



# THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT INTEREST



**Part Two: How to Attain a  
Saving Interest in Christ  
Booklet Four – Chapters III & IV**



**William Guthrie**

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## Part Two: How to Attain a Saving Interest in Christ

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#### Chapter III

#### Objections and Difficulties Answered and Explained

#### I. The sinner's baseness rendering it presumption to come to Christ

**Objection.** I am so base, worthless, and weak of myself that I think it were high presumption for me to meddle with Christ Jesus, or the salvation purchased at the price of His blood.

**Answer.** It is true, all the children of Adam are base and wicked before Him, *“who chargeth His angels with folly”* (Job 4:18). *“All nations are less than nothing and vanity before him”* (Isa. 40:17). There is such a disproportion between God and man, that unless He Himself had devised that covenant, and of His own free will had offered so to transact with men, it had been high treason for men or angels to have imagined that God should have humbled himself, and become a servant, and have taken on Him our nature, and have united it by a personal union to the blessed Godhead; and that He should have subjected Himself to the shameful death of the cross; and all this, that men, who were rebels, should be reconciled unto God, and be made eternally happy, by being in His holy company for ever. But I say, all this was His own device and free choice; yea, moreover, if God had not sovereignly commanded men so to close with Him in and through Christ, no man durst have made use of that device of His - *“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. 55:1-3). *“And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 3:23). So then, although with Abigail I may say, *“Let me be but a servant, to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord”* (1 Sam.

25:41); yet, since He hath in His holy wisdom devised that way, and knows how to be richly glorified in it - *“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know, what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”* (Eph. 1:18); *“All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them”* (John 17:10); and hath commanded me, as I shall be answerable at the great day, to close with Him in Christ, I dare not disobey, nor inquire into the reasons of His contrivance and commands, but must comply with the command, as I would not be found to *“frustrate the grace of God”* (Gal. 2:21); and in a manner disappoint the gospel, and falsify the record which God hath borne of His Son, *“that there is life enough in Him for men”* (1 John 5:10, 11), and so *“make God a liar,”* and add that rebellion to all my former transgressions.

## II. The singularity of his sin barring the way

**Objection.** I am a person singularly sinful, beyond any I know: therefore I dare not presume to go near to Christ Jesus, or look after that salvation which is through His righteousness.

**Answer.** Is your sin beyond the drunkenness and incest of Lot; adultery covered with murder in David; idolatry and horrid apostasy in Solomon; idolatry, murder, and witchcraft in Manasseh; anger against God and His way in Jonah; forswearing of Christ in Peter, after he was forewarned, and had vowed the contrary; bloody persecution in Paul, making the saints to blaspheme? etc. But woe to him who is emboldened to sin by these instances recorded in Scripture, and adduced here to the commendation of the free and rich grace of God, and to encourage poor penitent sinners to flee unto Christ; I say, are your sins beyond these? Yet all these obtained pardon through Christ, as the Scripture showeth. Know, therefore, that all sins are equal before the free grace of God, *“who loveth freely”* (Hos. 14:4); and looketh not to less or more sin. If the person have a heart to *“come unto Him through Christ, then He is able to save to the uttermost”* (Heb. 7:25). Yea, it is more provoking before God, not to close with Christ, when the offer comes to a man, than all the

rest of his transgressions are; for *“he that believeth not hath made God a liar,”* in that record He hath borne of life in the Son (1 John 5:10, 11). *“And he who doth not believe, shall be condemned for not believing on the Son of God”* (John 3:18). That shall be the main thing in his indictment; so that much sin cannot excuse a man, if he reject Christ, and refuse His offer; since God hath openly declared, that *“this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came to save sinners, whereof I am chief.”* Even he who is chief of sinners in his own apprehension, is bound to believe and *“accept this saying”* (1 Tim. 1:15).

### **III. Special aggravations a hindrance**

**Objection.** My sins have some aggravating circumstances beyond the same sins in other persons, which doth much terrify me.

**Answer.** What can the aggravations of thy sins be, which are not paralleled in the foregoing examples? Is thy sin against great light? So were many of those of whom we spake before. Was it against singular mercies and deliverances? So was that of Lot’s and Noah’s drunkenness. Was thy sin done with much deliberation? So was David’s, when he wrote the letter against Uriah. Was it against or after any singular manifestation of God? So was Solomon’s. Was it by a small and despicable temptation? So was that of Jonah and of Peter, if we consider the heinousness of their transgressions. Hast thou reiterated the sin, and committed it over again? So did Lot, so did Peter, so did Jehoshaphat, in joining with Ahab and Jehoram (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 3). Are there many gross sins concurring together in thee? So were there in Manasseh. Hast thou stood long out in rebellion? That, as all the former, is thy shame; but so did the thief on the cross; he stood it out to the last gasp (Luke 23:42, 43). If yet *“thou hast an ear to hear,”* thou art commanded *“to hear”* (Matt. 13:9). Although thou hast long *“spent thy money for that which is not bread”* (Isa. 55:1, 3), thou hast the greater need now to make haste and to flee for refuge; and if thou do so, He shall welcome thee, and *“in no wise cast thee out”* (John 6:37); especially, since He hath used no

prescription of time in Scripture. So that all those aggravations of thy sin, will not excuse thy refusing the Lord's offer.

#### **IV. Sins not named a barrier**

**Objection.** In all those instances given, you have not named the particulars of which I am guilty; nor know I any who ever obtained mercy before God, being guilty of such things as are in me.

**Answer.** It is difficult to notice every particular transgression which may vex the conscience; yea, lesser sins than some of those I have mentioned may very much disquiet, if the Lord awaken the conscience. But, for thy satisfaction, I shall refer to some truths of Scripture, which do reach sins and cases more universally than any man can do particularly: Exod. 34:7 - "*God pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin;*" that is, all manner of sin. If a man turn from all his wickedness, it shall no more be remembered, or prove his ruin (Ezek. 18:21, 22, 30). "*Him that cometh He will in nowise cast out*" (John 6:37); that is, whatsoever be his sins, or the aggravations of them. "*Whosoever believeth shall have everlasting life*" (John 3:16); that is, without exception of any sin or any case. "*He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him*" (Heb. 7:25); no man can sufficiently declare what is God's uttermost. "*All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men*" (Matt. 12:31); that is, there is no sort of sin, whereof one instance shall not be forgiven in one person or other, "*except the sin against the Holy Ghost.*" These and the like scriptures carry all sorts of sin before them: so that let thy sins be what they will, or can be, they may be sunk in one of these truths; so that thy sin can be no excuse to thee for refusing the offers of peace and salvation through Christ, since "*any man who will,*" is allowed to "*come and take*" (Rev. 22:17). We will not multiply words: the great God of heaven and earth hath sovereignly commanded all who see their need of relief to betake themselves unto Christ Jesus, and to close cordially with God's device of saving sinners by Him, laying aside all objections and excuses, as they shall be answerable unto Him in the day when He shall judge the quick and the dead; and shall drive away from His presence all

those who would dare to say, their sins and condition were such as that they durst not adventure upon Christ's perfect righteousness for their relief, notwithstanding of the Lord's own command often interposed, and, in a manner, His credit engaged.

## **V. The sin against the Holy Ghost alleged**

**Objection.** I suspect I am guilty of the "*sin against the Holy Ghost,*" and so am incapable of pardon; and therefore I need not think of believing on Christ Jesus for the saving of my soul.

**Answer.** Although none should charge this sin on themselves, or on others, unless they can prove and establish the charge according to Christ's example "*And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come*" (Matt. 12:31, 32): yet for satisfying of the doubt, I shall,

I. Show what is not the sin against the Holy Ghost, properly so called, because there be some gross sins which people do unwarrantable judge to be this unpardonable sin.

