

A Man's Interest in Christ May Be Known

by William Guthrie

A man's interest in Christ may be known, and it is a matter of the highest importance to have a saving interest in the covenant.

Scripture: Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 25:12, Mark 9:24, John 8:44, Romans 8:18, Romans 8:38, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 2 Timothy 1:12, 2 Peter 1:10, 1 John 5:13

Topics: "Assurance Of Salvation", "Self Examination"

Description

William Guthrie preaches about the certainty of knowing one's interest in Christ, emphasizing that it is attainable through examining oneself and aligning with Scripture. He highlights the importance of having a saving covenant with God, cautioning against false confidence and the narrow path to Christ. Guthrie stresses the need to allow Scripture to determine one's condition and the reasons why many struggle to have a clear knowledge of their state in Christ. He addresses common mistakes and hindrances in understanding one's interest in Christ, urging diligence, self-examination, and reliance on God's Word for clarity.

Transcript

I.--A man's interest in Christ may be known First, That a man's interest in Christ, or his gracious state, may be known, and that with more certainty than people conjecture; yea, and the knowledge of it may be more easily attained unto than many imagine; for not only has the Lord commanded men to know their interest in Him, as a thing attainable--'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith' (2 Cor. 13: 5); 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure' (2 Peter 1: 10)--but many of the saints have attained unto the clear persuasion of their interest in Christ, and in God as their own God.

How often do they call Him their God and their portion? and how persuaded is Paul 'that nothing can separate him from the love of God?' (Rom. 8: 38, 39.) Therefore the knowledge of a man's gracious state is attainable. And this knowledge of it, which may be attained, is no fancy and mere conceit, but it is most sure: 'Doubtless Thou are our Father,' saith the prophet (Isa. 43: 16), in name of the Church. It is clear from this:--1. That can be no fancy, but a very sure knowledge, which does yield to a rational man comfort in most real straits; but so does this--'When the people spoke of stoning David, he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' (1 Sam. 30: 6.)

He saith, 'He will not be afraid though ten thousands rise up against him.' (Psa. 3: 6.) Compare these words with the following: 'But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.'

(Psa. 3: 3.) 'The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.' (Psa. 27: 3.) 2.

That is a sure knowledge of a thing which maketh a wise merchant sell all he has, that he may keep it sure; that maketh a man forego children, lands, life, and suffer the spoiling of all joyfully; but so does this--Matt. 13: 44; Mark 10: 28, 29; Heb. 10: 34; Rom. 5: 3; Acts 5: 41. 3. That must be a sure and certain knowledge, and no fancy, upon which a man voluntarily and freely does adventure his soul when he is stepping into eternity, with this word in his mouth, 'This is all my desire' (2 Sam. 23: 5); but such a knowledge is this.

And again, not only may a godly man come to the sure knowledge of his gracious state, but it is more easily attainable than many apprehend: for supposing, what shall be afterwards proved, that a man may know the gracious work of God's Spirit in himself; if he will but argue rationally from thence, he shall be forced to conclude his interest in Christ, unless he deny clear Scripture truths. I shall only make use of one here, because we are to speak more directly to this afterwards.

A godly man may argue thus, Whosoever receive Christ are justly reputed the children of God--'But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God' (John 1 12); but I have received Christ in all the ways which the word there can import: for I am pleased with the device of salvation by Christ, I agree to the terms, I welcome the offer of Christ in all His offices, as a King to rule over me, a Priest to offer sacrifice and intercede for me, a Prophet to teach me; I lay out my heart for Him and towards Him, resting on Him as I am able.

What else can be meant by the word "receiving"? Therefore may I say, and conclude plainly and wsrantably, I am justly to reckon myself God's child, according to the aforesaid scripture, which cannot fail.

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

III.--We must allow our condition to be determined by Scripture The third thing to be premised is, Men must resolve to be determined by Scripture in this matter of their interest in Christ. The Spirit speaking in the Scripture is judge of all controversies'--To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' (Isa. 8: 20)--and of this also, whether a man be savingly in covenant with God or not. Therefore do not mock God whilst you seem to search after such a thing.

If we prove from Scripture, which is the uncontroverted rule, that you are gracious, and have made a covenant savingly with God, then resolve to grant so much, and to acquiesce in it; and if the contrary appear, let there be a determination of the controversy, else you do but mock the Lord, and so 'your bands shall be made strong' (Isa. 28: 22); for 'a jot of His word cannot fail.' (Matt. 5: 11.) Therefore, seek eye-salve from Christ to judge of things according as the word of God shall discover them to be.

