

SALVATION BY FAITH.

CONTINUED FROM LAST NUMBER.

For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." Romans iii, 3, 4.

We resume the argument, in this discourse, concerning those prisoners brought forward in our last. We left them in bondage under the sentence of the law, with no hopes of deliverance. The first year rolls away. The king says, My son, the time has come; go, and reveal my love to these prisoners, by bringing the promise of their redemption to light. The son flies on wings of love, enters the prison and exclaims; I bring you good tidings of great joy. My father, the king is your friend. He loves you; and that love has induced him to proclaim your liberation as a free gift. He has promised (and he cannot lie) that in two years from this day you shall be free. This covenant, so far as concerns its fulfilment, is unconditional. Believe, and you will be saved, by faith in the promise, from your present fears and condemnation under the law.

Those stubborn prisoners see a sufficiency of evidence to believe the promise. They exercise unshaken faith, in this second covenant between the father and son. This faith works by love in their hearts, and purifies them from disobedience. Their souls melt in view of the love and goodness of the king, revealed to them by his son. In fine, they love him because he first loved them. They are now saved by faith in his promise, from not only all their miseries and sorrows, but from their disobedience, and look forward with joy, to the day of redemption. Here we perceive the "righteousness of faith," which far exceeds the "righteousness of the law."—They now delight to obey the king, because they are under the influence of love.

Here let the question be asked,—are these three men to be let out of prison, at the appointed time, because they believe the promise or love and obey the king?—They are not. Their redemption depended on the truth and faithfulness of the king's promise, which he made to his son, and that promise would have been fulfilled, even if it had not been revealed to them, till the day of their deliverance. They are not to be set free, as a reward for their faith, love, and obedience. They have great peace and joy in believing that promise. They are in the happy enjoyment of a salvation by faith, and that is all the reward they deserve, or have reason to expect. We here perceive, that these three men are made to establish the law of their king, by faith, in the good news he sent them by his son, which is to them a gospel. We now see the propriety of the apostle's language. "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." We also perceive, that these three men are not to be liberated from prison, because they believe the promise, or love and obey the king. But on the contrary, it is the king's love and promise to them which sets them free.

Let us now notice the other three prisoners. One says, I do not believe that we shall ever be released from prison. It is too good news to be true. Well, shall

his unbelief make the king's promise of none effect? The king would; yea, let the king be true, but that man a liar. But let it be remembered that he cannot be proved a liar, unless he is liberated.—Would you now go and tell that man, Sir, because you will not believe, you shall never come forth from prison? But do you not perceive that by so doing, you would give the king the lie? It would be saying that his promise was good for nothing, unless the man would believe it. It would be contending that the unbelief of this prisoner will make the king's promise of none effect.

The two other prisoners exclaim, we believe this second covenant, but it must bear some resemblance to the first, which is conditional. We believe that we shall get out of this prison, if we continue to serve the king as we have hitherto, by keeping his commandments. Here are two men trusting in the first covenant for deliverance. They are trusting in the law. They are depending on their own love and faithfulness to the king for redemption, and not on the king's love, promise, and faithfulness to them. Here then we see the righteousness of the law in those two prisoners; in another we see the effect of unbelief; and in those three who remained disobedient under the first covenant, we see the righteousness which is of faith, when they heard the glad tidings of redemption in the second covenant.

At length the day of their redemption dawns. They are all brought to the knowledge of the truth. Those three prisoners, who were saved by faith in the promise, during those two years of suspense, now find their faith lost in certainty. Their salvation by faith has come to an end.—And so has the unbelief, condemnation and doubtings of the other three prisoners. In one word, the belief and unbelief of the six are lost in knowledge, and they burst out in songs of deliverance. So we perceive that a salvation by faith, and a condemnation in unbelief, can last no longer than till we come to the knowledge of the truth in eternity.

Let us now apply this to the Scriptures. Man sinned, and not only involved himself in guilt and misery, but was sentenced to that very death with which God threatened him; "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." Here was the end of the first covenant, and the termination of all the miseries of life. It is evident from revelation, as well as reason, that man at death drops to a state of insensibility, and knows no more till he is made alive in Christ, who is himself the second covenant. The language of Scripture is, the dead know not any thing, they sleep,—and the apostle (in Cor. xv.) reasons that if there be no resurrection, then there will be no future existence; that they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished, that preaching was vain,—faith was also vain, and that the Christians were yet in their sins. On such language as this, I can put no other construction than that the resurrection is our salvation and eternal life, our deliverance from sin and imperfection.—Under the first covenant, the resurrection in Christ was not revealed to the human family, and they remained of course under the sentence of condemnation, with no hopes of a future existence. "By the offence of one judgment came upon all men

to condemnation." Obedience to the law was enforced by threatenings on the one hand, and promises of temporal rewards on the other, which were communicated to the fathers by the prophets.

