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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 12

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. We have thought of Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple. According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth: Thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.” (Psalm 48)

In the course of eleven articles so far, the Sabbath has been traced through Scripture – from its institution at Creation, through the Patriarchal period, its inclusion in the Decalogue, its place in the Mosaic economy, the Lord’s observance of it, and His corrective teaching in the Gospels concerning the excessive ritualism imposed by the Pharisaic elders. The teaching of Christ on this never undermined the Sabbath; rather did it restore it to its original purpose. The transfer from the Jewish day to the first day of the week was observed; an obvious thing to those who were enlightened, but difficult for the Jews in the early days, hence an overlap with both Sabbaths being seen throughout the book of Acts. Then came the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the scattering

of the Jews, the overthrow of the temple and all its ritual and worship, conclusively demonstrating that those things had ‘vanished away’ (cf Hebrews 8:13). Thereafter, the history of the early centuries A.D. was considered, showing that the first day of the week was the accepted Sabbath (as had been set by the Apostles immediately after the Resurrection). In all this, the vital truth is: **the continuance of the Sabbath through all ages**. In this article we will consider more practical teaching – man’s duty to the Sabbath in the present day.

Everything contained in the canon of Scripture relative to this subject conspires to emphasise its supreme importance. Its very antiquity (as old as time); its essential moral nature (being a part of the Ten Commandments); its dignity so great that it rises high above Mosaic ceremony (the holy prophets insist upon it); the re-establishment of its true meaning and change to the first day of the week (by no less than the Lord Himself). Christ erects this day, as it were, as a memorial to His mighty victory. This day stands as a monument. Christians’ observance of it is a public acknowledgement of the two mightiest works of Eternal God: **creation** and **redemption**. The hallowing of the Sabbath is the very badge of Christian profession. The hours of the Sabbath are for meditation upon the Mighty Creator God in all His sovereignty and power; the wonder of His providence; His immeasurable love; His amazing grace in salvation to miserable wretches of earth. If this holy day be thus spent, it is one of the chief means of sanctification, drawing the saints closer to our God – which both creation and redemption were destined to effect.

Further to this, it is a **visible setting forth of true Christianity**, and a majestic representation before the eyes of men of something of God’s holiness, and of His claims and demands upon His creatures. *“For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them...”* (Psalm 48:4-6). This will always be the case as long as the Church on earth endures. The maintenance of the Moral Law is her tower and

bulwark (cf Psalm 48:13), and would prove the same for society in general, if men would only realise (cf Proverbs 14:34)!

Now to come to the practicalities of this, let the question be asked: **what are the actual duties of the Sabbath – both public and private?** This article will begin to answer that question. Before considering any positive injunctions, let it be reiterated that neither the Ceremonial or Judicial aspects of the Mosaic Law are to be re-imposed, at any time. The spirit of bondage and terror contained in that aspect of the Sinaitic Law has passed. Neither must a Pharisaical approach develop, such as is described in the Gospels, and which the Lord rebuked with scathing words and devastating authority. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures will reveal the true position for today: that which is really spiritual; which is truly for the welfare of man; and what are legitimate duties and employments on this day. The opinions and fashions of a corrupt world must be completely set aside, and likewise the leanings and inclinations of a carnal church. We must rise to the standard of the Sabbath as set forth in Holy Writ.

It was earlier stated that the Sabbath is a memorial; something erected to commemorate; a visible, tangible monument. *“Verily My sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you”* (Exodus 31:13). *“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes”* (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). The duty of God’s people is to regard the Sabbath as a **sign** or a **badge** of their profession of the God they serve. They belong to the Covenant of Grace; they are of His Kingdom; they are governed by His law and authority; they testify their allegiance to the Lord who died and rose again. *“Through the blood of the everlasting*

covenant” (cf Hebrews 13:20) they have redemption, and have been brought from darkness into light. Thus the Sabbath rightly interrupts their secular pursuits. After every six days there is a halt. This is the Creation principle. The Lord’s people stop, being summoned to spiritual duties. It is a symbol or sign whereby they declare that the God of Heaven is their God. Like Joshua they are saying: “*therefore will we also serve the Lord; for He is our God*” (Joshua 24:18). “*For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death*” (Psalm 48:14). Before men, angels and devils, they openly identify themselves with the true God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and rested on the seventh day. They uphold the principle of ‘one-in-seven’ on the first day of the week.