II. I shall show what is the sin against the Holy Ghost.

III. I shall draw some conclusions in answer directly to the objection.

### **I. What it is not**

As for the first, there be many gross sins, which although, as all other sins, they be sins against the Holy Ghost, who is God equal and one with the Father and the Son, and are done against some of His operations and motions; yet are they not that sin against the Holy Ghost which is the unpardonable sin. As,

1. Blaspheming of God under bodily tortures is not that sin; for some saints fell into this sin - "*And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme*" (Acts 26:11); much less blaspheming of God in a fit of distraction or frenzy; for a man is not a free rational agent at that time; and "*He that spareth His people, as a father doth the son that serveth him, and pitieth them that fear Him, as a father pitieth his children*" (Mal. 3:17; Psa. 103:13); so doth He spare and pity in these roving; for so would

our fathers according to the flesh do, if we blasphemed them in a fit of distraction. Much less are horrid blasphemies against God darted in upon the soul, and not allowed there, this unpardonable sin; for such things were offered to Christ, and are often cast in upon the saints (Matt. 4:1-11).

2. The hating of good in others, whilst I am not convinced that it is good, but according to my light, judge it to be evil; yea, the speaking against it, yea, the persecuting of it in that case, is not the sin against the Holy Ghost; for all these will be found in Paul before he was converted; and he obtained mercy because he did these things ignorantly.

3. Heart-rising at the thriving of others the work and way of God, whilst I love it myself; yea, the rising of the heart against Providence, which often expresses itself against the creatures nearest our hand; yea, this rising of heart entertained and maintained (although they be horrid things leading towards that unpardonable sin, yet) are not that sin; for these may be in the saints proceeding from self-love, which cannot endure to be darkened by another, and proceeding from some cross in their idol under a fit of temptation: the most part of all this was in Jonah (chapter 4).

4. Not only are not decays in what once was in the man, and falling into gross sins against light after the receiving of the truth, this unpardonable sin; for then many of the saints in Scripture were undone; but further, apostasy from much of the truth is not that sin; for that was in Solomon, and in the church of Corinth and Galatia; yea, denying, yea, forswearing of the most fundamental truth, under a great temptation, is not this sin: for then Peter had been undone.

5. As resisting, quenching, grieving, and vexing of the Spirit of God by many sinful ways, are not this unpardonable sin; for they are charged with these who are called to repentance in Scripture, and not shut out as guilty of this sin: so neither reiterated sin against light is the sin against the Holy Ghost, although it leads towards it, for such was Peter's sin in denying Christ; so was Jehoshaphat's sin in joining with Ahab and Jehoram.

6. Purposes and attempts of self-murder, and even purposes of

murdering godly men, the party being under a sad fit of temptation; yea, actual self-murder (although probably it is often joined in the issue with this unpardonable sin, which ought to make every soul look upon the very temptation to it with horror and abhorrence, yet) is not the sin against the Holy Ghost. The jailer intended to kill himself upon a worse account than many poor people do, in the sight and sense of God's wrath, and of their own sin and corruption; yet that jailer obtained pardon (Acts 16:27, 34); and Paul, before his effectual calling, was accessory unto the murder of many saints, and intended to kill more, as himself granteth - "*I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme: and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities*" (Acts 26:9-11). Although all these are dreadful sins, each of them deserving wrath everlasting, and, not being repented of, bringing endless vengeance; especially the last, cuts off hope of relief, for anything that can be expected in an ordinary way; yet none of these is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: and so under any of these there is hope to him that hath an ear to hear the joyful sound of the covenant. All manner of such sin and blasphemy may be forgiven, as is clear in the Scripture, where these things are mentioned.

## **II. What the sin against the Holy Ghost is**

As for the second thing: Let us see what the sin against the Holy Ghost is. It is not a simple act of transgression, but a combination of many mischievous things, involving soul and body ordinarily in guilt. We thus describe it - It is a rejecting and opposing of the chief gospel truth, and way of salvation, made out particularly to a man by the Spirit of God, in the truth and good thereof; and that avowedly, freely, wilfully, maliciously, and despitefully, working hopeless fear. There be three places of Scripture which do speak most of this sin, and thence we will prove every part of this



description, in so far as may be useful to our present purpose; by which it will appear, that none who have a mind for Christ need stumble at what is spoken of this sin in Scripture - *“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”* *“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, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 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?”* (Matt. 12:23-32; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:25-29).

1. Then let us consider the object about which this sin, or sinful acting of the man guilty thereof, is conversant, and that is the chief gospel-truth and way of salvation; both which come to one thing. It is the way which God hath contrived for saving of sinners by Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and Saviour, by whose death and righteousness men are to be saved, as He hath held Him forth in the ordinances, confirming the same by many mighty works in Scripture tending thereto. This way of salvation is the object. The Pharisees oppose this that Christ was the Messiah - *“And all the people said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils”* (Matt. 12:23, 24). The wrong is done against the Son of God - *“It is impossible to renew them*

*again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6); and against the blood of the covenant, and the Spirit graciously offering to apply these things - “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. 10:29).*

2. In the description, consider the qualifications of this object. It is singularly made out to the party by the Spirit of God, both in the truth and good thereof. This faith,

(1). That there must be knowledge of the truth and way of salvation. The Pharisees knew that Christ was the heir - *“But when they saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come let us kill Him” (Matt. 21:38).* The party hath knowledge - *“But if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26).*

(2). That knowledge of the thing must not swim only in the head, but there must be some half-heart persuasion of it: Christ knew the Pharisees’ thoughts (Matt. 12:25); and so did judge them, and that the contrary of what they spake was made out upon their heart. There is a tasting, which is beyond simple enlightening - *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come,”* etc (Heb. 6:4, 5). Yea, there is such a persuasion ordinarily as leadeth to a deal of outward sanctification - *“Who hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing” (Heb. 10:29).*

(3). This persuasion must not only be of the verity of the thing, but of the good of it: the party *“tasteth the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5);* and he apprehendeth the thing as eligible.

(4). This persuasion is not made out only by strength of argument, but also by an enlightening work of God’s Spirit, shining on the truth, and making it conspicuous; therefore is that sin called, *“The sin against the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 12:31; Mark*

3:29). The persons are said “*to have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost*” (Heb. 6:4); and “*to do despite unto the Spirit of grace,*” who was in the nearest step of a gracious operation with them (Heb. 10:29).

3. In this description, consider the acting of the party against the object so qualified. It is a rejecting and opposing of it; which importeth,

(1). That men have once, some way at least, been in hands with it, or had the offer of it, as is true of the Pharisees.

(2). That they do reject, even with contempt, what they had of it, or in their offer. The Pharisees deny it, and speak disdainfully of Christ - “*This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils*” (Matt. 12:24). They fall away, intending to put Christ to “*an open shame*” (Heb. 6:6).

(3). The men set themselves against it by the spirit of persecution, as the Pharisees did still. They rail against it; therefore it is called “*blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*” (Matt. 12:24, 31). They would “*crucify Christ again*” if they could (Heb. 6:6). They are adversaries (Heb. 10:27).

4. Consider the properties of this acting.

(1). It is avowed, that is, not seeking to shelter or to hide itself. The Pharisees speak against Christ publicly - “*But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils*” (Matt. 12:24). They would have “*Christ brought to an open shame*” (Heb. 6:6). They forsake the ordinances which savour that way - “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*” - and despise the danger; for, looking for indignation, they trample that blood still (Heb. 10:25, 27, 29).

(2). The party acteth freely. It is not from unadvisedness, nor from force or constraint, but an acting of free choice; nothing doth force the Pharisees to speak against and persecute Christ. They “*crucify to themselves,*” they re-act the murder of their own free accord, and in their own bosom, none constraining them. They sin of free choice, or, as the word may be rendered, spontaneously - “*For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*” (Heb. 6:6;

10:26).

(3). It is acted wilfully. They are so resolute, they will not be dissuaded by any offer, or take most precious means, as is clear in the aforesaid scriptures.

