



COME
UNTO
ME,

ALL YE
THAT LABOR

THOMAS BOSTON (1676-1732)

Come unto Me, All Ye that Labor

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Come unto Me, All Ye That Labor

*“Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest” —Matthew 11:28.*

The great and main object of gospel-preaching and gospel-practice is a coming to Christ. It is the first article in Christianity, according to John 5:40, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” It is the connecting chain: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone...ye also, as lively stones, are built up” (1Pe 2:4-5). And it is the last exercise of the Christian; for when finishing his warfare, the invitation is: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (Mat 25:34). It is virtually the all which God requireth of us: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Joh 6:29). The words of the text are a most solemn and ample invitation which Christ gives to sinners.

1. The Context

In the words of the text I shall consider the connection.¹ For this look to verses 25 and 26. Compare Luke 10:21—“Jesus rejoiced in spirit.” It was a joyful time to Him when He made this invitation. He rejoiced in the account of the good news; the success with which the message of the disciples was attended; and in the wise and sovereign dispensation of grace by the Father, which He here celebrates, as also upon the view of His own power, where He shows that all power was lodged in Him. The keys of the Father’s treasures of grace were in His hand, yea, and whatsoever is the Father’s. He also shows that none could know the Father, but by Him, for that is given to Him only. He, as it were, opens the treasure-door to sinners in the text. From the connection of this verse, as just now stated, I would observe, that the solemnity of this invitation is most observable. There seems something to be about it more than ordinary.

A. It was given in the day of Christ’s gladness.

He was a man of sorrows, all made up of sorrows. Sorrow, sighing, weeping, and groaning were His ordinary fare. Once indeed we read of His being glad (Joh 11:15);

¹ **connection** – context.

and once of His rejoicing (Luk 10:21). And, again, on this occasion here, that thread of sorrow was interrupted, the sun of joy broke out for a little from under the cloud. His heart was touched, and, as it were, leaped for joy, as the word signifies (Mat 5:12; Luk 6:23). In the Greek, "he was exceeding joyful." At this extraordinary time and frame, He gives the invitation in the text.

Christ invites sinners with an enlarged heart. Joy enlarges it. His heart is open to you, His arms are stretched wide. You often see Him with sorrow and anger in His face, and this works with you that you will not come. Behold Him smiling and inviting you now to Himself, sending love looks to lost sinners, from a joyful heart within!

May I say, *the Mediator's joy is not complete till you come and take a share?* The Scriptures will warrant the expression. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa 53:11). He rejoiceth, but resteth not; but invites sinners to a share, as if all could not satisfy while He goes childless, as to some He has yet an eye upon.

Nothing can make Christ forget poor sinners, or be unconcerned for them. Sorrow could not do it, joy could not do it; either of these will drive a narrow-spirited man so into himself, as to forget all others. But never was His heart so filled either with sorrow or joy, but there was always room for poor sinners there. When He was entering the ocean of wrath, He remembered them (Joh 17); and as our forerunner, He went into the ocean of joy (Heb 6:20). Like Aaron, He carried our names on His heart, when He went in to appear before the Lord in heaven (Exo 28:29).

B. A great breach in the devil's kingdom

The invitation was given at a time when there was a great breach made in the devil's kingdom (Luk 10:17, 18). Christ was now beginning to set up a new kingdom, and He sends out seventy disciples, which was the number of the Sanhedrin at first. He was to bring His people out of the spiritual Egypt (Gen 46:27). The success of the disciples was a fair pledge of the devil's kingdom coming down, and the delivery of sinners. And when the news of it comes, His heart rejoices, and His tongue breaks out in this invitation to the devil's captives to come away upon this glorious signal. As He had begun to perform this part of the covenant, the Father had begun to perform His, which made His heart leap for joy, and sets Him on to cry, that they would all come away, as disciples, vigorously to pursue the advantage which was got. "He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head" (Psa 110:7).

Christ's heart is set upon the work of sinners' salvation. Ye see no undue haste, but He would have no delays. He holds His hands to the work, calling, "Come unto me." He preferred it to the eating of His bread (Joh 4:32); and what else is the meaning of all the ordinances and providences ye meet with?

Christ would have you to come, taking encouragement from the example of others that have come before you. There is a gap made in the devil's prison; some have

made their escape by it already, Oh, will ye not follow? The Lord has set examples for us, both of judgment and of mercy. In the beginnings of the Jewish church, there was an example of God's sovereignty in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1, 2); and in the time of the Christian church, in the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5). There were examples of mercy in the Jewish church, Rahab the harlot, besides² Abraham, the father of them all, an idolater (Jos 24:2; Isa 51:2). Then in the Christian church: Paul, the blasphemous persecutor (1Ti 1:16).

However full Christ's house be, there is always room for more. He wearies not of welcoming sinners; the more that come the better. Christ's harvest is not all cut down at once, nor His house built in a day. If the last stone were laid in the building, the scaffolding of ordinances would be taken down, and the world be at an end. But none of these has hitherto taken place; therefore yet there is room. "For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion" (Joe 3:21).

C. The fullness of the Mediator

This invitation is given on a solemn review of that fullness, of all that which the Father hath lodged in the hand of the Mediator, and that solely. The Father, as it were, no sooner leads Him into these treasures, but He says, "This and this is for you, sinners; here is a treasure of mercies and blessings for you; pardon, life, peace, etc., all is for you. Come, therefore, unto Me. The Father has delivered them into My hand; I long to deliver them over to you. Come, therefore, to Me, and hence I shall draw my fullness out to you." Christ had got a kingdom from the Father; it was as yet thinly peopled, and so He calls you to come to Him, that ye may be happy in Him. He has no will to enjoy these things alone, but because He has them, He would have you to take a share.

I would thence draw this doctrine: *That as the fullness lodged in the Mediator hath a free vent in His heart, so it seeks to diffuse itself into the souls of needy sinners.* Jesus Christ longs to make sinners the better of that all-fullness that is lodged in Him by the Father. Christ speaks here to us as the true Joseph (Gen 45:9-11). As Joseph invited his brethren to come and dwell with him, so Jesus cordially invites us, and promises us a share of the fullness which He Himself possesses.

2. Reasons Christ Is So Kind in His Invitation

I am to give some reasons of this doctrine, or show why Christ is so kind and liberal to sinners.

A. *Because the Father hath given Him for that end:* "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people" (Isa 55:4). The Father

² besides – along with.

had thoughts of love to man; His love designed to distribute a treasure of mercy, pardon, and grace to lost sinners; but justice would not allow His giving them immediately out of His own hand; therefore He gives them to the Mediator to distribute. An absolute God being a consuming fire, guilty creatures, as stubble, could not endure His heat, but they would have been burnt up by it; therefore He sets His own Son in man's nature, as a crystal³ wall betwixt Him and them. He gives Him the Spirit without measure (Joh 3:34). Not only a fullness of sufficiency, but abundance of blessings, is laid up in Him; "for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col 1:19).

B. *Because He received a fullness of treasure for that very end.* "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (Joh 17:19). The first Adam got mankind's stock;⁴ he soon lost all. Christ takes the elect's stock in His hand for their security, and so He is given for a covenant of the people. He takes the burden upon Him for them, and takes the administration of the second covenant, that it might, with them, be a better covenant⁵ than the first.

C. *Because He bought these treasures at the price of His blood for their behoof.*⁶ "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phi 2:8, 9). The Son of God, Who is Lord of all, needed no exaltation in the court of heaven, being equal with His Father, but His design was: to exalt man's nature, to make these that were the children of the devil friends to heaven, and prepare for them room there. "I go," said He, "to prepare a place for you" (Joh 14:2). No wonder, then, that He should long to see the purchase of His blood, the fruit of the travail of His soul, come to Him.

D. *He is kind and liberal because of His love to them.* Where true love is, there is an aptness to communicate. The lover cannot see the beloved want⁷ what he has. God's love is giving love: He "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (Joh 3:16). Christ's love is also such. He loves indeed: "He loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). For the improvement of this doctrine, I only add a use of exhortation.

3. Motives to Come to Christ

Come to Christ, then, O sinners, upon this His invitation, and sit not idle under His blessed call. To enforce this, I urge these motives:

³ **crystal** – glass; as in a fireplace.

⁴ **stock** – capital; money employed in a particular venture.

⁵ See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁶ **behoof** – benefit.

⁷ **want** – lack; be in need of.

A. *There is a fullness in Him: all power is given Him.* Want what you will, He has a power to give it to you; the Son of Man had power, even on earth, to forgive sins (Mat 9:6). Grace without⁸ you, or grace within you—He is the dispenser of all. “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16). He is the great Secretary of heaven, the keys hang at His girdle. He shuts, and none can open; He opens, and none can shut (Rev 3:7).

B. *You are welcome to it.* He has it not to keep up, but to give out, and to whom but to needy sinners? Even the worst of you are welcome, if you will take it out of His own hand: “If any man thirst,” says He, “let him come unto me, and drink” (Joh 7:37).

C. *Would you do Christ a pleasure?* Then come to him. “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11). Would you content and ease His heart?—then come. It is a great ease to full breasts to be sucked. The breasts of His consolations are full; hear how pressingly He calls you to suck. “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Song 5:1).

