

The Revelation of Christ to Believers

by John Fletcher

The sermon explores how believers can experience the revelation of Christ through spiritual senses, leading to transformative faith and personal knowledge of God.

Scripture: Psalm 34:8, Matthew 5:8, John 3:8, John 14:21, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 1:17-18, Hebrews 11:1

Topics: "Revelation of Christ", "Spiritual Senses"

Description

John Fletcher emphasizes the significance of spiritual senses in experiencing the revelation of Christ to believers, distinguishing between mere intellectual knowledge and a profound, transformative encounter with the divine. He argues that true knowledge of Christ is not just historical or doctrinal but involves a supernatural, experiential understanding that changes the heart and soul. Fletcher illustrates that this revelation is a personal and intimate experience, akin to tasting honey after a diet of bread and water, and is essential for genuine faith and spiritual growth. He encourages believers to seek this deeper connection with Christ, which brings about true liberty, joy, and a life of obedience. Ultimately, Fletcher asserts that the revelation of Christ is a mystery that can only be fully understood through the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's heart.

Transcript

I am presuming that it is now as obvious to you, as it is to myself, that spiritual senses not only exist, but also that they are the means of communication used by the Lord when He chooses to reveal Himself to us.

A NEW KNOWLEDGE

Do not mistake me for a fanatical enthusiast; I do not insist, as you must know, upon a manifestation of the voice, body, or blood of our Lord to our external senses. It is true that Pilate heard Christ's voice, the Jews saw His body, the soldiers handled Him, and some of them must have been literally sprinkled with His blood, but this had no spiritual significance—they did not come to know 'God manifest in the flesh'.

Neither think that I hold the view that a knowledge of our Redeemer's doctrine, offices, promises, and performances only (such as any unconverted man can attain, by the force of his understanding and memory) is effectual. All carnal professing Christians and all foolish virgins, by conversing with true believers, by hearing gospel sermons, and by reading evangelical books, may attain to a historical or

doctrinal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Their understanding may be informed, but their hearts remain unchanged; acquainted with the letter they continue ignorant of the spirit. Even though boasting of the greatness of Christ's salvation, they remain altogether unsaved and, although full of talk about what He has done for them, they know nothing of Christ in them, the hope of glory.

Much less do I mean, by this teaching, such a representation of our Lord's person and sufferings as the natural man can form in his mind, by the force of a warm imagination. Many, by seeing a striking picture of Jesus bleeding on the cross, or hearing a pathetic discourse on His agony in the garden, are deeply affected and melted into tears. They raise in themselves a lively idea of a great and good man unjustly tortured to death; their soft passions are wrought upon, and pity fills their heaving breasts. However, they remain strangers to the revelation of the Son of God by the Holy Ghost. The murder of Julius Caesar, pathetically described, would have the same effect upon them, as that of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. A passionate play would touch them as easily as a deep sermon, and much to the same purpose, for in either case their impressions and their tears are generally wiped away together.

Nor must you gain the impression that I am writing of good desires, meltings of heart, victories over particular corruptions, a confidence that the Lord can and will save us, power to stay ourselves on some promises, gleams of joy, rays of comfort, enlivening hopes, touches of love; no, not even foretastes of christian liberty, and the good Word of God. These are the delightful drawings of the Father, rather than the powerful revelation of the Son. These, like the star that led the wise men for a time, disappeared then appeared again, are helps and encouragements to come to Christ, and are not a divine union with Him by the revelation of Himself.

I can more easily tell you what this revelation is not, than what it is. The tongues of men and angels need proper words to express the sweetness and glory with which the Son of God visits the soul that cannot rest without Him. This blessing is not to be described, but enjoyed. It can be written, not with ink, but only with the Spirit of the living God, not on paper, but in the fleshly tables of the heart. May the Lord Himself explain the mystery, by giving you to eat of the hidden manna; and by bestowing upon you the new name, which no man knows except him who receives it ! In the meantime, look closely at the following exposition of this mercy, and-if it seems to you to be agreeable to the teaching of the Word-pray that it may be engraved upon your heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

EXPERIMENTAL FAITH

The revelation of Christ, by which an unconverted man becomes a holy and a happy possessor of the faith, is a supernatural, spiritual, experimental manifestation of the spirit, power, and love (and sometimes of the Person) of God, manifest in the flesh, whereby He is known and enjoyed in a manner which is altogether new. It is as new as the knowledge that a man has when he first tastes honey and wine, if he had eaten nothing but bread and water previously; such a man, dissatisfied with the most eloquent descriptions of these rich productions of nature now before him, is actually tasting them for himself !

