

This corruption which raged and boiled within me, this sin which revived, or which made me painfully conscious of its existence and power, when the law of God, exhibited to me in its extent and purity by the enlightening spirit, taught me that all my righteousness arising from the observance of rites and ceremonies, and from my fancied keeping of the divine commandments, was but filthy rags in the sight of the Holy One. This in-dwelling evil principle then received its death-blow; for grace so triumphed over corruption as to make me willing to relinquish, and to retire from, all my former vain hopes and dependences, and to "submit myself unto the righteousness of God," by a cordial receiving of Christ, and resting upon him for my salvation. But, although mortally wounded, it is not yet extinct: its writhings and struggles convince me that, although it does not now possess the strong-hold of my heart as it did when I was "alive without the law," and when it reigned with undivided sway, it is nevertheless not yet completely dislodged. It is still able to maintain a conflict with grace, which has gained the ascendancy; for, although "I delight in the law of God after the inward man, yet I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." And so severe and dreadful is the internal war—so much am I distracted and tossed to and fro thereby—that I am often constrained to cry in agony of soul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" By what power shall I be completely devoted from these assaults of my enemy, and this spiritual warfare be brought to a successful and glorious termination, and I be enabled fully and finally to triumph? "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" "For, although in myself altogether incompetent to cope with this foe, which, in spite of being wounded, yet grievously harasses and assails me, I know that greater is he that is with me than all that can be against me; and I am confident that, even though I may be at times reduced to the most dire extremity, and my soul within me may be disquieted and downcast by the fear of the enemy's ultimately prevailing. He shall appear for my help, and in his strength I shall be more than conqueror. And when I am most thoroughly wearied from self-dependence, then it is that I am most able in my patience to possess my soul; for "when I am weak, then am I strong."

This then, dear reader, is an avowal which most signally abuses self, and which at the same time eminently exalts the Saviour. It is expressive of a strong and abiding conviction, which leads to self-distrust, but not to despair,—a conviction which constrains the subject of it to come forth from the refuge of lies in which he has vainly sought to shelter himself from the storms of an accusing conscience and the threatened wrath of a justly-offended God,—a conviction, however, which does not leave him in a state of helpless and hopeless exposure to the out-breaking of Almighty vengeance, and the eternal upbraidings of the inward monitor, which, with awful appropriateness, is called "the worm that dieth not"—but leads him at once to the divinely-appointed "hiding-place from the wind, and covert from the tempest," in which he is perfectly and for ever safe. O blessed sense of weakness, which leads the sinner to an humble reliance on Almighty strength! O happy conviction of insecurity which constrains the soul to take up its everlasting habitation in Christ, and causes it to tremble at nothing so much as the thought of separation from him!

Let it be remembered that all convictions of inability do not produce this blessed result. There are those which drive to despair, and ultimately to everlasting perdition. A man has become temporarily impressed with a sense of the necessity of attending to the concerns of eternity. An attack of disease, or the death of a friend, or some other awakening providence, or, it may be, some alarming message from the word has produced this effect. He bethinks himself of the precariousness of all sublunary things, and sets about seeking some more abiding foundation of happiness and security than this world can afford. He applies himself to

the work of reformation, forgetful or regardless of the truth that the transforming process by which the sinner, from being an heir of wrath, becomes an heir of glory, can be effected only by the energy of the Holy Spirit. He knows neither the nature of his disease, nor its true remedy. He is aware, indeed, of the necessity of abandoning his evil courses, but he is *unaware* of the self-renunciation and submission to the righteousness of God, to which the Holy Spirit leads every truly awakened soul. He resolves, therefore, to resist and subdue his wrong propensities, and to walk unblameably in the way of God's commandments. Again and again he resolves; but again and again he breaks his resolutions. He gradually becomes more and more convinced of his own weakness, and of the awful power of inherent corruption. Now comes the infinitely momentous crisis of his history. The word of God declares to him that without Christ he can do *nothing*—that salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast,"—and that, renouncing all dependence upon his own exertions, and throwing himself as a helpless and justly-condemned sinner, upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, he may find pardon and acceptance, and receive from above a new and living principle of holy obedience, by which he shall be enabled to live a spiritual life, and bring forth fruit to the praise and glory of divine grace. But because there is something in all this that he cannot comprehend, and something that is too humbling to his pride for him to acquiesce in, he listens rather to the impious suggestion, that God cannot *righteously* demand of him that which he is unable in his own strength to render,—and thus either lowers his standard of obligation to suit his own inclination and ability, or else imbibes the tenets of infidelity, and quiets his conscience with arguments which he himself disbelieves, while at the same time he suffers himself to be influenced and deluded by them.

