

Honour Due to the Person of Christ -- the Nature and Causes of It.

by John Owen

The person of Christ is the immediate object of all duties of religion, and divine honour and worship are due unto him as the Son of God incarnate.

Scripture: Luke 17:5, Luke 23:46, John 5:23, John 20:28, Acts 7:56, Acts 7:59, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 1:21, Revelation 5:8, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Christology", "Worship"

Description

John Owen preaches about the importance of honoring and worshiping the person of Christ in all acts of religion, emphasizing that all divine honor is due to the Son of God incarnate. He highlights the necessity of considering the glory, life, and power of the Christian religion in relation to the person of Christ, stating that he is the object of divine honor and worship. Owen explains that in times of distress, gracious discoveries, persecution, growth in grace, and even in death, believers should make especial applications unto Christ through prayer for various needs and experiences.

Transcript

Many other considerations of the same nature with those foregoing, relating unto the glory and honour of the person of Christ, may be taken from all the fundamental principles of religion. And our duty it is in them all, to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession" -- "the Author and Finisher of our faith". I shall not insist on more, but proceed unto those principles of truth which are immediately directive of our duty towards him; without diligent attendance whereunto, we do but in vain bear the name of Christians. 104And the substance of what is designed may be included in the following assertion:--

"The glory, life, and power of Christian religion, as Christian religion, and as seated in the souls of men, with all the acts and duties which properly belong thereunto, and are, therefore, peculiarly Christian, and all the benefits and privileges we receive by it, or by virtue of it, with the whole of the honour and glory that arise unto God thereby, have all of them their formal nature and reason from their respect and relation unto the person of Christ; nor is he a Christian who is otherwise minded."

In the confirmation hereof it will appear what judgment ought to be passed on that inquiry -- which, after the uninterrupted profession of the catholic church for so many ages of a faith unto the contrary, is begun to be made by some amongst us -- namely, Of what use is the person of Christ in religion? For it proceeds

on this supposition, and is determined accordingly -- that there is something in religion wherein the person of Christ is of no use at all; -- a vain imagination, and such as is destructive unto the whole real intercourse between God and man, by the one and only Mediator!

The respect which we have in all acts of religion unto the person of Christ may be reduced unto these four heads: I. Honour. II. Obedience. III. Conformity. IV. The use we make of him, for the attaining and receiving of all Gospel privileges -- all grace and glory. And hereunto the whole of our religion, as it is Christian or evangelical, may be reduced.

I. The person of Christ is the object of divine honour and worship. The formal object and reason hereof is the divine nature, and its essential infinite excellencies. For they are nothing but that respect unto the Divine Being which is due unto it from all rational creatures, regulated by revelation, and enforced by divine operations. Wherefore the person of Christ is primarily the object of divine honour and worship, upon the account of his divine nature and excellencies. And those who, denying that nature in him, do yet pretend to worship him with divine and religious adoration, do but worship a golden calf of their own setting up; for a Christ who is not over all, God blessed forever, is not better. And it implies a contradiction, that any creature should, on any accounts be the immediate, proper object of divine worship; unless the divine essential excellencies be communicated unto it, or transfused into it, whereby it would cease to be a creature. For that worship is nothing but the ascription of divine excellencies unto what is so worshipped.

105But we now consider the Lord Christ in his whole entire person, the Son of God incarnate, "God manifest in the flesh." His infinite condescension, in the assumption of our nature, did no way divest him of his divine essential excellencies. For a time, they were shadowed and veiled thereby from the eyes of men; when "he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant." But he eternally and unchangeably continued "in the form of God," and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," Phil. ii. 6, 7. He can no more really and essentially, by any act of condescension or humiliation, cease to be God, than God can cease to be. Wherefore, his being clothed with our nature derogates nothing from the true reason of divine worship due unto him, but adds an effectual motive unto it. He is, therefore, the immediate object of all duties of religion, internal and external; and in the dispensation of God towards us, none of them can be performed in a due manner without a respect unto him.

