

~Other Speakers S-Z: Thomas Shepard:

He has from before all worlds loved thee, when [there appeared to be] no reason for it. Jer. xxxi. 1-3. Thou hast neglected to love him long, all thy youth, nay, it may be all thy life; O, you beloved of the Lord, begin to do it now, when there is all reason for it, when heaven calls for it, earth calls for it, ordinances plead for it, Spirit saith come, and calls for it too. It may be thy life is not long. What, not yet?

How Shall I Love Him?

Question: But how shall I come to do this, thus to love the Lord?

Answer: The Lord only can plant, can water this grace; yet because the Lord does it by means, I will give you some now.

#1 Learn to Taste the Truth

I. Labor to find out the true sweetness, and to taste the bitterness of the deceitful sweetness of all creatures: for this is a rule in reason, a man's affections, like streams, must run some way; and it is a rule in theology, stop the affections from running to the creature, and in a sincere heart it will run unto Christ, (Hos. ii. 6, 7,) if it be from all creatures. Now, then, the affection is turned from the creature, when it finds the bitterness of the deceiving sweetness of it; and, secondly, finds out the real sweetness of it; for make it as a rule, when a man's heart can not love Christ, (unless it be when it is benumbed,) it is because he has somewhat else to joy his heart now, let the creature yield you no more joy, and Christ has your love; indeed, you may and must joy in the real sweetness of it, and this will increase, and not diminish your love.

But these other things taste so sweet!

Question: What is the real sweetness of the creature?

Answer: Christ's love. O, see this! If Christ should not love thee, would not thy life be death, thy salvation from many dangers be damnation, thy friends miserable comforters, thy joys sorrows? What good would any thing do thee if thou hadst these thoughts-- all these I have, but wrath with them? What comfort can a man take in his feast, if news were then brought that after it is done, you must go to the stake to be burnt? You that joy in your pastimes, one frown of Christ would blast all. O, see this! Psalm lxiii. "Thy loving kindness is better than life; in thy favor is life." Now, joy for this, and this will knit your heart nearer to him. For Jesus' sake, ponder this point.

Are these other things really so tasty?

2. Taste the bitterness of the sweetness remaining now it is distilled; and Satan shows a threefold sweetness, before, in, and after the enjoying of it.

Before, remember how they have drawn a ray and held thy heart from God, done thee more hurt than all afflictions; many a sweet smile hadst thou had from God, but for them.

In the enjoying of it, it is sweet; but when it is sweet to thee, it is then most bitter to the heart of God; when thy joy is kindled, the Lord's sorrow is stirred up and provoked.

After; 1. It will draw thy heart from God; and, 2. It will be bitter in thy belly at last. Whatever sweetness draws thee from the love of Christ, O, it will be bitter. Rom. vi. 21. Chew upon this, and see if any thing here be worthy of your joy, and if not, then return to your first husband.

#2 Be Satisfied with Christ's Love

II. Taste the all-sufficiency of the love of Christ. A woman that is not content with her husband's love, she will not love him as it is fit. So when other things make love to us, and the Lord's love is not enough, (Cant. i. 4,) "More than wine." Hence "the upright love thee." Do but sit down and think what this is: if once he loves thee, whatever he can he will do for thee; he will order all thy life, not one thing shall hurt thee; every thing in

providence shall work for thy glory, sins, sorrows, etc., so as thou shalt say his denials are better than his gifts, his blows better than smiles, his withdrawings better than his presence, these evils better than joys, and when once he loves me, he will never leave me; that come life, come death, I am safe. O, taste this!

#3 See Jesus as He Is.

III. See the Lord Jesus now as he is, and in truth this were enough to make any profane heart love him, much more a saint espoused to him; but the Lord has hid himself from their eyes. Shall he be so, is he so from yours? 1 Pet. i. 8, "When seeing not with bodily eyes, but with faith ye love him." 1 John iii. 1-3, "We shall see him as he is." Why, suppose the day of doom was come, Christ in the clouds and all creatures before him, all angels ministering to him, in all the glory of his Father; O, then, the love of Christ; O, one smile, one word of Christ would be precious! Lord, that men should be in a dream! See Christ a little higher set in his throne, a place more glorious, though less seen, in all the glory of his Father, all mighty angels ministering to him, all the world put into his hand, doing what he will, and all he will; why will you not love him now? Is the gospel a fable? Say so if it be, then love him not if you can. When Simeon and the wise men saw him, though but in his abasement, they honored him; much more now if they see him in glory. It is a question whether the beams of the sun are fire. Some demonstrate it thus: Take a glass and gather together the beams, it burns. Therefore so, if you would see so as to be affected, gather together the beams of his glory and love; thus you see the means to get fit love; and if it be lost, O, now get it again, lest the Lord strain for it, else you are not fit; and if it be not any love that suffices, much less no love, as in many of you; but consider, (1 Cor. xvi. 22,) "He that loves not Christ, let him be accursed."

O that this might be won from you! O, little love goes out to Christ; who sees it not? Ordinances of Christ, men are weary of them; the truths of Christ, despise them; the servants of Christ, they quarrel with them. Now, recover your love; the Lord help you so to do.