Hereby they also avow and give open and public declaration that, on that day, the sinners’ redemption was finalised, a new creation accomplished and mortality swallowed up of life. The Saviour is alive from the dead, “*having spoiled principalities and powers*” (Colossians 2:15). All this they acknowledge by setting aside work, and resting from their labour on the Sabbath. Something of the everlasting covenant and eternal purpose of God is set forth as His people cease from their labour, and reverently and solemnly observe this holy day. It is a ‘sign throughout all generations’ states the Word of God (cf Exodus 31:13).

But it is more than just a sign: “*Moreover also I gave them My sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.*” (Ezekiel 20:12). It was stated earlier that **sanctification** was also in view when the Sabbath was ordained. God declares that He gave the Sabbath for the promotion of sanctification. This is the work of God the Holy Spirit – the inner effectual working which separates a person from sin, the world and fleshly desires, and turns their mind and heart unto holiness. In this, amazing wisdom can be seen: God sanctifying a day, setting it apart for holy things, so that by its due observance His people might be sanctified also. The external

observance is a sign, but also, by it the inward man is consecrated. Does not this give added significance to the Lord's words when He said: "*The sabbath was made for man*" (Mark 2:27)? It was made, by God, for His people! It is their solemn duty to observe it, for thereby is the work of sanctification promoted and furthered. Show me a Christian who is lax in Sabbath observance, and I will show you a Christian where the work of sanctification is at a standstill; or worse, has never really begun and such was only a 'stony ground hearer'.

Even before man fell, God deemed it necessary for him to have a Sabbath; a day which should be devoted to his Maker; a time set aside when all his powers should be mustered and sanctified unto the Lord, in order that his knowledge and service might be heightened and confirmed. If this was necessary for unfallen Adam, then how much more needful it must be for Christians in the present day.

Now regarding all that has been said so far, some critics are bound to retort, 'but in this gospel and spiritual age, every day is a Sabbath; we are to do all things every day for God's glory'; and they are quick to quote: "*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross... Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days*" (Colossians 2:14,16). However, they are willingly ignorant of such verses as these: "*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.*" (Galatians 4:9-10). The weekly observance is conspicuous by its absence from that list. How men will wrest the Scriptures! God's holy Sabbath was never a 'weak and beggarly element'. It was a part of His perfect creation, hallowed to Himself, and made for man, for his spiritual good, for all time! Of course, God is also to be glorified on the other six days of the week. All that a Christian does, even to eating and drinking, is to be done unto His

honour (cf 1 Corinthians 10:31); but that is nothing to do with the Sabbath. Sabbath means the ‘seventh’, or ‘one-in-seven’, which is special. The intermingling of daily devotions with lawful, secular occupations (which should always be done) does not constitute a holy day and is in no way a substitute for the Sabbath.

To come to a conclusion: the Christians’ foremost practical duty is to keep the great end in view: the Sabbath it is a sign (all men see it), and it is also for the believers’ sanctification. There are two aspects to sanctification: Firstly, **Positional Sanctification** – all believers are saints and are sanctified; set apart by God from all eternity and effectually called in time. “*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours*” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Secondly, **Experimental, or Progressive Sanctification** – the work within the heart, in mortification of the flesh and conformity unto Christ. This is why the unregenerate have no desire for the Sabbath. Man only desires to hallow the Sabbath when he is sanctified of God. The Sabbath is ‘born’ to man when man is truly born of God. Then, where such a true work of grace has been wrought, there is perseverance and progressive sanctification in evidence. Such persons will in no way violate the Sabbath, neither will they be slack in their duty to sanctify it, to the end that they might be sanctified thereby. The Lord’s Day is not the only day in which these things can happen (such a statement is foolish and wholly untrue), but **this** day is wholly devoted to these things. It is a day of spiritual teaching and instruction; it is a day of learning.