(4). It is done maliciously, so that it proceeds not so much, if at all, from a temptation to pleasure, profit, or honour. It proceedeth not from fear, or force, or from any good end proposed, but out of heart-malice against God and Christ, and the advancement of His glory and kingdom: so that it is of the very nature of Satan's sin, who hath an irreconcilable hatred against God, and the remedy of sin, because His glory is thereby advanced. This is a special ingredient in this sin. The Pharisees are found guilty of heart-malice against Christ, since they spake so against Him, and not against their own children's casting out devils: and this is the force of Christ's argument - "*If I, by Beelzebub, cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?*" (Matt. 12:27). They do their utmost "*to crucify Christ again, and to bring Him to an open shame*" (Heb. 6:6). They are adversaries, like the devil.

(5). It is done spitefully: the malice must betray itself. The Pharisees must proclaim that Christ hath correspondence with devils: He must "*be put to open shame, and crucified again:*" they must "*tread under foot that blood, and do despite to the Spirit:*" so that the party had rather perish a thousand times than be in Christ's debt for salvation.

5. The last thing in the description is, the ordinary attendant or consequence of this sin; it induceth desperate and hopeless fear. They fear Him, whom they hate with a slavish, hopeless fear, such as devils have- "*A certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*" (Heb. 10:27). They know that God will put out His power against them; they tremble in the remembrance of it; and if they could be above Him, and destroy Him, they would: and since they cannot reach that, they hate with the utmost of heart-malice, and do persecute Him, and all that is His, with despite.

### **III. Conclusions bearing on the objection**

As for the third thing proposed, viz., the conclusions to be drawn from what is said, whereby we will speak directly to the objection.

1. As I hinted before, since the sin against the Holy Ghost is so remarkable, and may be well known where it is, none should charge themselves with it, unless they can prove and establish the charge; for it is a great wrong done unto God to labour to persuade my soul that He will never pardon me: it is the very way to make me desperate, and to lead me into the unpardonable sin; therefore, unless thou can't and dare say that thou dost hate the way which God hath devised for the saving of sinners, and dost resolve to oppose the thriving of His kingdom, both with Himself and others, out of malice and despite against God, thou oughtest not to suspect thyself guilty of this sin.

2. Whatsoever thou hast done against God, if thou dost repent of it, and wish it were undone, thou canst not be guilty of this sin; for in it heart-malice and despite against God do still prevail.

3. If thou art content to be His debtor for pardon, and would be infinitely obliged unto Him for it, then thou canst not, in this case, be guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost; for, as we showed before, they who are guilty of it do so despite God that they would not be His debtors for salvation.

4. Whatsoever thou hast done, if thou hast a desire after Jesus Christ, and dost look with a sore heart after Him, and cannot think of parting with His blessed company forever, or, if they must part with Him, yet dost wish well to Him, and all His, thou needs not suspect thyself to be guilty of this unpardonable sin; for there can be no such hatred of Him in thy bosom as is necessarily required to make up that sin.

5. If thou would be above the reach of that sin, and secure against it forever, then go work up thy heart to approve of salvation by Christ Jesus, and so close with God in Him, acquiescing in Him as the sufficient ransom and rest, as we have been pressing before, and yield to Him to be saved in His way. Do this in good earnest, and thou shalt for ever be put out of the reach of that awful thing wherewith Satan doth affright so many poor seekers of God.

## **VI. Objections from the want of power to believe answered**

**Objection.** Although I be not excluded from the benefit of the

new covenant, yet it is not in my power to believe on Christ; for faith is the gift of God, and above the strength of flesh and blood.

**Answer.** It is true that saving faith, by which alone a man can heartily close with God in Christ, is above our power and is the gift of God, as we said before in the premises; yet remember,

1. The Lord hath left it as a duty upon all who hear this gospel cordially by faith to close with His offer of salvation through Christ, as is clear from Scripture. And you must know, that although it be not in our power to perform that duty of ourselves, yet the Lord may justly condemn us for not performing it, and we are inexcusable; because at first he made man perfectly able to do whatsoever He should command.

2. The Lord commanding this thing, which is above our power, willeth us to be sensible of our inability to do the thing, and would have us to put it on Him to work it in us. He hath promised to give the new heart, and He hath not excluded any from the benefit of that promise.

3. The Lord uses, by these commands and invitations, and men's meditation on the same, and their supplication about the thing, to convey power unto the soul to perform the duty. Therefore, for answer to the objection, I do entreat thee, in the Lord 's name, to lay to heart these His commandments and promises, and meditate on them, and upon that blessed business of the new covenant, and pray unto God, as you can, over them, "*for He will be inquired of to do these things*" (Ezek. 36:37); and lay thy cold heart to that device of God expressed in the Scripture, and unto Christ Jesus, who is given for a covenant to the people, and look to Him for life and quickening. Go and endeavour to approve of that salvation in the way God doth offer it, and so close with, and rest on Christ for it, as if all were in thy power; yet, looking to Him for the thing, as knowing that it must come from Him; and if thou do so, He who meets those who remember Him in His ways (Isa. 64:5), will not be wanting on His part; and thou shalt not have ground to say, that thou movedst toward the thing until thou couldst do no more for want of strength, and so left it at God's door. It shall not fail on His part, if thou have a mind for the business; yea, I may say, if by all thou hast ever heard of that matter, thy heart loveth it, and desireth

to be engaged with it, thou hast it already performed within thee; so that difficulty is past before thou wast aware of it.

## **VII. Objection arising from the complaints of believers as to unfruitfulness**

**Objection.** Many who have closed with Christ Jesus, as aforesaid, are still complaining of their leanness and fruitlessness, which makes my heart lay the less weight on that duty of believing.

**Answer.** If thou be convinced that it is a duty to believe on Christ, you may not neglect it under any pretence. As for the complaints of some who have looked after Him, not admitting every one to be judge of his own fruit, I say-

1. Many, by their jealousies of God's love, and by their unbelief, after they have so closed with God, do obstruct many precious communications, which otherwise would be let out to them – *“And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief”* (Matt. 13:58).

2. It cannot be that any whose heart is gone out after Christ *“have found Him a wilderness”* (Jer. 2:31). Surely they find somewhat in their spirit swaying them towards God in whose two great things, namely, how to be found in Him in that day - *“Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (Phil. 3:8, 9); - and how to show forth His praise in the land of the living, *“Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep Thy word”* (Psa. 119:17). *“Wilt Thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the land of the living”* (Psa. 56:13). They find these two things existing in the soul, and that is much. Moreover, they shall, on due inquiry, ever find such an emptiness in the creatures, that the utmost abundance of the creature cannot satisfy their souls - all is vanity, only God can fill the empty room

in their heart; and when He breathes but a little, there is no room for additional comfort from creatures. This shows that God hath captivated the man, and hath fixed that saving principle in the understanding and heart - *“Who is God but the Lord? Worship Him all ye gods”* (Psa. 97:7). Yea, further, those whose hearts have closed with God in Christ as aforesaid, will not deny that there hath been seasonable preventing and quickening now and then when the soul was like to fail - *“For Thou preventest me with the blessings of Thy goodness”* (Psa. 21:3). *“When I said, my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul”* (Psa. 94:18, 19). Therefore, let none say that there is no fruit following, and let none neglect their duty upon the unjust and groundless complaints of others.

### **VIII. Objection from ignorance regarding covenanting with God - The nature of that duty unfolded**

**Objection.** Although I judge it my duty to close with God’s device in the covenant, I am in the dark how to manage that duty; for sometimes God offers to be our God without any mention of Christ, and sometimes saith, that He will betroth us unto Him: and in other places of Scripture we are called to come to Christ, and He is the bridegroom. Again, God sometimes speaketh of Himself as a Father to men, sometimes as a Husband; Christ is sometimes called the Husband, and sometimes a Brother; which relations seem inconsistent, and do much put me in the dark how to apprehend God, when my heart would agree with Him and close with Him.