This manifestation is, sooner or later and in a higher or lower degree, vouchsafed to every sincere seeker, through one or more of the spiritual senses opened in his soul; it may be in a gradual or an instantaneous way that the manifestation comes, according to God's good pleasure. As soon as the veil of unbelief, covering the human heart, is rent by the power of the Holy Spirit; as soon as the soul has struggled into a living belief in the Word of God; as soon as the door of faith is opened-the Lord Jesus Christ comes in and reveals Himself as being full of grace and truth. Only then is the tabernacle of God with man; His kingdom

has come with power; righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are spread through the newborn soul; eternal life has begun; heaven has come upon earth; the conscious heir of glory cries Abba, Father; and, from blessed experience, he witnesses that he has come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.

If, by God's grace, this general manifestation is improved upon, the effects are glorious : now, the believer's heart, set at liberty from the guilt and dominion of sin, and drawn by the love of Jesus, pants after greater conformity to God's holy will, and mounts up to Him in prayer and praise. His life is a course of cheerful, evangelical obedience, and his most common actions become good works done to the glory of God. If he walks according to his privileges, outward objects entangle him no more. Having found the great I AM, the eternal Lord, he considers all created things to be as mere shadows. Man, the most excellent of all creation appears to him altogether lighter than vanity. In fact, he counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, esteeming them but dung, so that he may win Christ and, to the last, be found in Him, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ; so that by new discoveries of the Lord, he may know Him and the power of His resurrection every day more clearly. In the meantime, he casts his sins and miseries upon Jesus; and in return Jesus bestows His righteousness and happiness upon him. He puts on Christ and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Thus, they are mutually interested in each other; and, to use Paul's illustration, they are espoused and married. Joined by the double band of redeeming love and saving faith, they are one Spirit, even as Adam and Eve - by matrimony - were one flesh. `This is a great mystery' wrote the Apostle, but thanks be to God, it is made manifest to his saints.

INNER PERSONAL EVIDENCE

If you ask `How can these things be? Describe to me the particular manner of these manifestations!' I can only reply in the manner of our Lord to Nicodemus : Are you a Christian, and do not know these things? Truly, I say unto you, though we cannot fix the exact mode, and precise manner of the breathing of the Spirit, yet, we speak what we do know and testify to what we have seen. Marvel not, however, if we find it impossible to tell you all the particulars of a divine manifestation. You yourself, though you feel the wind, see its amazing effects, and hear the sound of it, you cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth (much less could you describe it to the satisfaction of someone who had neither heard it nor felt it himself). Many earthly things cannot be conceived by earthly men; the blind, for example, cannot conceive the difference between colours. What wonder is it then if unconverted men do not understand us when we tell them of heavenly things?

Nevertheless, I would-in general-observe that the manner in which the manifestation of the Son of God is vouchsafed, is not the same in all persons, nor in the same person at all times. `The wind bloweth where it listeth', but the Spirit of the living God is more active than this. His thoughts are not as our thoughts; God dispenses His blessings, not as we expect them, but as it pleases Him. Most commonly, however, the sinner-driven out of all of his refuges-feels an aching void in his soul. Unable to satisfy himself any longer, with the husks of empty vanity, dry morality, and speculative Christianity, and tried with the best form of godliness which is not attended with the power of it, he is brought to spiritual famine, and hungers after heavenly food. Convinced of unbelief, he feels the want of the faith of God's operation. He sees that nothing short of an immediate display of the Lord's arm can bring his soul into the kingdom of God and then fill it with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Sometimes, encouraged by lively hopes, he struggles into liberty of heart, and prays with groanings which cannot be uttered; at other times, almost sinking under a burden of guilty fear or stupid unbelief, he is violently tempted to throw away his hope, and go back to Egypt, but an invisible Hand supports him and, far from yielding to the base suggestion, he

resumes courage, and determines to follow on to know the Lord or to die seeking Him. Thus he continues wandering up and down in a spiritual wilderness, until the Lord gives him the rest of faith, the subsistence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

This evidence comes in various ways. Sometimes the spiritual eye is opened first, and chiefly (though not only) wrought upon. Then the believer-in a divine, transforming light-discovers God in the man Christ, perceives unspeakable glories in His despised Person, and admires infinite wisdom, power, justice, and mercy, in the blood of the Cross. He reads the scriptures with new eyes; the mysterious book is unsealed, and everywhere it testifies of the One whom his soul now loves. He views (experimentally, as well as doctrinally) the suitability of the Redeemer's offices, the firmness of His promises, the sufficiency of His righteousness, the preciousness of His atonement, and the completeness of His salvation; he sees and feels the Lord's interest in everything. Thus he beholds, believes, wonders, and adores; sight being the noblest sense, this sort of manifestation is generally the brightest.

