

*any theory.*”—Nor is your assertion less important—“the only question with me is to understand each sentence” [of the scriptures] “in its own context.”

I am not at all surprised that the descriptions you give of faith, regeneration, christian experience, and the sanctifying influence of the truth, should occasion such opposition. No man will believe that faith is the belief of the gospel till he understand the gospel in the sense in which the apostles preached it. Express the gospel in every possible way, and exhibit in the most pointed manner that it is impossible to be saved in the very nature of things, in any way but by believing what God has said of his Son: Still the thing is not understood—the internal feeling and sentiment of every one, even the best instructed in speculations about the gospel, is, “What shall I do that I may work the works of God?” And if you are so plain and pointed that such persons cannot mistake you that you mean exactly what you say, the faith is no more than believing what God says of Jesus—then the carnal mind rises in wrath against God’s only way of saving sinners. For in the ears of all such persons the words of Jesus, faith, repentance &c. mean no more to them than the same thing they have done, or are about to do to reconcile God to them, and thus avert his wrath. The work that God has wrought they will by no means believe. And it has appeared to me the more orthodox, as you would say, unbelievers are, the more they are opposed to salvation by faith. The fact is, that men are not disposed to be dependant on the Saviour for salvation, and therefore their hearts rise in enmity against the doctrine of the gospel. And this is the real cause why their minds are blinded as to God’s way of renovating the human soul and sanctifying all its powers. You have no doubt observed the striking beauty of the Saviour’s words to Paul in reference to the effects of that gospel which he was to preach among the Gentiles, Acts xxvi. 18. “To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in me.”

Here the Saviour attributes the enlightening of the mind, the renovation of the heart, the forgiveness of sins, and the present and eternal inheritance of his people, to the faith that is in him. A mistake then with respect to this faith will be fatal, to the whole of personal salvation. Hence the great mistakes about what is called “christian experience,” I do not, indeed, approve of the phraseology. The word “experience” is used, I think, only three times in our translation of the Bible: first, in the book of Genesis, xxx. 27. where Laban says that he had learned by “experience” that the Lord had blessed him in worldly things on account of Jacob, second Eccles. i. 16, where Solomon boasts of his having great “experience” of wisdom and knowledge, evidently in worldly matters, above all that were before him in Jerusalem, And third, Rom. v. 4, where in Paul’s beautiful climax he informs us that “patience worketh ex-