

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, after the title of the book (v. 1), we have Christ and his church, Christ and a believer, expressing their esteem for each other.

I. The bride, the church, speaks to the bridegroom (v. 2-4), to the daughters of Jerusalem (v. 5, 6), and then to the bridegroom (v. 7).

II. Christ, the bridegroom, speaks in answer to the complaints and requests of his spouse (v. 8-11).

III. The church expresses the great value she has for Christ, and the delights she takes in communion with him (v. 12-14).

IV. Christ commends the church's beauty (v. 15).

V. The church returns the commendation (v. 16, 17). Where there is a fire of true love to Christ in the heart this will be of use to blow it up into a flame.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

We have here the title of this book, showing,

- 1.** The nature of it; it is a *song*, that it might the better answer the intention, which is to stir up the affections and to heat them, which poetry will be very instrumental to do. The subject is pleasing, and therefore fit to be treated of in a song, in singing which we may *make melody with our hearts unto the Lord*. It is evangelical; and gospel-times should be times of joy, for gospel-grace puts a *new song* into our mouths, ⁹⁸¹Psalm 98:1.
- 2.** The dignity of it; it is *the song of songs*, a most excellent song, not only above any human composition, or above all other songs which Solomon penned, but even above any other of the scripture-songs, as having more of Christ in it.
- 3.** The penman of it; it is Solomon's. It is not the song of fools, as many of

the songs of love are, but the song of the wisest of men; nor can any man give a better proof of his wisdom than to celebrate the love of God to mankind and to excite his own love to God and that of others with it. Solomon's songs were a thousand and five (^{<1062>}1 Kings 4:32); those that were of other subjects are lost, but this of seraphic love remains, and will to the end of time. Solomon, like his father, was addicted to poetry, and, which way soever a man's genius lies, he should endeavor to honour God and edify the church with it. One of Solomon's names was *Jedidiah* — *beloved of the Lord* (^{<1025>}2 Samuel 12:25); and none so fit to write of the Lord's love as he that had himself so great an interest in it; none of all the apostles wrote so much of love as he that was himself the beloved disciple and lay in Christ's bosom. Solomon, as a king, had great affairs to mind and manage, which took up much of his thoughts and time, yet he found heart and leisure for this and other religious exercises. Men of business ought to be devout men, and not to think that business will excuse them from that which is every man's great business — to keep up communion with God. It is not certain when Solomon penned this sacred song. Some think that he penned it after he recovered himself by the grace of God from his backslidings, as a further proof of his repentance, and as if by doing good to many with this song he would atone for the hurt he had perhaps done with loose, vain, amorous songs, when he *loved many strange wives*; now he turned his wit the right way. It is more probable that he penned it in the beginning of his time, while he kept close to God and kept up his communion with him; and perhaps he put this song, with his father's psalms, into the hands of the chief musician, for the service of the temple, not without a key to it, for the right understanding of it. Some think that it was penned upon occasion of his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, but that is uncertain; the tower of Lebanon, which is mentioned in this book (^{<2004>}Song of Solomon 7:4), was not built, as is supposed, till long after the marriage. We may reasonably think that when in the height of his prosperity he *loved the Lord* (^{<1038>}1 Kings 3:3) he thus *served him with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things*. It may be rendered, *The song of songs, which is concerning Solomon*, who as the son and successor of David, on whom the covenant of royalty was entailed, as the founder of the temple, and as one that excelled in wisdom and wealth, was a type of Christ, in whom are *hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and yet is a greater than Solomon; this is therefore a song concerning him. It is here fitly placed after *Ecclesiastes*; for when by the book we are thoroughly convinced of the vanity of the creature, and its

insufficiency to satisfy us and make a happiness for us, we shall be quickened to seek for happiness in the love of Christ, and that true transcendent pleasure which is to be found only in communion with God through him. The voice in the wilderness, that was to prepare Christ's way, cried, *All flesh is grass*.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:2-6

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST

The spouse, in this dramatic poem, is here first introduced addressing herself to the bridegroom and then to the daughters of Jerusalem.

I. To the bridegroom, not giving him any name or title, but beginning abruptly: *Let him kiss me*; like Mary Magdalen to the supposed gardener (⁴¹⁶John 20:15), *If thou have borne him hence*, meaning Christ, but not naming him. The heart has been before taken up with the thoughts of him, and to this relative those thoughts were the antecedent, that good matter which the heart was inditing, ⁴⁹¹Psalm 45:1. Those that are full of Christ themselves are ready to think that others should be so too. Two things the spouse desires, and pleases herself with the thoughts of: —

