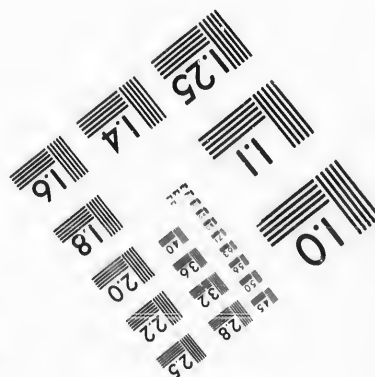
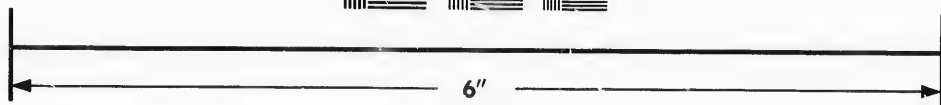
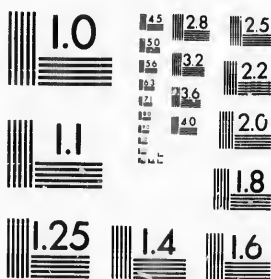


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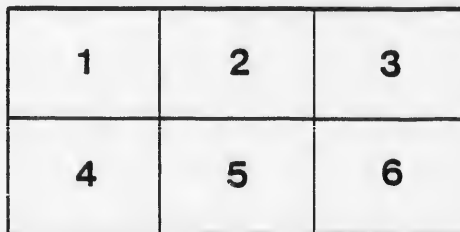
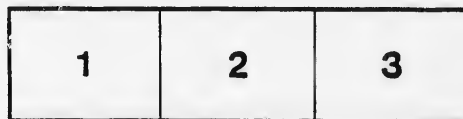
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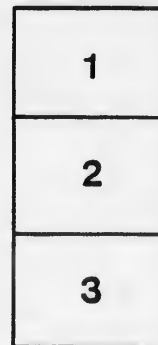
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ESSAYS

ON

GRACE, FAITH, AND EXPERIENCE,

WHEREIN SEVERAL

*GOSPEL TRUTHS ARE STATED AND
ILLUSTRATED,*

AND THEIR

OPPOSITE ERRORS POINTED OUT.

BY SAMUEL ECKING.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

*SOME INTERESTING EXTRACTS ON SIMI-
LAR SUBJECTS, SELECTED FROM
EMINENT AUTHORS.*

PICTOU :
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1832.

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PREFACE.

It has been observed, that in controversies about religion, most parties, however wide in their sentiments, have claimed the authority and countenance of scripture for their respective notions. Some, on this account, have been disposed to fix the charge of inconsistency upon the sacred records; and others, for the same reason, have thought it necessary to have some certain rules to interpret scripture by. Hence traditions, church-authority, creeds, and confessions of faith, have been multiplied in great abundance, and which are in general thought better calculated to guard against heresy than that book which is appealed to by all heretics.—The church of Rome has deservedly been held up to public ridicule, for her pretensions to intallibility, and for keeping the people in ignorance, by prohibiting the reading of the scriptures; happy day that was, therefore, which began the dawn of *Reformation*. But does it not lead us back to Rome, to condemn *free enquiry*, from the fear of innovation? What essential difference is there between having the scriptures wholly kept from our eyes, and suffering our understanding, judgment, and conscience to be limited by articles, church authority, &c.? Do not these limitations tend to shut us up in as gross darkness, as our ancestors were covered with, by receiving papal tradition in the room of divine revelation?—The preaching of Fulgentio at Venice, on

Pilate's question, *What is Truth?* is not foreign to our purpose. He told his hearers that at last, after many researches, he had found it out, and holding out a New Testament, said that it was in his hand; but he put it in his pocket, and coldly added, 'The book is prohibited.' What difference would there have been had he said, You may read the book, but its true meaning is prohibited? But what has been the consequence of introducing this method of preventing heresies and schisms? Plainly this (not to say any thing about extirpation), many have, as it were insensibly, been led to make tradition and church-authority their faith; and have thus become the dupes of superstition, while they have professed to be guided by the word of God! Yet since all spirits must be tried by the scriptures—since all true church-authority must be founded there—and since if any man speak not according to the form of sound words recorded there, it is because there is no light in him, where can Christians appeal but to the scriptures? These, they are well assured, are able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'

The writer of the following pages might tell his reader of his connections with those who are reputed orthodox; but as one justly observes, "Orthodoxy, like almost all martial terms of controvertists, is a very vague, equivocal word.—In its original and true import, it signifies a right belief; but, such is the fate of language! in one latitude it means a belief of one thing, in another the belief of another

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thing, quite contrary." In these Essays, let it stand for what Paul calls the belief of the truth—not the belief of the truth as it is in this creed, or in that, or in any other, but as it is in Jesus.—He presents them to the reader's serious attention, submissively and impartially to be tried by the heavenly oracles, in their most simple and obvious meaning, comparing spiritual things with spiritual; assuring him, that he wishes them to have no other influence than what they may have borrowed from thence. His grand design is to recommend the disallowed gospel as the *one thing needful*; as that alone which can give peace at the last, and land a sinner safe and happy on the heavenly shore. The glorious gospel, in its primitive simplicity, freeness, and glory, stands opposed, on the one hand, to self-righteousness and self-dependence in all its forms; and, on the other, to carnal confidence, worldly mindedness, and self-indulgence: for while it makes ample provision for the most wretched circumstances a sinner can be in, by laying a sufficient foundation for his hope in the Redeemer's finished work; it exhibits the most powerful incentives to true godliness, and makes the keeping of Christ's commands essential to the Christian character. On this account it is expected that the self-righteous and the licentious (however ambiguously they hold those tenets which lead them to self-confidence and self-indulgence), will be much disgusted with what they find in the following pages: and the writer frankly acknowledges that he has not designed, in a single line, to please either of them; but on the contrary has endeavoured to set forth his sentiments in such a light, as to stand in direct opposition to their notions of Christianity. The doctrines opposed are mostly stated in the very words

of some who have written in favour of them, but without mentioning the names of the authors; the reason of which is, that persons or particular parties are not attacked, but errors, let them be found with what persons or parties they may. The same method has been occasionally observed, in regard to those who have maintained the doctrines herein stated; and when the reader is referred to an author's name, it is not with the least design, either to rest the sentiment upon his credit, or screen the writer from censure, under covert of another's reputation: for though he highly esteems their writings, who have been valiant for the truth, yet if ten thousand writers, in the highest reputation for orthodoxy, could be produced in confirmation of what is here said, unless they were prefaced with, Thus saith the Lord, they will only stand as so many insignificant cyphers in the esteem of those who have 'an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.' On the other hand, if the reasoning of these Essays be found to accord with the word of truth, it will be a very small circumstance with discerning Christians, though the wise, the learned, or the seemingly religious, should unite to reprobate the book, and load its author with reproach; for what are the highest sounding names among men, to the name and authority of Christ? and what should Christians fear, though their faith and practice provoke the contempt of nations? would any strange thing happen to them if it should be so? Nay verily! for so persecuted they the prophets and apostles, which have gone before them.

The writer has nothing to say in favour of the manner in which the work is executed. He makes no pretention to accuracy of language, or refine-

ment of style; but is conscious of many deficiencies in each of these respects. All he aims at is to convey his meaning, in the most simple and intelligible manner he can. If he has made known what he intended, by what he has declared, the summit of his attempt, as to manner, is obtained.—If it should please the great Prophet of the church, who alone can teach to profit, to make use of these hints to convince any of the error of their way, or to confirm the souls of the disciples, the author's labours will be richly rewarded: But if, after comparing what is written with the Bible, that infallible standard of truth, any should be disposed to condemn it as heretical, he has no higher court to appeal to. He is persuaded, in his own mind, that the remarks are grounded upon the evidence of Moses and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles; but is very willing to allow, what indeed, every man has an equal right to, the right of private judgment; and can say no more than, 'I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say, and let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.'

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ESSAY I.

ON DIVINE GRACE.

SECTION I.

OF THE NATURE OF GRACE IN GENERAL.

THE doctrine maintained by the apostles of Christ, is distinguished from every scheme framed by the wisdom of men, in that it is a system of pure grace. They asserted, that man must stand before his Maker either upon the footing of the law of works; or the gospel of grace. Upon the former ground they fully demonstrate, that no flesh living can be accepted, because the whole world is become guilty before God, and so justly condemned by his law; therefore they assert, that if any of the fallen race of Adam are saved, it must be by sovereign grace alone. In the apostles' days, however, many asserted with them that salvation was of grace, who yet meant something thereby, very different from the obvious sense of their words; and it is hardly to be questioned, that the greatest part of those who call themselves Christians, in our day, will affirm in

like manner, that we are saved by grace; while yet, when they come to explain themselves upon the point, few will be found to understand the term, in the sense in which it is plain the apostles used it.—The inspired witnesses, aware of the errors which many ran into in their own day, about grace, and also of the more general opposition that would be made against it after their decease; declared themselves upon the subject, with the greatest precision. Thus when Peter had written upon the truth of the gospel he tells those who had received his doctrine, ‘this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand,’ 1 Peter v. 12. It was Paul’s peculiar consolation that the Colossians knew the grace of God in truth; Col. i. 6. that is, as opposed to every falsehood, or counterfeit of it: they had been taught ‘the truth as it is in Jesus,’ and so had received the grace of God in incorruption. And it was his grief to find, that the Galatians had fallen from grace; Gal. v. 4. that is, if we attend to what he says in the beginning of that epistle, they had received a perverted gospel, which led them to entertain wrong notions of the true grace of God. In his epistle to the Hebrews, he exhorts professing believers to ‘look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God,’ &c. Heb. xii. 15.

Now as every one chooses to affix his own notion to the words of scripture which he has occasion to use; and seeing that an error about grace is, of all

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others, the most dangerous, yea the very source of all other errors, under a profession of religion, and must therefore prove fatal, if not perceived and corrected; it is needful that we should search diligently into the true nature of that grace which is revealed, and by which alone we can be saved.

Grace, in the scriptures of truth, stands in direct opposition to works of every kind and every degree; so that it is utterly impossible there should be any, even the least mixture of the one with the other; for such is the purity of grace, and so opposite is its nature to human works, that a coalition would destroy its very being; grace would be no more grace. This appears plain from Paul's writings, Rom. xi. 6. 'And if of grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work.' If this passage does not state the most glaring opposition between works and grace, it is past a possibility to make a contrast. They, therefore, who attempt to join them, to the same end and for the same purpose, even though it might be under the most plausible pretence of securing the interests of holiness, are under a fatal mistake in the most essential points of the gospel, and as far from standing in the true grace of God as the east is from being joined with the west. 'For to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt,' Rom. iv. 4.

And here let it be carefully observed, that the grace of God stands in opposition, not only to those legal works, by which the Jews went about to establish their own righteousness, but to *all works* whatever, wrought by the creature. Whether they be works of the law, or works of the gospel; exercises of the heart, or actions of the life; done while we are in a state of nature, or after we are born of God; they are all, and every of them *equally* set aside, as being either the cause, condition, qualification, or medium, either in the purpose, manifestation, or bestowment of grace, in any of its abounding blessings*; in order that every shadow of glorying should be for ever cut off from the creature, and God in Christ receive the unrivalled honour of salvation in all its parts.

Divine grace, therefore is the free favour, the undeserved compassion of Jehovah, through Christ Jesus, to the absolutely wretched and includes the bestowment of all spiritual and eternal blessings.—The properties of divine grace are, sovereign, rich, and free; that is, sovereign, as it bestows its favours where and on whomsoever it pleases;—rich, as being exceeding abundant in all manner of supplies, extended to the utmost necessities of the poor and

* It must be noticed that the author is here treating of the nature of divine grace, and therefore distinguishes it even from its effects upon men's hearts and lives, which in scripture are sometimes called grace.—Ed.

wretched;—and free, because not conferred upon the account of any inviting qualifications, nor rewarding him that willeth or runneth, but, in all its bestowments, wearing the pleasing appearance of reigning mercy. In short, grace confers the greatest blessings and highest favours upon the most undeserving amongst the sons of men, according to the good pleasure of the divine goodness.—The scriptures always preserve these ideas, whenever the term grace is mentioned.—Thus the gospel is called the grace of God, because it reveals the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, and opens up the eternal purposes of sovereign grace and abounding mercy in him. If the new creature be at any time designed by this term, it still preserves the same endearing signification. For ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’—2 Cor. iv. 6. Titus iii, 4, 6. ‘Who hath saved, us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.’—2 Tim. i. 9. If acts of liberality or a good conversation, 2 Cor. viii. 7. be called grace, it directly leads our thoughts from the effect to the cause, 2 Cor. ix.

I shall close this section with the words one had occasion to use when giving cautions against the

courterfeit grace. 'The doctrine of free grace being so illustrious in the scriptures as not to be spoken against, they (the Arminians) will talk as high of it in general terms as any other, and tell us what great pretensions their doctrine hath to magnify grace, and that they design nothing more than the honour of that; when, indeed, it is not grace, but a contrary thing set up with that name: for, follow the stream either upward or downward, and as it arises from; so it all runs into, advancement of self.'



SECTION II.

THE PURPOSE OF GRACE.

Nothing is more capable of demonstration, if we take it for granted that the scriptures are the word of God, than that the self-moved good pleasure of Jehovah's eternal purpose, is the grand original source of all spiritual and eternal blessings: according as it is written, 'Who hath saved us, and called us—according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.'—The choice of the Mediator's person, in whom men should be blessed, and his fore-ordination to be the beginning of the new creation, was the effect of mere good pleasure and sovereign favour. 'I will give

thee for a covenant to the people,' is the language of pure grace. In the eternal purpose, Christ stands the first and chief elect. Hence the Father calls him 'Mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.' He is the first-born among many brethren in the household of faith, the family of heaven; the centre of Jehovah's delights amongst the sons of men. In him God is well pleased; and out of him, he is nothing but displeasure against sinners. Hence 'the remnant according to the election of grace are chosen in him;' and unless this had been the case, there could have been no salvation.—That Jehovah's good pleasure was the only cause of a people being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of grace being treasured up in him, by the divine decree, for the salvation and glorification of numberless sinners, is a fact which shines with the clearest lustre, and is demonstrated and confirmed in the oracles of unerring truth. Hence we read of, 'a remnant according to the election of grace—of predestination to the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will, which he had purposed in himself,' &c. And it is equally plain from the same authority, that his original design in the appointment of Christ, &c. was his own glory,—the manifestation of his sovereignty, wisdom, justice, holiness, mercy, faithfulness, power, and truth.

But though this good pleasure of the divine goodness is so grand in its own nature, so full of divine

sovereignty, so consistent with all the divine perfections, so infinitely worthy of himself to make known, that he is represented as delighting in the same before he gave birth to time, or existence to creatures; yet it is most disgusting to, and mortally hated by, the sons of pride, who think no reproaches too odious to cast upon it! But why is it so? Why should man reply against God? Why does the creature proceed so impiously, as to call the God that made him to his bar, and censure and condemn his conduct, who has a sovereign right to do according to his own pleasure in heaven and earth, without being subject to any one's inquiry into the reason of his procedure?

The true cause of this ungodly opposition is, that vain man would fain have some ground of glorying in himself before God; whereas the language of the Bible is, 'the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted.' It not only forbids creatures glorying in the divine presence, but strips them of all their fancied importance, and leaves them destitute of the least pretence to, or ground of boasting. Hence the very sinews of human pride are cut; and every one that is saved enters the kingdom of heaven upon the same footing as a little child. But however this sublime truth is hated, traduced, and rejected by those who fancy themselves rich, and so stand in need of nothing; it will ever

prove salutary to those who view themselves as poor and miserable; because towards such it wears the most encouraging, friendly, and smiling aspect: for, if rightly understood, the doctrine of divine sovereignty opens a door of hope, presents an all-sufficient relief to those who are justly condemned, and on the very verge of despair. The self sufficient, like their prime leader, go about industriously to pervert this heavenly doctrine; for, though like him, they use scripture, and, in general terms, talk highly about the eternal purposes of grace; yet under that name, they set up a thing contrary in its nature to the *true grace of God*. Such are they who make the cause of the divine choice to salvation and eternal life, to centre in some foreseen works, pious desires, repentance, &c. But could we imagine that man appeared, in the foreknowledge of God, as pure and holy as the angels who sinned not; yet if that were the cause, or, in any sense, the reason that influenced Jehovah to choose them, though we might discover faithfulness and justice in the Almighty, when accomplishing his designs, we directly lose sight of sovereign grace. And though the signification of the term grace be twisted and turned by false criticism, to blind the eyes of the weak and unstable; yet an authority higher than human, warrants us to say, that if any, or all of the above mentioned things be the cause of any being chosen to eternal life, *grace is no more grace*. Yea, we may go further, and yet keep within the

bounds of revealed truth. The eternal purpose of grace was not the effect of Jehovah's foreknowledge even of the spotless obedience, and perfect atonement of Christ. This is not the cause of everlasting love and the eternal purpose, but the fruit and effect thereof. John iii. 16. Much less then would it comport with the scripture account of the eternal purpose, or the genuine signification of grace, to say, that foreseen works, or any inward qualities whatever in the creature, were the moving cause, or even the remotest medium of the divine choice.

Again the supposition, that any thing foreseen in the creature, influenced the divine choice, is opposed by that state which the word of God represents mankind universally to be in, and in which the divine prescience must have universally beheld them, *viz.* a state of sin, in which they lay polluted as an unclean thing, and obnoxious to the divine wrath; which it would be blasphemy to suppose, could draw out the love of the holy God, so could not be any reason of the divine approbation or choice. But the Holy Spirit, even the Spirit of truth who cannot err, makes void the hypothesis I am opposing, when he tells us, they who were 'chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, and predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace; were dead in trespasses and

sins, and by nature the children of wrath, even as others,' Eph. i. 4—6. chap. ii. 1—3. Thus he who searches the mind of God reports, and we know that his witness is true.

Further; it is contrary to the express declaration of the word, Rom. xi. 5, 6. where we are expressly taught, that the divine choice proceeds upon grace, in opposition to every notion of worthiness or desert whatever. We have not the liberty, here even of halving the matter, or adding the least grain of the one to the other, for even this cannot be done without destroying both. To say, therefore, that the divine choice is of grace, and yet to maintain that it has respect to works, under any form or notion that they can be conceived of, is to assert, in Paul's estimation, the most glaring contradiction that can possibly be thought of. I can compare it to nothing more fitly, than an attempt to prove that darkness is the cause of light.

Once more; it has been said that election is founded upon a foreknowledge of our love. But the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so that naturally we have no love to God in us; nor can we have any love to God's true character, until the sovereign, preventing grace of God, turn us from darkness to light; for till then, we are totally ignorant of the divine beauty. Paul sets the matter in its

true light, Eph. ii. 4, 5. 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,' &c. And another scripture saith, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us;' And we love him because he first loved us. So that it would seem, if credit is to be given to God's word, that the notion of foreseen love in us being the cause or medium of God's love to us, is a mere human fabrication, and without the shadow of foundation, in the scriptures.

Lastly; others who admit the eternal purpose, and deny either foreseen works or foreseen love to be the cause of it, nevertheless maintain, that it was formed upon the foreknowledge of our faith or believing. But the full force of this notion is invalidated by this single consideration, that faith comes as much of God's good pleasure and sovereign favour, as the eternal purpose itself. Divine faith is what no man naturally possesses; for we are all in unbelief. Faith is of the operation of God; the very verse which declares salvation to be of grace, shews that faith is not of ourselves, *it is the gift of God*. And the person who receives this precious favour, can no more account for its being given to him, in the behalf of Christ, to believe in his name, while others remain in unbelief, than he can tell whence the wind cometh, or whither it goeth. For however firmly a person may have believed, what he imagined was the gospel of Christ, when he truly knows

through divine teaching, what the gospel is, he will plainly discover that the Lord was found of him who sought not after him.

From this brief view of the eternal purpose of grace, it appears that divine sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and goodness, are united in the blessed decree of him whose counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure; and though many have been more concerned about the creature's liberty, lest it should be infringed, than Jehovah's sovereignty, lest it should be limited, yet divine wisdom so directs the accomplishment of his purpose, that his chosen people are made willing in the day of his power; whilst all who eventually perish, do so with the utmost freedom of will: they choose what their delight centers in; they love darkness rather than light.

To conclude this section; sovereignty is essential to Deity. Sovereignty, directed by unerring wisdom, is the rule of all Jehovah's proceedings. The original cause of salvation, is the self-moved purpose of divine grace; and the only cause of any sinner's damnation is his own voluntary wickedness, and unprovoked rebellion against God.

SECTION III.

THE MANIFESTATION OF GRACE.

PAUL having spoken of the purpose of grace in Christ Jesus before the world began, tells us that it is 'now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' And that, 'through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' Our attention is hereby led to the entrance of sin into the world. Sin is the cause of that death which God our Saviour came to abolish. Sin first originated in Satan: his sin was pride, which it has been thought, (from John viii. 44.), arose in his high mind from supposing it an indignity to him, that the human nature should be the medium of God's communion with his creatures, and so he left his own habitation. From Christ and his apostles comparing those who are enemies to, and corrupters of the gospel, to the angels that fell, and declaring, that those who apostatize, fall into the condemnation of the devil; it seems not unlikely that this was the case. However that may be, we are at no uncertainty when the first manifestation of sovereign grace was made to man; and this more directly claims our attention.

The word informs us that man was made lord of this lower creation, yet himself framed to live in absolute dependance on his Maker, as the author and giver of all things, and the sovereign of life and death; in the enjoyment of whose favour he was completely happy, and had assurance that he should remain so, while his dependance upon, and obedience to the word of his Sovereign, were preserved inviolable. His natural knowledge of God then gave him comfort, while conscious of having done the things that were well pleasing in his sight. He did not stand in need of any different revelation of God, to complete that happiness which he was framed to enjoy; so that no intimation was, or consistently could be given him, in his state of innocence, of the purpose of grace. But when, through affecting independence, he became a transgressor, and so deserving of the threaten'd death;—when defiled, and so incapable of communion with God;—when nothing but awful; aggravated guilt flew in his face, —nothing but shame, terror, and almost despair filled and harrassed his conscience;—when, in consequence of this, his former knowledge of God heightened, instead of allaying the storm within, so that nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment was before him;—when emptiness, vanity, confusion, disorder, and wrath were brought upon the whole creation;—when nothing from without Jehovah could move him to suspend the execution of the threatening, far less be a motive to manifest

his goodness;—then was the time that infinite wisdom chose, for grace, in all its rich aboundings, to make its welcome appearance; that its true nature and design might appear, and that it might be seen upon the earth, that sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and mercy, were in the purpose of grace perfectly united. ‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,’ were the blessed words that opened the grand mystery which had been hid with God.—By this glorious system of grace the wisdom of God in the permission of sin was manifested, and the honour of the divine government in the destruction of Satan’s kingdom—the abolishment of death—the establishment of the divine law—and the eternal salvation of the elect—are infallibly secured.

The way Jehovah has been pleased to make known his designs of grace in its various stages, is declared by the apostle Paul, Heb. i. 1. ‘God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son—who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.’—Hence we see, that though there has been but one way of salvation since the fall, and that according to the purpose of God in Christ, yet the manifestation of it was given at sundry times, and in divers manners.—I shall not attempt

here to trace at large, the various openings of the mystery of grace, previous to the appearance of God our Saviour, but only observe, that Paul ranks them under the general name of the old covenant; by which I understand, that temporary dispensation which God gave to the fathers, which under the veil of types, &c. represented the blessings of the divine purpose, and were patterns of heavenly things, to remain in use until the seed should come. It appears from Gen. iii. 21. and chap. iv. 4. that sacrifices were made immediately after the fall, which, without doubt, were intended to set forth the great atonement, through faith in which Abel's sacrifice was accepted, Heb. xi. 4. Not to say any thing particularly about Noah, and the manifestation of grace to him under certain signs, such as the ark, the rainbow, &c. it may be observed, that the nature of this covenant was more fully revealed to Abraham, and the blessings of grace which it represented, more clearly manifested to him, Gen. xii. 3. xxii 6—19. John viii. 56. Gal. iii. 3. the apostle Paul also confirms this thought, Heb. ix. 15. 'And for this cause he is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called, might receive the promise of eternal inheritance,' see v. 26. The one atoning sacrifice of Christ extended itself to the transgression of Adam, and to all their transgressions, who believed in the promised seed to the time that the

sacrifice was made at Calvary, with as much virtues it does to those who through grace believe in him now, as having finished his work, and received the great reward thereof. Some are inclined to think that the old covenant began, when the Lord took Israel by the hand, and led them forth out of Egypt; and perhaps there is reason from the scripture to think so: though without doubt, under the ministry of Moses, the former signs were renewed; greatly augmented, and formed into a complete system of ceremonial worship. The sacrifices in general—the cities of refuge—the year of jubilee—the land of Canaan—the kings, prophets, and priests in Israel—the temple, its utensils, and every part of the worship thereof (of which things we cannot now speak particularly) were all shadows of good things to come; but after having answered their end, decayed, waxed old, and then vanished away. But I have chiefly to speak of grace and truth as it came by Jesus Christ. And indeed it is only in reference to this that we can behold grace manifested under the old covenant, for we are not to imagine that any thing pertaining thereunto could take away sin; nor yet that the privileges of the temporary covenant gave any right to that of the new and everlasting.

‘ The promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law but through the righteousness of faith: for if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void,

and the promise' (that all nations of the earth should be blessed in Christ) 'made of none effect.'

God—'hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' And indeed only the Son could make known the mystery which lay hid with God; for no man hath seen God at any time;—the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. It will not be amiss here, to take some notice of the person of the Son, by whom the eternal purpose is made manifest. He is frequently styled the Son of Man, which points out that he is properly a man; and when this title is given him in the New Testament, it leads us to think of him as in this respect naturally inferior to the angels, and not a creature existing before any other creature were made, as some most absurdly suppose, Heb. i. 1.; ii. 14. Yet under this title we are not to suppose him begotten of man; otherwise he could not have been called *that holy thing*. Concerning this important matter, the word of God thus teaches. 'Fear not' Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son—and Mary said unto the angel How shall this be seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered, and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.' By the Holy Ghost coming upon the virgins

&c. our attention is led to what is written in the Psalms concerning him. 'A body hast thou prepared me.' This body was set apart for Jehovah as his own, so that God was manifested in the flesh: for though Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death; yet he has a name above every name, and all the angels of God are commanded to worship him. The prophet foretold, that he who should make his appearance upon the earth, in the fulness of time, was in fact no less a person than 'the mighty God! the everlasting Father! the Lord God! the God of the whole earth!' &c.—Isa. ix. 6.; xl. 10.; liv. 5. John also tells us, that the Word that was in the beginning with God—was God; so that when Immanuel made his appearance, he scrupled not to say, I am the Son of God; by which he meant the same as when he said, 'I and my Father are one. The Father is in me, and I in him.' In this sense the Jews understood him, and counted what he said blasphemy, for which they put him to death: and in the resurrection of Christ we see the Father, who was appealed to on both sides, interposing and deciding the controversy; by which he cleared Jesus from the charge of blasphemy when he made himself God. He is therefore the living and true God in human nature, and as Immanuel he is a true and perfect image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. As the Christ of God, it hath pleased the father that

in him all fullness should dwell, and those who knew him in the days of his flesh, beheld him 'full of grace and truth,' John i. 14. In agreement with this we are told, that the grace of God was upon him, and grace is poured into his lips.' Moses speaking of him as the great Prophet who should reveal the Father's grace, says, *Him shall ye hear*; and that he was well qualified to open the grand mystery, will appear if we collect what has been already hinted of him. He is truly and properly man and so can hold converse with us, without his terrors making us afraid. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and so a fit person for Jehovah to enter into covenant with, and communicate his mind unto. He is above all, God blessed for evermore, and so possessed of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and being all this in unity of person, he could stand between God and man—and of course, all that he did, or spoke, must be filled with infinite dignity and virtue.

Having seen that Christ is the only person in earth or heaven worthy to open the divine purpose and accomplish the same, let us see wherein sovereign grace appears in the manifestation of God our Saviour.—God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son; and this unspeakable gift is the proper expression of that love, with which God loved his people before the world began; for that love being infinite, the full expression of it could not

have been declared, but by a gift of infinite worth, so that unless Jesus were an infinite person, the gift would not have been expressive of the abundant grace; but the gift of Christ is equal to the Father's superlative love: yet how great the grace and the expression of it are, no finite being can tell. We can only say, God so loved the world! &c. and herein is love! yet since it is so manifested, as that we may, in part, perceive it, let us take a view thereof, in the mirror of truth. Jehovah gave his Son, his only Son, his well-beloved Son—gave him for a covenant to a people deserving his wrath—gave him up to the sword of justice in their place—and, what is most astonishing, himself commanded that sword to delay no longer, but awake and strike the awful blow! yea, it even pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief! Whether the divine sovereignty, justice, or grace, shone most glorious in this awful transaction, who can tell? Consider further, that the persons on whom this infinite blessing was bestowed, were enemies to God by wicked works—rebels against the divine Majesty—persons who had wickedly trampled upon his authority—at awful enmity in their hearts against his government—universally defiled with sin, and of consequence infinitely odious to divine purity—a mass of uncleanness. What shall we say to these things? Was God under any obligation to manifest such abundant kindness? Far otherwise: his law, which man had broken, was holy, so that the wisdom, holiness,

faithfulness, and honour of God, yea, all his adorable perfections, stood engaged to punish the transgressor with destruction. Nothing therefore but pure sovereignty and free grace could be the moving cause of such compassion. This Paul had an eye to when he said, 'But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even while we were dead in sins,' &c. How infinitely above the utmost extent of what is called mercy among men, does the divine good pleasure rise!—Again, as the riches of grace appear in the Father's unspeakable gift, and considering the objects upon whom its favours are conferred, so also in the astonishing humiliation of the Son of God. 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' Unparalleled condescension this! That he who inhabited the praises of eternity—he who spake, and the universe rose into being—he who fills the sun with light, preserves the course of nature, stretches out his hand, and fills all living with food—he who appeared in tremendous glory at Sinai, and shall shortly ascend his great white throne to

judgment—that he should become an infant of days—be brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger where oxen fed—should take the form of a servant—suffer hunger, thirst, and fatigue—be without a place to lay his head—and subject himself to cruel mockings, buffetings, and shameful spitting, and, to complete the strange scene, voluntarily yield up himself to his enemies—deny himself of his Father's smiles, which he valued more than life—make his soul a sacrifice for sin, and expire under the wrath of a sin-avenging God!—What things are these! Does any thing but mere good pleasure, grace altogether liberal and unmerited, appear throughout the whole?

Let us now consider the character that Jesus sustained in his state of humiliation, and the benefits resulting to his people from his work.—The important office which the Son of God sustained was that of a Surety, Heb. vii. 22. In order to this he was made under the law, and set by the Sovereign of heaven in the law room and place of his people; to fulfil all righteousness in their behalf, and to satisfy justice in its utmost demands for their transgressions, 'that God might be just, and yet, the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' The prophet Daniel very accurately states the Surety's work in the following words, 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon the holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting

righteousness.' That our sins were imputed to the Surety; that Jesus was substituted to be the sin-bearing and sin-atonement lamb, appears from such declarations as follow: 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was made sin for us. Himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot unto God, and *thereby* put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' Thus 'He poured out his soul unto death;' and 'he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' But though our divine Substitute placed himself in the lowest state of human wretchedness, and expired under the wrath of God; though he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; yet the third day he rose again according to the scriptures; whereby it was fully demonstrated, that the work which he had declared *finished*, when he gave up the ghost, was acceptable and well pleasing to God, was all-sufficient to deliver his people from death and the curse,—that he, as our Surety, was freed from those sins which had been charged upon him, having made full atonement for them,—being justified in the sight of the holy law.—declared to be the Son of God with power, and as the reward of his obedience and sufferings, crowned with glory, as it is written, 'Thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.'

It is generally allowed that Christ magnified the law and made it honourable, and so fulfilled all righteousness; and it is as plain that his obedience to the law, was done in his people's room, or as their Surety. If this be not true, it will be hard to find a tolerable gloss to put upon that scripture which informs us, that 'by the obedience of one many are made righteous.' But this momentous truth does not go a begging for its evidence, nor does it rest simply upon one passage of holy writ, but is intermingled with the whole of revelation. Paul, in describing the righteousness of faith, shows, that it is imputed for righteousness to every one that believeth.—'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,' Rom. x. 4. 'He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,' 2 Cor. v. 21, see also Rom. iii. 21—26.; iv. 3—6, 22—25. Unless this be admitted, there can appear no propriety, beauty, nor glory in that admirable name which the Surety bears, and which is the glory of his church, viz. 'the Lord our righteousness,' Jer. xxiii. 6. And their claim would be void, who, in the triumphs of faith, say, 'In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.' If this sacred truth was built upon no better foundation, than the highest witness of men, we might fear the wrath of men against it; but it rests upon a basis infinitely more secure, than even earth's foundations; for 'their righteousness is of me saith the Lord.'

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Thus we have seen that the incarnation, obedience, sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ, and the glory that followed, together with the declared end thereof, is the eternal purpose of grace unfolded, 'even the mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.' Many of the works of men are beautiful; all the divine works are glorious; but the Saviour's works of obedience and suffering exceed in glory. Here the Eternal ceases, as it were to be invisible: the veil is rent, and the most holy place thrown wide open; for in the cross of Christ the brightest exhibition is made of every divine perfection; the sovereignty and riches of divine mercy and grace—the glory of the divine justice, or the infinite opposition of the Deity to sin; in a word infinite wisdom, veracity, and power, with every other glorious attribute, unite in honouring the holy law, setting forth the evil of sin, destroying the works of Satan, and completely saving the chosen of God.



SECTION IV.

THE WORD OF GRACE; OR, GRACE IN ITS PUBLICATION.

NOTHING can be more grand, and becoming the Sovereign of heaven, than that awful view of eternal

power given us in the following words: 'Let there be light--and there was light!' Thus by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the spirit of his mouth; for he spake, and it was—he commanded, and it stood fast. This divine person, who spake all things into existence, and who upholds all things by his power, is called the Word of God, Rev. xix. 13. and in reference to the purpose of grace and its publication, he is called a Prophet, Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19. the forerunner of this great Prophet testifies, that 'he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God;' and the faithful and true Witness himself declares, 'The words which ye hear of me are not mine, but the Father's that sent me; he gave me commandment what I should speak.' And addressing the Father, he says, 'I have given them (his apostles) the words which thou gavest me.' Now the scriptures of truth are the words of this great Prophet; for though but a small part of them were spoken by him, while he tabernacled upon earth; yet it was by his Spirit that holy men of old were inspired to write, 1 Peter i. 11. 2 Peter i. 21. And the same blessed Spirit was, after Christ's ascension, made to rest upon his apostles, under whose inspiration they spake 'none other things than Moses and the prophets did say should come.' The scriptures then being given by inspiration of God, are a perfect record of his mind, and the only unerring guide to the knowledge of him the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

So that it is a vain thing to pretend to, or expect any other knowledge of grace—than what the word of truth publishes. Hence it is called the word of grace—the gospel of grace—the truth, &c. and all that are of the truth hear Christ's voice. Such will not be surprised to see these heavenly oracles perverted; it will not appear a strange thing to them to behold some turn the grace of God into lasciviousness—others with cunning craftiness, lying in wait to deceive—others changing the truth of God into a lie—and many following their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of; they rather receive hereby a notable confirmation of the truth of the scriptures, which foretold, that many would deny Christ, under a profession of his name

I shall here therefore give a brief view of some systems out of many, which, while they pretend to have their foundations in the word of God, answer no other end, than to eclipse and pervert the truth as it is in Jesus; and so, to decoy and ruin precious souls: and then attempt to state the true nature, glory, sufficiency, and freeness of the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

It might be observed by the way, that the variety of doctrines, and the diversity of sentiments, prevailing in the professing world, are by no means to be considered as arising from any different end, that

their inventors and propagators have in view, but from the different ways in which they hope to attain the one common end. Nothing less than happiness, even everlasting happiness, is the grand end proposed; and every one is ready to think his own scheme the nearest and most eligible way thereunto. Those among professing Christians, who have the highest reputation for virtue, benevolence, candour, and decorum, seek to obtain the favour of the Most High, by their own obedience; and it must be acknowledged, that this plan claims the preference of any modern scheme, which the wisdom of man has framed; for such have the assurance of the one law-giver for their security, and if they are found perfectly good, or in his sight do well, they shall be rewarded. Man was at first framed to live and enjoy his Maker's favour in this way; nor is their any knowledge, that we have naturally, that can point out a better. We find many very earnest in the pursuit of eternal life this way, seeking after righteousness as it were by the deeds of the law; not that it should be thought they have nothing to do with the gospel; for, in general, that is esteemed as the best directory to obey the law. Nor are we to imagine, that every notion of grace is excluded from this system, for looking upon the progress of nature, as they imagine under divine assistance. they can see great cause to say, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are;' and though they do not come up to the full requirements of the law, even

in their own sense of it, yet they put their many acts of piety, charity, benevolence, heavenly-mindedness, &c. in the opposite scale, and, with pleasing admiration, fancy they see the balance in their favour. And as to their short-comings, occasioned by human frailty, the streaming sorrows of the heart-bleeding penitent are thought sufficient to wash away the impurity thereof. Now, to animate the votaries of this way, the rewards of virtue in this present life, but more especially in the life to come, are proposed to their consideration--'To be conscious of that cloudless serenity within which proceeds from passions subdued, under the superior authority of reason and religion;--to feast upon the uninterrupted joys, which this vain world can neither give nor take away; to bless and be blessed; to love and be loved; to be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame;--to serve him whose service is the glory of those who sit enthroned in heaven, and to have neither thought nor wish, which would not do us honour, if published before the universe--What sense of dignity, what self-enjoyment, must this consciousness yield!--And if such enjoyments are the rewards of virtue here, what, then must be the undisturbed fruition of that state which the present weakness of the human understanding cannot adequately conceive!' &c. Such is the doctrine, and such the stimulation to virtue, among some who profess to derive their religion from the Bible.--But what if it should appear, from that very book, that every

son and daughter of Adam is under a law, which requires sinless perfection, on pain of eternal death-- that the least transgression is infinitely heinous; and that no partial obedience, however sincere, can recover the divine favour, when once lost? and what if it should appear, from the express words of the great Lawgiver, that the whole world is guilty before him? Then surely it will follow, that this doctrine is corrupt, the hope founded upon it delusive;-- and that, while its votaries are pleasing themselves with the thoughts of being in the way to heaven, they are in fact going down to hell, with a lie in their right hand.—And that this is the case, plainly appears from Gal. iii. 10. Luke x. 27. Matth. v. 22, 28. whence it is evident, that such is the nature of that law, which every intelligent creature is under infinite obligations to obey, that extends to the inmost thoughts of the heart, and condemns the rising of anger, as murder, and the secret-motions of uncleanness, as adultery. If it be denied by any, that every soul of man is under obligations to keep the whole law, let the following thoughts be impartially weighed. If all are not under the law naturally;-- then the rewards of obedience, and the threatenings of disobedience, could not be universal. But the whole world is become guilty before God; and so are liable to the threaten'd curse. Rom. iii. 19. ch. ii. 8, 6. Gal. iii. 10. therefore all men are naturally under the law. And however it might shock the boasted benevolence of some, to think of God de-

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stroying the soul and body of any of his creatures in hell; yet that book, from whence they profess to have gathered their creed, informs us, that the law, even as the ministration of death, is glorious. To urge that the remorse of the transgressor, or any degree of penitence, would bind or influence Jehovah to pardon him, would be an unworthy reflection upon the holy law, and the equity of the divine government; and would involve nothing less than an insinuation, that Christ died in vain, and that the doctrine of the cross is foolishness. But so far is remorse or penitence from averting the curse, or procuring pardon, or the highest human virtue from balancing the least transgression; that a single grain of sand would do more towards overbalancing the world. If sin be an infinite evil (and consistently to deny it we must give up the whole of revelation) then 'the streaming sorrows of the heart-bleeding penitent,' added to thousands of sacrificed rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil, will be of no avail to atone for it. Now that sin is an infinite evil, might be fairly demonstrated from—the object against whom it is committed—the malignant stain of it, which, unless atoned for, will eternally remain—the loss of an infinite portion in God being its demerits; and the eternal extent of that loss. Unless therefore an atonement of infinite worth be found out, the wrath of God must abide on the soul that sinneth; for this (however uncharitable it may appear in their view whom it affects) is the decision of that law, by

which we are to judge ourselves and to be judged.

