

Reciprocal Affection.

Cant. 4.

"Handfuls of Purpose" Part 3 (Miscellaneous, chapters 15 - 30).

Let fall for eager Gleaners.

Thirty Addresses on Various Scripture Truths and Incidents

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CHAPTER 17 — RECIPROCAL AFFECTION.

It is a blessed thing to cultivate in our hearts, not only the sense of what God has done for us, but also what He in grace has made us to be for Himself. It is most blessed to get away from ourselves, and entering into the secret of God's presence, there to learn what those sentiments are which fill His heart. The Spirit of God makes those who believe in Christ to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; so the apostle Peter says in his first epistle (1 Peter 1: 8). That is our side of this joy, but "it is meet that we should make merry and be glad," is His, for the Father has His joy as well, and it is boundless. He rejoices to have children near to Him — children who can enjoy Himself "Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" and "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5: 11).

It is that we may enjoy Himself that we are made nigh by the precious blood of Christ. It is not merely what He gives us, but Himself, who is to be the portion of our souls, and this is the fruit of the new birth. Because born again, we enjoy God Himself "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But what is this new birth? It is our getting a new nature, which has the capacity to enjoy and understand and know God. The soul gets this as the fruit of His grace. We are made to enjoy God; but then He has His side as well. His joy is to have His children near to Him, and we are to have the sense that there is nothing between our hearts and Himself. Thus we see there is the joy of the Father, and the children's joy likewise. In chapter 4 of the Song of Solomon we see Christ's part in this joy. The relationship here presented is not that of father and children. Of that the words of our hymn speak

"Thou the prodigal hast pardoned,

Kissed us with a *Father's* love;

Killed the fatted calf, and called us

E'er to dwell with Thee above.
Clothed in garments of salvation,
At Thy table is our place;
We rejoice, and Thou rejoicest,
In the riches of Thy grace."

In the fourth chapter of the Song it is the bridal relationship which comes out. It is the joy of the Bridegroom and of His bride.* We are prone to read this book so as to find Christ in it, and our hearts glow as we trace Him in its various scenes; but it is very sweet to turn for a moment and learn what the bride is to Christ. No language could be more lovely than that which we find He uses with regard to her. Listen to Him! "Behold, thou art all fair, my love" — all fair; "there is no spot in thee." Yet the more we know of Christ, the more we know of ourselves; and as we walk with God, as the years roll by, we take lower and lower estimates of ourselves. Each year we think less of ourselves than we did the year before. So much is this the case that the heart is apt to become legal. The exceeding worthlessness of what we find within us is so apparent to us. How blessed then, notwithstanding all we see ourselves to be, that Christ says of us, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (Cant. 4: 7).

*As our readers know, the bride in this book is the earthly one — Jerusalem. Still the heart of Christ is the same in all relationships, and we may therefore fairly make an application to the Church.

It is blessed to dwell upon the Lord's thoughts of His people; to think of the Lord's pity, and of His *compassionate* love, though that is not the love referred to in the Song. Here it is the love of *complacency*. He is rejoicing over His bride, and He speaks of her beauty and of her comeliness. But how can He find in *us* that which can delight Him? He does find that which is the joy and rejoicing of His heart, though not because of what we are in ourselves. It is all the result of what He Himself has invested us with. Jacob found in Rachel that which met the desires of his heart; — and we find in Christ that which satisfies us; and Christ finds in His bride, the Church, that which delights His heart. "Ah!" you say, "it may be so when He will have presented us to Himself 'a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.' Then the Church will be holy, and without blemish. Then all that which is worthless shall have been dropped, and only that which is His own perfect workmanship will abide."

But that is not the moment to which this chapter points. That day of glory and exceeding joy will come; but what we find here is something more wonderful than what will then be shown forth. Here we learn that even now, whilst we tread the sand of the desert, on our way to the glory that awaits the bride and Bridegroom, He finds in the Church that which delights His heart. He waits in heaven at the Father's right hand for the nuptial day. Whilst then He is the portion of our hearts, He finds in us the portion of His heart. Look at what He says. As the Bridegroom speaks of His bride, the expressions of His love and appreciation deepen. He says to her, "Thou hast ravished," or taken away, "my heart; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes." Do

we think of this? Do we believe it, beloved, that we are a joy to Him? We might well say of Him, that He has stolen away our hearts; but when He says we have ravished His heart, surely it is a wonderful thing. His delight is found in *us*; in the one He calls His bride.