The Sabbath day is a sign and a monument both to creation and to redemption; it is also a day for that all-important work of sanctification to be furthered in the heart. Let us be prayerful and diligent that we use this day to the full, for the honour and glory of God.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

SUPREME IN SYMPATHY

– Continued –

[In the first instalment of this article, the necessity for sympathy on the part of a High Priest was established, and consequently the supreme sympathy of Christ, The Great High Priest. Many practical examples of this attribute in Christ are supplied by the Gospel record. The Lord's people today may rest assured of the same sympathy towards themselves, since it springs from three sources: Firstly, His Deity (He is the Eternal, Creating, All-Wise and Immutable God); secondly, His Humanity, in consequence of which He has endured: (1.) the dire effects of man's Fall. From which point we proceed...]

They are also sadly mistaken who maintain that Christ was free from any hurt or malady during His earthly life, quoting in their support the Old Testament stipulations for sacrificial beasts (cf Leviticus 22:17-25), requiring physical perfection. These things written aforetime were merely types and shadows of something greater to come, namely, the moral and spiritual perfectness of Christ, the antitype. No lamb or bullock could attain to sinlessness, being dumb animals – so in these God demanded only the absence of bodily blemishes. The Lord Jesus meanwhile, rendered complete holiness and righteousness unto God, 'fulfilling' the Law in every sense of that word.

Whilst not having any broken bone (cf John 19:36), He was still subjected to afflictions of the flesh; and suffered the ravages of the Fall within His human frame, throughout His mortal life. "*Many a time have they afflicted Me from my youth*" (Psalm 129:1) – long before Calvary, He was daily proving the frailty and mortality of the body. The gospels furnish much more evidence: He hungered (cf Matthew 4:2, Mark 11:12), thirsted (cf John 4:7, 19:28), grew weary (cf John 4:6), even to the point of sleeping in extreme circumstances (cf Mark 4:38); while Matthew translates the words of Isaiah thus: "[He] *Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses*" (Matthew 8:17). The principle of

Christ being ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities’ (cf Hebrews 4:15) is to be understood literally, as well as metaphorically. He was ‘compassed’ with them, and endured them Himself for thirty-three years. “*For He said, Surely they are My people, children that will not lie: so He was their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted...*” (Isaiah 63:8-9) – prophetic words which find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ. These were all part of His divinely-appointed sufferings, and are still greater grounds for His sympathy towards men.

2.) The Sinner’s Lot

The Lord Jesus then, “*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). At which detail, some might raise objection, and ask, ‘since **sin** is so great a part of the human experience, how could Christ, being sinless, truly comprehend the lives of sinful men?’ Indeed, the reader may concur, and further add, that the time when sympathy is most desirable, is in the wake of temptation foolishly indulged, sin rashly committed, guilty fears awakened, and discovery or consequences nervously awaited. How could He ‘who knew no sin’ possibly enter into the mindset of persistent, habitual, self-condemned sinners, and sympathise with them?

The answer is contained within the same verse: “*For He [the Father] hath made Him [the Son] to be sin for us, Who knew no sin*” (2 Corinthians 5:21); a truth confirmed by other scriptures also: “*the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6); “*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many*” (Hebrews 9:28). What exactly is the nature of His ‘sin-bearing’? Some understand it in purely technical terms – that on the dreadful crucifixion day, Christ was sentenced with all the sins of all His people, and suffered all the punishment which those sins demanded – that He carried those sins in the same way a convicted felon might wear a placard announcing his crime upon the gallows. Such an interpretation is true to a point – but the Word of God goes much further, and Peter describes how Christ, “*His own self bare our sins in His own body on [or,*

more accurately, *to] the tree*” (1 Peter 2:24). The horrible aggregated mass of His people’s sins was borne by the Saviour – not by means of a third party, not at a distance, not at ‘arm’s length’ – but ‘by His own self’, and ‘**in** His own body’ – in His own memory, and on His own conscience. Neither was this a momentary transplant of iniquity, at the last instant on Calvary; no, He already bore those sins as He laboured up Golgotha’s slopes towards the awful tree. He had ever been carrying them, throughout His earthly life, as John the Baptist testified when he said, “*Behold the Lamb of God, which **taketh away** the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

