



THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT INTEREST



**Part Two: How to Attain a
Saving Interest in Christ
Booklet Three – Chapters I & II**



William Guthrie

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Having, in the former part of this Treatise, put every man's state to the trial, it now remains that, in this following part, we give advice to those who neither can nor dare lay claim to the marks formerly mentioned.

Question 2. What shall they do who want the marks of a true and saving interest in Christ, already spoken of, and neither can nor dare pretend unto them?

Answer. If men do not discover in themselves the marks of a saving interest in Christ, spoken of before, then it is their duty, and the duty of all that hear the gospel, personally and heartily to close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, and thus to secure their state.

Chapter I

Some Things Premised for the Information of the Ignorant

For the better understanding of this, we shall premise some things for the information of those who are more ignorant, and then speak more directly to the thing. As for the things to be premised: -

1. The Lord did, at the beginning, out of His bounty, make a covenant with man in Adam - *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree in the garden thou mayst freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* (Gen. 2:16, 17). And He gave the man ability to abide in that covenant - *"God hath made man upright"* (Eccl. 7:29); but man, by eating of that forbidden fruit, did break that covenant - *"They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant"* (Hos. 6:7); and made it void forever, and involved himself in misery thereby - *"By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in His sight"* (Rom. 3:20); *"As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom. 5:12).

2. The Lord did most freely, from everlasting, purpose and intend to save men another way, namely, by Christ Jesus, and the covenant of grace, in which He intended reconciliation with the elect through Christ Jesus, God and man, born of a woman, in due time to make this agreement effectual. And this device of satisfying His own justice, and saving of the elect by Christ, He did at first intimate to our parents in paradise, saying, *“That the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head”* (Gen. 3:15). And the Lord hath in all generations made this known to His church.

3. The Lord hath in all ages covenanted to be the reconciled God of all those who, by their subjection to His ordinances, did profess their satisfaction with this device, and oblige themselves to acquiesce in the same, and to seek salvation by Christ Jesus, as God doth offer Him in the gospel; so all the people of Israel are called the Lord’s people, and are said to avouch Him to be their God, and He doth avouch them to be His people *“Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and to hearken unto His voice; and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldst keep all His commandments”* (Deut. 26:17, 18). Yea, the Lord doth also engage Himself to be the God of the seed and children of those who do so subject themselves to His ordinances. The covenant is said to be made between God and all the people, young and old, present and not present that day (Deut. 29:10-15); and all are appointed to come under some seal of that covenant, as was enjoined to Abraham (Gen. 17:10). Not only was it so in the Old Testament, but it is so in the New Testament also. The Lord makes offer of Himself to be our God in Christ Jesus; and the people professing their satisfaction in that offer, and in testimony thereof subjecting themselves unto the ordinances, they are reckoned a covenanted people, and are joined unto His church in thousands, receiving a seal of the covenant, without any further particular previous trial - *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins. Then they that gladly received the word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:38, 41).

4. Many deal treacherously with God in this covenant -

“Nevertheless, they did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied unto Him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant” (Psa. 78:36, 37). And although they profess their estimation of Christ the Saviour, and their heart-satisfaction with that device of saving sinners by Him, and having the image of God restored by Him in them; yet their heart is not right with God, and they do content themselves with an empty title of being in a sealed covenant with God: *“Abraham is our Father,”* say they (John 8:39). For although the Lord obligeth every man, who professeth his satisfaction with Christ Jesus, the devised ransom, to be cordial and sincere herein; and only to those who are so doth He make out the spiritual promises of the covenant, they only being privileged to be the sons of God who do really receive Christ (John 1:12); yet the Lord doth permit many to profess their closing with Him in Christ, both in the Old and New Testament, whilst their heart is not engaged; and He doth admit them to be members of His church, granting unto them the use of ordinances, and many other external mercies and privileges denied unto the heathen, who are not in covenant with Him.

5. Although the greater part of people do foolishly fancy that they have closed with God in Christ Jesus sincerely and heartily; or, at least, they do, without any ground or warrant, promise a new heart to themselves before they depart this life; yet there be but very few who do really and cordially close with God in Christ Jesus as He is offered in the gospel: and so there be but very few saved, as is clear - *“strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be who find it”* (Matt. 7:14); *“Many are called, but few are chosen”* (Matt. 20:16). If people would believe this, it might help to alarm them.