This, then, in the first place, is to be confirmed; namely, that all divine honour is due unto the Son of God incarnate -- that is, the person of Christ.

John v. 23: It is the will of the Father, "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." Some considerations on this divine testimony will confirm our position. It is of the Son incarnate that the words are spoken -- as all judgment was committed unto him by the Father, as he was "sent" by him, verse 22 -- that is, of the whole person of Christ in the exercise of his mediatory office. And with respect hereunto it is that the mind of God is peculiarly revealed. The way whereby God manifesteth his will, that all men should thus honour the Son, as they honour the Father, is by committing all power, authority, and judgment unto him, verses 20-22, "For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Not that these things are the formal reason and cause of the divine honour which is to be given him; but they are reasons of it, and motives unto it, in that they are evidences of his being the Son of God.

But it may be said, What need is there that the Father should so interpose an act of his will and sovereign pleasure as to this honouring of the Son, seeing the sole cause and reason of this divine honour is the divine nature, which the Son is no less partaker of than the Father? I answer --

106(1.) He doth not in this command intend the honour and worship of Christ absolutely as God, but distinctly as the Son; which peculiar worship was not known under the Old Testament, but was now declared necessary in the committing all power, authority, and judgment unto him. This is the honour whereof we speak.

(2.) He doth it, lest any should conceive that "as he was now sent of the Father," and that in the "form of a servant," this honour should not be due unto him. And the world was then far from thinking that it was so; and many, I fear, are yet of the same mind. He is, therefore, to be honoured by us, according to the will of God, καθὼς, "in like manner," as we honour the Father.

[1.] With the same honour; that is, divine, sacred, religious, and supreme. To honour the Father with other honour, is to dishonour him. When men design to give glory and honour to God which is not truly divine, it is idolatry; for this honour, in truth, is nothing but the ascription of all infinite, divine excellencies unto him. Whereon, when men ascribe unto him that which is not so, they fall into idolatry, by the worship of their own imaginations. So was it with the Israelites, when they thought to have given glory to God by making a golden calf, whereon they proclaimed a feast unto Jehovah, Exod. xxxii. 5. And so was it with the heathen in all their images of God, and the glory which they designed to give him thereby, as the apostle declares, Rom. i. 23-25. This is one kind of idolatry -- as the other is -- the ascribing unto creatures anything that is proper and peculiar unto God, any divine excellency. And we do not honour God the Father with one kind of honour, and the Son with another. That were not to honour the Son καθὼς, "as" we honour the Father, but in a way infinitely different from it.

[2.] In the same manner, with the same faith, love, reverence, and obedience, always, in all things, in all acts and duties of religion whatever.

This distinct honour is to be given unto the person of the Son by virtue of this command of the Father, though originally on the account of his oneness in nature with the Father. And our duty herein is pressed with the highest enforcement; he that honours not the Son, honours not the Father. He who denieth the Son (herein) "hath not the Father; [but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also,]" 1 John ii. 23. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," chap. v. 11, 12. If we are wanting herein, whatever we pretend, we do not worship nor honour God at all.

And there is reason to give this caution -- reason to fear that this great fundamental principle of our religion is, if not disbelieved, yet not much attended unto in the world. Many, who profess a respect unto the Divine Being and the worship thereof, seem to have little regard unto the person of the Son in all their religion; for although they may admit of a customary interposition of his name in their religious worship, yet the same distinct veneration of him as of the Father, they seem not to understand, or to be exercised in. Howbeit, all the acceptance of our persons and duties with God depends on this one conditions -- "That we honour the Son, even as we honour the Father." To honour the Son as we ought to honour the Father, is that which makes us Christians, and which nothing else will so do.

This honour of the person of Christ may be considered -- in the duties of it, wherein it doth consist; and in the principle, life, or spring, of those duties.

strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever."

The especial object of divine adoration, the motives unto it, and the nature of it, or what it consisteth in, are here declared.

