

GLEANINGS IN THE GODHEAD

**Part 2: Excellencies Which
Pertain to God the Son as Christ**

Section four

**The Friendship,
Helpfulness, and
the Call of Christ.**

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The Friendship of Christ

How many have ever heard a sermon or read an article on this subject? How many of God's people think of Christ in this blessed relationship? Christ is the best Friend the Christian has, and it is both his privilege and duty to regard Him as such. Our scriptural support is in the following passages: "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24), which can refer to none other than the Lord Jesus; "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:16). That is the language of His Spouse, the testimony of the Church, avowing this most intimate relationship. Add to these the witness of the New Testament when Christ was termed "a friend of publicans and sinners" (Luke 7:34).

Many and varied are the relationships in which Christ stands to a believer, and he is the loser if He is ignored in any of them. Christ is God, Lord, Head, Saviour of the Church. Officially He is our Prophet, Priest, and King; personally He is our Kinsman-Redeemer, our Intercessor, our Friend. That title expresses the near union between the Lord Jesus and believers. They are as if but one soul actuated them; indeed, one and the same spirit does, for "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). "Christ stands in a nearer relation than a brother to the Church: He is her Husband, her Bosom-friend" (John Gill). "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). But even those relationships fall short of fully expressing the nearness, spiritual oneness, and indissolubleness of the union between Christ and His people. There should be the freest approaches to Him and the

most intimate fellowship with Him. To deny Christ that is to ignore the fact He is our best Friend.

“There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” That endearing title not only expresses the near relation between Him and His redeemed but also the affection which He bears them. Nothing has, does, or can, dampen, or quench its outflow. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). That blessed title tells of the sympathy He bears His people in all their sufferings, temptations, and infirmities. “In all their affliction he was afflicted . . . in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isa. 63:9). What demonstrations of His friendship! That title also tells of His deep concern for our interests. He has our highest welfare at heart; accordingly He has promised, “I will not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer. 32:40). Consider more definitely the excellencies of our best Friend:

Christ is an ancient Friend. Old friends we prize highly. The Lord Jesus was our Friend when we were His enemies! We fell in Adam, but He did not cease to love us; rather He became the last Adam to redeem us and “lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He sent His servants to preach the Gospel unto us, but we despised it. Even when we were wandering in the ways of folly He determined to save us, and watched over us. In the midst of our sinning and sporting with death, He arrested us by His grace, and by His love overcame our enmity and won our hearts.

Christ is a constant Friend; One that “loveth at all times” (Prov. 17:17). He continues to be our Friend through all the vicissitudes of life—no fair-weather friend who fails us when we need Him most. He is our Friend in the day of adversity, equally as much as in the day of prosperity. Was He not so to Peter? He is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa. 46:1), and evidences it by His sustaining grace. Nor do our transgressions turn away His compassion from us; even then He acts as a friend. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Christ is a faithful Friend. His grace is not shown at the expense of righteousness, nor do His mercies ignore the requirements of

holiness. Christ always has in view both the glory of God and the highest good of His people. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). A real friend performs his duty by pointing out my faults. In this respect, too, Christ does “show himself friendly” (Prov. 18:24). Often He says to each of us, “I have a few things against thee” (Rev. 2:14)—and rebukes us by His Word, convicts our conscience by His Spirit, and chastens us by His providence “that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

Christ is a powerful Friend. He is willing and able to help us. Some earthly friends may have the desire to help us in the hour of need, but lack the wherewithal: not so our heavenly Friend. He has both the heart to assist and also the power. He is the Possessor of “unsearchable riches,” and all that He has is at our disposal. “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them” (John 17:22). We have a Friend at court, for Christ uses His influence with the Father on our behalf. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). No situation can possibly arise which is beyond the resources of Christ.

Christ is an everlasting Friend. He does not desert us in the hour of crisis. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me” (Psa. 23:4). Nor does death sever us from this Friend who “sticketh closer than a brother,” for we are with Him that very day in paradise. Death will have separated us from those on earth, but “absent from the body” we shall be “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). And in the future Christ will manifest Himself as our Friend, saying “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Since Christ is such a Friend to the Christian, what follows? Friendship should be answered with friendship! Negatively, there should be no coldness, aloofness, trepidation, hesitancy on our part; but positively, a free availing ourselves of such a privilege. We should delight ourselves in Him. Since He is a faithful Friend we may safely tell Him the secrets of our hearts, for He will never betray our confidence. But His friendship also imposes definite obligations—to please Him and promote His cause, and daily seek His counsel.

