

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH Part III 8. COMING TO CHRIST WITH OUR AFFECTIONS

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH

Part III

8. COMING TO CHRIST WITH OUR AFFECTIONS

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me" (John 6:37), declared the Lord Jesus. He who, before the foundation of the world, gave the persons of His people unto Christ, now gives them, in regeneration, a heart for Christ. The "heart" includes the affections as well as the understanding. In the previous chapter we pointed out how that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while ignorant of Him; it is equally true that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while his affections are alienated from Him. Not only is the understanding of the natural man shrouded in total darkness, but his heart is thoroughly opposed to God. "The carnal mind is enmity (not merely "at enmity," but "enmity" itself) against God" (Rom. 8:7); and "enmity" is something more than a train of hostile thoughts, it is the hatred of the affections themselves. Therefore when the Holy Spirit makes a man a "new creature in Christ," He not only renews his understanding, but He radically changes the heart. When faith gives us a sight of spiritual things, the heart is warmed with love to them. Note the order in Hebrews 11:13, where, in connection with the patriarchs' faith in God's promises, we are told, "were persuaded of them, and embraced them," which is a term denoting great affection. When the understanding is renewed by the Spirit, then the heart is drawn unto Christ with a tender desire for Him. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to make known in the soul the wondrous love of Christ to me, then love unto Him is begotten and goes out toward Him in return. Observe the order in 1 John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him;" the apostle places knowledge (not intellectual, but spiritual) before faith, and both before a union and communion with Divine love. The light and knowledge of Christ and heaven which we have by tradition, education, hearing or reading, never fires the affections. But when the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 5:5), O what a difference is produced! Far too little emphasis has been placed upon this aspect of our subject. In proof of this assertion, weigh carefully the following question: Why is it that "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16) is quoted a hundred times more frequently by preachers and tract-writers than "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (1 Cor. 16:22)? If we are to properly preserve the balance of truth, we must note carefully the manner in which the Holy Spirit has rung the changes on "believe" and "love" in the N. T. Consider the following verses: "all things work together for

good to them that (not "trust," but) love God" (Rom. 8:28); "the things which God hath prepared for them that (not only "believe," but) love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9); "if any love God, the same is known (or "approved") of Him" (1 Cor. 8:3); "a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that (not "believe in," but) love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8); "a crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James 1:12); "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8). "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). In the last chapter we saw that this "drawing" consists, in part, of the Spirit's supernatural enlightenment of the understanding. It also consists in the Spirit's inclining the affections unto Christ. He acts upon sinners agreeably to their nature: not by external force, such as is used on an unwilling animal, but by spiritual influence or power moving their inward faculties: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4)—by rational conviction of their judgment, by showing them that there is infinitely more goodness and blessedness in Christ than in the creature or the sinful gratification of carnal desire; by winning their hearts to Christ, by communicating to them a powerful sense of His superlative excellency and complete suitability unto all their needs. To them that believe, "he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:7)—so precious, they are willing to part with the world and everything, that they may "win Christ" (Phil. 3:8). As was shown at some length in the opening chapter, the affections of the natural man are alienated from God, wedded to the things of time and sense, so that he will not come to Christ. Though God's servants seek to charm him with the lovely music of the Gospel, like the adder he closes his ear. It is as the Lord portrayed it in the parable of the Great Supper: "they all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18), one preferring his lands, another his merchandise, another his social recreation. And nothing short of the Almighty power and working of the Holy Spirit in the heart can break the spell which sin and Satan has cast over man, and turn his heart from perishing objects to an imperishable one. This He does in God's elect by His secret and invincible operations, sweetly working in and alluring them by revealing Christ to them in the winsomeness of His person and the infinite riches of His grace, by letting down His love into their hearts, and by moving them to lay hold of His kind invitations and precious promises. Most blessedly is this represented to us in "My beloved put is hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him" (Song of Sol. 5:4). Here the door of the heart (Acts 16:14), or more specifically, the "door of faith" (Acts 14:27), is seen shut against Christ, and the object of His love being so loath and unwilling as to rise and open to Him. But though unwelcome, His love cannot be quenched, and He gently enters (He does not burst the door open!) uninvited. His "hand" opening the "door" is a figure of His efficacious grace removing every obstacle in the heart of His elect (cf. Acts 11:21), and winning it to Himself. The effect of His gracious entry, by His Spirit, is seen in the "and my bowels were moved for him," which is a figure of the stirring of the affections after Him—cf. Isaiah 63:15, Philemon 12. For the thoughts of this paragraph we are indebted to the incomparable commentary of John Gill on the Song of Solomon. O what a miracle of grace has been wrought when the heart is truly turned from the world unto God, from self unto Christ, from love of sin unto love of holiness! It is this which is the fulfillment of God's covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:26, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." There is no man that loves money so much, but that he is willing to part with it, for that which he values more highly than the sum he parts with to purchase it. The natural man esteems material things more highly than he does spiritual, but the regenerated loves Christ more than all other objects beside, and this, because he has been made a "new creature." It is a spiritual love which binds the heart to Christ. It is not simply a knowledge of the Truth which saves, but a love of it which is the essential prerequisite. This is clear from 2 Thessalonians 2:10, "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Close attention must be paid unto these words, or a wrong conclusion may be drawn: it is not a

