



### 3. OF GOD'S RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE, A MEANS TO PREVENT ANXIETY<sup>†</sup>

*Matthew 6:32. For your heavenly Father knoweth  
ye have need of all these things*

THERE is much of the practice of religion in our carriage, in reference to outward things, that we be holy, and Christian, even in our eating, drinking, and clothing, and in the use of all our worldly enjoyments and employments; and there is much need of the exercise of faith and stayedness upon God, even in reference to external wants; and where there is faith and holiness with respect to spiritual things, there will be also faith, and holiness, in reference to bodily or temporal things. And as the believer's peace and quietness, depends very much upon the exercise of his faith in God, and in the study of holiness in things immediately spiritual, so there is also much of the believer's peace and quietness, which depends on the exercise of his faith in God, even in reference to temporal things. And where this is wanting, there is much anxiety; and this is the reason why though some believers have peace as to the pardon of their sins, yet they are very anxious and thoughtful as to their through-bearing and subsistence in this world, and being well provided for in outward things, because they live not by faith in God, and in his promises, as to their daily provisions in things necessary, therefore our Lord here seeks to quiet his people, who ordinarily have not a great share

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<sup>†</sup>Original title: *Of God's Relation to his People, a Mean to prevent Anxiety, &c.* This would appear to be a sermon preached subsequently to the previous on Matthew 6:31.

or good lot in the world, and when he has given many arguments, this is the sum of all: Take, he says, no thought, be not anxiously troubled about those things. It becomes you not. Why so? Because your heavenly Father knows that you have need of them. You have a Father, and a heavenly Father, to provide for you, and he knows that you stand in need of, and cannot want [*lack*] these things, and therefore will provide them for you. Is it then suitable to your confidence in such a Father, as you have, to be anxious how you shall live for a little time in the world, seeing that you have such a good, wise, and merciful Father? Be quiet, and cast away your carking [*worrying*] anxiety.

There are three things in these words, which comprehend the scope and substance of them.<sup>†</sup>

I. There stands a kindly relation between God and believers, He is their Father, and they are his children.

II. Even believers that stand in this kindly relation to God, may have many wants and needs; they may be in straits and difficulties, and may have much difficulty to get through the world, being hungered and straitened as to outward things.

III. Though a Christian and follower of Christ want and need many things, yet where this kindly relation subsists between God and him, there is good ground for him to be quiet, and without anxiety under all these needs, wants, straits, and difficulties. For this is the conclusion Christ draws from this relation, that therefore they needed not be thoughtful and anxious, and careful [*full of cares*].

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<sup>†</sup>While the outline of this sermon could be discerned, it was obscured by uneven editing as originally published. The roman numeral III later in the text is original, and that numbering has been adopted for the outline of all three sections above and subsequently. Paragraph breaks have been inserted to better indicate the flow of the points and subpoints of each of the sections.

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[I.] We observe from these words, that there is an excellent and kindly relation betwixt God and every true believer. This springs from the Covenant that is established between them: *I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Doubtless, thou art our Father, though Abraham should be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not* [2 Cor. 6:18; Isa. 63:16]. But there are two words, which evidently set out or illustrate this amiable and comfortable relation. 1. That God is a Father. 2. A heavenly Father.

1. *God is our Father, and we are his children;* and when God calls himself our Father, it implies, (1) A kindly and loving relation, as there is betwixt a father and his children.

(2) A relation that has in it a subordination. Children are subordinate to or dependent on their parents. *Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long in the earth* [Eph. 6:1-3]. All the relations of husband, Redeemer and Father, imply this; and also imply,

(3) The advantage believers have by this relation, not only their being and subsistence, but also a portion, and all needful provision. Fathers lay up and provide for their children, there is an inheritance and portion which descend from father to son.