The Helpfulness of Christ

One of the apostle's purposes in writing the epistle to the Hebrews is to strengthen the faith of those who were sorely tried and wavering—and by parity of reason all who are weak in grace. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). The method he followed in prosecuting that end was to set forth the transcendent excellency of Christ, with His good will to the sons of men. He exhibits at length the perfections of His person, His offices, and His work. He declares that He is the Son of God, who has been made the Heir of all things; that He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. Full demonstration was made of His immeasurable superiority to angels, yet so infinite was His condescension and so great His love to those given Him by the Father that He took a place lower than that occupied by celestial creatures; yet, “in all things . . . to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17). In His offices He is revealed as the supreme Prophet, the final spokesman of Deity (Heb. 1:1-2), as a glorious king (Heb. 1:8), as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17); in His work as making “reconciliation [literal “propitiation”] for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17), as ever living to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25), as “bringing many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10).

So amazing was the grace of this august Being that He not only partook of the nature of those He came here to save, but also He entered fully into their circumstances, became subject to their infirmities, was tempted in all respects as they are (inward corruption excepted). He shed His precious blood and died a shameful death in their stead and on their behalf; and all of this to manifest the reality and abundance of His mercy unto sinners, fire their hearts, and draw out the affections of believers to Him. The apostle points out one of the blessed consequences of the Son's having become incarnate and entered into fellowship with His suffering people. First, the Lord of glory came down into the realm of temptation. Scripture is always to be understood in its widest possible latitude; therefore “tempt” is signifying put to the

proof, subjected to trials and troubles, solicited to evil. Christ was tempted by God, by men, by the devil. Second, He “suffered” while being tempted. Those temptations were not mere make-believe, but real and painful. It could not be otherwise, for not only did He partake of all human sensibilities, but also His holiness felt acutely every form of evil. Third, the remembrance of His sufferings makes Him the more mindful of ours.

“For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” Let us consider first the timeliness and preciousness of those words to those to whom they were originally addressed. The Hebrews saints were Jews who had been converted in the days of Christ and under the preaching of the apostles, and they were in peculiarly trying circumstances. Their unconverted countrymen regarded them as apostates from Moses, and therefore from Jehovah Himself. They would have no fellowship with them, but instead regarded them with the utmost contempt and treated them most cruelly. This resulted in great distress and privation, so that they “endured a great fight of afflictions,” were “made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions,” even to “the spoiling of their goods” (Heb. 10:32-34), because of their continued loyalty to Christ. Hence they were strongly tempted to abandon the Christian profession, resume their former place under Judaism, and thereby escape further trouble. Now it was to believers in such a situation that our text was addressed. The apostle reminds them that Christ Himself was severely tempted, that He was subjected to worse trials than ours; yet He endured the same and emerged a victorious Overcomer. Then he assured them that the Saviour was able to sustain, comfort, and strengthen them.

There are Christians today who are in circumstances similar to those of the oppressed Hebrews. The world hates them, and does so in proportion to their fidelity and conformity to Christ. Some are treated harshly by ungodly relatives. Some suffer at the hands of graceless professors. Others experience divine chastisement or perplexing providences, or are passing through the waters of bereavement or a painful sickness. At such times Satan is particularly active, launching his fiercest attacks, tempting them in

various ways. Here is relief—real, present, all-sufficient relief. Turn your heart and eye to the Saviour, and consider how well qualified He is to succour you. He is clothed with our humanity, and therefore capable of being “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” The experience through which He passed fit Him to pity us. He knows all about your case, fully understands your trials and gauges the strength of your temptation. He is not an indifferent spectator, but full of compassion. He wept by the grave of Lazarus—and He is the same today as yesterday. He is faithful in responding to the appeals of His people.

“He is able to succour” no matter what form the temptation or trial takes. “Succour” is a comprehensive word: it means “to befriend,” “to assist those in need,” “to strengthen the weak.” But the Greek term is even more striking and beautifully expressive: it signifies to hasten in response to a cry of distress, literally to “run in to the call” of another. Chrysostom interpreted it, “He gives out His hand unto them with all readiness.” A blessed illustration is seen in the case of Christ stretching forth His hand to catch hold of Peter as he began to sink in the sea (Matthew 14:30-31). That was the Saviour succouring one of His own. The same tender benevolence was yet more fully exemplified where we behold Him as the good Samaritan tending the wounded traveller (Luke 10:33-35). “He is able.” The Greek word implies both fitness and a willingness to do a thing. Christ is alike competent and ready to undertake for His people. There is no unwillingness in Him. The straitness is always in us. “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25) signifies readiness as well as ability.

During His sojourn on this earth, was He not ever ready to heal diseased bodies? And do you think that He is now unwilling to minister to distressed souls? Perish the thought. He was always at the disposal of the maimed, the blind, the palsied, yes, of the repellent leper too. He was ever prepared, uncomplainingly, to relieve suffering, though it cost Him something—“there went virtue out of him” (Luke 6:19)—and though much unbelief was expressed by those He befriended. As it was then apart of His mission to heal the sick, so it is now a part of His ministry to bind

up the brokenhearted. What a Saviour is ours! The almighty God, the all-tender Man. One who is infinitely above us in His original nature and present glory, yet One who became flesh and blood, lived on the same plane as we do, experienced the same troubles, and suffered as we, though far more acutely. Then how well qualified He is to supply your every need! Cast all your care upon Him, knowing that He cares for you.

