Song of Solomon - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

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Many Christians spend much of their lives desiring the love of Christ, and still more in desiring to love Christ. "Draw me, we will run after thee." There is love to Christ, but a sense of distance. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Such expressions as these in the Song of Solomon express the state of many a soul now, as well as they describe the condition of the remnant of Israel in days to come. How many of us have felt a well-known line in a hymn suit the real state of our souls—"Oh, draw me, Savior, after Thee"—and may have wondered why a dear servant of the Lord, more deeply experienced in the love of Christ than ourselves, should have altered it to, "Lord, Thou hast drawn me after Thee." Is not the difference immense?

The difference would not be greater than if you saw a child looking eagerly through a shop window at various kinds of delicious fruit within. Yes, that child loves grapes, and pears, and plums, and greatly desires them, but not one does it enjoy; it is outside, and they are all inside. A kind hand opens the door, and a loving voice says, Come in, my child. Freely I give you all. Eat and enjoy whatever is for your good. How real the difference between the desire of that child, and the enjoyment of the fruit!

And has not that One with the wounded hand opened the door? Or does He leave us outside still, only to desire? It is, or was, the true place of a Jew outside the holiest; he could only earnestly desire. That is not the true place of a Christian. "The King hath brought me into his chambers." "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Is not this the King with the wounded hands? "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." What holy, deep, real enjoyment do these words describe! Is this desire at a distance, looking through the window? No; "I sat"-perfect repose of heart -in the presence of Christ. No fear; no, such perfect love casts out fear. God is love, and that new nature born of Him delights in Him "with great delight." And it is not longing to love Him, but delighting in Him. "And his fruit was sweet to my taste."

Now a very common mistake is often made. It is this: that we must love Him more, and more, and more, until at last we may hope to arrive at this banquet of love. It is not so; it is not an act of our own. "He brought me to the banqueting house." Oh, how tenderly He led me with those wounded hands to the banquet of love! But must it not be our love to Him that makes the banquet of love? No; "His banner over me was love."

Is it not evident then that if we truly "have known and believed the love that God hath to us," we must go beyond "Oh, draw me, Savior, after Thee"? It is quite true in another sense that we need constantly His power to keep us and guide us through this wilderness. But "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Yes, He has not only brought us into the banquet of love, and spread His banner over us, but this is our dwelling, abiding place. Is it not written, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end"? The banner of love ever floats over us. The fruit is ever sweet. The perfect rest is ever secure. Not a sin did He fail to bear. Never can He cease to love or intercede for those whose sins He bore.

No, the believer has not to desire peace with God, and rest to his soul. "I sat down." He has not too long for repose of soul in the presence of Christ. No, he rests under His shadow in sweet repose. He has not to desire the love of Christ; that love is sweet to his taste. He has not to say, "Oh, draw me"; he is brought into the banqueting house. He can say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies."

There is no effort to love; all is deep, perfect, full enjoyment. A miner in a deep pit, on fire, and about to perish in the suffocating fumes, may well cry out, Oh, draw me out; draw me out into the bright day and pure air. But if a nobleman sent his own son as volunteer to rescue him from that pit of death, and then made him joint heir with that son, of a large estate, his desires would be entirely changed. His one desire would be to be with that one who had saved him, walking and talking with him, sharing all the delights of the estate together.

Is this an overdrawn picture? Far from it. Every illustration fails to set forth the eternal love of God in Christ. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love." Surely then He could not love us more. "So have I loved you." Mark, we have not to keep His commandments to cause Him to love us, or to attain to His love, but to abide in His love. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." And why does the Lord thus speak to us? He says further, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." He would not have us remain outside in the continual disappointment of mere desire, but come into the banquet of full joy in the everlasting possession of His love, with the conscience purged, and in perfect repose, through His precious blood; the heart forever satisfied, dwelling in His unchanging love; the affections now free to act and flow forth from Himself to all the objects of His love. For this is the desire of His heart. "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Have we to desire Him to do this? Surely not. Who could have conceived such a thing? No, God so loved. Jesus so loved. It is done. "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

It will thus be seen by the Christian reader, that we cannot desire Christ to love us. His love to us has been displayed to the utmost. We cannot desire God to love us more than He has loved, or more than He does love. For nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We may have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Paul had this desire (Phil. 1:23), but this was because he knew the love of Christ to him. We may long and hope for that moment when we shall be like Him in the glorified body, but this is because of the certainty

that when He appears we shall be like Him. Yes, we shall see Him as He is, and be like Him. But all this is far different from desiring now that Christ should love us. No, He wishes our present joy to be full, dwelling in His love. He says to the Father, "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." John 17:22, 23.

Just think of the glory given to Christ, already given to us. And shortly the world shall know that the Father has loved us, even as He has loved Christ!! Oh, yes, the blessed One, with those wounds in His hands, says, Come unto the banquet; My banner over you is eternal love.

But the reader may say, Ought I not to desire to love God? How plain the answer! If you know and believe this wondrous love of God to you, you will (not desire, but) love Him, because He first loved you. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "We love Him, because He first loved us." As the children of God, we have the nature of our Father, and He is love. Would not that be a strange child that desired to love its parent? And the love of God leads us to delight to keep His commandments. It is the very outflow of the new nature, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. True love is never occupied with self. Desire to love is always so. We may read page after page of those seeking and desiring to love God, and find nothing but self-occupancy, from beginning to end. If you ask them the meaning of those words, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5), their thought will be, The more we love God, the more He will love us. This shows sad ignorance of the great fact declared here.

Believing God, who has raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification," we are justified, accounted righteous, before the very eye of God. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." To desire to make peace with God would spoil all. It would be to set aside the peace now made by the blood of Jesus, and thus desire to make peace with God ourselves in some other way. No, it is as certain a fact that we have peace with God, as that He who has made our peace is raised from among the dead. We do not desire peace; we have it WITH GOD. We do not desire access to the banquet of love; we have access by faith into this grace, this wondrous free favor wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In like manner, though we pass through tribulation, yet we "glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Do not mistake; if the love of God is not shed abroad in your heart, if the Holy Ghost is not given to you, then you are not a Christian, and that is another matter. But if you know and believe the love of God to you in sending His Son, then every barrier to the love of God has been removed. You have not to desire, but the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, the Holy Ghost is given to you. That love is revealed in Christ; cease your vain, unbelieving desires. No longer stand with the doubting crowd without, but take your happy seat beneath His shade in everlasting repose. The Lord bless these few thoughts on the difference between love and desire to every Christian reader, and may we evermore rejoice in the Lord.

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