

by chap. iii. 1. to be written to the same persons) the inscription is, *To them who have obtained like precious faith with us*, i. e. with the Apostles and servants of Christ. And in the third chapter, he tells them, both his Epistles were designed to *stir up their rure minds*. In the First Epistle of John, written (for ought appears) to professing Christians in general. chap. ii. 12, &c. the Apostle tells them, "He writes to them because their sins were forgiven, because they had known him that was from the beginning.—Because they had overcome the wicked one," &c. In verses 20, 21, he tells them, "they have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things; and that he did not write to them because they had not known the truth, but because they had known it," &c.: And in verse 27, he says, "The anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man should teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." And in the beginning of chap. iii. he addresses them as those who were the sons of God, who when he should appear should be like him, because they should see him as he is." In chap. iv. 4, he says, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome," &c.—The Apostle Jude, in his general Epistle, speaks much of apostates and their wickedness; but to other professing Christians, that had not fallen away, he says, verses 20, 21, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Plainly supposing, that they had professed faith with love to God our Saviour, and were by the Apostle considered as his friends and lovers.—Many other passages to the like purpose might be observed in the Epistles, but these may suffice.

Now how unaccountable would these things be, if the case was, that the members of the primitive Christian churches were not admitted into them under any such notion as their being really godly persons and heirs of eternal life, nor with any respect to such a character appearing on them; and that they themselves joined to these churches without any such pretence, having no such opinion of themselves!

But it is particularly evident that they had such an opinion of themselves, as well as the Apostles of them, by many things the Apostles say in their Epistles. Thus, in Rom. viii. 15, 16, the Apostle speaks of them as "having received the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of God bearing witness with their spirits, that they were the children of God." And chap. v. 2, of "their rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."—In 1 Cor. i. 8, he speaks of them as "waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus." In chap. xv. 17, the Apostle says to the members of the church of Corinth, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins;" Plainly supposing, that they hoped their sins were forgiven. In Philip. i. 25, 26, the Apostle speaks of his coming to Philippi, to "increase their joy of faith, and that their rejoicing in Christ might be more abundant;" implying (as was observed before), that they had received comfort already, in some degree as supposing themselves to have a saving interest in Christ.—In 1 Thess. i. 10, he speaks of the members of the church of Thessalonica as "waiting for Christ from heaven, as one who had delivered them from the wrath to come."—In Heb. vi. 9—19, he speaks of the Christian Hebrews as having that "hope which was an anchor to their souls."—The Apostle Peter, 1 Epistle, i. 3—6, 8, 9, speaks of the visible Christians he wrote to, as being "begotten to a living hope, of an inheritance incorruptible, &c.—Wherein they greatly rejoiced," &c.—And even the members of the church of Laodicea, the very worst of all the seven churches of Asia, yet looked upon themselves as truly gracious persons, and made that profession; they "said, they were rich, and increased in goods, and knew not that

they were wretched and miserable," &c. Rev. iii. 17. It is also evident, that the members of these primitive churches had this judgment one of another, and of the members of the visible church of Christ in general.—In 1 Thess. iv. 13, &c. the Apostle exhorts the Christian Thessalonians, in mourning for their deceased friends who were visible Christians, *not to sorrow* as the hopeless Heathen were wont to do for their departed friends; and that upon this consideration, that they had reason to expect to meet them again in *glorious* circumstances at the day of judgment, never to part more. The ground of *comfort* concerning their dead friends, which the Apostle here speaks of, is evidently something *more* than such an *hope* as it may be supposed we ought to have of all that profess Christian *doctrines*, and are not *scandalous* in life whom we must forbear to censure, because we do not know but they are true saints.—The members of the church of Sardis, next to Laodicea, the worst of the seven churches of Asia, yet *had a name that they lived*; though Christ, who speaks to these seven churches from heaven, in the character of the Searcher of Hearts (see Rev. ii. 23), explicitly tells them, that *they were dead*; perhaps all in a dead frame, and the most in a dead state.

These things evidently show, how all the Christian churches through the world were *constituted* in those days; and what sort of *holiness* or *saintship* it was, that all visible Christians in good standing had a *visibility* and *profession* of, in that apostolic age; and also what sort of *visibility* of this they had, *viz.* not only that which gave them right to a kind of *negative charity*, or freedom from censure, but that which might justly induce a *positive judgment* in their favor. The churches that these Epistles were written to, were all the principal churches in the world; some of them very large, as the churches of Corinth and Ephesus. Some of the Epistles were directed to all the churches through large countries where the gospel had great success, as the Epistle to the Galatians. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to all the Jewish Christians in the land of Canaan, in distinction from the Jews that lived in other countries, who were called Hellenists or Grecians, because they generally spake the Greek tongue. The Epistles of Peter were written to all the Christian Jews through many countries, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia; where were great numbers of Jews, beyond any other Gentile countries. The Epistle of James was directed to all Christian Jews, scattered abroad through the whole world. The Epistles of John and Jude, for ought appears in those Epistles, were directed to all visible Christians through the whole world. And the Apostle Paul directs the First Epistle to the Corinthians, not only to the members of that church, but to all professing Christians through the face of the earth: 1 Cor. i. 2, and chap. xiv. 33, speaking of the churches in general, he calls them *all churches of the saints*. And by what Christ says to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea in the Apocalypse, of whom more evil is said than of any Christian churches spoken of in the New Testament, it appears that even the members of those churches looked on themselves as in a state of salvation, and had such a name with others.

Here possibly some may object, and say, it will not follow from the Apostles speaking to and of the members of the primitive church after the manner which has been observed, as though they supposed them to be *gracious* persons, that therefore a *profession* and *appearance* of this was looked upon in those days as a requisite *qualification* for admission into the visible church; because another reason may be given for it, *viz.* Such was the *extraordinary* state of things at that day, that it so came to pass, that the *greater part* of those converted from Heathenism and Judaism to Christianity, were *hopefully gracious persons*, by reason of its being a day of such large communications