6. Although none at all do cordially close with God in Christ Jesus, and acquiesce in that ransom found out by God, except only such as are elected - *“But the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded”* (Rom. 11:7) - and whose hearts the Lord doth sovereignly determine to that blessed choice - *“No man can come to Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him”* (John 6:44); yet the Lord hath left it as a duty upon people who hear this gospel, to close with His offer of salvation through Christ Jesus, as if it were in their power to do it; and the Lord, through these commands and exhortations, wherein He obligeth men to the thing, doth convey life

and strength to the elect, and doth therein convey the new heart unto them, which pointeth kindly towards this new device of saving sinners, and towards Christ in His covenant relations; for it is the Lord's mind, in these commands and invitations, to put people on some duty, with which He uses to concur for accomplishing that business between Him and them: so then, it is a coming on our part, and yet a drawing on His part; *"No man can come to Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him"* (John 6:44). It is a drawing on His heart, and a running on our part - *"Draw me, we will run after Thee"* (Cant. 1:4). It is an approaching on our part, and yet a *"choosing and causing to approach"* on His part (Psa. 65:4). It is a believing or receiving on our part - *"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name;"* and yet *"it is given us to believe"* (John 1:12; Phil. 1:29).

Chapter II

The Duty of Closing with God's Plan of Saving Sinners by Christ Jesus

Having premised these things, I say, if men do not find in themselves the marks of a saving interest in Christ, spoken of in the former part of the treatise; then, for securing their state, they ought forthwith, with all diligence, personally and heartily to accept of and close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, held out in the gospel. In handling of this we shall show -

I. What it is to accept of and close with that noble device.

II. That it is the necessary duty of those who would be in favour with God and secure their souls.

III. What is previously required of those who perform this duty.

IV. What are the qualifications and properties of this duty, if rightly managed.

V. What are the native consequences of it, if it be performed aright.

I. What it is to accept of, and close with, the gospel offer

1. As for the first, What it is to close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, held out in the gospel. Here we must remember, as we showed before, that at first God willed man to abide in His favour, by holding fast his first integrity in which he

was created; but man by his transgression lost God's favour, made void that covenant of works, and put himself in to an utter incapacity to regain the Lord's friendship, which he had lost by his sin, and to rescue himself from the curse and wrath now due to him for sin, or any way to procure his own salvation: but the Lord hath freely manifested another way of repairing man's lost estate, namely, by sending His Son Christ Jesus in the flesh, to satisfy His justice for the sins of the elect, and to restore in them His image, now defaced, and to bring them unto glory; and He hath made open proclamation in the church, that whosoever will lay aside all thoughts of saving themselves by the covenant of works, or inherent righteousness, and will agree heartily to be saved by Christ Jesus, they shall be restored to a better condition than formerly man was in, and shall be saved. So then, to close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, is to quit and renounce all thoughts of help or salvation by our own righteousness, and to agree unto this way which God hath found out: it is to value and highly esteem Christ Jesus as the treasure sufficient to enrich poor sinners; and with the heart to believe this record, that there is life enough in Him for men: it is to approve this plan and acquiesce in it, as the only way to true happiness: it is to point towards this mediator, as God holdeth Him out in the gospel, with a desire to lay the stress of our whole state on Him. This is that which is called faith or believing, the "*receiving of Christ,*" or "*believing on His name*" (John 1:12). This is that "*believing on the Lord Jesus Christ,*" commanded to the jailer for his safety (Acts 16:31). This agreeth to all the descriptions of justifying faith in the Scripture. This answers to the type of looking to the "*brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness*" (John 3:14, 15); and this is supposed in all those ordinary acting of faith to which promises are annexed in the Scripture; and will be found in all who have got the new heart from God, and it will be found in none else.

II. This the duty of those who would be saved

As to the second thing, namely, That this is the necessary duty of all such as would be in favour with God and secure their souls; it appeareth thus:-

1. This closing with God's device or believing in Christ, is commanded everywhere in Scripture by the Lord as the condition of the new covenant, giving right and title unto all the spiritual

blessings of the same; for it is, upon the matter, the receiving of Christ. This is commanded, when God bids *men come and buy,*” that is, appropriate all, by closing with that device (Isa. 55:1). *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matt. 11:28). The weary are commanded to come unto Him thus, for their rest - *“This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 3:23). This is enough to prove it a duty incumbent. But further, it is such a duty as only gives right and title to a sonship; for only they who receive Him are privileged to be sons - *“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”* (John 1:12).