The object of it is Christ, not separately, but distinctly from the Father, and jointly with him. And he is proposed, 1st, As having fulfilled the work of his mediation in his incarnation and oblation -- as a Lamb slain. 2dly, In his glorious exaltation -- "in the midst of the throne of God." The principal thing that the heathen of old observed concerning the Christian religion, was, that in it "praises were sung to Christ as unto God."

The motives unto this adoration are the unspeakable benefits ¹⁰⁹which we receive by his mediation, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God," &c.

Hereon the same glory, the same honour, is ascribed unto him as unto God the Father: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

The nature of this adoration is described to consist in three things. 1st, Solemn prostration: "And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever." So also is it described, chap. iv. 10, 11. 2dly, In the ascription of all divine honour and glory, as is at large expressed, chap. v. 11-13. 3dly, In the way of expressing the design of their souls in this adoration, which is by the praises: "They sung a new song" -- that is, of praise; for so are all those psalms which have that title of a new song. And in these things -- namely, solemn prostration of soul in the acknowledgment of divine excellencies, ascriptions of glory and honour with praise -- doth religious adoration consist. And they belong not unto the great holy society of them who worship above and here below -- whose hearts are not always ready unto this solemn adoration of the Lamb, and who are not on all occasions exercised therein.

And this adoration of Christ doth differ from the adoration of God, absolutely considered, and of God as the Father, not in its nature, but merely on the account of its especial motives. The principal motive unto the adoration of God, absolutely considered, is the work of creation -- the manifestation of his glory therein -- with all the effects of his power and goodness thereon ensuing. So it is declared, chap. iv. 11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." And the principal motive unto the adoration and worship of God as the Father, is that eternal love, grace, and goodness, which he is the fountain of in a peculiar manner, Eph. i. 4, 5. But the great motive unto the adoration of Christ is the work of redemption, Rev. v. 12, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." The reason whereof is given, verses 9, 10, "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood; and made us unto our God kings and priests." The adoration is the same, verse 13, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." But the immediate motives of it are different, as its objects are distinct.

Herein no small part of the life of the Christian religion doth consist. The humbling of our souls before the Lord Christ, from an apprehension of his divine excellencies -- the ascription of glory, honour, praise, with thanksgiving unto him, on the great motive of the work of redemption with the blessed effects thereof -- are things wherein the life of faith is continually exercised; nor can we have any evidence of an interest in that blessedness which consists in the eternal assignation of all glory and praise unto him in heaven, if we are not exercised unto this worship of him here on earth.

2dly, Invocation is the second general branch of divine honour -- of that honour which is due and paid unto the Son, as unto the Father. This is the first exercise of divine faith -- the breath of the spiritual life. And it consisteth in two things, or hath two parts. (1st,) An ascription of all divine properties and excellencies unto him whom we invoke. This is essential unto prayer, which without it is but vain babbling. Whoever comes unto God hereby, "must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (2dly,) There is in it also a representation of our wills, affections, and desires of our souls, unto him on whom we call, with an expectation of being heard and relieved, by virtue of his infinitely divine excellencies. This is the proper acting of faith with respect unto ourselves; and hereby it is our duty to give honour unto the person of Christ.

When he himself died in the flesh, he committed his departing soul by solemn invocation into the hands of his Father, Ps. xxxi. 5; Luke xxiii. 46, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." And to evidence that it is the will of God that we should honour the Son, as we honour the Father, even as the Son himself in his human nature, who is our example, honoured the Father -- he who first died in the faith of the Gospel, bequeathed his departing soul into the hands of Jesus Christ by solemn invocation, Acts vii. 59, "They stoned Stephen, ἐπικαλούμενον, solemnly invoking, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And having by faith and prayer left his own soul safe in the hands of the Lord Jesus, he adds one petition more unto him, wherewith he died: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," verse 60. Herein did he give divine honour unto Christ in the especial invocation of his name, in the highest instances that can be conceived. In his first request, wherein he committed his departing soul into his hands, he ascribed unto him divine omniscience, omnipresence, love, and power; and in the latter, for his enemies, divine authority and mercy, to be exercised in the pardon of sin. In his example is the rule established for the especial invocation of Christ for the effects of divine power and mercy.

