

Seeing the Glory of Christ

by John Owen (1616-1683)

John 17:24

I. The Text Opened

A. John 17:24

1. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory,” (John 17:24).

a) Christ prays that “they may behold my glory.”

b) But this glorious privilege is not to be limited to the heavenly state only.

(1) *It includes the state of believers in this world as I shall show.*

(2) *Unbelievers see no glory in Christ.*

(3) *They see nothing attractive about Him.*

(4) *They despise Him in their hearts. Outwardly they cry, like Judas, “Hail, master,” (Mat 26:49); but in their hearts they crucify Him.*

(5) *In this way, they strip Him of His glory, deny the only “Lord that bought them,” (2Pe 2:1), and substitute a false Christ.*

(6) *Others think little of Christ and His glory and see no use for His person in Christianity—as though there were anything in our religion that has any truth or reality apart from Christ!*

c) In the early days of the church, there were swarms of brain-sick people who vomited out many foolish ideas, culminating at length in Arianism, in whose ruins they now lie buried.

(1) *The gates of hell in them did not prevail against the rock on which the church is built.*

(2) *Yet, many still oppose the person and glory of Christ under the pretense that nothing can be believed except that which reason can understand and accept.*

(3) *Indeed, unbelief in the Trinity and the incarnation of the Son of God, the sole foundation of Christianity, is so spread about in the world that it has almost demolished the life and power of true Christianity.*

(4) *And not a few, who do not dare let people know what they really believe, lead people to think they love Jesus, when all the time they scorn, despise, and persecute those who truly desire to know nothing but “Christ, and him crucified,” (1 Cor. 2:2).*

d) But God, in His appointed time, will vindicate His honor and glory from the foolish attempts of sinful men who attempt to strip Him of both.

(1) *Meanwhile, it is the duty of all those who “love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” (Eph. 6:24) to testify to His divine person and glory according to the ability God has given to each of us; and this I have chosen to do, not in a controversial way, but in order to strengthen the faith of true believers, to build them up in the knowledge of Christ and His glory, and to help them experience that which they have, or may have, of the power and reality of these things.*

(2) *That which I intend to show is that beholding the glory of Christ is one of the greatest privileges that believers are capable of in this world or even in that which is to come.*

(3) Indeed, it is by beholding the glory of Christ that believers are first gradually transformed into His image and then brought into the eternal enjoyment of it because they shall be forever “like him; for we shall see him as he is,” (1 John 3:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

(a) Our present comforts and future blessedness depend on this.

(b) This is the life and reward of our souls (Joh 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:6).

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: One of the greatest privileges the believer has, both in this world and for eternity, is to behold the glory of Christ.

1. Scripture shows us two ways by which we may behold the glory of Christ.

a) We may behold it by faith in this world, faith being “the evidence of things not seen,” (Heb. 11:1), and we may behold it by sight in the next (2 Cor. 5:7-8; 1 Cor. 13:12).

2. When Christ prayed “that they may behold my glory,” He meant by actual sight in the light of eternal glory.

a) But the Lord Jesus does not exclude that sight of His glory that we may have by faith in this world; rather He prays for the perfection of it in heaven.

b) So, we can learn the following lessons:

(1) No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven who does not, in some measure, behold it by faith in this world.

(2) Grace is a necessary preparation for glory and faith for sight.

(3) The soul unprepared by grace and faith is not capable of seeing the glory of Christ in heaven.

(a) Many will say with confidence that they desire to be with Christ and to behold His glory.

(b) But then they can give no reason for this desire, except that it would be better than going to hell.

(c) If a man claims to love and desire that which he never even saw, he is deceiving himself.

c) John writes not only of himself but of his fellow apostles also: “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” (Joh 1:14).

(1) Now, what was this glory of Christ that they saw, and how did they see it?

(2) It was not the glory of Christ's outward condition for He had no earthly glory or grandeur.

(3) He kept no court, nor did He entertain people to parties in a great house.

(a) He had nowhere to lay His head, even though He created all things.

(4) There was nothing about His outward appearance that would attract the eyes of the world (Isa. 52:14, 53:2-3).

(5) He appeared to others as a “man of sorrows,” (Isa. 53:3). Neither was it the eternal essential glory of His divine nature that is meant, for this no man can see while in this world.

(6) What we shall see in heaven, we cannot conceive.

(7) What the apostles witnessed was the glory of “grace and truth,” (John 1:14).

(8) They saw the glory of Christ's person and office in the administration of grace and truth.

(a) And how did they see this glory?

(b) *It was by faith and in no other way, for this privilege was given only to those who “received him” and “believe on his name,” (John 1:12).*

(c) *This was the glory that the Baptist saw when he pointed to Christ and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” (John 1:29).*

(i) *So, let no one deceive himself.*

(ii) *He that has no sight of Christ's glory here shall never see it hereafter.*

(d) *The beholding of Christ in glory is too high, glorious, and marvelous for us in our present condition.*

(e) *The splendor of Christ's glory is too much for our physical eyes just as is the sun shining in all its strength.*

(i) *So, while we are here on earth, we can behold His glory only by faith.*

3. Many learned men have written of this future state of eternal glory.

a) Some of their writings are filled with excellent things that cannot but stir the minds and hearts of all who read them.