D. *Would you fall in with the designs of the Father’s and the Son’s love, in the mystery of salvation?*—then come to Him. Why is a fountain opened, but that ye may run to it and wash? Seal not, shut not that to yourselves, which God and Christ have opened.

4. The Persons Christ Invites to Come to Him

These are they that “labour,” and are “heavy-laden.” The word *labor* signifies not every laboring, but a laboring to weariness, and so some read it “weary.” The heavy-laden are they that have a heavy burden on their back, which they are not able to bear.

Who are meant by these? I cannot agree with those that restrain these expressions to those that are sensible of their sins and misery without Christ, and are longing to be rid of the same; but I think it includes all that are out of Christ, sensible or insensible; that is, these that have not had, and these that have had, a law-work upon their consciences.

And, to fix this interpretation, consider: The words apply to all that are out of Christ, and none have any right to restrain them. None more properly labor, in the sense of the text, than those that are out of Christ, seeking their satisfaction in the creatures. “All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Ecc 1:8). And who have such a burden of sin and wrath upon their back as they have? The word properly signifies a ship’s lading, which, though insensible of it, may yet sink under the weight.

⁸ **without** – outside of.

“The whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19), as men in a deep mire, still sinking. Christ came to deliver men out of that case, having taken upon Him our nature (Heb 2:16). He caught hold (Greek) as one doth of a drowning man, even as He did of Peter when sinking (Mat 14:31). And what are the invitations of the gospel, but Christ putting out His hands to sinking souls, sinking with their own weight.

Consider that the words, in other Scriptures, are without controversy applied to the most insensible sinners. See what labor and weariness! “Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?” (Hab 2:13). In the most solemn invitation to Christ in all the Old Testament, the word laboring is so used: “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isa 55:2). “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne” (Luk 11:46). *Lade* is the same Greek word used in our text. “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity” (Isa 1:4). Were they sensible?—far from it; for “Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (v. 3). And it is said, “Silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts” (2Ti 3:6).

Consider the parallel text: “Ho, every one that thirsteth” (Isa 55:1), where by the thirsty is not so much understood those that are thirsting after Christ, as those that are thirsting after happiness and satisfaction, seeking to squeeze it out of the creature; for the thirsty invited are the same that are spending their labor for that which satisfieth not. But these that are thirsting after Christ are not such.

If the words be a restriction of the call to sensible sinners, then the most part of sinners are excluded. If they are not included, sure they are excluded; and if the words are restrictive, sure they are not included; and then, so far from being the truth of the text, that it is no gospel-truth at all; for all, without exception, that hear the gospel, are called to come to Christ. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). And if any one be not called, they have no warrant to come; and if so, unbelief is not their sin, as in the case of the pagans, which is absurd.

This is a most solemn invitation to come to Christ; and if I say the most solemn, there is some ground for it by what is said before. And shall that be judged restrained, that so expressly and solemnly comes from that fullness of power lodged in Christ, more than that just quoted in Revelation 3:20 where there is no shadow of restriction. Besides, this restriction may well be a snare to an exercised soul, which ordinarily, by a legal disposition in all, will not allow that they may come to Christ, because sin is not heavy enough to them. But although sinners will never come to Christ till they see their need of Him, yet this I will ever preach, that all, under pain of damnation, are obliged to come to Him, and that they shall be welcome on their coming, be their case what it will; that such as are willing to come ought not to stop on a defect of their sensibleness, but come to Him, that they may get a true sense of

sin unto repentance; for He is exalted “a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31). He is to give, not to stand and wait, till “folly bring repentance with it”...⁹

5. What Sinners Are Laboring For

No man engageth in a labor, but for some end he proposeth to himself. Though the devil is oversman¹⁰ of these laborers, yet he does not make them go like clocks, without a design. Every one that labors proposes some profit to himself by his work, and so do these; there is always something, either really or seemingly good, that men seek in all their labors. So, in a word, it is happiness and satisfaction that they are laboring for, as well as the godly.

The desire of happiness and satisfaction is natural to man; all men wish to see good. It is not the desire of good that may satisfy that makes the difference between the godly and the wicked, but the different ways they take. “There be many that say, Who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psalm 4:6, 7). In whatever case a man is on earth, in heaven or hell this is still his desire; and he must cease to be a man, ere he can cease to desire to be a happy man. When that desire, mentioned in Ecclesiastes 12:5, shall fail, this desire is still fresh and green; and it is good in itself. Our Lord supposeth this in the text, and therefore He promises to them what they are seeking—rest—if they will come to Him.

This desire is the chief of all; all other things are desired for it. All men’s desires, however different, meet here, as all the rivers meet in the sea, though their courses may be quite contrary. Therefore this is what they labor for. The devil had some laborers at his coarse work, others at the more fine, but they all meet in their end.

⁹ “The doctrine of the gospel is preached not for mere amusement to the understandings of those who hear it. It is preached as the word of salvation sent unto them; as the gospel of their salvation, as the salvation of God, sent unto the Gentiles. And in this public dispensation of the gospel, there is made to all the hearers of it, immediately and equally, a most gracious offer of Christ and all His salvation, with a most gracious call unto them, for their receiving and resting upon Him accordingly.” —*Gibb’s Sacred Contemplations*.

“Misspend not your time, as many do, in poring upon your hearts, to find whether you be good enough to trust on Christ for your salvation, or to find whether you have any faith, before you dare be so bold, as to act faith in Christ. But know, that though you cannot find that you have any faith or holiness, yet, if you will now believe on ‘him that justifieth the ungodly’ (Rom 4:5), it shall be accounted to you for righteousness”—*Walter Marshall on Sanctification*.

¹⁰ **oversman** – overseer.

Defects and wants are interwoven with the very nature of the creature; and the rational creature finds that it cannot be, nor is self-sufficient. Hence it seeks its happiness without itself, and must do it, to satisfy these natural desires.

Seeing, then, man's happiness is without himself, it must be brought in, which cannot be done without labor. It is proper to God to be happy in Himself; but every creature must needs go out of itself to find its happiness, so that action is the true way to it—that is, rest cannot be found but in the way of action and labor, and because they are not in the right way, it is wearisome labor.

6. How Men out of Christ Labor for Happiness

Here, it is impossible to reckon up particulars, and that due to the different dispositions of men, and the various, as well as contrary opinions, concerning what may make a man happy. Varro says there were two hundred and eighty opinions touching the chief good in his time. It is true, Christianity, in the profession of it, hath fixed this point in principle; but nothing less than overcoming grace can fix it in point of practice. The whole body of Christless sinners are like the Sodomites at Lot's door; all were for the door, but one grasps one part of the wall for it, another another part, not one of them found it. The world is, as the air in a summer-day, full of insects; and natural men like a company of children, one running to catch one, another to catch another, while none of them is worth the pains. One runs to the bowels of the earth, another to the ale-house, etc.

It is impossible to determine here, in regard of men's still altering their opinions about it, as they meet with new disappointments. Like a man in a mist, seeking a house in a wilderness, when every bush, tree, etc., deceives, till, by coming near, he is undeceived. "Oh," thinks the man, "if I had such a thing, I would be well." Then he falls to labor for it; maybe he never gets it, but he ever pursues it. If he gets it, he finds it will not do, for as big as it was afar off, yet it will not fill his hand when he grips it: but it must be filled, or no rest, hence new labor to bring forth just a new disappointment. "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind" (Isa 26:18).

It is difficult also because they cannot tell themselves what they would be at. Their starving souls are like the hungry infant that gapes, weeps, cries, and sucks everything that comes near its mouth, but cannot tell what it would have, but is still restless till the mother set it to the breast. It is regenerating grace that does that to the soul. The Hebrew word for believing comes from a root that signifies to nurse, as if faith were nothing but a laying of the soul on the breasts of Christ, in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead. The Scripture holds Him out as the mother that bare them; hence His people are called the fruit "of the travail of his soul" (Isa 53:11). He also is their nourisher; hence He says, "I have nourished and brought up

children” (Isa 1:2). The breasts of the church, at which they are to suck and be satisfied, are no other than Christ (Isa 66:11). But, in the general, to see from whence it is that men out of Christ go about to squeeze out their happiness, see Psalm 4:6-7: “There be many that say, Who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.” From which observe two things:

(1) That it is not God, for these two are set in opposition; go to as many doors as they will, they never go to the right door. Hence it follows, that it is the creatures out of which they labor to draw their satisfaction: “They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13).

(2) That it is good they are seeking out of them: and indeed men can seek nothing but under that notion, though for the most part they call evil good, and good evil. All good is either profitable, pleasurable, or honest; these, then, are all that they are seeking, not from God, but from themselves, or other creatures. The two former have respect to the cravings of men’s desires, the latter to the cravings of the law. And seeing it is not in God that they seek their happiness and satisfaction, I infer hence, That all out of Christ are laboring for their happiness and satisfaction in one or both of these ways, either from their lusts, or from the Law; and this I take to be the very labor intended in the text. For which consider these three things:

1st. All natural men have two principles in them: 1) corruption; and 2) conscience. Both crave of them: “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom 2:15). Hence, because they do not mortify the lust, they must be fed, or no rest; and therefore they labor for their lusts to satisfy them. Then, because they fly not to Christ for the satisfaction of their conscience, they go to the Law.