Hence the apostle describeth the church, or believers, and distinguisheth it, or them, from all others, by the charge of this duty, 1 Cor. i. 2, "With all that call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." To call on the name of the Lord Jesus expresseth solemn invocation in the way of religious worship. The Jews did call on the name of God. All others in their way called on the names of their gods. This is that whereby the church is distinguished from them all -- it calls on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He requires that, as we believe on God, that is, the Father, so we should believe on him also; and therein honour the Son, as we honour the Father, John xiv. 1. The nature of this faith, and the manner how it is exercised on Christ, we shall declare afterwards. But the apostle, treating of the nature and efficacy of this invocation, affirms, that we cannot call on him in whom we have not believed, Rom. x. 14. Whence it follows, on the contrary, that he on whom we are bound to believe, on him it is our duty to call. So the whole Scripture is closed with a prayer of the church unto the Lord Christ, expressing their faith in him: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," Rev. xxii. 20.

There is not any one reason of prayer -- not any one motive unto it -- not any consideration of its use or efficacy -- but renders this peculiar invocation of Christ a necessary duty. Two things in general are required to render the duty of invocation lawful and useful. First, That it have a proper object. Secondly, That it have prevalent motives and encouragements unto it. These in concurrence are the formal reason and ground of all religious worship in general, and of prayer in particular. So are they laid down as the foundation of all religion, Exod. xx. 2, 3, "I am the Lord thy God" -- that is, the proper object of all religious worship -- "which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;" which being summarily and typically representative of all divine benefits, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, is the great motive thereunto. The want of both these in all mere creatures, saints and angels, makes the invocation of them, not only useless, but idolatrous. But they both eminently concur in the person of Christ, and his acting towards us. All the perfections of the divine nature are in him; whence he is the proper object of religious invocation. On this account when he acted in and towards the church as the great angel of the covenant, God instructed the people unto all religious observance of him, and obedience unto him, Exod. xxiii. 21, "Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him." Because the name of God was in him -- that is, the divine nature, with sovereign authority to punish or pardon sin -- therefore was all religious obedience due unto him. And no motives are wanting hereunto. All that the Lord Christ hath done for us, and all the principles of love, grace, compassion, and power, from whence what he hath so done did proceed, are all of this nature; and they are accompanied with the encouragement of his relation unto us, and charge concerning us. Take away this duty, and the peculiar advantage of the Christian religion is destroyed.

We have lived to see the utmost extremes that the Christian religion can divert into. Some, with all earnestness, do press the formal invocation of saints and angels as our duty; and some will not grant that it is lawful for us so to call on Christ himself.

The Socinians grant generally that it is lawful for us to call on Christ; but they deny that it is our duty at any time so to do. But as they own that it is not our duty, so on their principles it cannot be lawful. Denying his divine person, they leave him not the proper object of prayer. For prayer without an ascription of divine excellencies -- as omniscience, omnipresence, and almighty power -- unto him whom we invoke, is but vain babbling, that hath nothing of the nature of true prayer in it; and to make such ascriptions unto him who by nature is not God, is idolatrous.