(1) *But many complain that such writings do nothing for them.*

(2) *They are like a man who beholds his natural face in a mirror and immediately forgets what he saw (James 1:23-24).*

(3) *But why do these writings make no impression on them?*

(4) *Is it not because their idea of future things has not arisen out of an experience of them that faith alone gives?*

b) In fact, a soul will be troubled rather than edified when it thinks of future glory, if it has had no foretaste, sense, experience, or evidence of these things by faith.

(1) *No man ought to look for anything in heaven if he has not by faith first had some experience of it in this life.*

(2) *If men were convinced of this, they would spend more time in the exercise of faith and love about heavenly things than they usually do.*

(3) *At present they do not know what they enjoy, so they do not know what to expect.*

(4) *This is why men who are complete strangers to seeing the person and glory of Christ by faith have turned to images, pictures, and music to help them in their worship.*

c) So, it is only as we behold the glory of Christ by faith here in this world that our hearts will be drawn more and more to Christ and to the full enjoyment of the sight of His glory hereafter.

(1) *It is by beholding the glory of Christ by faith that we are spiritually edified and built up in this world; for as we behold His glory, the life and power of faith grow stronger and stronger.*

(2) *It is by faith that we grow to love Christ.*

(3) *So, if we desire strong faith and powerful love, which give us rest, peace, and satisfaction, we must seek them by diligently beholding the glory of Christ by faith.*

(4) *In this duty, I desire to live and to die.*

(5) *On Christ's glory I would fix all my thoughts and desires; and the more I see of the glory of Christ, the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes, and I will be more and more crucified to this world.*

(a) *It will become to me like something dead and putrid, impossible for me to enjoy.*

4. By beholding the glory of Christ, we shall be made fit and ready for heaven.

- a) Not all who want to go to heaven are fit and ready for it.
 - b) Some are not only unworthy of it and excluded from it because of unforgiven sin, they are not prepared for it.
 - c) Should they be admitted, they would never enjoy it.
 - d) All of us naturally regard ourselves as fit for eternal glory.
 - e) But few of us have any idea of how unfit we really are because we have had no experience of that glory of Christ that is in heaven.
 - f) Men shall not be clothed with glory, as it were, whether they want to be or not.
 - (1) *It is to be received only by faith.*
 - (2) *But fallen man is incapable of believing.*
 - (3) *Music cannot please a deaf man, nor can beautiful colors impress a blind man.*
 - (4) *A fish would not thank you for taking it out of the sea and putting it on dry land under the blazing sun!*
 - (5) *Neither would an unregenerate sinner welcome the thought of living for ever in the blazing glory of Christ.*
 - g) So, Paul gives “thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” (Col 1:12).
 - (1) *Indeed, the first touches of glory here and the fullness of glory hereafter are communicated to believers by an almighty act of the will and the grace of God.*
 - (2) *Nevertheless, He has ordained ways and means by which they may be made fit to receive that fullness of glory that still awaits them, and this way and means is by beholding the glory of Christ by faith, as we shall see.*
 - (3) *Knowing this should stir us up to our duty, for all our present glory lies in preparing for future glory.*
 - (4) *By beholding the glory of Christ, we shall be transformed “into the same image,” (2 Cor. 3:18).*
 - (a) *How this is done and how we become like Christ by beholding His glory will become clear as our study progresses.*
 - (5) *By beholding the glory of Christ by faith we shall find rest to our souls.*
 - (a) *Our minds are apt to be filled with troubles, fears, cares, dangers, distresses, ungoverned passions, and lusts.*
 - (6) *By these our thoughts are filled with chaos, darkness, and confusion.*
 - (a) *But where the soul is fixed on the glory of Christ, then the mind finds rest and peace; for “to be spiritually minded is life and peace,” (Rom. 8:6).*
 - (7) *By beholding the glory of Christ, we shall begin to experience what it means to be everlastingly blessed.*
 - (a) *“So shall we ever be with the Lord,” (1 Thess. 4:17).*
 - (b) *We shall “be with Christ,” (Phil. 1:23), which is best of all.*
 - (c) *For there we shall behold His glory (John 17:24).*
 - (d) *And by seeing Him as He is, we shall be made like Him (1 John 3:2).*
- (i) *This is our everlasting blessedness.*

III. The Text Applied

A. The Beatific vision

1. The enjoyment of God by sight is commonly called the “Beatific Vision,” and it is the only motive for everything we do in that state of blessedness.
 - a) What the sight of God is and how we will react to it, we cannot imagine.
 - b) Nevertheless, we do know this: God in His immense essence is invisible to our physical eyes and will be in eternity, just as He will always be incomprehensible to our minds.

- c) So, the sight that we shall have of God will be always “in the face of Jesus Christ,” (2 Cor. 4:6).
 - d) In Christ's face, we shall see the glory of God in His infinite perfections.
 - e) These things will shine into our souls filling us forever with peace, rest, and glory.
2. We can rejoice in these things even though we cannot understand them.
- a) We can talk of them but never fully comprehend them.
 - b) In fact, true believers experience a foresight and foretaste of this glorious condition.
 - c) Sometimes, when reading and meditating on the Bible, our hearts are filled with such a sense of the uncreated glory of God shining through Jesus Christ that we experience unspeakable joy.
 - d) In this way arises that “peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ,” (Phil. 4:7).
 - e) “Christ in you [believers], the hope of glory,” (Col. 1:27) gives them a foretaste of that future glory.
 - f) And where any have no acquaintance with these things, they are blind and dead to spiritual things.
 - g) It is because believers are lazy and ignorant that we do not experience more and more in our souls the visits of grace and the dawns of eternal glory.