1. The bridegroom's friendship (v. 2): *“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, that is, be reconciled to me, and let me know that he is so; let me have the token of his favour.” Thus the Old-Testament church desired Christ's manifesting himself in the flesh, to be no longer under the law as a schoolmaster, under a dispensation of bondage and terror, but to receive the communications of divine grace in the gospel, in which God is reconciling the world unto himself, binding up and healing what by the law was torn and smitten; as the mother kisses the child that she has chidden. “Let him no longer send to me, but come himself, no longer speak by angels and prophets, but let me have the word of his own mouth, those *gracious words* (⁴⁰²Luke 4:22), which will be to me as the *kisses of the mouth*, sure tokens of reconciliation, as Esau's kissing Jacob was.” All gospel duty is summed up in our kissing the Son (⁴⁰²Psalm 2:12); so all gospel-grace is summed up in his kissing us, as the father of the prodigal kissed him when he returned a penitent. It is a kiss of peace. Kisses are opposed to wounds (²⁷⁶Proverbs 27:6), so are the kisses of grace to the wounds of the law. Thus all true believers earnestly desire the

manifestations of Christ's love to their souls; they desire no more to make them happy than the assurance of his favour, the lifting up of the light of his countenance upon them (^{~1046}Psalm 4:6, 7), and the knowledge of that love of his which surpasses knowledge; this is the one thing they desire, ^{~1274}Psalm 27:4. They are ready to welcome the manifestation of Christ's love to their souls by his Spirit, and to return them in the humble professions of love to him and complacency in him, above all. *The fruit of his lips is peace,* ^{~2579}Isaiah 57:19. "Let him give me ten thousand kisses whose very fruition makes me desire him more, and, whereas all other pleasures sour and wither by using, those of the Spirit become more delightful." So bishop Reynolds. She gives several reasons for this desire.

(1.) Because of the great esteem she has for his love: *Thy love is better than wine. Wine makes glad the heart,* revives the drooping spirits, and exhilarates them, but gracious souls take more pleasure in loving Christ and being beloved of him, in the fruits and gifts of his love and in the pledges and assurances of it, than any man ever took in the most exquisite delights of sense, and it is more reviving to them than ever the richest cordial was to one ready to faint. Note,

[1.] Christ's love is in itself, and in the account of all the saints, more valuable and desirable than the best entertainments this world can give.

[2.] Those only may expect the kisses of Christ's mouth, and the comfortable tokens of his favour, who prefer his love before all delights of the children of men, who would rather forego those delights than forfeit his favour, and take more pleasure in spiritual joys than in any bodily refreshments whatsoever. Observe here the change of the person: *Let him kiss me;* there she speaks of him as absent, or as if she were afraid to speak to him; but, in the next words, she sees him near at hand, and therefore directs her speech to him: "*Thy love, thy loves*" (so the word is), "I so earnestly desire, because I highly esteem it."

(2.) Because of the diffuse fragrantcy of his love and the fruits of it (v. 3): "*Because of the savour of thy good ointment* (the agreeableness and acceptableness of thy graces and comforts to all that rightly understand both them and themselves), *thy name is as ointment poured forth,* thou art so, and all that whereby thou hast made thyself known; thy very name is precious to all the saints; it is an ointment and perfume which rejoice the heart." The unfolding of Christ's name is as the opening of a box of precious ointment, which the room is filled with the odour of. The

preaching of his gospel was the *manifesting the savour of his knowledge in every place*, ^{<A24>}2 Corinthians 2:14. The Spirit was the *oil of gladness* wherewith Christ was anointed (^{<A09>}Hebrews 1:9), and all true believers have that *unction* (^{<A27>}1 John 2:27), so that he is precious to them, and they to him and to one another. A *good name* is as *precious ointment*, but Christ's name is more fragrant than any other. Wisdom, like oil, *makes the face to shine*; but the Redeemer outshines, in beauty, all others. The name of Christ is not now like ointment sealed up, as it had been long (*Ask not after my name, for it is secret*), but like *ointment poured forth*, which denotes both the freeness and fulness of the communications of his grace by the gospel.

(3.) Because of the general affection that all holy souls have to him: *Therefore do the virgins love thee*. It is *Christ's love shed abroad in our hearts* that draws them out in love to him; all that are pure from the corruptions of sin, that preserve the chastity of their own spirits, and are true to the vows by which they have devoted themselves to God, that not only suffer not their affections to be violated but cannot bear so much as to be solicited by the world and the flesh, those are the virgins that love Jesus Christ and *follow him whithersoever he goes*, ^{<A04>}Revelation 14:4. And, because Christ is the darling of all the *pure in heart*, let him be ours, and let our desires be towards him and towards the *kisses of his mouth*.

2. The bridegroom's fellowship, v. 4. Observe here,

(1.) Her petition for divine grace: *Draw me*. This implies sense of distance from him, desire of union with him. "Draw me to thyself, draw me nearer, draw me home to thee." She had prayed that he would draw nigh to her (v. 2); in order to that, she prays that he would draw her nigh to him. "*Draw me*, not only with the moral suasion which there is in the fragrancy of the good ointments, not only with the attractives of that name which is as ointment poured forth, but with supernatural grace, with the *cords of a man* and the *bands of love*," ^{<A14>}Hosea 11:4. Christ has told us that none come to him but such as the Father draws, ^{<A64>}John 6:44. We are not only weak, and cannot come of ourselves any further than we are helped, but we are naturally backward and averse to come, and therefore must pray for those influences and operations of the Spirit, by the power of which we are unwilling made willing, ^{<A03>}Psalms 110:3. "*Draw me*, else I move not; overpower the world and the flesh that would draw me from thee." We are not driven to Christ, but drawn in such a way as is agreeable to rational

creatures.