Whatever your circumstances, the succouring Saviour is all-sufficient and enters sympathetically into your condition. He knew what it was to be weary (John 4:6) and exhausted (Mark 4:36-38). He knew what it was to suffer hunger and thirst. Are you homeless? He had not a place to lay His head. Are you in straitened circumstances? He was cradled in a manger. Are you grief-stricken? He was the Man of sorrows. Are you misunderstood by fellow believers? So was He by His own disciples. Whatever your lot, He can enter fully into it. He experienced all the miseries of mankind, and has not forgotten them. Are you assailed by Satan? So was He. Do blasphemous thoughts at times torment your mind? The devil tempted Him idolatrously to worship him. Are you in such desperation as to think of making an end of yourself? Satan challenged Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, sin excepted.”

Angels may pity, but they can have no fellow feeling. But Christ’s compassion (to suffer with) moves Him to succour. In some instances He does so *before* the temptation comes, and in a variety of ways. He prepares for it by forewarning of the same; as with Israel being afflicted in Egypt (Gen. 15:13), and Paul (Acts 9:16)—in our case by causing His providences to presage the temptation; by fitting us for them, as Christ was anointed with the Spirit before the devil tempted Him; or by melting the heart with a sense of His goodness, which moves us to say,

“How then can I do this great wickedness?” (Gen. 39:9).

He succours *under* temptation; in some cases by the powerful application of a precept or promise, which as a cable holds the heart fast amid the storm; by a providential interposition which prevents our executing the evil intention, or by removing the

temptation itself; by giving us to prove the sufficiency of His grace (2 Cor. 1:2). He succours *after* temptation, by giving us a spirit of contrition (Luke 22:61-62), moving us to confess our sins. As angels ministered to Him after His conflict with Satan, so He ministers to us. Then no matter how dire your situation or acute your suffering, apply to Christ for relief and deliverance, and count upon His help. It is when the child is most ill that the mother comes and sits beside it (Isa. 66:13).

The Call of Christ

“Come Unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Familiar as the sound of those words are to professing Christians, there is a pressing need for their careful examination. Few portions of God’s Word have received such superficial treatment. That these verses call for prayerful meditation some will admit, but few realize that such a “simple passage” demands protracted study. Many take it for granted they already understand its meaning, hence they make no diligent inquiry into the significance of its terms. The mere fact a verse is so frequently quoted is no proof that we really see its import; yet, such familiarity has precluded careful examination and renders it far more likely we do not rightly grasp its truth.

There is a vast difference between being acquainted with the *sound* of a verse of Holy Writ and entering into the *sense* of it. Our age is marked by industrial loafing and mental slackness. Work is detested and how quickly a task may be disposed of, rather than how well it may be done, is the order of the day. The same dilatory spirit marks the products of both the pulpit and the printed page; hence the superficial treatment this passage commonly receives. No regard is paid to its context or no laborious attempt made to ascertain its coherence (the relation of one clause to another); no painstaking examination and exposition of its terms.

If ever a passage of Scripture were mutilated and its meaning perverted, it is this one. Only a fragment of it usually is quoted,

with the part most unpalatable to the flesh omitted. A particular call is twisted into a promiscuous invitation by deliberately ignoring the qualifying terms there used by the Saviour. Even when the opening clause is quoted, no attempt is made to show what is involved in “come to Christ,” so the hearer is left to assume he already understands its meaning. The special offices in which the Son of God is portrayed, namely as Lord and Master, as Prince and Prophet, are ignored, and another substituted. The conditional promise made by Christ is falsified by making it an unconditional one, as though His “rest” could be obtained *without* our taking His “yoke” upon us, and *without* our “learning” of Him.

Such charges may be resented bitterly by a large number of churchgoers who do not wish to hear anyone criticized. But if they are prepared to remain “at ease in Zion,” if they are content whether they be deceived or not, if they have such confidence in men that they are willing to receive the most valuable things of all secondhand, if they refuse to examine their foundations and search their hearts, then we must “let them alone” (Matthew 15:14). But there are still some who prize their souls so highly they consider no effort too great to ascertain whether or not they possess a saving knowledge of God’s truth; whether or not they truly understand the terms of God’s salvation; whether or not they are building on an unshakable foundation.

Take a closer look at the passage. It opens with, “Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest” and closes with, “and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” It is not (as some have supposed) two different rests which are spoken of, but the same in both cases; namely, spiritual rest, saving rest. Nor are two different aspects of this rest portrayed; but rather one rest viewed from two distinct viewpoints. In the former, divine sovereignty is in view, “I will give;” in the latter, human responsibility is enforced, “ye shall find.” In the opening clause Christ affirms that He is the Giver of rest; in what follows He specifies the terms upon which He dispenses rest; or to express it another way, the conditions which we must meet if we are to obtain that rest. The rest is freely given, yet only to those who comply with the revealed requirements of its Bestower.

