



THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT INTEREST



**Part One: The Trial of a
Saving Interest in Christ
Booklet One – Chapters I & II**



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Since there are so many people living under the ordinances, pretending, without ground, to a special interest in Christ, and to His favour and salvation, as is clear from the words of our Lord - *“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt. 7:22, 23). *“Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not”* (Matt. 25:11, 12). *“Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”* (Luke 13:24). And since many who have good ground of claim to Christ, are not established in the confidence of this favour, but remain in the dark, without comfort, hesitating concerning the reality of godliness in themselves, and speaking little in the commendation of religion to others, especially in the time of their straits: I shall speak a little respecting two things of the greatest concern: The one is, How a person may know if he hath a true and special interest in Christ, and whether he doth lay just claim to God's favour and salvation. The other is, In case a person fall short of assurance in this trial, what course he should take for making sure of God's friendship and salvation to himself.

Question 1. How shall a man know if he hath a true and special interest in Christ, and whether he hath, or may lay claim justly to God's favour and salvation?

Chapter I

Things premised for the better understanding of the trial itself

Before we speak directly to the question, we shall premise some things, to make way for the answer.

I. A man's interest in Christ may be known

First, That a man's interest in Christ, or his gracious state, may be known, and that with more certainty than people conjecture; yea, and the knowledge of it may be more easily attained unto than many imagine; for not only hath the Lord commanded men to know their interest in Him, as a thing attainable – *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith”* (2 Cor. 13:5); *“Give diligence to make your calling and election sure”* (2 Peter 1:10) - but many of the saints have attained unto the clear persuasion of their interest in Christ, and in God as their own God. How often do they call Him their God and their portion? and how persuaded is Paul *“that nothing can separate him from the love of God?”* (Rom. 8:38, 39). Therefore the knowledge of a man's gracious state is attainable. And this knowledge of it, which may be attained, is no fancy and mere conceit, but it is most sure: *“Doubtless Thou art our Father,”* saith the prophet (Isa. 63:16), in name of the Church.

It is clear from this:

1. That can be no fancy, but a very sure knowledge, which doth yield to a rational man comfort in most real straits; but so doth this - When the people spake of stoning David, *“he encouraged himself in the Lord his God”* (1 Sam. 30:6). He saith, *“He will not be afraid though ten thousands rise up against him”* (Psa. 3:6). Compare these words with the following: *“But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head”* (Psa. 3:3). *“The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident”* (Psa. 27:1-3).

2. That is a sure knowledge of a thing which maketh a wise merchant sell all he hath, that he may keep it sure; that maketh a man forego children, lands, life, and suffer the spoiling of all joyfully; but so doth this - Matt. 13:44; Mark 10:28, 29; Heb. 10:34; Rom. 5:3; Acts 5:41.

3. That must be a sure and certain knowledge, and no fancy, upon which a man voluntarily and freely doth adventure his soul when he is stepping into eternity, with this word in his mouth, *“This is all my desire”* (2 Sam. 23:5); but such a knowledge is this.

And again, not only may a godly man come to the sure knowledge

of his gracious state, but it is more easily attainable than many apprehend: for supposing, what shall be afterwards proved, that a man may know the gracious work of God's Spirit in himself; if he will but argue rationally from thence, he shall be forced to conclude his interest in Christ, unless he deny clear Scripture truths. I shall only make use of one here, because we are to speak more directly to this afterwards. A godly man may argue thus, Whosoever receive Christ are justly reputed the children of God - "*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God*" (John 1:12); but I have received Christ in all the ways which the word there can import: for I am pleased with the device of salvation by Christ, I agree to the terms, I welcome the offer of Christ in all His offices, as a King to rule over me, a Priest to offer sacrifice and intercede for me, a Prophet to teach me; I lay out my heart for Him and towards Him, resting on Him as I am able. What else can be meant by the word "*receiving?*" Therefore may I say, and conclude plainly and warrantable, I am justly to reckon myself God's child, according to the aforesaid scripture, which cannot fail.

II. Importance of having an interest in Christ

The second thing to be premised is, That a man be savingly in covenant with God is a matter of the highest importance: "*It is his life*" (Deut. 32:47). And yet very few have, or seek after a saving interest in the covenant; and many foolishly think they have such a thing without any solid ground (Matt. 7:14). Few find, or walk in, the narrow way. This should alarm people to be serious about the matter, since it is of so great consequence to be in Christ, and since there be but few that may lay just claim to Him; and yet many do foolishly fancy an interest in Him, who are deceived by a false confidence, as the foolish virgins were (Matt. 25).

III. We must allow our state to be determined by Scripture

The third thing to be premised is, Men must resolve to be determined by Scripture in this matter of their interest in Christ. The Spirit speaking in the Scripture is judge of all controversies - "*To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*" (Isa. 8:20) - and of this also, whether a man be savingly in covenant with God or not.

Therefore do not mock God whilst you seem to search after such a thing. If we prove from Scripture, which is the uncontroverted rule, that you are gracious, and have made a covenant savingly with God, then resolve to grant so much, and to acquiesce in it; and if the contrary appear, let there be a determination of the controversy, else you do but mock the Lord.

“They shall be made strong” (Isa. 28:22); for *“a jot of His word cannot fail”* (Matt. 5:11).

Therefore, seek eye-salve from Christ to judge of things according as the word of God shall discover them to be.

IV. Causes why so few attain to a distinct knowledge of their state

The fourth thing to be premised is, although the matter of a man’s interest in Christ be of so great importance, and the way to attain to the knowledge of it so plainly held forth in the Scriptures, yet there be but few who reach the distinct knowledge of it. And that this may not discourage any person from attempting it, I shall hint some few reasons why so few come to the clear knowledge of it; which will also prepare the way for what is to be spoken afterwards.

1. The first thing which hinders many from the knowledge of their interest in Christ is their ignorance of some special principles of religion; as,

(1). That it was free love in God’s bosom, and nothing in man, that moved Him to send a Saviour to perfect the work of redemption (John 3:16) - *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”* Men are still seeking some ground for that work in themselves, which leads away from suitable and high apprehensions of the first spring and rise of God’s covenant favour to His people, which hath no reason, cause, or motive in us; and so they cannot come to the knowledge of their interest.

