

"How is your beloved better than others?"  
Song 5.9

The power of contrast is acknowledged by all. The poet studies it in the construction of his epic; the artist in the coloring of his picture; the logician in the arrangement of his argument; the lover of nature as his eye roves over the boundless landscape-- all are conscious of the presence and power of this principle. The object of contrast is not to create the ideal, or to foster the fictitious; but to confirm the existence, and heighten the power and impression of the true. It is thus that the beautiful becomes more attractive, the grand more sublime, the good more excellent, and the object which awakes our admiration and inspired our regard, enthrones itself more firmly and supremely upon the soul.

The Word of God is replete with contrasts. In no volume is there more, and no principle of the Scriptures is so strikingly exemplified, as the beauty of holiness; in the contrast and attractions of idols, and the existence of God; the insignificance of man, and the greatness of Jehovah; the evanescence of time, and the permanence of things eternal; the defilement of sin, and the beauty of holiness; the objects and varieties of earth, and the scenes and arrangements of heaven; our unworthiness and unworthiness, with God's mercy and love. With what power, beauty, and reality are the great things of God's word thus brought out!

In paying to you, my reader, the Lord Jesus Christ, as worthy of your undivided affection, supreme confidence, and unreserved service, infinitely distancing and eclipsing all other beings and all other objects brought in competition with him, we purposely adopting this principle; assured that the result must be, with the accompanying blessing of the Holy Spirit, the supreme enthronement of Christ in your admiration, trust, and love, as the "chief among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely one." Happy shall we be if the conviction of the truth is deepened in your soul, NONE LIKE CHRIST!

Nor could we engage your thoughts upon a subject more suitable to the new and solemn period of time upon which we have entered. You are thus being added to the momentous volume of your personal history. As yet our lines are untraced, its events unrecorded. What that history may be, you have no vision to guide your knowledge; nor, if you are wise and trusting, do you wish to know-- calm and fixed in the assurance that it is all prearranged in the covenant that is "ordered in all things, and sure," and that, impenetrable as is the veil that conceals it from your eye, God will permit nothing to transpire but what he has shaped and tinted with just that form and hue that will the most perfectly harmonize and blend, and the most surely promote, your greatest well-being with his highest glory.

"What is your loved more than another beloved?" It is clear, from this interrogation, addressed to the Church of Christ, that other and rival beings, other and competing objects, were brought into comparison with Christ, asking, if not a superior, yet an equal share of homage and regard, and the Church is challenged to a vindication of the unnumbered and numberless attractions claimed for her beloved Lord. "What is your loved more than another beloved?" It is a humiliating fact, that there exists no object, the most trivial and contemptible, which the unenraged mind will not place in competition with, and choose in preference to, and delight in to the exclusion of the Lord Jesus Christ! Take a brief and summary view of these claimants to man's regard-- these rivals of Christ-- and see how far they are worthy of a moment's consideration, when brought in contrast with the incarnate Son of God. Before we proceed, however, to particularize, let us premise that this is no new phase or development of our depraved humanity. Our world has ever been a Christ-rejecting world. From the moment the angels' song broke in music upon the plains of Bethlehem, the prediction of the Christ-exalting prophet, Isaiah, commenced its sad fulfillment. "He is despised and rejected of men."

With some individuals, SELF is the rival-- self in some of its many forms. Self-righteousness, self-seeking, self-indulgence, self-worship is the acknowledged and enthroned god-- the "beloved" object of the unenraged mind's supreme affection and worship.

With others, the WORLD is preferred to Christ-- its acquisitions, opinions, and pleasures. O treacherous world what myriads how you draw within your insatiable vortex, "drowning men's souls in perdition!" Reader, are you preferring its gayeties, its riches, its honors, its religion-- its Christ? Pause on the threshold of its solemn period of time, and ask-- "What, should I draw this year, will the world I have chosen in preference to the Savior do for me when eternity stares me in the face?"

Others place the CREATURE in competition with Christ; the creature and not the Savior is their "beloved." But what a fearful crime are they chargeable with, "who worship and serve the creature more (or rather) than the Creator, who has himself loved them." The creature is the defaced, the spoiled image of God. To prefer this marred and ruined temple to the glorious Being who constructed it, is to place yourself upon a level with the idolatrous Persian, who in his blindness worships the sun as the image of the Deity.