IV.--Causes why so few attain to a distinct knowledge of their state The fourth thing to be premised is, although the matter of a man's interest in Christ be of so great importance, and the way to attain to the knowledge of it so plainly held forth in the Scriptures, yet there be but few who reach the distinct knowledge of it. And that this may not discourage any person from attempting it, I shall hint some few reasons why so few come to the clear knowledge of it; which will also prepare the way for what is to be spoken afterwards. (1) The first thing which hinders many from the knowledge of their interest in Christ is their ignorance of some special principles of religion; as, 1.

That it was free love in God's bosom, and nothing in man, that moved Him to send a Saviour to perfect the work of redemption (John 3: 16)--'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.' Men are still seeking some ground for that work in themselves, which leads away from suitable and high apprehensions of the first spring and rise of God's covenant favour to His people, which has no reason, cause, or motive in us; and so they cannot come to the knowledge of their interest. 2.

They are ignorant how that love effectually discovers itself to a man's heart, so as he has ground to lay claim to it, namely, That ordinarily, 1st, It discovers his fallen state in himself, because of sin and corruption defiling the whole man, and any thing in him that might be called a righteousness: 'All these things are loss and dung.' (Phil. 3: 8.) 2ndly, It discovers Christ as the full and satisfying treasure, above all things: 'The man finds a treasure, for which with joy he selleth all that he has.' (Matt. 13: 44, 46.) 3rdly, It determines the heart, and causes it to approach unto a living God in the ordinances: 'Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth, and causes to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts' (Psa. 65: 4); and causes the heart to wait upon Elm, and Him alone: 'My soul, wait thou only upon God. (Psa. 62: 5.)

Thus having dropped in the seed of God in the heart, and formed Christ there (Gal. 4: 19), the heart is changed and made new in the work (Ezek. 36: 26); and God's law is so stamped upon the heart in that change (Jer. 31: 33), that the whole yoke of Christ is commended to the man without exception. (Rom. 7: 12, 16.) The law is acknowledged good, holy, just, and spiritual. Upon all which, from that new principle of life, there flow out acts of a new life (Gal. 5: 6), 'Faith worketh by love;' (Rom. 6: 18, 22), and the man becometh a servant of righteousness unto God, which especially appears in the spirituality of worship: men then 'serve God in spirit and in truth, in the newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter' (John 4: 24; Rom. 7: 6)--and tenderness in all manner of Conversation.

The man then 'exerciseth himself how to keep a conscience void of offense towards God and towards men.' (Acts 24: 16.) Now in this way does the love of God discover itself unto man, and acteth on him, so as he has ground of laying some good claim to it; and so as he may justly think that the love which sent a Saviour had respect to such a man as has had these things made out unto him. Surely ignorance in this does hinder many from the knowledge of their interest in Christ; for if a man know not how God worketh with a person, so as he may justly lay claim to His love, which was from eternity, he will wander in the dark, and not come to the knowledge of an interest in Him. 3.

Many are also ignorant of this, that God alone is the hope of His people; He is called 'the hope of Israel.' (Jer. 14: 8.) Although inherent qualifications are evidences of it, yet the staying of the heart upon Him, as a full blessing and satisfying portion, is faith--'The faith and hope must be in God' (1 Peter 1: 21)--and the only proper condition which giveth right to the saving blessings of the covenant: 'To him that worketh not but believeth, faith is counted for righteousness.' (Rom. 4: 5.)

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

I say God is the hope of His people, and not their own holiness. they intend honestly and long seriously to be like unto Him, many failings should not weaken their hope and confidence, for it is in Him 'who changeth not' (Gal. 3: 6); 'and if any man sin, we have an advocate.' (1 John 2: 1.) Now, when men place their hope in any other thing besides the Lord, it is no wonder they are kept in a staggering condition, according to the changes of the thing which they make the ground of their hope; since they give not to God the glory due to His name, and which He will not give to another.

'They who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.' (Psa. 9: 10.) 'My glory will I not give to another: I am the Lord, that is my name.' (Isa. 42: 8.) 4. Many are ignorant of the different ways and degrees of God's working with His people, and this does much darken their knowledge and reflex acts of their interest in Him. This ignorance consists mainly of three things:--1. They are ignorant of the different degrees and ways of that work of the law, by which God ordinarily dealeth with men, and of the different ways in which the Lord bringeth people at first to Christ.