(2.) Her promise to improve that grace: *Draw me*, and then *we will run after thee*. See how the doctrine of special and effectual grace consists with our duty, and is a powerful engagement and encouragement to it, and yet reserves all the glory of all the good that is in us to God only. Observe,

[1.] The flowing forth of the soul after Christ, and its ready compliance with him, are the effect of his grace; we could not run after him if he did not draw us, ^{<4005>}2 Corinthians 3:5; ^{<3043>}Philippians 4:13.

[2.] The grace which God gives us we must diligently improve. When Christ by his Spirit draws us we must with our spirits run after him. As God says, *I will, and you shall* (^{<3627>}Ezekiel 36:27), so we must say, "*Thou shalt and we will; thou shalt work in us both to will and to do, and therefore we will work out our own salvation*" (^{<1052>}Philippians 2:12, 13); not only we will walk, but we will run after thee, which denotes eagerness of desire, readiness of affection, vigour of pursuit, and swiftness of motion. *When thou shalt enlarge my heart then I will run the way of thy commandments* (^{<1482>}Psalms 119:32); *when thy right hand upholds me then my soul follows hard after thee* (^{<1618>}Psalms 63:8); when with lovingkindness to us he draws us (^{<2913>}Jeremiah 31:3) we with lovingkindness to him must run after him, ^{<2403>}Isaiah 40:31. Observe the difference between the petition and the promise: "Draw me, and then we will run." When Christ pours out his Spirit upon the church in general, which is his bride, all the members of it do thence receive enlivening quickening influences, and are made to run to him with the more cheerfulness, ^{<2815>}Isaiah 55:5. Or, "Draw me" (says the believing soul) "and then I will not only follow thee myself as fast as I can, but will bring all mine along with me: *We will run after thee*, I and the *virgins that love thee* (v. 3), I and all that I have any interest in or influence upon, *I and my house* (^{<1245>}Joshua 24:15), I and the *transgressors whom I will teach thy ways*," ^{<1513>}Psalms 51:13. Those that put themselves forth, in compliance with divine grace, shall find that their *zeal will provoke many*, ^{<4102>}2 Corinthians 9:2. Those that are lively will be active; when Philip was drawn to Christ he drew Nathanael; and they will be exemplary, and so will win those that would not be won by the word.

(3.) The immediate answer that was given to this prayer: *The King has drawn me, has brought me into his chambers*. It is not so much an answer fetched by faith from the world of Christ's grace as an answer fetched by experience from the workings of his grace. If we observe, as we ought, the

returns of prayer, we may find that sometimes, *while we are yet speaking*, Christ hears, ^{<2524>}Isaiah 65:24. The bridegroom is a king; so much the more wonderful is his condescension in the invitations and entertainments that he gives us, and so much the greater reason have we to accept of them and to *run after him*. God is the King that has made the *marriage-supper* for his Son (^{<4117>}Matthew 22:2) and brings in even *the poor and the maimed*, and even the most shy and bashful are *compelled to come in*. Those that are drawn to Christ are brought, not only into his courts, into his palaces (^{<4965>}Psalms 45:15), but into his presence-chamber, where his secret is with them (^{<4341>}John 14:21), and where they are safe in his pavilion, ^{<4175>}Psalms 27:5; ^{<2350>}Isaiah 26:20. Those that *wait at wisdom's gates* shall be *made to come* (so the word is) *into her chambers*; they shall be led into truth and comfort.

(4.) The wonderful complacency which the spouse takes in the honour which the king put upon her. Being *brought into the chamber*,

[1.] “We have what we would have. Our desires are crowned with unspeakable delights; all our griefs vanish, and *we will be glad and rejoice*. If *a day in the courts*, much more an hour in the chambers, *is better than a thousand*, than ten thousand, elsewhere.” Those that are, through grace, brought into covenant and communion with God, have reason to *go on their way rejoicing*, as the eunuch (^{<4189>}Acts 8:39), and that joy will enlarge our hearts and be our strength, ^{<4680>}Nehemiah 8:10.

[2.] All our joy shall centre in God: “*We will rejoice*, not in the ointments, or the chambers, but *in thee*. It is God only that is our *exceeding joy*, ^{<4948>}Psalms 43:4. We have no joy but in Christ, and which we are indebted to him for.” *Gaudium in Domino* — *Joy in the Lord*, was the ancient salutation, and *Salus in Domino sempiterna* — *Eternal salvation in the Lord*.