2nd. The bulk of natural men in the world have still been of two sorts: 1) the profane party; and 2) the formal party. These have still been among Jews, pagans, and Christians; the former laboring most in lusts, the latter in the law.

3rd. Adam left us with two yokes on our necks: 1) of lusts; and 2) of the law. The last was of God’s putting, but He gave strength with it to bear it. Adam took away the strength, but left the yoke, and put on a yoke of lusts beside; and in opposition to both these, Christ bids us come and take on His yoke which is easy, and His burden, which is light (Mat 11:30).

As to the labor they have in their lusts, they call them, and they run after them. These infernal devils in the heart drive the swine of this world into the sea of perdition—nay, turn the soul itself into a very sea that cannot rest. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isa 57:20). They labor like madmen for satisfaction to them, and no calm, no rest, till the soul come to Christ.

A. Labor in the lusts of profit

They labor hard in the *lusts of profit*. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1Jo 2:16). The profits of the world are the cisterns they squeeze for satisfaction; they bewitch the hearts of them that have them, and of them that want them; they fly after them with that pains and labor the ravenous bird doth after its prey. “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Pro 23:5). The strength of men’s desires and the cream of their affections are spent on them; their happiness depends upon its smiles, their misery upon its frowns; if gone, their god is gone. Hence is that verified: They “labour in the very fire, and...weary themselves for very vanity” (Hab 2:13), like a poor fool running to catch a shadow. They have hard labor in lawful profits, how to get them, and how to keep them, but hardest of all, how to squeeze satisfaction out of them; there they labor in the very fire; they labor also in unlawful profits. The soul is an empty thing; lusts are ill to guide. Conscience must make a stretch now and then, for the satisfaction of lusts; and the man will leap over the hedge, though the serpent will bite him. “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil” (1Ti 6:9, 10). Hence the carnal man, I may say, never can stand straight; but on his belly doth he go, and labors, as if he were a slave condemned to the mines, to dig in the bowels of the earth. Like the blind moles, his constant labor is in the earth, and he never opens his eyes till he is dying. He has his lade¹¹ of thick clay upon his back, as the fruit of his laboring in the fire (Hab 2:6). There is thus a laboring and heavy-laden party. Others take the world in their hand as a staff, nay, tread on it as the dirt, and they get it as a burden on their back, while guilt, many times contracted in the getting of it—whether by oppression, cheaterly, or neglecting of the soul for it—is like a sore back under the load, that makes them ready in despair to throw it away, but they know not how to subsist without it.

B. Labor in the lusts of pleasure

They labor in *lusts of pleasure*. They go about as the bee, extracting the sweet out of the creatures for their own satisfaction; this and the former usually go together. Profits and pleasures are the world’s two great baits, at which all natural men are constantly leaping, till they are caught by the hook and flung out into the fire of wrath. “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell” (Pro 9:17, 18). Pleasure is a necessary ingredient in happiness, and man cannot but seek it; hence God proposeth it to men in Himself, Who is the fountain of all sweet-

¹¹ lade – load.

ness. “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). But blind man makes the creature-sweetness his idol and puts it in the room of God; for “they are lovers of pleasures [in this sense] more than lovers of God” (2Ti 3:4). It is no fault to seek our profit; for we are to have “respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb 11:26). Nor is it a fault to seek what may be sweet to the soul; for we may wish our souls to be “satisfied as with marrow and fatness” (Psa 63:5). But the natural man’s misery and sin both is, he forsakes God, and fastens on the breasts of the creatures for these things.

Now, there are two breasts of the creatures at which men may be sucking, as follows:

(1) The breast of *lawful comforts*. Natural men fall on these, instead of the breasts of God’s consolations, and labor, though in vain, to squeeze happiness and satisfaction out of them, and that with the greatest eagerness. They are lawful in themselves, but they often press so hard, that they draw out blood instead of milk from them; and are like men working at a flinty rock, to bring out water, instead of which they get fire flashing in their face, as in that case, when fire came out of the bramble to devour the cedars of Lebanon (Jdg 9:15).—There is,

(2) The breast of *unlawful comforts*. “Stolen waters are sweet” (Pro 9:17). Many seek their satisfaction in those things which they ought not so much as to desire, and fill themselves with what God forbids them so much as to taste. Oh, the misery of Christless sinners, to whom both lawful and unlawful comforts are effectual snares for ruin. Like mad beasts, if they abide within the hedge, they tear up all to the red earth, which doth not yet satisfy. But they most usually break over all hedges; and they do so, because the creature can never fully answer the craving desires and hungry appetite—and yet, after all, they will not come to Christ, that they may have rest.

These breasts of the creatures have many springs: “divers lusts and pleasures” (Ti 3:3); and these are served. Men must labor in them as a servant at his master’s work. I shall reduce them to these two heads mentioned in Ephesians 2:3—“the desires of the flesh and of the mind.”

1st. They labor for satisfaction and happiness in the pleasures of the flesh. This is first seen in sensuality. This was the door man first went to after he had left God. And since the world was turned upside down by that means, the soul has lain downmost,¹² and the flesh uppermost, so that they are all sensual, as Jude says, that have not the Spirit (Jude 19); and the soul is made drudge of the body. The belly is a god, and the pleasures of the flesh are squeezed for satisfaction. All the senses are set a-working for it, and yet can never do enough. “All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled” (Ecc 6:7). Many arts and trades are found out to bring this

¹² **downmost** – furthest down; towards the bottom.

to perfection, though all in vain, and there is no end of these things, which are of no use but to please the flesh, which, like the grave, never says it has enough.

This is also seen in ease, sloth, and quiet, which is a negative kind of sensuality. The rich man said, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease” (Luk 12:19)—all to please the flesh. This costs hard labor many times to the soul, many a throw¹³ conscience gets for the sake of this idol, what by neglect of duties, what by going over the belly of light to shun what is grieving to the flesh, as if men’s happiness consisted in the quiet enjoyment of themselves.

2nd. They labor for satisfaction in the desires of the mind, and pleasures thereof. These, if they terminated on right objects, and were sought in a right manner, it would be well, for our true happiness consists in the soul’s enjoyment of God; but in the natural man all is in confusion.

There is much labor in seeking happiness in the pleasures of the judgment. This is the snare of thinking graceless men; this was among the first doors men went to when they turned from God. “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). And there is hard labor without limit, for the punishment of that. “And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith” (Ecc 1:13). And what comes it to at length?—to no rest; for, “In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (v. 18). Here is fulfilled the saying: “The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Ecc 10:15). However, would they go to Christ, they would be in a fair way to get what they are seeking; for, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

There is also labor in pleasures of the fancy. What else are all the lusts of the eye?—all the abundance of the riches for which men labor so much? “When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?” (Ecc 5:11). All they can think or say is, These are mine. What is honor, credit, and the like, but a tickling of our fancy, with the fancies of others about us, adding nothing to real worth? And how busy is the soul often times in that. “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecc 6:9). What satisfaction is sought in imagination sins: lust, revenge, and the like? What restlessness is there! “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin” (2Pe 2:14). How busy is the soul oftentimes in imagination, of wealth, and the like, as if, when it had tried all other means in vain, it would try, while awake, to dream itself happy! “The thoughts of my heart,” says Job (Hebrew—“the passions of my heart”), “are broken off” (Job 17:11).

¹³ **throw** – blow.

C. Labor for rest in the Law

The other thing in which natural men labor for rest is *the Law*. Compare the text, Matthew 11:28, with verses 29 and 30. Emphatically is that labor described: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness” (Rom 10:3). “Going about”—the word signifies a seeking, like a disputer in the schools, or a tormentor of one upon the rack. “To establish” signifies to make it stand itself alone. They seek to make it stand, as men that will have a stone to stand on end, which, at the same time, is ever coming down on them again. Why all this?—because it is their own. “They have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3). Christ offers a righteousness; but to take it is to them a point of submission, against which they labor, as the untoward bullock against the yoke. They will never let it on till God break the iron sinew of the neck (Isa 48:4).

To confirm this, consider: all men desire to be happy, and no man can get his conscience quite silenced, any more than he can get the notion of a God quite erased from his mind. “They are a law unto themselves...their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom 2:14, 15). Peace of mind is a natural desire, which none can divest¹⁴ himself of. Hence it follows: men cannot but seek inward peace; and though they may set themselves to murder conscience for that end, yet seeing it will not do for them totally, they do of necessity take some other way. There have always been only two ways: either Christ, or the law. The former they reject; therefore it follows, they follow the latter. Let us view this in three sorts of natural men.

(1) In *the profane person*, who has not so much as a form of godliness; it is hardest to be found in them. But none so profane, but it will readily be found they have some one good thing or another about them, and sometimes they will compliment their consciences with a denial of satisfaction to their lusts, which is a labor so much the harder to them, as they are under the greater power of lusts. This sure they do not with an eye to make themselves miserable, but happy, that their consciences may excuse them (Rom 2:15). “Excusing”—even those that are most at the devil’s will are taken captive, as hunters who take their prey alive (2Ti 2:26). Importing¹⁵ still, a conscience labouring in the law, though lusts, as being stronger, do for the most part prevail.—Let us view this,

(2) In *the formal natural man*: some of whom labor in the duties of morality; others in those of religion; who are at no small travail in the Law, if we consider it all for nought. Like the Pharisee, they take not the gospel way, yet they labor in the Law (Luk 18:11). Sure lusts remain in them in their life and vigor. It surely costs labor so far to restrain them.—Let us view this,

¹⁴ **divest** – rid.