(4) Confidence that the children may have in their father, in expectation of what is needful for them; as Christ reasons (Matt. 7:11). *If ye which are evil, give good things to your children; how much more will your heavenly Father give good things unto them that ask him?*

2. But we also learn, that God is called our heavenly Father, for these reasons: (1) That the people of God may have a deep impression of the awe and reverence of God's majesty, and greatness upon their spirit. The first word, Father, gives ground for confidence and boldness; and the second words, heavenly Father, imprints a holy fear and reverence on the heart (Eccles. 5:1[-2]). *Keep thy foot, when thou goest unto the house of*

*God, that thou may not give the sacrifice of fools ... for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth*, therefore should thy words be few. Heaven is far above the earth, and our heavenly Father is far above all earthly parents.

(2) God is called our heavenly Father, to show what are the things about which his care is exercised, and the nature of that inheritance which he provides for his own children. Our heavenly Father has provided a heavenly inheritance for his children.

(3) God is styled a heavenly Father, to show the difference that ought to be betwixt his children and others; they should be of a heavenly stamp and frame, on the account of their celestial descent, and therefore they ought to have their conversation or citizenship in heaven, and their treasure there also.

The improvement and USE of this endearing relation, is very obvious. [USE ONE.] See here what a great privilege and advantage believers have, beyond the wicked and unregenerate; they have God to be their father, and they are his children; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. [Rom. 8:17] All his children are his first-born, they are called the *congregation or general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven* (Heb. 12:22 [sic 23]). And they are not only brethren, but heirs in the family, and heirs of an heirship suitable to such a Father as God is. If Christ has a good heirship, as the heir of all things (Heb. 1:2, 3). They have also a good heirship, and their dignity is great, *for they are fellow-heirs with him*; it were much to have the right faith of this, that the believer is so privileged and honored, and this should make our believing the more important and useful. The great reason why the preaching of believer's privileges has no influence on some people, it never sinks into their hearts, that there is such advantages by believing, otherwise it would be impossible, that you would sit under security and unbelief, and prejudice yourselves as you do; for when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith upon the earth [Luke 18:8]. We may farther observe,

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[USE TWO]. That it not only serves to comfort, but to reprove even believers themselves for not believing, and improving aright this relation of God's being their heavenly Father. It is ill that such a precious truth should not be believed by many, but more shameful in the believer. Should you not believe that God is your Father, and upon that ground assuredly conclude, that your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure; that a good portion shall be given you, and that ere all be done, you shall be brought to the full possession of all that you have a right to, and to the faith of this, 'for as poor I am in this world, yet I am a child of God, and an heir of all the promises;' this would comfort a poor believer.

[USE THREE]. From this doctrine, believers would learn somewhat of their duty (Mal. 1:6). *A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if I then be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?* This relation bespeaks reverence, obedience, and submission; of all persons in the world believers are under the most potent and effectual obligations to the obedience, and all the duties of children; if then you call God, Father, remember to behave as his obedient children, if he is your heavenly Father, then let your confidence be placed in him, forever. It is neither kindly nor dutiful to distrust a father, much more to distrust our heavenly Father, or reflect upon his paternal care, as if a sinful creature would be more careful of his children than God can be of his. 'If ye being evil, give good gifts unto your children, will not your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit, and all other good things unto them' [Luke 11:13]? This should quiet distraction, and bound our anxiety. Doubtless thou art our Father, and we are thy children and offspring [Isa. 63:16; 2 Cor. 6:18].

