

# THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. ii. 1.

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

## SALVATION BY WORKS AND THE LAW.

Rev. Sir:—There is hardly any thing more common than for people who claim to be followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and talk of hope in the promises of the gospel, to manifest a most inexcusable ignorance of the very things they profess to believe and understand. It not unfrequently happens, that, totally neglecting "the analogy of faith," their attention is riveted on some particular passage of scripture, which they refuse to understand in any sense but what the text, or part of the text, may seem literally to convey, cut off, separated, and alienated from the whole Bible: whereas, if, in most instances, they would but honestly consider the context, it would shew them at once their utter ignorance of the words on which they presume to build a system. Now faith is the parent of practice: a right faith is therefore indispensable to a right practice. But the faith of such persons is not faith in the word of God, for they know not its meaning; but faith in a thing of human invention, substituted in place of God's word. The practice then, which is founded on this false faith is not the service of God; but service paid to the "vain imagination" of a poor creature, whose "understanding is darkened," and who "walks in the sparks of his own kindling." And so most unhappily it comes to pass, that many—very many, like those whom the king of Assyria sent to repeople Samaria, "fear the Lord, and worship their own Gods," and have as many different systems of religion as there are fancies to frame them.

Not many months since I met with a striking exemplification of the position I have laid down. I was conversing with a man who professed to believe in Christ as the Saviour of sinners. In speaking of the conduct of men in the world, he made the following observation: "Well, this is one chief consolation to me: the fewer my sins, the fewer I shall have to answer for; and therefore I am cautious how I conduct myself." I asked him if he had not a better ground of hope than that;—if he did not trust in the Saviour for the remission of his sins rather than in the expectation of future punishment. He replied: "My Bible tells me that every one must give an account of himself to God, and receive according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." I endeavoured to convince him that he had a wrong impression of this scripture—that its meaning could not be such as to exclude pardon of sins and justification by faith in Christ—and that a penitent believer could enjoy, even now, a reasonable assurance of deliverance from all the consequences of sin in the future world, or he could have no grounds of faith. But all would not do: he had moored his faith in "the bottomless pit" of rewards and punishments in the strictest letter of the law;—at the same time that he spoke of being certain of salvation by Jesus Christ:—and so I was compelled to leave him.

Permit me to offer a few observations on the absurdity, folly, and danger of such a foolish error.—1. It is contrary to Scripture. 2. It sets aside the atonement of Christ. 3. By placing us under the law it destroys the distinction between Saints and sinners, and makes salvation a thing unattainable. 4. It is calculated to make us despair of God's mercy.

1. *It is contrary to Scripture.*—The gospel was declared to be glad tidings of great joy to all people. But how can it be so on this scheme, which chains us down to the letter of the law? how can it give present comfort or future hope, if it assures us that God is going to punish us for our sins? The gospel most expressly teaches the full and free pardon of sin to all believers. We read of the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins—that Jesus came to save his people from their sins—and of the kindness of God in forgiving sins that are past. No single doctrine in the whole Bible is more frequently or more clearly insisted on; and in fact it is the only ground of the assurance of happiness by faith in Christ—the first thing that strikes a sinner as

an encouragement to trust his soul in the hands of his Saviour. For why should we believe in Jesus with more confidence than in Satan if he has not broken down the wall of separation between us and God, making peace, and giving us leave to come boldly to the throne of grace? It is therefore matter of surprise that any man in his right mind can think the Bible thus guilty of bearing testimony against the grace and mercy of God, when its sole object is to set them forth, and win souls over to a holy confidence in his most gracious promises.

2. *It sets aside the atonement of Christ.*—The object of Christ's death was to deliver his people from the dominion of their sins, and from the curse of the law, by exhibiting what sinners might look for, and by a powerful appeal to their gratitude. He was wounded for our transgression—he was bruised for our iniquities—the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. This is the language of prophecy concerning him. And what is the comment of an inspired writer thereon? His own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree: that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. And what says the Lord himself? I give my life for the sheep. This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

The curse of the law is the punishment of sin. But Christ came and suffered to remove the curse of the law; therefore it was to set us free from punishment by a full and free pardon for his sake. In other words: it was to relieve us from the necessity of "answering for our sins," as those objectors are wont to say. But if all men are to bear their sins, the curse of the law is to be fully executed on them—Christ's blood is shed utterly in vain—we are still in our sins, and likely to lie under them till we have paid for them; and that we can never do. If we must legally answer for our sins, we must "bear the blame forever." Christ died to prevent the execution of the law on believers, and to snatch them as brands from the burning. But by this erroneous doctrine, even the most devoted believers shall be condemned to "hell fire."

Neither is it any nearer the truth to say, we shall suffer and then be saved.—We know that in this life the chosen saints of God do suffer. But how? As graceless sinners? As outlawed malefactors? As receiving the wages of sin? No. He lays no punishment on them. They are not under the law but under grace. They are not under condemnation, but have passed from death unto life. For there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. How have they then to answer for their sins? How can they any longer be counted Satan's bond slaves? They are not. They are Christ's free men. They stand in the liberty wherewith Christ hath set them free. They are under the good Shepherd, who careth for his own—their advocate, their life, their hope, their joy, the captain of their salvation: and thus he "is the end of the law to every one that believeth."

Neither can punishment for sin be inflicted in order to apply the merits of Christ and procure pardon. If that were necessary then were he deficient—then were he not able to save to the uttermost. We do find, however, that correction and chastisement are administered to all God's people. But it is not to procure the means of giving pardon. It is not for the satisfaction of the law—not to bring them into condemnation. It is for their reformation; and therefore it is pure grace. It is to exercise them in virtue, patience, resignation, humility, meekness, fear, and habitual trust in God. It is to prepare their minds by religious discipline and pious exercises for the happiness of heaven, by training them in the school of Christ, and thus restoring his divine image defaced and lost by sin.

We should think it strange to hear our lawyers talk of punishing criminals and then pardoning them; or of punishing them in order to produce in them moral fitness for rightly receiving and using the grace and favour of pardon. Equally absurd is it to apply such contradictory terms to the dealings of God with the subjects of his grace. Pardon excludes punishment, and punishment equally excludes pardon. The two can no more be confounded together in the same subject than