¹⁵ **importing** – meaning.

(3) In the *awakened sinner*. I am not for excluding these out of the text, but only that it be not restrained to them. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Act 2:37). These mend their hands at this hard labor, and oft-times labor so to keep the Law, that they are both by themselves and others taken for saints of the first magnitude, and yet it is but still in the Law, till converting grace come and send them off the old root.

It is natural for men to labor in the Law for happiness, and therefore, till nature be overcome by grace, men will not be put off it. The law was Adam’s covenant, who, with his children, were to work and win heaven by their works. Though they have lost their father’s strength, yet they will keep their father’s trade. Though their stock be small, yet they will keep the merchandising for heaven, and give God good works for good wages. See nature speaking out of him: “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Mat 19:16). And it often happens that they who have fewest of good works lay the greater stress upon them.

Consider how this practice has been formed into principles, in the face of the sun of the gospel. Never was an error yet vented in principle, but in compliance with some corruption of the heart; therefore is that made the characteristic of true doctrine, that it is according to godliness (1Ti 6:3). No sooner was the gospel preached, than Cain sets up for works in opposition to faith. “And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (Gen 4:4, 5). Paul gives the reason: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Heb 11:4). In Abraham’s family, to whom the promise of righteousness was more clearly made, Hagar bears her son (Gal 4:24). When the people were in Egypt, the generality of them knew nothing else. They had curtailed the law so very short, as all that labor in it do, that they thought they kept all very well. “For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom 5:13). For that cause God gave them the Law, as in Exodus 20. The law “was added because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19); it prevailed in the days of the prophets, in Christ’s days, and from the beginning of the Christian church to this day; hence our swarms of Papists, etc.

Consider: they turn the very gospel into law, as unclean vessels sour the sweetest liquor that is put in them. What a real gospel was the ceremonial law to the Jews, holding up blood, death, and translation¹⁶ of guilt from them to the substitute every day before their eyes in their sacrifices! But, Their very table (that is, their altar) became a snare (Rom 11:9; Mal 1:12); and they went about these things, as if by them they would have made up what was wanting¹⁷ in their observation of the moral law. Just so was it turned in Popery; yea, and, alas, among Protestants it is found thus

¹⁶ **translation** – transfer.

¹⁷ **wanting** – lacking.

soured, to whom the gospel is the law, and faith, repentance, and new obedience the fulfilling of the Law. But would to God it stood in principles only; but as sure as every unrenowned man is out of Christ, as sure even these natural men, whose heads are set right in this point, in their hearts and practice the very gospel is turned into law, and their obedience, their very faith and repentance, such as it is, is put in the room of Christ. For practice, when fairly traced, will show the principles from which it proceeds.

Consider, though all would be saved, yet natural men are enemies to the gospel-way of salvation. It is “unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1Co 1:23). They must then be in love with the law, for there is no middle way about it; yea, so cleave they to it, that nothing but death can part Adam’s sons and it, and this even a violent death in a day of God’s power (Psa 110:3). “Ye also are become dead to the law” (Romans 7:4). In the Greek this denotes deadened, killed, or put to death. As long as a soul sees how to shift without Christ, it will never come to Him; add to this, that the godly find the remains of this principle in them to struggle against. Self denial is the first lesson Christ gives, but they are learning it all their days. If it is thus in the green tree, what shall it be in the dry?

7. The Nature of Labor outside of Christ

The nature of the labor of sinners outside of Christ, considered, A) As it respects their lusts; B) As it respects the Law.

A. Laboring in their lusts

First: We are to consider this labor of sinners, as it respects their lusts, their going up and down among the creatures, extracting from them comfort and pleasures, which they take for happiness. I shall here show the properties of this labor, and thus confirm the point, that they are engaged in a wearisome labor.

1) Hard Labor

It is hard labor and sore toil. They “weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer 9:5). None win the devil’s wages for nought, they eat no idle bread where he is task-master, and they must needs run, whom he drives. The devil’s yoke is of all yokes the heaviest.

Scriptural Comparisons

To clear this point, consider what the Scriptures compare this labor in lusts unto, whereby it will appear hard labor.

a. It compares it to *the labor of a man going to a city, and not knowing the way*. Ecclesiastes 10:15, “The labour of the foolish wearieth everyone of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Ecc 10:15). That is hard labor, as many know by

experience. Many a weary foot such must go, many a hardship they must endure, and so must these in pursuit of happiness.

b. It compares it to *a laboring in the fire*. “Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?” (Hab 2:13). How hard is their labor that is situated near a fire!—what sweat!—what toil! “The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away” (Jer 6:29). But how much harder in the fire!—as when a house is on fire, and men are in it, laboring to preserve that which the fire consumes even among their hands. These labor, 1) In the fire of lusts, that inflames the heart, and scorches the very soul. “For, by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Pro 6:26, 27). 2) These labor in the fire of divine wrath that is kindled by their lusts. “For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke” (Isa 9:18). This consumeth what they are working for in the other; so that when, like the spider, they have spun out their own bowels for a covering, yet it is by far too narrow, and they have but wearied themselves for very vanity.

c. It is compared to *laboring under a burden*, as in the text itself, which will not let the man stand up straight. They are the devil’s drudges,¹⁸ laboring under that load that will crush them at last, if they do not cast their burden on the Lord, that he may sustain them (Psa 55:22). They are laden with divers lusts, which lie on them as a burden on the weary beast, which weary them indeed, but they are bound on as with bands of iron and brass.

d. It is compared to *the labor of a soldier in war*; they watch for iniquity as a sentry at his post (Isa 29:20). The natural man himself is the very field of battle. “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jam 4:1). The war itself you may see described in the three following verses. Who cannot but be well labored with the feet of men and horse in that confusion? Though there be not grace and corruption to war in them, there are lusts, and lusts opposed to one another, lusts and light also.

e. It is compared to *the labor of the husbandman in ploughing*. “Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity” (Hos 10:13). They devise wickedness, which the Hebrew calls ploughing it. “Devise not evil against thy neighbour” (Pro 3:29). “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Pro 16:27).

f. Not to insist on more, it is compared to *the labor of a woman in childbirth*. “Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood” (Psa 7:14). What pangs do raging lusts create to the soul? What cords of

¹⁸ drudges – slaves.

death does it straiten¹⁹ with? No small toil at conceiving of sin, and bearing it in the heart, and bringing it forth; but nothing in the abominable brat to satisfy the soul after all.

Pictured by Egyptian Bondage

It is hard labor, if you consider that eminent emblem of our natural state, the Egyptian bondage. Their deliverance out of Egypt was typical of their spiritual deliverance by Christ, and so that must needs signify man's natural state. Concerning this it may be remarked, that as the children of Israel went down to Egypt in the loins of their parents, so we were in Adam. As the deliverance was wrought by the angel of the covenant, by the hands of Moses the lawgiver and Aaron the priest, so are we brought to deliverance by the law and the gospel.²⁰ As Pharaoh opposed the children of Israel to the utmost, so the devil opposeth here. Pharaoh was "the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself" (Eze 29:3), and was a type of that great red dragon mentioned in Revelation 12:3. But for that which concerns this point, see Exodus 5. There you will find persons laboring and heavy-laden (vv. 4, 5). It is hard labor to satisfy lusts, the devil's task-masters. He "worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph 2:2, 3). The Israelites had their tasks doubled, to put religion out of their heads and hearts (Exo 5:10). Lusts also must be satisfied, but the means to do it is withheld, as straw was from the Israelites (v. 11). They are scattered up and down among the creatures for it, but can never squeeze out a sufficiency for them, even as the Israelites could not find stubble enough to prepare their bricks (vv. 12-14). If there is any appearance of deliverance, the labor is made the harder. Paul says, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Romans 7:9).

Its Effects on Men's Souls and Bodies

It is hard labor if ye consider the effects this labor has on the souls of men. The minds of men have a toilsome task, where sin is on the throne. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa 5:20). That soul must needs be in a continual fever, while inordinate affections are in their strength, as in all who are outside of Christ. A fermentation of lusts cannot but make a tossed mind. Anxiety and cares of the world stretch the mind, as on tenter-hooks.²¹ A conceived slight, like

¹⁹ **straiten** – make narrow or restricted.

²⁰ This does not mean that the Law saves us from sin. The work of the law is to point out our sinfulness and inability to save ourselves and to be the schoolmaster to point us to Christ, Who alone can save (Gal 3:24).

²¹ **on tenter-hooks** – hooks that hold cloth on a wooden framework for stretching; i.e. in painful suspense.

that of Ahab (1Ki 21:4), sets the proud man's heart in a fire of wrath and revenge, and squeezes the sap out of all their enjoyments, as in the instance of Haman (Est 5:9-13). Envy slays the silly one, lust strikes as a dart through the liver. Anger, malice, discontent, and the like, make a man his own executioner; they are tossed between hopes, fears, and vanity, tumbled hither and thither with every wind of temptation, as a ship without either pilot or ballast.