[Use Four]. Believers may also learn what to reckon their portion, and in what they should mainly place their happiness; and that surely must be in spiritual and in heavenly things. Many get greater things in the world than some believers; but the portion of God's children in-

cludes the possession of heavenly things, answerable to the relation that is betwixt God and them (John 14:1-3). *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* Their portion is not only a kingdom, but *an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and immortal, which fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for them* [1 Peter 1:4]. And they need never lake [*lack*] for their portion here, nor think they come the better to, because they have abundance of the goods of this world. Many are in hell that have had more wealth, and finer apparel than any here. We read in the parable [in] Luke 16, how the rich glutton was tormented in hell, when Lazarus, the beggar, was comforted in heaven. The reason is, God was a heavenly Father to him, and not to Dives.<sup>†</sup>

[II.] Another observation we proceed to consider from the text is, secondly, that believers, who have God for their heavenly Father, may have many needs and wants. *Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have the need of these things*, which he speaks not merely to strengthen their faith in this respect, that no needs shall come, but though they may come, yet they should not be anxious. A wicked man, who has no faith, will have little or no anxiety, when he has no need or pinching strait to perplex him. They have their heart's desire, and sometimes more than they could wish.

But here is the vast difference, the wicked man is quiet, when he has the goods of this world, but the believer is put to exercise his faith and trust in God, when a strait or difficulty comes, and quiets himself upon God's promise, *as having nothing yet possessing all things*, while fed with hunger and feasted with want (2 Cor. 6:10). When in hunger, and thirst, and *in fastings, often* [2 Cor. 11:27], he yet abounds as having all things.

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<sup>†</sup>Dives, which is *rich man* in Latin, is the name tradition via the Vulgate gives to this unnamed character in the parable.

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*I have learned in every state, and case wherein I am, to be content, both to be full, and to be hungry* (Phil. 4:9–12). It is nothing in some straits to be content, but it is a holy, and eminently Christian practice, to be content under every strait, to know how to be abased, as well as how to abound, how to be hungry, as well as to be full, how to be discredited, how to be in high reputation, and not to be puffed up with it. And he says [in] Philippians 4:18, *I have all things, and abound*, there is a rich man, who in the mean time may be living on charity, and in a prison.

To confirm this point, we may take all the instances of the saints in scripture, the catalogues of God's famous witnesses, *who walked in sheep skins, and goat skins, in caves, and dens of the earth, of whom the world was not worthy* [Heb. 11:37–38]. Look through all God's covenant, it speaks out this, and therefore it is fitted and furnished with grounds of spiritual consolation, in reference to believers outward wants; hence God says, *When thou goes through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, when thou passest through the water, it shall not overflow thee; fear not, for I am with thee, says the Lord, the holy One in the midst of thee* [Isa. 43:2–3; cf. Hos. 11:9]. The tenor of the covenant runs upon promises, to sustain believers under all the trials they meet with.

The reason why the Lord will have believers to stand in need of outward things, are,

1. That they may be weaned from, and not have their affections inordinately set upon the creature. For when outward things abound, they are ready to go a whoring after them; but their affections are weaned, and drawn from them, when creatures are blasted to them; so the Lord dealt with his people, when he brought them out of Egypt; he suffered them to be in want, to humble them, and prove them, and to do them good in their later end, and to let them know, that man lives not by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3).

2. The Lord hereby learns his people to live by faith. Too many know not well what the exercise of faith as to outward things means, and if they wanted [*lacked*] silver, they would be at their wit's end, and therefore the Lord would have them to know, that it is not by silver, but by the word of his promise and providence, that they are sustained. But when a strait comes, the unbeliever will say, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* but the believer says, *God will provide* [Ps. 78:19; Gen. 8:8].

3. The Lord hereby lets believers know their own infirmity, and how much they are in his reverence, and sometimes discovers their recklessness and weakness, and sometimes their sinfulness under straits, and their sinfulness in giving way to unbelief; for they will trust God with giving them heaven, when they cannot trust him with their dinner; and if it discovers not their sin, yet it discovers their feebleness. The believer is discovered to be at his best like a flower that cannot live a day without being entertained; and if God should withdraw his hand, how bitter would their life be unto them? they would be naked, pined with hunger, and thirst, and would lament like the delicate woman, who would boil and eat her own children. The Lord, by this, lets believers know that they live in his common,<sup>†</sup> and how many ways they are obliged to him every day they put on their clothes, and for every bit of bread, and drops of drink they enjoy. God made the first clothes Adam had, and for as little as you may think of clothes, if you had not a rag to cover you they would be more thought of, and highly esteemed. Jacob says, *I am less than the least of all thy mercies* [Gen. 32:10]. He was thankful when he had food to eat, and raiment to put on; and if you got not entertain-