“Come unto Me.” Who issues this call? Christ, you reply. True, but Christ in what particular character? Did Christ speak as King, commanding His subjects; as Creator, addressing His creatures; as Physician, inviting the sick; or as Lord, instructing His servants? But do you draw a distinction in your mind between the person of Christ and the office of Christ? Do you not distinguish sharply between His office as Prophet, as Priest, and as King? Have you found such distinctions both necessary and helpful? Then why do people complain when we call attention to the varied relations which our Lord sustains, and the importance of noting which of these relations He is acting in at any time. Attention to such details often makes all the difference between a right and wrong understanding of a passage.

To answer our query in what particular character Christ issued this call, it is necessary to look at the verses preceding. Attention to context is one of the very first concerns for those who would carefully ponder any particular passage. Matthew 11 opens with John the Baptist having been cast into prison, from which he sent messengers to Christ to acquaint Him with his perplexity (verses 2-3). Our Lord publicly vindicated His forerunner and magnified his unique office (verses 4-15). Having praised the Baptist and his ministry, Christ went on to reprove those who had been privileged to enjoy both it and that of His own, because they did not profit from it, but had despised and rejected both. So depraved were the people of that day, they accused John of being demon-possessed and charged Christ with being a glutton and a winebibber (verses 16-19).

One of the most solemn passages in Holy Writ (verses 20-24) records some of the most fearful words which ever fell from the lips of the Son of God. He upbraided the cities where most of His mighty works were done because “they repented not” (verse 20). Note that Christ refused to gloss over the perversity of the people; instead, He charged them with their sins. And let Antinomians observe that, so far from the Christ of God ignoring human responsibility or excusing men’s spiritual impotency, He held them strictly accountable and blamed them for their impenitency.

“Wilful impenitency is the great damning sin of multitudes that

enjoy the Gospel, and which (more than any other) sinners will be upbraided with to eternity. The great doctrine that both John the Baptist, Christ Himself, and the apostles preached, was repentance: the great thing designed to both in the “piping” and in the “mourning” was to prevail with people to change their minds and ways. to leave their sins and turn to God; but this they would not be brought to. He does not say, because they *believed* not, for some kind of faith many of them had, that Christ was a “Teacher come from God;” but because they “*repented not*”—their faith did not prevail to the transforming of their hearts and the reforming of their lives. Christ reproved them for their other sins that He might lead them to repentance, but when they repented not, He upbraided them with that as their refusal to be healed. He upbraided them with it, that they might upbraid themselves, and might at length see the folly of it, as that which alone makes the sad case a desperate one and the wound incurable” (Matthew Henry).

The particular sin for which Christ upbraided them was that of impenitence. The special aggravation of their sin was that they had witnessed most of Christ’s miraculous works, for in those cities the Lord had for some time resided and performed many of His miracles of healing. Some places enjoy the means of grace more plentifully than others. Just as certain parts of the earth receive a much heavier rainfall than others, certain countries and towns have been favoured with purer Gospel preaching and more outpourings of the Spirit than others. God is sovereign in the distribution of His gifts, both natural and spiritual, and “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Luke 12:48). The greater our opportunities the greater our obligations; and the stronger the inducements we have to repent the more heinous is impenitence, and the heavier reckoning will be. Christ notes His “mighty works” among us, and will yet hold us to an account of them.

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!” (Matthew 11:21). Christ came into the world to dispense blessing. But if His person is despised, His authority rejected, and His mercies slighted, then He has terrible woes in reserve. But how many church attenders hear anything at all about this? Often the pulpiteer has deliberately taken the line of least resistance and sought only to

please the pew, withholding what was unpalatable or unpopular. Souls are deceived if a sentimental Christ is substituted for the Scriptural Christ, if His “Beatitudes” (Matthew 5) are emphasized and His “woes” (Matthew 23) are ignored.

In still further aggravation of their sin of impenitence, our Lord affirmed that the citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida were worse at heart than the Gentiles they despised. He asserted that if Tyre and Sidon had enjoyed such privileges as they, they would have “repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” Some of the blessings Christendom despises would be welcome in many parts of heathendom.

“We are not competent to solve every difficulty, or fully to understand the whole of this subject; it suffices that Christ knew the hearts of the impenitent Jews to be more hardened in rebellion and enmity, and less susceptible of suitable impressions from His doctrine and miracles, than those of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon would have been; and therefore their final condemnation would be proportionably more intolerable” (Thomas Scott).

On the one hand this passage does not stand alone (see Ezekiel 3:6-7); on the other, the repentance spoken of by Christ is not necessarily one which leads to eternal salvation.