(2). They are ignorant how that love effectually discovers itself to a man’s heart, so as he hath ground to lay claim to it, namely, That ordinarily,

First, It discovers his fallen state in himself, because of sin and corruption defiling the whole man, and any thing in him that might be called a righteousness: *“All these things are loss and dung”* (Phil. 3:8).

Secondly, It discovers Christ as the full and satisfying treasure, above all things: *“The man finds a treasure, for which with joy he selleth all that he hath”* (Matt. 13:44, 46).

Thirdly, It determines the heart, and causes it to approach unto a living God in the ordinances: *“Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causes to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts”* (Psa. 65:4); and causes the heart to wait upon Him, and Him alone: *“My soul, wait thou only upon God”* (Psa. 62:5). Thus having dropped in the seed of God in the heart, and formed Christ there (Gal. 4:19), the heart is changed and made new in the work (Ezek. 36:26); and God’s law is so stamped upon the heart in that change (Jer. 31:33), that the whole yoke of Christ is commended to the man without exception (Rom. 7:12, 16). The law is acknowledged good, holy, just, and spiritual. Upon all which, from that new principle of life, there flow out acts of a new life (Gal. 5:6), *“Faith worketh by love;”* (Rom. 6:18, 22), and the man becometh a servant of righteousness unto God, which especially appears in the spirituality of worship: men then *“serve God in spirit and in truth, in the newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”* (John 4:24; Rom. 7:6) - and tenderness in all manner of Conversation. The man then *“exerciseth himself how to keep a conscience void of offense towards God and towards men”* (Acts 24:16). Now in this way doth the love of God discover itself unto man, and acteth on him, so as he hath ground of laying some good claim to it; and so as he may justly think that the love which sent a Saviour had respect to such a man as hath had these things made out unto him. Surely ignorance in this doth hinder many from the knowledge of their interest in Christ; for if a man know not how God worketh with a person, so as he may justly lay claim to His love, which was from eternity, he will wander in the dark, and not come to the knowledge of an interest in Him.

(3). Many are also ignorant of this, that God alone is the hope of His people; He is called *“the hope of Israel”* (Jer. 14:8). Although inherent qualifications are evidences of it, yet the staying of the heart upon Him, as a full blessing and satisfying portion, is faith – *“The faith and hope must be in God”* (1 Peter 1:21) - and the only proper condition which giveth right to the saving blessings of the covenant: *“To him that worketh not but believeth, faith is counted*

for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). Indeed, if any person take liberty here, and turn grace unto licentiousness, there is, without doubt, in so far a delusion: since there is mercy with Him upon condition that it conciliate fear to him (Psa. 130:4). Yea, hardly can any man who hath found the former-mentioned expressions of God’s love made out in him, make a cloak of the covenant for sinful liberty, without some measure of a spiritual conflict. In this respect, *“he that is born of God doth not sin,”* and *“he who doth so sin hath not seen God”* (1 John 3:6, 9).

I say God is the hope of His people, and not their own holiness. They intend honestly and long seriously to be like unto Him, many failings should not weaken their hope and confidence, for it is in Him *“who changeth not”* (Mal. 3:6); *“and if any man sin, we have an advocate”* (1 John 2:1). Now, when men place their hope in any other thing besides the Lord, it is no wonder they are kept in a staggering condition, according to the changes of the thing which they make the ground of their hope; since they give not to God the glory due to His name, and which He will not give to another. *“They who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee”* (Psa. 9:10). *“My glory will I not give to another: I am the Lord, that is my name”* (Isa. 42:8).

(4). Many are ignorant of the different ways and degrees of God’s working with His people, and this doth much darken their knowledge and reflex acts of their interest in Him. This ignorance consists mainly of three things:

First, They are ignorant of the different degrees and ways of that work of the law, by which God ordinarily dealeth with men, and of the different ways in which the Lord bringeth people at first to Christ. They consider not that the jailer is not kept an hour in bondage (Acts 16); Paul is kept in suspense three days (Acts 9); Zaccheus not one moment (Luke 19).

Secondly, They are ignorant of, at least they do not consider, how different are the degrees of sanctification in the saints, and the honourable appearances thereof before men in some, and the sad blemishes thereof in others. Some are very blameless, and more free of gross outbreakings, adorning their profession much, as Job and Zacharias. These are said to be *“perfect and upright, fearing God, and eschewing evil”* (Job 1:8); *“righteous before God, walking in*

all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Others were subject to very gross and sad evils, as Solomon, Asa, etc.

Thirdly, They are ignorant of the different communications of God’s face and expressions of His presence. Some walk much in the light of God’s countenance, and are much in sensible fellowship with Him, as David was; others are *“all their days kept in bondage, through fear of death”* (Heb. 2:15). Surely the ignorance of the different ways of God’s working and dealing with His people doth very much darken the knowledge of their interest in Him, whilst they usually limit the Lord to one way of working, which He doth not keep, as we have shown in the former examples.

2. The second thing which darkens men about their interest in Christ is,

There is one thing or other wherein their heart, in some respect, doth condemn them, as dealing deceitfully and guilefully with God. It is not to be expected that those can come to clearness about their interest, whose heart doth condemn them for keeping up some known transgressions against the Lord, which they will not let go, neither are using the means which they know to be appointed by God for delivering them from it: Neither can those come to clearness who know some positive duty commanded them in their stations, which they deceitfully shift and shun, not closing cheerfully with it, or not willing to be led into it. These are also, in some respects, condemned of their own heart, as the former sort are; and in that case it is difficult to come to a distinct knowledge of their state: *“If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God”* (1 John 3:21). It is supposed here, that a self condemning heart maketh void a man’s confidence proportionally before God. I do not deny but that men may on good grounds plead an interest in Christ in the case of prevailing iniquity: *“Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away”* (Psa. 65:3). *“I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin”* (Rom. 7:23, 24). But it is hard to be attained, if

at all attainable, when the heart is dealing deceitfully, and entertaining known guile in any particular: therefore, let people clear themselves of the particular, which they know too well. It is the thing which hinders them, marring their confidence and access in all their approaches unto God. *“Yet ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more”* (Judges 10:13). The idolatries of the people are cast up to them by the Lord, and their suit rejected thereupon. That which draweth away the heart first in the morning, and last at night, like *“an oven heated at night, and it burns as a flaming fire in the morning”* (Hos. 7:6), spoken of the wicked; and taketh up their thoughts often on their bed: as it is said of some, *“He deviseth mischief upon his bed”* (Psa. 36:4):

That which doth ordinarily lead away the heart in time of religious duty, and the remembrance of which hath power to enliven and quicken the spirits more than the remembrance of God, so as *“their heart is after the heart of some detestable thing”* (Ezek. 11:21): - That which withstandeth men when they would lay hold on the promise, as God casteth up men’s sins to them who are meddling with His covenant, *“What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldst take My covenant in thy mouth?”* (Psa. 50:16): - that is the thing which doth prevent the knowledge of a gracious state. Let it go, and it will be more easy to reach the knowledge of an interest in Christ.