[3.] “We will retain the relish and savour of this kindness of thine and never forget it: *We will remember thy loves more than wine*; no only thy love itself (v. 2), but the very remembrance of it shall be more grateful to us than the strongest cordial to the spirits, or the most palatable liquor to the taste. We will remember to give thanks for thy love, and it shall make more durable impressions upon us than any thing in this world.”

(5.) The communion which a gracious soul has with all the saints in this communion with Christ. In the chambers to which we are brought we not

only meet with him, but meet with one another (~~117~~1 John 1:7); for *the upright love thee*; the congregation, the generation, of the *upright love thee*. Whatever others do, all that are Israelites indeed, and faithful to God, will love Jesus Christ. Whatever differences of apprehension and affection there may be among Christians in other things, this they are all agreed in, Jesus Christ is precious to them. *The upright* here are the same with the *virgins*, v. 3. All that *remember his love more than wine* will love him with a superlative love. Nor is any love acceptable to Christ but the love of *the upright*, love in sincerity, ~~462~~Ephesians 6:24.

II. To *the daughters of Jerusalem*, v. 5, 6. The church in general, being in distress, speaks to particular churches to guard them against the danger they were in of being offended at the church's sufferings, ~~533~~1 Thessalonians 3:3. Or the believer speaks to those that were professors at large in the church, but not of it, or to weak Christians, babes in Christ, that labour under much ignorance, infirmity, and mistake, not perfectly instructed, and yet willing to be taught in the things of God. She observed these by-standers look disdainfully upon her because of her blackness, in respect both of sins and sufferings, upon the account of which they thought she had little reason to expect the kisses she wished for (v. 2) or to expect that they should join with her in her joys, v. 4. She therefore endeavors to remove this offence; she owns she is *black*. Guilt blackens; the heresies, scandals, and offences, that happen in the church, make her *black*; and the best saints have their failings. Sorrow blackens; that seems to be especially meant; the church is often in a low condition, mean, and poor, and in appearance despicable, her beauty sullied and her face foul with weeping; she is in mourning weeds, clothed with sackcloth, as the Nazarites that had become *blacker than a coal*, ~~508~~Lamentations 4:8. Now, to take off this offence,

1. She asserts her own comeliness notwithstanding (v. 5): *I am black, but comely*, black as *the tents of Kedar*, in which the shepherds lived, which were very coarse, and never whitened, weather-beaten and discoloured by long use, but comely as *the curtains of Solomon*, the furniture of whose rooms, no doubt, was sumptuous and rich, in proportion to the stateliness of his houses. The church is sometimes *black* with persecution, *but comely* in patience, constancy, and consolation, and never the less amiable in the eyes of Christ, *black in the account of men, but comely* in God's esteem, *black* in some that are a scandal to her, *but comely* in others that are sincere and are an honour to her. True believers are *black* in themselves,

but comely in Christ, with the comeliness that he puts upon them, *black* outwardly, for *the world knows them not*, but *all glorious within*, ^{<453>}Psalm 45:13. St. Paul was *weak*, and yet *strong*, ^{<470>}2 Corinthians 12:10. And so the church is *black* and yet *comely*; a believer is a sinner and yet a saint; his own righteousnesses are *as filthy rags*, but he is clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. The Chaldee Paraphrase applies it to the people of Israel's blackness when they made the golden calf and their comeliness when they repented of it.

2. She gives an account how she came to be so black. The blackness was not natural, but contracted, and was owing to the hard usage that had been given her: *Look not upon me so scornfully because I am black*. We must take heed with what eye we look upon the church, especially when she is in black. *Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brother*, the day of his affliction, ^{<312>}Obadiah 1:12. Be not offended; for,

(1.) *I am black* by reason of my sufferings: *The sun has looked upon me*. She was fair and comely; whiteness was her proper colour; but she got this blackness by *the burden and heat of the day*, which she was forced to bear. She was sun-burnt, scorched with tribulation and persecution (^{<416>}Matthew 13:6, 21); and the greatest beauties, if exposed to the weather, are soonest tanned. Observe how she mitigates her troubles; she does not say, as Jacob (^{<434>}Genesis 31:40), *In the day the drought consumed me*, but, *The sun has looked upon me*; for it becomes not God's suffering people to make the worst of their sufferings. But what was the matter?

[1.] She fell under the displeasure of those of her own house: *My mother's children were angry with me*. She was *in perils by false brethren*; her foes were *those of her own house* (^{<406>}Matthew 10:36), brethren by nature as men, by profession as members of the same sacred corporation, the children of the church her mother, but not of God her Father; they *were angry with her*. The Samaritans, who claimed kindred to the Jews, were vexed at any thing that tended to the prosperity of Jerusalem, ^{<420>}Nehemiah 2:10. Note, It is no new thing for the people of God to fall under the anger of their own mother's children. *It was thou, a man, my equal*, ^{<452>}Psalm 55:12, 13. This makes the trouble the more irksome and grievous; from such it is taken unkindly, and the anger of such is implacable. *A brother offended is hard to be won*.