But the above system is found fault with and exploded by others, who yet maintain, 'That though Paul says, where sin hath abounded, grace hath also superabounded; it does not therefore follow, that before one is by grace made acceptable, he may not through divine assistance prepare himself, by works morally good for the divine favour.'—'I agree' says one, 'with those who ascribe a little to free will, but very much to grace.' Now, by the works hinted at here, we are to understand either sincere obedience to the law, or fulfilling the conditions of faith and repentance, or else complying with the terms of peace, to which we are told the blessings of the gospel belong, and which may be produced by nature, assisted by common grace. If any fixed meaning can be given to this jargon, it is something like the following, viz. that God will give all desirable assistance to the well disposed;—and if we do but what we can, or at least make but one step towards our reconciliation with him, he will give us his Spirit to help us to proceed. The same sentiment has been given us in various other forms of speech, and by some with a great show of sound doctrine? we have been told, that 'whosoever endeavours sincerely to please God, may rest perfectly assured, that God has no displeasure against him; for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.' At other times the word of encouragement is given to the

weak and feeble, though well-disposed, in this form, 'In the usual methods of grace, evil habits are mastered by degrees—and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength, and man comes to a confirmed state of goodness—but yet this ought not to discourage us; for so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us;—and if we pursue our advantage, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hand.' When our first beginnings to be better take the notion of sincere repentance, then we have the following instructions; 'If you hate your former ways, which were not good, and sincerely repent of them, and with mourning hearts, and weeping eyes approach to God, for the pardon of sin; as that law, which is the unchanging standard of right, requires man should forgive his enemies, upon their repenting and asking pardon; much more will the divine author of that law.—To the humble penitent every encouragement is given.'—But when the beginning of any good in us, is termed acting faith upon Christ, then the address runs thus: 'If ever the Spirit of God graciously influence your souls, ye will become thoroughly sensible of your absolute inability' (here follows the proof of this) 'and yet enter upon a vigorous use of means. Ye will do for yourselves as if you were to do all; and yet over-

look all ye do' (which by the way will be the greatest part of the work) 'as if ye had done nothing. Will ye do nothing for yourselves, because ye cannot do all? Lay down no such impious conclusions against your own soul. Do what you can, and it may be, while ye are doing what you can for yourselves, God will do for you what ye cannot.' And in order to remove every discouragement, from the thought that the natural man cannot please God, it is added, 'Let us believe as we can, in obedience to God's command, and while we are doing so, although the act be at the beginning but natural, yet in the very act, promised and purchased grace strikes in, and turns it into a supernatural act of believing.' Thus, at length, it is found out how they that are in the flesh might please God!—This the apostle Paul had not attained to, Rom. viii. 8. To the same amount is the following address, 'So soon as the sinner was disposed to accept, the Saviour was willing to bestow, free and full redemption; and the very first sigh that comes from an awakened heart, pierces the heart of our gracious God—the psalmist says, He sent water into the wilderness to change its nature; that is, he sent his grace into our hearts to change their nature, to shew them their dead and barren state, to make them sensible of it, distressed under it, and then to cry to him for deliverance, and when his grace has thus far disposed the heart aright, and it can pray for more grace;—then will our Lord enrich it with abundant streams; for he is

always disposed to give, in the measure we are disposed to receive.'

These are but a few specimens, out of many that might be collected, to shew the use men have made of the gospel, in what sense they understand it, and how they expect to be saved by it. But if it be indeed true, as most of the above systems would insinuate, that man is a ruined creature, and so in a forlorn, helpless condition; it does not appear from either of these schemes, that there is any thing, like 'glad tidings of great joy,' to such an one; for however much the better disposed sort of people may be encouraged thereby, they contain no hope or encouragement for the simply guilty; for nothing can be gospel to such, but that which presents a sufficient ground of hope to them, while, in the divine sight, and in their own conscience, they stand justly condemned, as transgressors of the law. This the gospel of the grace of God does; and therefore every scheme of religion that teaches men to do any thing, or even to wait to have any thing done, to encourage their hope in God, is quite different in its nature and design, to the gospel of Christ, and in fact encourages man's natural disaffection to God, even while it leads him to fancy that he is at peace with him. The gospel does not teach us to do any thing for life, though it be varnished over with the most evangelical names, but to live by what is already finished, 1 John iv. 9.—It is, whether men

perceive it or not, glad tidings of great joy to all people; and so must be free from what are called *the terms of the Gospel*; for however small these terms are sometimes said to be, when they come to be explained, they shew that by far the greater part of the work of salvation is left for the sinner to perform. The gospel is in fact nothing more than a report of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. There are various summaries given of it in the scriptures, such as he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.—The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth from all sin.—He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.—For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, and ‘God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;’ yea, ‘herein perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us,’ and ‘it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief among them;—Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them;’ so then it is ‘not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour;—that being

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justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.—For now the righteousness of God, without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 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 at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.’ The word that conveys this blessed righteousness ‘is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; for the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed—so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’ The glorious truths set forth in these words of scripture are, 1st, That the work of Christ finished upon the cross, does in itself contain every requisite for the justification of those who are ungodly and without

strength;—that God appears just in justifying such through the work of his Son;—and that therefore, the Redeemer's work is an all-sufficient ground of present peace to the guilty conscience, and of joy to the most disconsolate soul, without taking in any other consideration whatever. 2dly, That salvation, through the finished work of the divine Surety, is bestowed in the most sovereign, free, and unconditional manner, on sinners, without any distinction of character, nation, name, or degree; on sinners, as such, destitute of every qualification or recommendation whatever. Such are the persons, and such the deplorable circumstances of those, whom the gospel is designed to relieve and save! 3dly, That this gospel of the kingdom is brought near to the guilty, and that the faithfulness of God, in the free promise of life in Christ Jesus to sinners believing in him, is the only encouragement that the lost and helpless have to hope in divine mercy; and that to hope through any other medium, is to frustrate the true grace of God.

First: That Christ obeyed and suffered in the room of his people, has been before shown to be a scripture doctrine. We have seen that he placed himself in the lowest state of human wretchedness, even under the curse of God: beneath the full weight of which he expired.—Now had the Lord Jesus been confined a prisoner by the bars of death; it would have been fully demonstrated, that this work

was not sufficient to bring salvation to persons in the circumstances under which he died, and therefore we are taught to look upon his resurrection, as the grand central evidence of the sufficiency of his work: of which fact the Lord therefore has been pleased to give ample evidence, both human and divine.—The Old Testament foretold it—the New Testament confirms the glorious truth;—the Spirit, whom Christ promised as the consequence of his resurrection and ascension, testifies of it, in the miracles which the apostles wrought, and the happy effects which the gospel had amongst the nations of the earth; for though the gates of hell were set in opposition to it, the kings of the earth, and all human power united against it, and a fortress still more invulnerable in the hearts of sinners; yet such was the almighty power attending it, that it bore down all opposition, and proved itself mighty to save. It to all this be added the testimony of them whose interest it was to conceal it, it must appear that no fact can be supported by stronger evidence; and the truth of the resurrection of Christ being established, the sufficiency of his work to save the guilty, is confirmed. By his being placed under the law by sovereign grace, that according to the eternal purpose men might be blessed in him; God, by whose act of sovereignty he was appointed Mediator, in very faithfulness imputes his obedience and atonement to every one that believes, whereby they are made the righteousness of God in him.

The belief of this truth is the first and only thing which gives peace to a guilty conscience; for as the only reason God assigns, why any should be delivered from going down to the pit is, I have found a ransom; so this is the only reason of that good hope that comes through grace. When a guilty sinner understands that it is the voice of God that addresses his conscience, informing him that righteousness is imputed without works; he believes, ceases from his own works, and enters into rest by virtue of what he believes, concerning 'Christ's being delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.'

Again: that good news which the gospel brings is, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, as such. Unless this be true, the scriptures contain no tidings of great joy to all people; nay, unless this be an established fact, there is no just ground upon which any of the human race can approach to God; nor can any soul receive the least benefit by the work of Christ. Nature will teach us, and the law of Moses will confirm it, that if we do well we shall be accepted. But this cannot be glad tidings to those who are conscious of being the unhappy subjects of every evil inclination, and of having been to every good work reprobate. But happy for such sons and daughters of wretchedness, that the gospel is a pure stream of grace, flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. Far from

being clogged with those manifold qualifications and pre-requisites, which the sons of pride would make a kind of stepping-stone to the salvation of Jesus; the heavenly publication of grace does not lead poor sinners to look for the beginning of something for the better in themselves, under any notion whatever, previous to faith on the Son of God; but teaches them, even while destitute of every sign, work, or evidence, except what confirms their misery, to hope in the bleeding sacrifice. It reveals and establishes an important, comfortable, precious, undeniable truth; and leads the most guilty to take their first beginnings of hope, peace, and comfort from it alone. Thus the genuine gospel passes by, and totally disregards all those fine distinctions, which the pride of men prompts them to make, as so many cyphers; and in the most sovereign manner bestows the richest favours on the most unworthy among men. Every other scheme, but the gospel, leads men, either directly or indirectly, to take the beginnings of their hope from their sincere obedience, penitential tears, deep humiliations, watchfulness, earnest desires, holy breathings, repentances, faith, &c. If it be admitted that something is requisite to appear in the soul, that is favourable, and whereby we become, in some measure, different from the ungodly and profane; this fatal something, whether we are aspiring after it, waiting for it, or in the supposed possession of it, is that awful instrument by which the god of this world blinds the minds

of them that believe not, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, should shine into their hearts, and is a grand reason why the gospel is foolishness to some, and a stumbling-block to others: in short, it is the true cause of all disaffection to the gospel.—The gospel of the grace of God, making known the sufficient righteousness, and perfect atonement of Christ, as the sovereign cure provided of God for sinners, may very fitly (and with the strictest propriety) be called the one thing needful. This in the word of faith is brought near to us, Rom. x. 6, 10; is directed to the attention of sinners of all sorts; to such as possess nothing but what is loathsome and disgustful; to persons whose character is fitly set forth, Luke xiv. 21.; the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind; and shows that as mankind are in an equal state of condemnation by nature, the most zealous devotee is as far off from God as the most profane. In fine, it considers the whole human race as having turned their backs on God; and so the word of faith is a voice behind them, calling them in the most benevolent language to return, at the same time presenting a sufficient encouragement thereto. ‘Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted and far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness: it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry—Hear, and your souls shall live—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved.’

It has pleased the Lord also to leave on record many patterns of his grace, all of which import, that it is divinely sovereign, unboundedly rich, and infinitely free. And we are, moreover, informed, that those examples of Jehovah's long-suffering and mercy, were recorded to this end, 'that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, through Christ Jesus.' Thus it appears that the eternal purpose of grace, manifested by the appearance of God our Saviour, and published in the word of faith, is the only encouragement that the wretched have to hope in Jehovah's mercy; so that hope peace, or comfort taken from any source aside from, or in conjunction with, the abundant grace, is delusive, and must, in the end make ashamed.

I shall conclude this Section with the words of an author, who writes with becoming reverence for the true grace of God, and like one who has tasted its sweetness, and knows its value. 'The genuine gospel will always appear an insult on the taste of the public. Wherever it comes, if it be not received, it awakens disgust, and provokes abhorrence. Nor can it be otherwise. For its principal design is, to mortify the pride of man, and display the glory of grace; to throw all human excellence down to the dust, and to elevate, even to thrones of glory, the needy and wretched; to shew that those things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination in the sight of God, and that he who is de-

spised of men, and abhorred by the nations, is Jehovah's eternal delight. The ancient gospel is an unceremonious thing. It pays no respect to the academic, because of his profound learning; nor to the moralist, on account of his upright conduct. It has not the least regard to the courtier, because of his pompous honours; nor to the devotee, for the sake of his zeal or his righteousness. No: the potent prince and the abject slave; the wise philosopher and the ignorant rustic; the virtuous lady and the infamous prostitute, stand on the same level in its comprehensive view.--Its business is only with the worthless and miserable, whoever they be. If these be relieved, its end is gained. If these be made happy its author is glorified, whatever may become of the rest. Towards these it constantly wears the most friendly aspect, and rejoices to do them good. But the self-sufficient of every rank are treated by it with the utmost reserve, and beheld with a steady contempt. He (the convinced sinner) wants to find himself some way distinguished, as a proper object of mercy, by holy tempers and sanctified affections. This is a barbarous comfort: this is his grand embarrassment. In other words, he is ready to fear, that he is not sufficiently humbled under a sense of his sins; that he has not those fervent breathings after Christ and holiness, which he ought to have, before he can be warranted to look for salvation with a well-grounded hope of success—But the spirit of truth shows that there are no good qualities

to be obtained; no righteous acts to be performed—that we must come to Jesus under that character by which he calls us. But it is evident, he calls us by the name of sinners. As sinners, therefore, miserable, ruined sinners, we must come to him for life and salvation—It was wrought for the sinner; it was designed for the sinner, and is bestowed, freely bestowed, on the vilest of sinners. It is not matter of bargain or the subject of sale; it is not proposed on I know not what conditions; as the performing some arduous course of duties, or the attaining some notable qualifications; but it is a free gift. Grace, as a sovereign, is exalted to confer it; and grace, we know, deals only with the unworthy. As a gift it is imparted; as a gift, therefore, it must be received; and as for an absolute free gift, the possessor of it ought to be thankful. From these considerations we may with confidence affirm, that the mere sinner, the obnoxious wretch; he who feels himself in a perishing condition, and is conscious that he deserves no favour; has the strongest encouragement given him to rely on it, as sufficient for his justification, and free for his use*.

* See Booth's *Reign of Grace*, p. 3—9, 124—130, 416.

SECTION V.

THE NATURE AND MANNER OF THE OPERATION OF
THE SPIRIT OF GRACE.

Nothing is more generally mistaken, though nothing more important to be known and well understood, than the nature and manner of the operation of the Spirit of grace. Many indeed have gone so far in profaneness, as to deny, flatly and openly to deny, that there are now afforded to mankind any divine and supernatural influences; and level the blackest charges against those who maintain the importance and necessity of this heavenly doctrine. It must be acknowledged, that too much ground has been given for a denial of divine influences by those enemies of the truth, who, professing themselves advocates of the doctrine, have run into the most profane enthusiasms, and the vilest jargon. In this Section, therefore, an attempt will be made to point out the absurdity of the former, to expose the enthusiasm and profaneness of the latter, and to set forth the scripture account of this important doctrine

We have nothing to do here with those men of wit, who not only sneer at the work of the Holy Spirit, but also disregard every thing that wears

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the stamp of holiness: we rather address ourselves to those who, while they profess an uncommon attachment to the scriptures, and the one way of salvation by Jesus Christ, in fact, rank themselves among those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. Those who presuming they can produce a few passages of scripture (without regard to their connection) to show that the terms word and spirit are synonymous, fancy they have made a vast improvement in the scheme of Christianity; and so, with contemptuous sneer, pour ridicule upon all who acknowledge the divine sovereignty, and maintain the indispensable necessity of the operation of the Spirit of grace, to give a true understanding of the word.

Their notion upon this subject is, that the word itself is a divine power, granted for us to believe by:—and that there is no supernatural agency necessary to go forth in the word, either for our instruction, edification, consolation, or establishment;—but it is our adhering to the written word. When persons of this sentiment condescend to explain themselves, we find that they look upon the scriptures as one would a common history, and maintain that all who understand the use of words, may attain to the true knowledge of the Bible;—and that it is as foolish to talk of the necessity of the supernatural agency of the divine Spirit, to lead us into the truth, as to talk of waiting for his instruction when reading the History

of England. Upon this plan it would seem that the more wise and learned they are, and the more skilful in the knowledge of words, they stand the fairest chance to enter into life, contrary to that authority which informs us, that 'Not many wise men of the flesh are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,' &c. 1 Cor. i. 19. &c.—If it be asked, why one receives the word and not another? Why do the most illiterate receive it, while the wise and learned, in the same assembly, manifest the most awful enmity against it?—It is replied, because the one mix the word with faith, while the other do not. If the question again be moved, how does one come to mix the word with faith, and not another?—Then we are told because he perceives beauty and suitableness in it; which in fact only tends to provoke a repetition of the question, which when made, we are told, that we are not satisfied with the word—we seek a separate spirit, &c. And thus raillery is substituted in the place of argument, and anathemas in the room of scripture proof. In opposition to this sentiment it may be observed, that the highest evidence has been presented to the wise and learned, of the truth and divinity of the scriptures, without success. Rational and scriptural arguments have been urged by him who spake as never man spake, with the addition of miracles to confirm what he said, and yet it all proved ineffectual; and he who knew what was in man, in-

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forms us, that 'No man can come unto him, except the Father draw him.' The preaching of Paul drew the contempt of the wise and learned, and was a stumbling-block to the religious, 1 Cor. i. 23, and he points out the cause of this, 1 Cor. ii. 14. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him:—neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' The Pharisees made many converts; the Judaizing teachers propagated their false gospels with wide success; yet neither reason, scripture, nor miracles did, in themselves, make men in love with the truth. Such is the natural and wilful darkness of man—such the awful infatuation that the god of this world spreads over the soul—and such the spirituality of divine truth; that until supernatural influence be exerted, gross darkness will remain. But here let it be observed, that unbelief is infinitely criminal, and that the whole blame of disbelieving the gospel lies at the sinner's door; Matt. xi. 20—25. John vi. 44.; viii. 24—47.; xv.—22. Matth. xxii. 1, 7.

If any one is made wise unto salvation, it must be either by the creature, willing and running, or else through the Lord shewing mercy. But the scripture saith, It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;—and, indeed, nothing is more firmly established in the sacred records, than that the eternal purpose of grace, ma-

nifested by the appearing of God our Saviour, and published in the scriptures of truth, is only applied to sinners by the Holy Spirit. All who are born of God are said to be 'born of the Spirit'—all who have good hope through grace, abound in it 'through the power of the Holy Ghost'—all who believe in Christ, and so are saved from the wrath to come, 'obey the truth through the Spirit,' and are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by 'the Spirit of our God;' love to God is shed abroad in the heart 'by the Holy Ghost;' in short, the kingdom of Christ in the souls of his people is righteousness, peace, and joy, 'in the Holy Ghost.'

Again : our Lord, when speaking of the Spirit, says, 'He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.'—Here is a plain distinction between the words which Christ spake, and the Spirit by whom the disciples were guided into the truth of those words. It is plain, therefore, that no one understands the truth but by his teaching; or believes it, but by his persuasion; or obeys it, but through his influence and power. I suppose it is customary, upon some occasions, for this class of professors to pray;—though I cannot see what propriety there is in their doing so, at any time or upon any occasion, while they retain this notion : for if we do not believe that divine influences are essentially necessary to give the word success, why should we pray to

the Father of mercies to edify sanctify, and comfort us in reading or hearing the word? Is not this drawing near with the lips, while the heart is far from God? And must not such prayers be an abomination in the sight of the Lord? And can any, holding this sentiment, pray in faith for a blessing upon the word?

But on the other hand it is readily admitted, that the doctrine of the operation of the Spirit of truth has been much abused and traduced by men who have not the Spirit;—who teach that his operations are wrought by mere energy, making impressions upon the mind without the word of grace:—yea, some have ascribed to his agency, the most crude, ludicrous, and even diabolical whims and fancies,—all of which must also be an abomination in the sight of the Lord:—and if the holy anointing oil (which was a type of the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit) was forbidden to be counterfeited, on pain of being cut off from the people, *Exod. xxx. 31—33.* surely nothing can be more heinously wicked, nothing more pernicious to men, than counterfeiting the operation of the Holy Spirit, or imposing the delusions of the spirit of darkness upon men, under the sanction of God's work. Yet what is more common among professors of religion, than to call every rapturous humour of the mind, every impulse of the imagination, and every false fire of the passions, the work and operation of the Spirit of God? And if any, one,

out of zeal for God, and love to their souls, faithfully expose the delusion, and affectionately warn them to avoid the fatal snare, he will be thought an enemy to their peace, and be branded as an opposer of the Spirit.

It is still thought by some, that miracles, or something like them are included in the work of the Spirit, even as in the apostles' days.—Such would do well to consider, that those things, which, through the power of the Spirit, were wrought by the apostles, were intended as confirmations of the truth which they preached; but when the whole mind and will of God to his church was completed, their end was answered, and their use ceased; for if they had been continued after revelation was declared to be completed, it would have been an argument against that declaration. Whoever therefore pretends to them, or is waiting for them, errs, not knowing the scriptures.

Again: it is generally thought that his saving work consists in disposing the mind to seriousness, restraining evil practices, and in working good dispositions and heavenly tempers, as they are called. But a person may have much seriousness about him, be very decent in his carriage among men, have a number of what we may think good and heavenly dispositions, and yet all this be nothing more than the effects of that principle, common to mankind, which teaches poor sinners to fancy themselves bet-

ter than others, and that they are approaching very near in likeness to God and so leads them to establish their own righteousness. Whatever teaches a poor sinner to do this, is not of God, but is that spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Further: it is thought that terrors of conscience, fearful apprehensions of God, and despair of the soul, proceed from the operation of the spirit of truth. But this arises from a mistaken notion, and wrong application of what Christ says, John xvi. 8. 'He shall convince the world of sin,' &c. He explains himself, v. 9. (to take up his words, and put a construction of our own upon them, therefore, when the great Prophet condescends to explain, is, to say the best of it, very disingenuous indeed!) He informs us, that his Spirit would act as the Comforter in this operation, v. 7. by shewing the world their sin in not believing in him; which could not possibly be done, without giving them an understanding to know him that is true;—and the knowledge of him would keep them from tormenting despair on the one hand, and from self-righteous confidence on the other. But many things which are not sins, because not a breach of any divine law, are sometimes attributed to the work of the Spirit;—such is the remorse which seizes the conscience of the Papist for eating flesh on a fast-day, or a consciousness of guilt tormenting the mind of a Protestant Dissenter, as the

consequence of having broken one or other of the laws of his particular church-covenant, &c. and this concern of mind can readily be removed without the atoning blood of Christ. It will be inquired, perhaps, how people come to be convinced of sin?—And the scripture teaches us to reply, that convictions of sin, followed with torment and tending to despair, arise from the natural conscience, and the holy law;—Rom. ii. 14, 15; iii 20.;—the one revives and enforces the genuine dictates of the other, and conviction, arising from this quarter, will not suffer a person to think himself in a fair way of deliverance from the threatened wrath; any more than a felon's being apprehended would be to him a hopeful sign of his being acquitted. Never will this kind of conviction prevailing in the mind suffer the least attempt to deliver himself out of the hands of his offended Sovereign;—but will rather show him, that nothing but death and destruction are his just portion. Nor will he (I mean, while natural conscience is permitted to speak its genuine language) imagine that God will assist him to make his escape. But, as it hath been already hinted, many terrors may possess the mind, where the person has never been convinced of the evil of sin;—such as frightful views of hell, impressions upon the imagination that the flames of hell are kindling about him, &c. by which he might be drove into actual despair, as thinking he is reprobated—that his day of grace is passed, or that he has committed the sin against the Holy

Ghost. For persons to be encouraged therefore to extract any degree of hope, peace, or encouragement from convictions, is but drawing off their hope from a profane to a self righteous foundation;—is only changing from an obvious delusion, to a more subtle and secret one, which makes their situation the more dangerous.

And as the nature of the Spirit's work has been grossly mistaken; so also has the manner of it been sadly misunderstood. It has been generally thought that his manner of working is by some secret whisper, impression, or operation, *without the written word*; whereby sinners are taught to believe, that a work of grace is begun in them, and from which they are instructed to conclude, that they are the dear children of God. But without transgressing the bounds of scripture charity, it may be observed, that whatever spirit impresses, influences, or comforts a sinner, by any thing aside from what is written in the word of God, is fitly denominated, and justly characterized, by the following epithets;—the spirit of the world—the spirit of disobedience—the spirit of error—the spirit of antichrist—the spirit of slumber, &c. The direct tendency of whose teaching is, to promote the work of self-independence which he began in our first parents; and one justly observes on this head, that, 'This self-independence may be ranked among the most dangerous of the infernal politics, because the poison lies deep, and is too often undiscerned.'

I shall now proceed to give some account of the Spirit of grace and his work, by which alone we know the things which are freely given us of God. The Spirit of whom we now speak, is distinguished from every other, under the titles of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God—the Spirit of truth—the good Spirit—the Spirit of Judgment—the Spirit of knowledge—the Spirit of wisdom—the Spirit of faith—the Spirit of grace—and the Spirit of glory. These sacred epithets plainly set forth the nature of his work;—and that we may speak of it with all becoming reverence, let us remember that he is the Spirit of God;—which should cause us to tremble, lest we ascribe any work to him, unworthy of his wisdom, justice, holiness or truth. The work of this sacred agent is to testify of Christ—to glorify him—to lead into truth, and to comfort the disciples of Jesus. But our safest way of proceeding will be to hear the faithful and true Witness speak upon the subject, John xvi. 13—15. 'When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak—he shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and show it unto you. All that the Father hath are mine, therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and show unto you.' From hence we learn, that the sole work of the promised Spirit is to glorify Christ, by testifying of him: and lest we should fancy, that the Father would be dishonoured thereby, we are

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informed, that all things that the Father hath are Christ's even every divine excellency, perfection and glory. Moses and the prophets, who wrote under the influence, and by the direction of the Spirit of grace, had Christ for their theme. Many subordinate subjects, it is true, were introduced by them, to illustrate and confirm this one grand design, but to testify of Jesus Christ in his person and sufferings, and to speak of the glory that should follow, was their primary design in writing—1 Peter i. 11. Rev. xix. 10. Acts x. 43. And as it was the prophets' delightful employ, to testify of Christ through the Spirit; so also was it the one grand theme of the apostles of our Lord, on whom this Spirit in his rich effusions rested. Paul, in giving a summary of the doctrine which himself and fellow-apostles advanced, says, *We preach Christ crucified*. Hence it is plain, that the whole Bible is a testimony of Jesus; even as himself saith, *Search the scriptures—for they testify of me*. The Spirit of grace, therefore, through the whole of his work, of enlightening, quickening, edifying, and comforting sinners; speaks not of any thing distinct from, much less opposed to, the glory and compassion of Jesus. He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak*. If

* What the author here says is exceedingly just, and it is noticed only to prevent improper cavils, that when it is said the Spirit shall not speak of himself, it means that he shall not speak uncommissioned, for it is immediately

then the Spirit of truth does not speak of himself, it cannot be supposed that he will lead any whom he instructs to speak of any work of his separate from Christ, who is the alone subject of his testimony. Whatever influence then, men are led by, to talk of a work of grace, that is not wrought by the Spirit's testimony of the things of Christ, we may with certainty conclude that it is not of God. Much less then can we suppose, that this glorious Agent leads any to speak great things of themselves: of their own supposed efforts, pious exertions, humble breathings, holy strivings. &c. and to call them his regenerating influences. Far otherwise; his work attains the pride of man, by laying his fancied honour in the dust; and presenting a source of glorying in the Lord alone. But this doctrine deserves a more particular illustration. First: as the employment of the blessed Spirit is to lead into truth, even the whole truth as it is in Jesus, of consequence he has no hand in teaching any thing inconsistent with, or unworthy of the truth. He speaks and communicates only the things of Christ, and of the Father whom Christ reveals; which things are written: there can, therefore, be no divine operation, but what is wrought by the concurring influence of the word and Spirit of

added, but *whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.*

This however comes to the same thing that the author pleads for. It is Christ he is commissioned to speak of. He is the Spirit of the truth, guides into all truth, and shews Christ's glorious grace to the guilty.—Ed.

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truth. Is it the Spirit's work to regenerate the soul? We are also said to be begotten by *the word of truth*, and through the gospel. Are his regenerating influences compared to the old creation? It was by the *word of the Lord* that the heavens were made. He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. Is his work compared to the resurrection? That will take place by the dead hearing Christ's voice, John v. 24, 25. In one word, the beginning, and his future operations upon the souls of his disciples, in nourishing, comforting, establishing, and sanctifying them, are performed by the *word of grace*. It is by the babes partaking of the *sincere milk of the word*, that they grow into a more advanced state in Christ; and it was only by being nourished up in the *words of faith*, and of good doctrine, that Timothy could be fitted for the work of the ministry. And as the work of sanctification is carried on in the soul, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, so our Lord informs us, that it is the truth, even the *word of truth*, that sanctifies, John xvii. 17. and ye are clean *through the word* which I have spoken unto you, see also Eph. v. 25, 26. To what has been observed it may be added, that the Spirit of grace never leads any to misapply the word; never comforts by the word in any other way, than by giving a true understanding of it, and applying the true sense of the passage to the soul. He does not speak a jot more than is contained in the written word; or lead to perceive any thing in

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one part of scripture, that is contrary to, or inconsistent with, the general scope of revelation.—Here I shall take the liberty to introduce the sentiment of Calvin upon this doctrine; that they who call themselves by his name, and yet plead for a work of the Spirit separate from the word, may see how improperly they bear the name of Calvinists. He enquires of those who hold the Spirit's operation without the word, 'Whether they have tasted of any other spirit than that which the Lord promised to his disciples?—But what manner of spirit did he speak of in the promise? Even that Spirit which should not speak of himself, but should minister, and inspire into their minds, those things which he, the Lord himself, had taught by his word.—It is not, therefore, the office of the Spirit which is promised to us, to feign new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new doctrine, whereby we should be led from the received doctrine of the gospel; but to seal in our minds the self-same doctrine that is commended to us by the gospel.—If any spirit, leaving the wisdom of the word of God, doth thrust unto us another doctrine, that same spirit ought rightfully to be suspected of vanity and lying. But lest under his (the Spirit of God's) name, the spirit of Satan should creep in, he will have us to know him by that image of himself, which he hath printed in the scripture.—The Holy Ghost doth so stick fast in his truth, which he hath expressed in the scripture, that then only he putteth forth and displays his force, when the scrip-

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ture has its due reverence and dignity.—The faithful know none other spirit, but that which dwelt and spake in the apostles, by whose oracles we are continually called to the hearing of the word." Calvin's Inst. B. 1. ch. 9.

Having thus briefly noticed the manner of the divine Spirit's operations, let us now attend a little to the nature of them. In general it may be observed, that when any one is instructed by him, he learns some precious truth of the word, which previously he was ignorant of—or some truth which he had been before taught, is seasonably revived in his mind, and his soul confirmed in the true understanding thereof; of which, comfort, direction, or support will be the consequence. But more particularly, his work is to convince of unbelief—to reconcile those who are at enmity against the truth, to it—and to further enlighten, quicken, comfort and confirm, the souls of the disciples.

To fasten a conviction of unbelief, even in the hearts of the wise, the learned, the devout, &c. as well as the profane, is the peculiar work of God, the sovereign of the conscience; it is what no man can do for himself, or work in another. This will plainly appear if we advert to the days when what our Lord says of the Spirit was eminently confirmed. The apostles went forth, not in the wisdom of the scribes, or the disputers of this world, or with the

charms of human eloquence ; but preaching Jesus and the resurrection, declaring the testimony that God had given of his Son, that he was well pleased in him. By this testimony they commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, declaring with all boldness, ' He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.' And though the gates of hell were moved against their testimony—though the god of this world exerted every artifice to blind the minds of men, and pervert the truth—though the lords of the Gentiles, and the tyrants of the earth opposed it—though the men, who were in the highest repute for philosophy and universal literature, and were believed to be the most pious and devout upon the face of the earth, did all they could to prevent the name of Jesus from being mentioned; yet the Spirit of truth bore down, with irresistible evidence, the prejudices which men of all ranks had imbibed—convinced them that the whole world was guilty and in unbelief—emboldened many to receive the testimony, openly to confess salvation and eternal life through it, and made them willing to suffer the loss of all things for it, yea, encouraged them rather to give up their lives, than let go the truth. But still it will be inquired, How does the Spirit convince of unbelief? In reply to which I would inquire, How do we come to know that we have been in error, about things in general which we have heard, and either denied to be true, or received under some

mistaken notion, but by receiving a true understanding of the matter? Even so it is in the question under consideration. Man, previous to divine teaching, either wholly rejects the testimony of God, or receives it in a natural, carnal sense. But when the Spirit of grace enlightens the understanding, to know the truth as it is in Jesus; when he sets before any one the true grace of God, and gives him to behold the authority of God in his word, the soul readily discovers its former error; perceives its dangerous situation while in a state of ignorance; forsakes its former oppositions to the truth, or false notions about it; is ashamed of its evil ways, repents of them, and turns unto the Lord. The Spirit, therefore, convinces of unbelief, in giving an understanding to know him that is true.

Again: his work consists in reconciling enemies to God. It is a maxim that has not yet been refuted; that *the determination of the will must evermore follow the illumination, conviction, and notice of the understanding.* Without staying to illustrate this at large, it may be observed, that scripture and matter of fact clearly show, that, when a sinner beholds the beauty and excellency of God in Christ, as displayed in the gospel, he immediately chooses that most lovely manifestation of the true God as his chief good. It is contrary to scripture to maintain, that the Holy Spirit, in his operation upon the minds of men, exerts any power that does the least injury to the highest,

the most rational sense of human liberty, which consists in choosing what we like best;—and yet every part of his work is founded in pure sovereignty, directed by infinite wisdom, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. This blessed agent does not drag the sinner unwillingly, or against his will; but by bringing near to his view, the infinite loveliness of Jesus, and the preciousness, freeness, and glory of the gospel; and thus by filling the understanding with the light of truth, the man's will becomes effectually determined. The soul finds the charms of Christ so irresistibly strong, that every power thereof is drawn out after him; so that now should any other object propose itself as the supreme good; the happy sinner would, without hesitation, say, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' He is now reconciled to the one way of salvation by free grace and sovereign mercy. It appears, therefore, that the essential difference between a real work of the Spirit of God, and every counterfeit thereof, is this, that to the one it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; he has heard the word of God and understood it; while the natural man, whatever notions he has obtained of the gospel, knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God, &c. It may be added, that when a sinner is reconciled to God by the Spirit, he will not be led thereby, to talk of a certain previous round of feelings which he has had, or serious acts which he has exerted; but will frankly

confess, that all his strivings, and earnest and laborious exertions, in seeking, fasting, praying, resolving, &c. before he knew the truth in which he now rejoices, only tended to fear his conscience, and draw off his attention from the hope of the gospel; so that in all, he was doing that abominable thing that God hated; that now his only refuge is divine grace—his only hope, that sovereign mercy which the gospel makes manifest, and which the most profane have an equal right to with himself.

Further: Christ promised not to leave his people comfortless; but to send the promise of his Father upon them, even the Comforter, who should bring all those things to their remembrance that he had spoken unto them, and thereby comfort their hearts with peace and joy, while in the world they had tribulation.—This he does by leading them into the grand, sublime, and inexhaustible fullness of the mystery which lay hid in God; by gradually opening their understanding, and causing them thereby to grow up into ‘all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; filling him with all the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; strengthening them thereby, with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.’

We may now collect a summary of what has been

said upon this matter: All men by nature are in error, ignorance, and unbelief—going on in a course of deception, deceiving and being deceived--no one but the Spirit of grace can spiritually enlighten, and comfortably undeceive them-- this he does, not by the exertion of power without instruction, nor yet by teaching any doctrine about himself separate from Christ; but by taking of *the word of the truth of the gospel*, and causing that to enter into the soul, he thereby communicates the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ--that, as in the first beginning of his work on the mind, he uses no other instrument but the written word, so in all his future instructions, quickenings &c. he proceeds by the same rule; which rule is the only touchstone that we have to try the operation of spirits by.

As the whole process of divine grace is sovereign, free, and efficacious; so the work of the Spirit uniformly wears the same aspect. All his operations are sovereign: in every act the arm of the Lord is manifested, John iii. 8. no one can assign a reason why a wind should come, at any particular time, from one point in preference to another;--or why it goes in that direction, not in this, but that so it pleaseth its sovereign Director. Neither can any account for one out of a particular company of hearers, and he perhaps the most illiterate, unthinking and rebellious, coming to the knowledge of the truth and re-

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joining therein, while the rest continue in enmity to it; but that the Spirit quickeneth whom he will. All his operations are also perfectly and unconditionally free. It was the crime of Simon Magus that he thought the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money; and it would have been a happy circumstance, had the spirit and essence of his crime died with him, or with that age; but alas! it is but too evident, while we find persons saying, that when we exert our natural efforts, &c. the Spirit will help us, and turn our natural aids into supernatural ones, that though the letter of Simon's crime is not common among us, the essence of it still prevails. But if the exertions of our natural abilities are the inducements, or circumstances, that encourage the Spirit to work, grace is no more grace. And as all his operations are sovereign and free, so they are effectual. 'For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;—so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void—but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whercunto I send it.'—Isaiab, lv. 10, 11.