Christ was not only required ‘to take sin’, ‘to carry sin’, ‘to bear sin’, ‘to suffer for sin’ – but was actually ‘made to **be** sin’, for us. The language could not be more emphatic. The Lord was caused to know all His people’s sins as though they were His own; to feel within Himself as though He were the committer of every one; at length to be judged as if He were guilty of them all. In the terrible transaction wrought by God, He, though personally faultless, was made to be as sinful as the sinners for whom He died. Here, let believing readers pause a while in contrite reflection, and penitently call again to mind the worst of their former transgressions, the most grievous of past offences, those that still raise the echoes of shame, despite the passage of time. Then consider: Christ knows that iniquity in all its excruciating detail; He comprehended its awfulness far more fully than you; He suffered more pangs of conscience, more agonies of guilt than you. While you cried tears of regret, He sweat great drops of blood; while you were chastened, He was punished; while you felt temporary repercussions, He endured all its spiritual and eternal consequences. And would any dare to suggest that He cannot sympathise with the sinner’s lot?

This also helps to explain the prophetic language of the Psalms, and other Old Testament passages, where the Saviour speaks in first-person terms regarding sin: “*O God, Thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from Thee... Because for Thy sake **I have borne reproach**; shame hath*

*covered my face” (Psalm 69:5, 7). “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger... The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand: **they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck...** For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water” (Lamentations 1:12, 14, 16). This transference of iniquity to the Lord Jesus and its personal consequences for Him, is almost too awful for believing minds to grasp. As an old chorus asks:*

“Oh, make me understand it,
Help me to take it in;
What it meant to Thee, the Holy One,
To bear away my sin.” (K. Kelly)

3.) The Believer’s Condition

Having established just how fully Christ experienced the sinner’s lot, a further objection to answer is this: ‘how can He sympathise with a New Testament believer? What does the Lord Jesus know of faith and its trials, and the struggles of the Christian life, when He had all the advantages and assurances of His own Deity?’ Those who think along such lines have clearly failed to grasp the magnitude of the incarnation, and its implications for the Second Person of the Trinity. He Who was one with God – by Him, with Him, daily rejoicing before Him (cf Proverbs 8:30) – endured an alteration in that relationship by virtue of His nativity on earth. Being made like man, He was subjected to man’s restrictions and limitations; with human eyes that cannot see God, and ears of flesh that cannot hear His voice; a mere five physical senses that are all insensible of spiritual things; obliged to live within the confines of time, on a planet sundered far from the heavenly realms of God and His saints and angels.

To the Saviour, it must have been as though His eyes were blindfolded, His ears stopped and His feet shackled, relative to His former condition in glory. There is good reason why the Devil, in his assault upon the

Lord, framed his first temptation thus: “*If thou be the Son of God...*” (Matthew 4:3) – the impediments of manhood were of such a degree as to call His very Deity into question, and the Adversary surely hoped his impious insinuation might breed the sin of doubt, or even denial.

The Eternal Son, in consequence of His incarnation, was required to do that which, in the bosom of the Father, He had never needed to do before, namely: **pray** to a God whom He could not see; and live by **faith** in the invisible. This is precisely the manner of life to which Christians are called in this New Testament age. Concerning the Saviour’s prayers, much is recorded in the Gospel accounts: their frequency, intensity and fervour, which so impressed the disciples that they begged: “*Lord, teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1); His unswerving confidence in prayer: “*Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always*” (John 11:41-42), coupled with total submission to the sovereign purposes of God: “*Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done*” (Luke 22:42). In the discipline of prayer, He is completely acquainted with, and sympathetic to, the believer’s condition.