2. It appears to be the necessary duty of all, thus: No less than this doth give an opportunity for God, offering Himself to be our God in Christ; and no less than this doth answer our profession, as we are in covenant with Him, as members of His visible church. The Lord offereth to be our God in Christ; if we do not close with the offer, laying aside all thoughts of other ways by which we may attain to happiness, we give no opportunity to him. He saith - *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him”* (Matt. 17:5). If we close not with the offer, we give no answer unto God. Moreover, we are all *“baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38). Now, unless we close with Christ, as aforesaid, we falsify that profession: therefore, since this is the thing which doth answer God’s offer in the gospel, and maketh good our profession, as members of His church, it is a necessary duty lying upon us.

3. Whatsoever a man hath else, if he do not thus close with God’s device concerning Christ Jesus, and do not receive Him, it doth not avail, either as to the accepting of His person, or of His performances, or as to the saving of His soul. Men are accepted only in Christ the beloved - *“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph. 1:6). Abel and his offering are accepted by faith. *“Without faith; it is impossible to please God”* (Heb. 11:4, 6); and *“He that believeth not is condemned already, and shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (John 3:18, 36). For want of this, no external title doth avail; the children of the kingdom are *“cast out,”* if this be wanting (Matt. 8:10-12). The people of Israel are like other

heathens, in regard of a graceless state, lying open to the wrath of God - *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised, Egypt and Judah, and Edom; for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart”* (Jer. 9:25, 26). If men do not believe that He who was slain at Jerusalem, who was called Christ Jesus, and witnessed unto by the prophets, and declared to be the Son of God by many mighty works - I say, if men do not believe that He is the way, and close not with Him as the only way, they shall die in their sins - *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins”* (John 8:24). We say, then, it is a most necessary duty thus to close with Christ Jesus, as the blessed relief appointed for sinners. Every one who is come to years of understanding, and heareth this gospel, is obliged to take to heart his own lost condition, and God’s gracious offer of peace and salvation through Christ Jesus, and speedily to flee from the wrath to come, by accepting and closing with this offer, heartily acquiescing therein as a satisfying way for the salvation of perishing sinners. And, that all may be the more encouraged to set about this duty, when they hear Him praying them to be reconciled unto Him, let them remember that peace and salvation are offered in universal terms to all without exception: *“If any man will,”* he shall be welcome (Rev. 22:17). If any thirst, although after that which will never profit, yet they shall be welcome here, on the condition aforesaid - *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David”* (Isa. 55:1-3). All are *“commanded to believe.”* This is His commandment, *“that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 3:23). The promises are to all who are externally called by the gospel. God excludes none, if they do not exclude themselves - *“The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:39). So that if any

desire salvation, they may come forward, *“He will in no wise cast them out”* (John 6:37), being *“able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through Him”* (Heb. 7:25). And those who have long delayed to take this matter to heart, have now the more need to look to it, lest what belongs to their peace be hid from their eyes. But all these words will not take effect with people, until *“God pour out His Spirit from on high”* (Isa. 32:15); to cause them to approach unto God in Christ; yet we must still press men’s duty upon them, and entreat and charge them, by the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their reckoning to Him in that day, that they give the Lord no rest until He send out that *“Spirit, which He will give to them who ask it”* (Luke 11:13), and cause them to know what belongs unto their peace, and bring them to their duty.

III. What is required of those who would believe on Christ Jesus and be saved

We come now to speak of the third thing which is previously required of those who are to perform this duty. Men must not rashly, inconsiderately, and ignorantly, rush in upon this matter, saying, they approve of the device of saving sinners by Christ, and will acquiesce and rest on Him for safety. Often men do deceive themselves here, and do imagine that they have done the thing. We shall, therefore, notice some things pre-required in a person who is to close with Christ Jesus; which, although we offer not as positive qualifications, fitting a man for Christ that way: *“Come - without money, and without price”* (Isa. 55:1); yet they are such things as without them a man cannot knowingly and cordially perform the duty of believing on Christ Jesus. Besides the common principles which are to be supposed in those who live under gospel-ordinances; as the knowledge that men have immortal souls; that soul and body will be united again at the last day; that there is a heaven and hell, one of which will be the everlasting portion of all men; that the Old and New Testaments are the true word of God and the rule of faith and manners; that every man is by nature void of the grace of God, and is an enemy unto God, and an heir of condemnation; that reconciliation is only by the Mediator Christ Jesus; that faith unites unto Him, and is the condition of the new covenant; that holiness is the fruit of true faith, and is to be followed as that without which no man shall see God: I say, besides these things, the knowledge of

which is necessary, it is required of him who would believe on Christ Jesus –

First, That he take to heart his natural condition; and here he must know some things, and be very serious about them; I say, he must know some things; as

1. That as he was born a rebel and an outlaw unto God, so he hath by many actual transgressions disobeyed God, and ratified the forfeiture of His favour: yea, a man should know many particular instances of his rebellion on all hands; as that he is a liar, Sabbathbreaker, blasphemer, or the like; as Paul speaketh very particularly of himself afterwards - *“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious”* (1 Tim. 1:13).