SECTION VI.

ON THE PRINCIPLE OF GRACE IN THE HEART.

It is thought a matter of little importance by some, whether we conceive of the principle of grace in the heart previous to, and so distinct from the word of grace, or insist that the word of life implanted in the soul, is that principle. With all becoming deference to the learned persons, who have attempted to accommodate matters in this respect, the writer of these Essays takes the liberty of saying, that in his view of the matter, one of the most important distinctions is to be made, that concerns the whole system of experimental Christianity; and that the schemes established upon these two hypotheses, are as much opposed to each other, in their nature, and necessary tendency, as light and darkness, or Christ and Belial.

The reader will observe, that the important difference attempted to be stated in this Section, is not whether there is any such thing as a supernatural principle, or habit of grace, in the soul; nor whether that principle be abiding when implanted; nor yet whether it is the work of the Holy Spirit to implant it; all these things are admitted, as important and undeniable facts. But our principal inquiries are,—

wherein does the nature of the principle of grace consist?—and, are there any preparatives of any kind thereunto?—It will not be amiss to lay down some general and scriptural truths, which may tend to shorten this Section : such as that,—man is by nature dead in sins, nothing but spiritual death is to be found in the unregenerate soul,—all works proceeding from man in that state are dead works;—for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit;—there can be no spiritual life infused into man, but what proceeds from Christ;—so that ‘ he that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life;—the figures, metaphors, representations, &c. which set forth the darkness of the mind, or man’s sinful state by nature, do not lead us to any gross conceptions of the disease, as though it were something material, and so needed some physical or mechanical power to be exerted to rectify it* ; but rather, the scripture doctrine of the fall is, that the moral rectitude of the soul is disordered, the understanding darkened through error, ignorance, and

* No subject has been more betroped and befugured than the article of *inherent grace*. Scriptural writers speak figuratively of the religion of the heart—they call it *circumcision—dying—living—seed—creation*, and so on;—and many divines, instead of reducing metaphor to meaning, affix gross notions to those terms, and cover them with grosser still, till one would think conversion consisted in the actual addition of some new bodily organs, or mental powers when nothing perhaps is intended but the *belief of a truth or the practice of a virtue*.—*Claude’s Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*, vol. 1. p. 398.

unbelief, whereby the will is influenced to rebellion, the affections are become unholy, sensual and brutal; all of which is made manifest by false worship, false hope, false comforts, and evil works; by the deep rooted enmity of the heart against God, and the aversion there is to depend simply upon his word. These things premised, I shall now proceed to take some notice of the prevailing notion of a principle of grace in the soul, I mean previous to the word of life being implanted there by the Holy Spirit.

What is generally asserted upon this subject is this, that there is in regeneration, an inherent, spiritual, principle implanted in the soul, previous to, and so separate entirely, and altogether from the hearing, understanding, and receiving the gospel of Christ. The nature of this principle, the manner of its coming into the soul and the use that should be made of it when discovered there, are matters about which the professing world is by no means agreed;—some plead for certain principles in the soul, previous to this principle; but here again they are divided wherein these principles consist; while others maintain, so far justly, that there is no medium betwixt being dead in sins, and being new creatures; and these generally hold, that this principle is infused into the soul, it does not know when, how, or where, or in fact whether it is there or no, till by the help of some kind, casuistical friend, he is

enabled to persuade himself that it is so. Though it frequently happens, that to a person's dying day he remains in painful suspense, and dreadful anxiety about it.—But let us hear each of these divided parties speak for themselves.

‘Man comes to the grace whereby we are regenerated in Christ, by a natural faculty;—as in asking, seeking, knocking; and before they are born again, there is repentance, a sorrow for sin, a change of life for the better, and a beginning of faith, and an initial love of God, and a desire of grace: these are an occasion’ (how modestly expressed) ‘by which God is moved to bestow his grace. For such is the mercy of God, that he recompenses these very small beginnings of good, with this illustrious reward.’ We have the same sentiment given us in the following words. ‘Some work of man therefore goes before his vivification; viz. to acknowledge and bewail his death; to will and desire deliverance from it; to hunger, thirst, and seek after life; all which, and a great deal besides, is required by Christ in those whom he will make alive.’ To these things it has been replied, that since we are *dead in trespasses and sins*, we can do nothing before, by way of preparation for grace, unless we think sinful thoughts and rebellious actions will do it. But, moreover, we have seen persons the best disposed for this kind of grace—the person mentioned *Matth. xix.* for instance: he was full of good

intentions, inflamed with a desire after heaven, and of a blameless life before men, notwithstanding which he was disapproved of; and there was another, whom we are told was not far distant from the kingdom of heaven--wanted, as it were, but one step, and yet publicans and harlots, who were void of the least good qualification, went in before those who were civilly righteous, and externally religious. Nor does it happen favourably to this scheme, that the scriptures point out several examples or actual proofs of the assertion, that in the first manifestation of grace to the soul, God is found of them that sought him not: and made manifest to them that asked not after him. But we have been ingeniously informed upon this head, for the encouragement of the well-disposed, that 'He is sometimes found of them that seek him not;—much more will be found of them that seek him, in his appointed way.' If we call to mind the true signification of the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto men, it will readily appear that, upon this plan, *grace is no more grace.*

There are others who agree in the main with the class above referred to, about the nature of this principle, and who, with them, insist upon the necessity of some kind of pre-requisites thereunto, and yet would seem to differ from them, about the author of these previous principles, and the design of their being wrought in the mind. 'In persons to be regenerated is required a breaking of the natural ob-

stinacy, and a flexibility of the will—a sound law-work upon the soul—a legal fear of punishment and a dread of hell, &c. and some anxiety about deliverance.’ But then we are informed that, ‘These things are not produced by nature alone, but are rather to be conceived of as the effects of the spirit of bondage preparing a way to himself for their actual regeneration. And that God does not bestow the grace of regeneration from a regard to, or moved by occasion of these preparations, much less by any merit in them, but God in this manner levels a way for himself, fills vallies, depresses mountains and hills, in order the better to smoothe a way for his entrance into the soul.’ To which it has been replied that all this, and more is common to those, who perish, and therefore cannot, either *from the nature of the thing, or the intention of God*, be preparative for regeneration. Not the former: for however great these things may appear to be, yet they continue within the verge of spiritual death; and sinners are so far from being disposed thereby to spiritual life, that on the contrary, deceived by these acts, which counterfeit spiritual life, they are the more hardened in real death, and fondly pleasing themselves, are at a greater distance from inquiring after true life, which they falsely imagine they have obtained. Not the latter: for no intention of God can be rendered void. (See Witsius on Regeneration.) It may be added that the grace of God does not consider man as upon the return to God--will-

ing to be saved, and only needing a little help; but as being quite indisposed, even so much as to hearken to God's method of salvation; or rather, quite at enmity with the God of grace; though it is natural enough for sinners to be in love with a false, or what Paul terms a perverted gospel. Hence the complaint which the Saviour brings against them is not, they are not sincerely disposed to come—they have not yet had a sound law-work upon their souls;—they are not sufficiently terrified with the dread of hell, &c. but 'ye will not come unto me.' The fact is, God would have the ends of the earth, sinners at the greatest distance from him, to behold the salvation which he has provided, and live:—but sinners will not come as such, and yet they fancy they are willing to come. It is plain they want to make a more creditable appearance, before they do come, that when they approach, it may be manifest to all, that God had not so much trouble to save them, as those despicable wretches, the thief, Zeceheus, &c.

Again: there are others who deny absolutely, any work previous to regeneration, who yet zealously maintain that a principle of grace is infused into the soul, by the Spirit of God, previous to, and distinct from the gospel of grace, which principle contains the habits of every other grace, faith, hope, love, &c. which principle also disposes the soul, to receive and delight in the word of God; for we are told 'the principles of faith, hope and love, must be in

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the soul prior to the knowledge of what we are to believe, hope in and love.' This kind of doctrine is so mystical and metaphysical (not to say enthusiastic and unintelligible) that though it plainly appears what it leads to, yet to reconcile it either to scripture or common sense, would be a task unsurmountable to any but those who are skilled in the depths of the doctrine. The following sentence seems, in some measure, to set forth the notion under consideration. 'The reason why the word of Christ was effectual upon Peter's hearers, when three thousand were converted, and that it had no success, at Chorazin and Bethsaida, when Christ himself preached, is not to be attributed to any different energy upon the mind of one more than the other;—but rather to the different principles of those to whom it came—the word is attended with the same power and efficacy, simply considered in itself, in all places, and at all times:—the difference, and reason of its success is, one is principled, and the other is not; and therefore, had all had the same principles, all would have received it alike *.'

* A friend, upon reading the above, observes, in a letter to the author of these Essays, that 'This previous principle destroys the use of prayer for a blessing upon the word all prayer on such principles must be conditional, thus, 'If thou seest any here already principled for the reception of the word, bless it to them.' If the word is attended with the same power in all places, and at all times, it would be as foolish for me to pray for a blessing at any given time, as for me to pray that the sun may rise March 19th, 1784, an hour sooner than it did former years."

I shall not stay here to remark upon this sentence— which, it is obvious, is contrary to the true grace of God, and virtually, with the Arminians, opposes the work of the Spirit; but proceed to consider the principles upon which this notion is founded. And we are told, that ‘ Man being dead in trespasses and sins, void of the least degree of spiritual life, he must necessarily be passive in the work of regeneration, for dead matter cannot act. But whenever the word of grace is received to any good purpose, it always supposes the mind to be active in the entrance thereof. Therefore, sound reason teaches us to conclude, that there must of necessity be a principle of life existing in the soul, before it can hear, understand, and receive the word, and so cannot be the grace of the gospel implanted: nor can the word be the instrument of implanting it; unless we can conceive, with any degree of rationality, of one seeing without eyes, hearing without ears, receiving without action, or believing the word of God without faith.’ Here we are presented with an argument blended with scripture and some sort of metaphysical philosophy, which the apostles were cautious to keep separate, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect:—for to entertain precious souls with philosophical speculation, about the activity and passivity of the mind in receiving the truth, tends to lead them from that which alone can give peace to the conscience, purity in the soul, and holiness in the life.

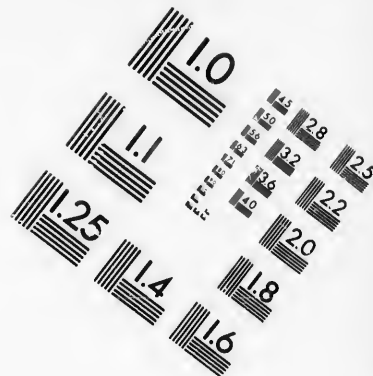
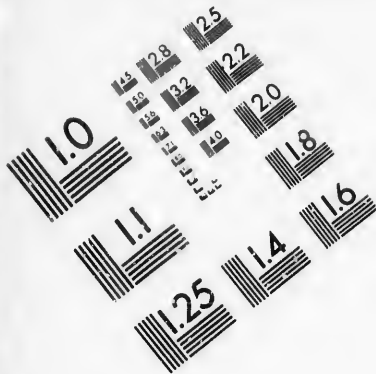
That man is dead in trespasses and sins, is an awful fact, admitted and much lamented—that he must therefore be necessarily passive in regeneration is freely granted—and that ‘dead matter cannot act,’ is also readily acknowledged. But surely that system of philosophy that would teach us to compare dead matter to a spirit that cannot but think and be conscious, ought not to be reputed sound. It is plain that man can be regenerated, he has faculties in which the principles of regeneration can be wrought; but dead matter cannot, in the same sense, be regenerated; and so then the parallel is altogether impertinent to the subject. And if a possibility of being regenerated is intended, by having the principles of faith, &c. it is granted, and when we think of God, and behold his works, we must say, Is any thing too hard for him? But we have instances recorded in the scripture of the power of the divine word to animate and vivify even ‘dead matter.’ ‘And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures,’ &c. And of the truth of this we have full evidence at the grave of him who had been dead four days, John xi. 39—44. Here we behold that dead matter was forcibly and effectually worked upon and quickened by the living word of Jesus. But, dismissing any further remarks about dead matter, let us turn our attention to a living spirit.

The minor proposition we beg leave to deny,

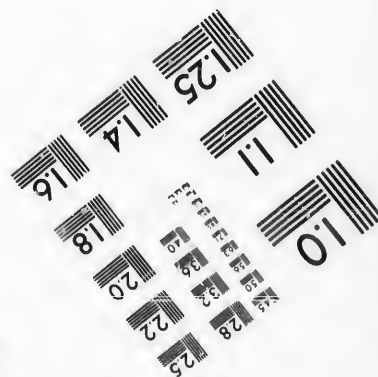
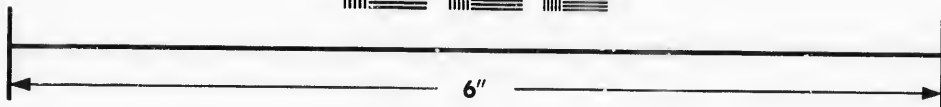
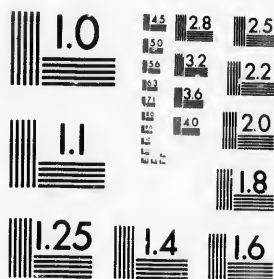
which may be done without falling into the absurdity and irrationality of saying a person may see without eyes, hear without ears, &c. and if this can consistently be done, then not only the conclusion must fall to the ground, but most of the arguments for this doctrine being built upon kindred premises, will be weakened, if not overturned. The whole argument goes upon the supposition, that in hearing, understanding, and receiving a report of testimony, the mind must necessarily and invariably be, not only active but also well disposed to the tidings which it conveys: which seems as though some fatal necessity had forced us to love and delight in a thing before we have either heard or understood any thing about it! It is granted, that the mind frequently, though not necessarily and invariably, is active in receiving a report; and also, that what it is well disposed to, it frequently seeks to hear of, in order to receive. But very often we receive reports not only without having a good disposition towards them; but we have been forced to admit them through unquestionable conviction of their reality and truth, even though the inclination would wish to oppose them. Thus a criminal receives sentence from his judge—a servant reproof from his master—and thus on the day of Pentecost, Christ's murderers were convinced of sin sorely against their inclination. And are not our minds frequently surprised, by receiving the knowledge of that which gives us pleasure? But what is that inability in man which is the ground work of his

opposition to the truth; are not we too apt to forget ourselves that it is of a moral and spiritual nature? That it consists in having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, and that the soul being under the fatal influence of error, ignorance, and unbelief, it opposes the true grace of God? Are we not too apt to forget that the language used to describe this awful state is frequently metaphorical, and in consequence thereof, run into some thoughts of a physical or natural death of the soul, or privation of animal life, at least of the natural faculties? But does not man's inability consist in his loving darkness rather than light, in a disinclination to depend upon a holy sovereign God; and not from the want of rational faculties, so that he would return to, and depend upon God, if he could? Now it is perfectly agreeable to sound reason to say in this case, that if the cause of this spiritual death be removed, the necessary effects thereof will be removed also: and if the disease consist in error, ignorance, and unbelief; these being done away, and truth, knowledge, and faith implanted in their stead; the soul must be renewed; the renewal will consist in the implanting of these things; and that which removed their opposites may with propriety, be termed the means or instrument of the work. If then ignorance, &c. are the very essence of the natural man's darkness; what can remove it but the entrance of the light of divine truth? For as when the sun





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riseth darkness fleeth away, so 'the entrance of the word giveth light: it giveth understanding unto the simple,' Psal. cxix. 130. That is, the word is the very first principle of spiritual light in the soul: and this word, under the direction, and by the influence of the Spirit of grace, being implanted in the soul, light, life, and spiritual activity, are the certain concomitants. As then the very essence of spiritual death consists of ignorance about God's true character, of error about the way of salvation by Christ Jesus, and in disbelieving the divine word; and as the true character of God, the way of life, &c. are only made known in the scripture, spiritual death, or man's natural darkness cannot be removed, and the divine life communicated to the soul, but by the entrance of the word through the power of the Spirit.

But let us consider those irrational consequences which we are thought to fall into by this kind of doctrine. 1st, 'It cannot be rationally received, that the principle of grace is the word implanted, unless we can make it out that one can see without eyes. Here it is readily acknowledged, that we must have eyes before we can perceive objects; and also that we must have a spiritual principle, before we can discern divine beauties; but it should be kept in mind that the hinge upon which the enquiry turns, is— what is that principle, and how is it implanted? As it is commonly acknowledged, that Christ's miracles

of healing all manner of sicknesses, &c. were signs of his ability to save his people from their sins; so also that the way which he took to perform them, serves as a fit illustration of that way by which he blesses his chosen with all spiritual blessings. Mark x. 53. informs us that sight was given to the blind by the word of Jesus. It appears to be in the same way that Saul of Tarsus received his sight, Acts ix. 17. in other cases Jesus chose, by his word to give success to different means, Matth. ix. 28, 29. John ix. 1. though he could have done it by mere invisible energy. We have seen wherein spiritual blindness consists, and likewise how it is removed: to what has been observed might be added, Psal. xix. 8.—‘The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes,’ even as we may suppose the entrance of a torch enlightens a dark room; to do which, would it not be absurd to say, that there must of necessity be some principles of light in the dark room, which disposed it to receive the light? Rather did not the light disperse the darkness? Even so did the word of Jesus disperse the natural darkness of him mentioned, Mark x. 52. and in like manner is spiritual eyesight given to those whose understandings the god of this world has blinded. 2dly, Nor shall we be driven to embrace the irrational notion, of ‘hearing without ears;’ for admitting the physical necessity of having the sense of hearing previous to being active in the reception of sounds; the point pleaded for is sufficiently established by submitting

to the simple dictates of scripture upon this head; not only in Mark vii. 32. have we an account of a deaf man being brought to Jesus to be cured, and v. 34. of the manner how the cure was wrought; (Jesus looking up to heaven, sighed, and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened, and straightway his ears were opened;) but in Psal. lviii. 4, 5. spiritual deafness is thus described: 'They will be like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears: which will not hear the voice of charmers, charming ever so wisely;' plainly showing, that this deafness is not any defect subsisting in the natural faculties, but mere enmity to that which addresses them, Acts vii. 57. Hence it is said, 'Bring the deaf men that have ears.' And surely he who first formed the ear can, whenever it pleases him, command attention, and by the force of his almighty voice, cause not only the deaf, but even the dead, to hear and obey him. He saith, Isaiah xxxv. 5. 'The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped;' and it should be observed that the truth as it is in Jesus, is not received upon a long chain of rational conclusions; but upon the authority of him who speaks in the sacred records. We may see this sentiment confirmed in various places in the scriptures.—Our first parents fell by admitting a falsehood into their minds: and they were renewed in knowledge, by hearing the voice of the Lord God conveying the welcome tidings of a Saviour. Was there any principle of grace in Adam's heart previous to the hearing the word of

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reconciliation? And was not the divine word the instrument of conveying that knowledge whereby he was renewed? Surely no one can put on a face to deny the last question; and without doubt corruption and grace, and their methods of working, are the same in all ages.—The case of Matthew is much to our purpose, Luke v. 27, 28. to see a man of his infamous character—in the midst of his avaricious and oppressive employment, wrought upon by a word speaking: so wrought upon as to change the whole bias of his soul; is such a proof that the word is passively implanted—that it is the very first principle of light, and the instrument of regeneration, that it requires a good deal of art to make even a tolerable opposition to it.—The instance of Zaccheus recorded Luke xix. 1.--6. corroborates the doctrine. It will hardly be thought, that grace in his heart influenced him to climb the tree; for nothing is more plain than that he was then a graceless wretch. Curiosity seems to have been the motive, that he might the more advantageously behold Jesus, whom he had heard of as an extraordinary person. When the Saviour said unto him, Make haste and come down, &c. the happy effects quickly manifested, that the heavenly word was quick and powerful, and brought every needful requisite along with it*.—Paul's regeneration is thus

* Mr Hervey says, pointing to the apostle's own words in describing his conversion, 'Can any thing denote a more iniquitous and savage temper! it is the very picture

recorded, Acts ix. 3—8. where it is obvious, that the voice accompanied with divine power unstopped his deaf ears.

Let us now consider the genuine import of some passages of scripture which are made use of to prove the previous principle: 1st, The implanting of grace in the heart is, Eph. ii. 1. called quickening, and we are asked, 'What instrument does God make use of to implant the soul in the body?' In reply to this deep question, the writer frankly confesses he cannot tell. But if the enquiry be, how is a soul dead in trespasses and sins quickened and made alive unto God the scriptures furnish us with a sufficient reply, John v. 24, 25. When the word of grace enters into the soul, through divine influence, it conveys the knowledge of Christ, which quickens the mind to delight in him, and ardently to long af-

of an incarnate devil—the favour of man is backward to interpose till something amiable and inviting appears in the object; but the grace of God is immensely rich, and infinitely free. It prevents the most vile and hardened rebel, it brings every requisite and recommendation in its own unspeakable and beneficent nature. It accomplishes all its blessed ends, not by any towardly disposition in the sinner; but by that one glorious righteousness provided in the Saviour. This overtook the persecutor in his journey to Damascus, light and comfort were poured upon him, not from any dawn of reformation in himself, but from a very different quarter; by opening as it were a window in heaven, while he sojourned even in the suburbs of hell. *He saw that just one*, and was made partaker of the inestimable gift.³

ter him, John iv. 10. 1 Cor. xv. 45. 1 John v. 11, 12. As the spirit dwelling in the first Adam's body, made him a living soul; even so Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, begins and maintains the life of God there. Such a soul will say, with the psalmist, 'Thy word has quickened me.' 2dly, The implanting grace in the heart is called a resurrection, Eph. i. 19, 20. and the question put in favour of the previous principle is, 'What instrument do you suppose Jehovah made use of, when he raised Christ from the dead, and what instrument will he make use of in the resurrection of the dead?' and it has been added, 'none at all, no not even his word.' Here it should be observed, that power or efficacy must always be of such a nature as is suited to the object upon which it is exerted. And though it may appear, that the power which raised Christ from the dead was what may be called a physical power, it does not follow, that the same kind must be exerted towards them that believe; nay, the contrary is manifest, ver. 17, 18. But then we are told, that the metaphor is destroyed. By no means; for in both cases nothing less than the great power mentioned in the word is exerted by the divine Spirit; and this is the very essence of the metaphor. And as to the spiritual resurrection, we are expressly told, Col. ii. 12. that it is produced through the faith of the operation of God; see Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10. 3dly, The work is compared to the creation, Eph. ii. 10. and we are asked, what in-

strument was made use of in that work? and reminded of Eph. iv. 24. That the old creation was a figure of the new will appear by comparing the one with the other. The first creation of the world was out of nothing, so nothing was prepared for the second, no good no virtue, no previous dispositions in the subject: yea, something indeed was in being, which had no place in the old; but that was only rebellion and enmity making vehement opposition to the almighty grace of God. The first was performed by the command of God, the second in like manner, 'Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth,' James i. 18. The rudiments of the first were an undigested mass, 'The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep,' Gen. i. 2. In like manner, all things lie in base confusion in the soul, when it is to be adorned by the new creation, and depraved lusts are violently agitated every where without any order. Those things which should possess the upper place, are depressed to the lowest. There is also a surprising emptiness of every thing that is good, Rom. vii. 18. Neither are all things only surrounded with the gross darkness of ignorance, but the whole soul is nothing but darkness itself, Eph. v. 8. When God was pleased to adorn the world he had created, he began with the production of light, and he takes the same method in this other creation. 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts,'

&c. 2 Cor. iv. 6.* 4thly, The case of infants is thrown in, as an unsurmountable objection to this doctrine; yea, it is said that, 'Upon this plan there is as much ground for the regeneration and salvation of infants, as there is for that of devils! That all infants are saved, is a pleasing fact founded in the word of truth; for Christ says, 'Of such (that is, mostly of such) is the kingdom of heaven,' even that innumerable multitude made righteous by the obedience of the divine Surety, Rev. vii. 9. Infants have done no evil, and yet die by the imputation of the first Adam's transgression; they have done no good, and yet are entitled to eternal life through the obedience of the second Adam, and so enter in upon the very same footing as St. Paul, and all others that are saved. But it is a hard matter for us to submit to that doctrine which teaches us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. Yet whoever thinks that their believing, or any activity in themselves whatever; is taken into consideration in their justification to eternal life, are without doubt ignorant of the true grace of God. Without admitting the salvation of infants, it cannot be shown, how Christ hath bruised the serpent's head—destroyed the works of the devil—and abolished death. It is plain infants are among the number mentioned, Rev. xx. 12.-15. But they not having done evil, can have no sin charged upon them against either

See Witsius' *Æcon.* B. 4. chap. 6. p. 49, 50.

the law of nature, the written law, or the gospel, so cannot be judged and condemned out of these books. We must either say, therefore, that there is a purgatory for them, or according to some modern refiners of Popery, a middle state, the notion of which is without the shadow of a foundation in scripture, and is absolute nonsense; or admit that they are written in the Lamb's book of life. See Deut. i. 39. And if a person is passive in receiving the truth, then why may we not say that the efficacy of the divine Spirit can and does implant the truth in the soul of an infant: which we can have as clear conceptions of as that which is so generally admitted, viz. that a falsehood, first instilled into our federalhead, dwells in them, and corrupts their souls. 5thly, It has been thought that the good and honest heart, mentioned Matth. xiii. 8. Luke viii. 15. is an argument in favour of grace in the heart, previous to the truth being implanted. To this it has been observed, that the scope of the parable is to represent the different effects of the word. But this has been cavilled at, though never yet sufficiently refuted. Some, however, have thought, that the good and honest heart has reference to those who, like Simeon, Cornelius, &c. were waiting for the kingdom of God; who had believed in the Saviour to come, and so were justified by his righteousness, as Abraham was; and who, when they heard the word, testifying that the Christ was actually come, readily received it. From

the whole, if grace can be in the heart, previous to the word of Christ entering there, then the gospel is not the power of God unto salvation; neither is there any essential need of Christ, especially not of his word. For whoever is regenerated shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, because such being born of God, are heirs of the promise of eternal life; and can this be, without understanding and knowing the true character of God, or believing in the name of Christ, or even hearing of his name? Though the implanting of this principle in the heart is ascribed to the Spirit of God; it is plain that he has nothing to do in the affair; for it is his office to testify of Jesus, and to apply the things which speak of him. He works, not by energy alone, but by the almighty, persuasive force of truth; and by instruction leads those to whom he teaches, to speak of Christ, and to rejoice in him. But the spirit that implants this principle, leads persons to boast but too commonly of themselves; he cannot therefore be the Spirit of God; nor is it the true grace of God which he implants; and it must follow, that the various systems of doctrinal and experimental religion, that are founded upon this principle, are essentially different, in their nature and necessary tendency, from the gospel of the grace of God. Their necessary tendency, therefore, must be to mislead, perplex, and entangle, if not to delude and destroy the souls, who are founding their hope of eternal life upon them.

Having said so much in opposition to the distinct, previous principle of grace in the heart generally pleaded for, and but two commonly made the foundation of a professor's hope, as it is most obviously the source of various errors, more especially in experimental religion; I shall do little more in this Section, than briefly show wherein the true principle of grace consists—confirm the sentiment by the word of God—and then show the harmony of this view of the principle of grace with every other part of the revelation of the true grace of God.

The true principle of grace in the soul is the gospel in its true import, implanted there by the Spirit of God, which is properly a divine instinct, a living and abiding principle. It counterbalances the corrupt principle which resides in the soul; and powerfully and effectually inclines it to desire the sincere milk of the word—to live upon the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ—to exercise every becoming affection towards him, as he is revealed in the word—and influences to a conduct agreeable to the gospel. This is that new heart and right spirit promised in the new covenant, and the scriptures expressly prove that the truth in the love of it, dwelling in the heart, is the only grace of God that his Spirit implants, Heb. x. 16. Isa. li. 4. John xii. 49, 50. Rom. iii. 27.; viii. 2. Is it inquired, how we are made partakers of the divine nature, that is, of the communicable attributes of God, his wisdom, happiness,

love, and holiness? Peter informs us, that it is through the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be made partakers of the divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. Is it asked, how do we become the children of God? The reply is, 'Being born again, not with corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, even the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.' James i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23, the word is the seed, the supernatural, vital, unchanging, incorruptible principle of divine life. Spiritual life is only in Christ, and is communicated from him by knowledge to his people. 'God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life,' 1 John v. 11, 12. however much he may amuse himself with a notion of a principle of grace dwelling in his heart. These simple declarations of scripture confirm the doctrine under consideration, beyond all reasonable contradiction. This is life eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ; and if any modern refiner should object to these a thousand passages that seem to make against, it and thereby urge the old insinuation, 'Yea hath God said,' &c. the scriptures being one perfect harmonious system of incorruptible truth; clear of the least contradiction in any of its parts, we should take the plain evidence of these divine witnesses as absolute-

ly decisive, and impute any quibble that forms a seeming contradiction, to the blindness of man, who naturally opposes his own wisdom to the revelation of God. We may here take notice, how suitable the divine word, in the hand of the Spirit, is, to perform every operation by which this principle is denominated. Is it called *grace in the heart*? The gospel is styled *The word of grace*. Is it termed *The truth in us*? The gospel is *The word of truth*. Is it called *life*? The scriptures are the *words of life*. Is it conceived of as a principle of *faith*? The gospel record is *The word of faith*, &c.

When this divine principle is implanted in the soul, the true knowledge of God is given. That is, a true knowledge of God in Christ, where justice and mercy in perfection unite, shine, and harmonize. This is the true grace of God. This the sinner believes with all his heart. His standing is fixed upon it; and it begets every answerable affection there. Hence the true gospel, being the proper principle of grace, begets in the soul faith, hope, love, &c. and is the genuine source of all true experience. This view of things preserves the glorious system of grace, in its beautiful symmetry, its grand and uniform connexion. Let us take a summary view thereof. If we conceive of grace dwelling in the eternal purpose, it is nothing more than Jehovah's sovereign design of shewing favour to the people of his choice, through the Son of his love. If we take

the term for the manifestation of his great love, free favour and boundless compassion, it is discovered in the incarnation, life, sufferings, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom grace and truth came. If we speak of grace as a doctrine, then it is the word of truth revealing, explaining, and proclaiming the nature, end, and design of Christ's work, as the Surety of his people. And if we take the term to signify that vital principle, by which we are partakers of spiritual life, it is the doctrine of Christ implanted in the understanding, possessing the will, and influencing the affections and conversation: and so conforming the soul to Christ, which was the very end of being chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

The following remarkable words of Dr. Owen, may be considered as an epitome of the whole of this *Essay*, and with them I conclude it: "As the word is in the gospel, so is grace in the heart; yea they are the same things variously expressed, Rom. vi. 17. as our translation doth not, so I know not how, in so few words, to express that which is emphatically here insinuated by the Holy Ghost. The meaning is, that the doctrine of the gospel begets the form, figure, image, or likeness of itself, in the hearts of them that believe: so they are cast into the mould of it. As is the one, so is the other. The principle of grace in the heart, and that in the word, are as children of the same parent, complete-

ly resembling and representing one another. Grace is a *living word*, and the word is figured; *limned grace*. As we have heard, so have we seen and found it; such a soul can produce the duplicate of the word, and so adjust all things thereby. The first original expression of divine truth is not in the word, no not as given out from the infinite abyss of divine wisdom and veracity, but it is first hid, laid up, and expressed in the person of Christ. He is the first pattern of truth, which from him is expressed in the word, and from, and by the word impressed on the hearts of believers; so that as it hath pleased God that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge should be in him, dwell in him, have their principle residence in him, Col. ii. 3. so the whole word is but a revelation of the *truth in Christ*, or an expression of his image and likeness to the sons of men. Thus we are said to 'learn the truth as it is in Jesus, Eph. iv. 21. It is in Jesus originally, and really, and from him it is communicated unto us by the word. We are thereby taught, and do learn it; for thereby, as the apostle proceeds, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and do put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, v. 23, 24. First, the truth is in Jesus; then it is expressed in the word; this word, learned and believed, becomes 'grace in the heart,' every way answering unto the Lord Christ, his image, from whom this transforming truth did thus proceed. Nay, this is carried by the apostle yet

higher, namely, unto God the Father himself, whose image Christ is, and believers his, through the word, 2 Cor. iii. 18. 'We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord;' whereunto add, chap. iv. 6. 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.' The first pattern or example of all truth and holiness is God himself: hereof Christ is the image, v. 4. Christ is the image of God, 'the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person,' Heb. i. 3. 'The image of the invisible God,' Col. i. 15. Hence we are said to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; because he, being his image, the love, grace, and truth of the father, are represented and made conspicuous in him. For we are said to behold it in his face, because of the open and illustrious manifestation of the glory of God in him. And how do we behold this glory? in a glass (as in a glass) that is, in the gospel, which hath the image and likeness of Christ who is the image of God, reflected upon it, communicated unto it. So have we traced truth and grace, from the person of the Father, unto the Son as Mediator, and thence transfused it into the word. In the Father it is essentially, in Jesus Christ originally and exemplary, and in the word as in a transcript or copy. But doth it abide there?

No! God by the word of the gospel shines into our hearts. He irradiates our minds with a saving light into it, and apprehension of it. And what thence ensues? The soul of a believer is changed into the same image, by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost, 2 Cor. iii. 18. that is, the likeness of Christ implanted on the word, is impressed on the soul itself, whereby it is renewed into the image of God, whereunto it was at first created. This brings all into perfect harmony*.

* See Dr. Owen on the 130th Psalm, p. 168—170. Quarto edition.

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ESSAY II.

ON THE NATURE OF FAITH.

EPHESIANS iv. 5.—One faith.

INTRODUCTION.

It has much prevailed as a fashionable sentiment, though it displays great ignorance of human wretchedness, and the vast extent of the holy law, that if we walk before God according to that light which is afforded us, either by nature or religious instruction, our services will be pleasing to God, and without doubt we shall be happy with him for ever. From hence it has been argued, that if it be true that man can please God here, and enjoy him hereafter, by doing the best he can, there can be no necessity for him to trouble himself about those matters of opinion, about which even the wise, the learned, and the religious, are so much divided. Yea, it has been thought that an attention to those things has been the grand cause of the present glar-

ing declension in piety. But surely such are not aware, that this sentiment is immediately opposed, and effectually overthrown, by the unerring word of God, which declares that 'without faith it is impossible to please him;' and also that there is no acceptable worship without it; 'for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Which includes, not only a belief that there is a God, which the devils believe and tremble at, but that he is such an one as the scriptures represent him to be. To form ideas of the great God contrary to his true character, and to worship him according to our own false imaginations, is to worship we know not what; is to worship, in fact, an imaginary god. All such worship, therefore, although attended with the formalities of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, supplication, dedication, &c. and with the most animated harangues, about the excellencies of virtue, and the extensive rewards of piety, or even of the happiness and comfort of the people of God, is not only unprofitable, being unmixed with faith, but odious and abominable in the sight of God. Isa. lxvi. 3, 4. Rom. xiv. 23. Psal. i. 21.

Again: true holiness, whether of heart or conversation, cannot possibly be without faith, for in reality faith is the grand source from whence it flows. Such is the inseparable connection betwixt faith and sanctification, that where works do not appear,

faith is dead; and where faith does not dwell, works are dead also. Works, therefore, without faith in Christ, however splendid, are of no account at all in the sight of God; and the heart not being purified by faith, being naturally polluted, cannot but bring forth corrupt fruits, even as a corrupt tree cannot but bring forth corrupt fruit.

Further: faith is essentially necessary to salvation. The scripture teaches us, that there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved, but the sacred name of Jesus Christ, and most solemnly avers, 'He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,' &c. John iii. 18—36.; and notwithstanding the most decent appearance among men, unbelievers are ranked in that black list of characters, that are excluded the kingdom of heaven. Luke xii. 46. Rev. xvi. 8.

The necessity and importance of proceeding with the greatest care, in our inquiries about faith, will appear, if we add to the above considerations, that all men have not faith—that there is such a thing as a dead faith—a feigned faith, &c.—that, in reality, there is but one faith that will profit the soul. Yet if we attend to the prevailing cavils in the professing world about faith, it will not be wondered at,

that men of sense, who have no fear of God before their eyes, reject every system of religion as a mere farce, or that deism should so much prevail in our day. For while they behold that faith, which is in general acknowledged essential to salvation, made a matter of doubtful disputation; by some any thing, by others nothing; by a third class, every thing; and by a fourth, worse than nothing; they cannot think that all are right; nor can they think it consistent to suppose, that the God of nature, the Fountain of all intelligence, would give a revelation to his creatures that was altogether unintelligible; and if persons were not led more by fashion and custom (for it is become rather indecent to be of no religion) in their religious profession, than solid reflection; they would rather reject all religion, and commence deists, or renounce the vain jangling of the professing world, and become Christians indeed, by receiving that truth which is able to save their souls. It remains, therefore, that there is no consistent medium between ancient apostolic Christianity, and downright infidelity; and accordingly. In strict truth, in his sight who searches the heart; there are but two sorts of men in Christendom; and at the day of judgment it will appear so to all the world. Now we are divided into a great variety of sects and parties, but then of all these sects and parties, there shall appear but two sorts of men, believers and unbelievers. And then that most remarkable saying of Jesus Christ will take effect and be fulfilled, 'He

that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.' See Bellamy's *Essay on the Gospel*, p. 252.



SECTION I.

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE VARIOUS NOTIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF FAITH.

FAITH, in the scripture account of it, is a very simple, intelligible thing. But as it is retailed out in the professing world, it is sometimes so cut and trimmed, so changed and metamorphosed, that it is hard to say, after all the definitions and directions that have been given, what it is, wherein it consists, or how it is to be performed! Some notice, however, may be taken of the names which have been given it, in some of its transmutations, though fully to explain their genuine import, our skill would fail us in attempting, 1 Tim. i. 6, 7. Faith then, as it appears in human writings, has among several others, obtained the following epithets, viz. historical faith, temporary faith, the faith of reliance, the faith of affiance, the faith of application, the faith of approbation, the direct, the reflex, the recumbent, the courageous the venturesome, and the triumph-

ant, acts of faith. It is also represented by some as having, and putting into action, eyes, ears, mouth, arms, hands, fingers, legs and feet.—To describe these various kinds of faith, and to give direction when each of these acts should be put forth, or which of these members should be exerted, has served to employ the time, talents, and ingenuity of many, though, after all, few of them, if any, have condescended to make it appear, how their notion of faith is consistent, either with the scripture definition thereof, or the use of the term in common life. Fearing, therefore, lest I should get involved in a labyrinth of inextricable difficulties, should I attempt to explain the above terms, and indeed, not seeing what use my labours would be of, had I talents to perform it, I shall leave that part of the work to those that have more time on their hands than I have, and whose reputation and interest may lie more in the use of them than mine happens to do. However, a few of the most intelligible definitions that have been given may be considered.