But God has in these latter days spoken unto us by his Son, and through him revealed the second covenant, in which he "gave him the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession," and declared him to be the resurrection and life of the world. If in the divine counsels no Christ had been provided, the human family, it appears, would have remained in eternal slumber.—They would have known but one covenant, which would have rewarded and punished them according to their deeds, and consigned them to the regions of the dead.—"But since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead."

God saw fit to keep the human family, for four thousand years under the first covenant, without the knowledge of eternal life, through the resurrection of the dead. But it was, at length, "made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Yes he first brought it to light, and through his apostle declared, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began, but hath in due time manifested his word through preaching." This promise of eternal life all men are called upon to believe. The moment they believe, they are saved by faith, and are at peace; and they that doubt are damned; they are already under condemnation. But shall their unbelief make God's promise of eternal life, of none effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar. "For he hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all."

We have now noticed the two covenants—the law and gospel, have pointed out the distinction between them,—shown that all conditions are confined to the law, and that the gospel is unconditional, and justly requires our faith and confidence. We will now bring to view the scripture doctrine of salvation by faith, and show that divine truth must have an existence before we can be called upon to believe.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is based upon eternal and unchanging truth. Truth is one of the attributes of Jehovah, and the unshaken pillar that supports the throne of eternity.—In truth and righteousness he governs the world, and by an omnipotent arm wields the destinies of men. Truth is the sun of divine revelation, pouring its beams on intelligent creation, and calling upon all men to believe. If a man assert that which does exist, it is a truth; but if he assert that which does not exist, it is a falsehood. Whatever has an existence in the compass of reality, is a truth to be believed, and whatever has no such existence, is a falsehood not to be believed. It is beyond the power of man to create one solitary divine truth. All that he can do, is to declare the existence of that which may be hidden from others, or relate some circumstances respecting that which does absolutely exist. An absolute truth must, therefore, be presented to the understandings of men, before they can be called upon to believe it, or before they can be called believers

for embracing it, or unbelievers for rejecting it. No man can be an unbeliever rejecting that which does not exist.

We now commence plain argument, by using great plainness of speech. In preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, truth must be the foundation. If, then, truth must exist before men can be called upon to believe, the question arises, what is the truth, which the second covenant reveals for the belief of mankind? Answer, it is the record God hath given of his Son.—But what is the record? Let John answer, "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." It then follows, that we are to believe that God has given us eternal life, in his Son, before the world began, and unchangeably promised it. Paul says; "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." If we believe the record, we are in the Scriptures recognised as believers, and are saved by faith, and will of course exhibit in our life and conversation the righteousness of faith.

The great error of many, who read the Bible, consists in supposing there is but one salvation. But there are two. The first is a special salvation by belief in the promise, and the second is our eternal salvation beyond the grave, where we shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth, involved in the promise, and to know shall be life eternal. Faith shall then be lost in certainty. Now, if we disbelieve the record, will that make it false? No; our unbelief cannot alter the truth. Let the record, then, be proclaimed to every creature, saying, God has promised and given you eternal life in Christ, before the world began, and calls upon all to believe it.—But suppose they should all reject it saying, We do not believe one word of it, would their unbelief make the promise or record false? No. Would not then the record prove true? It would. Then, the whole world would, of course, receive that eternal life, which is promised and given them in Christ. No, says the objector, they will not believe. But can their unbelief make God's promise of none effect? Can it put that truth out of existence, and make it a falsehood? We would ask the objector, what will they not believe. Answer; they will not believe, that God has given them eternal life in Christ, but they will not believe it, and because they will not believe it, they never shall obtain it! Then we must contend (if they never obtain it), that it was never given to them, and if not given, then the record is false; because the record declares, that God has given them eternal life in his Son. It then follows, that their unbelief can make the faithfulness of God without effect, by rendering the record he has given false.

But, says the objector, it ought to be stated conditionally as follows,—God first calls upon men to believe, and if they will believe, then Christ will become their Saviour, and then they will receive eternal life in him, and not before. But does not the objector see, that he has stated no truth for them to believe, in order to make Christ their Saviour? I ask, what does God call upon them to believe? There must be some truth presented, before men can be called upon to believe. God calls upon men to believe, what? That Christ is their Saviour? But you said he was not their Saviour, till after they believed.