Still more solemn are the awful words of Christ (Matthew 11:23-24), where He announced the doom of highly favoured Capernaum. Because of the unspeakable privileges enjoyed by its inhabitants, they had been lifted heavenwards. But because their hearts were so earthbound they scorned such blessings; therefore they would be “brought down to hell.” The greater the advantages enjoyed, the more fearful the doom of those who abuse them; the higher the elevation, the more fatal a fall from it. Honourable Capernaum is then compared with dishonourable Sodom, which, because of its enormities, God had destroyed with fire and brimstone. It was in Capernaum the Lord Jesus had resided chiefly upon entry into His public ministry, and where so many of His miracles of healing were accomplished. Yet so obdurate were its inhabitants, so wed to their sins, they refused to apply to Him for the healing of their souls. Had such mighty works been done by Him in Sodom its people would have been affected and their city

remain as a lasting monument of divine mercy.

“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (verse 24). Yes, my reader, though you may hear nothing about it from the pulpit, there is a “day of judgment” awaiting the world. It is, “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds;” it is the day “when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:5, 16); “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14); “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:9); The punishment then meted out will be in proportion to the opportunities given and rejected; the privileges vouchsafed and scorned; the light granted and quenched. Most intolerable will be the doom of those who have abused the greatest advancements heavenwards.

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matthew 11:25). The connection between this and the preceding verses is most instructive. There the Lord Jesus intimates that the majority of His mighty works had produced no good effect upon those who saw them, that their beholders remained impenitent. So little influence had His gracious presence exerted upon Capernaum, where He spent much of His time, that its fate would be worse than Sodom’s. Christ looks away from earth to heaven, and finds consolation in the sovereignty of God and the absolute security of His covenant. From upbraiding the impenitence of men, Christ turned to render thanks to the Father. On the word “answered,” Matthew Henry said, “It is called an answer though no other words are found recorded but His own, because it is so comfortable a reply to the melancholy considerations preceding it, and is aptly set in the balance against them.”

A word of warning is needed at this point, for we are such creatures of extremes. In earlier paragraphs we referred to those

who substituted a sentimental Christ for the true Christ; yet the reader must not infer from this that we believe in a stoical Christ, hard, cold, devoid of feeling. Not so. The Christ of Scripture is perfect Man as well as God the Son, possessed of human sensibilities; yes, capable of much deeper feeling than any of us, whose faculties are blunted by sin. The Lord Jesus was not unaffected by grief when He pronounced the doom of those cities, nor did He view them with fatalistic indifference as He found comfort in the sovereignty of God. Scripture must be compared with Scripture: He who wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) would not be unmoved as He foresaw the intolerable fate awaiting Capernaum. The fact that He was “the Man of sorrows” precludes any such concept.

A similar warning is needed by hyper-Calvinists with fatalistic stoicism:

“It seems plain then, that those who are indifferent about the event of the Gospel, who satisfy themselves with this thought, that the elect shall be saved, and feel no concern for unawakened sinners, make a wrong inference from a true doctrine, and know not what spirit they are of. Jesus wept for those who perished in their sins. Paul had great grief and sorrow of heart for the Jews, though he gave them this character, “that they pleased not God, and were contrary to all men.” It well becomes us, while we admire distinguishing grace to ourselves, to mourn over others: and inasmuch as secret things belong to the Lord, and we know not but some of whom we have at present but little hopes, may at last be brought to the knowledge of the Truth, we should be patient and forbearing after the pattern of our heavenly Father, and endeavour by every proper and prudent means to stir them up to repentance, remembering that they cannot be more distant from God than by nature we were ourselves” (John Newton).

As perfect Man and as “minister of the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8) the Lord Jesus felt acutely any lack of response to His arduous efforts. This is clear from His lament, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought” (Isa. 49:4). But observe how He comforted Himself. “Yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work [or “reward”] with my God” (Isa. 49:4).

Thus, both in the language of prophecy and here in Matthew 11:25-26, the Lord Jesus sought relief from the discouragements of the Gospel by retreating into the divine sovereignty. “We may take great encouragement in looking upward to God, when round about us we see nothing but what is discouraging. It is sad to see how regardless most men are of their own happiness, but it is comfortable to think that the wise and faithful God will, however, effectually secure the interests of His own glory” (Matthew Henry).

Christ alluded here to the sovereignty of God in three details. First, by owning His Father as “Lord of heaven and earth,” that is, as sole Proprietor thereof. It is well to remember, especially when it appears Satan is master of this lower sphere, that God not only “doeth according to His will in the army of heaven,” but also “among the inhabitants of the earth,” so that “none can stay his hand” (Dan. 4:35). Second, by affirming, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.” The things pertaining to salvation are concealed from the self-sufficient and self-complacent, leaving them in nature’s darkness. Third, by declaring, “and hast revealed them unto babes.” By the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit a divine discovery is made by those who are helpless in their own esteem. “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight,” expressed the Saviour’s perfect acquiescence.