Even the body is oft-times hard put to it in this labor. The covetous rises early, eats the bread of sorrow for what is not; the drunkard uses his body worse than his beast. More bodies have fallen sacrifices to lusts, one way or another, than ever fell by all the hardships either in or about religion.

2) Debasing Labor

It is base, mean, and abject labor (Jer 2:21-24). Were we to die like beasts, we might live like beasts, with our souls groveling still downward on the earth. If the soul had been so narrow, as to be satisfied with less than an infinite good, he had not spoke like a fool, who said to his soul, "Soul...take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luk 12:19), when his barns were full; in that case, the swine and his soul might have fed together. But we have immortal souls, capable of enjoying an infinite good, and such working in the earth must needs be a base labor for an heaven-born soul, which God breathed into the formed dust, but gave not to be drowned in a mass of flesh and blood, nor to be only as salt, to keep the body a while from rotting.

3) Constant Labor

It is a constant labor. The sea rests sometimes, the carnal heart never. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isa 57:20). Lusts are ever craving and never say they have enough; they are rolling the stone to the top of the hill, which still comes down on them again and again, and creates new labor. "And they tempted God in their heart, by asking meat for their lust....Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?...So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; They were not estranged from their lust" (Psa 78:18, 20, 29, 30). Two things make it a continual labor. First, they meet with continual disappointments. These they cannot miss, seeing there is no satisfaction to be had in the creatures; yet their soul still craves, hence no rest, but are urged on to work again. "Thou art weary in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope" (Isa 57:10). Men are like the silly doves without heart, who still go to the same nest where they have been harried never so often before, and will even beg there, where they have got a thousand nay-says.²² Secondly, what is got in these labors enlarges the desire, instead of satisfying it. The more that lusts are fed, the more they require to maintain them. Sin is an insatiable tyrant; to

²² **nay-says** – No's.

labor in its service is but to cast oil into the flame. The dropsy²³ thirst can never be quenched.

4) Vain Labor

It is vain labor; they can never reach the end of it. "Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (Isa 55:2). They shall as soon fill a triangle with a circle, as the heart with such things. The grave shall sooner give back its dead, than the lusts of the heart say, It is enough. It is impossible to find satisfaction in these things, for they are less suitable to the soul than stones for the nourishment of the body. The body gets its nourishment from the earth, because it is of the earth; the soul is from heaven, and so its satisfaction must come from thence. The things of the world cannot satisfy the soul, because they have no word of divine appointment to be the staff of that bread which nourishes it; without this, grass could no more satisfy the beasts, nor bread the hunger of man, than sand. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4). God has kept this as His own prerogative, to satisfy the soul, incommunicable to the creatures conjunctly or separately.

5) Costly Labor

It is notwithstanding costly labor; for time that is precious is spent on it, which men should husband well. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16). By time well improved, we might attain true happiness; time once gone can never be recalled. But, ah, what precious hours are cast away on these things, which might be improved in trading for heaven. It is costly, because the gifts of the mind are thrown away on it. Reason makes us differ from the beasts, but by the abuse of it men make themselves worse than the beasts. "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD" (Jer 8:7). Men's minds are employed not to know God, but other things; their choice also is not fixed upon Him, their affections are bestowed on other things. It is costly because the outward good things of the body, and estate in the world, are bestowed upon it. Health and strength go in the pursuit of vanity, and in the service of their lusts, yea, are sacrificed many times on the altar of intemperance and sensuality. Riches, power, and honors, as the feeding of the horse does, make people kick against him who lays these things in their hands. Yea, to crown all, the soul itself is thrown away upon it. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat 16:26). Men seeking vanity lose what is most excellent; and it is dear-bought that is purchased at that rate.

²³ **dropsy** – in medicine, an unnatural collection of water in a part of the body; it was thought that sufferers from dropsy were always thirsty and that drinking did nothing to remedy their thirst.

B. A laboring in the Law

It is most *hard labor*, for it requires the most exact obedience, under pain of the curse. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). Nothing but perfect obedience is accepted, according to the Law; and for the least failure, it dooms the sinner to death. Now, no man can perform this; and yet, so foolish are men, that they think to please God with their works. Again, it is hard, because the law neither promiseth nor giveth strength. God gave Adam strength to perform. He lost it, and the law does not restore it, so that in this case they must make the brick, but no straw is laid to their hands. This makes hard work, and so, by the Spirit, it at length breaks the heart of the elect, and makes them die to the Law, as a wife to a rigorous husband (Gal 2:19).

It is a *vain and useless labor*. There are much pains, and yet no gain, in this labor. It is vain, in respect of the soul thriving; they that labor in the Law do but sow their seed in the sand; all they reap is wind, which may puff them up, but cannot nourish. Why so many barren dry professors?—because they are not trading with Christ, but with the law. Men go to duties, and rest in them; the pipe is laid short of the fountain. It is vain, in respect of acceptance with God. It is thankless work, for it supersedes the commandment to believe. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Joh 6:29). It is a sad word. “Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (Rom 9:31, 32). Turtles²⁴ were accepted on the altar at Jerusalem, when bullocks were rejected on those at Dan and Bethel.

It is vain, in respect of answering the demands of the Law (Gal 3:10). Our curtailed obedience will not answer the measuring reed of the Law; it demands satisfaction for what is past, and perfect obedience for what is to come. Finally, it is vain, in respect of salvation. The way to heaven by the first covenant is blocked up; the angel with the flaming sword guards it (Gal 3:10). O sirs, duties are a sandy foundation, and great will be the fall of legal professors!

8. Why Sinners Labor for Happiness, yet Come Not to Christ

Sinners labor for happiness, yet come not to Christ, because they have lost God, the fountain of happiness, and therefore they seek to squeeze it out of the creatures. “Having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). For, says God, “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters” (Jer 2:13). The sun is gone down upon them; and therefore they light their candles and compass themselves with their

²⁴ turtles – turtle-doves.

own sparks, for the empty soul must have something to feed on. The prodigal wanted bread and therefore fed on husks. Doves' dung is precious, when there is no bread in Samaria.

Sinners labor in these things because, by the power of a strong delusion, they still expect satisfaction from them; they are represented in a magnifying glass, as the forbidden fruit was to our first parents (Gen 3:5, 6). That delusion took hold of them, is conveyed to their posterity, and will never be cured till grace do it. Hence men, though they meet with a thousand disappointments in these things, yet still from new hopes, they renew the attempt.

Sinners labor thus because these things are most suitable to the corrupt nature. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" (Rom 8:5). Fishes swim in the river, and care not for the most pleasant meadow. Swine prefer the dunghill to a palace, because everything seeks its like. Lusts must be nourished with these. Even the way of the law, though just and good in itself, is the way that agrees best with self. Romans 3:27, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith" (Rom 3:27).

Sinners are engaged in this labor because they know no better. Christ is a hidden Christ to men in their natural estate; they see not His glory, fullness, and excellency. They say, as in Song of Solomon 5:9, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" The fowl scrapes by the jewels, and takes up a corn beside them, because it knows not their worth. "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient" (1Pe 2:7, 8).

Sinners continue this labor because men naturally are enemies to the way of salvation by Christ.

9. The Sinner Earnestly Reasoned With

A. A call to exchange one labor for another

Why do you spend your labor for that which satisfieth not? I would beseech you, in the most earnest manner, not only to cease from and to give up your present unpleasant and unprofitable labor, but also to change your labor. I would have you, not only to depart from evil, but even to do good. I would call upon you to engage in the service of a new Master, and run in the way of His commandments. You are laboring—you must be laboring—one way or other. Will you not then engage in the labor of true religion and real godliness? If we must serve, surely it is better to serve Christ than the devil. The labor that there is in religion frightens the world at it; but why should it, seeing their labor is so great while out of Christ?

We are not calling you from idleness to working, but from labor to labor. And even if we were still to be slaves, better be so to God than to the devil. What will men say to Christ at the last day, who will be at pains in their lusts, but be at none in holiness, who will bear a yoke, but not Christ's yoke?

We call you, not from one base labor to another, but from a base to an honorable work. Should one be called from the stone-barrow to be a king's cup-bearer, it would not be comparable to what is proposed. They will have a more honorable Master; more honorable fellow-laborers, for the angels serve Him; more honorable work—God himself is glorious in holiness; and a more honorable office—from being slaves to the devil, they are made kings and priests unto God.

We call you from vain labor, to that which shall be prosperous and successful. You are labouring for happiness there, where you will never get it, but here are full breasts. You are in vain striking at the flinty rock for water; here is an open fountain, where none ever went away disappointed.

We call you from a barren labor, where you will get nothing but sorrow to take away with you, to a labor which, when you have finished your works, will follow you (Rev 14:13). Ah, miserable is your present labor (Isa 59:5, 6). The spider wastes its bowels to spin its web, and when all is done, one stroke of the broom sweeps all away. It is either killed in its web, or drawn by it as a rope unto death, so that it doth but spin its winding-sheet, or plait the rope for itself.