3. The third thing which hindereth in many the knowledge of an interest in Christ is,

A spirit of sloth and careless negligence. They complain that they know not whether they be in Christ or not; but as few take pains to be in Him, so few take pains to try if they be in Him. It is a work and business which cannot be done sleeping: *“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves”* (2 Cor. 13:5). The several words used here, namely, Examine, prove, know - intimate that there is a labour in it: Diligence must be used to make our *“calling and election sure”* (2 Peter 1:10). It is a business above flesh and blood: the holy *“anointing which teacheth all things,”* must make us *“know the things freely given to us of God”* (1 John 2:27). Shall the Lord impart a business of so great concernment, and not so much as *“be inquired after to do it for men?”* (Ezek. 36:37).

Be ashamed, you who spend so much time in reading of romances, in adorning your persons, in hawking and hunting, in consulting the law concerning your outward state in the world, and it may, be in worse things than these; - Be ashamed, you that spend so little time in the search of this, whether ye be an heir of glory or not? whether you be in the way that leadeth to heaven, or that way which will land you in darkness for ever? You who judge this below you, and unworthy of your pains, any part or minute of your time, it is probable, in God's account, you have judged yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, so that you shall have no lot with God's people in this matter.

4. The fourth thing that darkens the knowledge of an interest in Christ is,

Men do not condescend upon what would satisfy them. They complain that God will not show unto them what He is about to do with them, but yet cannot say they know what would satisfy them concerning His purpose. This is a sad thing. Shall we think those are serious who have never as yet pitched on what would satisfy them, nor are making earnest inquiry after what should satisfy? If the Lord had left us in the dark in that matter, we were less inexcusable; but since the grounds of satisfaction, and the true marks of an interest in Christ, are so clear and frequent in Scripture, and so "*many things written, that our joy may be full*" (1 John 1:4); and, "*that those who believe,*" may "*know that they have eternal life*" (1 John 5:13); and since "*he that believeth hath the witness of it in himself*" (1 John 5:10), none can pretend excuse here. We shall not here insist to show what may and should satisfy concerning our interest, since we are to speak directly of it afterwards.

5. The fifth thing that helps much to keep men in the dark with respect to their interest in Christ is,

Their pitch upon some mutable grounds, which are not so apposite proofs of the truth of an interest in Christ as of the comfortable state of a triumphing soul sailing before the wind; and marks which I grant are precious in themselves, and do make out an interest clearly where they are; yet they are such as without which an interest in Christ may be, and be known also in a good measure. We shall touch on a few of them.

First, Some think that all who have a true interest in Him are above the prevailing power of every sin; but this is contrary to that of Psa. 65:3, *“Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions Thou shalt purge them away;”* where we find that holy man laying just claim to pardon, in the case of prevailing iniquity; and that of Rom. 7:23, 24, 25, where Paul thanketh God through Christ, as freed from the condemnation of the law, even whilst a law in his members leadeth captive unto sin.

Secondly, Some think that all true saints have constantly access unto God in prayer, and sensible returns of prayer at all times; but this is contrary to the many sad exercises of His people, complaining often that they are not heard nor regarded of God: *“How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?”* (Psa. 13:1); *“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent”* (Psa. 22:1, 2).

Thirdly, Some think that all who have any true interest in Him have God witnessing the same unto them, by a high operation of that witnessing Spirit of His, spoken of: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God”* (Rom. 8:16, whereof afterwards); and so they still suspect their own interest in Christ, because of the want of this. But they do not remember that they must first believe and give credit to that record which God hath given of the Son, that there is life enough in Him for men (1 John 5:10, 11), and then look for the seal and witness of the Spirit: *“In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise”* (Eph 1:13). As long as people hold fast these principles, and the like, they can hardly come to the knowledge of their gracious state, which God hath warranted people to prove and clear up to themselves, otherwise than by these aforesaid things.

V. Some mistakes concerning an interest in Christ removed

The fifth thing to be premised is,

The removal of some mistakes into which people may readily run themselves when they are about to prove their interest in Christ; as -

1. It is a mistake to think that every one who is in Christ doth know that he is in Him; for many are truly gracious, and have a good title to eternal life, who do not know so much, until it be made out

afterwards: *“These things are written to them that believe, that they may know they have a title to eternal life”* (1 John 5:13); that is, that they may know they are believers, and so it is supposed they knew it not before.

2. It is a mistake to think that all who come to the knowledge of their interest in Christ do attain an equal certainty about it. One may say, *“He is persuaded nothing present, or to come, can separate him from the love of God”* (Rom. 8:38); another comes but this length, *“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24).

3. It is a mistake to think that every one who attains a strong persuasion of his interest doth always hold there; for he who today may say of the Lord, *“He is his refuge”* (Psa. 91:2), and *“his portion”* (Psa. 119:57), will at another time say, *“He is cut off”* (Psa. 31:22), and will ask, *“if the truth of God’s promise doth fail for evermore”* (Psa. 77:7, 8, 9).

4. It is also a mistake to think that every one who attains a good knowledge of their gracious state can formally answer all objection made to the contrary; but yet they may hold fast the conclusion, and say, *“I know whom I have believed”* (2 Tim. 1:12). There are few grounds of the Christian religion, whereof many people are so persuaded, as that they are able to maintain them formally against all arguments brought to the contrary; and yet they may and will hold the conclusion steadfastly and justly; so it is in the case in hand.

5. It is no less a mistake to imagine, that the vain groundless confidence, which many profane ignorant atheists do maintain, is this knowledge of an interest in Christ which we plead for. Many do falsely avow Him *“to be their Father”* (John 8:41); and many look for heaven, who are beguiled, like the *“foolish virgins”* (Matt. 25:12). Yet we must not think because of this, that all knowledge of an interest is a delusion and fancy, although these fools be deceived; for, whilst thousands are deluded, some can say on good and solid grounds, *“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness”* (1 John 5:19).

