

Everyone's Invited

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To Dr. Albert N. Martin

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Preface

Dr. Al Martin spoke on the true nature of coming to Christ almost fifty years ago. I have used the structure of his approach, which I still find to be enormously helpful, explaining a lot of the phenomena one sees in the professing church today. Certain sections of this book are his, as they are vital and as relevant as when he first preached them half a century ago. I have added much and changed the focus of this book to address the sympathetic inquirer who desires to know what it means to come to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have written it to encourage people on this happy journey to be one with Him. I have dedicated the book to Al Martin, whose trilogy of books on preaching titled *The Man of God* will surely be of lasting value until the end. Without his planting these seeds in my understanding all those years ago, I would not have ventured to share them with the world today.

Won't You Come Now?

My wife and I were walking the grounds of Chiswick House, looking at the lake, the waterfall, a heron, early crocuses, children, and the ubiquitous dogs. A young woman ahead of us let her dog off its lead, and off he ran, exploring the park with all the delight of his newly given liberty. He came to a fork in the road and chose the upper path, while his owner had taken the lower one. As we strolled along after her, we noticed she could see him running here and there, stopping, sniffing, looking around, and she called him from the southern path, "Alfie!" He paid no attention at all and ran on. She called again, "Alfie!" He was far too interested in other things to consider the location of the familiar voice calling his name. She called again, this time louder and more stridently: "Alfie! Come! Come here!" Still no response. The two paths were now going farther apart, and undergrowth and bushes were between her and the dog. Often we lost sight of him. Now she was getting serious about his return to her. She stopped walking and stood,

crying loudly with notes of angry concern—"Alfie! Alfie! Come here! Alfie! Come!" He must come. He *had* to come.

The delay presented her with an easy decision. Would she stop her cries and shrug in indifference? Would she think, "Well, if that's his choice, he can please himself. I can do nothing more"? Would she look at my wife and me as we were walking behind her, shake her head, half smile and sigh, saying to us, "You do so much, then they run off. That will be the third dog I've had to give up on"? Would she think, "He has made his mind up. He has chosen to deafen his ears against my commands. He has decided to reject my invitation. What more can I do? He may find his way back to the car or to home, or then he may not. Someone else will find him. Someone may take him in and be a better owner than me. He may end up in a dog shelter and they will offer him to someone else, or else they will have him put down painlessly"? Or would she go after him and search until she had found him?

That issue was a no-brainer for her. Not for a moment did such thoughts rise in her mind. She was not a callous, indifferent dog owner. She could not desert him. She loved her dog, and the thought of losing him was unthinkable. She would go after him. So we saw her pushing through the briars and undergrowth to the other path, seeking him, calling all the time, "Alfie! Come here, Alfie!" We lost sight of her but kept hearing her increasingly distant voice calling out, "Alfie! Alfie! Come here, Alfie," until, we presume, she

finally found him and rubbed his head reprovingly but lovingly, “You come to me when I call you, you rascal.” And as always, by her persistent and determined graciousness, at the end of their stroll, he accompanied her again to the home they shared.

How important it is to come when someone calls us, especially a person with authority, such as a teacher, our commanding officer, our parent, our boss, or a policeman. It is very serious to ignore their words and look away, but it becomes particularly poignant when the person who is calling also loves us dearly—when he or she is the one who intends to do us much good, who will meet our needs and warmly welcome us. As they are saying, “Come to me,” they are smiling so cheerfully at us, and all their intentions are honorable, healing, strengthening, and joyful. Will we come, or do we think we know better, turning away?

I believe, along with every other Christian, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the loving Son of God. He is the Word of God incarnate—that is, “made flesh.” He is that very God and Lord who for centuries was speaking to men and women by His servants the prophets. Through them all He’d been saying, “Return to God!” But when the Lord Christ came (He who was and remains as much a man as any of those prophets were), He stood among men as one who was full of grace and truth—bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, found in fashion as a man. He showed to everyone who observed Him the character of God, teaching us about Himself while continuing to be the archetypal man. All we need to know

about Him is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

While our Lord spoke to men and women, He often employed one very simple word: "Come!" In other words, He is saying to us, "You're not anywhere near Me or following Me. In fact, you're moving farther away from Me. I want you to come to Me. Before you do anything else—before making any resolutions, before discovering totally satisfying answers to every one of your questions, before studying all other religions and weighing up all their claims—there is one thing you must do. Give absolute priority to this: come, just as you are, to Me, finding out more about Me, learning who I am and what I do for people who come, and what it will mean to go through life day by day with Me, facing the challenges and the privileges of the future with My loving counsel and help. Don't go it alone. Why should you? You must come to Me, and don't delay."