Perhaps his spiritual ear is first opened. If so, that voice which raised the dead, says 'Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee', and passes through his waiting soul in power. He knows, by the gracious effect that it is the voice of Him who once said 'Let there be light'. He is sensible of a new creation, and can say, by the testimony of God's Spirit bearing witness with his spirit 'This is the voice of my Beloved'; 'He is mine, and I am His'; 'I have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of my sins.' And having been much forgiven, he loves much, and obeys.

Perhaps Christ will manifest Himself to the spiritual feeling. By taking the burden of guilt, dejection, and sin, from the heavy-laden soul, and-in its place-by imparting a strong sense of liberty, peace, love, and joy in the Holy Ghost, the Lord makes Himself known. The ransomed sinner, enabled to overcome racking doubts and dull insensibility, now believes with the heart unto righteousness, and makes confession with the mouth unto salvation. 'Surely' he says 'in the Lord I have righteousness and strength; this is the finger of God; this day is salvation come to my soul; none but Jesus could do this for me; the Lord, He is God; He is my Lord and my God.' This manifestation is generally of the least order, being made to a lower sense; therefore great care ought to be taken, not to confuse it with the strong drawings of the Father, to which it is similar. Some babes in Christ, who -like young Samuel-do not yet have their senses properly exercised to know the things freely given to them of God, are often made uneasy on this very account. Nor can they be fully satisfied, until they find that the effects of this manifestation are lasting, or until they obtain clearer ones by means of the nobler senses-the sight or hearing of the heart.

OUTWARD PERSONAL EVIDENCE

Although I contend only for those discoveries of Christ which are made by the internal senses (because such only are promised to all), yet I cannot-without contradicting Scripture-deny that external senses have been wrought upon in some saints. When Abraham saw his Saviour's day he was, it seems, allowed to wash His feet with water,(Genesis 18:3) as afterwards the penitent harlot did with her tears. Saul, on his way to Damascus, saw Jesus's glory and heard His voice both externally and internally, whilst they that journeyed with him saw but a light and heard words which they could not distinguish.

Sometimes divine manifestations, though actually internal, have appeared to be external to those who were favoured with them. For example, when the Lord called Samuel in Shiloh, the pious youth supposed the call was outward, and ran to Eli saying 'thou callest me'. Although real to the lad, it seems that the voice had struck his spiritual ear only, because the high priest, who was present, did not hear the words

with the young prophet. Also, although Stephen steadfastly looked up to heaven, as if he really saw Christ there with his bodily eyes, it is plain that he beheld Him only with his eyes of faith, for the roof of the house where the court was held, bounded his outward sight. If Christ had appeared in the room, so as to be visible to common eyes, the council of the Jews would have seen Him along with the pious prisoner at the bar.

Hence we learn, first, that the knowledge of spiritual things, received by spiritual senses, is as clear as the knowledge of natural things obtained by bodily senses. And secondly, that one can be unsure sometimes as to whether it is the outward or the inward senses which are concerned in particular revelations; you will remember that Paul himself could not tell whether the unspeakable words, which he heard in paradise, struck his bodily ears, or only those of his eternal soul. Thirdly, we learn that no stress must be laid upon the external circumstances which have sometimes accompanied the personal revelation of Christ, as though these were of the essence of the revelation. If aged Simeon had been as blind as old Isaac, the internal revelation which he had of Christ would still have made him say, with the same assurance `Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ... for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' If the Apostle had not been struck to the ground, and if his eyes had not been dazzled by the outward light, his conversion would not have been less real, as long as he was as equally inwardly humbled and enlightened. Finally, if Thomas, regardless of the carnal demonstration he insisted upon, had previously experienced, in his inner man, that Christ is the resurrection and the life, he could have confessed Him, with just as great a consciousness-before that personal manifestation -as when he cried out later `My Lord and my God'.

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