love for the Truth, but a love of the Truth. There are those who have the former, who are destitute of the latter. We have met Russelites, and have boarded with Christadelphians, who put many a real Christian to shame: people who after a long day's work, spent the whole evening in diligently studying the Bible. Nor was it just to satisfy curiosity. Their zeal had lasted for years. Their Bible was as precious to them as a devout Romanist's "beads" or "rosary" are to her. So too there is a natural "love" for Christ, an ardent devotion for Him, which springs not from a renewed heart. Just as one reared among devout Romanists, grows up with a deep veneration and genuine affection for the Virgin; so one carefully trained by Protestant parents, told from infancy that Jesus loves him, grows up with a real but natural love for Him. There may be a historical faith in all the doctrines of Scripture, where the power of them is never experienced. There may be a fleshly zeal for portions of God's Truth (as there was in the case of the Pharisees) and yet the heart not be renewed. There may be joyous emotions felt by a superficial reception of the Word (as there was in the stonyground hearers: Matt. 13:20), where the "root of the matter" (Job 19:28) be lacking. Tears may flow freely at the pathetic sight of the suffering Saviour (as with the company of women who bewailed Christ as He journeyed to the cross: Luke 23:27, 28), and yet the heart be as hard as the nether millstone toward God. There may be a rejoicing in the light of God's Truth (as was the case with Herod: Mark 6:20), and yet Hell never be escaped from. Since then there is a "love for the Truth" in contradistinction from a "love of the Truth," and a natural love for Christ in contrast from a spiritual love of Him, how am I to be sure which mine is? We may distinguish between these "loves" thus: first, the one is partial, the other is impartial: the one esteems the doctrines of Scripture but not the duties it enjoins, the promises of Scripture but not the precepts, the blessings of Christ but not His claims, His priestly office but not His kingly rule; but not so with the spiritual lover. Second, the one is occasional, the other is regular: the former balks when personal interests are crossed; not so the latter. Third, the one is evanescent and weak, the other lasting and powerful: the former quickly wanes when other delights compete, and prevails not to control the other affections; the latter rules the heart, and is strong as death. Fourth, the former betters not its possessor; the latter transforms the life. That a saving "coming to Christ" is the affections being turned to and fixed upon Him, may be further demonstrated from the nature of backsliding, which begins with the heart's departure from Christ. Observe how this is traced to its real source in Revelation 2:4, "Thou hast left (not "lost") thy first love." The reality and genuineness of our returning to Christ is evidenced by the effects which the workings of the understanding produce upon the affections. A striking example of this is found in Matthew 26:75, "and Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.' And he went out, and wept bitterly": that "remembrance" was not merely an historical, but a gracious one—his heart was melted by it. So it ever is when the Holy Spirit works in and "renews" us. I may recall a past sin, without being duly humbled thereby. I may "remember" Christ's death in a mechanical and speculative way, without the affections being truly moved. It is only as the faculty of our understanding is quickened by the Holy Spirit that the heart is powerfully impressed.

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