Chapter II

Marks of a Saving Change

Having premised these things, it now follows that we give some marks by which a man may know if he be savingly in covenant with

God, and hath a special interest in Christ, so that he may warrantable lay claim to God's favour and salvation. We shall only pitch upon two great and principal marks, not willing to trouble people with many.

A preparatory law work

But before we begin to these, we will speak of a preparatory work of the law, of which the Lord doth ordinarily make use, to prepare His own way in men's souls. This may have its own weight as a mark, with some persons. It is called the Work of the Law, or the Work of Humiliation. It hath some relation to that "*spirit of bondage,*" and doth now under the New Testament answer unto it, and usually leadeth on to the "*spirit of adoption*" (Rom. 8:15). Only here, let it be remembered -

1. That we are not to speak of this preparatory work of the law as a negative mark of a true interest in Christ, as if none might lay claim to God's favour who have not had this preparatory work, in its several steps, as we are to speak of it; for, as we shall see, the Lord doth not always observe the same plan with men.

2. The great reason why we speak of it is, because the Lord deals with many, whom He effectually calls by some such preparatory work; and to those, who have been so dealt with, it may prove strengthening, and will confirm them in laying more weight on the marks which follow.

3. It may help to encourage others, who are under such bondage of spirit, as a good indication of a gracious work to follow; for, as we shall point out, it will be rarely found to miscarry and fail of a gracious issue.

4. Where God uses such a preparatory work, He doth not keep one way or measure in it, as we shall see. For the more distinct handling of this preparatory work, we shall shortly hint the most ordinary ways by which the Lord leads people savingly into His covenant, and draws them unto Christ.

I. Some called from the womb

There are some called from the womb, as John the Baptist was (Luke 1); or in very early years, before they can be actively engaged in Satan's ways, as Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15). It cannot be supposed

that these have such a preparatory work as we are to speak of. And because some persons may pretend to this way of effectual calling, we offer these marks of it whereby those who have been so called may be confirmed.

1. Such are usually from their childhood kept free from ordinary pollutions, as swearing, lying, mocking of religion and religious persons, etc., with which children are often defiled. Those whom God calleth effectually, He sanctifieth from the time of that effectual calling: *“sin cannot have dominion over them,”* as over others, *“Because they are under grace”* (Rom. 6:14).

2. Religion is, as it were, natural to them; I mean, they need not to be much pressed to religious duties even when they are but children; they run willingly that way, because there is an inward principle of *“love constraining them”* (2 Cor. 5:14), so that they yield themselves servants of righteousness, without outward constraint (Rom. 6:16).

3. Although such know not when they were first acquainted with God, yet they have afterwards such exercises of spirit befalling them as the saints in Scripture, of whose first conversion we are not told. They are, upon some occasions, shut out from God, and are again admitted, in their apprehension, to come near; their heart is also further broken up by the ordinances, as is said of Lydia (Acts 16:14). And ordinarily they remember when some special subject of religion and duty, or when some sin, of which they were not taking notice before, was discovered to them. They, who can apply these things to themselves, have much to say for their effectual calling from their youth.

II. Some called in a sovereign gospel-way

Some are brought to Christ in a sovereign gospel-way, when the Lord, by some few words of love swallowing up any work of the law, quickly taketh a person prisoner at the first, as He did Zaccheus (Luke 19), and others, who, upon a word spoken by Christ, did leave all and follow Him; and we hear nothing of a law-work dealing with them before they close with Christ Jesus. And because some may pretend to this way of calling, we shall touch on some things most remarkable in that transaction with Zaccheus, for their clearing and confirmation.

1. He had some desire to see Christ, and such a desire as made him waive that which some would have judged prudence and discretion, whilst he climbeth up a tree that he might see Him.

2. Christ spake to his heart, and that word took such hold upon him, that presently with joy he accepted Christ's offer, and closed with Christ as Lord, whilst few of any note were following Him.

3. Upon this his heart was opened to the poor, although it seems he was a covetous man before.

4. He had a due impression of his former ways, evidencing his respect to the law of Moses, and this he signifies before all the company then present, not shrinking from taking shame to himself in such things as probably were notorious to the world.

5. Upon all these things, Christ confirms and ratifies the contract by His word; recommending to him that oneness of interest which behoved to be between him and the saints, and the thoughts of his own lost condition, if Christ had not come and sought him; all which is clear from Luke 19:3-10. We grant the Lord calleth some so; and if any can lay claim to the special things we have now hinted, they have a good confirmation of God's dealing with them from Scripture; neither are they to vex themselves because of the want of a distinct preparatory law work, if their heart hath yielded unto Christ; for a work of the law is not desirable, except for this end. Therefore Christ offers Himself directly in the Scripture, and people are invited to come to Him; and although many will not come to Him who is the Surety, until the spirit of bondage distress them for their debt, yet if any, upon the knowledge of their lost estate, would flee and yield to Christ, none might warrantable press a work of the law upon them. As for others, whom Christ persuaded by a word to follow Him, whatsoever He did, or howsoever He spake to them, at His first meeting with them, we must rationally suppose that then He discovered to them so much of their necessity, and His own fullness and excellency, as made them quit all, and run after Him; and if He do so to any, we crave no more, since there is room enough there for the Physician. So that from all this, as some may be confirmed and strengthened, with whom God hath so dealt, so there is no ground for deluded souls to flatter themselves in their condition, who remain ignorant and senseless of their own miseries, and Christ's all-sufficiency, and hold fast deceit.

III. Some graciously called at the hour of death

There are some brought in to Christ in a way yet more declarative of His free grace; and this is, when He effectually calls men at the hour of death. We find somewhat recorded of this way in that pregnant example of the "*thief on the cross*" (Luke 23:39-45). Although this seems not very pertinent for the purpose in hand, yet we shall speak a little of it, that, on the one hand, men may be sparing to judge and pass sentence on either themselves or others before the last breath; and we shall, on the other hand, speak so particularly, that none may dare to delay so great a business to the last hour of their life. We find these remarkable circumstances in the conversation between Christ and the thief.