The solemn ordinary worship of the church, and so of private believers in their families and closets, is under an especial directory and guidance. For the person of the Father -- as the eternal fountain of power, grace, and mercy -- is the formal object of our prayers, unto whom our supplications are directed. The divine nature, also lately considered, is the object of natural worship and invocation; but it is the same divine nature, in the person of the Father, that is the proper object of evangelical worship and invocation. So our Saviour hath taught us to call on God under the name and notion of a father, Matt. vi. 9; that is, his God and our God, his Father and our Father, John xx. 17. And this invocation is to be by and in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, through the aid of the Holy Ghost. He is herein considered as the mediator between God and man -- as the Holy Ghost is he by whom supplies of grace, enabling us unto the acceptable performance of our duties are actually communicated unto us. This is the way whereby God will be glorified. This is the mystery of our religion, that we worship God according to the economy of his wisdom and grace, wherein he doth dispense of himself unto us, in the persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Otherwise he will not be honoured or worshipped by us. And those who in their worship or invocation do attempt an approach unto the divine nature as absolutely considered, without respect unto

the dispensation of God in the distinct persons of the holy Trinity, do reject the mystery of the Gospel, and all the benefit of it. So is it with many. And not a few, who pretend a great devotion unto God, do supply other things into the room of Christ, 113as saints and angels -- rejecting also the aids of the Spirit to comply with imaginations of their own, whose as distance herein they more approve of.

But this is the nature and method of ordinary solemn evangelical invocation. So it is declared, Eph. ii. 18, "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." It is the Father unto whom we have our access, whom we peculiarly invoke; as it is expressed, chap. iii. 14-16, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you," &c. But it is through him -- that is, by Christ in the exercise of his mediatory office -- that we have this access unto the Father; we ask in his name, and for his sake, John xiv. 13, 14; xvi. 23, 24. They did so of old, though not in that express exercise of faith which we now attain unto. Dan. ix. 17, "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for the Lord's sake." All this are we enabled unto by one Spirit -- through the aids and assistance of the Spirit of grace and supplication, Rom. viii. 26, 27. So that prayer is our crying -- "Abba, Father," by the Spirit of the Son, Gal. iv. 6. This is farther declared, Heb. iv. 15, 16; x. 19-22. Herein is the Lord Christ considered, not absolutely with respect unto his divine person, but with respect unto his office, that through "him our faith and hope might be in God," 1 Peter i. 21.

Wherefore, it being our duty, as hath been proved, to invoke the name of Christ in a particular manner, and this being the ordinary solemn way of the worship of the church -- we may consider on what occasions, and in what seasons, this peculiar invocation of Christ, who in his divine person is both our God and our advocate, is necessary for us, and most acceptable unto him.

(1st.) Times of great distresses in conscience through temptations and desertions, are seasons requiring an application unto Christ by especial invocation. Persons in such conditions, when their souls, as the Psalmist speaks, are overwhelmed in them, are continually solicitous about compassion and deliverance. Some relief, some refreshment, they often find in pity and compassion from them who either have been in the same condition themselves, or by Scripture light do know the terror of the Lord in these things. When their complaints are despised, and their troubles ascribed unto other causes than what they are really sensible of, and feel within themselves -- as is commonly done by physicians of no value -- it is an aggravation of their distress and sorrow. And they greatly value every sincere endeavour for relief, either by counsel or prayer. In this state and condition the Lord Christ in the Gospel is proposed as full of tender compassion -- as he alone who is able to relieve 114them. In that himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and knows how to have compassion on them that are out of the way, Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15; v. 2. So is he also, as he alone who is able to succour, to relieve, and to deliver them. "He is able to succour them that are tempted," chap. ii. 18. Hereon are they drawn, constrained, encouraged to make applications unto him by prayer, that he would deal with them according to his compassion and power. This is a season rendering the discharge of this duty necessary. And hereby have innumerable souls found consolation, refreshment, and deliverance. A time of trouble is a time of the especial exercise of faith in Christ. So himself gives direction, John xiv. 1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." Distinct acting of faith on Christ are the great means of supportment and relief in trouble. And it is by especial invocation, whereby they put forth and exert themselves.

