

themselves as sinners before they believed the gospel, and themselves as Christians since they believed, in a respect wherein the Scripture warrants not the smallest; namely, in the way of relief from a sense of guilt, and in the ground of their encouragement in approaching God. When sinners, they sought *nothing more* to relieve their guilty consciences, *nothing more* wherewith to approach God, than what assured them that God had accepted of, and was altogether well pleased in the work of Christ. *Now*, let this be as it will, they cannot be comforted, they cannot approach, before they see that they believe thus, and that it produces proper effects upon them; things, the one of which can only be known, and the other only produced in the way of having their whole confidence founded on the blood of Jesus, and by this being altogether and fully encouraged to draw near unto God. In fine, they are no more helpless sinners pricked in their hearts, receiving the word gladly, and so approaching God; but good Christians, proud of their evidences as distinguishing them from other men, and coming to God in consequence of presenting their Christian character instead of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Here, then, we see one way in which the beginning of the confidence is not kept steadfast to the end. For surely all must allow, that there is a material difference between the *beginning* and the *end* of this confidence; a beginning and end as different as trust in God and trust in self; as different as glorying in the person and work of Christ, and glorying in our own persons and our own works.

But there is yet another way intimately connected with the former, in which the beginning of the confidence is not kept steadfast to the end. To put love, obedience, hope, joy, peace, repentance, in place of the work of Christ, is evidently to destroy them all. For instance, when we think we see, or wish to see, other things than the work of Christ between us and misery, love to him as the only refuge must be impaired in proportion; hope also must be lost; joy and peace too cannot be kept alive, or deceit alone preserves them; nor shall we mourn much on account of those sins, of which anything else but the work of Christ gives us the confidence or prospect of forgiveness. Here, then, are the effects of the gospel gone; and thus forsaking God, the fountain of living waters, we must hew out to ourselves broken cisterns which can hold none. The mind of man is formed for activity, and the desire of happiness is there a first and necessary principle, and when we do not find happiness in the Creator, we must be seeking it in the creature. Forsaking the love of Christ, we must be placing our affections on opposite objects, that is, upon somewhat in the world, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life." Forsaking the hope of the gospel, we must be seeking a hope in this world, producing a correspondent joy and peace, and our former godly sorrow will give place to "the sorrow of this world which worketh death." Thus are self-righteousness and the love of the world

inseparably connected. But will the conscience of such a man be easy? Alas! no. The remembrance of his departed hope, love, and joy, will haunt him, but 'in hand, with the consciousness of his present alienation; and while he has lost hope from the gospel, and cannot take comfort from what he is, he will strive to obtain some glimpse of hope from what he was. Tell him "the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin," he will grant it in words, when in fact he denies it. Granting that the greatest sinner, at first hearing the truth, may, and ought to set his hope in God; he will doubt, if one long professing the gospel, and long in works denying it, has the same ground to do so. Here, then, is a denial that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. *Formerly* (that is, when the truth was first believed), comfort and hope sprung from the truth, in the very worst views entertained of sin; *now*, unless he be free, as he thinks, from sins inconsistent with Christianity, no hope can be entertained. *Here then, again, the beginning of the confidence is not kept steadfast unto the end.* *Formerly*, whatever godly sorrow sin might produce, no sin, however great, occasioned distrust for salvation, the gospel removing every cause of it. *Formerly*, no unworthiness could make us judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life, knowing that God viewed us still more unworthy than we could possibly view ourselves. *Now*, sin produces not so much godly sorrow, as despair.

What is there, then, which can recover from such a situation? What can again restore to hope? The Lord will indeed restore the souls of his sheep: but it will not be by their getting a better opinion of themselves; nay, we may safely say, on the contrary, that it will be while they entertain a worse. *That same truth* (which level-human pride and abases human worth, while it sets forth God as our boast, and God as our righteousness; that same truth, which first quickened to lively hope in God when dead to all other, and destroyed every degree of hope in self once entertained; *that very truth alone*) can now revive the same. Let us then, when falling into unbelief, and consequently into the love of the world, and so either having hope in our own righteousness, or repining for want of it; let us, while thus asking that question, "Where-with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" or that in Romans x. 5, "Who shall ascend into heaven, or who shall descend into the deep?" let us, I say, remember, that "the word is nigh us, even in our mouths and in our hearts," that which we profess to believe; and neither having, nor wishing to have, hope founded upon our own righteousness, but confessing ourselves the chief of sinners, let us take comfort from that word, which to us, as such, brings salvation. The effect is sure: we shall again, through the resurrection of Jesus, have lively hope; we shall again be filled with joy and peace in believing; we shall, above all things, love Him who is free from all variableness and shadow of turning—the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. This love also will constrain us powerfully, not to live unto

ourselves but unto him; pouring contempt upon all that the world holds excellent and worthy of love. This unchangeable love and kindness, contrasted with our own ingratitude and backsliding, will then too produce that godly sorrow, which leads to repentance never to be repented of. Thus then do men live by faith; thus do they fall by unbelief; and thus are they again restored to live by faith; that is, by that very truth, by the faith of which they formerly stood, and by the unbelief of which they fall.

The whole design of what has been said, is to inculcate the great necessity of glorying, first and last, entirely and exclusively, in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is freely admitted, that it is highly proper for professors of the faith to examine themselves by their fruits, but then of what are these fruits the evidence? Of their faith in Christ, and hope in him alone for salvation; and therefore no works can afford any evidences of those that perform them, being the people of God, unless they are conscious that these works flow from the faith and love of the gospel, as the sole ground of their confidence. It is of the last importance for professors of the faith to be fully convinced, that when they backslide from God and his ways, they can only be recovered by that truth which first quickened them, and that the free and sovereign grace of God can alone renew their hope and joy.

To this purpose we have many examples in the word of God: and particularly the case of the Churches in Asia is exactly in point, recorded in Rev. chapters ii. and iii. The Ephesians, having left their first love, are called on "to remember from whence they had fallen, and to repent." The Church in Sardis, having departed from their liveliness in God's ways, is exhorted "to remember how they had received and heard, and to hold fast, and repent." And the Laodiceans, having fallen into a self-righteous and lukewarm state, highly offensive to Christ, are counselled by him "to buy of him gold tried in the fire that they might be rich, and white raiment that they might be clothed, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear, and to anoint their eyes with eye-salve, that they might see."

It is then a comfortable and safe doctrine, that Christians, in all their defections and sins, must have immediate recourse to the blood of Jesus for pardon and peace of conscience. They may perhaps have, at times, reason to doubt if they ever knew the truth, and this may be a state of mind salutary to their souls in certain circumstances, but they ought at all times to be convinced, that the gospel is true, and suited to their case, although they themselves should have been self-deceivers, and thus to be encouraged, while it is called to-day, to draw near to God, and call on his Almighty name, who has assured us that none shall ever do so in vain. Rom. x. 13.

He who is active and agile, who works as well as wishes, who adds endeavours to his desires, will quickly be a cedar in grace. —Brooks.