**Answer.** It may be very well said, that men do come to God, or close with Him, and yet they come to Christ, and close with Him. They may be said to come under a marriage-relation unto God, and unto Christ also, who is husband, father, brother, etc., to them; and there is no such mystery here as some do conceive. For the better understanding of it, consider these few things –

1. Although God made man perfect at the beginning, and put him in some capacity of transacting with Him immediately - *“God hath made man upright”* (Eccl. 7:29); *“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou*



*mayest freely eat,*” etc (Gen. 2:16, 17); yet man by his fall did put himself at such a distance from God, as to be in an utter incapacity to bargain or deal any more with him immediately.

2. The Lord did, after Adam’s fall, make manifest the new covenant, in which he did signify he was content to transact with man again, in and through a mediator; and so did appoint men to come to Him through Christ - *“He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him”* (Heb. 7:25); and to look for acceptance only in Him - *“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph. 1:6); ordaining men to hear Christ, He being the only party in whom God was well pleased - *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him”* (Matt. 17:5).

3. This matter is so clear, and supposed to be so evident in the Scripture, and so manifest to all who are under the ordinances, that the Lord often speaks of transacting with Himself, not making mention of the mediator, because it is supposed that every one in the church knows that now there is no dealing with God, except by and through Christ Jesus the mediator.

4. Consider that Christ Jesus, God-man, is not only a fit place of meeting for God and men to meet in, and a fit spokesman to treat between the parties now at variance - *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”* (2 Cor. 5:19); but we may say also, He is an immediate bridegroom; and so our closing or transacting with God may be justly called the marriage of the King’s son, and the elect may be called the Lamb’s wife; Christ Jesus being, as it were, the hand which God holdeth out to men, and on which they lay hold when they deal with God. And so through and by Christ we close with God, as our God, on whom our soul doth terminate lastly and ultimately through Christ *“Who by Him do believe in God that raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God”* (1 Peter 1:21).

5. Consider that the various relations mentioned in Scripture are set down to signify the sure and indissoluble union and communion between God and His people. Whatsoever connexion is between head and members, root and branches, king and

subjects, shepherd and flock, father and children, brother and brother, husband and wife, etc., all is here - *“And they all shall be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them”* (John 17:21-26).

So that whatsoever is spoken in Scripture, people may be sure, that God calleth them to be reconciled unto Him through Christ, and doth offer Himself to be their God and husband in Him alone: and men are to accept God to be their God in Christ, approving of that way of relief for poor man, and to give up themselves unto God in Christ, in whom alone they can be accepted. And they who close with Christ, they do close with God and Him, who is in Christ, *“reconciling the world to Himself”* (2 Cor. 5:19; John 14:8-11). And we are not to dip further into the different relations mentioned in Scripture between God or Christ and men, than as they may point out union and communion, or nearness with God through Christ Jesus, and our advantage thereby. These things being clear, we will not multiply words: but since to believe on Christ is the great duty required of all that hear this gospel, we entreat every one, in the Lord’s name, to whom the report of this shall come, that without delay they take to heart their lost condition in themselves, and that they lay to heart the remedy which God hath provided by Jesus Christ, whereof He hath made a free offer unto all who will be content with the same, and to be saved that way; and that they lay to heart, that there is no other way of escape from the wrath that is to come, because of which men would be glad, at the last day, to run into a lake of melted lead, to be hid from the face of the Lamb, whom they do here despise; - we say, we entreat all, in the consideration of these things, to work up their hearts to this business, and to lay themselves open for God, and to receive Him through Christ in the offers of the gospel, acquiescing

in Him as the only desirable and satisfying good, that so they may secure themselves. Go speedily and search for His offers of peace and salvation in the Scripture, and work up your heart and soul to close with them, and with Christ in them, and with God in Christ; and do it so, as you may have this to say, that you were serious, and in earnest, and cordial here, as ever you were in any thing to your apprehension; and, for aught you know, Christ is the choice of your heart, at least you neither know nor allow anything to the contrary; whereupon your heart doth appeal unto God, to search and try if there be aught amiss, to rectify it, and lead you into the right way. Now, this cleaving of the heart unto Him, and casting itself upon Him to be saved in His way, is believing; which doth, indeed, secure a man from the wrath that is to come, because now he hath received Christ, and believeth on Him, and so shall not enter into condemnation, as saith the Scripture.

### **IX. Doubts as to the inquirer's being savingly in covenant with God answered**

**Objection.** When I hear what it is to believe on Christ Jesus, I think sometimes I have faith; for I dare say, to my apprehension, I approve of the plan of saving sinners by Christ Jesus; my heart goes out after Him, and doth terminate upon Him as a satisfying treasure; and I am glad to accept God to be my God in Him: but I often question if ever I have done so, and so am, for the most part, kept hesitating and doubting if I do believe, or am savingly in covenant with God.

**Answer.** It is not unusual for many, whose hearts are gone out after Christ in the gospel, and have received Him, to bring the same in question again: therefore I shall advise one thing, as a notable help to fix the soul in the maintaining of faith and an interest in God, and that is, that men not only close heartily with God in Christ, as aforesaid, but also that they expressly, explicitly, by word of mouth, and viva voce, and formally close with Christ Jesus, and accept God's offer of salvation through Him, and so make a covenant with God. And this, by God's blessing, may contribute not a little for establishing them concerning their save interest in God.

## Chapter IV

### Concerning Personal Covenanting With God in Christ

#### I. Certain things premised concerning personal covenanting

Before I speak directly to this express covenanting with God, I premise these few things:-

1. I do not here intend a covenanting with God essentially differing from the covenant between God and the visible church, as the Lord doth hold it out in His revealed will; neither do I intend a covenant differing essentially from the transacting of the heart with God in Christ, formerly spoken unto: it is that same covenant; only it differeth by a singular circumstance, namely, the formal expression of the thing which the heart did before practice.

2. I grant this express covenanting and transacting with God is not absolutely necessary for a man's salvation; for if any person close heartily and sincerely with God, offering Himself in Christ in the gospel, his soul and state are thereby secured, according to the Scripture, although he utter not words with his mouth; but this express verbal with God is very expedient, for the better well-being of a man's state, and for his more comfortable maintaining of an interest in Christ Jesus.

3. This express covenanting with God by word of mouth is of no worth without sincere heart closing with God in Christ joined with it; for, without that, it is but a profaning of the Lord's name, and a mocking of Him to His face, so *"to draw near unto Him with the lips, whilst the heart is far from Him"*

4. I grant both cordial and verbal transacting with God will not make out a man's gracious state unto him, so as to put and keep it above controversy, without the joint witness of the Spirit, by which we know what is freely given to us of God; yet this explicit way of transacting with God, joined with that heart-closing with Him in Christ, contributes much for clearing up to a man that there is a fixed bargain between God and him, and will do much to ward off from him many groundless jealousies and objections of an unstable mind and heart, which uses with shame to deny this hour what it did really act and perform the former hour. This explicit covenanting is as an instrument taken of what passed between God

and the soul, and so hath its own advantage for strengthening of faith. As for this express covenanting, we shall

I. Show that it is a very warrantable practice.

II. We shall show shortly what is previously required of those who do so transact with God.

III. How men should go about that duty.

IV. What should follow thereupon.

**I. The thing itself is warrantable** As to the first, I say, it is a warrantable practice and an incumbent duty, expressly and by word to covenant with God; which appeareth thus:

1. In many places of Scripture, if we look to what they may bear, according to their scope and the analogy of faith, God hath commanded it, and left it on people as a duty - *“One shall say, I am the Lord’s.” “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength”* (Isa. 44:5; 45:24). *“Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth”* (Jer. 3:4). *“They shall say, the Lord is my God”* (Zech. 13:9); *“Thou shalt call Me Ishi”* (Hos. 2:16); and in many places elsewhere. Now, since God hath so clearly left it on men in the letter of the word, they may be persuaded that it is a practice warranted and allowed by Him, and well pleasing unto Him.