An instance hereof, as unto temptation, and the distress wherewith it is attended, we have in the apostle Paul. He had "a thorn in the flesh," "a messenger of Satan to buffet" him. Both expressions declare the deep sense he had of his temptation, and the perplexity wherewith it was accompanied. "For this cause he

besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him," 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8. He applied himself solemnly unto prayer for its removal, and that frequently. And it was the Lord -- that is, the Lord Jesus Christ -- unto whom he made his application. For so the name Lord is to be interpreted -- if there be nothing contrary in the context -- as the name of God is of the Father, by virtue of that rule, 1 Cor. viii. 6, "To us there is one God, the Father; and one Lord Jesus Christ." And it is evident also in the context. The answer he received unto his prayer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power [strength] is made perfect in weakness". And whose power that was, who gave him that answer, he declares in the next words, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me," that is, the power of him on whom he called, who gave him that answer, "My power is made perfect in weakness."

(2dly,) Times of gracious discoveries either of the glory of Christ in himself, or of his love unto us, are seasons that call for this duty. The glory of Christ in his person and offices is always the same, and the revelation that is made of it in the Scripture varies not; but -- as unto our perception and apprehension of it, whereby our hearts and minds are affected with it in an especial manner -- there are apparent seasons of it which no believers are unacquainted withal. Sometimes such a sense of it is attained under the dispensation of the Word; wherein as Christ on the one hand is set forth evidently crucified before our eyes, so on the other he is gloriously exalted. Sometimes it is so in prayer, in meditation, in contemplation on him. As an ability was given unto the bodily sight of Stephen, to see, upon the opening of the heavens, "the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand," Acts vii. 55, 56 -- so he opens the veil sometimes, and gives a clear, affecting discovery of his glory unto the minds and souls of believers; and in such seasons are they drawn forth and excited unto invocation and praise. So Thomas -- being surprised with an apprehension and evidence of his divine glory and power after his resurrection, wherein he was declared to be the Son of God with power, Rom. i. 4 -- cried unto him, "My Lord and my God," John xx. 28. There was in his words both a profession of his own faith and a solemn invocation of Christ. When, therefore, we have real discoveries of the glory of Christ, we cannot but speak to him, or of him. "These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him," John xii. 41. And Stephen, upon a view of it in the midst of his enraged enemies, testified immediately, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." And thereby was he prepared for that solemn invocation of his name which he used presently after, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Acts vii. 56, 59. And so, also, upon his appearance as the Lamb, to open the book of prophecies; wherein there was an eminent manifestation of his glory -- seeing none else could be found in heaven, or earth, or under the earth, that was able to open the book, or so much as to look thereon," Rev. v. 3. "The four and twenty elders fell down before him," and presenting all the prayers of the saints, "sang a new song" of praise unto him, verses 8-10. This is our duty, this will be our wisdom, upon affecting discoveries of the glory of Christ; namely, to apply ourselves unto him by invocation or praise; and thereby will the refreshment and advantage of them abide upon our minds.

So is it also as unto his love. The love of Christ is always the same and equal unto the church. Howbeit there are peculiar seasons of the manifestation and application of a sense of it unto the souls of believers. So it is when it is witnessed unto them, or shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. Then is it accompanied with a constraining power, to oblige us to live unto him who died for use and rose again, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. And of our spiritual life unto Christ, invocation of him is no small portion and this sense of his love we might enjoy more frequently than for the most part we do, were we not so much wanting unto ourselves and our own concerns. For although it be an act of sovereign grace in God to grant it unto us, and affect us with it, as it seems good unto him, yet is our duty required to dispose our hearts unto its reception. 116Were we diligent in casting out all that "filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness" which

