go to Him with all that you are and have, does He not say, "I have heard him, and observed him;...From Me is thy fruit found." "I am the true vine;...as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me;...for without Me he can do nothing." (John 15:1-5) Is that not true? And does He not graciously speak such things to us? telling us to abide in Him. "Abide in Me, and My words abide in you." There is intimacy. May we look for it as a people. May we pray for it as a people, that He would speak to us.

Would not this be a wonderful remedy for some of our own ways? Would it not save us from many things? Should we employ our tongues as we often do if the Lord were to speak to us? We should praise Him. We should be saying to our souls, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is

within me, bless His holy name." No man, no minister, no exhortations, no letter of the scripture, no warning will ever contain this unruly member. We speak against the Lord, and we speak wrong things. But if the Lord were to communicate more to us of Himself, it would be the cure; the taming of the unruly member. Is not the glory of the church conformity to the truth? What says the Apostle by the Holy Ghost to the Romans? "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you." (Rom. 6:17) God runs you into the truth as molten metal is run into a mould; you take its shape, and so when God is with people and speaks the truth in power to their souls, they take the shape of truth and there is a divine beauty put upon them, a beauty that never can be where the truth is not present in power and in glory. Every word that the Lord has spoken to His people has had an effect upon them. Every word they receive from heaven does something for them, moulds their will and their affections and their understanding and brings them into some degree of conformity to the truth they hear with power. Is not the glory of a church conformity to Christ's image? Are not the Lord's people predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ and to His suffering image? They suffer for sin and they suffer by sin; sin their greatest cross, their sharpest pain, their deepest shame; it is the cause of their fears and doubts and weakness and failings. Sin is the root of evil in them and it brings forth evil to them and much pain. Christians are predestinated to the glorious image of Christ; He rose from the dead, so do they rise from the dead; they are baptized into His death and they are raised up in the likeness of Him who is their life; they are called upon to reckon themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. This is their glory. Their glory is the name which He gives to them; a name better than that of sons and daughters; the name is this, "The Lamb's wife."

God's saints and churches as such, rightly led, pray,

"Make the union closer yet,
And let the marriage be complete."

There is a person by whom this glory comes, by Christ Jesus and by the death of Christ. Let us go back a little. Let us come in spirit as we may to the birth of Christ. It was unique, a birth of a miraculous nature. He was born of the virgin, and this is the birth we are to celebrate continually. Christ is born. What a mercy it is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary. All God's glory is here; the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells in the man Christ Jesus. Go with Him to His baptism and there is the Trinity, the Father owning Him, the Spirit descending upon Him. Follow Him into the wilderness of temptation, forty days and forty nights with wild beasts and tempted of the devil; subjected in His temptations to all the indignity and pollution of the devil; yet nothing touched Him, for He resisted unto blood, He strove and He conquered. Go with Him throughout Judaea and watch Him doing miracles, for God was with Him. Follow Him into the garden of Gethsemane and see there the man Christ Jesus, weak and yet strong, submitting Himself to the will of His Father. Then follow Him into the judgment hall where His judgment was taken away in the day of His humiliation; and thence to Calvary.

What is all this? It is the glory of God; the manifestation of divine love; the flowing out of infinite goodness, the forth goings of the grace of God in and by Jesus Christ. Sin is put away, everlasting righteousness is brought in and the name of God honoured. Grace is great but the equity of the law is equal to it. The law can never be dishonoured, and the grace of Christ

honoured the law and magnified it and made it honourable. (Isa. 42:21) Then this is wrought in experience as He comes to His dear children; He speaks life into their souls by His Spirit; He comforts them with love; He indulges them with His presence; He gives them from time to time to know that He put away their sins, as it is written, "Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins." (1 John 3:5) What a wonder this is, that God should gather people to Himself in Jesus Christ and see in them no sin, and declare to them that they are without spot or wrinkle or blemish or any such thing. (Eph. 5:27) "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus."

There is a glory of God in the law and that will overtake all mockers and wall who die in their sins; a terrible end that will be when the glory of God shines illustriously in their everlasting condemnation. May none of us know that glory. But this glory is mild, is bearable, is beautiful, is communicable and is communicated by the Holy Spirit, the glory of the man Christ Jesus; the glory of His work, the glory of His death, the glory of His resurrection, the glory of His ascension into heaven. This glory is upon them, "Let My name be named on them." The glory of the gospel is in the church. It was Paul's labour and prayer that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Galatians. Beset by tempters and by false teachers, they were much damaged, and he prays that the truth of the gospel, which they had for the moment turned away from, might continue with them. Thus he travailed in birth for them again until Christ should again come to them and be in them as He had been, the hope of glory.

Do you feel afraid of losing the truth? Do you even fear the truth may depart from you? Have you ever a fear that it won't continue with us here? One may say I am determined never to let it go, but the probability is, you have not got it. The people who have it say, "Lord take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." That is the way the Lord's people go. They stand in weakness; they move by prayer; they hold fast by these supplications; they stand in faith; be not high-minded. Faith alone will keep you holding to the throne of grace and to the atonement of the Lord Jesus.

This, then, is just a little hint of the glory of God in the church by Christ Jesus and it is to continue through all ages. Visible churches have risen and fallen; have come into being and have passed away. Seven such churches were in Asia, they are not there now. Churches in this our own beloved country have been raised up and continued for a time. But churches pass away; they come, they go; they live for a time, then they die. Yet in the true church, there is a continuance throughout all ages. First here then there, there is a living church of the living God and in that church visibly the glory of God is "by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, would without end." Can you say honestly as in God's sight, regarding what is the glory of a church; can you say, Amen? And can you put your hand on your heart and say: Let that glory be here; then let me be part of a church of Christ? Have you courage, being a sinner, to look to the Lord Jesus and say,

"Enter the chambers of my breast
Thyself prepare the room."

Can you invite Him? Have you courage of faith to invite Him to come and enter your heart? If you have, you do not know yet how pleased He will be to answer you; what delight and pleasure it will be to Him to come and say: This is My bride; this is My house, I bought this sinner with My blood, he is Mine; I claim him, I have given him prayer, here I come with My answer, thou

art Mine. O! sinner, what a day that will be when He so comes to you. The grace of God is great; the love of Christ is infinite; the grace of the Spirit is omnipotent and when this Holy, Holy, Holy Trinity shall come, then the sinner will welcome Him. May it please the Lord to glorify Himself in our midst and in our hearts. Amen.