The notion of **faith** on the part of Christ is rarely considered. However, describing the nature of His humanity and oneness with men in Hebrews chapter 2, the apostle is inspired to add a remarkable quotation: “*For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, ‘I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee’. And again, ‘I will put My trust in Him’. And again, ‘Behold I and the children which God hath given Me’. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same*” (Hebrews 2:11-14, punctuation added). The second of these Old Testament references might equally well have been taken from 2 Samuel 22:3, Psalm 16:1, Psalm 18:2, or Isaiah 8:17; the inference is the same: the Saviour became like His people in the exercise of faith. Though He

were the Son, yet He learned what it was to trust in God, in the things which He suffered. In the New Testament Epistles, one often encounters this expression: ‘the faith **of** Jesus Christ’ (e.g. Galatians 2:16, 20; Philippians 3:9, James 2:1). This is not necessarily a poor translation, or unfortunate choice of English preposition, but accurately describes Christ’s own faith. For He is both the object of faith, and the highest example of faith. True Christians not only have faith **in** Christ; they have faith **like** Christ. Indeed, had it not been for the Saviour’s absolute belief in the Redemptive purposes of God the Father, He might not have ventured Himself to fulfil them, or else failed to accomplish the Divine objective, and there would be no way of salvation for men! Thus, the Lord Jesus wholly sympathises with His people as they live the life of faith here below.

4.) Even Death

It can accurately be stated that the Lord’s experience of the human condition is more extensive and complete than that of any reader of these words – for by virtue of being able to take up and read this article, it is evident that the recipient has sufficient ability, and is in possession of physical and mental faculties, and is still alive. By contrast, the Lord Jesus has known what it is to be betrayed, to lose liberty, to be denied justice in three successive courts, to suffer horrific physical violence against himself, to receive a sentence of death, and experience its execution. He has felt what it is to **die**. *“Jesus... was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death... that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Hebrews 2:9); *“being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8). He shared in the portion of mortal men to the very last extremity, had meted out upon Himself the worst acts of brutality that fallen minds could devise, and was killed as though a malefactor guilty of capital crimes. In the mercies of God, relatively few of His children are caused to walk so severe a path, and face such grievous trials: *“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against*

Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:3-4). But even those who do, are not beyond the remit of His sympathy, who trod this blood-stained track before them. Indeed, great comfort lies here for every aged and dying saint, who can rest assured that the Good Shepherd Himself has gone through the Valley of the Shadow of Death itself in advance, and ‘knoweth the way that they take’ (cf Job 23:10).

“Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before;
And he that to God’s kingdom comes
Must enter by this door.” (Baxter)

Part III: HIS SYMPATHY AS GOD AND MAN

Christ’s sympathy is of a supreme degree, both by virtue of His Deity, and His humanity. Through the incarnation, He has added to His Divine qualifications a first-hand knowledge of the Fall and its effects; as substitute and sin-bearer He has felt the sad lot of the sinner; as one separated from God by mortality He has known the faith and prayer which belong to the believer’s life; and being found in fashion as a man, He has suffered fallen man’s ultimate doom, namely death. However, His measure of sympathy is exalted to a still higher order when we consider the implications of His **dual nature** – that He is Deity and Humanity combined – at once the Son of God **and** Son of Man. In this He is unique, and uniquely sympathetic towards His people.

Those who find fault with the present subject are likely to take this point and wrest it in support of their counter-arguments, saying: ‘surely Christ’s Deity reduced the attendant difficulties of His life upon earth? No doubt His absolute power and knowledge, and the ability to accomplish miracles at will was an unfair advantage, which greatly eased

His passage through this world, and made it utterly unlike the ordinary experience of humankind!’ Perhaps the reader too has occasionally thought along these lines, and entertained the notion that the Lord’s intrinsic Godhood must have alleviated, at least to some extent, the things that He suffered. However, a brief reflection upon the Scriptures will show the very opposite to be the case. The Lord’s Deity coupled with His humanity was a cause of far greater suffering, and thereby causes Him to have a much deeper sympathy. Consider:

1.) His Divine Temptations

Not only was the Saviour ‘in all points tempted like as we are’, He was tested and tried in many, many **more** ways than human minds can ever comprehend. His Deity did not render Him impervious to temptation as some have suggested, for why else would the Devil make such a sustained attack and thus assault Him in the wilderness? In fact, the record of that encounter proves that there were many temptations specific to Incarnate God alone. Already that insidious suggestion “*if Thou be the Son of God*” has been mentioned – a matter of concern only to God’s Son Himself. The Adversary then proceeded, “*command that these stones be made bread*” (cf Matthew 4:3), putting his diabolical finger upon the point of conflict between Christ’s human flesh (He hungered) and Divine nature (He could do all things); the temptation to selfishly deploy supernatural means to change the God-appointed course of events. It was a temptation renewed on numerous occasions, by means of such diverse agents as James and John (cf Luke 9:54), Peter in Gethsemane (cf Matthew 26:51-54) the crowds around the cross (cf Matthew 27:40), and even one of the co-accused (cf Luke 23:39).

The Devil’s other temptations were likewise targeted to the Christ of God – to declare and glorify Himself by alternative means, or to effect salvation by a way other than the cross (cf Matthew 4:5-10). Little wonder that when Peter later re-echoed the same temptation, he was rebuked in such strong language: “*Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an*

offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). Here is a small part of the battle with which the Lord Jesus sustained, from the commencement of His earthly life, to its end – exceeding anything and everything to which sinful men could be subjected. *“In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted”* (Hebrews 2:18). Let none then suggest He is unfeeling, or unsympathetic!

2.) The Burden of Omniscience

Christ’s Divine knowledge, and foreknowledge of all things, in no way lessened His afflictions in this world. Quite the reverse. Let the reader call to mind some painful or tragic circumstance in his or her own life, such as an accident, injury, or sudden bereavement. Then think what it would have been to know every detail of that trauma and suffering in advance; and also to know the exact time to the minute that it would occur; and to be duty-bound to go through with those events notwithstanding; and to be disbelieved or refuted by those unto whom one confided beforehand. What a dreadful exacerbation of suffering this would be – perpetual knowledge of an inexorable and impending disaster, its awfulness unrelieved by ignorance! Such was the terrible burden of omniscience borne by the Lord Jesus, to which He testified: *“I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted”* (Psalm 88:15). Yet wonderfully, *“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth...”* (John 18:4).

What a mercy is human naivety, imperception and forgetfulness – mercies that the Saviour was denied. Imagine if one were to have complete knowledge of the thoughts of others concerning oneself – the scorn hidden behind a superficial smile, the hypocrisy of outward appearances, the personal reproaches uttered afterward in private, the doubts or treachery festering in the hearts of friends – what a dreadful curse it would be. The Lord suffered it. *“Certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said,*

*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?” (Matthew 9:3-4); “The Pharisees . . . said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts” (Matthew 12:24-25); “Many therefore of His **disciples**, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you? . . . For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him” (John 6:60-61, 64). Could there be any sorrow like unto the sorrow endured by Christ? His omniscience served both to magnify those sorrows – and also increase His sympathy for suffering men.*

3.) The Necessity of Omnipotence

Why did the plan of salvation require the incarnation of God? Was there no man, or angel who could have acted as the Substitute, and stood as Surety for the elect people of God? No – no less a being than God Himself could accomplish this mighty work. For nothing short of Divine Omnipotence could bear the penalty that had to be exacted, and endure the full weight of the wrath due against sin. Let this point be grasped: Christ’s almighty power did not reduce His sufferings, but rather, enabled Him to suffer to a greater extreme.

The practical realities of this are witnessed in Gethsemane, in the prelude to Calvary, where, *“being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44). The Lord was subjected to mental and spiritual torments so severe, that the very fabric of His mortal flesh began to be imperilled, and its natural processes broke down. This would surely spell immediate death in the case of a mere human – but He was uniquely capacitated for suffering. Even upon the cross itself, receiving all the physical injuries inflicted by the agents of the Sanhedrim, Herod and Pilate, He could not die by the violence of men, however fatal it might be: He stated: *“I lay down My life, that I might take it again. **No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.** I have power to lay it down, and I have*

power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:18-19). For a human being in these circumstances, unconsciousness or death might be considered a merciful release from the torture endured – but not so for Christ. No amount of bodily harm could produce an involuntary death. He would willingly suffer every last agony and pain required in the judgmental purposes of God, as it was commanded, before relinquishing mortal existence at His **own volition**. “*And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost*” (Mark 15:37).