2. The man must know that the wrath of God denounced in Scripture is standing in force against those very sins whereof he is guilty, and so, consequently, he is the party undoubtedly against whom God, who cannot lie, hath denounced war. A man must know, that when the Scripture saith, *“Cursed is he that offereth a corrupt thing unto God”* (Mal. 1:14); it speaketh against him for his superficial service performed unto God with the outward man, when his heart was far off. When the word saith, *“The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain”* (Exod. 20:7), the man must know it speaketh against himself, who hath often carelessly profaned that dreadful name, before which all knees shall bow (Phil. 2:10); and which His enemies do take in vain (Psa. 139:20). When the word saith, *“Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently”* (Jer. 48:10), the man must know that it speaks against himself, who hath irreverently, with much wandering of heart, and drowsiness, heard the word preached; and without sense, faith, or understanding, hath often prayed before him. When the word saith, *“Woe be unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, and putteth his bottle to him, to make him drunk also”* (Hab. 2:15, 16), the man must know that it is spoken against himself, who hath gloried in making his neighbour drunk, and that dreadful wrath is determined by the Lord against him according to that scripture. When the word saith, *“God will judge unclean persons”* (Heb. 13:4), and will exclude them from the *“New Jerusalem, and they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone”* (Rev. 21:8); the man must know that the Scripture speaketh these very words against him, he being an unclean person; so that he is the person

against whom the curses of the law do directly strike.

3. A man must know that he hath nothing of his own to procure his peace, and to set him free from the hazard under which he lieth; because *“all his righteousness is as an unclean thing”* (Isa. 64:6). His prayers, his other services done to God, his alms-deeds, etc., are not acceptable unto God, since they came not from a right principle in his heart, and were not performed in a right way, nor upon a right account, nor for a right end; his *“sacrifices have been an abomination unto God”* (Prov. 21:27).

4. He must know, that as he is void of all the saving graces of the Spirit, as the true love of God, the true fear of his name, godly sorrow for sin, etc., so particularly, that he wants faith in Christ, who taketh away the sins of all them who believe on Him. Until a man know this, he will still leave all his debt and burden, without care or regard anywhere else, before he bring it to the Surety. Now, not only must a man know these things, as I said before, but he must also very seriously take them to heart; that is to say, he must be affected with these things, and must be in earnest about them, as he used to be in other cases in which he is most serious; yea, he should be more in earnest here than in other cases, because it is of greater concernment unto him. This seriousness produceth –

(1). A taking of salvation to heart more than anything else. Shall men be obliged to *“seek first the kingdom of God?”* (Matt. 6:33); is there but *“one thing necessary?”* (Luke 10:42); shall Paul *“count all things loss and dung”* for this matter (Phil. 3:8); is a man a loser, if he gain *“the whole world and lose his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36); shall this be the only ground of joy, *“that men’s names are written in the book of life?”* (Luke 10:20); and shall not men, who would be reckoned serious, take their soul and salvation more to heart than anything else? Surely it cannot fail. Let none deceive themselves. If the hazard of their soul, and the salvation thereof, and how to be in favour with God, have not gone nearer to their heart than anything in the world beside, it cannot be presumed, upon just grounds, that they have known sin, or God, or the eternity of His wrath, aright.

(2). This seriousness breaks the man’s heart, and causeth the stoutness of it to faint, and leadeth it out to sorrow as for a firstborn (Zech. 12:10). I grant their sorrow will better suit that scripture afterwards, when they apprehend Christ pierced by their sins.

(3). It leads the man to a self-loathing. A man taking up himself

so, cannot but loathe himself for his abominations, whereby he hath destroyed himself. There is somewhat of that spirit of revenge, which is mentioned as a fruit of true repentance *“This self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what revenge?”* (2 Cor. 7:11).