2. It is the approved practice of the saints in Scripture thus expressly to covenant with God, and they have found much comfort in that duty afterwards. David did often expressly say unto God, that He was his God, his portion, and that himself was His servant. Thomas will put his interest out of question with it - *“And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord, and my God”* (John 20:28). Yea, I say, the saints are much quieted in remembrance of what hath passed that way between God and them - *“Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.” “I cried unto Thee, O Lord, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living”* (Psa. 73:25; 142:5). We find it often so in the book of the Canticles. Now, shall the chief worthies of God abound so much in a duty, which produces so much peace and satisfaction to them in many cases, and shall we, under the New Testament, unto whom access

is ministered abundantly, and who partake of the sap of the olive; shall we, I say, fall behind in this approved method of communion with God? Since we study to imitate that cloud of witnesses in other things, as faith, zeal, patience, etc., let us also imitate them in this.

3. The thing about which we here speak is a matter of the greatest concernment in all the world. *“It is the life of our soul”* (Deut. 32:47). Oh! shall men study to be express, explicit, plain, and peremptory, in all their other great businesses, because they are such: and shall they not much more be peremptory and express in this, which doth most concern them? I wonder that many not only do not speak it with their mouth, but that they do not swear and subscribe it with their hand, and do not everything for securing of God to themselves in Christ, and themselves unto God, which the Scriptures doth warrant - *“One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel”* (Isa. 44:5).

This also may have its own weight, as an argument to press this way of covenanting with God, that the business of an interest in Christ, and of real and honest transacting with Him, is a thing which, in the experience of saint, is most frequently brought into debate and in question; therefore, men had need all the ways they can, even by thought, word, and deed, to put it to a point.

This also may be urged here for pressing this as a duty, that God is so formal, express, distinct, and legal, to say so, in all the business of man’s salvation, namely, Christ must be a near kinsman to whom the right of redemption doth belong; He must be chosen, called authorized, and sent; covenants formally drawn between the Father and Him, the Father accepting payment and satisfaction, giving formal discharges, all done clearly and expressly. Shall the Lord be so express, plain, and peremptory in every part of the business, and shall our part of it rest in a confused thought, and we be as dumb beasts before Him? If it were a marriage between man and wife, it would not be judged enough, although there were consent in heart given by the woman, and known to the man, if she did never express so much by word,

being in a capacity to do so. Now, this covenant between God and man is held out in Scripture as a marriage between man and wife - *“And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord”* (Hos. 2:19, 20). *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:2). The whole Song of Solomon speaketh it. The Lord uses similitudes, to signify unto us what He intends; and surely this is a special requisite in marriage, that the wife give an express and explicit consent unto the business: the man saith - *“so I take thee to be my lawful wife and do oblige myself to be a dutiful husband.”* The woman is obliged, on the other part, to express her consent, and to say - *“Even so I take thee to be my lawful husband, and do promise duty and subjection.”* It is so here; the Lord saith, *“I do betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt call me Ishi,”* that is, my husband (Hos. 2:16). I will be for thee as a head and husband, if *“thou wilt not be for another”* (Hos. 3:3). The man ought to answer, and say, Amen, so be it; Thou shalt be my God, my Head, and Lord, and I shall and will be Thine, and not for another - *“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine”* (Cant. 6:3). And so this making of the covenant with God is called *“a giving of the hand to Him,”* as the word is - *“Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified for ever; and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you”* (2 Chron. 30:8); which doth intimate a very express, formal, explicit, and positive bargaining with God. So then, we conclude it to be an incumbent duty, and an approved practice necessary for the quieting of a man’s mind, and his more comfortable being in covenant with God, and more fully answering God’s condescension and offer in that great and primary promise - *“I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”*

Not only may and should people thus expressly close with God in Christ for fixing their heart; but they may upon some occasions renew this verbal transaction with God, especially when, through

temptations, they are made to question if they have really and sincerely closed covenant with God. As they are then to put out new acts of faith, embracing Christ as the desirable portion and treasure, and also upon other occasions, so it were expedient, especially if there remain any doubt as to the thing, that by viva voce and express words they determine that controversy, and say of the Lord, and to Him, that He is their refuge and portion (Psa. 91:2; 142:5). We find the saints doing so, and we may imitate them. Especially,

(1). In the time of great backsliding, people were wont to renew the covenant with God, and we should do so also. Our heart should go out after Christ in the promises of reconciliation with God: for He is our peace upon all occasions, and our Advocate; and we are bound to apprehend Him so, when we transgress - *“If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 John 2:1); and to express so much by word, as the saints did in their formal renewing of the covenant.

(2). When people are in hazard, and difficulties are present or foreseen, then it were good that they should send out their hearts after Him, and express their adherence unto Him for securing their own hearts. We find Joshua doing so, when He was to settle in the land of Canaan, in the midst of snares: - *“Now therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed; and the Lord drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the Lord; for He is our God. And*



*Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sin. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now, therefore put away (said he) the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem” (Josh. 24).*

So did David in his straits - *“In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast” (Psa. 57:1).*

(3). When men apprehend God to be at a distance from them, and their soul to be under withering and decay, then it is safest heartily to close with Christ, and embrace Him by faith for the securing of the soul; and it were good to put it out of question by the expression of the thing. This is the ready way to draw sap from Christ the root, for recovering of the soul, and for establishing the heart before Him. The spouse, in the Song of Solomon, doth so; thus asserting her interest in Him when in such a condition, professing and avowing Him to be her beloved (Cant. 5).

(4). At the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, men should thus cordially close with God in Christ, and speak and express so much; for that is a feast of love; and then and there we come under a solemn professing of closing with God in Christ personally and openly, and to receive the seal of it. It is, therefore, especially proper, at that time, to bring up both heart and tongue to second and answer our profession, apprehending God to be his, and at his disposal. We shall not confine the Lord’s people to times and seasons for this duty; the Lord may bind it upon them at His pleasure; only there is hazard, that by too frequent express covenanting with God, men turn too formal in it. Therefore, it is not so fit that people should ordinarily at full length renew that explicit transaction with God, but rather to declare unto God that

they adhere unto the covenant made with Him, and that they do maintain and will never revoke nor recall the same; and withal, they may hint the sum of it, in laying claim unto God in Christ as their own God; and this they may do often, even in all their addresses to God. And probably this is the thing designed by the saints in their so ordinary practice in Scripture, whilst they assert their interest in God as their God and portion; and it is fit that men, in all their walk, hold their heart to the business, by heart-cleaving to God in Christ - *“The life we live in the flesh should be by faith in the Son of God”* (Gal. 2:20).

## **II. The preparation needed**

As to the second thing, namely, what preparation is required of him who is expressly to transact with God here. Besides what we mentioned before, as previous to a man’s closing with Christ Jesus, we only add,

1. That he who would explicitly bargain with God, must know, that to do so is warranted, and allowed by God, as we showed before. If this be wanting, a man cannot do it in faith, and so it will be sin unto him - *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin”* (Rom. 14:23).

2. Then man must labour to bring up his heart to the thing, that it do not belie the tongue; it will be a great mocking of God, so to *“draw near to Him with the lips, whilst the heart is far from Him”* (Isa. 29:13).

## **III. How the duty of covenanting is to be performed**

The third thing to be considered in this express verbal covenanting with God is, the way how it is to be performed and managed. And besides what was said before in heart closing with Christ, I add here, -

1. The man should do it confidently; not only believing that he is about his duty when he doth it; but also, that God in Christ Jesus will accept his poor imperfect way of doing his duty: He doth *“accept a man according to what he hath, if there be a willing mind”* (2 Cor. 8:12). A mite is accepted, since it is *“all the poor woman’s substance”* (Mark 12:44). Yea, if it can be attained, the man should believe that the issue and consequence of this

transacting shall prove comfortable, and all shall be well; and that God, who engageth for all in the covenant (since He hath determined the man to this happy choice), will in some measure make him forthcoming, and will perfect what concerns him - *“Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it”* (1 Thess. 5:24). If this confidence be wanting, the matter will be done with much fear and jealousy, if not worse: and will still prove a disquieting business to the man.