1. The man falls out with his former companion.

2. He dares not speak a wrong word of God, whose hand is on him, but justifies Him in all that hath befallen him.

3. He now sees Jesus Christ persecuted by the world without a cause, and most injuriously.

4. He discovers Christ to be a Lord and a King, whilst His enemies seem to have Him under.

5. He believes a state of glory after death so really, that he prefers a portion of it to the present safety of his bodily life, which he knew Christ was able to grant him at that time, and he might have chosen that with the other thief.

6. Although he was much abased in himself, and so humbled that he pleaded but that Christ would remember him, yet he was nobly daring to throw himself upon the covenant, on life and death; and he had so much faith of Christ's all-sufficiency, that he judged a simple remembrance from Christ would supply all his need.

7. He acquiesced sweetly in the word which Christ spake to him for the ground of his comfort. All which are very clear in the case of that poor dying man, and prove a real work of God upon his heart. As this example may encourage some to wait for good from God, who cannot as yet lay clear claim to any gracious work of His Spirit; so we entreat all, as they love their souls, not to delay their soul's salvation, hoping for such assistance from Christ in the end, as too many do, - this being a rare miracle of mercy, in which Christ honourably triumphed over the ignominy of His cross; a parallel to which we shall hardly find in all the Scripture besides. Yea, as there

be but few at all saved: “*many be called, but few are chosen*” (Matt. 20:16); and fewest saved this way; so the Lord hath peremptorily threatened to laugh at the calamity, and not to hear the cry of such as mocked formerly at His reproof, and would not hear when He called to them: “*Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh*” (Prov. 1:24-26): which scripture, although it doth not shut mercy’s door upon any, who at the hour of death do sincerely judge themselves and flee to Christ, as this penitent thief did; yet it certainly implieth that very few, who reject the offer until then, are honoured with repentance as He was; and so their cry, as not being sincere, and of the right stamp, shall not be heard.

IV. God’s more ordinary way of calling sinners to Himself

The fourth and most ordinary way by which many are brought to Christ, is by a clear and discernible work of the law, and humiliation; which we generally call the spirit of bondage as was hinted before. We do not mean that every one, whose conscience is awakened with sin and fear of wrath, doth really close with Christ; the contrary appears in Cain, Saul, Judas, etc. But there is a conviction of sin, an awakening of conscience, and work of humiliation, which, as we shall point out, rarely miscarries, or fails of a gracious issue, but ordinarily doth resolve into the Spirit of adoption, and a gracious work of God’s Spirit. And because the Lord deals with many sinners this way, and we find that many are much puzzled about giving judgment of this law-work, we shall speak of it particularly. This work is either more violent and sudden, or it is more quiet and gradual, so as to be protracted through a greater length of time, by which means the steps of it are very discernible. It is more violent in some, as in the jailer, Paul, and some other converts in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, on whom Christ did break in at an instant, and fell on them as with fire and sword, and led them captive terribly. And because some great legal shakings are deceitful, and turn to nothing, if not worse, we shall point at some things remarkable in these converts spoken of before, which proves the work of the law on them to have had a gracious issue and result.

(1). Some word of truth or dispensation puts the person to a dreadful stand, with a great stir in the soul; some “*are pricked in heart*” (Acts 2:37); some fall a “*trembling*” (Acts 16:29). And thus it is, that the person is brought to his wits’ end: “*What wilt Thou have me to do?*” saith Paul (Act: 9:6). “*What must I do to be saved?*” saith the jailer (Acts 16:30).

(2). The person is content to have salvation and God’s friendship on any terms, as the question implies, “*What shall I do?*” As if he had said, What would I not do? what would I not forego? what would I not undergo?

(3). The person accepts the condition offered by Christ and His servants, as is clear in the fore-cited Scriptures.

(4). The person presently becomes of one interest with the saints, joins himself with that persecuted society, puts respect on those whom he had formerly persecuted, joining and continuing with them in the profession of Christ at all hazards. Those with whom the Lord hath so dealt, have much to say for a gracious work of God’s Spirit in them: and it is probable many of them can date their work from such a particular time and word, or dispensation, and can give some account of what passed between God and them, and of a sensible change following in them from that time forward, as Paul giveth a good account of the work and way of God with him afterwards. (Acts 22) Again, the Lord sometimes carries on this work more calmly, softly, and gradually, protracting it so that the several steps of men’s exercise under it are very discernible. It would lead us to a great length to enlarge upon every step of it. We shall touch on the most observable things in it.

1. The Lord lays siege to men, who, it may be, have often refused to yield to Him, when offering Himself in the ordinances; and by some word preached, read, or borne in on the mind, or by some providence leading on unto the word, He doth assault the house kept peaceably by the strong man, the devil; and thus Christ, who is the stronger man, cometh upon him (Luke 11:22); and by the Spirit of truth, fastens the word on the man, in which God’s curse is denounced against such and such sins, of which the man knoweth himself guilty. The Spirit convinces the man, and binds it upon him, that he is the same person against whom the word of God speaks, because he is guilty of sins; and from some sins the man is led on to

see more, until usually he comes to see the sins of his youth, sins of omission, etc.! yea, he is led on, until he sees himself guilty almost of the breach of the whole law: he sees "*innumerable evils compassing him,*" as David speaks (Psa. 40:12). A man sometimes will entertain alarming views of sin in this case, and is sharp-sighted to perceive himself guilty of almost every sin. Thus the Spirit comes and convinces of sin (John 16:8).

2. The Lord overcomes a special stronghold in the garrison, a refuge of lies, to which the man betaketh himself when his sins are thus discovered to him. The poor man pretends to faith in Christ, whereby he thinks his burden is taken off him, as the Pharisees said, "*We have one Father, even God*" (John 8:41). They pretend to a special relation to God as a common Lord. The Spirit of God drives the man from this by the truth of the Scriptures, proving that he hath no true faith, and so no interest in Christ, nor any true saving grace, showing clearly the difference between true grace and the counterfeit fancies which the man hath in him; and between him and the truly godly: as Christ laboureth to do with the Jews in John 8:42, 44 "*If God were your father, ye would love Me. Ye are of the devil, for ye do the lusts of your father.*" So, "*fear surpriseth the hypocrite in heart*" (Isa. 33:14); especially when the Lord discovereth to him conditions, in many of those promises in which he trusted most, not easily attainable. He now sees grace and faith to be another thing than once he judged them. We may in some respect apply that word here, The Spirit "*convinceth him of sin, because he hath not believed on the Son*" (John 16:9). He is particularly convinced of unbelief: he now sees a vast difference between himself and the godly, who, he thought before, outstripped him only in some unnecessary, proud, hateful preciseness: he now sees himself deluded, and in the broad way with the perishing multitude: and so, in this sight of his misery coucheth down under his own burden, which before this time he thought Christ did bear for him: he now begins to be alarmed as to the promises, because of such passages of Scripture as, "*What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth?*" etc. (Psa. 50:16).