There is another striking fact about the Saviour’s death upon Calvary. Think of the heavenly arithmetic of the situation: what is the number of God’s elect? What is the number of all their sins? What is the sum total of death sentences warranted by that great company of sinners? What is the measure of their indebtedness to the broken Law of God, calculated in blood? It is beyond computation, known only to God. How then could a single Substitute possibly discharge that fearful debt? A mortal man could not do it – he has only one life to give, one death to die, and that would not be sufficient to answer for his own sins, much less the sins of a multitude. The only acceptable Substitute must be God manifested in flesh: human, in order to be capable of dying; Divine, to be able to die many deaths in one. His omnipotence fitted Him for this. He endured not one death only, but the death of every man in whose stead He stood. The hymnwriter expressed it perfectly, who wrote:

“Thy cross, not mine, O Christ, has borne the awful load
Of sins that none could bear, but the incarnate God.
Thy death, not mine, O Christ, has paid the ransom due;
Ten thousand deaths like mine would have been all too few.”

(Bonar)

And can He fail to sympathise with you, believing reader, Who died with your salvation set before Him, your name upon His heart, your sins upon His conscience, and your death in His death?

4.) **The Consequences of Immortality**

The best of human sympathisers, and most empathetic of one's friends, are of little use or benefit if they be absent, out of contact, or otherwise insensible to our needs. There is little comfort in thinking upon an individual who has shared in similar circumstances to oneself, if those circumstances proved to be their downfall. The living cannot receive sympathy from the dead. If the record of Christ and the Gospel ended with a tomb in Jerusalem, all the foregoing remarks about His sympathy would pale to insignificance. But it is not the end; for His humanity is joined with Deity; His mortality with immortality. The living, rising, ascending Saviour appears and announces Himself thus: "*I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen*" (Revelation 1:18). This is the wondrous consequence of His dual nature: as mortal man, He has a perfect sympathy for His people, even unto death. As immortal God, He has the power of an endless life, and is forever present to render His aid, and apply His sympathy, saying: "*lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matthew 28:20).

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus, on account of His Godhood, has been received back into heaven, and ascended up where He was before. The Great High Priest, "*is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*", returning through the veil into glory, "*Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*" (Hebrews 9:24, 6:20). Though He has reassumed His native place, He occupies it in a different form than He had before. For still He wears His human flesh, and continues to be, "*like unto the Son of Man*" (Revelation 1:13) in glory. This He has done '**for us**'. What a comfort to contemplate His position in heaven, in combination with His sympathy for the saints on earth. He Who 'prays for us, that our faith fail not' (cf Luke 22:32), Who "*ever liveth to make intercession*" (Hebrews 7:25), Who is our Advocate with the Father and Propitiation for our sins (cf 1 John 2:1-2), Who has gone to prepare a place for us (cf

John 14:2-3), and will ultimately confess us before His Father which is in Heaven (cf Matthew 10:32), is also supremely sympathetic to our case. What confidence His people can have in the works of the Saviour on their behalf!

“With joy we meditate the grace
Of our High Priest above;
His heart is made of tenderness,
And overflows with love.” (Watts)

Lest any should harbour misgivings, and fear that the Lord’s intimate knowledge of the human condition might produce an aversion in His Holy mind; or that the depths of His humiliating incarnation are a source of resentment unto Him – hear the consoling language with which He speaks from heaven, the kinship and familial delight: “*Behold I and the children which God hath given Me*”! Far exceeding the Christians’ privilege to name Christ as their Saviour and Friend, is the wonder of this truth: “*He is not ashamed to call them brethren*” (Hebrews 2:13, 11).