2. It should be done holily. It is called *“the holy covenant”* (Luke 1:72); *“the sure mercies (or holy things) of David”* (Acts 13:34). Here it were fitting that what is done in this express transacting with God should not be done cursorily and by the bye, but in some special address unto God; the thing should be spoken unto the Lord - *“I cried unto Thee, O Lord; I said; Thou art my refuge and my portion”* (Psa. 142:5). It is proper, in so great a business, that a portion of time were set apart for confession and supplication before God; yea, also, the person so transacting with God should labour to have high apprehensions of God’s greatness and sovereignty - *“Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like unto Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee”* (2 Sam. 7:22). Although He thus humble himself to behold things in heaven and earth; and these high and holy thoughts of Him will and should be attended with debasing and humbling thoughts of self, although admitted to this high dignity - *“Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord: and he said, Who am I, O Lord God; and what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto?”* (2 Sam. 7:18). It is no small thing to be allied unto, and with, the great God of heaven and His Son Christ; as David speaketh, when King Saul did offer his daughter to him (1 Sam. 18:23).

Yea, further, there should be special guarding and watching that the heart keep spiritual in transacting with God. There is great reason for this holy way of performing the duty, for men are ready to mistake themselves, and to think of the Lord according to their own fancy, and to turn carnal in the business, since it is a marriage transaction held out in all the ordinary expressions of love, as in the Song of Solomon (Isa. 62:5; Zeph. 3:17).

#### **IV. What should follow this solemn act**

The fourth thing we shall speak a word unto is, What should follow upon this express verbal covenanting with God. I say, besides that union and communion with God in Christ, following upon believing, if a man explicitly by word transact with God –

1. He should thenceforth be singularly careful to abide close with God, in all manner of conversation; for, if a man thenceforth do anything unsuitable, he doth falsify his word before God, which will stick much in his conscience, and prove a snare. If a man henceforth forsake God, and take on him to dispose of himself, since he is not his own, and hath opened his mouth unto the Lord, he makes inquiry after vows, and devoureth that which is holy (Prov. 20:25).

2. He who so transacteth with God should hold steadfast that determination and conclusion. It is a shame for a man whose heart hath closed with God, and whose mouth hath ratified and confirmed it solemnly before Him, to contradict himself again, and to admit anything to the contrary; he ought boldly to maintain the thing against every enemy. Then, let me entreat you, who desire to be established in the matter of your interest in God, that, with all convenience, you set apart a portion of time for prayer before God, and labouring to work up your heart to seriousness, affection, and the faith of the duty to make a covenant, and to transact with God by express word, after this manner:- “O Lord, I am a lost and fallen creature by nature, and by innumerable actual transgressions, which I do confess particularly before Thee this day: and although, being born within the visible church, I was from the womb in covenant with Thee, and had the same sealed to me in baptism; yet, for a long time, I have lived without God in the world, senseless and ignorant of my obligation by virtue of that covenant. Thou hast at length discovered to me, and impressed upon my heart, my miserable state in myself, and hast made manifest unto my heart the satisfying remedy. Thou hast provided by Christ Jesus, offering the same freely unto me, upon condition that I would accept of the same, and would close with Thee as my God in Christ, warranting and commanding me, upon my utmost peril, to accept of this offer, and to flee unto Christ Jesus; yea, to my apprehension, now Thou

hast sovereignly determined my heart, and formed it for Christ Jesus, leading it out after Him in the offers of the gospel, causing me to approach unto the living God, to close so with Him and to acquiesce in His offer, without any known guile. And that I may come up to that establishment of spirit in this matter, which should be to my comfort, and the praise of Thy glorious grace; therefore, I am here this day to put that matter out of question by express words before Thee, according to Thy will. And now I, unworthy as I am, do declare, that I believe that Christ Jesus, who was slain at Jerusalem, was the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. I do believe that record, that there is life eternal for men in Him, and in Him only. I do this day in my heart approve and acquiesce in that device of saving sinners by Him, and do intrust my soul unto Him. I do accept of reconciliation with God through Him, and do close with Thee as my God in Him. I choose Him in all that He is, and all that may follow Him, and do resign up myself, and what I am, or have, unto Thee; desiring to be divorced from everything hateful unto Thee, and that without exception, or reservation, or anything inconsistent within my knowledge, or any intended reversion. Here I give the hand to Thee, and do take all things about me witnesses, that I, whatever I be, or have hitherto been, do accept of God's offer of peace through Christ; and do make a sure covenant with Thee this day, never to be reversed, hoping that Thou wilt make all things forthcoming, both on Thy part and mine, seriously begging, as I desire to be saved, that my corruptions may be subdued, and my neck brought under Thy sweet yoke in all things, and my heart made cheerfully to acquiesce in whatsoever Thou dost unto me, or with me, in order to these ends. Now, glory be unto Thee, O Father, who devised such a salvation, and gave the Son to accomplish it: Glory be to Christ Jesus, who, at so dear a rate, did purchase the outletting of that love from the Father's bosom, and through whom alone this access is granted, and in whom I am reconciled unto God, and honourably united unto Him, and am no more an enemy or stranger: Glory to the Holy Ghost, who did alarm me when I was destroying myself, and who did not only convince me of my danger, but did also open my eyes to behold the remedy provided in Christ; yea, and did persuade and

determine my wicked heart to fall in love with Christ, as the enriching treasure; and this day doth teach me how to covenant with God, and how to appropriate to myself all the sure mercies of David, and blessings of Abraham, and to secure to myself the favour and friendship of God for ever. Now, with my soul, heart, head, and whole man, as I can, I do acquiesce in my choice this day, henceforth resolving not to be my own, but Thine; and that the care of whatsoever concerns me shall be on Thee, as my Head and Lord, protesting humbly, that failings on my part (against which I resolve, Thou knowest) shall not make void this covenant; for so hast Thou said, which I intend not to abuse, but so much the more to cleave close unto Thee, and I must have liberty to renew, ratify, and draw extracts of this transaction, as often as shall be needful. Now, I know Thy consent to this bargain stands recorded in Scripture, so that I need no new signification of it; and I, having accepted of Thy offer upon Thine own terms, will henceforth wait for what is good, and for Thy salvation in the end. As Thou art faithful, pardon what is amiss in my way of doing the thing, and accept me in my Lord Jesus Christ, in whom only I desire pardon. And in testimony hereof, I set to my seal that God is true, in declaring Him a competent Saviour.”

Let people covenant with God in fewer or more words, as the Lord shall dispose them - for we intend no exact form of words for any person - only it were fitting that men should before the Lord acknowledge their lost state in themselves, and the relief that is by Christ; and that they do declare that they accept of the same as it is offered in the gospel, and do thankfully rest satisfied with it, intrusting themselves henceforth wholly unto God, to be saved in His way, for which they wait according to His faithfulness. If men would heartily and sincerely do this, it might, through the Lord's blessing, help to establish them against many fears and jealousies; and they might date some good thing from this day and hour, which might prove comfortable unto them when they fall in the dark afterwards, and even when many failings do stare them in the face, perhaps at the hour of death - *“These be the last words of David: although my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure;*

*for this is all my salvation, and all my desire”* (2 Sam. 23:5). It is much if a man can appeal unto God, and say, Thou knowest there was a day and an hour when in such a place I did accept of peace through Christ, and did deliver up my heart to Thee, to write on it Thy whole law without exception; heaven and earth are witnesses of it - *“Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope”* (Psa. 119:49).

## **II. A want of proper feeling considered as an obstacle in the way of covenanting**

**Objection.** I dare not venture to speak such words unto God, because I find not my heart coming up full length in affection and seriousness; so I should but lie unto God in transacting so with Him.