First: it has been received as a common axiom, for the use of the weak and wavering, who nevertheless wish to think well of themselves in religious concerns, that the desire of grace is grace; and so, that the desire of faith is faith. 'So if there be but a willing mind to this service it is accepted.'—Without doubt, where the true grace of God is known, there will be an earnest desire after its increase, it

being a living principle in the soul. But surely this is a very unwarrantable way of proceeding, either in defining faith, or leading those who wish to know whether they have believed or not, to a fair trial. The human heart is deceitful above all things, and is ever ready to fancy what is most agreeable; and indeed there are but few under a religious profession, but are ready to think, that they sincerely desire and endeavour to believe, though they are not able to perform their desire. Surely then we are not allowed to say, that every desire of faith is faith; this would be too vague. The desire then must be limited: and of course qualified. Without doubt it should be, in order to prove itself genuine, an humble, penitent, sincere, earnest, and affectionate desire. But there are some very material objections to this notion of faith; First:—It leads those who think they have such a desire, to presume upon it. If a sense of guilt trouble the conscience, nothing but that which fairly atones for sin can effectually remove it. But sinners are naturally disaffected to the gospel hope, and would rather catch at any thing for present relief, than give up every good thought of themselves, and be relieved from that which is equally free for the profligate, as for the morally decent. To lead sinners therefore to take peace, or encouragement, from the workings of their own minds (which, while in a state of nature, are nothing better than the working of pride), is to establish them in their enmity to the gospel hope;

and this cannot be done without confirming them in presumption. Again : it tends to, and often actually does involve those for whose relief it is intended, in greater distress, since it is told them that the desire must be qualified. The distressed person is led to seek within himself, for the approved qualities of this desire; but finding so much of the world there, so many interruptions in his devotion, so many instances of deceit in his heart, &c. either he comes to a conclusion that he has not such a desire, or has it not to that degree, which is thought necessary, in order to constitute a right desire. This he sincerely laments; yet lives in sad suspense from day to day, waiting and praying, as he is encouraged, for this desire. Sometimes he thinks (especially under preaching) he has obtained it, and then hope, joy, and comfort, begin to arise. Anon all these pleasing symptoms are cut down, dried up, and withered! then his life hangs in doubt, and were it not that he is told by his miserable comforters, that to sincerely lament these things is a token for good, his soul would be driven into black despair, unless it could obtain some temporary ease by mingling again with the world. It needs not be told, at least to those who have had access to class-meetings, and meetings for relating experiences, how common this method of comforting them that mourn, is in our day. But ah! how foreign to the hope set before us in the gospel! In fact it is neither law nor gospel. Neither works nor grace. But a mere device of Satan to

blind the minds of them that believe not, 2 Cor. x.
12. For

Further; the thing itself is contrary to scripture and common sense. When a person says, 'I desire to believe*,' nothing more pertinent can be replied than, why then don't you believe? Does some sovereign power, some fatal necessity prevent you? Or have you a sincere desire to believe what God has

* What is here supposed, is a great mistake, and gross absurdity; even that men may sincerely choose and desire those spiritual duties of love, acceptance, choice, rejection, &c. consisting in the exercise of the will itself, or in the disposition and inclination of the heart; and yet not be able to perform or exert them. This is absurd, because it supposes, that a man directly, properly and sincerely, inclines to have an inclination, which at the same time is contrary to his inclination, and that is to suppose him not to be inclined to that which he is inclined to. If a man in the disposition and acts of his will does properly and directly fall in with those duties, he therein virtually performs them; for the duties themselves consist in that very thing, they consist in the state and acts of the will being so formed and directed. If the soul properly and sincerely falls in with a certain proposed act of will or choice, the soul therein makes that choice its own. Even as when a moving body falls in with a proposed direction of its motion, that is the same thing as to move in that direction. That which is called a *desire* and *willingness* for these inward duties, in such as do not perform them, has respect to those duties only indirectly and remotely, and is improperly represented as a willingness for them, not only because it respects those volitions only in a distant view, and with respect to future time: but also because evermore, not these things themselves, but something else, that is alien and foreign, is the object that terminates these volitions and desires.—See *Edwards, on Free Will*, p. 131.

said, only there is not sufficient evidence thereof; the salvation is desirable, but not sufficiently proved to be true? Rather does not your unbelief proceed from ignorance, and a consequent disinclination to believe? Without doubt it does. But to convince of this is a work, which he only, whose name is Almighty, can perform. Therefore it is said by way of apology, that such desire to know the gospel. Then surely, the nature, design and evidence of the gospel salvation should be laid before them, instead of putting them to pore upon their own hearts, in order to extract some kind of comfort from their supposed desires.

But, as before hinted, the plain fact is, the gospel hope is thought to be too weak to support them; and therefore this humble, sincere, earnest, and affectionate desire, is to believe, not in Christ alone, but that they are the children of the Most High, the peculiar favourites of heaven. The desire, therefore, may be considered as an important struggle between conscience, which bears witness that they are not the children of God, and which the Holy Spirit in the word confirms—and the aspirations of their pride, under the influence of that ancient doctrine, *Ye shall be as gods*. Now as the former prevails, conviction, fear, shame and torment, are the painful consequences. But when the latter gains the ascendancy, and so the conscience becomes blinded or seared thereby, then some kind of peace,

joy, and comfort, are its attendants. But if such persons are, through divine teaching, mercifully brought to obtain peace by the blood of the Redeemer's cross; they will then perceive, that all their previous desires, prayers, resolutions, and endeavours, were not in reality after God's salvation, but aimed at doing or feeling something from which, or through which, their peace and hope might be derived,

Once more: the person who is seeking faith, or desiring to believe, must either be a believer or an unbeliever; for between these two there is no consistent medium. He cannot be a believer, or else what he professes to believe, would give rest to his soul. 'For being justified by faith, he would have peace with God,' and cease from those fruitless works, &c. He must therefore be an unbeliever: and as such is in a carnal state. But the carnal mind is enmity against God. Therefore, though it is natural enough, for one, under the alarms of conscience, sincerely to desire peace; it is neither scriptural nor rational to say, he desires to believe the truth of Christ, or is seeking faith in him. He does not understand or know what faith in Christ is; how then can he seek it? His heart rises in enmity when the pure gospel is preached; how then can he desire it? Would it not much better become Christian teachers, when they have to deal with such persons as those under consideration, to copy

after the example of Christ in his treatment of the like characters? Matth. xix. 16—21, &c.

Faith has also been defined a condition of justification, or that act of the mind which God requires us to exert, instead of obeying the whole law, and is frequently called the obedience to the new law. This sentiment has been sufficiently exposed by those who have engaged in the Arminian controversies; and stands so much opposed to salvation by grace, that no one can receive it, but he whose mind is blinded by the god of this world, and who is under a strong delusion to believe a lie. It indeed comes under the specious recommendation of that doctrine, which would seem to wear the face of more than ordinary holiness, but is in fact an abominable Antinomian tenet, and aims at making void the law. As to faith, it is as foreign to the scripture view of it, as darkness is to light. I shall therefore offer no other refutation of this notion, than Paul's words, Rom. iv. 4, 5. 'Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.'

Again it has been said that—'Faith is not simply the believing of any sentence that is written, or that can be thought upon!'—It is seldom expressed in these very words, though the same thing is to be un-

derstood, when we are told that—' Faith is a saving grace, implanted in the heart at regeneration (and must therefore be previous to understanding and believing the gospel) by the Spirit of God, and is a disposition of readiness in the human mind, to believe the gospel.'—But this faith, whatever it be, cannot be the faith of the operation of God; because that comes by hearing the word of God. It is admitted, that unfeigned faith is a work of the Spirit, and that salvation is inseparably connected with it; yet scripture and common sense forbid us thinking, that faith can exist without a testimony. The absurdity of this notion, about a disposition in the mind towards the gospel, previous to a true understanding thereof, has been shewn in the sixth Section of the first Essay.

By others faith has been defined, a belief that we have a right to salvation in preference to others—a belief that we are the elect of God— or a persuasion that Christ shed his blood for me in particular, or that I shall go to heaven, &c. That believers do come to a knowledge of their personal interest in Christ, and the things that they believe and hope in, is granted, and will be considered in its proper place. But it is most certain, that carnal men may and do embolden themselves, upon false notions, to use the most confident expressions about their personal interest in the favour of God. Such as, 'I know so surely as that there is a God in heaven, that he is

my God, and that I shall as surely go to heaven as if I were there,' &c. Who more confident than the Pharisees? they had no doubt of God being their Father; and yet, who more blind to the knowledge of the true God than they? If it be faith to believe our relation to God, to call ourselves the dear people of his choice, and appropriate all the blessings of eternal life to ourselves; then the Pharisees had faith in a very eminent degree. But to suppose that faith consists in a firm persuasion of our own interest, is, in effect, the very same thing as to say, faith is a believing that we believe. To this it will be objected, that wicked men, deceiving their own souls, in believing a lie, is no argument against the appropriating act of faith upon the grant of the gospel. True, if that were all the ground of objection. But it wants evidence from scripture to support that notion, that God promises eternal life to every hearer of the gospel, or which in fact is the same thing, that every hearer has a right to believe that Christ died for him in particular. It is granted that the gospel proclaims salvation indefinitely, and declares that every believer thereof shall be saved, and that whosoever believes on Christ, hath everlasting life; yet it gives no ground for any one to assure himself in his first believing, that Christ and heaven are infallibly his. Every believer of the gospel is confident that whosoever believeth on Christ shall be saved, and that it may be said of every one who is saved that Christ loved him, and gave himself for

salvation in the things he has held forth, then it is plain, that his faith is the substance of his hope; and the nature of his hope will be as his faith is. The term is frequently used in the Bible in this sense, as Rom. iii. 3. 'Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?' Gal. i. 23. 'The faith which he once destroyed;' and what the apostle preached 'Jesus Christ and him crucified.' In this sense it was used Gal. iii. 2, 5, 12, 23, 25. and nothing but the doctrine of Christ, which, by the writings of the prophets and apostles, were delivered to them, could be intended when Jude, ver. 3. exhorts to 'contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.'

v Calvin, in his Inst. B. 3. chap. 2. § 13. observes, that 'Oftentimes faith signifies the sound doctrine of religion, as in the place that we now allege, 1 Tim. i. 5. And in the same epistle Paul will have the deacons to 'hold fast the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.' Again, when he published the falling away of certain from the faith. But on the other side he saith, Timothy was nourished up with the words of faith. Again, where he saith that profane vanities and oppositions, falsely named sciences, are the cause that many depart from the faith: whom in another place he calleth reprobate touching faith. As again he chargeth Titus, saying, 'Warn them that they may be sound in the faith.' By soundness he meaneth nothing else but

purity of doctrine, which is easily corrupted, and brought out of kind by the lightness of men. Even because in Christ, whom faith possesseth, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Therefore faith is worthily extended to signify the whole sum of heavenly doctrine, from which it cannot be separated.*

There are many things spoken of in the sacred writings concerning faith, that must be understood in the above sense. As first: our resurrection from a death in trespasses and sins, Col. ii. 12. This cannot intend any act of the human mind, under any influence whatever, for 'of his own will begat he us by the word of truth.' Faith in this sense comes by hearing the word of God. But this shows how faith comes to us; not how we approach to it. Our ears are not previously disposed to hearken; but the almighty voice of the Son of God goes forth and unstops the deaf ears; even as he once said to one literally deaf, Be opened. And straightway his ears

* One would think that the greater part of those who call themselves Calvinists, are shamefully deficient in knowing wherein Calvin's doctrine consists; or should we find them maintaining the notion of faith being in the heart before we understand, receive, or even hear the word of God? But it has happened to Calvinism, as it has long been with Christianity:—many are fond of the name, for the sake of credit, reputation, and interest, who yet are as ignorant of the doctrine, and as far from following the practices of the first Christians, as an idolatrous pagan.

were opened. But this sentiment has been considered in the former Essay.

Again: it is faith taken in this sense, that is the matter of justification before God, and in the sinner's conscience. No fact comes better established in the word of God, than that the matter of a sinner's justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed. It is established firm as Jehovah's throne; nor can the deepest subtilities of hell move it. Yet we are expressly said to be justified by faith, Rom. v. 1.; iv. 3—9. and the divinity of men would teach us, though nothing can be more palpably absurd and dangerous, that faith justifies us as an instrument; and many by acting faith, as an instrument to their justification, are insensibly led, upon many occasions, to substitute these acts of faith, in the place of those divine acts which wrought out the all-sufficient righteousness. But if it be faith, as an instrument, that Abraham, is said to be justified by, then it would seem that it is by the instrumentality of Abraham's faith, that all his seed are justified! For it is the very same thing that justifies him and his children; see Rom. iv. 3—8. compared with verses 22—25. To the same signification are the following scriptures: Rom. iii. 38. Gal. ii. 6.; iii. 24. It is what the sinner believes! then, or the work of Christ alone, separate from all its effects and fruits, that justifies*.

* Though the work of Christ alone is the meritorious ground of our justification, yet we must ever remember, that it is only he that believed, that is justified by it.—Ed.

It has been very common to use the phrases 'justifying faith,' and 'saving faith;' and it is to be hoped many use them, without connecting any erroneous sentiment therewith. Yet it is plain others would be understood, that it is some peculiar sort or manner of believing that justifies. But if the heartiness, seriousness, or sincerity of our believing, have any influence whatever in our justification, it cannot be said to be 'freely by grace through the redemption which is in Jesus.'

Further: Faith in the sense under consideration is what believers live by according as it is written, 'The just shall live by his faith.' Some are apt to imagine that the vigorous actings of the soul are here intended. Such live (such a life as it is) by the workings of their own mind, which they call faith. But surely this is not the life of faith pointed to in the scripture; far otherwise. The soul that is spiritually quickened, lives a much nobler life than this. He lives by his faith it is true; but what is the believer's faith? Undoubtedly Christ as he is revealed in the word. 'He is our life,' Col. iii. 4 and 'this is the bread that cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am (says Christ) the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.' He, therefore, who lives by any thing else, whatever his

Christ be given, their claim will, in the end, be found miserably deficient. And though persons may strain every nerve in labouring to believe that their state is good, or to make that true which is not true before they believe it, will remain an unchangeable truth that, 'he that believeth not (that very gospel which Christ and his apostles preached) shall be damned.' — Seeing then that there is but one faith, and that without it we cannot please God, acceptably worship him, or eternally enjoy him; and since those various and opposite notions of faith prevailing in the professing world, cannot all be right; it follows that there is danger of being deceived; this cautions us to inquire, wherein the very essence of the one faith consists? which, when known, in obedience to the exhortation, we should contend earnestly for.



SECTION II.

ON THE FAITH OF THE OPERATION OF GOD.

THE inquiry in this Section is, principally, wherein the nature of that faith consists which may with strict propriety be styled *like precious* with the apostles? and in order to avoid an error in the proposition, and so to prevent stumbling at the threshold, I shall rest satisfied with such a definition of it as the

Bible affords. And surely, when the unerring Spirit of truth condescends to define, and to point out a line of illustration; it manifests much pride and ignorance in any one to swerve from it. Nor is it to be wondered that any who swerve from the scriptural definition, should also err from faith unfeigned, and turn aside to vain jangling.

According to that very accurate divine, Paul, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*,' Heb. xi. 1. Here then we are presented with a full, clear, and comprehensive definition of *gospel faith*: that faith which is of the operation of God, and without which we cannot please him: It consists of two parts, viz. *the truth*

* It may not be improper here to observe, that this text is, by some, differently translated. They say, the original word (*hypostasis*) which is rendered *substance*, should be translated *confidence*, as in the margin, and in 2 Cor. ix. 4.; xi. 17. Heb. iii. 14. This confidence, say they, respects *things hoped for*, i. e. future good things promised, and is illustrated by the faith of the patriarchs. The word (*elenchos*) *evidence*, they translate *conviction*, i. e. of *things not seen*, which are more comprehensive than *things hoped for*, as they include every thing that God has either testified or promised—things past present, as well as things to come. So that both the words *confidence* and *conviction*, according to this view, are expressive of simple belief; and the object of this belief is the truth, whether testified or promised.—See *M'Lean's Treatise on the Apostolic Commission*, p. 81. See also a little piece entitled, '*The belief of the Gospel saving Faith*' by the same author, p. 5, 6.—Ed.

believed, which is the substance of things hoped for; and *the belief of the truth*, which is the evidence of things not seen*. How plain, how rational, how worthy of the God of intelligence! We read nothing here of the direct, or reflex acts, nor of making a falsehood truth, by confidently believing it. Here is nothing said of the personal appropriating act, neither is faith and its effects confounded.—But I shall proceed to consider a little more particularly, this truly excellent definition of the faith of God's elect, which the inspired apostle has with plainness and clearness laid before all men.

* The author explains the apostle's definition of faith thus; 'Now faith is the truth believed, and the belief of the truth.' That the word *faith* is used in scripture in a metonymical sense, *i. e.* as importing *the truth to be believed*, must be very evident to an attentive reader, Acts vi. 7.; xxiv. 24. Gal. i. 23. Phil. i. 27. Jude, 3. Rev. ii. 13, &c. And that its general acceptance is the belief of the truth, is equally clear, and probably will not be denied by any; so that whatever may be the true meaning of this passage, Mr. Ecking's ideas are well supported by the scriptures, and the doctrines he has advanced in the remainder of the Section, will remain unaffected by any criticisms upon it.

It may not be improper however to observe, that in illustrating the second part of his definition of faith he has gone into a slight inconsistency, and has departed from the idea with which he set out; for he has made *the evidence of things not seen*, to consist in *the truth to be believed* and not in our belief thereof. So that, although he at first explains the word in a double sense, yet he has for the most part, as the reader may perceive adhered to one idea.—Ed.

First: *Faith is the substance of things hoped for.* The Bible exhibits one harmonious, consistent, beautiful system of truth. The whole of which, in all its glorious parts, is only a transcript or copy of what was drawn out in the character of Jesus Christ: so that the truth as it is in him, or the doctrine of Christ in the scriptures, of which many summaries are given, contains the sum or substance of the whole compass of evangelical truth; and the hope which is laid up for the saints in heaven, is heard of in the word of the truth of the gospel, Col. i. 5. which is the substance of what things they expect hereafter, or the substantial foundation of their hope. Faith then, in the first part of the definition under consideration, evidently intends the things to be believed: and that the term is often used in this sense, in things human and divine, will appear by having reference to a few instances. Laws and treaties made and confirmed, betwixt one nation and another, are called the faith of those nations. To preserve them inviolably is called keeping the faith; and for either party to recede from, or break any of them, is called a breach of faith; and these laws, treaties, &c. are the substantial ground of hope and confidence to each nation. When a person has declared his sentiments upon any point, those things that he has testified of are properly called his creed or his faith: and it becomes very common to denominate such a declaration, a confession of faith. If the person professes his hope of

him in particular, while yet he is not confident that this is true of himself, because it remains to be proved that he has believed, and that it is the gospel of Christ which he does believe*. And since it is not any thing about ourselves that we are immediately called to believe, but the testimony that God has given of his Son; our confidence, if it be that which the gospel produces, is not in ourselves, not of the goodness of our state, but in the sufficiency of that salvation which the scriptures indefinitely proclaim. Besides, some have rejoiced in the word of the gospel, who have afterwards revolted from their profession—many think they believe the truth, who are at the same time believing no truth contained in revelation, for it is no where ascertained in the word of God, that Christ died for the actual transgressions of any person in particular. But the mystery of this sort of faith is set before us in the following lines. 'Let it be well observed, that the reason why we are to assure ourselves in our faith, that God freely giveth Christ and his salvation

* When a man believes the gospel, he must be immediately conscious that he does so; though this requires to be farther proved by the fruits of his faith: but if it also 'remains to be proved that it is the gospel of Christ that he does believe,' he must either in the mean time be suspending his belief of the gospel till he obtain that proof, or else he must be believing it without proof. A proper attention to the difference between the evidence of our believing it, would have prevented this inaccuracy. Yet every man ought to take heed lest he believe a false gospel.—Ed.

to us particularly, is not, because it is a truth before we believe it, and because it will never be true except we do, in some measure, persuade and assure ourselves that it is so. We have no absolute promise or declaration in the scripture, that God certainly will or doth give Christ and his salvation to any one of us in particular; neither do we know it to be true already either by scripture, or sense, or reason, before we assure ourselves of it: yea, we are without Christ's salvation at present in a state of sin and misery, under the curse and wrath of God. Only I shall prove, that we are bound, by the command of God, thus to assure ourselves: and the scripture doth sufficiently warrant us, that we shall not deceive ourselves in believing a lie: but according to our faith, so shall it be to us. This is a strange kind of assurance, far different from ordinary kinds; and therefore no wonder if it should be found weak and imperfect, and difficult to be obtained, and assaulted with many doubtings. We are concerned to believe other things on the clear evidence that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no; so that we cannot deny our assent without rebelling against the light of our senses, reason, or conscience. But here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by the evidence of the things; but we must work it out in ourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and thereby we bring our own thoughts into captivity, to the obedience of Christ. None but

God can justly require of us this kind of assurance, because he only *calleth those things that are not, as though they were*, he only can give existence to those things that yet are not, and make a thing to be true upon our believing it, that was not true before*.

It is acknowledged in the above citation, that there is no evidence, of any kind, that God gives Christ and his salvation to *any one in particular*, before we absolutely assure ourselves of it—that *this is not a truth before we believe it*, and moreover, *will never be true, except we do persuade and assure ourselves that it is so*; but that which *was not true before, becometh a certain truth when we believe it!* Yet it is confessed, this doctrine of faith will not hold good in any other things; for we are concerned to believe them *on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no.* To believe without evidence is not faith, but fancy and presumption, whether the thing believed be human or divine. And it is most certain, that the very attempt to persuade persons to believe, without knowing what they are to believe, or without plain

* Marshall's Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, 8th Edition, pages 173, 174. The very singular nature of this quotation will sufficiently apologise for receding from the method I have all along adopted of concealing the author's name from whom I have quoted. And unless I had referred to the book in which this deep sentiment is maintained, I should have feared being suspected by some, of having fabricated it myself.

evidence that what they are called to believe is true; whether they believe it or no, would be hissed out of the world as an affront to common sense in any thing but religious matters: in which, grievous to think, nothing is too absurd to be propagated, or too ridiculous to be received! Is it then peculiar to the God of heaven, the source of intelligence, to set falsehoods before his creatures, to be transformed into truths by a confident belief of them, and to bind them by his command to perform the strange operation? Far be it from him! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

I conclude this general view of the various notions of faith in the professing world, with observing, that divine truth is always consistent with itself, and evidence is its inseparable characteristic; whereas falsehood wears many faces, and sets the invention of its propagator upon the rack to cover its hateful appearance with the mask of truth, in order to blind the understanding, sear the conscience, and delude the soul. Whether this appropriation therefore be supported by supposed qualifications—the imaginary deed of gift—or the courageous act of faith without evidence either from scripture, sense or reason, it is most certainly essentially different from believing the record that God has given of his Son.—So that however well pleased any may be, in a full persuasion that they have exerted the appropriating act, unless more solid evidence of their actual interest in

frames, feelings, his supposed humble breathings, holiness, sweet sensations, &c. is in the estimation of him who cannot err, a dead sinner. 'Jesus said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you, John vi. 53.

Once more: under this part of the definition, we are to conceive of faith sanctifying. Acts xxvi. 13. 'Sanctified by faith which is in me.' Acts xv. 9. 'Purifying their hearts by faith.' Nothing else can be intended but the truth believed, according to our Lord's prayer, John xvii. 17. 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.' John xv. 3. 'Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,' 1 Cor. i. 30. Eph. v. 26. Thus the precious truth as it is in Jesus, dwelling in the heart, produces every good disposition, and prompts to every good work. It dwells in the understanding, and enlightens it. It possesseth the conscience, and purges it from dead works. It prevails in the will, and disposes it to pray, Father, thy will be done. It engages the affections, and regulates and influences them, and of course the outward conversation will be adorned with every good word and work. Such are the triumphs, and such the correspondent effects of divine truth in the soul.

The second part therefore of the apostle's definition of faith, leads us to conceive of it as 'the evi-

dence of things not seen.' From hence it appears, that they who choose to define faith—a believing, without any evidence from scripture, sense, or reason, differ essentially from the apostle. Paul held no such crude notions. As a man of good sense, as a pupil of Gamaliel, and as a disciple of the Holy Ghost, he knew the absurdity of proposing any thing to be believed, without evidence of its existence and reality.

Equally absurd is their notion who, in order to appear more than ordinarily accurate, censure and solemnly condemn the idea of believing being an act of the mind. It is acknowledged, indeed, that very unscriptural sentiments have prevailed about acts of faith, when they are supposed to arise from some previous principle, well disposing the mind of unbelievers towards the gospel. Yet, if it be admitted possible for the soul of man to act (and who will deny that it does?) there is nothing more properly an act of the mind, than believing a truth; in which first the mind perceives it, then considers the evidence offered to support it; and finally gives assent to it. And can this comport with inactivity? We must either say then, that the soul acts in believing the gospel; or that the soul is an inactive spirit, which is absurd.

No iniquities are of greater importance in treating upon faith than, 'What is truth?' and, upon what

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kind of evidence is the truth to be received? In regard to the first, Christ says, I am the truth. And what he means by that the New Testament is intended to illustrate; which has been considered in the former Essay. As to the evidence upon which the truth is to be received, it might be observed in general, that evidence should always be of the same nature with what is proposed to be believed. Are we to receive the gospel, because, or just as far as, it is agreeable to reason? No; for then reason would be set up to inform us what God ought to say. And as what is called reason, wears an evil eye to the truth, it is not to be supposed that we can receive it in the love of it, upon this evidence. Are we then from some impressions upon the mind which are thought to be the convictions of the Holy Spirit? No; for then we should receive nothing from God, but what in some certain way or other we feel impressed upon our minds. However, many find it convenient to believe upon this kind of evidence; because then they can choose what part of the word they like best, and readily avoid what is disagreeable to them, or is likely to injure their reputation among professors, and hurt their worldly interest. Are we upon the evidence, that the fathers, the church, the wise and learned, or the great and pious have produced? No; for then we should acknowledge masters upon earth, contrary to Christ's command: neither would this be hearing his voice, but the voice of the learned, the pious, &c. and would

at best, be but *human faith*. Are we to receive the truth, upon the force of a philosophical argument, or a mathematical, or logical demonstration? By no means: for this kind of evidence is unsuitable to the nature of the testimony, which is not written in the words of man's wisdom.

The truth to be believed being divine, the evidence upon which it is received must be of the same nature. And the gospel has its most proper evidence in itself. The majesty which clothes the sacred pages evidently declares, that God himself speaks there. When the Spirit of truth opens the understanding, by the entrance of the word, to understand and know the truth as it is in Jesus, the light, power, and evidence thereof produces a confidence in the same. We believe and are sure, because the faithful and true witness has spoken it, 1 John v. 10. and this certainty of soul, grounded upon unchanging veracity, is the evidence not seen. However as our knowledge of the gospel admits of degrees, so our faith may be denominated weak or strong, and we be styled, agreeably thereunto, babes, young men, or fathers in Christ. Believing then, whether the things believed are human or divine, is nothing more than a conviction of the soul, that those things are true. This conviction is nothing more than the force of satisfactory evidence. And this evidence, in the gospel, is in the things believed.

It has rather inconsiderately been said by some, that when we understand we cannot help believing: for this is not literally true. Two persons may equally understand the nature of a proposition, while the one receives it as true, and the other rejects it as false. I may clearly understand the error of my friend; but does it follow that I cannot help believing it? Yet it certainly is impossible, that we should understand a proposition to be true, and not believe it, whether the nature of the thing be agreeable or displeasing.—When it is said all faith supposes evidence, it is not to be understood, that every thing spoken of in the scripture is to be comprehended in all its parts, powers, and qualities, in an absolute sense before we believe it; or that we should reject what we cannot fathom. For then we must not only disbelieve that there is a God, but also every thing that necessarily belongs to him; yea, and ten thousand things in nature beside. We believe that God is; but how he exists, our understandings were not framed to conceive, nor are we called to believe. So there is sufficient evidence, both human and divine, that the scriptures are the word of God, though many sacred truths are only known in their nature and extent, to him who searches the deep things of God; for even Paul himself, in the view of them, not being able to explore, cries out, *O the depth!* Yet it should be observed that, He who is perfectly wise, and cannot be deceived; faithful and good, and will not deceive his creatures, has revealed nothing but

what is worthy of himself. He does not bind his intelligent creatures to believe real inconsistencies: for though the sublime truths are above human reason, they are not inconsistent with it.

But what evidence have we in the *true sayings of God*, of that which man believes for his salvation?

First: there is evidence of the sufficiency of Christ's work to save to the uttermost, the most guilty, the most polluted, and the most abandoned wretch on the this side hell. This pleasing fact is confirmed in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, wherein the infinite dignity of his person, obedience and sacrifice, is demonstrated: for the declared import of this is, 'That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' No person that calls this in question believes the gospel: yet every one does this, who disbelieves the sufficiency of the atonement to save him. Again: there is evidence of the freeness of this salvation. The report of it is spread amongst all nations, and directed to all sorts of persons without distinction. All its blessings are to be partaken of freely, as the bestowment of sovereign grace to the guilty sinner, as such. So that the rude barbarian, and the savage Scythian, have an equal right to partake of this salvation, with the Jew, the polite Greek, or most decent Moralist. And when the evidence of the gospel strikes the mind, when a sinner is once con-

vinced of the veracity of God—that the scriptures are his word—and that sinners as such are invited to partake of the benefits of grace freely; he will need nothing more to satisfy his soul, and cause him to believe on the name of the Son of God. He will not wait for any new revelation or assurance that God speaks to him; nor will he go about to make this true by believing it; what is written sufficiently satisfies him that he is not excluded. But if the indefinite extent of the gospel report be denied (and this every one denies who excludes himself), the truth is called in question, and the common salvation is disbelieved.

Further: there is sufficient evidence in the dispensation of grace, that God in the distribution of his favours is just and merciful in perfection—that in the grand exhibition of mercy, through the obedience and atonement of Christ, his law is fulfilled, honoured, magnified, and established as holy, just, and good—sin is demonstrated to be an infinite evil—justice, in all its tremendous forms, a lovely attribute of Deity; and all his ways are founded in righteousness, holiness, and truth. To believe a gospel that does not set forth these things, is to believe a lie; and to manifest enmity against this gospel of the kingdom, is a full proof that such are 'alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them.' But to believe the truth, in its glorious connection, is the sovereign gift of Hea-

ven; those on whom it is bestowed, will not be heard saying, 'my sins are too great to be pardoned,' because they believe upon unchanging authority, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Nor will they be distressed for want of something as a pre-requisite, to distinguish them from the profane world, because they are persuaded that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners. Nor will they be perplexing themselves with fruitless fears, lest they should not be elected, because they know and believe that he is faithful and true who hath said, that 'Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.'

The believing view of this salvation, or rather 'the truth and the love of it,' dwelling in us, begets every evangelical motion of heart towards God in Christ. It leads to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity—to receive him as the free gift of God—to trust in him as the sure mercies of David, and, in a way of meditation and prayer, daily to be coming to him as unto a living stone. But the necessary fruits and happy effects of faith will be considered in the next Essay. Here I only add by way of summary, that the faith which is the like precious with that of all the apostles, has for its immediate object, *the righteousness of our God and Saviour*, 2 Pet. i. 1.—for its ground and salvation, *the testimony of God*, 1 Thes. ii. 13.—is obtained through divine teaching, as the *sovereign gift of God*, Eph. ii.

8. Phil. i. 29.—its peculiar effects are *joy and peace*,
1 Pet. i. 8.—and its genuine evidence is *good
works*, James ii. 14—26.



SECTION III.

WHEREIN ARE CONSIDERED SOME QUESTIONS WHICH
MAY ARISE, AND OBJECTIONS THAT MAY BE STARTED
UPON THE FOREGOING VIEW OF FAITH.

To the scripture account of salvation by faith, it has been objected, that, 'This is a very easy way of going to heaven: nothing more easy than to believe. And if believing will take us to heaven, the greater part of mankind are going there.' The objector, it would seem, has no other notion of the way to heaven than by doing some great thing. And it must be acknowledged that nothing can be more natural. However the objector is one instance, easy as this way may seem, that all do not believe the gospel, or except to be saved through the righteousness of Jesus. Instead of all men believing the gospel, it is but too manifest that very few in reality do: and that the greater part of mankind slight the gospel way of salvation as weak and foolish (among whom our objector must be ranked), or else think

nothing at all about it: while others professing that they know God, in works deny him, and turn the grace of God into wantonness. And there are not wanting others, who, while they profess to be saved by Christ, either in plain or more ambiguous terms and ways, establish their own righteousness. But can it be strictly said that either of these classes believe that very gospel which Christ and his apostles preached? Rather is it not manifest that they are sporting themselves with their own deceivings; and that, if sovereign mercy does not prevent, by giving them to understand and know the Lord, they will perish in their delusions. It is readily acknowledged that many will say, they 'Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,' &c. when in truth they do not believe it, but some false representation thereof which the god of this world has impressed upon their minds, to blind them, lest the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them. It has been justly observed, that most men, who live under the dispensation of the gospel, do woefully deceive their own souls in this matter. They do not believe what they profess themselves to believe, and what they believe. Men talk of fundamental errors; this is, to me the most fundamental error that we can fall into. This mistake is in the foundation, and ruins the souls of those who die in it. Nothing is more common than for men to deceive themselves in this point, self-love,

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reputation among the religious, &c. make them rest secure. Such will avoid the clear preaching of the truth, because if some of its light break in, it discovers their error, and fills them with torment—alas for them, for they have found out a way to go quickly down into the pit!—But still in whatever way it is supposed the objection has weight it will remain a truth established for ever, that, ‘he that believeth shall be saved.’

‘But a person may have the clearest perception, and the most just views of the person and work of Christ, in his head, who does not believe on him in his heart.’ It is acknowledged that all who profess to know the Lord, do not so in truth, John viii. 54; yet ‘this is life eternal to know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent,’ John xvii. 3. Such as know him are directed to glory only in this, Jer. ix. 24. and such are in a blessed state, Psal. lxxxix. 15. As to the above notion, it needs no other confutation, than for every thinking person to make the experiment, upon any point of knowledge that he has obtained; and I am of opinion that the greatest adepts in metaphysical subtilties, will find themselves puzzled to make out the distinction: tho’ all will at once perceive that it is possible, yea, very common, for persons to say that with their mouths, which they do not understand or believe in their hearts; and, without doubt, this is what Paul would lead our thoughts, to, Rom. x. 10. The faith of the

operation of God is very different from every other kind of faith, but that difference does not consist in the manner of believing, but in the nature of the thing believed, and in the evidence which supports that belief; an hypocrite may have feigned faith, which from various motives, and to various ends, he may see it prudent to retain; and many very sincere persons in their way, may have a false faith, by which they may deceive themselves and others: that is, they may believe a falsehood, or hold wrong notions of the truth. But then if they are sincere; it supposes that they believe it with their hearts to be true.

There is no reason to doubt that there are many sincere Papists, Arians, Socinians, &c. who believe in their hearts that the doctrines which they severally profess are true. Even as there were many very sincere in their opposition to Christ in the days of his flesh, and in the first preaching of the gospel, Acts xxvi. 9. Would it not then be talking more intelligibly to say, that when a person's profession is not productive of suitable fruits, it is plain he is not taught of God, and so does not know the truth as it is in Jesus; than to make the above idle distinction, which is void of foundation either in scripture or common sense? Eph. iv. 20—24. 2 Pet. i. 8—10.

‘ But a person may believe the doctrine of Christ,

who yet does not believe on the person of Christ.' It is true when faith relates simply to the existence of a person, the distinction is ever to be preserved. Many believe there were such persons as Paul and James, who do not believe their doctrine. But this weighs on the contrary side to that on which the objection would place it, for it supposes a person may believe all that is written about Jesus Christ, and yet not believe on him or in him. But Paul says, Rom. x. 14, 17. 'And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?—So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' And what can we know of Christ, or what benefit can we receive from him, but by and through his word? It is not the arrangement of letters or words of scripture barely that we believe, but the mind and truth of God contained therein. There is no other use, therefore, for the distinction, than to entangle and perplex persons, and to promote and cherish some kind of blind enthusiasm.

'But if faith is nothing more than a simple belief of the truth, it is only what devils believe: and can the faith of devils profit us?' Such an objection as this, coming from one whose person is held in admiration, will have much more influence upon the minds of his adherents (who without doubt hate every thing that they believe belongs to the devil) than sound argument or positive scripture. Those who, in attempting to answer this objection, have pleaded

that the devils only believe that there is one God; not only leave the objection unanswered, but certainly have very limited notions of their creed. The apostle James plainly shews that their faith, in some respects, is more orthodox than that of many professors of religion, because the faith of the former produces terror and dreadful horror, while that of the latter leads to presumption, and awfully sears the conscience; nor have we any reason to believe otherwise, if scripture be our guide, than that devils believe every gospel truth as firmly as the true believer does: and perhaps understand the nature of the truth much more extensively. But what does this avail them? Christ did not take upon him the nature of devils. He did not become surety for, and bear the sins of devils. Nor is it said to them, to you is the word of this salvation sent. No: unhappy creatures! they are, in awful sovereignty, though in strict justice, 'reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day,' Jude 6. So that though they believe and confess with Peter, that Jesus is the Son of God, Luke iv. 34, 41. Mark iii. 11.; yet they hate the truth, knowing that for this purpose he was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, ; John iii. 8. Hence we find them crying out and saying, 'Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God,' Mark i. 24. But though the saving truth torments devils, it de-

livers sinners of the human race from the wrath to come. The Son of God clothed himself in the human nature, and became the Surety of his people; and the language of scripture is, 'To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.' And whosoever among men believes what devils do about the Son of God, is born of God, and shall be saved, 1 John v. 1. Nevertheless there are not wanting those among the sons of men, who make no better use of what they know about the gospel than the devils do; and who, therefore, have no more benefit from it than they have. The devils know the truth well: but they hate it—make use of every artifice to corrupt and pervert it, and bring forth fruits directly opposite to it. The Pharisees saw so much of the truth, as to hate it, speak evil of it, and seek to take Christ's life away, for bearing witness to it, and hereby manifested themselves to be the children of the devil, John viii. 40, 44. And many in our day agree with devils, to hate and pervert the truth, and persecute them that are of it; having seen so much of it as to be aware, that it does not suit their scheme of religion. Let us remember, then, that the faith of devils is this; to know so much of the truth as to join with them to hate and corrupt it; while the same truth, known in its beautiful connection, believed in its native simplicity, and therefore received in the love of it, will save the soul, and promote a godly conversation. And it will appear plain to every one, who duly considers what the apostle

James says, that he does not distinguish the faith of the operation of God, from the faith of devils, by the nature of the thing believed, but by its fruits; he plainly intimates, that if we separate *love and good works* from faith, as its certain and necessary concomitants, the devils are as orthodox as the most critical professor, James ii. 18, 20.; i. 22, 27.