Consider that the worst which can be made of it is this: that religion is hard labor. But this should be no prejudice against it with you, seeing, as has been said, the labor out of Christ is also hard labor. But to cast the balance, observe:

(1) If it is hard labor, it is worth the pains; the other is not so; for, "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Pro 2:4, 5). There is hard labor in digging stones, as well as digging for gold; nay, it is hard labor digging disappointments, that which is not; whereas the gain of the other is precious and certain. 1st, The promise: "That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures" (Pro 8:21). 2nd, The experience of all the laborers confirm the certainty of it: "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain" (Isa 45:19).

(2) If it is hard labor, it is short; if the work be sore, yet it is not longsome. You shall soon rest from your labors. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev 14:13). He that is tired with his journey, his spirits will revive when near the end. The shadow of the evening makes the laborer work heartily, for the time to go home is at hand. The trials, afflictions, weeping, etc., of the saints, endure but for a moment. On the other hand, the labor of other people knows no end; no rest abides them, but an everlasting toil under wrath that never ends.

B. A call to an easy labor

We call you from a hard to an easy labor. “My yoke is easy.” Christ has said it, we must believe it. But to clear it, consider for this time, only these two things:

(1) All the difficulties in religion arise from that active corruption which is in men, putting them to labor in their lusts and in the Law. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mat 11:12). Violence and force, not with God, He opposeth us not, but with our own corruptions. And in this sense only the Scripture holds out the labor of religion to be hard. But men do not state the matter fairly: Lay a ton-weight upon a rolling-stone, certainly it is harder to roll both together than the stone alone; but is the stone therefore lighter than the ton-weight? Take them separately, and absolutely the labor in religion is easy, the other hard. Men cannot bear Christ’s burden. Why? Because they still carry the devil’s burden, and they cannot bear the one above the other; that is not suitable. Lay off the one, take up the other; see which is lightest. Compare a meek and a passionate man. Which of them has the hardest task in bearing ill treatment? How about the sober man or the drunkard?—the worldly man, or he that lives above the world? The more power grace has, the easier; the more power lusts have, the harder is the labor.

(2) There is true help in the one, not in the other. The labor in religion has outward helps. The laborers are not helpless. They have a cloud of witnesses gone before them, whom they may see with their crowns upon their heads (Heb 12:1). Ye are not the forlorn in hope. Armies of saints have stormed heaven before you and have left a message behind them that the work is possible and the reward certain. Those who labor in their lusts do not have this; if they get satisfaction in their lusts, they are the first. They see thousands before them, who have labored as hard as they, disappointed, and are lain down in sorrow. This labor has inward helps. Christ bears the heaviest part of His own yoke. He gives strength. He works the will for the work, and the work for us, when we have the will. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). “Thou also hast wrought all our works in us” (Isa 26:12). The others have not. True, they have that within them which puts them on to this labor, but the more of the one, the harder is the other, as the wearied beast is goaded by the spur, and worn out by their being beaten when no straw is allowed them. But where is the help to work satisfaction and happiness out of the creatures, or from the Law?

We call you from a wearisome to a lightsome pleasant labor. I have proved the first; for the last, see Proverbs 3:17—“Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” But let us hear what can be said for both.

C. The passing pleasures of sin

Is there much pleasure in sin? In some there is none. What pleasure has the passionate man, who kindles a fire in his own bosom? What pleasure has the envious, who gnaws himself like a serpent for the good that others enjoy? What pleasure has

the discontented, who is his own executioner? Consider the calm of spirit that the contrary graces bring, and judge who has the better part. As for those sins in which pleasure is found,

Their condition is similar to those creatures with whom they would not desire to be ranked. For these things that gratify men's sensual appetite are common to them with beasts—as gluttony, drunkenness, filthiness, etc. A sow can drink and be as drunk as the greatest drunkard, and so on. And the beasts have the better of them, as being under no law; and therefore, they can go the full length of their appetite. They do it without remorse. They find satisfaction in these things, seeing they are not capable of desiring greater things. Now, put these together, where is the pleasure? Is it not surpassed by the pain? As to the desires of the mind, these are common to them with devils. The greatest swearer, liar, and proud opposer of religion have the trade but from the second hand. The devil can satisfy his curiosity better than the most curious, and reason more closely against religion than any atheist. Only obstinate despisers of reproof and mockers surpass the devil, for the devils believe and tremble; whereas for a time they do not.

The pleasure is but momentary, the pain follows hard at the heels, and is eternal. What pleasure can be devised, for which a man would hold his finger over a burning candle for a quarter of an hour? How much more dreadful to endure eternal burnings!

The struggle that conscience makes against corruption brings more torment than that which corruption makes against grace. Conscience is more dreadfully armed than corruption. There is here as much difference as there is betwixt the hand of God and the hand of the devil. See now what becomes of the pleasure!

D. The labor in religion truly pleasant

The labor in religion is truly pleasant. It is truly holy labor; and Scripture-testimony proves its pleasantness; “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). Ask David, and he will tell you (Psa 84; 2Co 12:10).

It is a labor suited to the nature of the soul, the better part, their divine supernatural nature (2Pe 1:4). Believers are partakers of a divine nature. This must create ease and delight; the stream easily flows from the fountain; birds with pleasure fly in the air. The reason of the difficulty in religion for many is that they are out of their element when engaged in it.

Therein the soul carries on a trade with heaven and entertains communion with God, through the Spirit of Christ, by a mutual intercourse of grace and duty, the soul receiving influences, and returning them again in duties. As the rain falls on the earth freely, so the waters run freely toward the sea again.

Great peace of conscience usually attends this; and the more labor, the more peace. “Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa 119:165). Here is a feast which nothing but sin mars. “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our con-

science, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world” (2Co 1:12). Men cannot take it from us (Joh 14:27).

Sometimes they have great manifestations of Christ, evidences of the Lord’s love raising a high spring-tide of joy in their souls, greater than that which the whole congregation of the world enjoys (Psa 4:6,7). It is joy unspeakable, and full of glory (1Pe 1:8).

It is a lightsome way they walk in, whereas the other is darksome; the light of the Lord’s Word shines in it. The Mahometans²⁵ have a tradition, that Moses’ law and Christ’s gospel were written first with ink made of pure light. Without doubt the Scripture points out duty, as if it were written with a sun-beam.

We call you from a labor against yourselves, to a labor for your advantage. Ye must either do the work of God or the devil. Every sin is a new impediment in your way to heaven, a new stone laid on the wall of separation. What a mad thing is it to be working out our damnation, instead of our own salvation!

We call you not to more, but to other labor. We are all laborious creatures; the greatest idler is in some sort busy. Paul calls even them that work not at all “busy-bodies” (2Th 3:11). Our life is nothing but a continual succession of actions, even as the fire is ever burning, and the rivers running. It is in some respect impossible to do more than we do; the watch runs as fast when wrong as when right. Why may we not then keep to the highway while we are travelling?—Consider,

That the same pains that men take to ruin themselves might possibly serve to save them. There are difficulties in the way of sin as well as of religion. Does not sin oftentimes bereave men of their nights’ rest? Are they more disturbed when communing with their own souls than with God? Do not men draw sin as with cart-ropes (Isa 5:18)? Why might not labor be employed in drawing the heart to God? If men would but change and suck as greedily and incessantly at the breasts of God’s consolations as they do of the creature’s, how happy would they be!

Consider that the labor in religion is not greater, nay, it is less than in sin; for religion contracts our work to one thing. “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful” (Luk 10:41, 42). Sinners have many lusts to please, the saints have but one God to please. The work of religion is all of a piece, sin not so. There is a sweet harmony betwixt all the graces and all the duties of religion. But lusts are quite contrary; and as they war against grace, so they war against one another. “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not from hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jam 4:1). Therefore the sinner is dragged by one lust one way, and by another, another way. And how hard is it to serve contrary masters!

²⁵ **Mahometans** – Muslims; followers of Muhammed.

10. Christless Sinners under a Heavy Burden

Observe, that Satan has a load on all out of Christ; it is a load of sin. “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity” (Isa 1:4). This load is twofold:

A. A load of guilt

“And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment [*Heb.* sin] is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13). Guilt is the heaviest load that ever was on the shoulders of men or angels. The Scriptures hold it forth,

(1) As debt. He that is in debt is under a burden. It is the worst of debts; we cannot pay it, nor escape the hands of our creditor. Yea, we deny the debt and care not for count and reckoning. We put off our creditor as much as we can; so the debt stands uncanceled. But it is a debt that must be paid. “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2Th 1:9). They shall pay what justice demands.

(2) It is represented as a yoke tied fast on the sinner’s neck; hence pardon is called a loosing of it, guilt being, as it were, cords of wrath, whereby the sinner is bound over to God’s wrath. Pardon is also called remission or relaxation. “To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25).

(3) It is pointed out as a burden. “Take away all iniquity” (Hos 14:2). Take away, namely, as a burden off a man’s back. Hence Christ is said to have borne our sins, the burden of the elect’s guilt being laid on His back. What a heavy load is it! It makes the whole creation groan (Rom 8:22). It caused them to take their pains five thousand years since, and they are not yet delivered of their burden. All the groans that ever men gave on earth and in hell were under this burden; it sunk the whole world into ruin. Christ took our nature to prevent us going down to the pit (Heb 2:16). The Greek word denotes catching hold, as of a drowning man, not of the whole seed of Adam, for the greater part of it fell to the ground, but of the seed of Abraham, the elect. This load of guilt sank the fallen angels, made them fall as stars from heaven to the bottomless pit. And what a load was it to Christ, that made Him sweat as it were great drops of blood, that made Him groan and die!