3. The man becomes careful about his salvation, and begins to take it to heart as the one thing necessary. He is brought to say with the jailer, "*What shall I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16). His salvation becomes the leading thing with him. It was least in his thoughts

before, but now it prevails, and other things are much disregarded by him. Since his soul is ready to perish, *“what shall it profit him to gain the world, if he lose his soul?”* (Matt. 16:26). Some here are much puzzled with the thoughts of an irrevocable decree to their prejudice, and with the fears of uncertain death, which may attack them before their great concern is secured; and some are vexed with apprehensions that they are guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is unpardonable, and so are driven a dangerous length - Satan still reminding them of many sad examples of people who have miserably put an end to their own lives: but they are in the hand of one who *“knoweth how to succour them that are tempted”* (Heb. 2:18).

4. When a man is thus in hazard of miscarrying, the Lord uses a work of preventing mercy towards him, quietly and underhand supporting him; and this is by infusing into his mind the possibility of his salvation, leading him to the remembrance of numerous proofs of God’s free and rich grace, in pardoning gross transgressors, such as Manasseh, who was a bloody idolatrous man, and had correspondence with the devil, and yet obtained mercy (2 Chron. 33:11, 13); and other scriptures bearing offers of grace and favour indifferently to all who will yield to Christ, whatsoever they have been formerly; so that the man is brought again to this, - *“What shall I do to be saved”* which supposes that he apprehends a possibility of being saved, else he would not propound the question. He applies that or the like word to himself, *“It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger”* (Zeph. 2:3). He finds nothing excluding him from mercy now, if he have a heart for the thing. The man doth not, it may be, here perceive that it is the Lord who upholdeth him, yet afterwards he can say that, *“when his foot was slipping, God’s mercy held him up,”* as the Psalmist speaks in another case (Psa. 94:17, 18). And he will afterwards say, when he *“was as a beast, and a fool, in many respects, God held him by the hand”* (Psa. 73:22, 23).

5. After this discovery of a possibility to be saved, there is a work of desire quickened in the soul; which is clear from that same expression, *“What shall I do to be saved?”* But sometimes this desire is expressed amiss, whilst it goes out thus, *“What shall I do that I may work the works of God?”* (John 6:28). In this case the

man, formerly perplexed with fear and care about his salvation, would be at some work of his own to extricate himself; and here he suddenly resolves to do all is commanded, and to forego every evil way (yet much misunderstanding Christ Jesus), and so begins to take some courage to himself, *“going about to establish his own righteousness, but not submitting unto the righteousness of God”* (Rom. 10:3). Whereupon the Lord makes a new assault upon him, intending the discovery of his absolutely fallen state in himself, that so room may be made for the Surety: as Joshua did to the people, when he found them so bold in their undertakings: *“Ye cannot serve the Lord,” saith he, “for He is a holy God, a jealous God”* (Josh. 24). In this new assault the Lord -

(1). Shows the man the spirituality of the law; the commandment cometh with a new charge in the spiritual meaning of it (Rom. 7:9). The law came, saith Paul, that is, in the spiritual meaning of it. Paul had never entertained such a view of the law before.

(2). God most holily looseth the restraining bonds which he had laid upon the man’s corruption, and suffereth it not only to boil and swell within, but to threaten to break out in all the outward members. Thus sin grows bold, and spurns at the law, becoming exceedingly sinful. *“But sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law, sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Was then that which is good made death into me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”* (Rom. 7:8-13).

(3). The Lord discovers to the man, more than ever, the uncleanness of his righteousness, and the spots of his best things. These things kill the man, and he dies in his own conceit (Rom. 7:9), and despairs of relief in himself, if it come not from another source.

6. After many ups and downs, here ordinarily the man resolves on retirement; he desires to be like those in a besieged city, who, when they see they cannot hold out, and would be glad of any good condition from the besieging enemy, go to a council, that they may resolve on something; so the man here retires that he may speak with himself. This is like that *“communing with our own heart”* (Psa. 4:4). Thus God leadeth into the wilderness, that He may speak to the

heart (Hos. 2:14). When the person is retired, the thoughts of his heart, which were scattered in former steps of the exercise, do more observably throng in here. We shall reduce them to this method: -

(1). The man thinks of his unhappy folly in bearing arms against God; and here he dwells at large on his former ways, with a blushing countenance and self-loathing: *“Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight”* (Ezek. 36:31); like that of Psalm 51:3, *“His sin is ever before him.”*

(2). Then he remembers how many fair opportunities of yielding to God he hath basely lost; his spirit is like to faint when he remembereth that, as is said in another case *“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me. O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Deep calleth unto deep, all thy waves are gone over me”* (Psa. 42:1-7).

(3). He now thinks of many Christians whom he mocked and despised in his heart, persuading himself now that they are happy, as having chosen the better part; he thinks of the condition of those who wait on Christ, as the queen of Sheba did of Solomon’s servants: *“Happy are thy servants,”* saith she, *“who stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom”* (1 Kings 10:8). *“Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house”* (Psa. 84:4). He wishes to be one of the meanest who have any relation to God; as the prodigal son speaks, he would be as *“one of his father’s hired servants”* (Luke 15:17, 19).

(4). Then he calls to mind the good report that is going abroad of God, according to that testimony of the prophet, who knew that God was a *“gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”* (Jonah 4:2). The free and large promises and offers of grace come in here; and the gracious dealings of God with sinners of all sorts, as recorded in Scripture.

(5). He thinks with himself, *“Why hath God spared me so long? and why have I got such a sight of my sin? And why hath He kept me from breaking prison at my own hand? Why hath He made this strange change in me? It may be it is in His heart to do me good; O that it may be so!”* Although all these thoughts be not in the preparatory work of every one, yet they are with many, and very promising where they are.