corrupts our affections, and disposes the mind to abound in vain imaginations; were our hearts more taken off from the love of the world, which is exclusive of a sense of divine love; did we more meditate on Christ and his glory; -- we should more frequently enjoy these constraining visits of his love than now we do. So himself expresseth it, Rev. iii. 20, "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." He makes intimation of his love and kindness unto us. But oftentimes we neither hear his voice when he speaks, nor do open our hearts unto him. So do we lose that gracious, refreshing sense of his love, which he expresseth in that promise, "I will sup with him, and he shall sup with me." No tongue can express that heavenly communion and blessed intercourse which is intimated in this promise. The expression is metaphorical, but the grace expressed is real, and more valued than the whole world by all that have experience of it. This sense of the love of Christ and the effect of it in communion with him, by prayer and praises, is divinely set forth in the Book of Canticles. The church therein is represented as the spouse of Christ; and, as a faithful spouse, she is always either solicitous about his love, or rejoicing in it. And when she hath attained a sense of it, she aboundeth in invocation admiration and praise. So doth the church of the New Testament, upon an apprehension of his love, and the unspeakable fruits of it: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen," Rev. i. 5, 6. This, therefore, is another season that calls for this duty.

(3dly;) Times of persecution for his Name's sake, and for the profession of the gospel, are another season rendering this peculiar invocation of Christ both comely and necessary. Two things will befall the minds of believers in such a season; -- [1st,] that their thoughts will be neatly exercised about him, and conversant with him. They cannot but continually think and meditate on him for whom they suffer. None ever suffered persecution on just grounds, with sincere ends, and in a due manner, but it was so with them. The invincible reasons they have to suffer for him -- taken from his person love, grace, and authority -- from what he is in himself, what he hath done for them, and what account of all things is to be given unto him -- do continually present themselves unto their minds. Wildernesses, prisons, and dungeons, have been filled with thoughts of Christ and his love. And many in former and latter ages have given an account of their communion and holy intercourse with the Lord Christ under their restraints and sufferings. And those who at any time have made an entrance into such a condition, will all of them give in the testimony of their own experience in this matter. [2dly,] Such persons have deep and fixed apprehensions of the especial concernment which the Lord Christ hath in them as unto their present condition -- as also of his power to support them, or to work out their deliverance. They know and consider -- that "in all their afflictions he is afflicted" -- suffers in all their sufferings -- is persecuted in all their persecutions; that in them all he is full of love, pity, and unspeakable compassion towards them; that his grace is sufficient for them -- that his power shall be perfected in their weakness, to carry them through all their sufferings, unto his and their own glory. In these circumstances, it is impossible for them who are under the conduct of his Spirit, not to make especial applications continually unto him for those aids of grace -- for those pledges of love and mercy -- for those supplies of consolation and spiritual refreshments, which their condition calls for. Wherefore, in this state, the invocation of Christ is the refuge and sheet-anchor of the souls of them who truly believe in him. So it was unto all the holy martyrs of old, and in latter ages.

This doctrine and duty is not for them who are at ease. The afflicted, the tempted, the persecuted, the spiritually disconsolate, will prize it, and be found in the practice of it. And all those holy souls who, in most ages, on the account of the profession of the gospel, have been reduced unto outwardly unbelievable distresses, have, as was said, left their testimony unto this duty, and the benefits of it. The refreshment

which they found therein was a sufficient balance against the weight of all outward calamities, enabling them to rejoice under them with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." This is the church's reserve against all the trials it may be exercised withal, and all the dangers whereunto it is exposed. Whilst believers have liberty of access unto him in their supplications, who hath all power in his hand, who is full of ineffable love and compassion towards them, especially as suffering for his sake -- they are more than conquerors in all their tribulations.