‘But did not Simon Magus believe, who yet was a bad man?’ True: but what did he believe? It is replied, He believed the doctrine of Philip; without doubt he did in the sense in which he understood it. But who will say that he really understood the preaching of Philip? If then he did not understand that very gospel which was preached, but held it in a corrupt sense under a form of sound words, he cannot, with any degree of propriety, be said to have believed the gospel of Christ: for what we have no understanding of, we cannot believe, John ix. 35, 36. But that he did believe in some sense is true, because, the word asserts it, and it is very plain wherein his mistake lay. He had not received the evidence of the freeness of salvation by Jesus Christ, and was ignorant of the sovereign manner in which the blessings of it are bestowed. For he thought that the gift of the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money, Acts viii. 18—24. He wondered, like some professors now, at the discoveries which he had made, or the wonders which he beheld the apostles work, but did not understand the true grace

of God. Their faith, therefore, should be classed with his, who think by their doings, or on account of their sincere, earnest motions of heart, &c. they are qualified for Christ, and so through the medium of these things hope for his mercy.

‘But is there not such a thing as believing in vain?’ 1 Cor. xv. 2. Yes*: and to believe in vain is to believe something that is not true, and which therefore deceives us; to hold some error along with the truth, which tends to destroy its nature. As for instance: those to whom the apostle wrote, believed that Christ was risen from the dead; and yet denied that there would be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust: and thereby overthrew the faith of some. The apostle shows that if this sentiment be true, that the dead rise not, the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection must of consequence fall; and so, their preaching would be vain, and the Corinthians’ faith would be vain, and they would be yet in their sins, 1 Cor. xv. 13, 14. Again: It we believe that salvation from sin and hell comes only by the death of Christ, and yet maintain that we obtain righteousness by our legal works, or become qualified for Christ by virtue of any thing exerted by us, or wrought in us,

* There is no such thing as believing the gospel in vain, unless it can be shown that it is not true, or that Christ is not risen. It is only upon that supposition the apostle speaks of believing in vain.—Ed.

under any name or pretence whatever; it is plain that we have believed in vain. For if righteousness come by the law, or if we can by any means shorten the distance betwixt God and us, and so begin to return to him—the great difficulty is over; we may easily proceed on our way; but in that case Christ has died in vain, and, of consequence, our faith in him is a vain thing.

‘But is it not said that some believe only for a time?’ Matth. xiii. 20, 21. True: and where shall we say their faith was defective, for that there was some fatal defect is manifest? But surely it was not in the manner of their believing; for there appears to have been approbation of their idea of the gospel—delight in it, and dependence upon it. And, in the appearance of things, they deserved to have been received, as those who had obtained like precious faith with the apostles. Yet, as before hinted, some where or other a mistake was made, which, like a canker worm, at length eat away their zealous profession. Where then did this latent evil lie? Christ condescends to inform us; and therein points out a real difference between true faith, and its most subtle counterfeits that can possibly exist. ‘He that receiveth the seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit and bringeth forth some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty,’ v. 2, 3. while the rest understood it not, v. 19. On this account

Jesus frequently inquires of his disciples, 'Have ye understood these things?' After all the laboured definitions and nice distinctions, that have been given to distinguish a true faith from a false one, it appears from infallible truth, that the reason why any draw back to perdition, after many fair and flourishing appearances, is because that under their profession they entertain some mistaken notions of the truth, and join somewhat of their own to it: so that though they may frequent the ordinances, talk in feeling strains about their experiences, and profess much regard to many of Christ's sayings; yet some pernicious falsehood, lying at the root of their profession, they endure but for a while. But we ought not to have suspicion of this being the case with any, while they continue in a true profession of Christ, or while they apparently abide in him, and bring forth fruit. The example seems to have been recorded in order to prevent any, when they see these draw back, from supposing that true faith might be lost, 1 John ii. 19. And to lead each professor to examine what kind of faith he holds, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. But when we perceive persons swerving from the form of sound words—courting the favour of the world to avoid the cross—declining in good works, and falling into enthusiastic fancies, or immoralities, we have sufficient ground to suspect, they have no root in themselves, and are withering away, 2 Pet. ii. 1, 20, 21, 22. Heb. vi. 4—6.; x.

26, 27, 38 .There are various instances of persons making as clear profession of the truth as words can well express, who yet (as in the case with the Antinomians) do not understand that the Lord is a jealous God—that his holy law, so far from being abolished by the 'gospel, is honoured and magnified by the Suroty's obedience, and established as a rule of duty to them*; and it is to be feared that the principal reason, why some cavil at the law being a rule of conduct to believers is, because it forbids and condemns what their carnal appetites approve. The clearness of the profession—the uprightness of the conversation—obedience to Christ, and enduring therein unto the end—are the scripture criterions of true faith.

'Is it the duty of all who hear the gospel to believe it?' If the intention of this enquiry be, ought every hearer of the gospel to believe that he is elected—that Christ shed his blood for him in particular, or that he shall certainly go to heaven? we must reply in the negative; because these things are not true of all. So that if it were the duty of all to believe them, it would be their duty to believe the most palpable falsehood. If the design of the question be to know whether the belief of the gospel is enjoined upon us, and recommended to us as the law is, viz. that the man that doth those things

* See the Death of Legal Hope, the life of Evangelical Obedience, by Mr. A. Booth, p. 130—160.

shall live; it must be answered, No: for if any exertions of body or mind are required to that end, Christ has died in vain. But if the enquiry be, whether it is the duty of every hearer of the gospel, to believe the record that God has given of his Son; that he is well pleased in him, and gives eternal life to as many as believe in his name--that he is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, and that there is redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace, for those who are inexcusably criminal? it is certainly every one's duty, who hears these things, to believe them, and that for the following reasons:

1st, There is nothing in the gospel message, but what men are capable of believing and observing, if they choose it. As there is nothing which men more tenaciously retain, than a good opinion of their own disposition to do well, if they were disentangled from certain unfavourable circumstances, &c. so their deficiencies are generally attributed to the want of power or ability; which ultimately throws the blame upon God, and makes him the author of sin. If the Lord required that of us which is naturally impossible to be performed, however willing we might be to the service, the case would be hard indeed with us! But is this the case? far be such a case from us: far be such a thing from the Judge of all the earth. The scripture plainly shows that naturally man is as

able as he is willing, to do the will of God. There is no natural inability in man to believe the gospel, otherwise it would not be criminal in him to reject it; any more than it is sin in the deaf not to hear, or in the blind not to see, or in the lame not to walk. If a defect in the natural capacities were criminal, then the more ignorant part of mankind would be the greatest sinners; and they who had an assemblage of brilliant parts, would be the highest saints. But then it is urged that the scripture represents man as utterly unable to understand, receive or delight in the gospel. As that *no man can come unto me*, John vi. 44. 'The world cannot receive,' John xiv. 17.; viii. 43. Rom. viii. 7. All this, and whatever else can be urged of the same nature is admitted. But then, most certainly, this necessity is nothing more than disinclination. There is no lack of natural abilities*; sinners can love, delight in, and practice sin; and if they would—if they had not a prevailing inclination to the contrary—a deep-rooted enmity to God, there is nothing that would hinder them from loving him, and obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But unbelief and disobedience suit their inclinations better; and men, as free agents, choose what is most agreeable to them. So that the unbelieving and disobedient are not compelled,

* Such expressions are liable to be misunderstood by those who know not the distinction of natural and moral abilities. The author, while he affirms that men are possessed of the former, admits that they are destitute of the latter.—Ed.

by some extrinsic necessity, to follow their pernicious and destructive courses; but they do it by voluntary choice, as that which is most agreeable, and seems most convenient to them. Hence Jer. xlv. 16. 'We will not hearken unto thee.' Psal. lxxxi. 11. 'But my people would not hearken to my voice.' Job xxii. 17. Matth xxiii. 37. John v. 40. 'To repent and believe, to love and obey, therefore, cannot be what men would do, but cannot; for the natural man, if he would speak out the language of his soul, its meaning would be this: 'I have no inclination to love God and keep his commandments. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, suit my inclination better, and them I freely choose, voluntarily indulge, and delight in.'"

2dly, If it be not the duty of every one who hears the gospel to believe it, unbelief cannot be their sin. But unbelief is deemed a sin, so enormous in its own nature, and so dishonouring to God in its consequences, that condemnation is passed upon it in the divine word, John iii. 18, 36. It must therefore be their duty to believe the gospel. If it be not the duty of all who hear the truth preached, to believe and receive so glorious a revelation of Gods's love, then it can be no crime to break the first and great commandment. But nothing is more plain in scripture than that every intelligent creature is under infinite obligations, to love the Lord with all his heart. To disbelieve and reject the gospel must therefore

be an evil; and if it be an infinite evil to disobey and reject the truth and have pleasure in unrighteousness, then of course we are under infinite obligations to believe. If we are not bound in duty to believe the gospel, are we under any obligation to believe any part of God's word? If we are, what part? If not, then we are under no obligation at all to observe any one thing that is commanded therein—Deism, of consequence, is no crime, and Christianity a mere farce!

3dly, To believe the gospel is the commandment of the everlasting God, 1 John iii. 23. Rom. xvi. 25, 26. John xii. 50. Mark i. 15. And if the command, exhortation, and invitation of God, do not bind the conscience, and enforce obedience, what does?

Since, therefore, it is nothing but man's disinclination, that prevents his believing; since unbelief is a sin deserving damnation; and since it is the commandment of the everlasting God, that men should repent and believe the gospel, it follows of course, that to believe the gospel, must be the duty of every person who hears it. This then, I hope, being settled, I conclude this Section with a few observations on the following question:—'What are we to understand by the assurance, and the full assurance of faith?' It has in general been taken for a confidence of personal interest in Christ; but this goes upon the supposition that faith is a persuasion that Christ

loved me, and gave himself for me in particular; which as, hath been shewn, is not the faith of the gospel. Numbers have arrived at the full assurance of their election, &c. who yet have not obtained like precious faith with the apostles; and whose assurance therefore is built upon a false foundation, and is nothing better than self-conceit and sad delusion. The faith of the operation of God is believing the record, testimony, witness, or evidence that God has given of his Son, 1 John v. 9, 13. John iii. 33. Heb. xi. 1. The full assurance of faith, then, must be a more enlarged acquaintance with, and confidence in 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' Rom. iv. 19, 20. Luke i. 1. John vi. 69. Heb. x. 22. This is promoted by growing up into all riches of the full assurance of understanding, Col. ii. 2. And as faith grows in proportion to the increase of our knowledge of the truth, so also it becomes much confirmed, through the experimental enjoyment thereof: and as we grow up unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding in the truth, and enjoy pleasure in the blessed experience of it, so will our obedience prove, that our faith is not dead, and in this way we shall come to know our personal union with, and 'interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. For when we can assert with the apostle Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God (we may with great propriety add) who loved me and gave himself for me.'

ESSAY III

ON EXPERIENCE.

INTRODUCTION.

CHRISTIANITY is far from consisting in mere speculation: it has immediately to do with the understanding, will, conscience, affections and conversation. So that no person can have any substantial proof that he is a believer, unless he enjoys, in some measure, the inward powerful experience, of those truths that he professes to believe, as their genuine and necessary effects. Of all errors therefore, in a profession of Christianity, that is the most dangerous in its consequences, which supposes a person may understand, believe, and trust in the gospel of Christ, and yet have no experience of the reality and efficacy of it. This surely is to have a form of godliness, while the power thereof is practically denied.

But the many abounding errors about the nature of gospel experience, and the use that should be made of it, warn us to proceed cautiously in our inquiries about it. 'A vast deal of what now-a-days, goes by the name of Christian experience, is very delusive, consisting of whims, flights and raptures, engendered by the warmth of animal passions, without one spark of grace. Accordingly, we have often seen these vain-glorious boasters, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, bluster for a time, and then vanish into emptiness.' Yet vain and delusive as these imaginations are, it is but too manifest that many who pass for orthodox Christians in our day, have no better a reason of their hope, than 'Thus I have been affected, &c. and therefore I hope.' Whence conclusions are drawn just as fancy dictates.

Here it will not be amiss, briefly to glance at the true cause of the various mistakes about religion in general, and experience in particular. We are taught in the word of God, that while man retained his original rectitude, he beheld, his Maker's glory in the works of creation; and worshipped him with purity of affection, as far as God had made himself manifest in those visible objects. Moreover, man was framed to hear his Sovereign's voice, and obey it; and that he might know that his happiness depended upon his hearing and obeying the word of God; that to obey was life, and to transgress, death;

a test of his loyalty and dependence was given him, when he was placed in Paradise, Gen. ii. 16, 17. His understanding being clear, his will under subjection to the divine word, and his affections pure; his enjoyment, or experience of what he knew and believed, was a pure stream of felicity, flowing from the fountain of happiness itself. But human nature being corrupted by the poison of the serpent, that first apostate from holiness, being infused into it, man became vain, foolish and disobedient. That human nature is corrupted, I take for granted, rather than set myself formally to prove: not for want of evidence to demonstrate the awful fact, but because it is too stubbornly supported by scripture and experience, to be denied with any tolerable show of truth: and notwithstanding some may find themselves disposed to maintain the dignity of human nature, by substituting the flowers of rhetoric, or mere romance, in the place of evidence; the streams will indubitably prove the true qualities of the fountain, Mark vii. 20, 23.

Man's safety and happiness lay in his dependence on, and obedience to the word of his Maker; and therefore, the seducer's grand aim was to draw him off from that, which we find he went about to do, by representing to him, that God withheld something from him, which if enjoyed would greatly add to his felicity; and to gild the fatal snare, perverted the divine word; which scheme but too well answered

his design. Hereby he robbed man of the principle of truth, and so of the divine image, and of course of his safety and happiness. The false doctrines of Satan, *ye shall not surely die, and ye shall be as gods*, having entered into and corrupted the mind, the enemy thereby drew his own hateful image, consisting of pride, enmity, and deceit upon him. This is the sad source of all that irregularity, both in the powers of body and mind, that daily experience manifests, and of all that atheism, idolatry, and ungodliness, which so awfully prevail in the world. In consequence of this, it is become natural for man to sin with hope of impunity, and to seek happiness independent of God. If then we do but consider, what principles man is naturally under the dominion of, if we but reflect that his understanding is darkness through the ignorance that is in him, the will enmity, and every affection disordered and defiled; and moreover, that man voluntarily gives up himself, to be led by the spirit of error and self-dependence, we shall see the true cause of the various branches of idolatry, and shall be able to account for all that self-flattery, self-exaltation, and self-confidence, which men are so prone to: nor shall we wonder, that the experience of many, under a profession of religion, is legal, enthusiastic, or even diabolical. The corruption of human nature, and the lead which the spirit of error takes in directing the mind in religious concerns, are the two grand sources of all error and delusion. But it should also be observed, that Satan,

in all ages, has had his agents among men, who have industriously propagated his doctrinal tares, and thereby, while they have sealed their own destruction, have promoted that of their fellow-creatures. Such our lord styles blind guides, and leaders of the blind, and warns his disciples to be aware of them, because their delusions would be so strong as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. The apostles point them out (especially in the *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, and also in the *Revelation*) as the worst of enemies to mankind. We are informed that many would follow their pernicious ways, in consequence of which, such different sorts of churches would be framed, from those which were gathered by the influence of the apostles' doctrine, that they would be governed by different rules, and united by different principles, from what the first churches were. Such agree to give their power to the beast, and support the kingdom of the destroyer: for, however shocking it may appear, there is scarce any thing in which people are so willing to deceive and be deceived, as in their eternal concerns! This the Lord by the prophet complains of, *Jer. v. 30, 31.* 'A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land, the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and the people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?' This observation to persons famous for a liberal way of thinking, may seem exceedingly uncharitable; but we have seen that he who can neither deceive nor be

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deceived, has declared that so it is. Nor was this horrible thing confined to Jeremiah's day: our Lord and his apostles, as above hinted, bid us expect such things, even under the strictest pretensions to Christianity, and to guard against *the cunning craftiness of men, who lie in wait to deceive*, and who privily would bring in damnable heresies, Eph. iv. 14, 2 Pet. ii. 1. But the Protestant reformed churches are ready to imagine that error, deception, &c. are confined to Rome, and some few schismatics; while Protestant dissenters maintain that error and delusion are inseparable from national churches, the very constitution of them being antisciptural; and each party thinks every other sect is tainted with heterodoxy but themselves; when, alas! false joys, arising from false confidence, are but too manifestly among the various professions of our day; which should lead every man in the first place, to suspect himself, and then to look with a jealous eye on all making pretensions to Christianity about him. Yet there have gone forth such abundant effusions of the spirit of catholic charity, that nothing is deemed more rude, than to intimate the least suspicion of our neighbour's creed being sound; and, therefore, nothing more generally censured than bigotry, party spirit, and a narrow way of thinking. But strange to tell, though undeniably true the fact, this same catholic charity has it in her nature (happy for the friends of Jesus that it is not at present in her power) to persecute unto strange cities, and even unto death, those who

dare refuse subscription to her dogmas! Though the above representations are nothing more than the scripture foretels, the writer of these *Essays* is far from thinking that every one who is in error, and rejoicing in a thing of nought, is intentionally striving to deceive. Far be any such thought from him. No: It is to be lamented that many sincere persons are ignorantly led astray; and even some who are born of God, in their infantile state, may be in bondage to the rudiments of this world, *not knowing the depths of Satan*. There are also degrees in Christian experience, even as there are in knowledge and faith: for 'the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' Though it should be carefully observed, that even 'the new-born babe desires the sincere milk of the word,' that he may grow thereby; and so, the breathings of the heaven-born babe are essentially and visibly different from the swelling imaginations of the flesh, which are manifested in a certain kind of canting, whinnying, voluntary humility. In fine, the smallest degree of real gospel experience is, in its nature, foundation, and effects, not only distinct from; but directly opposite to, that which goes under the borrowed name of Christian-experience; but which, in fact, is nothing more than the fluctuation of the passions, generally set in motion by some enthusiastic rant, and is without foundation either in scripture, sense, or reason—a mere castle in the air.

SECTION I.

WHEREIN SOME KINDS OF DELUSIVE EXPERIENCES,
AND THE USE MADE OF THEM, ARE LAID OPEN AND
EXPOSED.

THE pleasure and satisfaction persons take, in reflecting upon the advances they have made towards the ports of bliss, according to their respective schemes of religion, and the influence this has upon their conduct, may be termed their experience. Not to enlarge upon the experience of the Pagan, the Mahometan, the Jew, or the Papist, who have all enjoyments suitable to the nature of their own creed, I shall briefly notice that kind of experience which is talked of among Protestants.

First: since the nations of the world have been denominated Christian, it has been no uncommon thing to find those who renounce the scripture as idle fiction, bearing the Christian name. Such, however, have a scheme of religion, and of consequence have experience suitable thereto. Their scheme may be briefly summed up thus: the notice of God and reason, which all men by the light of nature have, or at least may have, by the mere improvement of their abilities, without revelation, are sufficient to direct them in the way to eternal blessedness—satisfy them

that such a state is attainable—and point out the way how it is to be attained; so that by a practical compliance with these notions, which man in his present state is capable of, he may certainly attain to acceptance with God, please him, and obtain eternal happiness. So much for the doctrine. Now for the corresponding experience, which may be had in the words of one of this class, who, in describing some Christians of his own stamp, says, ‘They hearken to the great Immanuel within, the word and voice of everlasting reason, and are as blessed and happy as creatures can be, by the redeeming power of the holy Jesus.’ It is most certain that by the phrases ‘Immanuel, and the holy Jesus,’ the ‘word and voice of everlasting reason’ is intended. It is plain, also, that there is no other reason for using these scripture phrases, than to throw a dash of popularity into their system, in order to make it more agreeable to those who may yet find some scruples of conscience which make them unwilling entirely to give up revelation. Now though it is true, that by the notices of God in his works, Rom. i. 20. and the reasonableness of doing to others, as we think it right they should do unto us, Rom. ii. 14, 15. we are taught our duty to God and our neighbour; and though this knowledge is sufficient for every man to find himself guilty by, and so to stand in need of some other revelation of God, to give peace to his conscience, and make him happy for ever; yet nothing but some pernicious falsehood can teach the

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guilty to hope for eternal happiness, separate from that which takes away sin, and gives a title to everlasting life. But if any thing else can, there is no cause why 'the word and voice of everlasting reason' should not make us happy as creatures can be. However, it needs but little discernment in the scriptures to understand, that the sense connected with these phrases, in the experience before us, is foreign to the sense of them there; and that the experience itself is nothing better than a mere phantasm.

Again: we have already considered the doctrine of those who seek their Maker's favour, *as it were by the deeds of the law*, and have pointed out the falsity and delusion thereof, *Essay I. Sect. IV.* The experience arising from it, is that dignity and self-enjoyment, which a consciousness of their sincere obedience, and the progress they make in that ancient doctrine, *ye shall be as gods*, yields them. But things always are as their foundations be. The ground of the doctrine being falsehood and deceit, the experience must be nothing better than a miserable delusion, and the pleasure supported in the soul by it equally criminal with the indulgence of any fleshly lust, and much more dangerous.

Further: there are other professing Christians, whose doctrine and experience are of a more spiritual nature than the former, who are much more con-

cerned about cultivating the devout exercises of the heart, than performing the externals of religion. The doctrine of this class of professors, is not a very material circumstance even among themselves; for they can readily agree to differ about that, provided they are of one mind in what are reckoned essentials. Indeed, the most spiritual of this class find no occasion for any external revelation; but this notion is now become more out of repute than it was a century ago. However, they generally agree in this, that the word of God is a dead letter—that its doctrines are dry—and that to insist much upon them, leads, at least, to speculative Antinomianism. In short, the doctrines of the word being looked upon as mere shells, their language is ‘away with doctrines, and give us a spiritual frame, a warm heart, and comfortable feelings; you are for a Christ without; we are for a Christ within; you are for doctrine, we are for experience.’ Now if this warm heart, spiritual frame, and so on, is promoted, whether it be by bodily sensations, a dream, some impressions on the imagination, or by the force and energy of what is called a *powerful preacher*; they account that they are alive to God, and are eminently influenced by his Spirit. They have somehow got a notion, that something spiritual enters into the nature of Christianity, but being in a natural state, they understand not the things of the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii. 14. Alas for them! their wretched fits of affection begin in *self*, tend to exalt *self*, and end in *self*.

soothing, if not in *self-adoration*. The foundation of all such experience is gross ignorance, supported by the mere agitation of corrupted nature, or the strong delusions of the devil; and to attribute these things to the work of the Spirit of God, is in fact, to take the name of the Lord in vain. But I shall produce a specimen of these kinds of experience.

As to those which arise from bodily sensations, a certain author has thus expressed himself, 'There are some instances of persons, in whom it seems manifest, that the first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation. The animal spirits, by some cause (and probably sometimes by the devil) are suddenly and unaccountably put into a very agreeable motion, causing persons to feel pleasantly in their bodies; the animal spirits are put into such a motion as is wont to be connected with the exhilaration of the mind; and the soul, by the laws of the union of soul and body, hence feels pleasure. The motion of the animal spirits does not first arise from any affection or apprehension of the mind whatsoever, but the very first thing that is felt, is an exhilaration of the animal spirits, and a pleasing external sensation, it may be in their breasts.

Hence, through ignorance, the person being surprised, begins to think, surely this is the Holy Ghost coming into him. And then the mind begins to be affected and raised; there is first great joy, and then

many other affections, in a very tumultuous manner, putting all nature, both body and mind, into a mighty ruffle.' Instances of this sort of experience might be seen in abundance amongst the Jumpers in Wales, or in certain select experiences and journals, which have been published to the world. Query: Are not these kinds of experiences much promoted by the new mode of conducting the psalmody in certain places of worship? And, if so, might we not obtain as rich experience in a play-house, or at a concert?

Again the chief and most satisfactory experience of some arise from dreams, and I have known this kind of, to use their own phrase, 'precious experience,' received with great applause, when the dreamer has requested church-fellowship, which, by the way, is a proof that the bond of union amongst such societies, is a mutual good opinion of each others' experience, and not the faith which was once delivered to the saints. It is hardly to be told what terrible and what pleasing experiences come from this quarter. Some hereby have been driven to their wits end: while others have been soaring almost into the habitations of the blessed: and have been ready to imagine themselves enthroned in bliss above; when, to their sad mortification, they awoke and behold it was a dream! Eccl. v. 7. Isa. xxix. 8. However the ecstasies and raptures which it occasioned, frequently gave strength for many days afterwards.

Further: these *warm hearts* and *comfortable feelings*, frequently arise from impressions upon the imagination. Here I shall again lay before the reader the words of the author above referred to, who expresses himself accurately on this head. 'The imagination is that power of the mind, whereby it can have a conception or idea of things of an external or outward nature, when those things are not present, and are not perceived by the senses. It is called imagination from the word *image*; because thereby a person can have an image of some external thing in his mind, when that thing is not present in reality, nor any thing like it.—When such ideas are strongly impressed upon the mind, and the image of them in the mind, is very lively, almost as if one saw them, or heard them, &c. that is called an *impression upon the imagination*. Many, who have had such things, have very ignorantly supposed them to be of the nature of spiritual discoveries. Some have had impressed upon them ideas of a great outward light, which they call a *sight of God's glory*. Some have had imaginary ideas of Christ hanging on the cross, with his hands and feet extended, and the blood streaming from his pierced side; which they term a spiritual discovery of Christ crucified, and of the way of salvation through his blood. Some have had lively ideas of heaven, and of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, with the shining ranks of angels and arch-angels bowing before him, which they think is like what Stephen enjoyed, when he saw

heaven opened, &c. Some have had, time after time, lively ideas of a person of a beautiful countenance (somewhat like the representation of cherubs at the altar in churches) smiling upon them, which they account a spiritual discovery of a reconciled God, and a manifestation of the love of Jesus to their soul. To such it is sufficient evidence that these things are spiritual discoveries, and that they see them spiritually, that they do not see them with the external organs of sight, but in their hearts. For they can see them when their eyes are shut. In like manner the imagination of some has been impressed with ideas of the sense of hearing. They have had ideas of words, as if they were spoken to them; sometimes they are the words of scripture, and sometimes other words. These they term having the inward call of Christ—hearing his voice in their hearts*, having the inward witness of his Spirit—and the inward testimony of the love of Christ, and so on. From these impressions, and ideas, they conclude, as indeed they are taught by their leaders so to do, that the good work is begun in them—that they are the dear people of God's love, and that these experiences are the foretastes of heaven! and the heat of their passions so intoxicates their soul, that one may as soon expect to gain the attention of a company of drunkards to a lecture

* Some such notion as this must be maintained, to countenance the silly distinction between believing in the head, and believing in the heart.

upon sobriety, as to have theirs, while we expostulate with them about their delusions. It might be truly said, they feed on ashes; and a deceived heart has turned them aside; and, what is truly lamentable, these unhappy souls, instead of watching against these enthusiasms, lay themselves open to them; yea, they even pray for them, and when, after their absence, they have been renewed, it is taken for granted that God has heard their prayer; and this affects them more, and confirms them the stronger in their delusions. Now that these things are spiritual discoveries, of some kind, is readily admitted; but that they are the teachings of the Spirit of God, divine illuminations, or in any sense whatsoever proceeding from God, must be denied, so long as we retain the least veneration for him. All divine illumination conveys instruction. The Spirit of truth testifies of Jesus, and in all his operations makes use of the written word, by which he opens the understanding. But the hope and experiences of the persons above referred to, would not in the least be injured, if infidels could prove the scriptures to be a cunningly devised fable. If then, these enthusiastic reveries must be called spiritual discoveries, they may fitly be denominated by the scripture phrase, *spiritual wickedness in high places*.

Once more: under this sort of experience may be ranked those ecstasies of the mind, that are engendered by the solemn tone, earnest zeal, and blus-

tering vociferation, of those who are, by these persons, called experimental preachers. The principal attention of these leaders is to produce what is most likely to influence the passions, work upon the imagination, and wind up the affections into lively frames, raptures, and ecstasies; which, in order to make some show of gospel, they have the daring profaness to call by the most sacred names. Hence we have been told, in writings almost universally admired, that 'Whoever, upon an impartial examination, can find certain marks upon them, viz. a spirit of prayer—not committing sin—conquest over the world—loving one another, and loving our enemies*—may be as certain as though an angel from heaven was to tell them their pardon is sealed in heaven.—These are infallible marks; these are Immanuel, God in and with us; these make up the white stone; these are the earnest of the heavenly inheritance: in short these are glory begun, and are that good thing that better part, which neither men nor devils shall ever be able to take from us.' Now there is no reason why a free-thinker may not as well use the terms Immanuel, and the holy Jesus, when he applies them to the 'word and voice of everlasting reason,' as those who profess to be shocked at the thought of deism prevailing, when they apply them to the imagination of the thoughts

* These things, if real, are solid marks of a Christian: but the author is here speaking of counterfeit, delusive experiences.—Ed.

of their heart, under the influence of bodily sensations, dreams, impressions upon the imagination, or the influences of the passions under the powerful vociferation of a modern declaimer. Nor would the nature of these experiences be in the least injured, if the name should be changed from: 'Immanuel, God in and with us,' to the term spirit, or the light within, which is the great arcanum of the Quakers. Or were they to agree with the ancient Pythagoreans among the heathen, to call these inward movements *A divine afflatus*. But to renounce scripture, name and thing would never preserve the credit of these pretenders to Christianity.—The ebbings and flowings of these things are called Christian-experience: their absence is termed desertion, or the hiding of God's face; and their presence communion with God. Nothing can be more applicable to this class of professors, than the word of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, lxvi. 3, 4.; 1. 10. 'Yea they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.—Therefore, behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This ye shall have of mine hands, ye shall lie down in sorrow.'

Again: there are others who in their studied confessions of faith, profess to depend for life and salvation upon Jesus Christ, and to be governed in their faith and practices by his word alone: among whom, nevertheless, there is much chaff, which if it were winnowed away, would be no great loss. The experience of such might be considered as arising, either from some parts of scripture coming suddenly to their mind, from the appearance of the supposed principle of grace, or from what is generally called the assurance of faith. Without being solicitous about order, or the choice of words, some general attention may be given to these things as they appear in the professing world.

It is acknowledged that all genuine experience does proceed from the word of God: and those experiences which are agreeable to the gospel cannot but be true. But the error here intended to be pointed out, is that readiness discovered in professors, if they are in any way affected by a passage of scripture to conclude that it must come from God; it must be true gospel-experience, and therefore cannot deceive them. Such in relating what they call 'the Lord's gracious dealings with them,' will say, 'There were such and such sweet promises brought to my mind: they came suddenly as if they were spoken to me: I had no hand in bringing such texts to my mind. I was not even thinking of any thing leading to them; they came all at once, so that I was

surprised. I had not thought of them a long time before; I did not know at first that they were scripture; but they came with such power, that I was overwhelmed with joy, the tears flowed in great abundance, and I was filled with joy and peace in believing.' Here let it be observed, that if any scripture comes to the mind, whether suddenly or gradually, as the effect of the Spirit's work, and gives instruction and support, the effects are, without doubt, genuine gospel-experience, But what is here objected to shall be instanced in a few particulars.

If a person (whose hope is placed in his awakenings, his convictions, or his experiences, be they of what kind soever they may) should be in great distress from the fearful apprehension that his hope is vain, and that he is still in his sins; and his distress heightened by the near prospect of death's approach, should on a sudden have, Hab. ii. 3. darted into his mind, 'The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.'—If from hence he should, by the vision, understand the return of his former experience or joys—that the time for his comforts in this way is fixed, and so it becomes him to wait without them till they come, under the persuasion that they will shortly be here: and if, following this, Isa. liv. 7, 8. should be suggested and applied to the same purpose—'For a

small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee,' &c.—from which hope is revived, fear prevented, and comfort, in some measure, restored, in the thought that he shall some time be comforted again. It is very plain the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with any part of this; and it is as plain, that the hope founded upon it, and the comfort taken from it, are vain and delusive; for the sense in which the passages are understood, is contrary to the true meaning of the Spirit of truth in those places. It is making a new meaning to the text; a meaning too which God never designed, and is in fact the same as making a new Bible, which is not the work of the Spirit of God. Besides, there is no comfort that comes from God to guilty sinners, but what comes through Christ, his righteousness, and his atonement. But to take comfort under a sense of having done wrong, from a persuasion that we are different from others, and from what we once were, is not the hope set before us in the gospel. To suppose, therefore, that God would comfort any by such means, is to suppose that he delights in sinners out of his Son, and that he can comfort them in believing a lie: than which a greater absurdity cannot be invented.

Again: if a person prays earnestly to the Lord to direct him in the way of Providence, when we will

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suppose, there are two or more ways before him, (though perhaps before he has an inclination to one way) while he is musing and in great perplexity; that passage comes suddenly into his mind, attended with the circumstances mentioned in the other case, *This is the way walk ye in it*; that is, the way he has most impressed upon his mind. He takes this for a notable answer to his prayer; and meeting with what his heart went after, he becomes confirmed in the persuasion, and has it strengthened by Gen. xxviii. 15. following it, 'Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of;' and many others of the like import. Hence he concludes, that he has much interest with God; that he is beloved of the Lord, and that his ways are directed by him. Though there is no proof in all this that God has any hand whatever in the whole affair. But what is very remarkable, when a text of scripture comes to the mind which tends to distress, as for instance, when a doubting soul has darted into his mind the words of David, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul,' it is said to be the temptation of the devil. But what reason can be assigned for this? Has Satan power only over uncomfortable passages of scripture; or, cannot he pervert any part of them, to tempt and deceive men with? and if so, then its being a comfortable or a precious promise, is no proof that Satan has not a hand in it. Yea, it appears to be his

work alone when it tends to confirm the false joy, and false confidence of sinners.

The experience of others arises from, and is maintained by some imaginary symptoms of a work of grace in their souls; such are going about in quest of some token for good in themselves, and when they hear the word, are searching in every corner of their heart, to see if something favourable does not appear there, and that generally with a strong bias in the mind, to make the most of what they find; that much the same use has been made of these signs, as the ancient Pharisees made of the law. Hence some signs and marks are given for professors to judge of their state by, that are common to believers and hypocrites; and others, that have no foundation at all in the word of God; from which when they are perceived, or imagined to be in them, they conclude well of themselves. But when the more thinking part of them come to reflect, they perceive, that many have had those things and yet fallen away which tends to create sad suspense; and though nothing but the blood of Christ, flowing freely to the chief of sinners, can effectually remove the torment of the mind, yet their leaders either from ignorance of, or disaffection to this sovereign remedy, set themselves to distinguish where there is no difference and to create reverence for their own judgment, divide and subdivide very nicely, betwixt what are genuine convictions, desires, affections, and

so on; and what are counterfeit; whereby the mind is frequently more entangled, and heavier burdens laid upon it. And after all the labour and pains, it is generally found a difficult piece of work, to persuade some to think well of themselves; the most that they can be brought to is, that, *they desire to believe*; and when nothing else will do, they get some sort of ease by hearing, that *the desire of faith is faith*. This reminds me of what I once heard an old woman say to one of these *doubting believers*, with whom she had taken much pains to make her think well of herself; but her patience at length being worn out, she exclaimed, 'You are the most uncomfortable, people in the world to talk to. There is no end in it, for no sooner has one removed one doubt, but you bring up twenty more.'—The opportunities wherein comfort and joy are obtained from this source, are called *Bethel-visits*; and if the persons are what is called orthodox in their creed, although they should not think much [about a godly conversation, or of observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, but on the contrary, through frequent returns of these fits of affection, should grow tired of religion; yet believing the final perseverance of the saints, they know, that if once in grace then always in grace, and can address their souls in words often used upon this occasion:

' Did Jesus once upon thee shine?

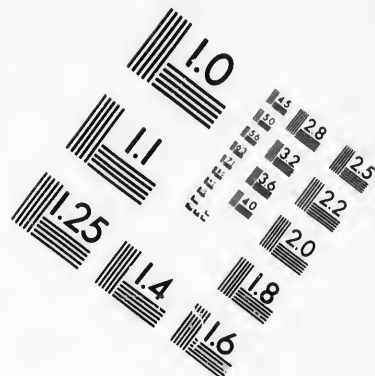
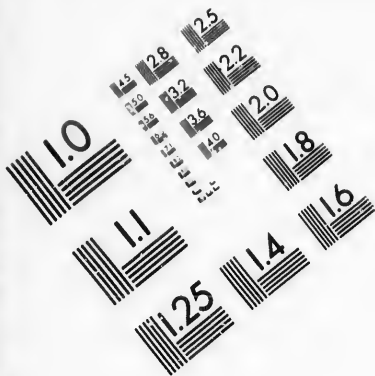
' Then Jesus is for ever thine.'