[2.] They dealt very hardly with her: *They made me the keeper of the vineyards*, that is, *First*, "They seduced me to sin, drew me into false

worships, to serve their gods, which was like dressing the vineyards, *keeping the vine of Sodom*; and they would not let me *keep my own vineyard*, serve my own God, and observe those pure worships which he gave me in charge, and which I do and ever will own for mine.” These are grievances which good people complain most of in a time of persecution, that their consciences are forced, and that those who rule them with rigour say *to their souls, Bow down, that we may go over*, ^{<252B>}Isaiah 51:23. Or, *Secondly*, “They brought me into trouble, imposed that upon me which was toilsome, and burdensome, and very disgraceful.” Keeping the vineyards was base servile work, and very laborious, ^{<291B>}Isaiah 61:5. Her mother's children made her the drudge of the family. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel*. The spouse of Christ has met with a great deal of hard usage.

(2.) “My sufferings are such as I have deserved; for *my own vineyard have I not kept*. How unrighteous soever my brethren are in persecuting me, God is righteous in permitting them to do so. I am justly made a slavish keeper of men's vineyards, because I have been a careless keeper of the vineyards God has entrusted me with.” Slothful servants of God are justly made to serve their enemies, *that they may know his service, and the service of the kings of the countries*, ^{<40B>}2 Chronicles 12:8; ^{<68B>}Deuteronomy 28:47, 48; ^{<257B>}Ezekiel 20:23, 24. “Think not the worse of the ways of God for my sufferings, for I smart for my own folly.” Note, When God's people are oppressed and persecuted it becomes them to acknowledge their own sin to be the procuring cause of their troubles, especially their carelessness in keeping their vineyards, so that it has been like *the field of the slothful*.

^{<211B>}SONG OF SOLOMON 1:7-11

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST

Here is,

I. The humble petition which the spouse presents to her beloved, the shepherdess to the shepherd, the church and every believer to Christ, for a more free and intimate communion with him. She turns from the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom she had complained both of her sins and

of her troubles, and looks up to heaven for relief and succour against both, v. 7. Here observe,

1. The title she gives to Christ: *O thou whom my soul loveth*. Note, It is the undoubted character of all true believers that their souls love Jesus Christ, which intimates both the sincerity and the strength of their love; they *love him with all their hearts*; and those that do so may come to him boldly and may humbly plead it with him.

2. The opinion she has of him as the good shepherd of the sheep; she doubts not but he *feeds his flock* and *makes them rest at noon*. Jesus Christ graciously provides both repast and repose for his sheep; they are not starved, but well fed, not scattered upon the mountains, but fed together, fed *in green pastures* and in the hot time of the day *led by the still waters* and made to lie down under a cool refreshing shade. Is it with God's people a noon-time of outward troubles, inward conflicts? Christ has rest for them; he *carries them in his arms*, ^{<2401>}Isaiah 40:11.

3. Her request to him that she might be admitted into his society: *Tell me where thou feedest*. Those that would be told, that would be taught, what they are concerned to know and do, must apply to Jesus Christ, and beg of him to teach them, to tell them. "Tell me where to find thee, where I may have conversation with thee, *where thou feedest* and tendest thy flock, that there I may have some of my company." Observe, by the way, We should not, in love to our friends and their company, tempt them or urge them to neglect their business, but desire such an enjoyment of them as will consist with it, and rather, if we can, to join with them in their business and help to forward it. "*Tell me where thou feedest*, and there I will sit with thee, walk with thee, feed my flocks with thine, and not hinder thee nor myself, but bring my work with me." Note, Those whose souls love Jesus Christ earnestly desire to have communion with him, by his word in which he speaks to us and by prayer in which we speak to him, and to share in the privileges of his flock; and we may learn from the care he takes of his church, to provide convenient food and rest for it, how to take care of our own souls, which are our charge.

4. The plea she uses for the enforcing of this request: "*For why should I be as one that turns aside by (or after) the flocks of thy companions*, that pretend to be so, but are really thy competitors, and rivals with thee." Note, Turning aside from Christ after other lovers is that which gracious souls dread, and deprecate, more than any thing else. "Thou wouldst not

have me to *turn aside*, no, nor to *be as one that turns aside*; *tell me* then, O tell me, where I may be near thee, and I will never leave thee.”

(1.) “*Why should I lie under suspicion, and look as if I belonged to some other and not to thee? Why should I be thought by the flocks of our companions to be a deserter from thee, and a retainer to some other shepherd?*” Good Christians will be afraid of giving any occasion to those about them to question their faith in Christ and their love to him; they would not do any thing that looks like unconcernedness about their souls; or uncharitableness towards their brethren, or that savours of indifference and disaffection to holy ordinances; and we should pray to God to direct us into and keep us in the way of our duty, that we may not so much as *seem to come short*, ^{<390>}Hebrews 4:1.