But what superior excellence and attraction has an earthly beloved, that you should choose, love, and adore it in preference to the Heavenly One, who, as human, is "fairer than the children of men," and who, as divine, is "God over all, blessed for evermore?" God will not hold him guiltless who loves, worships, and serves the creature rather than the Creator. Thus, there is nothing earthly, base, and contemptible which the natural man will not place above God, and prefer to Christ. His estate, his rank, his talents, his reputation, his very person, is "made to sit in the temple of God, showing itself that it is God," receiving the incense of adoration and worship, which alone belongs to Jehovah.

Reader, whatever earthly object reigns supreme in your mind and affections, dethrones and supplants the Lord Jesus. It may be your daily calling, or some pleasure of the soul, or some object of taste-- music, sculpture, painting, literature, science-- whatever the master-passion of your soul, the supreme, all-engrossing object of your life, it is your Christ, your Savior, your beloved, your all; and with this, your only portion and treasure, you are, in a little while, to confront the bar of God "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

But we approach yet closer our subject, and proceed to unfold the heart-beat Christ occupies in the universe of life, beauty, and love-- in the world of nature and of grace-- showing that there is not, amid this vast assemblage of magnificent objects and glorious beings, one like Christ.

"None like Christ!" How familiar is this sentiment to the family of God. Sometimes it is the expression of gladsome joy, at others, breathed in sadness and in grief. When some beam of holy rapture has lighted up the soul, and the premisseness of the Savior is felt, then the tongue exclaims, "None like Christ!"-- there is no joy like that which Jesus inspires! Or, when some scheme of human happiness is brighted, some cherished friendship chilled, some idol-god smitten from its shrine, some early spring dried, turning from the scene, spirit-wounded, and disappointed, the soul has fled anew to Christ, his true attraction and rest, and each bright gleam of emotion and an emphasis of expression, the inspiration only of such a feeling, the believer has exclaimed-- "Lord, there is none like yourself! I learn your scattered worth, your suffering worthlessness love, I behold your unrivaled beauty, I feel your immitable tenderness, gentleness, and sympathy in this hour when my spirit is overwhelmed within me, and my earthly treasures float a scattered wreck upon the surging waters through which I come to you!"

But follow us, dear reader, while, in a few particulars, we attempt to justify the preeminence of the Savior, and establish your believing soul in the truth that "there is none like Christ!"

I. No GLORY like His.

We begin with the statement, that there is no glory like Christ's glory. The universe is full of glory. The miserably is full of glory, because it is full of God. But God designed that his Son should occupy a place among created intelligences equal to himself touching his divinity, and inferior to himself only as touching his humanity, and both, mysteriously combined, constituting him "the head of all principalities and powers," and "that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father," of whose glory Christ is the effulgence, and of whose substance Christ is the exact impress. The deep gloom of earth was never illumined with such a light as when the Son of God descended from heaven, and the brightness of heaven never shone forth with such a luster as when he returned back to earth, invested with the sinless robe of our nature-- the divine prophet-- the atoning priest-- the triumphant king. Marvel not that all the hierarchies of heaven bend low before that central throne on which sits the glorified Redeemer, and that at his feet the elders cast their crowns. Surely, it is the wonder and the glory and hallelujah of heaven, that divinity could stoop so low, and heaven be less low; and that humanity could rise so high, and not be less human. Oh! there is no glory like Christ's glory.

Reader, can you, with the exulting Evangelist, exclaim-- "We have seen his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Judge of the sacred vision by its hallowed effects-- "We all, with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." This transforming, sanctifying influence of Christ's surpassing glory is real and palpable. One beam darting into your heart will gild the glory of the world, the glory of the creature, and the glory of self. And when this divine sun has risen resplendent on your soul-- a child of darkness though you are-- a worm of earth hiding in your obscurity and gloom-- you may emerge from your cloistered solitude and woe, bask in its warmth, sun yourself in its effulgence, and exult that, as a pardoned sinner, a justified believer, an adopted child, all this glory of Christ's is yours-- your robe of righteousness and your diadem of glory-- constituting you a king and a priest unto God.