“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). This verse supplies the immediate connecting-link between the sovereignty of divine grace mentioned (verses 25-26) and the communication of that grace through Christ (verses 28-30). The settlements of divine grace were made and secured in the everlasting covenant; communication of it is by and through Christ as the Mediator of that covenant. First, here is the grand commission the Mediator received from the Father: all things necessary to the administration of the covenant were delivered unto Christ (cf. Matthew 28:18; John 5:22, 17:2). Second, here is the inconceivable dignity of the Son: lest a false inference be drawn from the preceding clause, the essential and

absolute deity of Christ is affirmed. Inferior in office, Christ's nature and dignity is the same as the Father's. As Mediator, Christ receives all from the Father, but as God the Son He is, in every way, equal to the Father in His incomprehensible Person. Third, here the work of the Mediator is summed up in one grand item: that of revealing the Father to those given to Him.

Thus the context of Matthew 11 reveals Christ in the following characters: as the Upbraider of the impenitent; as the Pronouncer of solemn "woe" upon those who were unaffected by His mighty works; as the Announcer of the day of judgment, declaring that the punishment awaiting those who scorned gospel mercies should be more intolerable than that meted out to Sodom; as the Affirmer of the high sovereignty of God who conceals and reveals the things pertaining to salvation; as the Mediator of the covenant; as the Son coequal with the Father; and as the One by whom the Father is revealed. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Having examined the context of these words, so that we might the better see their connection and the particular characters in which Christ is portrayed, consider the persons addressed, the ones who were invited to the Rest-giver. This point brings some differences among commentators. Some give a narrower scope to this call of Christ, and some a wider. Note however, that all of the leading earlier expositors restricted this particular call to a special class:

"He now kindly invites to Himself those whom He acknowledges to be fit for becoming His disciples. Though He is ready to reveal the Father to all, yet the great part are careless about coming to Him, because they are not affected by a conviction of their necessities. Hypocrites give themselves no concern about Christ because they are intoxicated with their own righteousness, and neither hunger nor thirst after His grace. Those who are devoted to the world set no value on a heavenly life. It would be vain therefore for Christ to invite either of these classes, and therefore He turns to the wretched and afflicted. He speaks of them as "labouring" or being under a "burden," and does not mean generally those who are oppressed with griefs and vexations, but those who are overwhelmed by their sins, who are filled with alarm

at the wrath of God and are ready to sink under so weighty a burden” (John Calvin).

“The character of the persons invited: all that labour and are heavy laden. This is a word in season to him that is weary (Isa. 50:4). Those that complain of the burden of the ceremonial law, which was an intolerable yoke, and was made much more so by the tradition of the elders (Luke 11:46); let them come to Christ and they shall be made easy . . . But it is rather to be understood of the burden of sin, both the guilt and the power of it. All those, and those only, are invited to rest in Christ that are sensible of sin as a burden and groan under it, that are not only convicted of the evil of sin—their own sin—but are contrite in soul for it; that are really sick of sin, weary of the service of the world and the flesh, that see their state sad and dangerous by reason of sin, and are in pain and fear about it: as Ephraim (Jer. 31:18-20), the prodigal (Luke 15:17), the publican (Luke 18:13), Peter’s hearers (Acts 2:37), Paul (Acts 9), the jailor (Acts 16:29-30). This is a necessary preparative for pardon and peace” (Matthew Henry).

“Who are the persons here invited? They are those who “labour” (the Greek expresses toil with weariness) and are “heavy laden.” This must here be limited to spiritual concerns, otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the Gospel. Referring to the self-righteous religionists, this writer went on to say, “You avoid gross sins, you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst you think that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house and field to field; or you spend your days in a complete indolence, walking in the way of your own hearts, and looking no further: and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it, that you are neither weary nor heavy laden . . . then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of His rest” (John Newton).

“The persons invited are not “all” the inhabitants of mankind, but with a restriction: “all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” meaning not those who labour in the service of sin and Satan, are laden with iniquity and insensible of it: those are not weary of sin

nor burdened with it, nor do they want or desire any rest for their souls; but such who groan, being burdened with the guilt of sin on their consciences and are pressed down with the unsupportable yoke of the Law and the load of their trespasses, and have been labouring till they are weary, in order to obtain peace of conscience and rest for their souls by the observance of these things, but in vain. These are encouraged to come to Him, lay down their burdens at His feet and look to Him, and lay hold by faith on His person, blood and righteousness” (John Gill).

In more recent times many preachers have dealt with the text (Matthew 11:28) as though the Lord Jesus was issuing an indefinite invitation, regarding His terms as sufficiently general and wide in their scope to include sinners of every type. They supposed that the words, “ye that labour and are heavy laden,” refer to the misery and bondage which the fall brought upon the human race, as its unhappy subjects vainly seek satisfaction in the things of time and sense, and endeavour to find happiness in the pleasures of sin. “The universal wretchedness of man is depicted on both its sides—the active and the passive forms of it” (Fausset and Brown). They are labouring for contentment by gratifying their lusts, only to add to their miseries by becoming more and more the burdened slaves of sin.