R. J. Steward

Christ is altogether lovely, in the relation of an Advocate... He makes our cause His own, and acts for us in heaven, as if for Himself (cf Hebrews 4:15). He is touched with a most tender understanding of our troubles and dangers, and is not only one with us by way of representation, but also one with us in respect of sympathy and affection... In heaven, Christ our Advocate tracks our cause and business, as His great and primary design and business. For this reason, in Hebrews 7:25, He is said to ‘live forever to make intercession for us’. It is as if our concerns were so attended to by Him there, that all the glory and honour which is paid Him in heaven would not divert him one moment from our business... In word, He obtains for us all the mercies for which He pleads. No cause miscarries in His hand, which He undertakes (cf Romans 8:33-34). What a lovely Advocate is Christ for believers!

John Flavel (1627 – 1691)

EDITORIAL

The attention of the world's media, and that of the 'christian' press, was recently attracted by news of an alteration made to 'The Lord's Prayer' within the Roman Catholic church. In summary, the third edition of the *Messale Romano* (Italian Liturgy), published May 2019, has the wording of the sixth petition changed to: "do not abandon us to temptation" (*non abbandonarci alla tentazione*). This is hardly news. It brings the Missal in to line with the Vatican's 2008 Italian-language Bible translation, and represents the Papal interpretation of these words. Within Protestant denominations, some have responded with noisy disdain (while conveniently overlooking the fact that at least a dozen English Bible versions have made a similar dilution of the text). Others have, privately or publicly, admitted to confusion regarding the words: "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13, Luke 11:4).

The same word 'temptation' (Greek: *peirasmon*) is used in Scripture both to describe times of affliction and trial (cf Luke 22:28, Acts 20:19, 1 Peter 1:6), and also the enticement and inducements of sin (cf Luke 4:13, 1 Timothy 6:9). There is a close relationship between the two aspects – the former may be a test of an individual's physical or mental strength and of faith in God's providence; the latter is a test of moral or ethical resolve, and faith in God's commandments. In both situations, God is sovereign, and exercises His Divine control. This is not a matter for consternation or equivocation, but of joy and peace.

It is God Who appoints times of adversity in the life of the believer: "*He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. . . . For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him*" (Job 23:10,14). It is in this sense that God is said to have tempted (tested) Abraham (cf Genesis 22:1). How dreadful would the situation be, if afflictions came by the hand of some unknown fate, or by the malice of the Devil, independently of God, and contrary to His Divine and perfect will? But since they are heaven-sent and

God-appointed, He is the One unto Whom prayer may and must be made in every trial. It is true that these events sometimes accomplish His purposes in chastening (cf Hebrews 12:5-7), or refining (cf 1 Peter 1:7), and always work together for the believer's good (cf Romans 8:28); but still we are taught to pray 'lead us **not** into temptation', in the expectation of deliverance.

In regard to the allurements of iniquity, it is not a sin to **be** tempted (as the Lord Jesus' case proves), and it is not God who produces a tempting influence: "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God... neither tempteth... any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed*" (James 1:13-14). No circumstances of life into which He brings us would have any tempting effect, were it not for the corrupted state of human nature, and its perpetual tendency to evil – and for this, man is held responsible, ever since the fall of Adam. Still in these matters also, God remains supremely sovereign. The Devil does not have free-reign (cf Job 1:12, 2:6); the world has not unlimited power (cf 1 John 5:4-5); the flesh is not without the gracious aid of the Spirit (cf Galatians 5:16). What a mercy that these things are so – or there would be no recourse of prayer in times of tempting. Are we taught, when drawn by sin's attractive forces, to 'talk to ourselves', or to seek quarter from the world, or to ask the Adversary for a reprieve? No – rather humbly to pray unto God, 'lead us not into temptation'. Since He is sovereign, there is the guarantee of a gracious answer, and the added assurance that He "*will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Christ reiterates this doctrine to His disciples in all ages, saying: "*Pray that ye enter not into temptation*" (Luke 22:40). And this they ask of their Father with confidence, for He "*knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations*" (2 Peter 2:9). Therefore, "*Pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, **who also will do it***" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).