Oh! rest not, beloved reader, until this divine light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Then, and not until then, will you arise and shine in the beauty of holiness, a child of the light, shedding its luster all around you; and therefore, whatever be the leadings of your Savior, or the dealings of your God, the way along which he conducts you, checked, winding, lonely, will be that of the "just, which is as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

II. NO BEAUTY like His.

Another observation naturally results from this-- there is no beauty like Christ's beauty. We might expect that such divine glory, if ever it tabernacled on earth-- the world's resplendent Shekinah-- would be enshrined in a temple in all respects worthy of its dignity. We therefore find language like this-- "When he came into the world, he gave us sacrifice and offering to do not desire, but a body have we prepared by the Holy Spirit, of real, yet sinless flesh, in which the Son of God was dwelt. Hence we find the inspired artist, in portraying Christ's beauty as men, represents him as "fairer than the children of men"-- grace is poured into your lips." Himself the source and creator of all beauty, his own beauty kindled them. We love to trace the creations of his beauty, in the varied and endless forms of loveliness which still linger-- adorning and enriching this fallen world. Those bright countenances-- Christ created them; those burning sins-- Christ kindled them; those snow-wreathed Alps, those cloud-capped hills-- Christ raised them; those verdant valleys-- Christ spread them; that bubbling rose, that graceful lily, that exquisite fern, that curious sea-flower tossed upon the shore, that wondrous violet that screens the dew-drop from the sun, that winding stream, that leafy breeze-- Christ formed and penciled it all-- the Christ that magnificently has made up his robe of living green; scented the air with its fragrance; and hallowed out the depth of that expanding ocean dimpled with beauty by the gentle breeze, or drearily in its grandeur when trod by giant starm. Truly, "he has made everything beautiful in his time." Oh! I delight to see the incarnate God, who lived to save, scattering from the pearl of his own boundless resources all this jewelry, making man's sinful home so rich, so lovely, so attractive.

But his own beauty, you can describe? His person so lovely, his nature so holy, his spirit so fond, his heart so pure, his look so winning, his voice so soothing. His whole character, life, and demeanor so inland and resplendent with every human, spiritual, and divine perfection-- truly, it was no imaginative picture, and it was no mere oriental imagery with which the Church, in her just and lofty conception, described him as the "Chief among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely one."

But Christ's beauty is shared with all those who have union with him. Washed in his blood, robed with his righteousness, and adorned with his graces, each believer is lovely, through his loveliness put upon him. And there is more of wonder, because there is more of God, there is more of beauty, because there is more of Christ, in that poor sinner who clings in penitence, faith, and love to the cross, looking up to God as a pardoned child, and pulsating with a life derived from the indwelling spirit, than in all this vast creature, emanated and sparkling with endless forms of loveliness.

Reader, has Christ's beauty caught your eye, and penetrated your soul, transforming you-- reflecting his image in your Christ-like principles, your Christ-like spirit, your Christ-like walk, your whole Christ-like life? Then, did, and imperceptibly as the copy, before long it will be completed, when you "shall see the King in your beauty," and join in the faultless throng who encircle the throne of God and the Lamb. Oh! then, be, by your enjoyment to contemplate, study, and imitate the beauty of Christ, for there is no beauty like his!

"It is a finished portrait!" exclaimed an accomplished infidel, as the character of Christ was delineated to his view. It is a finished portrait-- examine it, transfer it to yourself, and beware how you allow a creature's beauty-- a being of low love and love-- to veil or shade a creature's glory of Christ's surpassing beauty and your eye.

III. NO LOVE like His.

There is no love like the love of Christ. The association of contrast will aid us here. God, who is love, is the author of all human affection. Love is the revelation of Deity, the descendant of heaven, the reflection of God; and he whose soul is most replete with divine love is the most like God. Paralyzed though our humanity is by the fall, tainted as it is by sin, his dignity he still the love of love in some of its loftiest and purest forms. It is impossible to behold its creations without the profoundest reverence. Who can stand, for instance, in the presence of a mother's love and not be by its aid, in his human, won by its power, and melted by its tenderness?

But there is a love which equals, a love which exceeds, a love which surpasses it-- it is the love of Christ! Institute your contrast. Select from among the different relations of life, the nearest and dearest; choose from those relations the dearest, purest, truest love that ever warmed the human breast, prompting to generous and noble deeds, to tender and touching expressions, to costly and different sacrifices; and place it side by side with the divine love that chose you, and the love that ransomed you, the love that cathected you, the love that soothes you, the love whose eyelid never closes, whose accents never change, whose warmth never chills, whose hand is never withdrawn-- "Oh! there is no love like Christ's love!" Trace its features.

