

The Transforming Effects of Beholding God

Isaiah 40:9

April 23, 2010

I. Introduction

A. Isaiah 40:1, 2, 9

B. We come this morning to the specific verse in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah that gives our series its title and really gives this chapter its theme: *Behold Your God*.

1. It's important again to be reminded of the context in which this verse comes to us.
 - God's people need comfort; they need comfort because they are battling a set of circumstances that would tempt anyone to discouragement and even depression
2. And having given them the comfort of the gospel (their sins are forgiven) and the comfort of the promise of his coming (prepare the way of the Lord) and the comfort that God was committed to his own glory (the glory of the Lord would be revealed) and the comfort of a fresh reminder of the abiding worth, power and effect of God's Word (the word of our God will stand forever), he now invites them to behold what is really the best news of all: **GOD HIMSELF!!**
 - *"Isaiah states the content of the message in simple terms, Behold! Your God! The interjection arrests the attention drawing it to the message itself. The cities of Judah are stopped as it were, that they might see their God before them. After the long night of sin and warfare, the time of darkness brought on by the sins of the people, at last God Himself is coming again to His own. In these words is found the heart of the Gospel, the 'sum of all happiness... which consists solely in the presence of God' [as Calvin puts it]...this is the great theme of the prophecy; it is the very center of the gospel. If we have not God, we have nothing; and if we have Him, we have all things" (E.J. Young, Commentary on Isaiah).*

II. The Transforming Effects of Beholding God

A. *We effectively become what we affectionately behold.*

1. It will *transform you emotionally*.
2. It will *transform you morally*.
 - a. I want to take a bit of time to establish this principle carefully.
 - 1) First notice how this works on the negative side of things
 - Isaiah 44:9-20
 - This is put emphatically in such passages as Psalm 115:4-8—*"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them"* (see also Psalm 135:15-18; Jeremiah 2:5; 10:1-8, 14, 15, 21)
 - In Romans 1:19-32 we learn that when humans turn from a gazing affectionate knowledge of God and turn to idols there is a corresponding debasing and diminishing of their souls (see also 1 Thess. 4:3-5!
 - Proverbs 22:24, 25 we read—*"Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare."*

- 1 Corinthians 15:33—“*Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’*”
- 2) But this human reality is just as true (and wonderfully so) on the positive side of things—for the good!
- Proverbs 20:20 tells us—“*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise...*”
 - 2 Peter 1:3, 4 tells us—“*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*”
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18—“*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*”
- b. So the principle is this: *we effectively become what we affectionately behold!*
- So that when we behold God we become like God—transformed in heart and character into the moral likeness of His being!!
 - A transformation to be perfected on the day Christ returns when as John puts it in I John 3:2—“*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*”
- c. Let me bring it all together with two powerful statements from the past:
- 1) “*The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love. He who loves mean and sordid things doth thereby become base and vile, but a noble and well-placed affection doth advance and improve the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves*” (Henry Scougal).
- 2) “*The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness. But may it not be supplanted by the love of that which is more worthy than itself?*”

...In a word... the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of [a strong desire] is to fasten it in positive love to another...[it is] by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter, that all old things are to be done away and all things are to become new...

This, we trust, will explain the operation of that charm which accompanies the...preaching of the gospel.

The love of God and the love of the world, are two affections, not merely in a state of rivalry, but in a state of enmity – [one so] irreconcilable, that they cannot dwell together in the same [heart]...

... the only way to dispossess [the heart] of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one.

Nothing can exceed the magnitude of the required change in a man's character - when bidden as he is in the New Testament, to love not the world... nor any of the things that

are in the world for this...[includes] all that is dear to him...

But the same revelation which dictates so mighty an obedience, places within our reach as mighty an instrument of obedience.

It brings...to the very door of our heart, an affection which once seated upon its throne, will either subordinate every previous inmate, or bid it away...

...[it is when] God stands revealed as an object of confidence to sinners [that] our desire after Him is not chilled into apathy...

It is when He stands dismantled of the terrors which belong to Him as an offended lawgiver and when we are enabled by faith...to see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ...it is then, that a love [greater than a] love of the world, and at length expulsive of it, first arises in the regenerated [heart].

It is when released from the spirit of bondage with which love cannot dwell, and when admitted into the number of God's children through the faith that is in Christ Jesus, the spirit of adoption is poured upon us - it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires..." (Thomas Chalmers).

- This is the expulsive power of a new affection, the transforming effect of seeing and savoring Christ...the morally revitalizing effect of beholding God with affection and love!

III. Conclusion

A. Here then is victory over sin!

B. And can I help you a bit further by answering the question: "How do I behold God?"

1. First—get some fresh air!
2. Second—pick up and read!
 - a. The Bible daily
 - b. This fistful of books! (check the bookstore page on the website for this list)
3. Third—pray for eyes to see.
4. Fourth—survey the cross.