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<sup>†</sup> *Common*. "To be in one's common, to be obliged to one, to be indebted, in whatever way," Scottish (Jamieson). The use seems "to originate from the use of *common* as signifying food, fare, diet; a term borrowed from religious societies in popish countries, or colleges, where there is a sort of community of goods" (Jamieson).



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ment, you would think it a hard life; all then which you have, may let you see, how much you are obliged to God. Read the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and when you consider how the tender hearted mothers have sodden and eaten their own children, in the siege and straitness [Lam. 4:10], and how you and your children have meat and drink; if your children were weeping and crying and you had nothing to give them, you would think much more of your present allowance, and esteem it a great mercy. God's people have been in such a strait, that a cub of dove's dung would even have given much money. And if your need of outward things were more felt and experienced, you would see more your dependence upon and your obligations to your heavenly Father, but we think little or nothing of mercies, when we are so much indulged, and want for nothing. For,

USE ONE.<sup>†</sup> Let this teach you to study patience under outward crosses, needs and wants, for these are not inconsistent with God's love, and care of his people. God may be a Father, and yet diet and feed you sparingly, to let you find your need.

USE TWO. It should teach you to keep a loose and small grip of temporal things. Riches are fleeting, how soon may they take wings, and flee away.

USE THREE. It should teach all to be sober, and thankful and moderate in the use of temporal things. Let not your hearts be glutted and surfeited with them, grow not vain and foolish in the use of meat, drink, and clothes. Do not use them for your vanity, and to satisfy your lusts.

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<sup>†</sup>This series of uses originally had the title USE 1. and the three paragraphs under it numbered 1st, 2dly, and 3dly. Whether this was original to the manuscript or an interpretation by the printer, it seems appropriate that these are three uses for the section of the sermon numbered observation II, and have been labeled accordingly for this new edition.

I am afraid for all the plenty we have at present, God will be provoked to bring us under a restraint, and some pinching straits. Some would be glad to have necessaries, though they got not superfluities. God would let us know ere many months went by, how much we are in his common: therefore be sober: It would be both our sins and our shame, if notwithstanding of all which God has done for us, there would be more vanity and madness, more rioting, and excess, in meat, drink, and fine clothing, than was before the time that God smote us. We shall now proceed, as we proposed, to the last observation from the text.

III. That though the good Christian may need or want [*lack*] many things, yet he has good ground to be without anxiety, in reference to what he needs. Take no thought, saying, *What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed, for your heavenly Father knoweth, that ye have need of all these things;* and since it is so, it will be very unbecoming, that a son of such a Father, and an heir of a heavenly kingdom, should yet notwithstanding of all this, be as anxious and perplexed, as the carnal men of the world are, who know nothing of God. This is the grand doctrine, and the chief scope of all the Lord aims at, and therefore we shall speak a few words to these three or four things in the application of it.

USE ONE. Take it for a ground of truth, that come of outward things what will, or whatever the believer's needs be, yet he has no ground to be anxious, but quiet, firmly believing he will be provided for, and well seen to, but this does not imply, that he should be negligent in his calling, or careless and defective in any duty he is called to perform; but that in going about his calling, and in providing for his family, he may, and ought to be without perplexing anxiety; and if provision fail him, he may be quiet on this ground, that God, his heavenly Father, will provide for him.

[1.] To confirm this, we may consider these scriptures. Philippians.

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4: 6, 7. *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.* Is there any thing more expressive than this word? *In nothing be careful.* And there is a good guard given unto it, *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard and keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.* Where anxiety is, it banishes peace, and many believers through their carefulness in every thing, mar their own peace, and bring themselves under anxiety.