It is true the unregenerate “labour in the very fire” and they “weary themselves for very vanity” (Hab. 2:13); it is true they “labour in vain” (Jer. 51:58), and “what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?” (Ecclesiastes 5:16). It is true they “spend money for that which is not bread,” and “labour for that which satisfieth not” (Isa. 55:2), for “the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Eccl. 1:8). It is equally true that the unregenerate are heavy laden, “a people laden with iniquity” (Isa. 1:4), yet they are totally insensible to their awful state. “The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Eccl. 10:15). Moreover, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 57:20-21). They have neither peace of conscience nor rest of heart. But it is quite another matter to

affirm these are the characters Christ invited to come unto Him for rest.

We prefer the view taken by the older writers. Over a century ago a latitudinarian spirit began to creep in, and even the most orthodox were often, unconsciously, affected by it. Those in the pews were more inclined to chafe against what they regarded as the “rigidity” and “narrowness” of their fathers; and those in the pulpit had to tone down those aspects of truth which were most repellent to the carnal mind, if they were to retain their popularity. Side by side with modern inventions, an increased means for travel, and the dissemination of news, came what was termed “a broader outlook” and “a more charitable spirit.” Posing as an angel of light, Satan succeeded in Arminianizing many places of truth; and even where this was not accomplished, high Calvinism was whittled down to moderate Calvinism.

These are solemn facts which no student of ecclesiastical history can deny. Christendom has not fallen into its present condition all of a sudden; rather its present state is the outcome of a long and steady deterioration. The deadly poison of error was introduced here a little, there a little, with the quantity increased as less opposition came against it. As the acquiring of “converts” absorbed more and more of the attention and strength of the Church, the standard of doctrine lowered, sentiment displaced convictions, and fleshly methods were introduced. In a comparatively short time many of those sent out to “the foreign field” were rank Arminians, preaching “another gospel.” This reacted upon the homeland, and soon the interpretations of Scripture given out from pulpits moved into line with the “new spirit” which had captivated Christendom.

While we do not affirm that everything modern is evil or that everything ancient was excellent, there is no doubt that the greater part of the boasted “progress” in Christendom of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a progress downward and not upward—away from God and not toward Him, into the darkness and not the light. Therefore we need to examine with double caution any religious views which deviate from the common teachings of the godly Reformers and Puritans. We need not be

worshippers of antiquity as such, but we need to regard with suspicion those “broader” interpretations of God’s Word which have become popular in recent times.

We should point out some of the reasons why we do not believe that Christ was making a broadcast invitation that was issued promiscuously to the light-headed, gay-hearted, pleasure-crazy masses which had no appetite for the Gospel and no concern for eternal interests. This call was not addressed to the godless, careless, giddy and worldly multitudes, but rather to those who were burdened with a sense of sin and longed for relief of conscience.

First, the Lord Jesus received no commission from heaven to bestow rest of soul upon all, but only upon the elect of God. “For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:38-39). That, necessarily, regulated all His ministry.

Second, the Lord Jesus always practiced what He preached. To His disciples He said, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7:6). Can we, then, conceive of our holy Lord inviting the unconcerned to come unto Him for that which their hearts abhorred? Has He set His ministers such an example? Surely, the word He would have them press upon the pleasure-intoxicated members of our generation is, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Eccl. 11:9).

Third, the immediate context is entirely out of harmony with the wider interpretation. Christ pronounced most solemn “woes” on those who despised and rejected Him (Matthew 11:20-24), drawing consolation from the sovereignty of God and thanking Him because He had hidden from the wise and prudent the things which belonged unto their eternal peace but had revealed them unto babes (verses 25-26). It is these “babes” He invites to

Himself; and we find Him presented as the One commissioned by the Father and as the Revealer of Him (verse 27).

It must not be concluded that we do not believe in an unfettered Gospel, or that we are opposed to the general offer of Christ to all who hear it. Not so. His marching orders are far too plain for any misunderstanding; his Master has bidden him “preach the Gospel to every creature,” so far as Divine providence admits, and the substance of the Gospel message is that Christ died for sinners and stands ready to welcome every sinner willing to receive Him on His terms. The Lord Jesus announced the design of His incarnation in sufficiently general terms as to warrant any man truly desiring salvation to believe in Him. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). Many are called even though but few are chosen (Matthew 20:16). The way we spell out our election is by coming to Christ as lost sinners, trusting in His blood for pardon and acceptance with God.

In his excellent sermon on these words before us, John Newton pointed out that, when David was driven into the wilderness by the rage of Saul, “every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them” (1 Sam. 22:2). But David was despised by those who, like Nabal (1 Sam. 25:10), lived at their ease. They did not believe he should be a king over Israel, therefore they preferred the favour of Saul, whom God had rejected. Thus it was with the Lord Jesus. Though a divine person, invested with all authority, grace, and blessings—and declaring that He would be the King of all who obeyed His voice—yet the majority saw no beauty that they should desire Him, felt no need of Him, and so rejected Him. Only a few who were consciously burdened believed His Word and came to Him for rest.