(4thly,) When we have a due apprehension of the eminent acting of any grace in Christ Jesus, and withal a deep and abiding sense of our own want of the same grace, it is a season of especial application unto him by prayer for the increase of it. All graces as unto their habit were equal in Christ -- they were all in him in the highest degree of perfection; and every one of them did he exercise in its due manner and measure on all just occasions. But outward causes and circumstances gave opportunity unto the exercise of some of them in a way more eminent and conspicuous than others were exercised in. For instance; -- such were his unspeakable condescension, self-denial, and patience in sufferings; which the apostle unto this purpose insists upon, Phil. ii. 5-8. Now the great design of all believers is to be like Jesus Christ, in all grace, and all the exercise of it. He is in all things their pattern and example. Wherefore, when they have a view of the glory of any grace as it was exercised in Christ, and withal a sense of their own defect and want therein -- conformity unto him being their design -- they cannot but apply themselves unto him in solemn invocation, for a farther communication of that grace unto them, from his stores and fulness. And these things mutually promote one another in us, if duly attended unto. A due sense of our own defect in any grace will farther us in the prospect of the glory of that grace in Christ. And a view, a due contemplation, of the glorious exercise of any grace in him, will give us light to discover our own great defect therein, and want thereof. Under a sense of both, an immediate application unto Christ by prayer would be all unspeakable furtherance of our growth in grace and conformity unto him. Nor can there be any more effectual way or means to draw supplies of grace from him, to draw water from the wells of salvation. When, in a holy admiration of, and fervent love unto, any grace as eminently exercised in and by him, with a sense of our own want of the same grace, we ask it of him in faith -- he will not deny it unto us. So the disciples, upon the prescription of a difficult duty, unto whose due performance a good measure of faith was required -- out of a sense of the all-fulness of him, and their own defect in that grace which was necessary unto the peculiar duty there prescribed -- immediately pray unto him, saying, "Lord, increase our faith," Luke xvii. 5. The same is the case with respect unto any temptation that may befall us, wherewith he was exercised, and over which he prevailed.

(5thly,) The time of death, whether natural, or violent for his sake, is a season of the same nature. So Stephen recommended his departing soul into his hands with solemn prayer. "Lord Jesus," said he, "receive my spirit." To the same purpose have been the prayers of many of his faithful martyrs in the flames, and under the sword. In the same manner doth the faith of innumerable holy souls work in the midst of their deathbed groans. And the more we have been in the exercise of faith on him in our lives, the more ready will it be in the approaches of death, to make its resort unto him in a peculiar manner.

And it may be other instances of an alike nature may be given unto the same purpose.

An answer unto an inquiry which may possibly arise from what we have insisted on, shall close this discourse. For whereas the Lord Jesus Christ, as Mediator, doth intercede with the Father for us, it may be inquired, Whether we may pray unto him, that he would so intercede on our behalf; whether this be comprised in the duty of invocation or prayer unto him?

Ans. 1. There is no precedent nor example of any such thing, of any such prayer, in the Scripture; and it is not safe for us to venture on duties not exemplified therein. Nor can any instance of a necessary duty be given, of whose performance we have not an example in the Scripture. 2. In the invocation of Christ, we "honour the Son, even as we honour the Father." Wherefore his divine person is therein the formal object of our faith. We consider him not therein as acting in his mediatory office towards God for us, but as he who hath the absolute power and disposal of all the good things we pray for. And in our invocation of him, our faith is fixed on, and terminated on his person. But -- as he is in the discharge of his mediatory office -- through him "our faith and hope are in God," 1 Peter i. 21. He who is the Mediator, or Jesus Christ the Mediator -- as God and man in one person -- is the object of all divine honour and worship. His person, and both his natures in that person, is so the object of religious worship. This is that which we are in the proof and demonstration of. Howbeit it is his divine nature, and not his discharge of the office of mediation, that is the formal reason and object of divine worship. For it consists in an ascription of infinitely divine excellencies and properties unto him whom we so worship. And to do this on any account but of the divine nature, is in itself a contradiction, and in them that do it idolatry. Had the Son of God never been incarnate, he had been the object of all divine worship. And could there have been a mediator between God and us who was not God also, he could never have been the object of any divine worship or invocation. Wherefore Christ the Mediator, God and man in one person, is in all things to be honoured, even as we honour the Father; but it is as he is God, equal with the Father, and not as Mediator -- in which respect he is inferior unto him. With respect unto his divine person, we ask immediately of himself in our supplications, -- as he is Mediator -- we ask of the Father in his name. The different actings of faith on him, under the same distinction shall be declared in the next chapter.

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