7. Upon all these thoughts and meditations the man, more seriously than ever before, resolveth to pray, and to make some attempt with God, upon life and death; he concludes, "*It can be no worse with him; for if he sit still he perisheth;*" as the lepers speak (2 Kings 7:3, 4). He considers, with the perishing prodigal son, "*that there is bread enough in his father's house and to spare, whilst he perisheth for want;*" so he goes to God, for he knows not what else to make of his condition, as the prodigal son doth. And it may be, here he resolves what to speak; but things soon vary when he is present before God, as the prodigal son forgot some of his premeditated prayers. "*I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came unto his father, and said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*" (Luke 15:17-21). And now, when he comes before God, more observable than ever before -

(1). He beginneth, with the publican, afar of, with many thorough confessions and self-condemnings, in which he is very liberal, as (Luke 15: 21) – "*I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy,*" etc.

(2). Now his thoughts are occupied as to the hearing of his prayers, which he was not wont to question much: he now knows what those expressions of the saints concerning the hearing of their prayers do import.

(3). It is observable in this address, that there are many broken sentences, like that of Psa. 6:3 - "*But Thou, O Lord, how long?*" supplied with sighs and "*groanings which cannot be uttered,*" and anxiously looking upward, thereby speaking more than can be well expressed by words.

(4). There are ordinarily some interruptions, and, as it were, diversions; the man speaking sometimes to the enemy, sometimes to his own heart, sometimes to the multitudes in the world, as David doth in other cases "*O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end*" (Psa. 9:6). "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the help of my countenance*" (Psa. 42:6). "*O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame?*" (Psa. 4:2).

(5). It is observable here that sometimes the man will halt, and be silent, to hear some indistinct whisperings of a joyful sound glancing on the mind, or some news in some broken word of Scripture, which, it may be, the man scarcely knoweth to be Scripture, or whether it is come from God, or whether an insinuation from Satan to delude him; yet this he hath resolved, only to *“hear what God the Lord will speak,”* as upon another occasion (Psa. 85:8).

(6). More distinct promises come into the man’s mind, on which he attempts to lay hold, but is beaten off with objections, as in another case the Psalmist is - *“But thou art holy - But I am a worm”* (Psa. 22:3, 6). Now it is about the dawning of the day with the man, and faith will stir as soon as the Lord imparteth *“the joyful sound”* (Psa. 89:15). This is the substance of the covenant, which may be shortly summed up in these words, *“Christ Jesus is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him”* (Matt. 17:5).

We can speak no further of the man’s exercise as a preparatory work; for what followeth is more than preparatory; yet that the exercise may appear complete and full, we shall add here, that after all these things, the Lord, it may be, after many answers of divers sorts, mightily conveyeth the knowledge of His covenant into the heart, and determines the heart to close with it; and God now draweth his soul so to Christ (John 6:44), and so layeth out the heart for Him, that the work cannot miscarry; for now the heart is so enlarged for Him, as that less cannot satisfy, and more is not desired; like that of Psa. 73:25 - *“Whom have I in heaven but Thee? or whom have I desired on earth beside Thee?”* The soul now resolves to die if He shall so command, yet at His door, and looking towards Him. We have stated this preparatory work at some length, not tying any man to such particular circumstances: only we say, the Lord dealeth so with some; and where He so convinceth of sin, corruption, and self-emptiness, and makes a man take salvation to beset as the one thing necessary, and sets him to work in the use of the means which God hath appointed for relief; I say, such a work rarely shall be found to fail of a good issue and gracious result.

V. Objections and difficulties considered

1. Objection: Hypocrites and reprobates have great stirrings of conscience, and deep convictions about sin, setting them to work

sometimes; and I do suspect any preparatory work of the law I ever had, to be but such as they have.

Answer: It will be hard to give sure essential differences between the preparatory work in those in whom afterwards Christ is formed, and those legal stirrings which are sometimes in reprobates. If there were not some gracious result of these convictions and awakenings of conscience in the Lord's people, and other marks, of which we shall speak afterwards, it were hard to adventure upon any difference that is clear in these legal stirrings. Yet, for answer to the objection, I shall offer some things, which rarely will be found in the stirrings of reprobates, and which are ordinarily found in that law-work which hath a gracious issue.

1. The convictions of hypocrites and reprobates are usually confined to some few very gross transgressions. Saul grants no more but the *persecuting of David* (1 Sam. 26:21). Judas grants only the *betraying of innocent blood* (Matt. 27: 4); but usually those convictions by which the Lord prepareth His own way in the soul, although they may begin at one or more gross particular transgression, yet they stop not; but man is led on to see many breaches of the law, and "*innumerable evils compassing Him*" (Psa. 40:12), as David speaketh in the sight of his sin. And withal, that universal conviction, if I may call it so, is not general, as usually we hear senseless men saying, "*that in all things they sin;*" but it is particular and condescending, as Paul afterwards spake of himself: He not only is the chief of sinners, but particularly, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor (1 Tim. 1:13).

2. The convictions which hypocrites have, do seldom reach their corruption, and that body of death which works an aversion to what is good, and strongly inclines to what is evil. Ordinarily where we find hypocrites speaking of themselves in Scripture, they speak loftily, and with some self-conceit, as to their freedom from corruption. The Pharisees say to the poor man, "*Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?*" (John 9:34); as if they themselves were not as corrupt by nature as he. They speak of great sins, as Hazael did - "*Am I a dog, that I should do this great thing?*" (2 Kings 8:13); and also in their undertakings of duty, as that scribe spake, "*Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest*" (Matt. 8:19). See how the people speak: "*Then they said to*

Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God” (Jer. 42:5, 6). They undertake to do all that God will command them: so that they still “*go about,*” in any case, “*to establish their own righteousness, not submitting unto the righteousness of God”* (Rom. 10:3). But I may say, that convictions and exercise about corruption, and that body of death, inclining them to evil, and disabling for good, is not the least part of the work where the Lord is preparing His own way. They judge themselves very wretched because of the body of sin, and are at their wits’ end how to be delivered as Paul speaks when he is under the exercise of it afterwards - “*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death”* (Rom. 7:24).