The falsity and ruinousness of these conceptions of inability, consist in this, that they allow him who entertains them to escape from a sense of his responsibility, and lead him, as has been stated, to reason thus,—that, since he is unable, in his own unaided strength, to keep the commandments of God, he must even hope that God will accept of him on account of what he can do,—or, otherwise, that, since he is incapable, by nature, of rendering an acceptable obedience to the divine law, he need not concern himself about the matter, seeing that a righteous God can never exact from him that which he is unable to give. But immensely different were the convictions of his weakness and helplessness, which agitated the breast of the Apostle, when he was first awakened and alarmed by the terrors of God's law. He perceived, as does every sinner taught by the Holy Spirit, that his inability consisted mainly in an entire alienation of heart from God, which prompted him to continual rebellion,—and that this inability, so far from being an *extenuation*, was an *aggravation* of all his actual sins and transgressions. He perceived also—and this was that which caused "sin to revive" within him; this was that which called forth into malignant exercise his inherent corruption, his pride and enmity against the truth—he perceived that this inability which he discovered within himself, did not in the least degree do away with the obligation under which he lay, to render a perfect and unvarying obedience to God's command; for the law still urged, with unabated vigour, its imperious requirements, and still thundered forth its dreadful penalty, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Now here it was that grace obtained the mastery in him; and it is just at this crisis, too, that it obtains the mastery in all who, after a deep *law-work*, as the old divines term it, are brought under the power of the truth as it is in Jesus. It is when bereft of all hope of being able to recommend themselves to God by their own exertions and performances, that they see the infinite excellency of the gospel plan of salvation. It is in this "valley of Achor" that the Lord opens up to them a "door of hope," and gives them to see that, although lost and undone, Jesus is able and willing to save them,—and that, although without him they can

do nothing of which God will accept, yet, through him strengthening them, they shall be able to "do all things,"—that is, they shall be able, in the strength which he by his Holy Spirit will impart unto them, to lead lives of humble, and holy, and acceptable obedience.

But, dear reader, it is at this point, also, that the rejecter of Christ turns away with disdain. When the law urges its requirements, and proclaims its penalty,—and when he finds that, notwithstanding his utter incapacity by nature to fulfil its demands, not one jot nor one tittle of these demands is abated. His proud heart rebels,—the arch-enemy of his soul whispers to him that such doctrine is repugnant to reason, and subversive of the dignity of human nature,—and he listens to the voice of the destroyer, and shuts his ears to the voice of God. It is just here,—when the humbled, contrite sinner, with the pride of his heart subdued by victorious grace, "lays his hand upon his mouth, and his mouth in the dust," and, with wondering and adoring gratitude, receives an offered Christ—it is just here, that the *unhumbled* and only *half-converted* sinner furnishes, by his rejection of the gospel terms, an awful and affecting comment upon the inspired declaration, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." He may have been so alarmed as to think of building himself a refuge; but he has not been sufficiently alarmed humbly to betake himself to Christ. The simplicity of the gospel scheme pays no homage to the idol self; and in the sullessness of offended pride he turns away "in a rage."—2 Kings v. 12.

I have read of a physician who was deemed skilful in his profession, but severe in his regimen. When he had prescribed, and the patient objected to the treatment, he was wont to say, "I see you are not yet *bad enough* for me." The man whose case I have been supposing,—and alas! it is a case of continual occurrence,—is not yet "bad enough" for Christ,—that is, he is not yet bad enough in his own apprehension. But tell a truly-awakened sinner the remedy for his sad condition, and however it may require him to humble himself, he will seek to comply with its terms. However mysterious to natural reason, however humbling to natural pride, the prescribed plan may be, he will seek to fall in with it. This is the state of a sinner's mind, when the law as a "schoolmaster" brings him to Christ.

The foregoing description of Christian experience will not be deemed a digression, when it is stated that the passage of scripture at the head of this article has been selected rather as a motto than as a text.

Suffer me now, my dear reader, to guard you against an error into which many fall, and into which many are led even by their *avowed creed*.—I mean the error of supposing that the sense of weakness of which the Apostle speaks, does not remain in the breast of the *advanced* believer. This caution might be deemed superfluous, when it is remembered that it is *Paul* who uses these words, "When I am weak." To what exalted height of Christian experience had he attained, when this letter was penned, in which he makes such humble acknowledgments of his own weakness, and such distinct professions of self-distrust! And when, in another epistle, he says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

I shall briefly notice a few facts in the experience of the believer, by which he is continually reminded of his own utter weakness, and of his need of looking away from himself for its strength. And the proofs that I shall adduce will be of so simple a kind, that I feel assured they will be at once understood by every child of God,—by every one in whose breast the conflict is going on between grace and in-dwelling sin.

1. He cannot do the things that he ought. Ho