They consider not that the jailer is not kept an hour in bondage (Acts 16); Paul is kept in suspense three days (Acts 9); Zaccheus not one moment (Luke 19). 2. They are ignorant of, at least they do not consider, how different are the degrees of sanctification in the saints, and the honorable appearances thereof before men in some, and the sad blemishes thereof in others. Some are very blameless, and more free of gross outbreakings, adorning their profession much, as Job and Zacharias.

These are said to be 'perfect and upright, fearing God, and eschewing evil' (Job 1: 8); 'righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' (Luke 1: 6.) Others were subject to very gross and sad evils, as Solomon, Asa, etc. 3. They are ignorant of the different communications of God's face and expressions of His presence. Some walk much in the light of God's countenance, and are much in sensible fellowship with Him, as David was; others are 'all their days kept in bondage, through fear of death.' (Heb. 2: 15.)

Surely the ignorance of the different ways of God's working and dealing with His people does very much darken the knowledge of their interest in Him, whilst they usually limit the Lord to one way of working, which He does not keep, as we have shown in the former examples. (2) The second thing which darkens men about their interest in Christ is, There is one thing or other wherein their heart, in some respect, does condemn them, as dealing deceitfully and guilefully with God.

It is not to be expected that those can come to clearness about their interest, whose heart does condemn them for keeping up some known transgressions against the Lord, which they will not let go, neither are using the means which they know to be appointed by God for delivering them from it: Neither can those come to clearness who know some positive duty commanded them in their stations, which they deceitfully shift and shun, not closing cheerfully with it, or not willing to be led into it.

These are also, in some respects, condemned of their own heart, as the former sort are; and in that case it is difficult to come to a distinct knowledge of their state: 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' (1 John 3: 21.) It is supposed here, that a selfcondemning heart maketh void a

man's confidence proportionally before God. I do not deny but that men may on good grounds plead an interest in Christ in the case of prevailing iniquity: 'Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.' (Psa. 65: 3.)

'I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.' (Rom. 7: 23, 24.) But it is hard to be attained, if at all attainable, when the heart is dealing deceitfully, and entertaining known guile in any particular: therefore, let people clear themselves of the particular, which they know too well.

It is the thing which hinders them, marring their confidence and access in all their approaches unto God. 'Yet ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.' (Judges 10: 13.) The idolatries of the people are cast up to them by the Lord, and their suit rejected thereupon. That which draweth away the heart first in the morning, and last at night, like 'an oven heated at night, and it burns as a flaming fire in the morning' (Hos. 7: 6), spoken of the wicked; and taketh up their thoughts often on their bed: as it is said of some, 'He deviseth mischief upon his bed' (Psa. 36: 4):-- That which does ordinarily lead away the heart in time of religious duty, and the remembrance of which has power to enliven and quicken the spirits more than the remembrance of God, so as 'their heart is after the heart of some detestable thing' (Ezek. 11: 21):--That which withstandeth men when they would lay hold on the promise, as God casteth up men's sins to them who are meddling with His covenant, 'What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldst take My covenant in thy mouth?' (Psa. 50: 16):--that is the thing which does prevent the knowledge of a gracious state.

Let it go, and it will be more easy to reach the knowledge of an interest in Christ. (3) The third thing which hindereth in many the knowledge of an interest in Christ is, A spirit of sloth and careless negligence. They complain that they know not whether they be in Christ or not; but as few take pains to be in Him, so few take pains to try if they be in Him. It is a work and business which cannot be done sleeping: 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves.' (2 Cor. 13: 5.)

The several words used here, namely, Examine, prove, know--intimate that there is a labour in it: Diligence must be used to make our 'calling and election sure.' (2 Peter 1: 10.) It is a business above flesh and blood: the holy 'anointing which teacheth all things,' must make us 'know the things freely given to us of God.' (1 John 2: 27.) Shall the Lord impart a business of so great concernment, and not so much as 'be inquired after to do it for men?' (Ezek. 36: 37.) Be ashamed, you who spend so much time in reading of romances, in adorning your persons, in hawking and hunting, in consulting the law concerning your outward state in the world, and it may, be in worse things than these;--Be ashamed, you that spend so little time in the search of this, whether ye be an heir of glory or note whether you be in the way that leadeth to heaven, or that way which will land you in darkness for ever?

You who judge this below you, and unworthy of your pains, any part or minute of your time, it is probable, in God's account, you have judged yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, so that you shall have no lot with God's people in this matter. (4) The fourth thing that darkens the knowledge of an interest in Christ is, Men do not condescend upon what would satisfy them. They complain that God will not show unto them what He is about to do with them, but yet cannot say they know what would satisfy them concerning His purpose.