(2.) “*Why should I lie in temptation to turn aside, as I do while I am absent from thee?*” We should be earnest with God for a settled peace in communion with God through Christ, that we may not be as waifs and strays, ready to be picked up by him that next passes by.

II. The gracious answer which the bridegroom gives to this request, v. 8. See how ready God is to answer prayer, especially prayers for instruction; even while she is yet speaking, he hears. Observe, 1. How affectionately he speaks to her: *O thou fairest among women!* Note, Believing souls are fair, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, above any other. Christ sees a beauty in holiness, whether we do or no. The spouse has called herself black, but Christ calls her fair. Those that are low in their own eyes are so much the more amiable in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Blushing at their own deformity (says Mr. Durham) is a chief part of their beauty.

2. How mildly he checks her for her ignorance, in these words, *If thou know not*, intimating that she might have known it if it had not been her own fault. What! dost thou not know where to find me and my flock? Compare Christ's answer to a like address of Philip's (^{<344>}John 14:9), *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* But, 3. With what tenderness he acquaints her where she might find him. If men say, *Lo, here is Christ, or, Lo, he is there, believe them not, go not after them*, ^{<123>}Matthew 24:23, 26. But,

(1.) *Walk in the way of good men* (^{<202>}Proverbs 2:20), follow the track, ask for the good old way, observe *the footsteps of the flock*, and *go forth by* them. It will not serve to sit still and cry, “Lord, show me the way,” but we

must bestir ourselves to enquire out the way; and we may find it by looking which way *the footsteps of the flock* lead, what has been the practice of godly people all along; let that practice be ours, ^{<312>}Hebrews 6:12; ^{<311>}1 Corinthians 11:1.

(2.) Sit under the direction of good ministers: “*Feed thyself and thy kids besides the tents of the under-shepherds*. Bring thy charge with thee” (it is probable that the custom was to commit the lambs and kids to the custody of the women, the shepherdesses); “they shall all be welcome; *the shepherds* will be no hindrance to thee, as they were to Reuel's daughters (^{<317>}Exodus 2:17), but helpers rather, and therefore abide by their tents.” Note, Those that would have acquaintance and communion with Christ must closely and conscientiously adhere to holy ordinances, must join themselves to his people and attend his ministers. Those that have the charge of families must bring them with them to religious assemblies; let their *kids*, their children, their servants, have the benefit of *the shepherds' tents*.

III. The high encomiums which the bridegroom gives of his spouse. To be *given in marriage*, in the Hebrew dialect, is to be *praised* (^{<313>}Psalm 78:63, margin), so this spouse is here; her *husband praises* this *virtuous woman* (^{<313>}Proverbs 31:28); he praises her, as is usual in poems, by similitudes.

1. He calls her his *love* (v. 9); it is an endearing compellation often used in this book: “My friend, my companion, my familiar.”

2. He compares her to a set of strong and stately *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*. Egypt was famous for the best horses. Solomon had his thence; and Pharaoh, no doubt, had the choicest the country afforded for his own chariots. The church had complained of her own weakness, and the danger she was in of being made a prey of by her enemies: “Fear not,” says Christ; “*I have made thee like a company of horses*; I have put strength into thee as I have done into *the horse* (^{<319>}Job 39:19), so that thou shalt with a gracious boldness *mock at fear, and not be affrighted, like the lion*, ^{<311>}Proverbs 28:1. *The Lord has made thee as his goodly horse in the day of battle*, ^{<310>}Zechariah 10:3. *I have compared thee to my company of horses* which triumphed over *Pharaoh's chariots*, the holy angels, *horses of fire*.” ^{<315>}Habakkuk 3:15, *Thou didst walk through the sea with thy horses*; and see ^{<313>}Isaiah 63:13. We are weak in ourselves, but if Christ

make us as horses, strong and bold, we need not fear what all the powers of darkness can do against us.

3. He admires the beauty and ornaments of her countenance (v. 10): *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels*, the attire of the head, curls of hair, or favourites (so some), or knots of ribbons; *thy neck also with chains*, such as persons of the first rank wear, *chains of gold*. The ordinances of Christ are the ornaments of the church. The graces, gifts, and comforts of the Spirit, are the adorning of every believing soul, and beautify it; these render it, *in the sight of God, of great price*. The ornaments of the saints are many, but all orderly disposed in *rows* and *chains*, in which there is a mutual connexion with and dependence upon each other. The beauty is not from any thing in themselves, from the *neck* or from the *cheeks*, but from ornaments with which they are set off. It was *comeliness which I put upon thee, said the Lord God*; for we were born not only naked, but polluted, ²³⁶⁴Ezekiel 16:14.