In like manner they are asked, ' Do you recol-

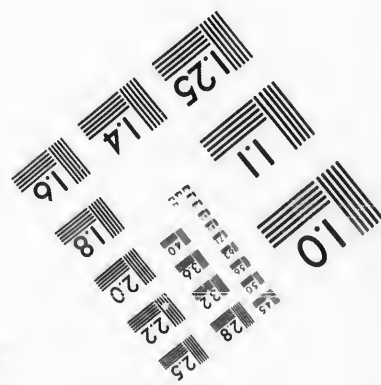
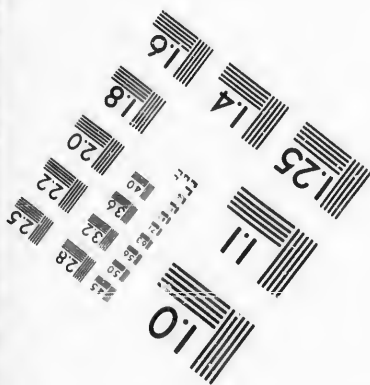
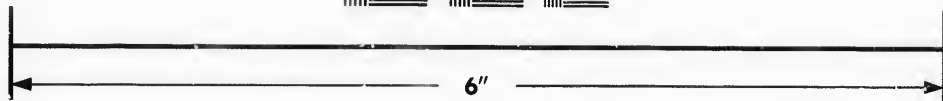
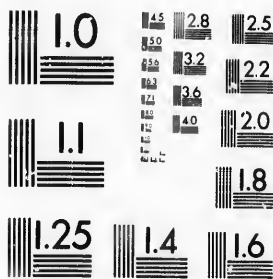
lect, in any part of your life, either in reading, hearing, praying, or conversing, when you enjoyed the presence of God? (of which they are to form their own conceptions) if so, then my soul for yours, all is safe,' or in words to this effect. Hence they conclude, that as by divine assistance they have exerted an act of faith, that is, persuaded themselves that they are not as other men) and have enjoyed the divine presence—all is secure and well. It only happens to be 'winter with the soul,' and if the person dies in this wintry season, it is hoped all is well, because we have been told God puts many of his children *to bed in the dark!* If any doctrine deserves to be denominated Antinomian, surely this does; for what can be more dangerous, or what have a greater tendency to lull professors to sleep, in the bed of carnal security, and encourage them to sin, with the hope of impunity? Once more: there are others whose experiences arise from what is called by them the *assurance of faith*, or in other words, the appropriating the benefits of the gospel, Christ, heaven, and so on, to myself; and if we closely attend to the experience arising from this doctrine, we shall find, that it does not come so much from the things believed, as from the consciousness that they are ours. We shall hear persons of this sentiment cry down works and legal doctrines, and set up what they call *faith* in opposition to them, and they will speak many excellent things about grace and the gospel; but then we are somehow led to imagine, that these

things, declared in common to the world, are little or nothing without the appropriating act. This act is sometimes made upon internal qualifications; but others cut the matter much shorter, and appropriate, without any evidence, either from scripture, sense, or reason, or in other words they vainly imagine, though firmly persuade themselves, that it is so, because they believe it to be so. They confess that it is not a truth before it is believed, but becomes a certain truth when they believe it, and never would be true, had not they assured themselves it was so. This persuasion begets joys and great peace, yea, even leads them (to use one of their own expressions) to 'bask before the throne.' Such will talk of lying very humbly before the Lord, and will make high pretences to humility; but not knowing where in true humility consists, they very awkwardly ape it. In giving an account of their rich experiences, wonderful discoveries, and so on, they tell us 'at such a season I was humbled in the very dust—was entirely emptied of self—saw my heart as black as hell, and as deceitful as the devil, and was as low as I well could be in self-abasement.' And this will be attended with great outward show of humiliation; perhaps, in the meanness or peculiarity of their dress—the affected manner of their speech—some strange gestures—solemn looks, &c.; so that if one had taken their word for it, they are the most humble creatures under heaven. Yet if their general conduct is but closely looked into, we shall see them to





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be the most haughty, assuming, and audaciously proud, of any among the sons of men. The writer has had occasion to see the best-affected humility spoiled, by an honest friend to truth charging the pretender thereto, with the very thing he had confessed himself the subject of. The person, whom we will call Humilis, having, in one of his prayers, confessed before the Lord, the hypocrisy of his heart, that he was less than the least of all saints, and not worthy to be named among the children of God: his friend having observed some things about him, which laid but too just a foundation for such a confession, took the liberty of expostulating with him. But Humilis having forgot what manner of person he had confessed himself to be, was very much chagrined at the charge; his temper warmed, and at length arose to the heights of resentment; in short, if the whole were told, it would appear, that Humilis had a very deceitful sense of the deceitfulness of his heart. From hence it is plain, as well as from various other circumstances, that the chief end in this voluntary humility, is to be thought very humble Christians, and persons of great diffidence, by all who hear them, that in their estimation they may be set foremost on the list of saints. The account God makes of this parade, may be seen, Isa. lxxv. 5. The whole of it is founded in ignorance; for did such know what cause there is in them for self-abasement before God; that would appear so great, that astonishment would seize them that such wretches as they are

so filthy and abominable, are not more deeply abased before him whose name is Holy. If we did but entertain just sentiments of ourselves, we should wonder why the Lord should condescend to call our lowest abasement humility, when even then we are infinitely short of being so low as we ought to be. A person truly humbled before God, would think it a much greater instance of pride in him to boast of his humility, than for a slave who has washed his master's feet, to triumph in the great stoop he had made. But the fact is, those who delight to talk of their humility, have an intolerably high conceit of their own importance, which makes them think, that the least condescension below what they imagine themselves to be, is great humility! We also hear much of their hearts being filled with the love of God, and how great their love to God is. But their love flows from a vain, blind conceit, that God loves them in particular; it is not the true character of God, either in the law, or in the gospel, that draws their attention. Besides, did they know the infinite loveliness of God, and the boundless lengths, breadths, and depths of his love to sinners, they would be led, in their highest flame of love to God to confess, that in comparison with what it ought to be, it is very flat and languid. But if their own interest in the great things of God be called in question; if they are charged with sin, because of the sad and shameful defects in their love, and are told, that nothing can relieve them, under a sense of

their deficiencies, notwithstanding all their former experiences, but that which saved the thief upon the cross; if they are warned to fear, lest a promise being made of entering into rest, any of them should seem to come short of it, and are addressed with those words, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall:—we shall be charged with razing foundations—making the hearts of God's people sad—discouraging them in their pilgrimage, and laying stumbling-blocks in their way; and in the temper that influenced our Lord's hearers in the synagogue at Nazareth, we shall hear them saying, 'What, have I, who have been a professor of Christ so many years, and have been indulged with communion with God—I, who have basked before the throne, and have been indulged with so many Bethel visits from the Lord—am I at last reduced to the same situation, as to the ground of my hope and comfort, as a sinner in his first coming to Christ? How shocking the thought! How alarming the consideration! If I could admit this to be true, I must give up all, and despair!'—Thus some have shown their enmity to the gospel hope, and plainly declared, that their experience comes from the soothing thought that Christ and heaven are theirs; though it is certain, that Christ proposes nothing, but his grace manifested in his death and resurrection, for the relief of any of his people, under a consciousness of their deficiencies and daily backslidings: witness, 2 Cor. xii. 8. Rev. i. 17. From

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the whole, though one would be ready to think, from hearing the doctrinal creed of these persons, that they have some regard for the disallowed gospel, yet when we trace them to their experiences, and mark the use they make of them, it but too visibly appears where their hope in reality is grounded.

From the specimens that have been produced of the best approved experiences, though each party is ready to censure the other, either for legality or presumption, and so would seem widely to differ from them; every one taught of God will easily discern, that in fact they all agree in one central point; and that is, to make up some kind of foundation for the guilty to build their hope upon, aside from the perfect atonement, and everlasting righteousness of the Son of God. And though some will speak of Christ's work in high strains, and would at first view appear to make it all in all; yet it is plain, that without taking into consideration something either acquired by them, or wrought in them, along with his work, they do not find rest to their souls; and therefore the more clear the profession, the greater the deception, and the more liable to entangle unwary souls. Because this kind of self-dependence is varnished over with evangelical phrases, and so lies deep and unsuspected. Whether then our preservative against despair, or the source of our experience, be called—everlasting reason—a life of piety, virtue, and devotion—some pleasing feelings of the

mind, arising either from bodily sensations, dreams, impressions upon the imagination, or the zeal of a blustering preacher—the evidence of a supposed work of grace begun, or a powerful persuasion of the goodness of our state, it is foreign to the hope set before the guilty in the gospel, and far distant from the source of all true Christian experience. In them, therefore, who are thus carried away, are the words of the prophet verified, Isa. ix. 16. ‘The leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.’ It would be the greatest happiness that could befall such, to be fairly convinced of the delusion, and be persuaded of the sufficiency of the truth in Christ to give them peace and joy in believing. But alas! their bands are generally strong, and the least that is to be expected, for making the friendly attempt (unless the arm of the Lord be revealed) is a sneer, an outcry of uncharitableness, a complaint of a bad spirit, or a charge of being an enemy to Christian experience.

SECTION II.

WHEREIN THE NATURE OF TRUE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IS CONSIDERED.

It is very common for persons carried away with the workings of corrupted nature, and the delusions

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of Satan, to charge those who, out of love to their souls, expostulate with them, and expose their error to them, with denying all Christian experience. But is it not very unfair to conclude, that because we do not hold a point to be true, in every sense in which persons have set it forth, therefore we do not believe it in any sense?—Every Christian has experience of the following nature, *viz.* That which ariseth from the flesh, the corruption of nature, and the various trials with which his heavenly Father sees meet to prove him; and from the inward proof or trial that his soul has of the gospel of peace and salvation, or from finding that to be true, by actual enjoyment, which he believes upon the unerring testimony of God. Of these we shall speak more particularly.

First: Man is naturally of the earth, earthy. His constitution was framed to dwell on the earth, and to hold communion with God in the things that are made, through the medium of his obedience; so that it was no crime for Adam to set his affections on things which are upon the earth, or to be of a legal spirit. We may justly say, therefore, that it is natural for man to cleave to the earth, and also to have a strong propensity to seek the favour of God by his own works. This state is commonly termed nature, or the natural man, and at other times the flesh. Rom. iv. 1, Gal. iii. 3, 1 Cor. ii. 14. But James iii. 15. not only represents man as earthly, but also, sensual, and devilish; and Paul, referring

to the same thing, says, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;' Rom. viii. 7, 8. Such is the dreadful malignity of the flesh as corrupted by sin, and such the contrariety of it to the divine nature, that it is impossible it ever should be made like to God, or even in the least degree conformed to him, being in its very essence absolute enmity against him.—This corrupt principle is properly inherent, being interwoven with the very texture of our constitution. Or rather we are said to be in the flesh, that is, covered in and overwhelmed with its impurity; so that naturally our thoughts, words, and actions, are under the dominion and powerful influence thereof.—When a soul is born of God, we are not to imagine that the old man is better natured than he was before; or that there is a change in our corrupt nature for the better. For we have the authority of the Holy Ghost to say, and the experience of Paul to evince, that in the flesh dwells no good thing, it is neither converted nor totally destroyed. There is indeed a new principle, a vital, spiritual, and divine source of life implanted, which liveth and abideth for ever; even the word which by the gospel is preached, and which is called spirit. But this is not nature renewed, but a principle as opposite to nature, as light is to darkness. Hence we read that the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would, Gal. v.

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17. Corrupt nature, or sin that dwelleth in us, is so full of enmity to God, so deceitful, so desperately wicked, that it is past all cure. We might as well attempt to wash the Ethiopian white, or to change the leopard's spots, as to make the carnal mind any better disposed towards God and his law; even the great Physician himself has marked it incurable, and died that it might be destroyed, Rom. vi. 6. It must, therefore, in whatever measure it remains in the soul, retain its corrupt principles and properties.—Now the opposite principles of flesh and spirit, or nature and grace, dwelling in the same soul, they cannot fail to oppose each other. Each strives for the victory, and aims at the total extirpation of the other, so that war is continually maintained, James iv. 1, 1 Pet. ii. 11. Every believer, then, has painful experience of this law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, which has made the saints in all ages groan, being burthened. Hence we find some of them making use of such expressive language as the following, 'Behold I am vile—I abhor myself—I am undone—I am as a beast before thee—I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man—In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' Those who have been made partakers of grace, cannot be reconciled to the flesh; they long and pray for its destruction, in all its properties. The different and opposite actings of flesh and spirit may briefly be described as follows: We have seen, that man was framed to live by virtue of

his own righteousness; hence self-righteousness is a chief property of nature, and all who are born again, find in themselves a strong bias to reject the righteousness of Christ, and establish their own; and that in various forms, and under various pretences; and none but believers in Christ are aware of the evil of this propensity—this is the root of unbelief—this cleaves close to, and easily besets every child of Adam; but as the believer only is conscious of it, the more he increases in the knowledge of Jesus, the more perceptible will these self-righteous propensities be to him. So that, though once he was very unwilling to think himself indisposed to the gospel, he now finds a constant necessity of suspecting himself of this evil. But the true grace of God in the heart leads the sinner to live by the righteousness of Christ:—its genuine language is, 'And be found in him not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; and, I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.' Here then is the chief point where watchfulness in the believer is requisite, lest the ever-restless principle of self-righteousness should prevail. The flesh tends to the earth, being earthy—the spirit is for having the affection set on things above, and for looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. The flesh is for gratifying the corrupt inclinations, which are sensual and devilish;—the spirit is

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for mortifying the deeds of the body, and denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts. Nature shudders at the thought of death, and, indeed, were it to act otherwise, it would deny itself—the spiritual desire is, *to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*. Thus we see, that every believer has a carnal, fleshy principle dwelling in him, but not reigning; abiding, but not ruling: in some measure cast-down, but not entirely destroyed. He has also a spiritual and divine principle, an immortal seed that is springing up into everlasting life. When nature is dissolved, the corrupt principle will be destroyed, and in the resurrection, the saints shall have their bodies fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and their renewed spirits shall inhabit this incorruptible frame; and by virtue of that righteousness, which is upon all who believe, enjoy eternal life.

Again: the believer has much experience, arising from the various trials which his heavenly Father sees meet to bring upon him; or which he, through his own weakness or imprudence, may bring upon himself. The trials of his faith may be of various kinds; sometimes prosperity, and at other times adversity; which have their different effects upon his mind; all of which tend to convince him, of standing in constant need of being upheld by the Lord, and in the end prove rich benefits to his soul, Heb. xii. 10. James i. 2, 4. 1 Pet. i. 7. He finds,

under these various trials, that 'tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope.' For while under the painful feelings of the body of sin and death, the temptations of Satan, who is continually attacking him, and the trials of life, he experiences divine grace sufficient for him; so that while in the world he has tribulation, in Jesus he has peace. He has thereby that hope, which is built alone on the riches of divine grace, confirmed; and thereby knows in whom he has believed, and becomes persuaded (not only from the certainty that ariseth from the divine declaration, but from his own joyful experience) that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him until that day; having found already that the love and power of Christ were sufficient to support him when, *without were fightings--within were fears.*

Secondly: we have now to speak more largely of the inward proof and trial that believers have of gospel truths. Such is the nature of every gospel truth, that no sooner is it received in the light of the Holy Spirit, than it produces in the mind every answerable affection; and as the happy soul advances in the knowledge of the truth, he finds himself, as it were, in an infinite circle. The transcendent beauty, glory, and suitableness of divine truth, engage his attention: with steady purpose of heart he pursues it, and receives the blessings contained in it; whereby his soul is fed, nourished, and strengthened, though

far from being cloyed; but finding his life in the enjoyment thereof, presses after more enlarged views and experience of the blessed realities, even until he arrives at all riches of the full assurance of understanding, which in the very nature of the thing, must lead him an eternal round of knowing, and desiring to know—of enjoying and longing to enjoy: still rising higher and higher—still learning more of the excellent knowledge of Christ; of his unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, which only make the soul hunger and thirst for more! for the truth of Christ can, never cloy.

Here it might be observed, that what distinguishes true gospel-experience from its various counterfeits, is, *the truth as it is in Jesus*: this is what the soul feels the force of, and not any manner in which the mind is exercised, in looking to, or receiving the truth, but the truth itself, even all the excellent things contained in the gospel, viz. the glorious character of God, his great love in giving his dear, his only, his well-beloved Son, to die the just for the unjust—the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross—and the glory, sufficiency, and freedom of the gospel to heal, pardon, and save the guilty. So that when a Christian speaks of his experience, he will not furnish us with a long detail of what he has been assisted to do, what success and disappointments he has met with (in attempting

to establish his own righteousness), what doubts and fears he has had about the goodness of his state, and his *secret hope at bottom* from his former experience, and so on; but having his heart directed into the love of God, out of the fulness thereof, he will speak of the sovereign favour of God—the beauties of the Redeemer's person, and the glory, excellency, and perfection of his finished work. With these pleasing realities his soul is so taken up, that he has no time to bestow any compliments upon himself; or his own attainments: a sense of the former charms, chains, and captivates his soul; an acquaintance with the latter lays him in the dust—shows him what a poor wretched, helpless sinner he is still—how deceitful his heart is—how prone to let slip the gospel-hope, and that he has need of many humbling and affecting lessons to subdue his pride. Hence he learns the necessity of distrusting himself, of keeping a watchful eye over his own heart, and of holding fast the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end. Having given some general hints about the nature of gospel-experience, we shall now attend a little more particularly to the subject. But it will not be amiss to collect from the foregoing Essays, a summary of the gospel, which we have seen is the genuine source of all true experience. The angel, in proclaiming the Saviour's advent, addressed the shepherds thus, 'Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of

David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.' Which manifestation brings 'glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.' The primary glory of the gospel consists in the divine perfections of wisdom, holiness, justice, love, mercy, truth, and faithfulness, being therein glorified in the highest. But in this bright mirror of deity, there is also represented the most shocking scene of human misery that can possibly be set forth, while yet, the good pleasure of God is manifested to men, in the all-sufficient relief that is provided there for sinners of all nations. These things published, contain good tidings of great joy to all people, whether they entertain them as such or no; for our reception or rejection of a truth cannot possibly alter its nature. The glad tidings of the gospel point immediately to every one who hears them. Unto you is the word of this salvation sent; and through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, is its benign language to every one who hears it. Whoever then is taught of God, to understand the gospel, will not conceive of it merely as an account of what God intends to do for some unknown persons; but he sees a wide door opened to sinners of every nation and degree, without distinction. No person, therefore, who doubts of the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ, to give him immediate relief under the deepest sense of guilt, believes that very forgiveness that is with God. No person questioning its unlimited freeness, or whether it is ad-

dressed to sinners as such, believes the same gospel that J sus and his apostles preached. No one believing that the blessings of the Gospel belong to him, because he is properly principled or qualified, in preference to those who are ungodly and without strength, understands and knows that gospel that is good tidings of great joy to all people. It is not denied that either of these persons, heartily, sincerely, affectionately, and steadily believe the gospel in some sense, as did Simon Magus, the stony ground hearers, and others. But to receive the gospel in any other sense than that which the Holy Spirit teacheth, is the most fundamental and pernicious error that any can fall into. However, all who have heard and learned of the father, and so have received the truth in the love of it, will find that it has, in some degree or other, the following effects, which may be called the experience of it.

First: Christ:an experience consists in the enjoyment of peace in the conscience. The work of righteousness, that the divine Surety wrought, has made perfect peace with God. Eph. ii. 14, 16 2 Cor. v. 19. God is now *the very God of peace*, Christ is *the Prince of peace*—the word that proclaims the Saviour's work is *the Spirit of peace*. Surely then the necessary effect of the Gospel known and believed, must be peace in the conscience. For as the knowledge of God and his law gives the guilty conscience torment; so the knowledge of the

atonement, or full, free, and everlasting forgiveness by the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now this peace of conscience which always, in some degree, follows the belief of the truth, arises merely from the blood of Christ, as it freely flows in the gospel proclamation, to sinners of all nations, ranks, and degrees. Hence it appears that true peace does not arise in the guilty conscience, from any thing that the sinner by reflection finds in himself, or from consideration of what he at any time has done, or under any influence whatever has been enabled to do; nor even from any evidences of a true work of grace in his soul; but simply and alone, from the exceeding abundant grace revealed in the gospel, which becomes his hope. Nothing, therefore, can be more evident, than that he is under some fatal mistake, about the very nature of the gospel, whose faith does not bring peace to his soul. Either he has some suspicion that the blood of Christ alone is not sufficient to cleanse him from all sin, that it is not so free as to be for every sinner, as a sinner that believes it, or that some work of the Spirit must be perceived in his soul before he must take the comfort which the gospel brings: which mistake, however small it may seem, if not corrected, will prove destructive. It is true many are crying peace to themselves, when there is no peace; but then every kind of false peace flows from some mistaken

notion of the gospel; from something different from that, which removes the ground of all fear and torment in the soul. Peace coming in this way may be said to proceed from believing: but from believing what? Not that God is well pleased in his Son, but that we are properly principled for receiving Christ, or something of that nature, under some other name. True peace leads the sinner to an absolute and immediate dependence upon the Lord; and so restores him that from which he fell: while every false peace (as in some form or other it leads to trust in something within) cherishes and promotes that awful apostasy, which began in self dependence.

Secondly: the believer experiences the meritorious righteousness and perfect atonement of Christ, to be a sufficient encouragement to give him boldness and access with confidence at the throne of grace. Many have quarelled with the Pharisee mentioned in the parable, Luke xvii. on account of the haughty manner of his approach to God, who yet, in reality, come in the very same way themselves. But those who have been taught of God, find no other ground of encouragement and confidence than what the publican had. Under the most aggravated sense of guilt, and conviction of many sad and shameful deficiencies, they derive all their encouragement, from having such an atoning sacrifice to look to—such a faithful God to trust in—such an altar to offer

up their prayers and praises upon—such rich incense to perfume them with, as the Mediator's intercession, and such an High-priest over the house of God. They mourn indeed over sin with bitter lamentation, abhor themselves as the subjects of it, and watch over it as their worst enemy; but do not take their lamentations, abasements, &c. into consideration in their approaches to God, but looking to the propitiation say, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression:' many who profess to draw nigh to God in this way, have nevertheless the full testimony of their conscience, that in all their approaches their is still a sad distance between God and them*. Yet if at any time they can approach the

* What follows to the end of this paragraph would require to be a little guarded, lest it should be construed to mean, that the spirit of adoption, and the testimony of a believer's conscience to the influence of the truth upon him, are inconsistent with his coming to God in the new and living way. Surely the author could not mean this, and the apostle, on the contrary, says, 'Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.' 1 John iii. 21, 22, referring to our Lord's words, John xv. 7. The fact is, though Christ is the alone way of access to the Father, yet no man can draw near in this way, or have true confidence before God through him, while he is conscious of allowed hypocrisy or want of love to the brethren; the scripture repels such confidence, (Isa. i. 15. Matth. v. 23, 24.; vi. 14, 15. Mark xi. 25, 26.), and the mediation of Christ was never intended to support it.—Ed.

throne, in the persuasion that they are less sinners than once they were—under a consciousness of more affection in their worship than usual, and less deficiencies—or in the belief that they are the children of God, they would have more encouragement hope of access, and pleasure in their devotion. But this way of approach is founded in legality, manifests that the heart is not right with God, and is directly opposite to the new and living way of coming to him. Heb. x. 19, 22.

Thirdly: in these things, and in this way the believer has the joyful experience of communion with God. Communion signifies fellowship, common possession, or a partaking of the same thing; and, communion with God consists in being pleased with, and taking delight in that which is the centre of his delights, with which his smiles, or the manifestation of the light of his countenance, are always connected. Nothing deserves the name of communion with God, but that pleasure which arises in the soul from understanding and knowing the Lord, who executeth loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord, Jer. ix. 24. If we would know when this grand exhibition was made on the earth, the voice from the excellent glory informs us, when pointing to the obedience and suffering of Christ, and the glory that should follow, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Whoever, therefore,

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is well pleased with, and delights in the person and work of Immanuel, has communion with God in his blessedness, even fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. But this is very different from what is commonly, though profanely, called communion with God, which arises merely from self love and self conceit. Some are confident they hold communion with God; bask before the Sun of righteousness; dwell upon the Mount; and have frequent Bethel-visits, because they have some impulses in their duties, or secret whispers, which they call the witness of the spirit, that God loves them far above the greater part of the world; which leads them to talk highly of eternal things, such as personal election, covenant transactions, and unchanging love, particularly redemption, the final perseverance of the saints, and the enjoyment of eternal glory*. And while this is the case. as a certain author observes, 'Even pride itself will prejudice them in favour of that which they call Christ. Selfish, proud man naturally calls that lovely, that greatly contributes to his interest, and gratifies his ambition.'—To be upon the Mount is to understand and delight in what was declared there. To have a Bethel-visit, is to behold heaven and earth united, and an intercourse opened between God and man, in the person and work of the Almighty God of Jacob, manifested in the flesh.

* It is not these doctrines that are intended to be censured for they are great and glorious in their own nature; but the abuse of them.

To behold all salvation and all desire in Christ--to rejoice in having no confidence in the flesh, and to glory in this, that we understand and know the Lord as *a just God and a Saviour*, this is communion with God, and nothing else deserves the name.

Fourthly: the gospel presents Jehovah's character in the most lovely point of view: so that no one can behold him as there revealed without loving him with a supreme affection. Indeed the beauty of God's moral image is set forth in the holy law;—and in that representation he is infinitely worthy to be loved, by all intelligent beings; and not to love him, in this view, is infinitely criminal. But while man's natural corrupt principles reign, so far is he from loving this infinitely amiable character, that his heart rises in enmity against it; which indeed is an awful proof of that gross darkness which, through unbelief of his mercy, covers the soul. Now though every rational creature is under obligations to love God for his own excellency (which every believer will do) and though not to love him with all the heart, justly deserves everlasting punishment;—yet nothing is more certain, from scripture and fact, than that no person will love God in truth till his natural enmity is broken; which is never done till the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, by the word of truth, quicken his soul. The natural man may love that notion of God which suits his carnal, deceitful, proud, sensual heart; but every notion of him

that does not give us just views of his glorious majesty, holiness, &c. tends to lead us into idolatry. Some are disposed to love God, because they conceive of him as a being so good and benevolent, that he cannot find in his heart to damn them for their sins.—Others feel an affection for the Deity, because they believe he has pardoned all their sins—exalted them above many of their fellow creatures, and that all the joys of heaven are their own. And these we shall hear speaking in high strains, about sovereign, free, electing love; who yet, when the true nature of God's sovereign love is set forth, and his true character declared, will, like the ancient Pharisees, (who also believed a kind of *absolute predestination**,) *hate it*. Yet so essential is *love to God* to the Christian† character, that he who loveth not is not of God; for God is love. And upon the person who loves not our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the most awful curses are denounced. To love God includes, 1st, Love to that amazing grace shown towards sinners in opening a way for their deliverance from deserved wrath. 'In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love;—not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be

* See Prideaux's Connection, vol. ii. part ii. p. 341.

† The passage referred to more immediately respects love to the brethren, which indeed arises from love to God.—Ed.

the propitiation for our sins,' I John iv. 9, 10. John iii. 16. 2dly, In connexion with the above, love to him for his special benefits and favours conferred upon us; for it would be an instance of the greatest ingratitude not to love him for the bestowment of favours so divine. 3dly, Love to that grand and most beautiful display of the divine perfections, drawn out in the obedience and atonement of Christ. Here the divine holiness shines forth with the brightest lustre, in its infinite opposition to sin, by appointing the Holy One to magnify the law and make it honourable—the inflexible justice of God appears in its persisting in the punishment of sin according to its infinite demerits, even though his well-beloved Son must bear the weighty stroke; and every other divine attribute shines most gloriously.—Whoever acknowledges this, and loves this appearance of the true God, justifies the divine proceedings toward the angels that fell;—and also his dealings with sinners who break the law;—and owns, that if all the world had been consigned over to aternal death, the character of God would have appeared infinitely glorious. We shall hear many talking of beholding great beauty in Jehovah's goodness, mercy and love, who manifest no disposition to love him, for the tremendous display of his holiness and justice, in opposition to sin. Yet nothing but a full conviction of divine glory in the distribution of justice, will effectually stop the cavils of man's pride against the procedure of the divine sovereignty.

But here let it be observed, that no one can love God; and at the same time love sin, 1 John i. 6. No one can love God, and at the same time hate his law, or speak unworthy things of it.—Rom. vii. 12. No person loves God who goes about to pervert the gospel of his grace, Gal. 1. 8. Nor can any one love God who does not love his brother, and study the good of mankind.—1 John iv. 20.; iii. 17.—Every one who loves the character of God is led to imitate it.

Fifthly: the gospel of grace gives the highest display of the great God of his tremendous perfections, and their infinite opposition to sin; so that wherever it is truly known and received, it cannot fail to implant the *fear of God*. The black character of the wicked is, that *There is no fear of God before their eyes*, Rom. iii. 18. Hence the Lord promises, in the new and everlasting covenant, to put his fear into his people's hearts. And this we are informed, is the beginning of wisdom—Every doctrine, but the doctrine of Christ, tends more or less to keep out godly fear from the soul. Hence the gospel, though it is the very source of the joys of the Holy Ghost, strikes at the root of all false confidence, false joys, and disobedience. A sort of fear or dread of God is sometimes awakened by the dictates of the natural conscience, and enforced by the written law; but from the knowledge of the truth, the fullest impressions of the living God are made on the mind,

and, of course, a more genuine and lasting experience of his fear is implanted there; the happy and salutary effects of which, among many others, are the following: 1st, It begets conviction of sin in the soul, where the conscience has been seared, and enforces and confirms it, where slight impressions have been made. Nothing is better suited to awaken the attention to a just sense of sin than the preaching of the cross of Christ, which makes known God's terrible wrath against it. Deep convictions of sin may be in the soul, previous to any saving illumination, and may occasion great terrors there, which may be stifled and expelled by a false hope: but when the perfection of the holy law appears to the sinner in the glass of Christ's sufferings, then he perceives that God is just indeed! and that there is nothing about himself, but what exposes him to the most awful frown of Jehovah; and from this source he learns more of the infinite heinousness of sin, and has the fullest display of its dreadful consequences. The fear of God, in the sense spoken of here, as proceeding from the knowledge of God in Christ, is perfectly consistent with the strongest confidence of Christ's ability to save to the uttermost—it possesses the mind of a believer in the full assurance of faith, in the delightful enjoyments of love, and in the firmest persuasion of his own interest, in electing, redeeming, calling, and preserving grace. Yea this reverence and godly fear maintains in the soul, an increasing view of the evil nature of sin, while it

grows in knowledge of, love to, and hope in the gospel of peace: and is thereby distinct in its very nature from, that slavish fear, which arises from pride, working in a way of painful desire, attended with many fears, till it is crowned with the enjoyment of self-complacency in its own works*, quite the reverse of that fear, which fills the mind with torment, till it can say, with some assurance, 'God I thank thee that I am not as other men.' It cannot be thought the true believer is led by his faith in Christ, and confidence of interest in him, to fear sin less than when he expected to be sent to hell for the commission of it;—or is emboldened to transgress the least command in hope of impunity; much less will he embrace

*This seems to glance at a passage in Sandeman's letters on *Theron and Aspasio*, see 4th Ed. vol. ii. page 8, 20—If so, it appears that the author must have much misunderstood the paragraph, as it does not seem to be applied in the *Essays*, according to its real meaning and intention. In order, therefore, to do justice to Mr. Sandeman, we have thought it necessary to insert the sentence at large.

His words are, 'No man, then, by enjoying the Holy Spirit as the Comforter can find any ground for being less afraid of sinning, or of its consequences, than he was before. For he no sooner indulges any evil affection, or any thought opposite to charity, than he loses that enjoyment. Paul supposes, that men would have tasted of this enjoyment, may, by indulging the passions opposite to charity, grieve the Holy Spirit, and so lose that enjoyment; so he says, Eph. iv. 30. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.' They who thus grieve the Holy Spirit, must find mercy and forgiveness in the same way as at the first; and their love must be left to work, in the way of painful desire, and fear, till it be again crowned with enjoyment, and so perfected."—Ed.

that vile tenet, that soul destructive error, that believers are not under the law as a rule of conduct, and so cannot sin! Nor does the believer in Christ imagine that his sins are less displeasing to God, or less deserving of the curse, than those of the most profane; that sentiment is purely Antinomian, which teaches professors to think that their sins only deserve fatherly chastisements. What! does our profession of faith in Christ make sin otherwise than an infinite evil in us?—Or does God, like some indulgent parent, wink at our transgressions? Far be it from us to think so of him, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; rather let us say that the least transgression in a professor, is attended with abundantly more ingratitude and baseness than in others, and will lead a real believer to the blood of Jesus, for pardon as a poor sinner, who has no hope but in the promise of mercy to the guilty. But this sentiment wears a very hostile aspect towards those who get relief, when under a sense of guilt, by referring to their past experiences:—and indeed it must be offensive to our corrupt nature; because it necessarily leads the soul to live near to, and be constantly dependant upon an infinitely holy and sovereign God. 2dly, The true fear of God in the heart promotes a genuine spirit of devotion, and a suitable frame of soul for the whole worship of God. Many, out of a false notion of boldness, and eminent nearness to, and familiarity with God, are guilty of much impertinence and irreverence before him. Did but

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the fear of God prevail in our souls, we should not dare to approach him but with sentiments of deep abasement. Believers, it is true, do not come before the Lord as slaves, but with a nearness of union and relation; yet the subjects of the true grace of God are taught by that grace, to worship and serve him with reverence and godly fear—for our God is a consuming fire. In this way the angels worship, Isa. vi. 3dly, By this fear the Lord preserves his people from falling away, Jer. xxxii. 10. By this the believer knows that God is well pleased only in his Son, and with him only as united to Christ. He perceives hereby, that if he turn aside from the hope exhibited in the death of Christ there remains nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume him. Under every fresh conviction of sin, it leads the soul to the atonement, as its only relief. In brief, it draws off the soul from every false source of peace, and keeps it fixed, trusting only in the free grace of God in Christ.

Sixthly: the faith of the gospel produces a gospel spirit, or promotes the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. The nature of a gospel spirit has been much mistaken. It is generally thought to consist in some kind of an affected *self-diffidence*, *tame submission*, and *universal catholicism*; or, in accommodating our views of the gospel to other men's notions, and thinking all good Christians, however widely their ideas of the nature and design of Christ's work may

be. But the gospel of grace creates an utter aversion to this spirit, and also to that canting, whinning, fawning way, that always accompanies it and teaches its adherents tenaciously to hold the truth, boldly to maintain the faith, undauntedly to reject and expose every attempt to pervert the gospel, and to limit their charity to those who are of the truth, and make it manifest by hearing the great Shepherd's voice, and following him. The gospel, most certainly, promotes a spirit agreeable to its own nature, wherever it comes in power, for the believer, ' beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, is changed into the same image.' A gospel spirit is a spirit of humility, meekness, forgiveness, love, and compassion. As to humility, we have already taken a view of that which the apostle calls voluntary, or affected; and in regard to genuine humility, it may be justly said, that no person is a partaker of it, who has not renounced those refuges of lies, which the natural man flies to, and fortifies himself in, and as a naked sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, and not till then, is the haughtiness of man bowed down, and the loftiness of man made low, when the Lord alone is exalted. By believing in, coming to and depending upon the atonement and righteousness of Christ alone, for peace, salvation, and eternal life; the sinner forsakes his own righteousness, holiness, tears, sanctification, humblings, &c. This proud nature cannot bear. To do it, therefore, is the most humbling thing in the world, for, the secre

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thought that there is something good, at least in the inclination, is the last thing a sinner gives up; and while any such thought prevails, and the soul is influenced accordingly, the spirit of pride rules in the heart. But when Christ is received, humility ascends the throne, and governs the soul;—the sinner then learns that there is an infinite disproportion between what he knows, and does not know of Christ—the strength of his faith in, and love to him—the degree of his likeness to his image, and his abasement before him; and what there ought to be (from the consideration of the cause there is for these things) so that he considers himself as the least of saints, and abhors himself in dust and ashes. We shall not hear the sinner thus taught of God, talking high things of his own love, attainments, and humility; for in the fairest view he can take of himself, he sees abundant reason to be ashamed and confounded, and an absolute need of looking to that blood which cleanseth from all sin:—and his demeanor will be answerable hereunto.

Again: the truth believed produces a spirit of meekness, which consists in a readiness to entertain all that God has spoken, James i. 21. and a temper of mind that suffers injuries without seeking revenge; that quietly submits to the will of God, and is gentle towards all men. Col. iii. 12. Tit. ii. 3. Matth xi. 29. Of this spirit Jesus was our eminent exemplar, and all his genuine disciples, in their measure,

copy after him. Yet let it be observed, that this spirit is by no means opposed to being valient for the truth, for even the meek and lowly Jesus, our bright example, ever opposed error with a steady zeal, regardless of the highest names among men: witness his controversies with the Pharisees. This spirit of meekness will teach us, in all controversies about the faith, to distinguish between persons and errors—to avoid all bitterness and wrath, and evil speakings, in regard to the former, and to shew the warmest indignation, and most steady opposition to the latter. In short, it is in perfect friendship with that zeal which promotes universal boldness for Christ, and carries the friends of truth above the displeasure and wrath of man.

Further: a gospel spirit is a forgiving spirit. This is so essential to the Christian character, that there is not the least shadow of real godliness without it, Matth. xviii. 22. to the end, also Mark xi. 20. The great motive to this is mentioned, Col. iii. 13. But it is much to be lamented, that while many marks and evidences of believing have been given, this doctrine has been but little spoken of, and less practised, even amongst the professed friends of practical godliness. How often do we see a spirit of revenge in one professing Christian towards another, who not only let the sun go down on their wrath, but even for days, weeks, months, and years, retain their anger; and this even among

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persons of the same religious community! But how can such persons from their heart pray, 'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us?' How can they have fellowship one with another in the Lord's Supper, where the doctrine of forgiveness is illustrated, confirmed, enforced, and professed? Or what proof have such that their trespasses are forgiven them? For upon the principles laid down, Matth. xviii. it is plain, that notwithstanding a person may profess himself a saint, and be held in high reputation for his acquaintance with doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion; yet if he be not under the prevailing influence of this gospel spirit, he is none of Christ's Rom. viii. 9. From such considerations as these many may strive, from wrong motives, and to wrong ends, to acquire this spirit; but it never enters the soul till the gospel is understood and believed, and so is a part of gospel-experience.