B. A load of servitude to lust

It is a load of servitude to lusts, which of themselves are heavy burdens, the very remainder of which made the apostle groan: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). What greater burden can there be, than for a man to have a swarm of unmortified corruptions hanging about him, whose cravings he is still obliged to answer. This is that which creates that weary labor, of which we have already spoken; better a man were burdened with serpents sticking in his flesh, than with these.

C. The load of the Law

The law also has a load on the Christless sinner.

(1) It is a load of *duties*, as great and numerous as the commandment, which is exceeding broad, can lay on. Though they perform them not, yet they are bound upon them by the commandment; and they shall sooner dissolve the whole fabric of the world, than make void this commandment. This is a heavy load. True, they that are in Christ have a yoke of duties laid on them, but not by the Law, but by Christ. The difference is great: the Law exacts perfect obedience, but gives no strength. Christ, when claiming obedience to His law, gives strength for the performance, which makes it an easy obedience. There is,

(2) It is also a load of *curses*. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). Every commandment of the Law is fenced with a curse, denounced against the breakers of it. How great must be the load, then, where every action is a sin, and every sin brings a curse! This is a heavy load that makes the earth reel to and fro, like a drunkard, under the weight of it.

D. The load of God’s wrath

God has a load on the Christless sinner, that is, a load of wrath. “And were by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). This is an abiding load: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36). This load is far heavier than mountains of brass; it is weightier than can be expressed.

11. The Nature of Coming to Christ

To come to Christ is to believe on Him. “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (Joh 6:35). Unbelief is the soul’s departing, not from a living law, but “from the living God” (Heb 3:12). Christ is the Lord. God is in Him; He calls sinners to come to Him. Faith answers the call, and so brings back the soul to God in Christ. Now, the Scripture holds forth Christ many ways answering to this notion of coming to Him by faith. And that you may see your privilege and call, I shall hold forth some of these to you.

The devil’s drudges and burden-bearers are welcome to Christ, as the *great gift* of the Father to sinners, to come and take it. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Joh 3:16). The world was broken by Adam. God sends Christ as a compensating gift, and the worst of you are welcome to Him. Yea, He urges Himself upon you. Come to Him, then, ye broken impoverished souls, that have nothing left you but poverty, wants, and debt.

Such are to come to Him as the *great Physician* of souls. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Mat 9:12). Christ in the gospel comes into the world as to a hospital of sin-sick souls, ready to administer a cure to those that will come to Him for it. Our diseases are many, all of them deadly, but He is willing and able to cure them all. He is lifted up on the pole of the gospel and says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa 45:22).

Such should come to Him as the *satisfying food* of the soul. Isaiah 55:1-3, "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). The soul is an empty thing and has hungry and thirsty desires to be satisfied. The creatures cannot satisfy; Christ can. "My flesh," says He, "is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (Joh 6:55). God has made a feast of fat things in Christ; in Him all the cravings of the soul may be satisfied. There are no angels to guard the tree of life; no seal on this fountain. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1). There is no enclosure about this flower of glory (Song 2:1). Here is the carcass; where are the eagles that should gather together?

Such come to Christ as *One on Whom they may rest*. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Song 8:5). We are not able to do our own turn, but on Him we should rely. "Because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand" (2Ch 16:8). Guilt makes the mind to be in a fluctuating condition. By coming to Jesus we are stayed, as is a ship at anchor. In, or from ourselves, we have nothing for justification and sanctification. God has laid help upon One that is mighty; the weary soul is welcome to rest in Him.

Such come to Him as *One on Whom they may cast their burdens*. "Cast thy burden on the LORD, and he shall sustain thee" (Psa 55:22). The soul is heavy-laden while out of Christ; Jesus holds forth the everlasting arms (Deu 33:27). Faith settles down on them, casting the soul's burden upon them. "Come," says He, "with all your misery, debts, beggary, and wants. I have shoulders to bear them all; I will take on the burden: ye shall get rest." He is content to marry the poor widow.

Such come to Him as *One in Whom they may find refuge*. "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18). The Law, as the avenger of blood, pursues the soul. Christ is that city of refuge, where none can have power against them. The gates are never shut; here is a refuge from the Law, from justice, and from the revenging wrath of God. Here is shelter under the wings of Christ: how willing is He to gather His people, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!

Such come to Him as *One in Whom the soul may at length find rest*. “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (Psa 37:7). The soul out of Christ is in a restless state, still shifting from one creature to another, not finding content in any. But by coming to Christ, the soul takes up its eternal rest in Him, and He becomes a covering of the eyes to it. We are like men in a fever, still changing beds. Like the dove out of the ark, we have no rest, till we come to Christ.

Such come to Christ as a *husband*. “All things are ready: come unto the marriage” (Mat 22:4). Your Maker is content to be your husband (Psa 54:5). Ministers are sent, as Abraham’s servant, to seek a spouse for Christ. He is willing to match with the worst, the meanest of you. He seeks no dowry; He is the richest, the most honorable, the most tender and loving husband.

Such come to Christ as a powerful *deliverer*. Christ stands at our prison-doors, proclaiming “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa 61:1). All who come to Him, “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5). Whosoever will come to Jesus must give up themselves to Him. It is the work of faith to give up the soul to Christ that He may save it, that He may open the prison-doors, take the prey from the mighty, and deliver the lawful captive.

12. Implications of Our Lord’s Kind Invitation to Sinners

A. Christ is ready to receive you

It implies that sinners are welcome to come to Christ that they may unite with God by Him. Christ is ready to receive you on your coming.

As to this, consider, Christ has made a long journey to meet with sinners. What brought Him out of the Father’s bosom into the world, but to bring sinners to Himself, and so back to God again? What was the errand of the great Shepherd, but to seek them, even them that were straying on the mountains of vanity? Luke 19:10, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10).

Consider how dear it cost him to purchase your union with God by him. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Though ye should little value His blood, He will not undervalue it Himself; for sinners it was shed, and will He not welcome the reward of it, the fruit of the travail of His soul? Why were His arms stretched on a cross, and His side pierced through, but that He might open up our way to God?

Consider how near lost sinners lay to Christ’s heart, that He would refuse no hardship, in order that He might see the travail of His soul. His love was ancient love; from eternity, his “delights were with the sons of men” (Pro 8:31). See His choice in Hebrews 12:2; and therefore, when He was to suffer, His heart was upon the work. “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”

(Luk 12:50). Jacob's love to Rachel showed itself by his long service for her, which seemed to him but a few days.

Consider why has He set up a ministry in the world, but to bring sinners to Himself? And he "sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding" (Mat 22:3). He would not have left ambassadors to deal with sinners in His name, if He were not willing to receive them, nay, were He not anxious that they should come to Him.

Consider: He heartily invites you to come to Him. "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). "Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). These invitations look not like one who cares not whether sinners come or not, far less like one who is not willing to receive them.

Consider the earnestness of the invitations; He deals with sinners as one that will not take "No" for an answer. "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luk 14:23). He not only knocks, but stands and knocks. He strives with sinners by His word, His providences, and the motions of His Spirit. He answers their objections (Isa 55:1ff), while none can refuse, but those that rush willfully on in their ruin. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Eze 33:11).

Consider how He complains of these that will not come: "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). He speaks as one that has been working in vain. "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain" (Isa 49:4). He complains of Jerusalem (Mat 23:37); yea, He weeps over obstinate, incorrigible sinners. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luk 19:41, 42). Sure He has lost no bowels of compassion by going to heaven; they flow out as freely and tenderly as ever.

Consider He commands sinners to come to Him. The invitations are all commands; they are most peremptory.²⁶ "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jo 3:23). If you do it not, you can do nothing that will please Him. John 6:29, "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (Joh 6:29). And He leaves it on us with the most dreadful certification. "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16). And hence it follows that the hearers of the gospel who perish are inexcusable; the door was open, but they would not enter in.

²⁶ **peremptory** – authoritative.

B. The worst of sinners welcome to Christ

The invitation implies that the worst of sinners are welcome to Christ. However great their burden of sin and misery be, it is no hindrance in their way to come to Christ. Where all are invited, none are excluded. But upon this I do not enlarge here. All that I shall just now observe is that this consideration should shame you out of your slighting of Christ, and strike at the root of that bitter despair which lodges in the breasts of many, who are yet far enough from absolute despair of their case.

C. Our desperate condition a reason to come

The invitation implies that Christ allows sinners to come to Him, rather on account of the desperateness of their case, than otherwise: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." As if He had said, "Ye have been laboring, and yet can get no rest; let that engage you to come to me. Sit down, and consider your case. If nothing else will prevail with you, let the desperateness of your disease bring you to the great Physician." You are cordially welcome to do so.

For consider that it is for this very end God reveals the worst of a man's case to himself, drives him to his wit's end, in order that he may begin to be wise. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths...then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (Hos 2:6, 7).

Consider that Christ has made offers of Himself to those in the worst of cases. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa 1:18). And He holds out Himself as a Savior in particular for these (Rev 3:17, 18; Isa 55:7).

Consider: such have been made welcome, who have employed such arguments with Him. "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11); and also in the case of the Canaanitish woman with Jesus: "But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour" (Mat 15:26-28).