IV. His gracious purpose to add to her ornaments; for where God has given true grace he will give more grace; *to him that has shall be given*. Is the church courageous in her resistance of sin, as the *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*? Is she *comely* in the exercise of grace, as *with rows of jewels and chains of gold*? She shall be yet further beautified (v. 11): *We will make thee borders of gold*, inlaid, or enamelled, *with studs of silver*. Whatever is wanting shall be made up, till the church and every true believer come to be *perfect in beauty*; see ²³⁶⁴Ezekiel 16:14. This is here undertaken to be done by the concurring power of the three persons in the Godhead: *We will do it*; like that (⁰⁰²⁶Genesis 1:26), “*Let us make man*; so let us new-make him, and perfect his beauty.” The same that is the author will be the finisher of the good work; and it cannot miscarry.

²⁰¹²SONG OF SOLOMON 1:12-17

CONFERENCE BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

Here the conference is carried on between Christ and his spouse, and endearments are mutually exchanged.

I. Believers take a great complacency in Christ, and in communion with him. *To you that believe he is precious*, above any thing in this world, ⁽¹¹⁷⁾1 Peter 2:7. Observe,

1. The humble reverence believers have for Christ as their Sovereign, v. 12. He is a *King* in respect both of dignity and dominion; he wears the crown of honour, he bears the sceptre of power, both which are the unspeakable satisfaction of all his people. This King has his royal table spread in the gospel, in which is *made for all nations a feast of fat things*, ⁽¹¹⁸⁾Isaiah 25:6. Wisdom has *furnished her table*, ⁽¹¹⁹⁾Proverbs 9:1. He *sits at this table to see his guests* (⁽¹²⁰⁾Matthew 22:11), to see that nothing be wanting that is fit for them; he *sups with them and they with him* (⁽¹²¹⁾Revelation 3:20); he has fellowship with them and rejoices in them; he *sits at his table* to bid them welcome, and to carve for them, as Christ *broke the five loaves* and gave to his disciples, that they might distribute to the multitude. He sits there to receive petitions, as Ahasuerus admitted Esther's petition at *the banquet of wine*. He has promised to be present with his people in his ordinances always. Then believers do him all the honour they can, and study how to express their esteem of him and gratitude to him, as Mary did when she anointed his head with *the ointment of spikenard* that was *very costly*, one pound of it worth *three hundred pence*, and so fragrant that *the house was filled with the pleasing odour of it* (⁽¹²²⁾John 12:3), which story seems as if it were designed to refer to this passage, for Christ was then *sitting at table*. When good Christians, in any religious duty, especially in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, where the King is pleased, as it were, to *sit with us at his own table*, have their graces exercised, their hearts broken by repentance, healed by faith, and inflamed with holy love and desires toward Christ, with joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed, then the *spikenard sends forth the smell thereof*. Christ is pleased to reckon himself honoured by it, and to accept of it as an instance of respect to him, as it was in the wise men of the east, who paid their homage to the new-born King of the Jews by presenting to him *frankincense and myrrh*. The graces of God's Spirit in the hearts of believers are exceedingly precious in themselves and pleasing to Christ, and his presence in ordinances draws them out into act and exercise. If he withdraw, graces wither and languish, as plants in the absence of the sun; if he approach, the face of the soul is renewed, as of the earth in the spring; and then it is time to bestir ourselves, that we may not lose the gleam, not lose the gale; for nothing is done acceptably but

what grace does, ^{<828>}Hebrews 12:28.

2. The strong affection they have for Christ as their *beloved*, their *well-beloved*, v. 13. Christ is not only *beloved* by all believing souls, but is their *well-beloved*, their best-beloved, their only beloved; he has that place in their hearts which no rival can be admitted to, the innermost and uppermost place. Observe,

(1.) How Christ is accounted of by all believers: He is *a bundle of myrrh* and *a cluster of camphire*, something, we may be sure, nay, every thing, that is pleasant and delightful. The doctrine of his gospel, and the comforts of his Spirit, are very refreshing to them, and they rest in his love; none of all the delights of sense are comparable to the spiritual pleasure they have in meditating on Christ and enjoying him. There is a complicated sweetness in Christ and an abundance of it; there is *a bundle of myrrh* and *a cluster of camphire*. We are not straitened in him whom there is *all fulness*. The word translated *camphire* is *copher*, the same word that signifies *atonement* or *propitiation*. Christ is *a cluster* of merit and righteousness to all believers; *therefore* he is dear to them because *he is the propitiation for their sins*. Observe what stress the spouse lays upon the application: He *is unto me*, and again *unto me*, all that is sweet; whatever he is to others, he is so *to me*. He *loved me*, and *gave himself for me*. He *is my Lord*, and *my God*.

(2.) How he is accepted: *He shall lie all night between my breasts*, near my heart. Christ lays the beloved disciples in his bosom; why then should not they lay their beloved Saviour in their bosoms? Why should not they embrace him with both arms, and hold him fast, with a resolution never to let him go? Christ must *dwell in the heart* (^{<827>}Ephesians 3:17), and, in order to that, the adulteries must be put from *between the breasts* (^{<822>}Hosea 2:2), no pretender must have his place in the soul. He shall be as *a bundle of myrrh*, or perfume bag, between *my breasts*, always sweet to me; or his effigies in miniature, his love-tokens, shall be hung between *my breasts*, according to the custom of those that are dear to each other. He shall not only be laid there for a while, but shall lie there, shall abide there.