Once more: the knowledge of the truth promotes a genuine spirit of love to the brethren. For as the gospel implants the love of God in the soul, so also he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten, 1 John iv. 20. The ground of this love is expressed, 2 John, 2. The rule of it, the *new commandment*, John xiii. 34. The example and motive to it, *Christ's love*, John xv. 12. and the manifestation of it in deed and in truth, in opposition to professing it in word and in tongue, is the

great evidence of having passed from death unto life, 1 John iii. 14, 18, Yet this spirit pays the highest regard to all the precepts of the kingdom of heaven, and leads those who possess it to be faithful to their brethren, and even sharply to reprove them, when they walk unworthy of the heavenly calling. Love will not suffer sin upon the brethren. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not: charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things' To conclude: a gospel spirit is a spirit of benevolence and compassion, Titus iii. 2. and leads to pity and relieve, as far as in our power, the poor, indigent, and afflicted, in imitation of him who went about doing good, and hereby we are followers of God as dear children. From what has before been observed, upon the believer's experience of the body of sin. &c. none will imagine that it is here insinuated, that the opposites of a gospel spirit are totally excluded. For if they were, it would be difficult to understand what is meant by the followers of Christ denying themselves—losing their life—taking up their cross—and warring against the flesh. Yet nothing can be a greater absurdity than the notion of a *proud, spiteful, envious, unmerciful, hypocritical, hard-hearted* Christian: though such a character, making pretensions to the Christian name,

may frequently be found even amongst those who bear the highest repute for seriousness, and depth of experience.

Lastly: the last kind of Christian experience which I shall mention is, practical godliness; or observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. This has been generally ranked under the notion of externals, and he whoever insists much upon the importance and necessity of it, is sure to procure the charge of legality; even as a scriptural defence of the *one thing needful*, draws forth the charge of Antinomianism. But the nature of a legal spirit is often mistaken, and even those very persons who are most zealous against it, are most frequently under the influence of it, for legality is a very subtle thing. If steadily and zealously maintaining, that no person is a Christian, but he who from the same motives, by the same rule, and to the same end, obeys the commands of Christ, as the apostles and primitive Christians did, be deemed legal, the writer frankly professes himself a stubborn legalist. Some in the heights of their zeal for doctrinal religion, and others, amidst their attention to the workings of their affections, have had but little regard, indeed seem almost to have forgotten, practical godliness, which is the immediate effect of true knowledge and experience. Others would seem to pay great regard and reverence to the kingly authority of Christ, who yet have taken upon them to cut and carve upon his commands, as most conve-

niently serves their worldly interest, and religious reputation. From this quarter we have heard much about what is essential, and what non-essential: what particulars we are to obey that Christ has commanded, and what might be left undone without incurring the censure of our Judge. But may we not modestly inquire, by what authority they do these things, and who gave them this authority? Indeed while the traditions of men have been mingled with the precepts and ordinances of Jesus Christ, there is great propriety in distinguishing between essentials and non-essentials; and if we may be permitted to assume for a moment the dictator's chair, the distinction may stand thus. All things that Christ has commanded his disciples to do, to the least jot or tittle of them, we will call essential: and every alteration of, and addition to them, we will venture to call non-essential*, or so many cyphers, which the disciples of Jesus may censure, expose, and reject at pleasure. When it is said obedience to Christ's commands is essential, it is not to be understood, that through our obedience, in any sense whatever, salvation is obtained; but that an universal compliance with them is essential to the *fear of God*, the *love of God*, and the *obedience of faith*; and to say that because the commands of Christ are not essential to salvation, therefore I will not obey, proceeds not from the Spirit of truth, but from him who first taught man to sin

* They are not only non-essentials, but pernicious.—Ed.

with hope of impunity, and savours both of legality and licentiousness. No one who enjoys the powerful experience of the precious truth, will dare to make light of any duty the gospel enforces; knowing that the beginning of all misery in the world, was the breach of such a positive precept, as the generality of professors, in this day of refinement, would deem trivial, punctilious, circumstantial, or non-essential. He therefore esteems his word in all things to be right, and will not admit any such distinction between great and small in the commandments of Christ, as shall tend to make void, or cast the least contempt upon the kingly office of the Lord the Redeemer; much less will he prescribe how far Christ ought to require obedience. And, surely, if there is any truth in the scriptures, those ordinances and precepts enjoined upon, and observed by the apostolic churches, are as much binding upon Christ's disciples now as they were then; and if obedience to the New Testament precepts was then, the standing rule of judging of those who made pretensions to the knowledge of Christ, is not the same rule to be observed now? It is true there may be much external appearance, where there is no true faith, and where this is the case, the most splendid works, however useful to men, are, in his sight who judges not by outward appearance, of no profit.

The inclination of the will to do whatsoever Christ has commanded, from those motives and to those

ends that he requires, is the inward experience or effect, of the belief of the truth; and the external conduct, or actual performance of what the will determines, must of course be the effect, and so the experience, of the truth. And nothing can more properly be called experimental religion, than, when Christ and his ways are set before us on the one hand; and the world, with its pleasures, profits honours. &c. on the other: and the former cannot be attended to without exposing us to the loss of the latter, together with shame, reproaches, &c. if the knowledge we have of Christ proves powerful to incline us to revere his authority, and make us willing to suffer the loss of all things for his sake; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; this is a proper experience of the truth and power of what we believe. And all experience without this is worse than nothing. If a man say, he loves his brother for the sake of the truth, and yet sees him in need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, it is plain he has no experience of the love of God dwelling in him. He professes, it may be, to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, but when he sees his brother in needy circumstances, he finds no heart to imitate the divine goodness; from whence it is plain, that he does not stand in the true grace of God. He professes to trust in the

Lord, but in refusing to lead unto him, by giving unto the poor, the hypocrisy of his profession is laid sufficiently open; it is plain he trusts in uncertain riches, and not in the living God, and his heart goes after covetousness.—They know most of gospel-experience who are most devoted in their lives to God; who are of humble, meek, forgiving, loving, compassionate spirit, who deny themselves for the sake of Christ, and to promote the welfare of his church; who walk with God in their families, provide things honest in the sight of all men, observe the things Christ has commanded, and count all things but loss for the excellent knowledge of him.

But alas! instead of the generality of professors proving their faith by their works, they offer no better evidence of it than either a confident assertion that they have exerted the appropriating act, or a long detail of their convictions, discoveries, experiences, and so on; all of which amount to nothing more than what the apostle James styles a man's saying he has faith; which, in fact, is no evidence at all, unless it be confirmed by a good conversation.

SECTION III.

WHEREIN SOME QUESTIONS ARE STATED AND CONSIDERED RELATIVE TO THE SENTIMENT CONTAINED IN THIS ESSAY.

QUESTION I.

'ARE there no further joys to be experienced, than what arise from the hope of the gospel?'

Answer. There are no true joys but the joys of the Holy Ghost; and the only way in which he leads to joy unspeakable and full of glory, is by testifying of the things of Christ which are written in the word of truth: so that unless the joys which we have are founded upon, or flow from the hope set before us in the gospel, we have great reason to think they are not the joys of the Holy Ghost, Rom. v. 3. 1 Cor. xiii. 6, Psal. v. 11. But it will be inquired: 'Am I to take no joy from perceiving the work of God in my soul distinguishing me from others? And can I come to no other certainty of my personal interest in Christ, than what arises from the belief of the gospel proclaimed equally to all*?' In reply to this, it

The answer to this question should be well attended to, as it sets, forth the way in which believers attain to the full assurance of hope, or of their personal interest in

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is needful to inquire, whether your conscience bear witness before God, who knoweth all things, that Christ, as the free refuge of the guilty, is your only hope, the free promise of life through his name, your only encouragement to draw near to God, and his righteousness, your only title to heaven. If this be not the case, it is in vain for you to look for any other kind of joy; for it is impossible there should be any distinguishing evidences, or genuine experience in the soul, till Christ is joined there the hope of glory; without this all our duties are legal and selfish, and our hope and experience delusive. But if you have the testimony of your conscience before God, that the blood of Christ gives you peace, and that all the blessings you hope for, are viewed *as the reward of his work*; if the free gospel comforts, quickens, and rejoices your heart, then you must be in a measure conscious, that Christ alone is your life, light, peace, and joy;—and that of course a vital union is formed between your soul and him;—and this being accompanied by the genuine spirit of the gospel, and the fruits of righteousness, it is confirmed, so far as this evidence goes, that you are born of God; and to the truth of this the Holy Spirit bears witness, by showing that these are the genuine internal and external effects of understanding the truth of Christ under a

Christ; and the rather as several expressions in the foregoing Essays, seems at first sight, to set aside the medium of proof here stated, but which the author could not intend in that view.—Ed.

consciousness of which, you may rejoice that your name is written in heaven; bless God for his distinguishing grace, and take comfort from, and rejoice in the doctrines of election, final perseverance and eternal glorification. But even in this the true believer does not lose sight of the common salvation, nor does he build his assurance of eternal life, either upon his experiences, or the fruits of his life. This is an important point of doctrine, and should be well considered.

The believer is assured, by the gospel testimony, that eternal life is inseparably connected with the belief of the truth; so that he that believes shall be saved. He looks upon the genuine effects of the gospel, only as proving his connection with Christ, or that he is a child of God by faith in him, and then justly argues, 'If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' He does not view his experience or obedience as an intervening righteousness intitling him to Christ and eternal life, and therefore does not assure himself of reigning in life by virtue of them; nor yet does he appropriate heaven, &c. without evidence either from scripture, sense or reason, that he has a right to make such a claim. The Christian's hope of eternal life, is founded upon his word, who cannot lie; but unless there is substantial evidence of a personal connection with Christ, the assurance thereof is groundless and vain; for as the gospel ascertains

the certainty of eternal salvation to none but believers of the truth, so unless we have the witness of the Spirit of God with our spirits, Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 20, 21. that we are of the truth, our assurance that Christ shed his blood for us in particular, and that of course eternal life is infallibly ours, is void of scriptural foundation. As the first Epistle of John was professedly written that believers may know that they have eternal life, the best way will be to take no man's opinion about the way by which we are to come to this knowledge, but each for himself consult that Epistle. We have been told by those who deny the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit, to make the Gospel effectual, that 'the appropriating act is necessary to a consciousness, knowledge, and enjoyment of the divine righteousness,' which is consistent enough with their own plan; because as that righteousness stands in the scripture, it is proclaimed indefinitely to the world, and therefore must need some power to give it efficacy to individuals, and they maintain as above, that their appropriating act does this;—whereas all who are taught of God in hearing the divine report concerning this righteousness, well know that it is not any working of their mind (whether it be called acting faith, appropriation, or by any other name) that gives knowledge, consciousness, or enjoyment of it;—but that the Spirit of truth, taking of the things of Christ which are written, and opening the understanding thereby, performs every divine operation,

and draws forth every evangelical act, whether of mind or body. But if any professor of the gospel so far forgets the only ground of hope and confidence before God, as to take pleasure in the exercises of his own mind, and lives by his experiences, or the change within him, he so far is guilty of criminal indulgences, and rejoices in the flesh; which cannot be done but at the expense of turning aside from Christ.

QUESTION II.

‘What are the proper uses believers should make of their experience?’—It has before been shewn what the genuine experience of the gospel is, and its happy and salutary effects upon the practice;—the sum of which is, that the *atonement* known and believed, gives rest to the guilty conscience;—the saved sinner lives daily by his faith, or that which the dying Redeemer declared *finished*, and walks as becometh the gospel of Christ. Without these things are more or less known by us, we are not, at present, Christians: we have no right to believe that we are so ourselves, nor has any one authority to believe it of us. Not the *former*, because the witness of our conscience, and that of the Spirit of God, are against us: to persuade ourselves of it, therefore, is not only to believe without evidence, which is absurd, but also against the strongest evidence to the

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contrary. Not the *latter*, because the rule given to judge and be judged by, is—‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ Without noticing the use commonly made of false joys, false confidence, &c. it may be observed, that a believer might make the following use of his experiences, viz. 1st, What inward experience he has of the body of sin and death, the opposition of flesh to the gospel, and the deceitfulness, pride, and enmity of his heart, should be used as a prevailing argument for the necessity of looking daily to the blood of Christ, for healing, cleansing, and pardon. 2d, The trials in Providence that he meets with, the losses, disappointments, persecutions, and sufferings, which he is called to endure, should be used as so many proofs that this is not his rest, that he should not lay up for himself treasure upon the earth, but be daily ‘looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. 3d, The precious, peaceful and comfortable experience of the truth, he should use as a confirming evidence of the gospel which he has believed upon the testimony of God.—For he finds that to be true by blessed experience that he before received upon the authority of scripture. John iv. 42.; viii. 30—32. 4th, He may also use his experience of the gospel, both his peace of conscience and his observance of those things that Christ has commanded, as a proof that his faith is not false or feigned, nor his hope in Christ vain. Rom. v. 1.; 1 John ii. 3. 5th, He may use his ex-

perience to lead him to the cause of it, when he needs a revival of it in his soul. But here let me be understood: I do not mean that he should renew his enjoyments by reflecting upon his former experiences; or that upon the ground of them, or through them, either as a medium, occasion, or circumstance, he should argue his right, or make his claim to present comfort; but simply this is intended; namely, that he may trace the streams up to the fountain; or by recollecting that Christ and his salvation are the source of all joy, peace, rest, and comfort, when he feels the want of these things he may apply to Christ to renew them, under the same character, upon the same ground, and with the same views as he at first looked unto him for salvation. All who are taught of God, are taught as guilty sinners, constantly to live by the righteousness of the Redeemer, which is perfectly consistent with a full persuasion of personal interest in him.

QUESTION III.

‘Does the gospel hope admit of taking relief, under fresh charges of guilt upon the conscience, from any former works or experiences; or any present feelings or resolutions?’ From what has been already observed, it is answered in the negative; for if any thing appears in the temper and walk of a professor, that the word of God condemns; he ought

on that account to examine himself whether he be in the faith, according to 2 Cor. xiii. 5. and indeed if but a small portion of the fear of God be before his eyes, and his conscience remain tender, a suspicion of this will force itself upon his mind, whether he chooses to entertain it or no. But the question requires a more distinct reply. 1st, There is nothing that persons are more deceived in than their feelings. Christ tells us of some whose joy, while it lasted, no one could question the truth of, Matth. xiii. 20.; Luke iv. 20—30. And have not we seen many making a shining profession of religion, persons who have been high in our esteem as Christians, and the relation of whose experiences has often given us pleasure, who yet have turned back, and been a sad disgrace to religion, yea even to society? And is it not plain from hence, and abundantly confirmed by the word of God, that professors may have false hopes, false confidence, false comforts, and false joys, even while they have made the clearest profession in words? And if this be the case, then would it not be confirming the delusion, and sealing the destruction of such, to endeavour to comfort them, and cause them to think well of their state from their former supposed experiences, or works, or present desires, or resolutions? But to say the best of this method, it is uncertain, and therefore uncomfortable and unsafe;—for seeing there have been persons who have been deceived this way, the leaders of this people set themselves

to divide and sub divide betwixt this kind of conviction, and the other.—these kind of desires, repentances, and faith, and those which have been disproved; yet, after all, many are held in sad suspense through life, and awfully prove the deficiency of this hope and comfort in death! And as few are capable of making the necessary distinctions, their comfort in general, depends upon their leaders, not upon God's testimony.—But 2d, The present situation the mind is supposed to be in, is an objection to this method of procedure. For this state of mind renders a former real experience apparently delusive, and so cannot give relief: no not even upon the supposition that a persuasion of our election will give peace to a guilty conscience: because the very ground of the proposed encouragement, or source of relief, is called in question;—and indeed if under a sense of guilt any can take relief from their past experience; that very satisfaction which he finds should lead him to suspect the truth of his faith, hope and experience. For our past experiences are no otherwise evidenced, to be the true joys of faith, and the real comforts of the Holy Ghost, than as the soul is disposed thereby to look directly to Christ alone for peace, when his conscience is charged with fresh guilt. 3d, To make use of any former works or experiences, or any present feelings or resolutions to this end, is in its own nature wrong. I suppose it will be admitted that fresh contracted guilt tends to work in the soul fear, darkness, and dis-

tress, which as before observed, render a former real experience apparently delusive. But if this were not the case, can our past experiences, however genuine, remove the ground of our present fear, darkness and distress? If so, then we have found out something different from the blood of Christ that can cleanse us from all sin! But, supposing it possible, that a retrospect of our past experiences could remove the present sense of guilt, &c. what sense can we make of such an address to believers as the following, 'As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him,' Col. ii. 6. A sinner does not at first receive Christ through the medium of his experiences, or upon the ground of his own working, under any consideration whatever; but rather as freely given for a sanctuary to the distressed, and the hope of the unqualified and guilty. If then, when guilt burthens the conscience again, we can get relief from any other quarter, than we did at first; that is, through any other medium than the gospel of the grace of God, we must certainly obtain it at the expence of turning out of the way to God; and instead of 'holding the beginning of our confidence (which if well-founded must be in Christ) steadfast unto the end,' as we are exhorted, Heb. iii. 14. 'we are moved away from the hope of the gospel,' Col. i. 23, to another hope and another gospel: 'which indeed is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ,' Gal i. 6 9. In short, if a believer

can at any time take relief in this way, to say the least of it, he does not obey the exhortation to walk in Christ as he first received him. But it must be acknowledged this method of giving peace to the guilty conscience, is consistent enough with that doctrine which teaches the necessity of certain pre-requisites to qualify us for receiving Christ. But, 4th, this method tends to give us slight notions of sin; which is a sufficient argument against it, if no other could be urged. It leads professors to think that their sins are not infinitely criminal, and such deserve the wrath of God; which sentiment is purely Antinomian, and so, is opposed to Jehovah's moral government. Nor can any person have the fear of God before his eyes, who entertains such thoughts of sin. If every defect in loving God with all our hearts is infinitely criminal, as without doubt it is, then the fear arising from a consciousness of it cannot be removed by any thing less, than an atonement of infinite dignity and worth. Hence we may see one reason, why the Christian should live daily by the faith of the Son of God. 5th, There is no occasion for such a procedure. For even while we view nothing about ourselves, but what leads to despair, yet against all hope from within ourselves, we may believe in hope of what is set before us *in the gospel*. It cannot be proved, by any logical deduction of one proposition from another, or a taking for granted certain premises, and then drawing rational conclusions from them, that we are be-

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lievers in Christ, unless we rest in the persuasion, that 'He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him,' and that the gospel is good tidings of great joy to all people; and if the sufficiency and freeness of the Redeemer's work is believed; and thereby a persuasion arises in the soul from the faithfulness of God, that whosoever believeth shall be saved; that person will find no necessity to look to any other quarter for peace. But if our knowledge and belief of these things do not bring peace, without doubt we do not believe them; or to speak the most cautiously, we have our minds sadly clouded about them. In short, if we could reconcile our minds, to attend to the direction of God himself, we should see that he proposes nothing, to renew or revive the peace and joy of the most eminent saint, but that which he sets before the most guilty sinner, which may be seen, 2 Cor. xii 8, 9. Rev. i. 17, 18.

Obj. 'But did not David in a time of trouble and sorrow seek comfort and peace in referring to his past experiences?' (Psal. xlii. 5, 11.; xliii. 5.) In reply to this it may be observed, that these psalms seem to have been composed by the same author, and upon the same occasion: probably David was the author of them, who at this time was banished from the house of God, either by Saul's tyranny, or Absalom's rebellion. He longs to be restored to the worship of God, with as much ardour

as the long-chased hart, ready to expire, pants for the water-brooks. He looks back to the happiness he was used to enjoy in going to the house of the Lord, and contracts it with his present forlorn situation: the effect whereof is, that 'his soul is cast down within him.' However, he is far from looking to, or expecting help from himself or any human aids; but in the midst of his grief he encourages himself in the Lord. He looks to his works of providence (v. 6.) which are the ground upon which he exhorts his soul (v. 1.) to *hope in God*; even as he at another time says, 'Because thou hast been my help, therefore, under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.' If therefore this might be applied to Christian experience, it is a suitable direction in what way we should proceed to renew our comforts (viz.) looking from ourselves, and upon the ground of the faithful word, which records the mighty acts of the Lord, hope in his mercy, and confide in his veracity.

The penman of Psal, lxxvii. had so far forgotten himself as to look to his former experiences to relieve him; under the sense of present guilt, but found the method fail in the trial. Ver. 1—4. he gives a distressing view of that which troubled his conscience, and v. 5, 6. he tries what looking to his past enjoyments would do for him. 'I have considered the days of old, the years of, ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune

with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.' Thus we see he took the same method that is commonly recommended to, and practised by professors in our day. But his conscience was too sensibly affected with the wrath that lay upon it, to take comfort from any such quarter—still he complains, v. 2, 9. Convinced in that trial of the folly of this method, he acknowledges his error, v. 10. And I said this is my infirmity.' He tries another expedient, v. 10—20. this is opposed to v. 5, 6. This method then is quite the reverse of the former. Instead of looking to his former experience, his song in the night, &c. he looks now to the wonderful works of God, which were a type of the spiritual redemption by the greatest of all the divine works. If then we count the psalmist a pattern worthy to be imitated, let us follow his example, cease from this former fruitless method of looking for relief, and renew our joys, by looking to the finished work of the Redeemer.

To conclude: to know the truth as it is in Jesus is to be *wise unto salvation*. To experience its genuine influences upon our souls, is to be *truly happy*. And to contend earnestly for it, against every opposition to it, or subtle corruption of it, is the Christian's highest honour. To profess the faith without enjoying the genuine effects of it, is to have the form without the power of godliness. To talk of experience without a scriptural knowledge of the

Son of God is mere enthusiasm. And the most flaming profession of knowledge and experience, without observing the things that Christ has commanded, is nothing better than a miserable delusion.

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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
CALLS AND INVITATIONS
OF THE
GOSPEL.



EXTRACTED FROM THE WORKS OF THE LATE

ARCHIBALD McLEAN,

One of the Pastors of the Baptist Church, Edinburgh.

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ON THE
CALLS AND INVITATIONS
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THE Gospel is the testimony of God concerning the person, mission, and work of Jesus Christ, including a promise of salvation to all who shall credit that testimony. God hath commanded, that this gospel be proclaimed universally to all mankind, without exception of nation, sex, age, condition, or character, and freely, without money and without price; i. e. without any condition of works or merit, whereby one man can be supposed to be better qualified for, or entitled to salvation, than another.

Considerable differences of sentiment have prevailed with respect to the invitations, calls, and exhortations which immediately accompany the declaration of the gospel, and are founded upon it. Many have greatly darkened and perverted the true grace of God, by what have been term-

ed ministerial calls, and exhortations, and gospel offers. Directions have been given to men, in a state of unbelief, in what manner they should work themselves into a converted state, and become qualified for trusting in Christ. Faith, by which alone men are justified has been represented as a mysterious and laborious exercise of the mind, including every good disposition and affection of the heart, and men have been exhorted to strive hard to attain and perform this great work of believing, that they may be justified; and the peculiar duties of the Christian life have been urged upon persons, while they were yet supposed to be unbelievers, void of every principle of obedience, and that in order to their making their peace with God, and obtaining an interest in Christ. These things are not only improper, but pernicious; for, instead of presenting Christ as the immediate, free, and complete relief of the guilty, they convert the gospel into a law of works, and give the sinner as much to do, in order to obtain an interest in Christ and his salvation, as if he were to obey the whole law. The natural effect of this is, that men either despair and give up, after repeated attempts, or foster a kind of presumptuous hope founded upon their sincere endeavours.

But, however the calls of the gospel may have been misrepresented and turned into a scheme of self-righteousness, this can never warrant us to de-

ny, that there are calls and exhortations to unbelievers in the gospel .

When we speak of gospel-calls to *unbelievers*, it may be proper to explain who are intended by this designation. By unbelievers, I do not mean merely Heathens, who worship idols; or Deists, who deny divine revelation; or Jews, who, though they admit the Old Testament revelation, deny its true meaning, as unfolded in the New Testament; but also all those called Christians, who are in an unconverted state; and even all such as make use of the gospel to establish their own righteousness, and have not found rest to their souls from the divine testimony concerning the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is evident, that among these different classes of unbelievers, there are very different degrees of knowledge, and that each of them is addressed in the scriptures, in a way suited to their peculiar circumstances. When the apostle addresses mere Heathens, he declares unto them first of all the true God, and exposes the absurdity of idolatry, Acts xiv. 11--19. xvii. 22--32. But in addressing the Jews, he proceeds upon their acknowledgment of the one true God, and of the Old Testament as a revelation from him, from which he evinces, that Jesus was the promised and expected Messiah, Acts xvii, 2, 3. xxviii. 23. I shall now proceed to shew,

I. That the gospel not only contains a declaration of facts concerning the person and work of Christ, with their import, but also invitations, calls and exhortations founded upon that declaration.

II. I shall take notice of some of the chief objections made to these calls.

When attempting to shew, that the gospel contains calls and invitations to unbelievers, I would not be mistaken.—I do not mean that any will comply with the calls of the gospel while they continue in unbelief, but only that these calls are addressed to them while in that state. This our Lord clearly shews, when he says, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’ Matth. xxii. 14. Let us consider a few of these calls and invitations.

In Isaiah lv. 1—4. the Lord gives the following most free and gracious call: ‘Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an

everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David.' That this is a gospel-call is evident from the mention of the everlasting covenant, and sure mercies of David, which is explained as regarding Christ, Acts xiii. 34. That it is a call to unbelievers, appears from the persons to whom it is addressed, being termed, the *wicked* and *unrighteous*, ver. 7.

Jesus himself, in the days of his flesh, thus invited sinners, Matth. xi. 28. 'Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' &c. That this call was addressed to unbelievers, appears from their being described as weary and heavy laden; as not having yet taken Christ's yoke upon them, nor found rest to their souls.

Answerable to the call in Isaiah is that in John vii. 37. 'In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.' This is addressed to Jews, who were evidently then in a state of unbelief, and is a call to believe in him.

In Rev. xxii. 16, 17 he says, 'I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning Star: and the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, and let him

that heareth say, Come, & let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Though the former part of this citation is expressive of the earnest desire of the redeemed for Christ's second coming, yet the latter part of it contains an invitation to him that is athirst, and whosoever will, to take of the water of life freely, as in Isa. lv. 1. Christ represents the preaching of the Gospel under the notion of inviting to a marriage-supper, where all things were ready for their use. All sorts of guests are invited, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind; and that from every place that could be supposed the haunts of the destitute and the miserable such as the streets and the lanes of the city, the highways and hedges of the fields; and his servants are enjoined to bid them come unto the marriage; nay, to *compel* them to come in, that his house may be filled with guests. See Matth. xxii. 2—15. Luke xiv. 16—24. This surely must mean not merely a declaration, that all things are ready, but also the most earnest and pressing invitation, to come and partake. Nor can any one reasonably doubt, that the subjects of these invitations were unbelievers, for those to whom they were at first addressed *refused* and the last invitation was addressed to idolatrous Gentiles, who were without God, and without hope in the world. Lest it should be thought, that this strains the parable beyond its intention, we may refer to Paul's account of the manner in which the apostles executed their com-

mission in compelling men to come in: 'All things,' says he, 'are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, viz. That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech (men) by us; we pray (them) in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be a sin offering for us,' &c. 2 Cor. v. 18—21. From these words, it is plain that the apostolic commission contained, not only a testimony, but intreaty, or earnest calls and invitations, founded upon that testimony. 1st, They were commissioned to testify and declare, that God had by Christ reconciled the world to himself, by making him a sin-offering, and did not impute their trespasses, but granted remission of them to those who believed this testimony; declaring, when they said so, what is intended by these words of the parable, 'All things are ready.' But this was not all: for they, 2dly, had it in commission to urge and beseech sinners to be reconciled to God; for he adds, 'God doth beseech men by us, we pray them in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God,' &c. They were to press home the doctrine of reconciliation upon guilty rebels, as the grand motive and argument for their being reconciled to God to impress them upon the consciences of men, and to excite their affections, their hopes and fears,

by every motive contained in their commission. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, they were to persuade men, by awakening in careless and insensible sinners, a conviction of their state, and of their danger in rejecting the great salvation. On the other hand, they were to set before them, the evidence, fulness, suitableness, and freedom of that salvation, and the happiness of enjoying it, in order to allure them by the mercies of God; in the whole of this addressing themselves, not merely to men's speculative faculty, but to every man's conscience in the sight of God. This earnest intreaty, beseeching and praying men to be reconciled to God, answers to these words of the parable, 'Compel them to come in.' We all know what influence the pressing invitations and importunate intreaties, even of our fellow-creatures, have upon the most obdurate and inflexible minds. These often prevail when all other methods have proved ineffectual to move them. God hath condescended to use this way to work upon men.

But the Lord not only calls and invites men who are in a natural state to believe in Christ, and to partake of the blessings of the gospel, but, in connection with this, he commands them to repent of their sins, be converted, turn unto the Lord, and call upon him. I shall mention a few texts, among a great number that might be quoted, to the same purpose. Is. lv. 6—12, 'Seek ye the Lord, while

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he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God; for he will abundantly pardon.' Here is a call to the wicked, and unrighteous man; a gospel call, as appears from the context, and so not peculiar to the Jews. It is a call to the wicked to seek the Lord; to forsake his wicked way and thoughts, and return unto the Lord. The time prescribed is, 'while he may be found; while he is near.' The encouragement given is, 'The Lord will have mercy on him and will abundantly pardon.' All this is founded on the 'everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David,' ver. 3.

In the New Testament, unconverted persons are exhorted in the same manner. John the Baptist exhorted all who heard him, without distinction, to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; using this argument, 'The kingdom of God is at hand,' Matth. iii. 2, 7, 8.

Peter exhorted the convicted Jews thus, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you, for the remission of sins;—and with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation,' Acts ii. 38, 40. And lest it should be thought, that this exhortation belongs to those only who are under conviction, we find him

addressing impenitent Jews in the same style. After having shewn them that God had raised and glorified his Son Jesus, whom they had denied and crucified, he says to them, 'Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,' chap. iii. 19.; and although he perceived Simon Magus to be still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, yet he did not scruple to exhort him thus: 'Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee,' chap. viii. 22.

But why need I produce any more instances of such exhortations? Does not our Lord declare, that the great end of his coming into the world was, 'not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,' Mark ii. 17. Will any one maintain, that by sinners he means only believers? Paul tells the elders at Ephesus, that the great subject of his ministry was 'testifying to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, Acts xx. 21. He gives the same account of it before Agrippa, saying, 'That he shewed the Gospel first to them at Damaseus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,' chap. xxvi. 20. Can we suppose, that they were believers he was thus calling every where to faith and repentance? Speaking

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of the insensible and benighted Gentiles, and their unfruitful works of darkness, he thus sums up the call of God to them in his word, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light,' Eph. v. 14. He tells the idolatrous Athenians, who scoffed at him and his doctrine, that the Creator of all gave men a being in this world, and discovered himself to them in creation and providence, for this very end, 'that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us;' so that they were inexcusable in their idolatry. He adds, 'And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained,' Acts xvii. 27, 30, 31. Surely, no man will affirm, that *all men every where* are believers; yet we are told, that by the gospel, God commands all men every where to repent. It appears, then, from the whole, undeniable, that the Gospel contains calls, invitations and exhortations, to men while in a state of unbelief. I shall now,

II. Take notice of some of the chief objections made to such calls and invitations. If the scriptures are admitted to be the word of God, every objection against the plain passages, which have been cited, may well receive the answer, '*Nay, but who art thou*

who repliest against God? However, as the children of God themselves are but partially enlightened, and may have difficulties in reconciling one part of scripture with another, I shall endeavour to solve some of their difficulties respecting what has been advanced.

Obj. 1st. It is objected, 'That the scripture clearly declares, that no man can believe, repent, or be converted by his own natural power. Faith is not of ourselves but is the gift of God. Eph. ii. 8. No man, says Christ, cometh unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him, John vi. 44. It is God that grants to sinners repentance unto life, Acts xi. 18. Conversion and regeneration are ascribed only to God. It is he who gives the new heart and spirit, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. who of his own will begets his people with the word of truth, James i. 18, and they are born again of the Spirit, John iii. 5. men are declared to be naturally enemies to God, without strength, nay, actually dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1. And all their salvation is ascribed solely to the sovereign free grace of God, for it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy, Rom. ix. 16. Now, if this is the case, with what propriety can men be commanded and exhorted to do that which the scripture declares they cannot, and which divine power alone can effect?

Can we suppose that God would ever require impossibilities of his creatures ?

Ans. This objection is frequently started for very different purposes. The Arminians make it in order to establish free-will, or men's moral ability to obey the gospel calls; for, say they, if man had not that power, he would never be exhorted to do it. Others, who admit man's inability, make the same objection, with a view to repel all exhortations to unbelievers; for, say they, since man in his natural state is as unable to do any thing spiritually good as the dead in the grave, he can with no propriety be exhorted to do any thing while in that state. But both these conclusions are false; for it has been already clearly proved, that the gospel calls and exhorts unbelievers; whilst, at the same time, it also declares, that none will comply with these calls and come unto Christ, but such as are drawn of the Father. The above conclusions are founded upon the following erroneous principle, viz. 'That God never commands or exhorts men to do any thing beyond the compass of their natural power.' Now that this is a false principle, will appear from this, that it amounts to a denial, either of the corruption of human nature, or of the obligation, perfection and justice of the divine law.

1. It implies a denial of the corruption of human

nature; for if man's moral ability be equal to the rule of his duty, there can be no corruption in his nature. To say he is able to do all that he is commanded *if he pleases*, is only to say he is able if he were able; for moral inability chiefly consists in the want of will or inclination. God indeed made man originally upright, and so capable to do all that he required. His *duty* and *ability* then perfectly corresponded; but man having voluntarily apostatised from God, lost his moral image, and so became unable to do any thing spiritually good, in consequence of the darkness of his mind, and the aversion of his will to the things of God. In this state every thing he does is wrong, because his leading principles and predominant motives are so. Hence 'they that are in the flesh cannot please God,' Rom. viii. 8. Now if man's inability be admitted, then it must also be granted, that God commands what men are not now able to do.

2. This principle goes to deny, that God now insists upon his holy law as the rule of obedience to all mankind, or that they are sinners in breaking that law. But if man by his rebellion has lost all spiritual ability to obey God's law, can this ever alter the rule of his duty, or dissolve his original obligation to love God supremely and to obey him? Is the eternal and unalterable rule of righteousness set aside, because the carnal mind is not subject to it, neither indeed can be? Is it improper in the Di-

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vine Sovereign to insist upon what is holy, just and good, because men are carnal, sold under sin? Has he brought down and accomodated his law to the corruption of human nature? And what kind of law would it be in that case, but a law allowing of sin, equally contrary to the divine perfections and government, as to the true happiness of man? God's commands must ever correspond with man's duty and obligations, and not with his sin and inability and corruptions. These considerations should lead a man to a humble sense of his own inability and guilt, and so to justify God, and condemn himself; but, instead of this, the principle under consideration strikes against the justice and perfections of God's law, man's obligation to obey it, and consequently against all conviction of guilt in disobeying it; and all this because he is not able, i. e. *does not like it*. Can any thing more clearly discover the pride and enmity of the human heart, both against God and his law, than this very principle?

3. This principle repels the evidence, calls and invitations of the gospel. The gospel declares, *that God was by Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: That this was accomplished by his sending his Son into the world, substituting him in the room of the guilty; delivering him up to the death, as an atoning sacrifice for their offences; and raising him again from the dead to an immortal life of glory in*

the heavens, for their justification: That hereby the law is perfectly fulfilled and magnified, divine justice fully satisfied, and God glorified and well pleased, in the obedience to the death of his beloved Son. It also declares, that whosoever credits this testimony upon the authority of God shall be justified, without any works of theirs, but purely by the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Upon this ground, it addresses *all mankind*, every one who hath ears to hear; *calling* upon them to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation; it *beseeches* them to come and partake *freely* of the blessings of a complete salvation, *without money, and without price*; which it represents as a royal marriage supper; wherein all things are ready prepared to their hand, without their own labour and industry, and free for their immediate use.

One would think that this should entirely remove every objection. But, instead of crediting God, receiving his word with thankfulness and joy, and giving him the glory of his faithfulness and grace, the objection of inability to believe and repent, &c. is set up; which repels the gracious call in this manner: 'There is indeed salvation in Christ, but it is only for those who believe. Men are called to believe, and partake of the blessings of the gospel freely; but they might as well be exhorted to obey the law perfectly; for they are as incapable to do the former as the latter, being utterly dead in tres-

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passes and sins. Notwithstanding all that Christ hath done, notwithstanding the completeness of his salvation, the nearness of the word of faith, and the evidence by which it is confirmed, yet sinners can no more believe, than they can ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above; or descend into the deep; to bring up Christ again from the dead. To what purpose, then, exhort dead men to believe, repent, &c. Now, whatever shew this objection makes of abasing the creature, and exalting the sovereignty of divine grace, it evidently darkens and clouds that grace in the very point of view wherein it gives relief to the guilty conscience, by setting salvation at as great a distance as if Christ had neither died nor risen again. It makes light of all that Christ has done for the salvation of the guilty, and of the strength to believe arising from the gospel-evidence of this. It converts the gospel calls and free invitations into a law of works, and considers them as tantalizing dead sinners, and requiring impossibilities of them. In short it is plainly the language of unbelief, cloaking itself under the plea of man's inability. It is the sullen murmur of a heart repining and replying against God, as reaping where he hath not sown, and gathering where he hath not strawed.

It is freely granted, that man cannot believe of himself without divine illumination: Faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; but this can never

make the gospel-calls and invitations improper. God may well command what men cannot perform of themselves, because he can bestow what he requires. When Moses objected to the Lord's command in sending him to Pharaoh, on account of his want of eloquence, the Lord replies, 'Who made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?' Exod. iv. 11. It is surely competent for him who at first commanded light to shine out of darkness to call men out of spiritual darkness into his marvellous light. He who spoke the world into existence out of nothing, and quickens the dead, may with the greatest propriety command the spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, to awake out of sleep, and arise from the dead, to believe, repent, and be converted, &c. His word is quick and powerful; it is as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces; it kills and makes alive; it shall not return to him void but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and prosper in the thing whereunto he sends it.