It is not the individual believer, but the collective thing that is here spoken of. It is always the body of believers when the bridal affections of Christ are referred to; but in order that our souls, as a whole, may walk in the power of this wonderful truth, we must each individually be in the enjoyment of it. Each saint must dwell on, that which Christ is seeking for in the assembly of His saints. It is through grace alone, I need not say, that any of us can enter into this — His joy concerning His own. But, I repeat, unless each one is individually enjoying it for himself and herself, we shall not, as a whole, answer to that which Christ is seeking us to be for Himself. There must be in your soul and in mine the sense of what we are to Christ. When this is known, and the heart has tasted it a little, we sigh to know it more deeply.

Look now at the response He gets from the bride In Cant. 1 she is heard to say, "Thy love is better than wine." She knows His love, and it is better to her than all beside; but His language exceeds hers. Hear what the Bridegroom says to her: "*How much* better is thy love than wine!" (Cant. 4: 10). What grace in Christ to say this of such poor heartless ones as you and me! Yet this is the estimate Christ forms of any little love He now finds in our souls to Him. "Thy lips," He continues, "O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue." Every word that falls from the lip, all that is the fruit of grace in the soul, is to Him like the droppings from the honeycomb. In Scripture honey indicates that which is food as well as refreshment. How such a scripture as this judges us! What has our conversation been? Has it been that which could feed as well as refresh the heart of the blessed Lord? "A garden enclosed," He says, "is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." All this means she is entirely for Him, only for the Bridegroom. Ah, beloved, it is blessed when the soul gets to this! All that I am, and all that I have, belong to Him, to Jesus only. I am to be for Him here, and He says I am His own. He wants me for Himself. Is not His desire enough to make each soul surrender fully to Him? "He died . . . that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5: 15).

But the Bridegroom enlarges on what the bride is to Him. "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Such is Christ's appreciation of "His own," and we should have the sense of all this in our souls, of what He sees His people to be. If we carried in our souls more the thought of what we are to Christ, He would be more to us. The eye would then be more off ourselves, and off one another. Then would our gaze on Him be more steady, and the joy of our souls be more calm and holy. Then we should be more jealous of that which would cause any distance between our souls and Christ. We would watch with eagerness its approach, and be able to shun it.

But He cares for His glory, and does preserve us for Himself; so we read, "Awake, O north wind." He sends His north wind, bearing its wave of trouble to rouse the careless one. We do not like this; but it is good and wholesome for the spices in His garden. It shakes them out. The wind gets through the branches, and the fragrance is poured forth. Trouble checks us. It casts us on

God, and presses out that which is of Christ in us. Thus we learn what He would teach us. Then He can vary His dealings; the wind is changed. He says, "Come, thou south wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." He gives deep enjoyment of Himself He makes the sun of His presence to shine in upon our souls, and the heart turns to Him, and says, "Let my Beloved come into his garden." The joy of communion is then known and enjoyed. Then the heart says: I am all for my Beloved. "I am my Beloved's, and his desire is towards me. Let him eat his pleasant fruits." The soul enters into His thought as to His bride. And how does He respond to her desire to have Him near her? "I am come," He says, "into my garden, my sister, my spouse." He appreciates that which is devoted to Him. He says, as it were, "It is all mine;" for, "I have gathered *my* myrrh with *my* spice; I have eaten *my* honeycomb with *my* honey; I have drunk *my* wine with *my* milk." As the soul enters into communion, and is conscious that He draws near, the heart goes out more and more to Him, and says, "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

But as we thus muse on this joy of communion between the Bridegroom and His bride, we may well bow our heads in humiliation, and say, How little have we known of it! How little can we have been the joy and rejoicing of His heart! True, very true; yet faith lays hold of God's estimate of things.

Turn for a moment to 2 Corinthians 11: 2, and see how the apostle sums up this matter. "I have espoused you to *one* husband, that I may present you as a *chaste* virgin to Christ." The Song of Solomon does not go beyond the day of espousals, but Paul points to the nuptial day, when the espoused one will be presented as a *chaste* virgin to Christ. What does he mean by a chaste virgin? It is one who is true, about whom a breath of reproach could not have been; so he warns them: "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is *in Christ*." We need more of this simplicity, brethren — the simplicity that is in Christ. Let our souls awake! Let us be able to say before Him, "He is everything to me, and I am everything to Him."