3. It will generally be found, that the convictions which are in hypocrites either are not so serious, as that some other business will not put them out of mind before any satisfaction is gotten; as in Cain, who went and built a city, and we hear no more of his conviction (Gen. 4); Felix went away until a more convenient time, and we hear no more of his trembling (Acts 24:25); or, if that work becomes very serious, then it runneth to the other extremity, even despair of relief, leaving no room for escape. So we find Judas very serious in his convictions, yet he grew desperate, and hanged himself (Matt. 27:4, 5). But where the Lord prepares His own way, the work is both so serious, that the person cannot be put off it, until he find some satisfaction, and yet under that very seriousness he lies open for relief; both which are clear from the jailer’s words, “*What must I do to be saved”* (Acts 16:30). This serious inquiry after relief is a very observable thing in the preparatory work which leadeth on to Christ. Yet we desire none to lay too much weight on these things, since God hath allowed clear differences between the precious and the vile.

2. Objection: I still fear I have not had so thorough a sight of my sin and misery as the Lord giveth to many whom He effectually calleth, especially to great transgressors such as I am.

Answer: It is true, the Lord discovereth to some clear views of

their sin and misery, and they are thereby put under great legal terrors; but as all are not brought in by that sensible preparatory work of the law, as we showed before, so even those who are dealt with after that way are very differently and variously exercised in regard of the degrees of terror, and of the continuance of that work. The jailer had a violent work of very short continuance; Paul had a work continuing three days; some persons are "*in bondage through fear of death all their lives*" (Heb. 2:15). So that we must not limit the Lord to one way of working here. The main thing we are to look unto in these legal awakenings and convictions of sin and misery is, if the Lord reach those ends in us for which usually these stirrings and convictions are sent into the soul; and if those ends be reached, it is well; we are not to vex ourselves about any preparatory work further. Now, those ends which God seeks to accomplish with sinners by these legal terrors and awakenings of conscience are four.

First, The Lord discovers a sight of men's sin and misery to them, to chase them out of themselves, and to put them out of conceit of their own righteousness. Men naturally have high thoughts of themselves, and incline much to the covenant of works; the Lord therefore discovers to them so much of their sin and corruption, even in their best things, that they are made to loathe themselves, and despair of relief in themselves; and so they are forced to flee out of themselves, and from the covenant of works, to seek refuge elsewhere (Heb. 6:18). "*They become dead to themselves, and the law,*" as to the point of justification (Rom. 7:4). Then "*have they no more confidence in the flesh*" (Phil. 3:3). This is supposed in the offers of Christ "*coming to seek and save that which is lost*" (Luke 19:10); and "*to be a physician to those who are sick*" (Matt. 9:12).

The *second* great end is, to commend Christ Jesus to men's hearts above all things, that so they may fall in love with Him, and betake themselves to that treasure and jewel which only enricheth (Matt. 13:44); and by so doing may serve the Lord's design in the contrivance of the gospel, which was the manifestation of His free grace through Christ Jesus in the salvation of men. The sight of a man's own misery and lost estate by nature is a ready way to make him prize Christ highly, who alone can set such a wretch at liberty; yea, it not only leadeth a man to a high esteem of Christ, but also of all things that relate to that way of salvation, as grace, the new

covenant, faith, etc., and maketh him carefully gather and treasure up his Michtams, or golden scriptures, for the confirmation of his interest in these things.

The *third* great end is, to deter and frighten people from sin, and make them quarrel with it, and consent to put their neck under Christ's yoke. God kindles some sparks of hell in men's bosoms by the discovery of their sin, as a ready means to make them henceforth stand in awe, knowing "*how bitter a thing it is to depart from the Lord*" (Jer. 2:19). So we find rest offered to the weary, upon condition they will take Christ's yoke: "*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*" (Matt. 11:29). And God offereth to own men as their God and Father, upon condition they will allow no peaceable abode to Belial: "*What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness and what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty*" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

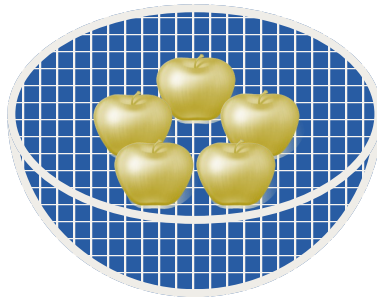
The *fourth* great end is, to work in men a patient and thankful submission to all the Master's pleasure. This is a singular piece of work: "*Then shalt thou remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth anymore, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord*" (Ezek. 16:63). The sight of a man's own vileness and deserving makes him silent, and constrains him to lay his hand on his mouth, whatsoever God doth unto him: "*I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it*" (Psa. 39:9). "*God hath punished us less than our iniquities*" (Ezra 9:13). "*I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned*" (Mic. 7:9). The man careth not what God doth to him, or how He deal with him, if only He save him from the deserved wrath to come: also any mercy is great mercy to him who hath seen such a sight of himself; "*he is less than the least of mercies*" (Gen. 32:10). "*Any crumb falling from the Master's table*" is welcome (Matt. 15:27). He thinks it "*rich mercy that he is not consumed*" (Lam. 3:22). This is the thing that marvellously maketh God's poor afflicted people so silent under and satisfied with their

lot; nay, they think he deserveth hell who openeth his mouth at anything God doth to him, since he hath pardoned his transgressions. So then, for satisfying the objection, I say, if the Lord have driven thee out of thyself, and commended Christ to thy heart above all things, and made thee resolve, in His strength, to wage war with every known transgression, and thou art in some measure as a weaned child, acquiescing in what He doth unto thee, desiring to lay thy hand on thy mouth thankfully; then thy convictions of sin and misery, and whatsoever thou dost plead as a preparatory work, is sufficient, and thou art to debate no more concerning it. Only be advised so to study new discoveries of the sense of thy lost condition every day, because of thy old and new sins; and also to seek fresh help in Christ, who is a priest forever to make intercession; and to have the work of sanctification and patience with thankfulness renewed and quickened often: for somewhat of that work, which abaseth thee, exalteth Christ, and renders thee conformed to His will, must accompany thee throughout all thy lifetime in this world.

The first of four booklets.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT INTEREST

William Guthrie was the minister of Fenwick, Ayrshire from 1650 to 1664. 'The Christian's Great Interest' was his only book, which has passed through more than eighty editions.



Pulling a copy of Guthrie's book from his pocket, John Owen once declared: "That Author I take to have been one of the greatest divines that ever wrote. It is my vade mecum [Latin: go with me. A useful thing that one constantly carries about]."

