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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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To the Editor of the Wesleyan.

REMARKS ON BURNET'S EXPOSITION OF THE ELEVENTH ARTICLE.

"Of the Justification of Man."

"We are accounted Righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by Faith, and not for our own Works or desertings. Wherefore, that we are Justified by Faith only is a most whole-some doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification."

Whatever diversity of views may exist among Christians, they are unanimous on one subject, and that is the pre-eminent importance of a sinner's justification before God, including the nature of justification, and the evangelically constituted and revealed terms whereby a man becomes just with God. An enquiry of this import is the first proposed by an ungodly soul when his true state of guilt and danger, is feelingly apprehended. Then he exclaims "What must I do to be saved?" To furnish the graciously sufficient answer to this demand, as well by satisfying the justice of God, as to lay ample ground for a sinner's hope, was the grand reason for the Incarnation and vicarious death of "the only begotten son of God." He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins; "once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Precious truths that are above comparison with "fine gold or choice silver."

The intrinsic excellence of this part of the "truth as it is in Jesus" is a sufficient reason for the general attention it has commanded, among those of reputation, in the different sections of the Church of Christ from the earliest ages, more particularly since the glorious reformation from Popery. Indeed the nature of justification, and its scriptural condition, constitute the principal points of difference between the Reformed Churches and the adherents of the Pope. Luther's judgment on this subject is well and strongly expressed in the words "the Christian Church stands or falls with it." Closely allied hereto is the teaching of the Church of England, "this is the strong Rock and Foundation of Christian Religion." That Church therefore very properly, has an article on "the justification of man," the substance whereof is to be taught to her congregations by a Clergy whose assent to its doctrine, has been attested by their personal subscription. The former part of this article is in happy and most useful conformity to the whole scriptures, and especially to the New Testament. The inference contained in the second part, "that we are justified by faith only," being precisely correct, is strongly asserted. For a more ample exposition of this brief, but richly expressive phrase, we are referred to the Homily of Justification." That Homily therefore must be regarded with equal deference as the article. The doctrine of both being the same, they no otherwise differ than a leaf enveloped in the bud, or expanded to its full natural proportions; or a chronometer viewed in its index only or when its parts are exhibited, and their uses pointed out by a skillful mechanician.

The Church of England has, perhaps wisely, abstained from any authoritative explanation of the Article. Such an explanation, if definite, must always have given offence to not a few of her sons, who have ever entertained a variety of opinions on most subjects of Christian doctrine, and ecclesiastical discipline. But individual divines of her communion have in several instances, published their views of the formularies and doctrines of the National Church. Of these, Bishop Burnet is not the least. His exposition of the Thirtieth article has justly been held in great esteem, because it contains a vast store of learning on sacred subjects, and an impartial statement of those conflicting opinions, in which the doctrinal articles, have been understood by ministers and others. That this pre-

late has written on the article relating to justification merits attention in these days, not only because of the noble testimony it bears against the Papistical notions of justification, now so extensively taught in the Church of England, but also because of the manner wherein he explains the "faith" that instrumentally justifies. On account of the former he has merited the commendation of every intelligent Protestant, but that in the latter he has gone beside the "oracles of God" and the Homily may be made to appear without difficulty.

Justification according to Burnet, is for "a man" to obtain "the favour of God by a mere act of his grace, or upon some consideration not founded on the holiness or merit of the person himself." This agrees substantially with the Homily on Salvation, "every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification" than he can procure for himself "to be received at God's own hands, that is to say the forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended." The scriptural warrant for this is Act. xiii. 38, 39, be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. The great consideration upon which God returns man's sins is "Christ's merits." His becoming obedient unto death even the death of the cross, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, "he whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, Eph. i. 7. The condition upon which justification is granted to penitent men is "faith" "we are justified by faith only." So says St. Paul. Rom. iii. 28, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare I say at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith, therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. The language of the Homily beautifully harmonises with these inspired sentences. The writer of that document having briefly described the "part" of God in our justification, and the "part" of Christ adds "upon our past true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ." Again, "St. Paul declareth" "nothing upon the behalf of man concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith." Yet again, "Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him." Such is the edifying agreement on this vital doctrine between St. Paul, the Article, and the Homily. It were to be wished that Burnet's exposition could be added also; but that his views do not coincide with these standards, will appear in the sequel.

The scriptural character of justification and the faith whereby it is embraced, stands at an equal distance from justification through the sacraments, and from justification by works. Formerly it was considered that Sacramental justification was a tenet peculiar to the Papists. The times are now altered. The alteration is a mournful deterioration in theological belief and teaching. Several divines of the Church of England, strenuously inculcate this once exploded and pernicious dogma of the Romanists, justification is described as "the act of God imparting his divine presence to the soul, through baptism, and so making us temples of the Holy Ghost." Dr. Pusey's letter to the bishop of Oxford, p. 70. They censure those who hold that justification is not necessarily the gift of