What did our Lord signify when He bade all the weary and heavy laden “come unto Me?” First, it is evident that something more than a physical act or coming to hear Him preach was intended. These words were first addressed to those already in His presence. Many who attended His ministry and witnessed His miracles never came to Him in the sense intended. The same holds

true today. Something more than a bare approach through the ordinances—listening to preaching, submitting to baptism, partaking of the Lord’s Supper—is involved in coming to Christ. Coming to Christ in the sense He invited is a going out of the soul after Him, a desire for Him, a seeking after Him, a personal embracing and trusting Him.

Coming to Christ suggests first, and negatively, a *leaving* of something, for the divine promise is, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Coming to Christ, then, denotes turning our backs upon the world and turning our hearts unto Him as our only Hope. It means to abandon every idol and surrender ourselves to His Lordship; it is repudiating our own righteousness and dependency, and the heart going out to Him in loving submission and trustful confidence. It is an entire going out of self with all its resolutions to cast ourselves upon His mercy; it is the will yielding itself to His authority, to be ruled by Him and to follow where He leads. In short, it is the whole soul of a self-condemned sinner turning unto a whole Christ, exercising all our faculties, responding to His claims upon us, and prepared to unreservedly trust, unfeignedly love, and devotedly serve Him.

Thus, coming to Christ is the turning of the whole soul to Him. Perhaps this calls for amplification. There are three principal faculties in the soul: the understanding, the affections, and the will. Since each of these were operative and affected by our original departure from God, so they are and must be active in our return to Christ. Of Eve it is recorded, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof” (Gen. 3:6). First, she “saw that the tree was good for food,” she perceived the fact mentally, a conclusion drawn from her understanding. Second, “and that it was pleasant to the eyes.” That was the response of her affections to it. Third, “and a tree to be desired to make one wise.” Here was the moving of her will. “And took of the fruit thereof and did eat,” was the completed action.

So it is in the sinner’s coming to Christ. First there is apprehension by the understanding. The mind is enlightened and

brought to see a deep need of Christ and His suitability to meet those needs. The intelligence sees He is “good for food,” the Bread of life for the nourishment of our souls. Second, there is the moving of the affections. Before, we saw no beauty in Christ that we should desire Him, but now He is “pleasant to the eyes” of our souls. It is the heart turning from the love of sin to the love of holiness, from self to the Saviour. Third, in coming to Christ there is an exercise of the will, for He said to those who would not receive Him, “Ye will not come to me that ye might have life” (John 5:40). This exercise of the will is a yielding of ourselves to His authority.

None will come to Christ while they remain in ignorance of Him. The understanding must accept His suitability for sinners before the mind can turn intelligently to Him as He is revealed in the Gospel. Neither can the heart come to Christ while it hates Him or is wedded to the things of time and space. The affections must be drawn out to Him. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema” (1 Cor. 16:22). Equally evident is it that no man will come to Christ while his will is opposed to Him: it is the enlightening of his understanding and the firing of his affections which subdues his enmity and makes the sinner willing in the day of God’s power (Psa. 110:3). Observe that these exercises of the three faculties of the soul correspond in character to the threefold office of Christ: the understanding enlightened by Him as Prophet; the affections moved by His work as Priest; and the will bowing to His authority as King.

In the days on earth the Lord Jesus stooped to minister to the needs of men’s bodies, and not a few came unto Him and were healed. In that we may see an adumbration of Him as the Great Physician of souls and what is required of sinners if they are to receive spiritual healing at His hand. Those who sought out Christ to obtain bodily relief were persuaded of His mighty power, His gracious willingness, and of their own dire need. But note that then, as now, this persuasion in the Lord’s sufficiency and His readiness to nourish varied in different cases. The centurion spoke with full assurance, “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8). The leper expressed himself more

dubiously, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2). Another used fainter language, “If thou canst do any thing, have compassion and help us” (Mark 9:22); yet even there the Redeemer did not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, but graciously wrought a miracle on his behalf.

But observe that in each of these cases there was a personal, actual application to Christ; and it was this very application which manifested their faith, even though it was as small as a grain of mustard seed. They were not content with having heard of His fame, but improved it. They sought Him out for themselves, acquainted Him with their case, and implored His compassion. So it must be with those troubled about soul concerns. Saving faith is not passive, but operative. Moreover, the faith of those who sought Christ for physical relief refused to be deterred by difficulties. In vain the multitudes charged the blind man to be quiet (Mark 10:48). Knowing that Christ was able to give sight, he cried so much the more. Even when Christ appeared to manifest a great reserve, the woman refused to leave till her request was granted (Matthew 15:27).

The Fourth of Seven Booklets.