Again, the apostle exhorts us, *to cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us* [1 Peter 5:7]. That is a great word; least it should be thought a loose way to cast all our care upon God, that other word is subjoined, *for he careth for you.* *Let your conversation,* says another apostle (Heb. 13:5), *be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* The denial is doubled in the original, *I will not, I will not leave thee, I will in no ways do it,* and the conclusion drawn from it is comfortable: we may boldly say, *The Lord is my helper* [Heb. 13:6]. He has said one word, we may say another: believers this is for you, and not for others. You have a good portion coming, and are assured of a competency for the present, and may be without anxiety. The greatest monarch has not that ground of confidence. He may beg, or die, or starve for hunger, and so may be anxious, if he be not in Christ; but you shall be provided for.

2. There may be some grounds given to confirm, not so much the thing as ourselves, if you take a view of this chapter, from the 19th verse, we will find the Lord reasons from the less to the greater. He has given the life, and therefore we may expect what is needful for it. *Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* And one that hath gotten a being in Christ, and more noble life, need not fear want.

3. Let us also look unto the creatures, whether senseless or inanimate, as the lilies, or living and ravenous, as the lions and ravens. God cares

for them, and will he not much more care for you? They are not anxious, and what a shame is it for you to be anxious? Besides this, it cast a deep reflection upon God, as if he cared more for the beasts and lilies than he did for his people. *Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them* [Matt. 6:26].

4. God even provides for them, which are not his saints and children. He is the Savior of all men in outward things; he makes his rain to fall, and his sun to shine upon the good and the bad, but he is the Savior, especially of them that believe. Do we not see many Turks, and Pagans, and many Atheists, without the church, provided for, and will he be less careful for his own?

5. Let us look unto what God hath already done for us. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things* [Rom. 8:32]? If he gave his only begotten Son to suffer and die for us, and made us his children through him, is it likely that he will withhold any thing needful for us? Shall he not give us with him all things? Christ is more than all things, and if he has done the less will he not do the great thing?

6. Let us also look through the generation of God's people. They have had hard straits, yet no anxiety. 'They have been cast down, but not destroyed, persecuted, yet not forsaken, dying, and yet living, having nothing, and yet possessing all things' (2 Cor. 6:11; [sic cf vs. 9, 10]). And if we look to daily experience, believers have their own wants, yet a singular providence accompanies them, so that they are never desperately pinched. *I have been young, and now am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread* [Psalm 37:25]. They were never in their wants forsaken, and God had a care of their seed, as well as themselves, and God keeps, and will not forsake them even in want.

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OBJECTION. But some will object, 'How can this be true, especially considering how the world is parted, for they are not the best, who have most of it?'

To this it may be answered: 1. That the doctrine says not that believers shall have most of the world, or even abundance, but whether they have or want, they need not be anxious.

2. The promise runs upon and extends only to things that are needful, and not to abundance or superfluity. When we have things necessary, the Lord would have us without carking [*worrying*] cares, and our great anxiety is not because we want, but because it is not with us, as we would have it. The Lord would have our pride slain, and would have us want [*lack*] something of our pleasure, and lust; and therefore the promise runs upon what is needful and good. *They that fear the Lord, shall want no good thing* (Psal. 34:9). And suppose the want of this, or that, or a third thing, what will follow from all this? but that it was not good for them. Many have been the worse of riches, and good cheer, and fine clothing, but few have been the better of them as to their spiritual condition; and therefore our anxiety for them, would be as if a physician would forbid roasted meat to his patient, and the patient cries out because he gets not that which would prejudice his health; so many of us would suck all our days at the breasts of creature-comforts, and live with our corruptions, rather than submit to be restrained a little to have them away. But these things are not needful, many are in heaven, who never had good cheer, or fine clothing.