**Answer.** It is to be regretted that men’s hearts do not, with intensity of desire and affection, embrace and welcome that blessed offer and portion. Yet, for answer to this objection, remember,

1. That in those to whom the Lord gives the new heart, forming Christ in them, the whole heart is not renewed; there is *“flesh and spirit lusting against each other, the one contrary unto the other, so that a man can neither do the good or evil he would do,”* with full strength (Gal. 5:17). It is well if there be a good part of the heart going out after Christ, desiring to close with Him on His own terms.

2. That there is often a rational love in the heart unto Christ Jesus, expressing itself by a respect to His commandments - *“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous”* (1 John 5:3); when there is not a sensible prevailing love which maketh the soul sick - *“I am sick of love”* (Cant. 2:5). Men must not always expect to find this. I say, then, although somewhat in your heart drawn back, yet if you can say that you are convinced of your lost state without Him, that you want a righteousness to cover your guilt, and that you want strength to stand out against sin, or to do what is pleasing before God, and that you also see fullness in Him; in both these respects,

if you dare say that somewhat within your heart would fain embrace Him upon His own terms, and would have both righteousness for justification, and strength in order to sanctification; and that what is within you contradicting this, is in some measure your burden and your bondage - if it be so, your heart is brought up a tolerable length; go on to the business, and determine the matter by covenanting with God, and say with your mouth, *“That you have both righteousness and strength in the Lord,”* as He hath sworn you shall do - *“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed”* (Isa. 45:23, 24). It is according to Scripture to say unto God, I believe, when much unbelief is in me and the heart is divided in the case *“Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). Withal show unto God how matters are in your heart, so that you may be without guile before Him, concealing nothing from Him; and put your heart as it is in His hand, to write His law on it, according to the covenant: for that is the thing He seeks of men, that they deliver up their heart to Him, that He may stamp it with His whole will, without exception; and if you can heartily consent unto that, judging Christ’s blood a sufficient ransom and satisfaction for man’s transgression, you may go and expressly strike a covenant with God, for your heart and affection is already engaged.

### **III. The fear of backsliding a hindrance**

**Objection.** I dare not so covenant with God lest I break with Him; yea, I persuade myself, that if such a temptation did offer, so and so circumstantiated, I should fall before it: therefore, to transact so with God whilst I foresee such a thing, were but to aggravate my condemnation.

**Answer.** 1. You have already entered into covenant with God, as you are a member of His visible Church; and what is now pressed upon you is, that you more heartily, sincerely, particularly,



and expressly covenant and transact with Him: you are already obliged heartily to close with God in Christ: and if you do it in heart, I hope the hazard is no greater by saying that you do so, or have done so.

2. What will you do if you decline sincerely closing with God in Christ, and do not accept of His peace as it is offered? You have no other way of salvation; either you must do this or perish for ever: and if you do it with your heart, you may also say it with your tongue.

3. If people may be afraid of covenanting with God lest they should afterwards transgress, then not one man should covenant with God; for surely every one will transgress afterwards, if they live any length of time after the transaction; and we know no way like this to secure men from falling; for if you covenant honestly with Him, He engageth, beside the new heart, to put His fear and law therein, to give His Spirit to cause you to walk in His way. And when you covenant with God, you deliver up yourself unto Him to be sanctified and made conformable to His will. It is rather a giving up of yourself to be led in His way, in all things, and kept from every evil way, than any formal engagement on your part to keep His way, and to hold off from evil: so that you need not be afraid of the covenant, the language whereof is, "*Wilt thou not be made clean?*" (Jer. 13:27). And all that shun to join in covenant with God, do thereby declare that they desire not to be made clean.

4. As it is hard for any to say confidently they shall transgress, if such a temptation did offer, so and so circumstantiated, because that men may think that either God will keep a temptation out of their way, or will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able to bear, or give to them a way of escape - "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (Psa. 46:1). "*There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10:13); so the question is not, what I may do afterwards, but what I now resolve to do. If my heart charge me presently with any deceit or resolution to transgress, I must lay aside that deceit before I

covenant with God; but if my heart charge me with no such purpose, yea, I dare say I resolve against every transgression; and although I think I shall fall before such and such temptation, yet that thought floweth not from any allowed and approved resolution to do so, but from a knowledge of my own corruption, and of what I have done to provoke God to desert me: but the Lord knows I resolve not to transgress, nor do I approve any secret inclination of my heart to such a sin, but would reckon it my singular mercy to be kept from sin in such a case; and I judge myself a wretched man, because of such a body of death within me, which threatens to make me transgress; in that case I say, My heart doth not condemn me, therefore, I may and ought to have confidence before God (1 John 3:21). If this then be the case, I say to thee, although thou shouldst afterwards fail many ways, and so perhaps hereby draw upon thyself sad temporal strokes, and lose for a season many expressions of His love, yet there is an *“Advocate with the Father”* to plead thy pardon (1 John 2:1); who hath satisfied for our breaches - *“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isa. 53:5, 6). And for His sake God resolves to hold fast the covenant with men after their transgression - *“If his children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments: nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness”* (Psa. 89:30-37). Else how could He be said *“to betroth us to Himself for ever?”* (Hos. 2:19, 20). And how could the covenant be called *“everlasting, ordered in all things and sure,”* if there were not ground of comfort in it, *“even when our house is not so with God?”* (2 Sam. 23:5).

Yea, it were no better than the covenant of works, if those who enter into it with God could so depart from Him again, as to make it void unto themselves, and to put themselves into a worse condition than they were in before they made it - *“And I will make*

*an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer. 32:40) - compared with Heb. 8:6, “But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” “The Lord hateth putting away” (Mal. 2:16). No honest heart will stumble at this, but will rather be strengthened thereby in duty - “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things: prudent, and he shall know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them” (Hos. 14:9). For other ties and bonds, besides the fear of divorce, and punishment by death, do oblige the ingenuous wife unto duty; so here men will “fear the Lord and His goodness” (Hos. 3:5).*

#### **IV. Objection arising from past fruitlessness considered**

**Objection.** I have at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and on some other occasions, covenanted expressly and verbally with God; but my fruitlessness in His ways, and the renewed jealousies of my gracious state, make me question, if ever I transacted with God in sincerity, and I think I can do it no otherwise than I have done it.

**Answer.** 1. Men are not to expect fruitfulness according to their desire, nor full assurance of God’s favour immediately after they have fled unto Christ, and expressly transacted with God in Him; these things will keep a man at work all his days. The saints had their failings and shortcomings, yea, and backsliding, with many fits of dangerous unbelief, after they had very seriously and sincerely, and expressly closed with God, as their God in Christ.

2. Many do look for fruitfulness in their walk, and establishment of faith, from their own sincerity in transacting with God, rather than from the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. They fix their hearts on their own honesty and resolutions, and not in the blessed root, Christ Jesus, without whom we can do nothing, and are vanity altogether in our best estate. Men should remember, that one piece of grace cannot produce any degree of grace: Further, nothing can

work grace but the arm of JEHOVAH; and if men would lean upon Christ, and covenant with Him as their duty absolutely, whatsoever may be the consequence, at least looking only to Him for the suitable fruit, it would fare better with them. God pleaseth not that men should betake themselves unto Christ, and covenant with Him for a season until they see if such fruit and establishment shall follow, purposing to disclaim their interest in him and the covenant, if such and such fruit doth not appear within such a length of time. This is to put the ways of God to trial, and is very displeasing unto Him. Men must absolutely close with Christ, and covenant with Him, resolving to maintain these things as their duty, and a ready way to reach fruit, whatever shall follow thereupon; they having a testimony within them, that they seriously design conformity to His revealed will in all things; and that they have closed covenant with Him for the same end, as well as to be saved thereby.