II. Jesus Christ has a great complacency in his church and in every true believer; they are amiable in his eyes (v. 15): *Behold, thou art fair, my love*; and again, *Behold, thou art fair*. He says this, not to make her proud (humility is one principal ingredient in spiritual beauty), but,

1. To show that there is a real beauty in holiness, that all who are sanctified are thereby beautified; they are truly fair.

2. That he takes great delight in that good work which his grace has wrought on the souls of believers; so that though they have their infirmities, whatever they think of themselves, and the world thinks of them, he thinks them fair. He calls them friends. The *hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, is in the sight of God of great price*, ^{<108>}1 Peter 3:4.

3. To comfort weak believers, who are discouraged by their own blackness; let them be told again and again that they are fair.

4. To engage all who are sanctified to be very thankful for that grace which has made them fair, who by nature were deformed, and changed the Ethiopian's skin. One instance of the beauty of the spouse is here mentioned, that she *has doves' eyes*, as ^{<200>}Song of Solomon 4:1. Those are fair, in Christ's account, who have, not the piercing eye of the eagle, but the pure and chaste eye of the *dove*, not like the hawk, who, when he soars upwards, still has his eye upon the prey on earth, but a humble modest eye, such an eye as discovers a simplicity and godly sincerity and a dove-like innocency, eyes enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, that blessed Dove, weeping eyes. I did *mourn as a dove*, ^{<207>}Ezekiel 7:16.

III. The church expresses her value for Christ, and returns esteem (v. 16): *Behold, thou art fair*. See how Christ and believers praise one another. Israel saith of God, *Who is like thee?* ^{<1051>}Exodus 15:11. And God saith of Israel, *Who is like thee?* ^{<1053>}Deuteronomy 33:29. Lord, saith the church, “Dost thou call me *fair*? No; if we speak of strength, *thou art strong* (^{<1099>}Job 9:19), so, if of beauty, *thou art fair*. I am fair no otherwise than as I have thy image stamped upon me. Thou art the great Original; I am but a faint and imperfect copy, I am but thy *umbra* — *the shadow of thee*, ^{<1116>}John 1:16; 3:34. Thou art fair in thyself and (which is more) *pleasant* to all that are thine. Many are fair enough to look at, and yet the sourness of their temper renders them unpleasant; but *thou art fair, yea, pleasant*.” Christ is pleasant, as he is ours, in covenant with us, in relation to us. “Thou art pleasant now, when the *King sits at his table*.” Christ is always precious to believers, but in a special manner pleasant when they are admitted into communion with him, when they hear his voice, and see his face, and taste his love. *It is good to be here*. Having expressed her esteem of her husband's person, she next, like a loving spouse, that is transported

with joy for having disposed of herself so well, applauds the accommodations he had for her entertainment, his *bed*, his *house*, his *rafters* or *galleries* (v. 16), which may be fitly applied to those holy ordinances in which believers have fellowship with Jesus Christ, receive the tokens of his love and return their pious and devout affections to him, increase their acquaintance with him and improve their advantages by him. Now,

1. These she calls *ours*, Christ and believers having a joint-interest in them. As husband and wife are *heirs together* (~~Q18E~~ 1 Peter 3:7), so believers are *joint-heirs with Christ*, ~~Q18E~~ Romans 8:17. They are his institutions and their privileges; in them Christ and believers meet. She does not call them *mine*, for a believer will own nothing as his but what Christ shall have an interest in, nor *thine*, for Christ has said, *All that I have is thine*, ~~Q18E~~ Luke 15:31. All is *ours* if we are Christ's. Those that can by faith lay claim to Christ may lay claim to all that is his.

2. These are the best of the kind. Does the colour of the bed, and the furniture belonging to it, help to set it off? *Our bed is green*, a colour which, in a pastoral, is preferred before any other, because it is the colour of the fields and groves where the shepherd's business and delight are. It is a refreshing colour, good for the eyes; and it denotes fruitfulness. *I am like a green olive-tree*, ~~Q18E~~ Psalm 52:8. We are *married to Christ*, *that we should bring forth unto God*, ~~Q18E~~ Romans 7:4. *The beams of our house are cedar* (v. 17), which probably refers to the temple Solomon had lately built for communion between God and Israel, which was of *cedar*, a strong sort of wood, sweet, durable, and which will never rot, typifying the firmness and continuance of the church, the gospel-temple. The galleries for walking are *of fir*, or *cypress*, some sort of wood that was pleasing both to the sight and to the smell, intimating the delight which the saints take in walking with Christ and conversing with him. Every thing in the covenant of grace (on which foot all their treaties are carried on) is very firm, very fine, and very fragrant.