

STEADFAST CONFIDENCE.

I am not unacquainted with your perplexities, and I shall tell how my mind used to work in producing them. I thought, with myself, "Since I have professed the gospel; I have acted inconsistently with it—more so, I fear, than a Christian could. If I am a Christian now, I was one then for no change has happened in my views of the Gospel; therefore I fear I am not one at all." Thus was I ready to be led either to despair on the one hand, or to a confidence founded on my Christian character on the other.

But this kind of reasoning goes opposite to the whole tenor of the Scriptures. Consider, as the sum of those texts to which I refer; the epistle to the Hebrews, chap. iii., verse 14:—"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

What the beginning of the confidence of these Hebrews was, and which they are here exhorted to hold steadfast, we see in Acts ii. They had lately murdered the Son of God. Convinced that they had done so, they were pricked in their hearts, while at the same time they received the word gladly. These effects of the downpouring of the Holy Ghost as a comforter, and as the Spirit of adoption, in opposition to the Spirit of bondage under the law, are conformable to the account which Christ gave of the effects of the Comforter, or Spirit of adoption, when he should come, John xvi. 7-9. We see these Jews, in Acts ii., convinced of sin because of their unbelief, and pricked to the heart; while at the same time, convinced of righteousness by the resurrection of Christ, they received the word gladly, and rejoiced; and doubtless this was the first period of the Spirit of adoption. These persons, looking back to their former lives, saw there the blackest scene of iniquity which ever disgraced the annals of mankind—the rejecting, betraying, and murdering the everlasting Jehovah manifest in the flesh. In themselves, therefore, they were altogether in despair, and perceived no ground of confidence in God for the remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, but what the righteousness manifested in the resurrection of Christ, and the love displayed in it, afforded them. On the other hand, notwithstanding all the aggravations of their sins, they saw nothing more to prevent their hope than that of the apparently most virtuous. Assured that the blood which they had shed cleansed from all sin; certain that Christ had entered into rest, had overcome every obstacle which could oppose the vilest, or prevent the weakest, and had promised salvation to every one that believed; they could not but trust in God for the remission of sins, deliverance from their power, and entering along with Christ into his rest. To these Hebrews, then, after (in consequence of receiving the word gladly) they had for many years continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, this apostle writes, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the

beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." We have seen *what this beginning was*. Now this it is which they are exhorted to hold fast.

And we shall evidently see how much occasion there is for an exhortation of this kind, if we attend a little to the danger Christians are in, of turning aside from the testimony they are commanded to hear: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

When persons at first believe the gospel of God, looking back to their former lives they see nothing but one scene of unbelief, or making God a liar, by rejecting the testimony he has given of his Son, and consequently of loving the world in preference to God. Despairing then in themselves, they think not at this season of building the smallest hope upon anything they ever did or could do; while on the other hand (and which is inseparably connected with the former) none of their sins, however great, can appear in the least degree to affect the most lively hope of salvation—which comes unasked, which supposes sin, and which is conferred by the love of God through a divine righteousness, without the smallest respect to human worth. So that *that very thing* which shuts them up from all hope in self, occasioning the most thorough self-despair (that is, all men being in one common situation before God, God not respecting human worth, or any thing whereby one man stands distinguished from his fellow, but according to his sovereign grace, choosing some to eternal life in distinction from others); I say that very thing which shuts up from hope in self, effectually takes away all that despair of salvation which greatness of sin, or any other thing could produce.

Thus it is with Christians hearing the word of God, and free from the doctrines and commandments of men, when they first believe the gospel. But alas! how often may it be said, "How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!" When men believe the gospel, *they receive the truth in the love of it*; for the natural consequence of seeing nothing between them and eternal misery, but the work of Jesus Christ, is above all things to love and prize Him, who, that he might become a refuge from every storm, "though he was in the form of God, took upon Him the form of a servant, became obedient to the death of the cross, and hid not his face from shame and spitting." Again, the necessary effect of love is, *the feelings of love*, and the natural consequence of both, *the pleasing the beloved object*, which, with regard to Jesus Christ, consists in keeping his commandments. The necessary consequence, also, of believing the glad tidings that Christ has become a sacrifice for sin, and that in this Jehovah is well pleased, is *the hope of a participation of all things which Christ was manifested to bestow*. The natural consequence of seeing God manifesting his justice, as well as his mercy, in the remission of sins, is hope in God's mercy, as nothing but the justice of God can appear to oppose this. The consequence of knowing the purpose of the

manifestation of the Son of God to deliver from sin, and the eternal design of God to save a people from all iniquity, to have fellowship with him in the contemplation and possession of his perfections, is *the earnest desire of sanctification and conformity to Christ*; while the effect of knowing, that Jesus, in overcoming every obstacle which could oppose his entering into rest, overcame at the same time every obstacle which could prevent the chief of sinners, is *the hope of entering into the same rest*. Further, the necessary consequence of this hope is *joy and peace*. And once more, the natural effect of the belief of his humiliation, who, on account of sinners,—not his own, but his people's—endured at once the hiding of the Father's countenance, the temptations of the devil, and the persecutions of men, must be *repentance and Godly sorrow* for those sins which thus brought the Son of God to the cross. Thus then are love, obedience, hope, repentance, produced by the faith of the gospel; and so far all is well, and in its proper place. But alas! how often and how sadly is the whole reversed. It is true, that all these things are the inseparable evidences and effects of the truth being believed; but the heart of man is desperately wicked, and deceitful above all things, ever prone to set the truths of God at variance. Under the pretence of examining by these things, whether or not the truth is believed (which is not improper, but often enjoined in Scripture), these things are put instead of that truth which produces them. The intention and nature of self-examination seems to be this: when a man has firm belief in God's mercy, and thinks that his hope is altogether founded upon the work of Jesus Christ, he is called to examine whether or not it produces those effects which hope upon the true foundation ever must produce. But it often happens that men, instead of examining themselves in consequence of the answer of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and while enjoying the sense of the remission of sins through his sacrifice, examine their evidences of Christianity, that is their love, obedience, hope, joy, peace and repentance, *when their consciences are burdened with a sense of guilt*, and so plainly put these evidences in place of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Here let us pause. Is the beginning of the confidence thus kept steadfast? or rather, do not all such give up the confidence and rejoicing of the hope, being moved away from the hope of the gospel? When the gospel was first believed, when they were oppressed by a sense of guilt, and destitute of every evidence of Christianity, they had then no other resource but the blood of Jesus. He was then as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. But now—they have other waters and other rocks besides him; now, when oppressed by a sense of guilt, they can fly away to their evidences, slighting the evidence of the good pleasure of God in the work of his beloved Son, manifested in his resurrection from the dead! Thus there is a distinction made between