3. Men should be sparing to bring in question their sincerity in transacting with God unless they can prove the same, or have great presumptions for it. If you can discover any deceit or guile in your transacting with Him, you are obliged to disclaim and rectify it, and to transact with God honestly, and without guile: but if you know nothing of your deceit or guile in the day you did transact with Him; yea, if you can say that you did appeal unto God in that day and that you dealt honestly with Him, and intended not to deceive; and did entreat Him, according to his faithfulness, to search and try if there was any crookedness in your way, and to discover it unto you, and heal it - *“search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psa. 139:23, 24); and that afterwards you *“came to the light, that your deeds might be manifest”* (John 3:20, 21); and if you can say, that God’s answers from His words to you, in so far as you could understand, were answers of peace, and confirmations of your sincerity; yea, further, if you dare say, that if, upon life and death, you were again to transact with Him, you can do it no other way, nor intend more sincerity and seriousness than before; then I dare say unto thee in the Lord’s name, thou ought not to question thy

sincerity in transacting with God, but to *“have confidence before God, since thy heart doth not condemn thee”* (1 John 3:21); and thou art bound to believe that *“God dealeth uprightly with the upright man, and with the pure doth show himself pure”* (Psa 18:25, 26). If a man intend honestly, God will not suffer him to beguile himself; yea, the Lord suffereth no man to deceive Himself, unless the man intend to deceive both God and man.

4. Therefore impute your unfruitfulness to your unwatchfulness and your unbelief, and impute your want of full assurance unto an evil heart of unbelief, helped by Satan to act against the glorious free grace of God: and charge not these things to the want of sincerity in your closing with Christ. And resolve henceforth to abide close by the root, and you shall bring forth much fruit; and by much fruit you lay yourselves open to the witness of God’s Spirit, which will testify with your spirit that you have sincerely and honestly closed with God, and that the rest of your works are wrought in God, and approved of Him; and so the witness of the Spirit and the water, joining with the blood, whereupon you are to lay the weight of your soul and conscience, and where alone you are to sink the curses of the law due unto you for all your sins and failings in your best things. These three do agree in one, namely, that this is the way of life and peace, and that you have interest therein, and so you come to quietness and full assurance - *“Abide in me, and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:4, 5). *“He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”* (John 14:21, 23). *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God”* (Rom. 8:16). *“There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one”* (1 John 5:8).

O blessed bargain of the new covenant, and thrice blessed

Mediator of the same! Let him ride prosperously and subdue nations and languages, and gather in all His jewels, that honourable company of the firstborn, that stately troop of kings and priests, whose glory it shall be to have washed their garments in the blood of that spotless Lamb, and whose happiness shall continually flourish in following Him whithersoever He goes, and in being in the immediate company of the Ancient of days, one sight of whose face shall make them in a manner forget that ever they were on the earth. Oh, if I could persuade men to believe that these things are not yea and nay, and to make haste towards Him, who hasteth to judge the world, and to call men to an account, especially concerning their improvement of this gospel. *“Even so, come Lord Jesus.”*

### **Conclusion**

#### **The whole Treatise resumed in a Few Questions and Answers**

**Question. 1.** What is the great business a man hath to do in this world?

**Answer.** To make sure a saving interest in Christ Jesus, and to walk suitably thereto.

**Question. 2.** Have not all the members of the visible church a saving interest in Christ?

**Answer.** No, verily; yea, but a very few of them have it.

**Question. 3.** How shall I know if I have a saving interest in Him?

**Answer.** Ordinarily the Lord prepareth His own way in the soul by a work of humiliation, and discovereth a man's sin and misery to him, and exerciseth Him so therewith, that He longs for the physician Christ Jesus.

**Question. 4.** How shall I know if I have got a competent discovery of my sin and misery?

**Answer.** A competent sight of it makes a man take salvation to heart above anything in this world: it maketh him disclaim all relief in himself, seen in his best things: it maketh Christ who is

the Redeemer, very precious to the soul: it makes a man stand in awe to sin afterwards, and makes him content to be saved upon any terms God pleases.

**Question. 5.** By what other ways may I discern a saving interest in him?

**Answer.** By the going out of the heart seriously and affectionately towards Him, as He is held out in the gospel; and this is faith or believing.

**Question. 6.** How shall I know if my heart goes out after Him aright, and that my faith is true saving faith?

**Answer.** Where the heart goes out aright after Him in true and saving faith, the soul is pleased with Christ alone above all things, and is pleased with Him in all His three offices, to rule and instruct as well as to save; and is content to cleave unto Him, whatsoever inconveniences may follow.

**Question. 7.** What other mark of a saving interest in Christ can you give me?

**Answer.** He that is in Christ savingly, is a new creature; He is graciously changed and renewed in some measure, in the whole man, and in all his ways pointing towards all the known commands of God.

**Question. 8.** What if I find sin now and then prevailing over me?

**Answer.** Although every sin deserves everlasting vengeance, yet, if you be afflicted for your failings, confess them with shame of face unto God, resolving to strive against them honestly henceforth, and see unto Christ for pardon, you shall obtain mercy, and your interest stands sure.

**Question. 9.** What shall the man do who cannot lay claim to Christ Jesus nor any of those marks spoken of it?

**Answer.** Let him not take rest until he make sure unto himself a saving interest in Christ.

**Question. 10.** What way can a man make sure an interest in Christ, who never had a saving interest in Him hitherto?

**Answer.** He must take his sins to heart, and his great hazard thereby, and he must take to heart God's offer of pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, and heartily close with God's offer by betaking himself unto Christ, the blessed refuge.

**Question. 11.** What if my sins be singularly heinous, and great beyond ordinary?

**Answer.** Whatsoever thy sins be, if thou wilt close with Christ Jesus by faith, thou shalt never enter into condemnation.

**Question. 12.** Is faith in Christ only required of men?

**Answer.** Faith is the only condition upon which God doth offer peace and pardon unto men; but be assured, faith, if it be true and saving, will not be alone in the soul, but will be attended with true repentance, and a thankful study of conformity to God's image.

**Question. 13** How shall I be sure that my heart doth accept of God's offer, and doth close with Christ Jesus?

**Answer.** Go make a covenant expressly, and by word speak the thing unto God.

**Question. 14** What way shall I do that?

**Answer.** Set apart some portion of time, and, having considered your own lost estate, and the remedy offered by Christ Jesus, work up your heart to be pleased and close with that offer, and say unto God expressly that you do accept of that offer, and of Him to be your God in Christ; and do give up yourself to Him to be saved in His way, without reservation or exception in any case; and that you henceforth will wait for salvation in the way He hath appointed.

**Question. 15** What if I break with God afterwards?

**Answer.** You must resolve in His strength not to break, and watch over your own ways, and put your heart in His hand to keep it and if you break, you must confess it unto God, and judge yourself for it, and flee to the Advocate for pardon, and resolve to do so no more: and this you must do as often as you fail.

**Question. 16** How shall I come to full assurance of my interest in Christ, so that it may be beyond controversy?



**Answer.** Learn to lay your weight upon the blood of Christ, and study purity and holiness in all manner of conversation: and pray for the witness of God's Spirit to join with the blood and the water; and His testimony added unto these will establish you in the faith of an interest in Christ.

**Question. 17.** What is the consequence of such closing with God in Christ by heart and mouth?

**Answer.** Union and communion with God, all good here and His blessed fellowship in heaven forever afterwards.

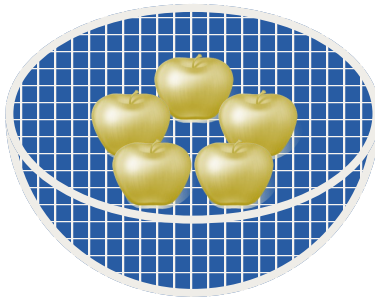
**Question. 18.** What if I slight all these things, and do not lay them to heart to put them in practice?

**Answer.** The Lord cometh with His angels, in flaming fire, to render vengeance to them who obey not His gospel; and thy judgment shall be greater than that of Sodom and Gomorrah; and so much the greater that thou hast read this Treatise, for it shall be a witness against thee in that day.

The fourth 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]."