(4). This seriousness makes the man peremptory to find relief; since it is not in himself. He dare not put off and delay his business as before; and this is indeed required, that he finds himself so pursued and urged to it, that he flees for refuge somewhere. I grant some have a higher and some a lesser degree of this seriousness, as we showed in the former part of this treatise: but if we speak of the Lord’s ordinary way of working with those who are come to age, we say, they must very seriously take their soul’s estate to heart, despairing of help in themselves, since *“the whole need not a physician, but those who are sick”* (Matt. 9:12). As for the measure, we plead only that which probably supposes that a man will be induced thereby to treat cordially with Christ, on any terms he doth offer himself to be closed with.

The *second thing pre-required* of him who would believe on Christ Jesus is, He must know and take to heart the way of escape from God’s wrath; the Spirit must convince him of that righteousness. Here a man must understand somewhat distinctly, that God hath devised a way to save poor lost man by Jesus Christ, whose perfect righteousness hath satisfied offended justice, and procured pardon and everlasting favour to all those whom he persuadeth, by this gospel, to accept of God’s offer - *“Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things”* (Acts 13:38, 39). *“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”* (John 1:12). So that no person is excluded, of whatsoever rank or condition, whatsoever hath been his former way, unless he be guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is a malicious hatred and rejection of the remedy appointed for sinners, as we shall hear; for *“all manner of sins”* are forgiven unto those who accept of the offer in God’s way (Matt. 12:31). *“He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through Him”* (Heb. 7:25).

The *third thing pre-required* is, A man must know, that as God hath not excluded him from the relief appointed, so He is willing to

be reconciled unto men through Christ, and hath obliged men to close with Him through Christ Jesus, and so to appropriate that salvation to themselves. He not only invites all to come - *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price”* (Isa. 55:1, 2); and He welcometh all that come, as we find in the gospel, and commendeth those who come, as the centurion and the woman of Canaan (Matt. 8:10; 15:28); and chideth for not coming and closing with Him, *“Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life”* (John 5:40); and condemneth for not closing so with Him: *“He that believeth not is condemned already”* (John 3:18); - but He also commandeth all to believe on Christ: *“This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 3:23). So that a man is not to question the Lord’s willingness to receive men who go to Christ honestly, for God hath abundantly cleared that in Scripture. Unless a man know so much, he will scarcely dare to lay his heart open for that noble device of saving sinners, or adventure the whole weight of his salvation upon Christ Jesus.

The *fourth thing pre-required* is, The man who would close with Christ Jesus, must resolve to break all covenants with hell and death - *“Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves”* (Isa. 28:15). Whatsoever known evil men are engaged in, they must resolve to forego it; for there is no concord between Christ and Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-18). The Lord requireth that they who would expect *“Him to be for them, should not be for another”* (Hos. 3:3). This is far from evangelical repentance, which I grant doth not precede a man’s closing with Christ by faith: there is little here beyond a disregard of those things into which a man was formerly devoted, and a slighting what he was mad upon, because he sees himself destroyed thereby, and relief now offered; upon which his heart beginneth to be more intent that formerly it was. After this when Christ is looked upon alone, His worth and beauty do appear, so as among all the gods there is none like unto Him, and He appeareth as a sufficient covering of the eyes to all who obtain Him: upon which the heart loves God’s device in the new covenant, and desires to lay its weight

upon Christ rather than any other way, bending towards Him; and so the man becomes a believer.

Now, I will not say that all these things, whereof we have spoken, are formally, orderly, and distinctly found in every person before he close with God in Christ; for the way of the heart with Christ may be added to "*the four wonderful things*" (Prov. 30:18). It is hard to trace the heart in its translation from darkness to light; yet we hold out the most ordinary and likely way to him who doth ask the way; debarring thereby ignorant and senseless persons from meddling, and discharging them from pretending to any interest in Him whilst they remain such.

IV. Some of the properties and native consequences of true believing

The fourth thing we proposed to speak to is, The properties of this duty, when rightly gone about. I shall only mention a few.

1. Believing on Christ must be personal; a man himself and in his own proper person must close with Christ Jesus - "*The just shall live by his faith*" (Hab. 2:4). This saith, that it will not suffice for a man's safety and relief, that he is in covenant with God as a born member of the visible church, by virtue of the parent's subjection to God's ordinances: neither will it suffice that the person had the initiating seal of baptism added, and that he then virtually engaged to seek salvation by Christ's blood, as all infants do: neither doth it suffice that men are come of believing parents; their faith will not instate their children into a right to the spiritual blessings of the covenant; neither will it suffice that parents did, in some respects, engage for their children, and give them away unto God: all these things do not avail. The children of the kingdom and of godly predecessors are cast out. Unless a man in his own person have faith in Christ Jesus, and with his own heart approve and acquiesce in that device of saving sinners, he cannot be saved. I grant, this faith is given unto him by Christ; but certain it is, that it must be personal.