Consider: He has the more glory, the more desperate that the case is. None see the stars so well as from the bottom of a deep pit. His power is the greater to pardon, His grace to overcome, when there is most occasion for these being displayed. It is the worst of diseases that do best proclaim the physician's skill when a cure is effected.

From what has been just now observed, we may see and admire the divine condescension, that Christ is so willing to take the sinner in, when he sees himself cast out at all doors and can get rest nowhere else. Christ will give rest to and embrace the

sinner, when he sees he can do no better, when he can make no other shift. Hence also learn: how to make an excellent use of the badness of your case, even to take up these stumbling blocks, and break up heaven's door with them; to make a virtue of necessity, and the more that the burden presseth, the more readily to go to Christ with it. True, it is never a right coming to Christ which sense of misery alone produceth; but love may thus crown a work, which terror begins, and which leads to an apprehension of mercy by the Holy Spirit. In a word, you are absolutely inexcusable that come not to Christ, be your case what it will.

13. The Nature of the Rest Which Christ Graciously Promises

Here it must be observed, that there is a rest which they may have in Christ: a rest here, and a rest hereafter. In this life there is a fourfold rest to be had in Christ.

A. Rest from sin

There is a rest in respect of sin. The rest Christ gives from sin is twofold.

(1) A rest from *the guilt of sin*. Guilt is a poison infecting the conscience, which makes it so to smart that it can get no rest, as in the case of Cain and Judas, and also with those that "were pricked in their heart" (Act 2:37). This, when it festers and becomes immovable, is the gnawing worm in hell. Christ gives rest from it; His blood purges the conscience from dead works (Heb 9:14). The conscience, when like the raging sea, is stilled by him. "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him" (Isa 57:18, 19). The soul finds this rest in the wounds of Christ, for, "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). The blood of Jesus Christ, Gods own Son, cleanses from all sin. The soul dipped in this fountain is washed from this poison, and is delivered from this sting of guilt.

(2) There is rest from *the reigning power of sin*. "For sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom 6:14). Sin on the throne makes a confused restless soul, like the raging sea, continually casting out mire and dirt. Christ, by His Spirit's efficacy, turns sin off the throne, and restores rest to the soul. He casts down these Egyptian taskmasters, and thus the soul enters into his rest. "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb 4:10). In the day of the soul's coming to Christ, He acts like a king, setting all in order in the kingdom that was a mere heap of confusion before His accession to the throne.

B. Rest from the Law

There is in Christ rest from the Law—not that He makes them lawless, but that He takes off from them the insupportable yoke of the Law, and gives them ease.

He gives them ease from the burden of Law duties, which are exacted in all perfection, under the pain of the curse, while no strength is furnished wherewith to fulfil them. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ” (Rom 7:4). This is the yoke on all men’s necks naturally; Christ put His neck in this yoke and bare it, satisfying the Law’s demands completely, and so frees all that come to Him from this service. Christ carries His people without²⁷ the dominions of the Law.

He brings rest from the curse of the Law. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). These that come to Him, He takes from off them that curse which they are under, and gives them His blessing, which He hath merited. He carries them from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, where they hear the blood of Jesus speaking peace, silencing the demands of vengeance, and affording a refuge for the oppressed.

C. Rest in God as the soul’s happiness

There is in Christ rest from that weary labor in which persons are engaged when in quest of happiness, leading the soul to the enjoyment of God. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee” (Psa 116:7). The soul, restless in seeking happiness among the creatures, He leads to God, the fountain of all perfection, opening their eyes, as He did Hagar’s, to see the well, and bringing them into the enjoyment of all good in Him, uniting the soul with Himself.

The soul finds a rest of satisfaction from Christ, which it can find in no other quarter whatever; for the soul finds a rest of satisfaction from Him, when by faith it is set on the breasts of His consolations. In these there is an object adequate to all the desires of the soul, answering all its needs. “A good man shall be satisfied from himself” (Pro 14:14). There is the triumph of faith in the enjoyment of God. “But I have all, and abound” (Phi 4:18).

The soul finds a rest in Him of settled abode, insomuch that the soul goes not abroad, as it was wont, among the creatures for satisfaction. “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). Christ becomes precious to the soul...“The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Mat 13:44).

²⁷ **without** – outside; away from.

D. Rest from trouble

There is in Christ rest in respect of troubles. Christ gives rest from troubles in the world, now and then, when He sees meet. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (Psa 34:19). Zion’s God reigneth, be on the throne who will; and when He speaks peace, neither devils nor men can create His people trouble. “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” (Lam 3:37). There is no such security from trouble as the godly have, which is from heaven, and not from earth.

Therefore, Christ gives rest in trouble. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Joh 16:33). You may, nay, you shall meet with troubles, but He can make you get sweet rest in your souls. Even when you are on a bed of thorns as to the outward man, He can give His people a sweet rest even in troubles.

“How can these things be?” some may say. In answer: Christ gives His people in trouble an inward rest, that is, an inward tranquility of mind in midst of trouble. “LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the LORD sustained me” (Psa 3:1-5). Christ can make the believer as a vessel on water tossed here and there, yet not jumbled. There was a greater calm with the three children in the furnace, than with the king in the palace (Dan 3:24). Fear may be on every side where there is none in the centre, because Christ makes a blessed calm in their hearts.

Christ gives in trouble a rest of contentment. “I have learned,” says Paul, “in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phi 4:11). This is not only the duty, but the privilege of believers. If the lot of the godly be not brought up to their spirit, Christ will bring their spirit down to their lot; and there must needs be rest there, where the spirit of the man and his lot meet in one. “They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied” (Psa 37:19).

Then follows a rest of satisfaction in the enjoyment of better things. What if the world hath a bitter taste in their mouths? Christ can hold a cup of consolation to them in that very instant, the sweetness of which will master the bitterness of the other. “Your sorrow,” says He, “shall be turned into joy” (Joh 16:20). Paul says, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world” (2Co 1:12). They are not indeed stocks, to be unmoved with troubles, but their sorrow is so drowned in spiritual joy, that it is but as sorrow:²⁸ “As sorrow-

²⁸ **as sorrow** – similar or like sorrow; resembling it, but not the real thing.

ful, yet always rejoicing” (2Co 6:10); even as the joy of the wicked is but as joy.²⁹ Troubles may raise a mutiny of lusts within, but the peace of God quells them. It keeps their “hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:7).

Christ gives a rest in confidence of a blessed issue.³⁰ “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12). The soul in Christ has the promise to rest on; and however dark a side the cloud may have, faith will see through it. Though they may sink deep, they will never drown, who have a promise to bear them up. Thus, you see, they rest in Christ in trouble; and this rest is a most secure rest, where people may rest confidently. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa 26:3). The wicked may have rest, but not with God’s good will; therefore the more rest, the more dangerous is their case. “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1The 5:3). But there is perfect security in Christ, and that in the worst of times (Song 3:7, 8). Again, it is a rest so rooted, that the soul can never be deprived of it. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isa 32:17). How soon is the rest of the wicked broken—their candle put out! But this, although it may meet with some disturbance by temptations, as the clouds may go over the sun, yet it shall be as sure as the sun fixed in the firmament. It will be proof against the disturbances of the world; against the temptations and accusations of the devil; yea, against the demands of justice, and the threatenings of the law. Then in the life to come, He will give them all complete rest who come to Him. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Heb 4:9). He will give their bodies rest in the grave (Isa 57:2), and both soul and body rest in heaven hereafter; and that is a rest beyond expression.

14. Who Gives This Rest?

If it should be enquired, Who is it that gives this rest?—this is answered in our text. Christ says to such laboring and heavy-laden sinners: “*I will give you rest,*” and He is able to make good His word. The gift of this rest is His prerogative; they that obtain it must get it out of His hands.

For illustrating and confirming this, consider that all creatures cannot give rest to a restless soul. Not any thing in them, or the whole of what can be afforded from them, can give it. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Ecc 1:2). Men, the best of men, cannot do it. Ministers may be directed to speak a

²⁹ **as joy** – similar or like joy; resembling it, but not the real thing.

³⁰ **issue** – result; end.

word in season, but the Lord Himself can only make that word effectual (2Sa 12:13; Psalm 51). Nay, angels cannot do it (Exo 33:2, 14, 15). It requires a creating power. "I have seen his ways, and will heal him" (Isa 57:18).

Consider: there can be no rest to the soul without returning to a reconciled God, for it is impossible the soul can find true rest elsewhere; and there is no returning to God but by Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Joh 14:6). He is the only ladder by which the soul can ascend to heaven.

Christ is the great Lord Treasurer of heaven. The fullness of power is lodged in Him. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat 28:18). There is nothing that any can get from heaven but what comes through His hands. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Joh 5:22). Jesus also hath the keys of hell and death (Rev 1:18).

He is the storehouse, where the treasure is laid up, and out of which all needful supplies come. "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:16).

Consider the glorious types illustrating this: Joseph (Gen 41:40-44), and Joshua, who brought the people to the rest in Canaan.

Consider that high character which He sustains. He is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

It is reasonable it should be so. He hath purchased this rest with His blood; and therefore there is a high propriety that He should be the giver, the dispenser of this glorious blessing.