This is a sad thing. Shall we think those are serious who have never as yet pitched on what would satisfy them, nor are making earnest inquiry after what should satisfy? If the Lord had left us in the dark in that matter, we were less inexcusable; but since the grounds of satisfaction, and the true marks of an interest in Christ, are so clear and frequent in Scripture, and so 'many things written, that our joy may be full' (1 John 1: 4); and, 'that those who believe,' may 'know that they have eternal life' (1 John 5: 13); and since 'he that believeth has the witness of it in himself' (1 John 5: 10), none can pretend excuse here.

We shall not here insist to show what may and should satisfy concerning our interest, since we are to speak directly of it afterwards. (5) The fifth thing that helps much to keep men in the dark with respect to their interest in Christ is, Their pitch upon some mutable grounds, which are not so apposite proofs of the truth of an interest in Christ as of the comfortable state of a triumphing soul sailing before the wind; and marks which I grant are precious in themselves, and do make out an interest clearly where they are; yet they are such as without which an interest in Christ may be, and be known also in a good measure.

We shall touch on a few of them. 1st, Some think that all who have a true interest in Him are above the prevailing power of every sin; but this is contrary to that of Psa. 65: 3, 'Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions Thou shalt purge them away;' where we find that holy man laying just claim to pardon, in the case of prevailing iniquity; and that of Rom. 7: 23, 24, 25, where Paul thanketh God through Christ, as freed from the condemnation of the law, even whilst a law in his members leadeth captive unto sin. 2ndly, Some think that all true saints have constantly access unto God in prayer, and sensible returns of prayer at all times; but this is contrary to the many sad exercises of His people, complaining often that they are not heard nor regarded of God: 'How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?' (Psa. 13: 1); 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

O my God, I cry in the day time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.' (Psa. 22: 1, 2.) 3rdly, Some think that all who have any true interest in Him have God witnessing the same unto them, by a high operation of that witnessing Spirit of His, spoken of: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (Rom. 8: 16, whereof afterwards); and so they still suspect their own interest in Christ, because of the want of this.

But they do not remember that they must first believe and give credit to that record which God has given of the Son, that there is life enough in Him for men (1 John 5: 10,11), and then look for the seal and witness of the Spirit: 'In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' (Eph 1: 13.) As long as people hold fast these principles, and the like, they can hardly come to the knowledge of their gracious state, which God has warranted people to prove and clear up to themselves, otherwise than by these aforesaid things.

V.--Some mistakes concerning an interest in Christ removed

The fifth thing to be premised is, The removal of some mistakes into which people may readily run themselves when they are about to prove their interest in Christ; as-- 1. It is a mistake to think that every one who is in Christ does know that he is in Him; for many are truly gracious, and have a good title to eternal life, who do not know so much, until it be made out afterwards: 'These things are written to them that believe, that they may know they have a title to eternal life' (1 John 5: 13); that is, that they may know they are believers, and so it is supposed they knew it not before. 2. It is a mistake to think that all who come to the knowledge of their interest in Christ do attain an equal certainty about it. One may say, 'He is

persuaded nothing present, or to come, can separate him from the love of God' (Rom. 8: 18); another comets but this length, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.' (Mark 9: 24.) 3. It is a mistake to think that every one who attains a strong persuasion of his interest does always hold there; for he who today may say of the Lord, 'He is his refuge' (Psa. 91: 2), and 'his portion' (Psa. 11: 57), will at another time say, 'He is cut off' (Psa. 31: 22), and will ask, 'if the truth of God's promise does fail for evermore' (Psa. 77: 7, 8, 9.) 4. It is also a mistake to think that every one who attains a good knowledge of their gracious state can formally answer all objection made to the contrary; but yet they may hold fast the conclusion, and say, 'I know whom I have believed.' (2 Tim. 1: 12.) There are few grounds of the Christian religion, whereof many people are so persuaded, as that they are able to maintain them formally against all arguments brought to the contrary; and yet they may and will hold the conclusion steadfastly and justly; so it is in the case in hand. 5. It is no less a mistake to imagine, that the vain groundless confidence, which many profane ignorant atheists do maintain, is this knowledge of an interest in Christ which we plead for. Many do falsely avow Him 'to be their Father' (John 8: 14); and many look for heaven, who are beguiled, like the 'foolish virgins.' (Matt. 25: 12.) Yet we must not think because of this, that all knowledge of an interest is a delusion and fancy, although these fools be deceived; for, whilst thousands are deluded, some can say on good and solid grounds, 'We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness.' (1 John 5: 19.)

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