2, This duty must be cordial and hearty - "*With the heart man believeth unto righteousness*" (Rom. 10:10). A man must be sincere, and without guile, in closing with Christ, judging Him the only covering of the eyes, not hankering after another way. The matter must not swim only in the head or understanding, but it must be in the heart: the man must not only be persuaded that Christ is the way,

but affectionately persuaded of it, loving and liking the thing, having complacency in it; so that *“it is all a man’s desire,”* as David speaketh of the covenant (2 Sam. 23:5). If a man be cordial and affectionate in anything, surely he must be so here in this *“one thing that is necessary.”* It must not be simply a fancy in the head, it must be a heart-business, a soul business; yea, not a business in the outer court of the affections, but in the flower of the affections, and in the innermost cabinet of the soul, where Christ is formed. Shall a man be cordial in anything, and not in this, which comprises all his chief interests and his everlasting state within it? Shall the Lord be said to *“rejoice over a man as a bridegroom rejoiceth over his bride?”* (Isa. 62:5); and *“to rest in His love with joy?”* (Zeph. 3:17); and shall not the heart of man go out and meet Him here? The heart or nothing; love or nothing; marriage-love, which goes from heart to heart; love of espousals, or nothing - *“My son, give me thine heart”* (Prov. 23:26). *“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing”* (1 Cor. 13:2). I will not say that there is in all, as soon as they believe, a prevailing sensible love, which maketh sick; but there must be in believing, a rational and kindly love, so well grounded and deeply engaged, that *“many waters cannot quench it. It is strong as death, and jealousy in it burneth as fire”* (Cant. 8:6, 7).

3. The third property or qualification of believing, as it goes out after Christ, is that it must be rational. By this I mean that the man should move towards God in Christ, in knowledge and understanding, taking up God’s device of saving sinners by Christ as the Scripture holds it out; not fancying a Christ to himself otherwise than the gospel speaketh of Him, nor another way of relief by Him than the word of God holdeth out. Therefore we find knowledge joined to the covenant between God and man as a requisite - *“And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”* *“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord”* (Jer. 24:7; 31:34). I mean also, that a man must be in calmness of spirit, and as it were in his cold blood, in closing with Christ Jesus; not in a simple fit of affection, which soon vanisheth - *“He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy*

receiveth it" (Matt. 13:20); nor in a distemper through some outward distress, as the people were, "*when He slew them, then they sought Him; and proved not steadfast in the covenant*" (Psa. 78:34); nor under a temptation of some outward temporary interest, as Simon Magus was when he believed. A man must act here rationally, as being master of himself, in some measure able to judge of the good or evil of the thing as it stands before him.

4. The fourth is faith; as it goes out rationally, so it goes out resolutely. The poor distressed people in the gospel did most resolutely cast themselves upon Christ. This resoluteness of spirit is in respect to all difficulties that lie in the way; violence is altered to these. The man whose heart is a laying out for Christ Jesus, cannot say, "*There is a lion in the street*" (Prov. 26:13). If he cannot have access by the door, he will break through the roof of the house (Luke 5:19). He often doth not regard that which the world calls discretion or prudence, like Zaccheus, climbing up on a tree to see Christ, when faith was forming in his bosom (Luke 19). This resoluteness of spirit foresees what inconveniences may follow, and disregards all these; at least resolving over all these, like a wise builder who reckoneth the expense beforehand (Luke 14:28). This resoluteness is also in regard to all a man's idols, and such weights as would easily beset him, if he did not follow after Christ over them all, like that blind man who did cast his garment from him when Christ called him (Mark 10:50). This resoluteness in the soul proceedeth from desperate self-necessity within the man, as it was with the jailer (Acts 16:30); and from the sovereign command of God, obliging the man to move towards Christ - "*This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 3:23); and from the good report gone abroad of God, that "*He putteth none away that come unto Him through Christ*" (John 6:37); but commends such as do adventure over the greatest difficulties, as the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:28). But, above all, this resoluteness doth proceed from the arm of JEHOVAH, secretly and strongly drawing the sinner towards Christ - "*No man can come to Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him*" (John 6:44).