1. The love of Christ is a REVEALING love. It uplifts the veil from the heart of God, and shows how that heart loves me. I would have known nothing of the love of my Father in heaven, but for the love of my Savior on earth. And that penitent, believing soul that feels the softest, gentlest pulse of Christ's love throbbing in his breast, knows more of the heart of God, sees more of the glory of God, and understands more of the character of God, than were earth and sky and sea to collect all their wonders and lay them at his feet.

2. The love of Christ is a CONDESCENDING love. No other love ever stooped like Christ's love. Go to Bethlehem and behold its lowliness, and as you return, pause awhile at Getsemane, and gaze upon its sorrow, then pursue your way to Calvary, and behold in its ignominy, in the curse, in the gloom, in the desertion, in the tortures, in the crimson tide of that cross-- how low Christ's love has stooped. And still it stoops! It bends to all your circumstances. It will not be conscious of the becloudings of no guilt it will not cancel, of the pressure of no sin it will not lighten, of the chafings of no cross it will not heal, of the depths of no sorrow it will not reach, of the dreary loneliness of no path it will not illumine and cheer. Oh! there is a home on earth where the love of Christ most loves to dwell, where you will often find, yes, always meet it? It is the heart-broken, contrite, and humbled life, sin!

3. The love of Christ is a SELF-SACRIFICING love. Christ has loved us, and has given himself for us, offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. "That a labored life, that a suffering death was his, and all was for our out-pouring, outpouring of his love. Every precept of the broken law he obeyed, every penalty of an exacting justice he endured. The path that conducted him from Bethlehem to Calvary wound its lonesome way through scenes of humiliation and insult, of trial and privation, the storm growing darker and darker, the thunder waxing louder and louder, and the lightning gleam brighter and brighter, until its pivotal horrors gathered round the cross and crushed the Son of God! O marvelous love of Christ! what more could you do than you have done? To what lower depth of ignominy could you stoop? What darker sorrow could you endure? Where did another cross ever impale such a victim, or illustrate such a love?"

4. Nor is there any love so FORGIVING as Christ's love. Forgiveness of injury is an essential element of true affection. We cannot see how love can exist at the same moment and in the same breast with an unbending, unrelenting, unforgiving spirit. Real love is so forgiving as Christ's love, so Godlike and divine in its nature and properties, we can not conceive of it but in alliance with every emotion, elevating, and worthy sentiment. Selfishness, malignity, revenge, uncharitableness, and all evil embodiment, are passions of our fallen and depraved humanity, so hateful and degrading, it would seem impossible that they should exist for an instant in the same atmosphere with true affection.

But a yet loftier beam, a more sublime emanation of love is presented to us in the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. God cannot love-- we speak reverently-- and not forgive. Those whom God loves, God pardons. That God regards every individual of the fallen race with a feeling of benevolence, is unquestionable; "for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust;" but those to whom the love of God extends his everlasting, his special, and his redeeming love-- the gracious, the full, the eternal forgiveness of all sin likewise extends. God could not love a being and give that being over into the hands of a stern, avenging justice. Divine love will never lose the lowest and unworthiest object of its affections.

If, my reader, you feel conscious that you love God, though your affection be but as a smoldering ember, as a glimmering spark, be sure of this, that God first loved you; and loving, he has pardoned you; and pardoning, he will preserve you; and preserving, you will love him, and you will behold his glory, and enjoy his presence forever.

We repeat the remark, there is no love so forgiving as Christ's love. A human love of injury is an essential element of true affection. We cannot see how love can exist at the same moment and in the same breast with an unbending, unrelenting, unforgiving spirit. Real love is so forgiving as Christ's love, so Godlike and divine in its nature and properties, we can not conceive of it but in alliance with every emotion, elevating, and worthy sentiment. Selfishness, malignity, revenge, uncharitableness, and all evil embodiment, are passions of our fallen and depraved humanity, so hateful and degrading, it would seem impossible that they should exist for an instant in the same atmosphere with true affection.

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