3. I would have you consider God's end in straitening his people sometimes; it is not unadvisedly, but for a good end, as the mother has a good end, when she hears the child weep after physic [*medicine*], and will not give it meat. It is not for want of love, but it is wisdom that induces her to do so; and so does the Lord deal with his own.

4. Consider, that God is your heavenly Father, and therefore he will

have temporal mercies subservient to heavenly, and this is the great scope the word aims at.

USE TWO. FIRST, Let us learn to be quiet and content when we meet with wants and difficulties, and labor to discern the sinfulness of fretting and anxiety, and the unsuitableness of it unto the temper of a believer, and to guard against it. This fretting and anxiety, as we showed, is not that which arises from coveting great things, but it is a perplexity of mind about lawful things that may be desired; and we say, that even this is unsuitable to a believer that stands in such a relation to God, of a child to a heavenly Father; it makes God worse to a believer, nor he is or will be to a beast; it would make him deal worse to his own children, than sinful men will deal with their children. For almost no earthly parent will suffer his child to want, if he have; and by our fretting and anxiety, we say, that either God is not able to give, or he is not pitiful and tender-hearted to give, or that he has not skill when to give, and when to keep up; and is any of these things to be said of God? It is also unsuitable to all the promises which God has made in reference to outward things; *be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer ... let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God ... shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ* [Phil. 4:6, 7]. *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* [Heb 13:5]; *'Cast all your cares upon him, who careth for you'* [1 Peter 5:7]; and shall a believer be as careful and anxious as a man that has not such promises? Nor is it suitable to a believer that will trust God with the great business of his salvation, to be anxious about lesser things, and not to trust God with his dinner, or daily bread. And it also unsuitable and inconsistent with God's care of his people hitherto. *All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but saw them afar off ... and confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers in this world* (Heb. 11:13), and looked for a city to come, not having a foot broad of ground that they could claim as their property. But,

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SECONDLY, We would exhort you in this time of straits, when our wants and necessities are multiplied, and we already take liberty to complain of an evil time, not to be anxious for straits felt and feared, to sober your minds of the account of this relation that God is your heavenly Father, and knows you have need of these things.

Consider, 1. that there is a sufficiency covenanted and secured. 2. Sufficiency of promises to communicate what is covenanted. 3. That you have a faithful God, who will keep his promise; believers have a good portion covenanted, and an honest and faithful word of a heavenly Father for it, and they would think themselves as sure of it as if it were in their own hand, and can it be without blasphemy to claim this relation to God, and yet be anxious for their provisions? And therefore to deter you from it,

Consider, (1) that it is an evil that reflects on God's faithfulness and sufficiency, and that it is exceeding distracting to the believer, making him to hang in suspense like a blazing star, or meteor in the air; it eats away his affection to God, and fosters corruption, which gets up and gathers strength, under a fretting humor. It is an enemy to holiness and growth in grace; it makes the believer turn carnal and earthly, like the men of the world; and it is far better to have want, and a mind stayed by faith under it upon God's promises, than to have abundance and restlessness under it. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. There is no quieting or settling of the mind, when anxiety and carefulness prevails; but believers, in their greatest needs and difficulties have had sweetness, calmness, and tranquility, as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. Whereas the giving way to fretting, some have had many things; and yet possessed nothing.

2. Seeing peace and quietness of mind is founded upon this ground, that you have a heavenly Father, study to make your relation to him, and interest in him clear, that you may be able to say, *Doubtless thou*

*art our Father* [Isa. 63:16]; because eternal happiness not only depends upon it, but your well-being in time. That man, or woman, who can lay claim to God as their heavenly Father, their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be made sure. Every person that stands in this relation has no ground to be anxious about earthly things. If then there be any that love to be without care, and to have enough with God's blessing, this is the way to it, betake yourselves to God through Christ, that you may have a right to God as your Father, and the privilege of adoption and provision, and the inheritance in heaven, and be sure that all other things needful shall be laid plentifully to your hand.