I will not say that every one, closing with Christ in the offers of the gospel, hath all the above thoughts formally in his mind; yet, upon search, it will be found, if he be put to it, or put in mind of these things, they are then uppermost in the soul.

By what is said, it manifestly appears that many in the visible church had need to do somewhat further for securing of their soul, when they come to years of discretion, than is found to have been done by them before, in the covenant between God and the church, sealed to them in baptism.

From what is said also, there is a competent guard upon the free grace of God in the gospel, held out through Christ Jesus; so that ignorant, senseless, profane men, cannot with any shadow of reason, pretend to an interest in it. It is true, believing in Christ, and closing with Him as a perfect Saviour, seemeth easy, and every godless man saith that he believes on Him: but they deceive themselves, since their soul hath never cordially, rationally, and resolutely gone out after Christ Jesus, as we have said. It may be, some wicked men have been enlightened (Heb. 6:4); and have found some reality in their fear - "*Felix trembled*" (Acts 24:25); - or in their joy - "*He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it*" (Matt. 13:20); and Herod heard John "*gladly*" (Mark 6:20); - but not having engaged their heart in approaching to God (Jer. 30:21), have either sat down in that common work, as their sanctuary, until the trial came - "*When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended*" (Matt. 13:21); - or, "*they return back with the dog to their vomit,*" from which they had in some measure "*escaped by the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour*" (2 Peter 2:20-22); or they utterly fall away to the hatred and malicious despising and persecuting of Christ and His interests, from whence hardly can they be recovered - "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.*" "*For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*" "*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot, the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*" (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Which things should provoke men to be serious in this great

business.

V. Some of the effects of saving faith

We come now to speak to the fifth thing proposed, and that is, What are the native consequences of true believing? I shall reduce what I have to speak of them to these two, namely, Union with God, and communion.

First, then, I say, When a sinner closets with Christ Jesus, there is presently an admirable union, a strange oneness between God and the man. As the husband and wife, head and body, root and branches, are not to be reckoned two but one; so Christ, or God in Christ, and the sinner closing with Him by faith, are one - "*We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones*" (Ephes. 5:30). He that is so "*joined unto the Lord is one spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:17); as the Father is in the Son, and Christ in the Father, so believers are one in the Father and the Son; they are one, as the Father and Son are one. The Father in Christ, and Christ in believers, that they may be "*made perfect in one.*" O what a strange interweaving and indissoluble union here! (John 17:21-26). Because of this union betwixt God and the believer,

1. They can never hate one another. Henceforth the Lord will never hate the believer - "*As no man hateth his own flesh at any time, but cherisheth and nourisheth it,*" so doth Christ His people (Eph. 5:29). He may be angry, so as to correct and chastise the man that is a believer; but all He doth to him is for his good and advantage - "*All the Lord's paths must be mercy and truth to him*" (Psa. 25:10). "*All things work together for good to him*" (Rom. 8:28). On the other side, the believer can never hate God maliciously; for - "*He that is born of God sinneth not*" (1 John 3:9). For the Lord hath resolved and ordained things so, that His hand shall undoubtedly so be upon all believers for good, that they shall never be permitted to hate Him, and so be plucked out of His hand.

2. Because of this union there is a strange sympathy and fellow-feeling between God and the believer: the Lord is afflicted with the man's affliction (Isa. 63:9). He doth tenderly, carefully, and seasonably resent it, as if He were afflicted with it. He who toucheth the believer, toucheth the apple of the Lord's eye (Zech. 2:8) - "*He is touched with the feeling of their infirmities*" (Heb. 4:15); and

“precious in His sight is their death” (Psa. 116:15). In a word, what is done to them, is done unto Him; and what is not done unto them, is not done unto Him - *“He that receiveth you, receiveth Me”* (Matt. 10:40). *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me: inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me”* (Matt. 25:40, 45). On the other part, the *“zeal of His house”* occupieth the heart of the believer (Psa. 69:9). *“The Lord’s reproach”* lighteth on the believer. If it go well with His affairs, that is the business of His people. So there is a strange sympathy between God and believers, all by virtue of the union between them; because of which, men should hate everything which would compete with Him in their love or affections, and should disdain to be slaves to the creatures, since these are the servants of their Lord and husband, and their servants through Him. What a hateful thing for a queen to disgrace herself with the servants of her prince and husband! It is also a shame for a believer to be *“afraid of evil tidings,”* since the Lord, with whom he is one, alone ruleth all things, *“and doth whatsoever pleaseth Him in heaven and earth.”* *“All things are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”* *“Surely he shall not be moved for ever, he shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; his heart is established, he shall not be afraid.”* *“Our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He pleased”* (1 Cor. 3:21, 23; Psa. 112:6, 7; 115:3). The other great consequence of believing, is an admirable unparalleled communion, by virtue whereof,