God through his sacraments; and condemn a strong terms those who do not revert to their baptism and their being then engrafted into Christ, but to their faith in Christ as the act whereby they were justified. The bishop of London, in his recent charge, has said, "I cannot therefore deny it to be the doctrine of our Church that baptism is instrumentally connected with justification." "Justification begins in baptism, when the children of wrath are regenerated by water and the Holy Ghost, and made the children of God, remission of sins is expressly declared to be then given, and remission of sins implies justification, in the proper sense of the term," we need not insist on the evident discrepancy between this doctrine and that of the Article and Homily above quoted, but shall satisfy ourselves by transferring to our columns, the judicious and strongly expressed sense of bishop Burnet, in his own language. "It is a tenet of the Church of Rome, that the use of the sacraments, if men do not put a bar to them, and they have only imperfect acts of sorrow accompanying them, do so far complete those acts as to justify us. This we do utterly deny as a doctrine that tends to enervate all religion; and to make the sacraments, that were appointed to be the solemn acts of repletion for quickening and exciting our piety, and for conveying grace to us upon our coming devoutly to them, become means to flatter and deaden us; as if they were of the nature of charms, which if they could be come at, though with ever so slight a preparation, would make up all defects. The doctrine of sacramental justification is justly to be reckoned among the most mischievous of all those practical errors that are in the Church of Rome. Since therefore this is now here mentioned in all those large discourses that are in the New Testament concerning justification, we have just reason to reject it; since also the natural consequence of this doctrine is to make men rest contented in low, imperfect acts, when they can be so easily made up by a sacrament, we have just reason to detect it as one of the depths of Satan; the tendency of it being to make these ordinances of the Gospel, which were given us as means to enlighten our faith and repentance, become engines to encourage sloth and impotence. Let these words be well weighed. The doctrine denounced is a "hateful tenet of the Church of Rome," and even one of the "most mischievous." It is to be detested as belonging to the depths of Satan, and its tendency is to prevent the divinely appointed means of grace into the sad occasions first of indifference, then of irreligion.

Thus far Burnet has rendered great service to the cause of saving truth, and has uttered the judgment of the English Reformers; but in other parts of his Exposition of the Eleventh Article he has shown himself to belong to another Theological School. Not having kept close to the authorised explanation of the Article he has varied also from the perspicuous teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Right knowledge of the appointed instrument of our justification is equally, perhaps even more, necessary than correct apprehensions of that blessing conferred by itself. Herein the Article and Homily partake of the perspicuity of the Scriptures. Not so the Exposition. The faith which justifies is presented to us as an enlightened and exclusive trust in Christ, both in the Homily and the word of God, "and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the son of God, once offered for us upon the cross to obtain thereby God's grace and remission." Hom. pt. 2. "For the right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that holy Scripture and all the foresaid articles of our Faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by

Christ." "For how can a man have this true faith, this sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ, his sins be forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God, and to be partaker of the Kingdom of Heaven by Christ, whom he liveth ungodly and denyeth Christ in his deeds? Surely no such ungodly man can have this faith and trust in God. Hom. p. 3. So the Scriptures "in him" Jesus Christ "shall the Gentiles trust." Rom. xv. 12. That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, in whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. Eph. 1. 13. "Trust" therefore is the Scriptural synonyme for "faith," and therefore it is neither "obedience" considered as practical submission to the laws of the Gospel nor those fruits of the Spirit whose combination and maturity in Christians make them "perfect and entire wanting nothing." Faith in the sense of affectionate trust, is to be regarded as alone instrumental in embracing remission of sins. No other grace does this office. Its province is peculiar. Were it possible that all other fruits of the Spirit should be present in him that believes, they neither justify him, nor do they contribute to his justification, were it possible that they should be absent from one who believeth with his heart. This faith would be unto righteousness. "Only Faith" being immediately and indispensably necessary to a sinner's justification.

On this important point, Burnet's Exposition is equally unsatisfactory and unscriptural. He evidently departs from the simple views of the Sacred writers, which have been well expressed in those formulae, whose gratuitous expounder he became. He thus enters upon the second principal term in the Article. "The next term to be explained is faith, which in the New Testament stands generally for the complex of Christianity, in opposition to the Law which stands as generally for the complex of the whole Mosaical dispensation. So that the faith of Christ, is equivalent to this the Gospel of Christ." "The believing this revelation, and that great article of it, of Christ's being the Son of God, and the true Messiah that came to reveal the Father's will, and to offer himself up to be the sacrifice of this new covenant, is often represented as the great and only condition of the covenant on our part, but still this faith must receive the whole gospel, the precepts as well as the promises of it, and receive Christ as a Prophet to teach, and a King to rule, as well as a Priest to save us. Again, "by faith only is not to be meant faith as it is separated from the other evangelical graces and virtues; but faith as it is opposite to the rites of the Mosaical Law." "So that the faith mentioned by St. Paul is the complex of all Christianity." "And as it is certainly true, that we are taken into the favour of God upon our receiving the whole gospel without observing the Mosaical precepts." Once more, "but still our faith which includes our hope, our love, our repentance and obedience, is the condition that makes us capable of receiving the benefits of this redemption and free grace."

All this, certainly looks very unlike justification by "faith only." The bishop however disclaims the merit of our works in justification, and therefore he must not be charged with that opinion. But that he includes other works besides faith as indispensably necessary to the remission of sins, his own words plainly evince. In so doing he wanders from the sense of that article, which he set himself to explain. This will further appear by the two following sentences, "in strictness of words we are not justified till the final sentence is pronounced, till upon our death we are solemnly acquitted of our sins, and admit-