1. The parties themselves do belong each to the other. The Lord is the God of His people; He Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is their God, in all His glorious attributes; His justice as well as His mercy; His wisdom, power, holiness, etc., for He becomes the God of His people, as He often speaks in the covenant. On the other part, believers are His people. In their very persons they are His, as the covenant doth speak; they shall be His people; their head, their heart, their hand, etc.; whatsoever they are, they are His.

2. By virtue of this communion they have a mutual interest in one another’s whole goods and property, so far as can be useful. All the Lord’s word belongs to the believer; threatening as well as promises are for his good; all His ways, all His works of all sorts, special communications, death, devils, even all things so far as can be useful - *“All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the*

world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). On the other side, all that belongs to the believer is the Lord's; heritage, children, life, wife, credit, etc., all is at His disposing; if any of these can be useful to Him, the believer is to forego them, else he falsifies that communion, and declares himself in so far unworthy of Christ. "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father; yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:26).

3. By virtue of this communion, there should be much intimacy and familiarity between God and the believer. The Lord may interfere with any thing which belongs to the believer, and do unto him what seemeth good to Him; and the man is not to mistake, or say unto God, "*What doest Thou*" except in so far as concerns His duty: yea, He is still to say, in every case, "*Good is the word and will of the Lord*" (Isa. 39:8; 2 Kings 4:23, 26). On the other part, the believer may, in a humble way, be homely and familiar with God in Christ; He may come with "*boldness to the throne of grace*" (Heb. 4:16); and present his addresses unto God. He is no more a stranger unto God, so that he needs not speak unto God as one who hath acquaintances to make every hour, as many professors do; which makes a great inconsistency in their religion. The believer also may lay open all his heart unto God - "*I have poured out my soul before the Lord*" (1 Sam. 1:15); and impart all his secrets unto Him, and all his temptations, without fear of a mistake. The believer also may inquire into what God doth, in so far as may concern his own duty, or in so far as may ward off mistakes respecting the Lord's way, and reconcile it with His words: so Job says, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; but I will maintain mine own ways before Him*" (Job 13:15). The believer is a friend in this respect, as "*knowing what the Master doeth;*" see Gen. 18:23; Jer. 12:1; Isa. 63:17. The believer also may draw near daily unto God with all his failings, and seek repentance, pardon, and peace, through the advocacy of Christ - "*Him hath God exalted with His right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 5:31). "*If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2:1). O how often in one day may the believer plead pardon, if he intend not to mock God, nor turn His grace into licentiousness! The Lord hath commanded men to forgive seventy times seven in one day; and

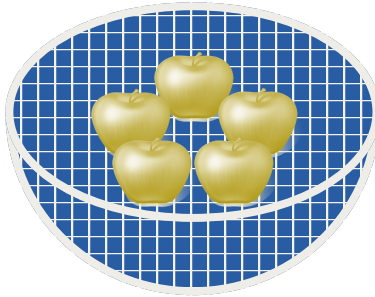
hath intimated there, in a parable of a king who took account of his servants, how much more the Master will forgive (Matt. 18:22-27).

The believer also may intrust God with all His outward concerns, for He careth for these things *“If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things”* (Matt. 6:30-32). *“Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). Yea, the believer may humbly put God to it to make Him forthcoming to him in all such cases as beseemeth, and to help him to suitable fruit in every season, *“even grace in time of need”* (Heb. 4:16). Yea, how great things may believers seek from him in Christ Jesus, both for themselves and others! *“If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us”* (1 John 5:14, 15). *“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do”* (John 14:13). *“Ask of me things to come concerning my sons: and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me”* (Isa. 45:11). It is the shame and great prejudice of His people that they do not improve that communion with God more than they do: Christ may justly upbraid them, *“that they ask nothing in His name”* (John 16:24). By what is said, it appears of how great consequence this duty of believing is, by which a man closes with Christ Jesus, whom the father hath sealed and given for a covenant to the people. It is so honourable to God, answering His very design, and serving His interest in the whole contrivance and manifestation of the gospel; and it is so advantageous to men, that Satan and an evil heart of unbelief do mightily oppose it, by moving objections against it, of which I shall notice the most ordinary.

The third 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]."