4. This principle sets aside all use of means, either in the hand of God, or on the part of the creature. With respect to God, it objects to his working upon men as rational creatures, or in a way suited to the powers and faculties he hath given them. He need not by means of his word instruct, convince, command, threaten, or allure them; be-

cause they are supposed to be dead, in such a sense as if they had neither judgment, conscience, hopes, or fears, to be wrought upon by such means, till they are converted. With respect to the sinner himself if such is his situation, he can use no means, nor reap any benefit from them, because there is no suitability in the means to the end. Besides according to this doctrine, his using means is not only useless, but pernicious. He must not 'consider his ways,' think of his 'danger, attend to the divine calls, search the scriptures like the Bereans, or pray to God for divine illumination, till once he knows he is a believer, lest he should add to his condemnation, by establishing his own righteousness; as if the first thing that warranted or led men to seek after God, was the knowledge of their conversion; yet [the publican seems to have had no such view of his state when he cries out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I freely grant that none will search the scriptures in earnest but he who expects to find some benefit from them, nor will any man truly call upon God, but he that believes that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them, who diligently seek him; but all this while he may not know that he is converted, or a true believer: he may yet, like Cornelius, have to learn words whereby he may be saved? and it is his duty, like him, to be eager to hear them as the means of his salvation; for faith in Christ cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

5. *Lastly*, The objection seems to consider a *moral or spiritual* death in sin, as in all respects answering to the *natural* death of the body. When the body is deprived of the animating spirit, it differs nothing from a lump of dust, or clay, in which case it cannot be the subject of instruction, commands, praise, or blame. Were spiritual death to be considered in this light, then it would follow, that men in a natural state could not be sinners. They could receive no instruction, or have any sense of right or wrong; neither could they feel the influence of any motives, having neither hopes, fears, nor affections to be wrought upon by them. In this case, all means would be improper, because there is no suitableness or connection at all between the means and the end: God uses no means but his own immediate power in quickening a dead body. In short, this view of the matter would set aside all moral obligation upon mankind, and were it really to be believed, would obliterate all conviction of guilt. But men's consciences can never fall in with such speculations; these will now and then speak the truth, let them reason as they will. The scripture gives a very different view of the death in trespasses and sins. It consists,

(1.) In the *guilt* of sin, whereby they are under the sentence of death denounced in the law; from this death men are delivered when God quickens

them together with Christ, forgiving them all trespasses, Col. ii. 13.

(2.) In the indwelling *power and dominion* of sin, whereby their minds are blinded, and their hearts and affections alienated from the life of God, and set upon opposite objects, Eph. iv. 18. In this sense they are dead while they live, 1 Tim. v. 6. Yet, notwithstanding this, the scriptures represent man in his natural state, as having a sense of right and wrong, and a conscience within him witnessing for God and his law, Rom. ii. 14, 15, that he is guilty in holding the truth which he knows in unrighteousness, not liking to retain God in his knowledge, and in going on in all manner of wickedness whilst he knows the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, Rom. i. 18, 28, 32. The scripture also declares, that men's guilt is aggravated in proportion to the means of instruction afforded them, and the warnings and calls given them, (see Prov. i. 24, 32. and many other passages); and particularly in rejecting the evidence, calls and invitations of the gospel, (see Matth. xi. 20, 25. ch. xxiii. 34—39. John iii 19, 20. ch. xii. 46 49. ch. xv. 22—25.) This evidently supposes, that they are rational voluntary agents, capable of instruction, conviction, and exhortation, and so of being wrought upon as rational creatures by these means, otherwise their guilt could never be heightened by being proof against them.

This kind of death, therefore, does not exclude means. Besides, there is such a *suitableness* in the means which God hath appointed for quickening dead sinners, as leaves men entirely inexcusable. If men are insensible and unconcerned about their state, what can be more proper to awaken, convict or alarm, than the account of their guilt and danger held forth in the scriptures? If they are dead under a legal sense of condemnation, filling them with fear of the divine displeasure, what is more suited to give them life, and to pacify their consciences, than the gospel-declaration of the divine good pleasure in the atonement, and the sufficiency of Christ's blood to cleanse from all sin? If they are dead through the blindness of their minds, sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death, what is better calculated to quicken and enlighten them, than the light of life which shines in the gospel? If they are dead through the enmity of their hearts against God, and attachment to this present world, what can be more suited to slay the enmity, reconcile the mind, and excite love to God, than the amiable manifestation he hath given of his character and love in the gospel? And what can be more effectual to disengage the affections from earthly things, than the certain and glorious prospects which the gospel presents beyond death and the grave? Are men naturally inattentive to the gospel, or apt to suspect that they are not welcome to partake of its blessings freely? what can be more suited to

rouse their attention, or to ascertain their welcome, than its pressing calls and alluring invitations and intreaties which are addressed to all, without excepting the vilest and most worthless? And as these things influence men just according to their belief of them, what can be more powerful to beget faith, than the divine evidence which the gospel exhibits for the truth of its testimony and promises?

Thus, the gospel is the means of conveying life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins, it being the wisdom and power of God unto the salvation of men; and hence we find the most wonderful effects ascribed to it, such as illumination, quickening, conversion, and regeneration, Psal. xix. 7, 8. 2 Cor. iii. 6. 1 Pet. i. 2, 3. And though the gospel cannot produce these effects without the Spirit of God, yet we are not to think of the influence of the Spirit abstract from the means, for he works by them upon the minds of men, and his province is to give them their proper effect.

OBJ. 2d. 'Although God may use means to bring men to faith and repentance, yet how can *unbelievers themselves* be commanded to believe, repent, be converted, &c. or enjoined to use any means for these ends? Will any man seek to believe, what he knows nothing about? or what he hates, or holds to be false?—Will he strive to repent of that which as yet he does not perceive to be either criminal or

dangerous? To suppose this, would be altogether absurd and ridiculous; yet such commands, calls and exhortations to unbelievers, plainly proceed upon such suppositions.'

Ans. It has been clearly shewn in the first part of this Essay, that God *by his word calls all men every where to repent and believe the gospel.* It is easy, then to see upon whom this charge of absurdity must fall. Let men attend to it, that to set the scripture calls in a ridiculous light, and then, on this account, to charge them with absurdity, is most highly profane. The absurdity here, however, lies only in the view of the objector, not in the calls of the scripture. The word of God calls upon unbelievers to repent, believe, and be converted; but it never once supposes that any will comply, or seek to comply, with these calls while they abide in *absolute* ignorance, unbelief, aversion and impenitence. God does not call any to believe, without declaring what they are to believe, and exhibiting the evidence for it; nor does he command any to repent, without setting before them both their guilt and danger. This being done, it is supposed in the scriptures, and surely most reasonably, that men are not now precisely in that very state in which they were before they heard or knew any thing about the testimony of God, or their own perishing condition. It is supposed, that such men have now received some information, which they had not

before, both with respect to their danger, and the remedy for it; and that they are hereby rendered quite inexcusable, if they should neglect so great salvation; which neglect must now be the effect of perverseness and aversion, and not of simple ignorance, John iii. 19. xv. 22—25.

To awaken therefore, their attention to the evidence and important nature of its testimony, to remove their prejudices, and gain upon their hearts, its doctrines are accompanied with calls, commands, expostulations, and intreaties, to believe and repent, which are urged by the most alluring and alarming motives that can possibly be proposed to the human mind. Now, wherein lies the absurdity of this? Is it not most reasonable and proper? Do not such commands and calls naturally arise from the doctrine itself, and the intention of proclaiming it? To what purpose is the gospel testimony, with its evidence, declared unto men, if they are not called to believe it? Or, why should their guilt and danger be set before them, if it be not meant that they should repent? And if this is the real meaning and language of declaring the doctrine and its evidence, why may it not be spoken out in express calls and exhortations?

As to 'unbelievers seeking and using means to obtain faith and repentance, it may be observed, that such unbelievers as have never heard of the

salvation by Christ, or of the need they have of it, can never be supposed to seek faith and repentance, or to use any means for that end; because they are furnished as yet with no principles in their judgment which lead to this, or from which they can be exhorted. But there are various other classes of unbelievers who are not in this situation. They have heard the gospel, and have it in their hands; and though they do not yet believe to the saving of their souls; yet they are hereby furnished with the means of knowledge, faith, and repentance; and they are entirely without excuse, if they do not make a proper use of them. Such are called to *hearken*, and to pay attention to the word of God, Isa. lv. 3. Acts ii. 14 vii. 2. xiii. 10. 'For faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,' Rom. x. 17. They are called to *search* the *scriptures* with respect to the evidence of the gospel-testimony concerning Christ, John v. 39. as was exemplified by the Jews at Berea, and it was the means of bringing many of them to the faith of Christ: 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so: Therefore, many of them believed,' Acts xvii. 11, 12. Is there any absurdity in supposing, that the important and interesting pretensions of the gospel testimony may be so far perceived by an unbeliever, as to induce him to give it a fair hearing, and lead him to consider its evidence? And who will deny that God may,

in this way, bring him to the faith, as he did those at Berea? His mind, indeed, is naturally blind, and averse to divine things; but the gospel doctrine is mighty through God to remove his ignorance; its evidence, his unbelief; and its motives, his aversion. The word of God also furnishes men with the means and motives of repentance. It not only gives the clearest discoveries of the evil nature of sin, and its dreadful consequences, but also of the mercy and grace of God, through the atonement, to the most guilty. When, therefore, it calls all men every where to repent, it is surely meant, that they should *consider* their ways, and seriously reflect upon their certain and awful consequences; that because of these things, the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience; and that except they repent, they shall all likewise perish; but that on the other hand, they should beware of giving themselves up to despair, seeing there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared, and plenteous redemption through the atonement; that therefore they should forsake their evil ways, and thoughts and turn to the Lord, and pray God, that their sins may be forgiven them through the propitiation; for, *whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Here, then, we have both motives given, and means prescribed for repentance: and though none will truly repent; or even use the means, without

some acquaintance with, and belief of the motives; et as the call and the motives come to men at the same time, and are involved in each other, there is the greatest propriety in commanding men, who are yet in a natural state, to repent of their sins and to turn unto God. So that there is no room for the ridiculous supposition, that men will strive to repent of that which as yet they do not perceive to be either criminal or dangerous, for they are called to consider their guilt and danger, as well as the remedy, and so to repent. And they must be the more inexcusable in rejecting these calls, that there is scarcely an infidel to be found, whose natural conscience will not, in some measure, correspond with the word of God, both as to his guilt and danger.

Obj. 3d. It is common to exhort unbelievers to pray; 'but with what propriety can unbelievers be exhorted to *this*? Does not the scripture say of such, 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed,' Rom. x. 14.; and forbid them to think they shall receive any thing of the Lord, James i. 17. Indeed, they have no ground to think so, since it is declared, 'That the sacrifice and prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord, Prov. xv. 3. xxviii. 9. Does the scripture command men to sin?'

Ans. Before I meet the objection directly, I would

observe, that prayer and worship are duties arising from the discoveries which God has made of himself in his works of creation and providence, and from man's relation to his Creator and his dependence upon him for his being and support. The apostle shews, that the heathens were inexcusably guilty, in not glorifying God, or being *thankful* to him, and in *worshipping* and serving the creature more than the Creator, Rom. i. 21, 25; because the language of such discoveries of God to them was, 'that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him,' Acts xvii. 27. The scripture, therefore, does not condemn such worship as sinful, but on the contrary, condemns men for withholding it from its proper object. The gospel does not set aside any of the natural grounds of worship, but rather establishes them, and gives such new discoveries of God, and of the certain and successful way of approaching him, as reason or nature could never suggest. Now, in answer to the objection, let it be observed,

1. That the scripture commands the *wicked and unrighteous* to seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near, Isa. lv. 6; and Peter exhorts Simon Magus, though he discovered him to be yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, to *pray God*, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him, Acts viii. 22. That the wicked are called and

commanded to pray and call upon God, is therefore a truth which can neither be denied, nor explained away. Shall we then say, that this is commanding them to sin? God forbid! If we cannot reconcile this with some other scriptures, let us humbly own our ignorance, and not reply against the word of God. But there is no inconsistency in this matter, if we consider,

2. That though the wicked are commanded to pray to, and call upon the Lord, yet they are not commanded to do so, while *continuing* or *persisting* in their wickedness and unbelief, but only in the way of *repentance* and *turning* to the Lord. Thus the exhortation to the wicked, to *seek the Lord and call upon him*, is connected with, and involved in the call to *forsake his way and unrighteous thoughts, and turn unto the Lord*, Isa. lv. 7. Thus also Simon Magus is not commanded to pray in impenitency, but to *repent of his wickedness, and pray God, &c.* Repentance and prayer to God for mercy, must necessarily go hand in hand; and so the call to both comes to the wicked at once. This observation will explain how the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: it is the prayer of impenitency and hypocrisy that is meant; when men make a shew of calling upon God, and honouring him with their lips, whilst, in the mean time, they are going on and obstinately persisting in their enmity and rebellion against him: so it is said, 'He that turneth away his

ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination,' Prov. xxviii. 9. Accordingly the Lord frequently declares, that he will not hear the prayers, nor accept the religious services, of the impenitent and incorrigibly wicked, and that they are offensive and nauseous to him, as being nothing but profane mockery, and solemn deceit: see Psal. 1. 16, 23. Isa. i. 10, 16. lviii. 2. lxvi. 3. Jer. vi. 19, 20. vii 21—29. Amos v. 21—25. "But all this is perfectly consistent with his calling the wicked to repent, and apply to him for mercy; and if, like the publican, they comply with his call, he will not despise their prayer.

With respect to Rom. x. 14. 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?' It shews, that no man can, or will call upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation in sincerity, till he believe the gospel-testimony concerning him; and that he cannot believe that testimony till he hear it; for as it is none of the principles of natural religion, the faith of it must come *by hearing the word of God*. But then when the gospel-testimony concerning Jesus is declared unto men, the command to *repent and call upon his name*, is as *extensive* as the command to believe on him, and is addressed, *at the same time*, to the same persons, viz. to all who hear the gospel, with a promise, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved; for the same Lord over all, is rich (in mercy) unto all that call upon him,'

ver. 12, 13. And what is this invocation of the name of the Lord, but the immediate and natural expression of that faith, whereby men believe that he is mighty to save? The very command to believe in Christ, is a tacit injunction to call upon him: and to suppose one believing on him for salvation, without applying to him for it, is quite contrary to the scriptures, which connect *believing* and *coming* to Christ inseparably together. If the command to call upon the name of the Lord be addressed only to believers, then none can warrantably call upon him, till they know they are such, and by this means, many would be kept at a distance, till they find some favourable symptom in themselves to warrant their approach. Even the children of God themselves must, according to this, give over prayer when they begin to question whether they have truly believed or not.

Obj. 4th. 'Calling and exhorting unbelievers, tends to give a false view of the grace of God, manifested in the salvation of men. It sets them upon some exertions to be, to do, or endeavour something good, in order to their acceptance with God. It leads them to think, that *they* must begin the work, and God will second their sincere endeavours; that they must first seek him, before he will be found of them; and, in short, that their salvation must originate with themselves. Whereas the grace of God, manifested in the gospel, is not only absolutely sovereign and free, but preventing and

unsolicited. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy, Rom. ix. 16. It is to him that worketh not, chap. iv. 5. It is preventing and unsolicited; for no man cometh unto Christ except the Father first draw him, John vi. 44; and the Lord says expressly, 'I was found of them that sought me not, I was made manifest to them that asked not after me,' Rom. x. 20. The scripture instances of conversion agree with this view of divine grace. Infants cannot be exhorted to repent, believe the gospel, or call upon the Lord, yet of such is the kingdom of God; and adults must enter therein, even as they do, Mark x. 14—17. The thief upon the cross found mercy in his last moments, without being called or exhorted to do any thing that we read of, or any endeavours of his to comply with such calls, Luke xxiii. 43. Paul was surprised and overcome with divine grace, when he was so far from expecting or seeking it, that he was in the height of his bloody career, persecuting the church, Acts ix. And that this was no extraordinary stretch of divine grace is evident from his considering himself as a pattern in this 'to them who should afterwards believe on Christ to life everlasting,' 1 Tim. i. 16.

Ans It is freely granted, that divine grace is absolutely sovereign, free, preventing, and unsolicited, as well in bringing men to the knowledge of the

truth, as in their election and redemption; but it is no way inconsistent with this, to command and exhort all men every where to repent, believe the gospel, call upon the Lord, &c. *Inconsistent*, did I say? On the contrary, it is one of the methods of divine grace wherein the Lord is before hand with men who were not seeking after him, and by which he draws their attention, and brings them to the actual enjoyment of his favour, who, till they were made to hear his voice in these calls, were intent upon something else as the foundation of their hope and happiness. It is very remarkable, that the calls to faith, repentance, and seeking the Lord, are ever founded on, and accompanied with, the clearest declarations of the freedom of divine grace. Thus, in Isa. lv. 1. when men are called to come and partake of the gospel blessing, they are at the same time told, that these blessings are without money and without price. Shall we say, that this declaration is overturned by the following calls in that chapter, to seek the Lord, to forsake their wicked ways and thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, &c. In the parable of the marriage feast, the King sends forth his servants, saying, 'I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fallings are killed, and all things are now ready.' Here is a full and free salvation declared, where every thing the sinner needs is furnished, and ready for his immediate use, without any labour of his; and shall we think it the less free, because it is added, 'Come ye unto the

marriage;' or because the servants are enjoined to 'compel them to come in?' Matt. xxii. 4, Luke xiv. 23. The apostles declared unto men the word of reconciliation, viz. 'that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;' and that 'he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,' 2 Cor. v. 18—21. No words can more emphatically set forth the absolute freedom of divine grace. Who among all the human race was beforehand with God in *meriting*, *soliciting*, or even *conceiving*, that God should reconcile the world to himself, by making Christ a sin offering? None could suggest the expedient, direct its execution, or so much as know any thing of it, till God himself, of his sovereign mercy, both performed and revealed it, to the surprise, the wonder and admiration of men and angels! The work of reconciliation, in as far as it respects the satisfaction of divine justice, is already completely finished by the Son of God, without the least concurrence, or even consent of men; and this righteousness of God is declared in the word of reconciliation, as the sole and exclusive foundation of hope for the guilty. Now, shall we say that the apostles, in their applications, overturned all this again, because with the very same breath they beseech and intreat men, in Christ's stead, to be *reconciled to God*? Can we think, that they are directing men to establish their own righteousness,

by doing any part of that work of reconciliation which Christ hath already finished? or, shall we think that Christ's work is imperfect, because it still leaves room for such calls and exhortations? Far be it! As well might we think, that in the marriage supper, all things were not *ready*, or *free* for men's immediate use, because they were *invited to come* and partake of it freely? When men are exhorted to be reconciled to God, it proceeds upon this ground that God is already pleased, through the atonement made by his beloved Son, for the sins of the guilty; and it imports, that men should *believe* this, and be influenced by it to *repent* of their enmity and rebellion against him. They are not called to reconcile God to them, by satisfying his justice, but to be themselves reconciled unto God, who hath already obtained full and complete satisfaction to himself from his own Son: And does not such an exhortation perfectly consist with, and natively arise from, the grace which appears in the atonement? Indeed, it would have been perfectly inconsistent, not only with the holiness of God, but with the riches of his free grace, to have dispensed with faith and repentance, and to have promised salvation to the unbelieving and impenitent, because, in the very nature of things, men can have no happiness in, nor enjoyment of that which they neither believe nor love.

I shall now consider the scripture texts quoted in support of this objection, and shew that none of

them give such a view of divine grace as supersedes the necessity of the gospel calls to all men every where to believe, repent, call upon the Lord, &c.

In Rom. ix. the apostle is speaking of the rejection of the greater part of the natural seed of Abraham, who were formerly the peculiar people of God, and of God's choosing only a remnant of them together with the Gentiles to be partakers of his promise, by the gospel: Upon this subject, he answers two objections. One against the *faithfulness* of God in his promise to the seed of Abraham which he shews did not respect his natural seed as such, but his spiritual seed, of Jews and Gentiles, who believe in Jesus, according to God's purpose of election. The other objection is against the *righteousness* or justice of God, for making such a difference among men, as to choose some who are not better, and reject others who are not worse than other men are. This he answers, by resolving it entirely into God's sovereignty, who has a right to shew mercy to, or withhold it from whom he pleases, without injustice to any, since all justly deserve to be rejected; and for this, he cites the Lord's words to Moses, asserting this prerogative, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' Upon which he observes, 'So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;' i. e. the purpose of God according to election, is not

influenced by any one's own free will, good desires, or diligent endeavours, these being *effects*, not *causes*, of God's choice; but it originates solely in the sovereign will and pleasure of God, who shews mercy to whom he will, and for reasons found in himself, not in them. But all this is perfectly consistent with his commanding all men every where to believe, repent, call upon him, &c.; for this is one of the ways whereby he brings into effect his sovereign purpose of grace respecting his elect. Grace is not the less sovereign and free, that it admits of means in bringing men to the knowledge and enjoyment of it. *Faith* cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; yet it is the gift of God's sovereign grace. *Repentance* is wrought in men by means of the doctrine, calls, and motives of the word; yet it is God, who, of his sovereign good pleasure, grants unto sinners repentance unto life. *Prayer* is influenced by a sense of need, and a belief that there is access to, and mercy with God, that he may be feared; yet it is God who pours out the spirit of grace and supplication on whom he will, and who causes them to approach unto him, that they may obtain mercy. It should be carefully noticed, that the scriptures set aside the *willing* and *running* of men, only in certain respects, viz. as anticipating, meriting, procuring, or influencing the grace of God, in their election and effectual calling; but it admits of both *willing* and *running*, as effects of God's grace in their calling; and urges them as

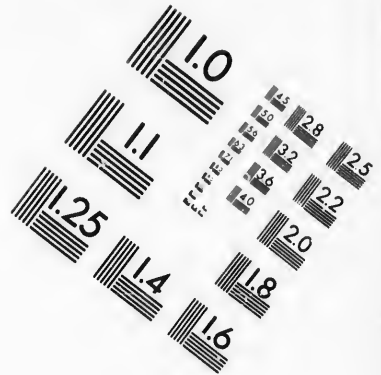
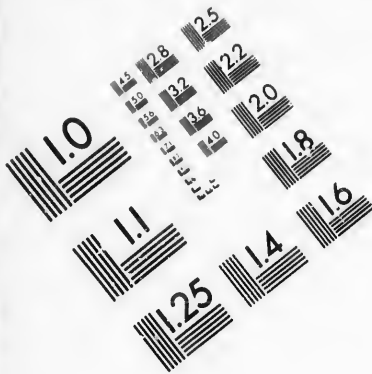
duties. In the very act of calling them by his sovereign grace, he makes them *willing* in a day of his power: he works in them, both to *will* and to do of his good pleasure, so that they are made to *will* and run, in obedience to his call, whilst others, like Pharaoh are hardened and resist it; and the apostle shews, that in this respect, as well as in election, God manifests the sovereignty of his grace, having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he will, ver. 18. That is, suffering them to continue in their unbelief and impenitence.

Rom. iv. 5. 'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.' The apostle is here speaking of the justification of the ungodly. Having proved that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin, and subject to the judgment of God, he shews that it was impossible for any of them to be justified by the works of the law; but that all who believe are justified freely by God's grace, without the works of the law, through the redemption that is in Christ; i. e. through his laying down his life as a ransom for them to divine justice, to procure the remission of their sins. Justification, therefore is not to him that worketh, but to him who believeth in the work of Christ as all-sufficient for that end. But how does this doctrine militate against calls and exhortations to unbelievers? Did Peter overturn the doctrine of free justification by faith, when

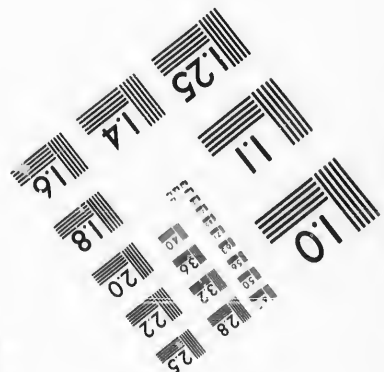
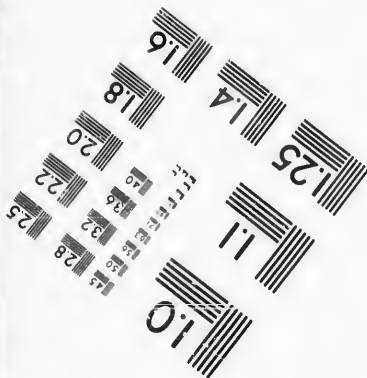
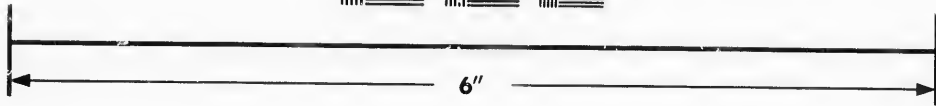
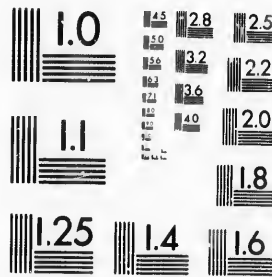
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he exhorted the unbelieving Jews to repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out? Acts iii. 19. Does he there direct them to do any part of that work which Christ had finished for the justification of the ungodly? or lead them to think, that their faith, repentance, and conversion, were to make an atonement for their sins? Some seem to consider faith, repentance, and conversion, to be equally opposed to free justification, as the works of the law are; but it is demonstrably evident, from the whole of the New Testament, that the apostles were of a very different mind. They commanded and exhorted all men every where to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, to repent and be converted, for the remission of sins, Acts ii. 38.; that their sins might be blotted out, chap. iii. 19.; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, chap. xxvi. 18.; and declared unto them, that except they repented, they should all perish. This shews, that they looked upon faith, repentance and conversion, to be perfectly consistent with free justification without works, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. But they never speak in this manner of the works of the law: On the contrary, when the Judaisers taught the disciples, that except they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved, the apostles immediately took the alarm, and declared, that this doctrine was entirely overthrowing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had received the Gentiles without the works of

the law, granted unto them repentance unto life, and purified their hearts by faith, Acts xv. 1, 5, 8, 9, 11. xi. 18. And Paul writing to the Galatians on this subject, says, that if they were circumcised, they thereby became debtors to do the whole law; Christ was become of no effect to them who were seeking to be justified by the law; they had fallen from grace; and as many as were of the works of the law were under the curse, Gal. iii. 10. v. 34. It is therefore an unscriptural refinement upon divine grace, and contrary to the doctrine of the apostles, to class faith and repentance with the works of the law, and to state them as equally opposite to free justification. Indeed those who conceive of faith as a work, or some strenuous actings of the will and affections to obtain justification, can have no idea of God's justifying the ungodly without works; but faith is opposed to works in this matter; and though neither faith nor repentance are the procuring cause of a sinner's justification, any more than the works of the law are, (and who that really believes and repents will imagine that they are?); still however, the latter is opposed to free justification, the former, not. To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but real faith and repentance corresponding exactly with the manifestation of divine grace, as freely justifying the guilty, through the atonement, are in their very nature opposite to self-dependence, and lead men to glory only in the Lord.

John vi. 44. 'No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him.' This text shews, that no man can be before hand with God, nor prevent his grace by coming first of his own accord unto Christ: Every proper view of, and desire after Christ, which takes place in the human mind, are effects of the Father's preventing grace, whereby he draws men unto him. But this is so far from setting aside the invitations, calls and exhortations of the gospel to all men, that, on the contrary, it establishes them. Our Lord shews, that this drawing of the Father is by divine teaching: 'It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me,' ver. 45. Now, by what means does he teach men; so as to draw them to Christ? Is it by his Spirit abstract from the word? or is it by his Spirit co-operating with the word, and making its doctrines, motives, calls and invitations, effectual to that end? The last, surely, is his method of drawing men unto Christ.

Rom. x. 20. 'I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me.' Isaiah adds, 'I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name,' chap. lxxv. 1. This passage respects the calling of the Gentiles, and rejection of the incorrigible Jews. The Gentiles are termed a nation that was not cal-

led by the name of the Lord; i. e. they were not his peculiar people, as Israel were, but were without God, and without hope in the world. In this situation, when they had no proper knowledge of the true God, no desires after him, and did not once think of seeking, worshipping, or serving him, but on the contrary, were bowing down to dumb idols of their own invention; in this situation the Lord, out of his free, sovereign, preventing, and unsolicited grace, sent his gospel into their benighted regions, proclaiming peace by Jesus Christ and, and manifesting himself unto them as the just God and the Saviour. Thus, he was found of them that sought him not; and made manifest unto them that asked not after him. But was he so found of them as to supersede the gospel calls and exhortations to faith, repentance, and conversion! By no means. This very passage tells us, that his language to them in the gospel was, 'Behold me, behold me,' Isaiah. lxv. 1.; agreeably to what he says in another place, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else;' chap. xlv. 22. And is not this a call to faith? They were also called to *repentance*; for Paul declares, that he preached unto them repentance toward God, as well as faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ; he also tells them, that 'the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent,' Acts xvii. 30.; and he 'preached unto them, that they should turn from

their vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth,' &c. chap. xiv. 15. In the parable of the marriage-supper, the Gentiles are represented by *those among the highways and hedges*; how was the Lord found of them when they were not seeking him? was it not by sending out his servants to invite them to a supper, of which they had no previous knowledge or expectation, and by accompanying the gracious message with the power of his Spirit, opening their eyes, and inclining their hearts to comply with the invitation?

Here I would have it carefully noticed, that the Lord is found of men, both *before* and *after* they seek him. He is found of them *before* they seek him, by sending them his word, and thereby awakening in them a sense of their guilt and danger, revealing unto them the remedy, and exciting their desires after it, causing them to hunger and thirst after righteousness. In this sense, he is found of them that seek him not; for men will never seek after any thing of which they have no knowledge, nor any desire after, or prospect of obtaining. But he is also found of men *after* they seek him, or in consequence of their doing so, when from a sense of their need, and a belief that there is forgiveness with God, and plenteous redemption through the atonement, they are excited and encouraged to draw near unto him, like the publican, that they may obtain mercy. To such *seeking* men are called:

'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call upon him while he is near,' Isaiah lv. 6.; and of such seekers he promises to be found, 'for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,' Rom. x. 12, 13. He is found of them, who thus seek him in a sense in which he was not before, viz. by giving them a sense of pardon in their consciences, shedding abroad his love in their hearts, making them grow in grace, and in the joyful hope of his glory; for these purposes he gives the Holy Spirit to them who ask him.

These two ways in which the Lord is found, are exemplified in the case of the prodigal son; by which our Lord sets forth the calling of the Gentiles. He had gone far away from his father's house, wasted his substance with riotous living, was reduced to servitude and want, and was even perishing with hunger. In this situation, the Lord was found of him, when he sought him not; for who else was it that made him come to himself—convinced him of his perishing condition—let him see the plenteous provision that was in his father's house—made him form the resolution of returning to his father, humbly confessing his sin, and begging to be made as one of his hired servants, being no more worthy to be called his son? The Lord was also found of him, in consequence of his seeking him. Under the influence of faith and repen-

tance, he arises, and comes to his father. Mark the gracious reception! 'When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: but the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead and, is alive again; he was lost, and is found,' Luke xv. 11—25. Thus, in forsaking his wicked ways and thoughts, and returning unto the Lord, he had mercy upon him, and abundantly pardoned him. In seeking the Lord, he found such a special manifestation and experimental enjoyment of his love, as far exceeded all his expectations: so that he must have been affected by it, like the Psalmist, Psal. xxxii. 1—6. and ciii. 1—14.

With respect to the scripture instances of conversion, none of them are inconsistent with calls to it. Infants, indeed, can neither believe, repent, nor call upon the Lord; and consequently can with no propriety be exhorted to these things: But it does not follow from this, that adults are equally incapable of instruction, calls and exhortations. And though our Lord says, 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall

not enter therein,' Mark x. 15. Luke xviii. 17. Yet he does not mean by this, that they are to receive the kingdom without faith, repentance, conversion, or any concern about it, more than is to be found in an infant: On the contrary the resemblance to little children which he intends, consists in their humbling themselves, and being converted (see Mat. xviii. 3,4.) from their pride, self-righteousness, worldly ambition, envy, and malice. This is not the only place where the resemblance of little children is opposed to such dispositions (See Psal. cxxxi. 1, 2. 1 Cor. xiv. 20. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.) And our Lord's words on this subject are a plain call to lay aside such dispositions.

As to the thief on the cross, he must surely have heard or seen something about Jesus which led him to believe that he was Christ the Saviour; for faith cometh by means. It is certain, he was effectually called of the Lord: His repentance appears in acknowledging the justice of his sufferings; his faith, in confessing Jesus to be the Lord, and on the way to his kingdom, though expiring on the cross, under every mark of indignity and disgrace. He believed that Jesus was able to save his soul, though he had gone on in wickedness to his last moments. He accordingly calls upon him for mercy, and receives a gracious answer. This is indeed a remarkable instance of the sovereignty and freedom of divine grace; and it is the more striking,

that it was at the last hour of life. But will any affirm, that grace would have been less sovereign and free, had the Lord pleased to bring this man to believe, repent, and call upon him, at an earlier period of his life, by means of the doctrine, calls, and invitations of the gospel? or is there any thing in this instance that militates against his calling all men every where to repent, believe the gospel, and call upon him, before the hour of death?

Paul's conversion is another instance of free, sovereign, and preventing grace, but there is nothing in the history of his conversion that overthrows the calls and invitations of the gospel. On the contrary, Jesus himself calls him to faith and repentance, when he says unto him, by an audible voice from heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' In his conversion, there are some things *common* to him with others. He was not seeking after the Lord, but going on in enmity and rebellion against him, till the moment the Lord called him. He had rejected the gospel-testimony, and resisted its evidence, calls and invitations, and was only the more exasperated the harder he was pressed by it, as is evident, from his joining with the murderers of Stephen, who spoke with such boldness, wisdom, and evidence; and did such wonders and miracles, to confirm his testimony, that none were able to resist the spirit by which he

spoke, Acts vi. 8, 10. Yet Paul still continued obstinate, and persisted to kick against the pricks? and therefore, he considers his obtaining mercy after all this, as designed to give an illustrious display of Christ's long suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting: A pattern not of Paul's sin, but of Christ's long suffering to him notwithstanding; not to encourage men's continuance in sin, but to encourage them to hope in divine mercy, thro' Jesus Christ, and repent of their sins, though, like Paul, they have hitherto rejected and opposed the Gospel; and that not merely by the latent unbelief and enmity of their hearts, but even by the bloody acts of persecution; for he considers himself as the foremost, or chief of sinners, in this respect; and therefore, as he obtained mercy in such circumstances, none after him have ground to despair. Though every man's sins may not be so atrocious and highly aggravated as Paul's before his conversion, yet all are in a state of rebellion and enmity against God, and liable to his wrath and curse; and so cannot be saved, but by the same sovereign, free, and unsolicited grace that saved Paul, and which takes not its measures by the comparative degrees of men's guilt. But then there are some circumstances in Paul's conversion, which are *peculiar* to himself; such as, the Lord's appearing to him by the way, his speaking to him by an audible voice from the shining glory, his striking him blind with the glory

of the light that surrounded him, &c. In these, and such like circumstances, his conversion is not a pattern; nor do we read of another instance like this in all the scriptures. In these respects, therefore, it was extraordinary and miraculous, not in the Lord's ordinary way of dealing with men.

There are other circumstances in his conversion, which, tho' they are not altogether peculiar to him, yet cannot be stated as the invariable and universal rule of the Lord's conduct in converting others; such as, his being struck all at once, and that too in the very act of prosecuting his cruel designs against the disciples of Christ. Some, no doubt, are like him surprised in a moment, and brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light; so that they can tell the very hour when the truth first struck their minds, and brought them rest and peace; such as, the three thousand converts by Peter's sermon: but there are others with whom the Lord deals in a more gradual and imperceptible manner. The Jews at Berea heard the apostles doctrine with candour; it induced them to search the scriptures daily, to see whether the things they declared were so or not, and the consequence was that many of them believed. Thus they were brought to the faith not instantaneously but gradually; not when persecuting the church, but searching the scriptures. Some, like Timothy, have known the scriptures from their childhood, and have been very early and

gradually brought to a view of their own state, and a discovery of the remedy, by which means they have escaped much of the corruption that is in the world; in which case, it may happen that their convictions of guilt have not been so poignant and sharp, nor their relief so sensible and transporting, as in the case of those who have been called at a later hour, and surprised and overcome all at once, in the midst of such wicked courses as are mentioned, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.; and consequently their transition from darkness to light has not been so discernible and striking. Many other cases might be mentioned, to shew the Lord's various methods of bringing men to the knowledge of the truth; but they are all equally of sovereign free grace, and the effects produced are essentially the same in all, which are the main things that ought to fall under our consideration. The interesting question with us is, what our Lord puts to his disciples, 'Do ye now believe?' If we can answer this in the affirmative, we ought not to perplex ourselves or others, respecting the process he observed in opening our eyes; it is enough that we know this one thing, that whereas we were blind, now we see and that this is the doing of the Lord. Nor are we to limit the Lord's method of dealing with men, either by our own experience, or any other particular instance whatever, seeing he is sovereign in his methods of working, as well as in their issue and result. In this, as well as in other

respects, it may be said, 'His ways are past finding out.' Yet all who know his grace in truth, will with the strongest conviction acknowledge, as well in their own particular case as in the general view of his conduct to the whole redeemed company, 'That of him, and to him and through him are all things;' and accordingly give him the glory.

To conclude: None of the scripture-instances of conversion furnish the least argument against the gospel-calls to faith, repentance, &c. The most of them were in consequence of calls: see Acts ii. 36—42. xiii. 38—44. xvi. 31—35. xvii. 30, 34. Some of them were attended with peculiar circumstances, and there are other circumstances which, though not peculiar, are yet not to be found in every scripture instance of conversion. And from what has been said, upon the whole, it appears, that these calls are not only consistent with, but subservient to the sovereign, free, and unsolicited grace of God, in men's conversion, as well as in their election before the world began, and redemption by the work finished by Christ on the cross.

Obj. 5th. 'As God hath not elected all mankind; and as Christ hath not died for all who hear the gospel, how can we suppose, that he calls all to faith and repentance, and invites them to partake of salvation?'

Ans. Consider, in the *first* place, That although God does not intend to save all mankind, yet it is the *duty* of all who hear the gospel to repent, and believe it, and their sin to do otherwise, and that independent of any consideration of God's secret design or purpose. His secret purpose belongs to himself; it is his revealed will that constitutes our obligation, and is the rule of our duty towards him. God's secret purpose does not diminish the guilt of sin; neither does it diminish or increase the obligation to duty: so that whether men are elected or not, it is equally their duty to repent, and believe the gospel; and they are therefore properly called to do so.

2dly, All who *believe* the gospel shall be saved. This is the promise of God, and is therefore his revealed purpose: 'This is the will of him who sent me,' said Jesus, 'that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day,' John vi. 40. If, therefore, it is a truth, that all, without exception, who believe, shall be saved, then it must be proper and consistent, that all, without exception, should be called to believe, and so invited to partake of a free salvation; for Christ says, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.'

3dly, If the calls and invitations of the gospel were not addressed universally to all who hear it, but re-

stricted to the elect, then none could warrantably obey these calls till they knew that they were elected: But it is imposible for them to know this till they obey the call. The elect must believe upon the common grounds laid for all men, and not upon any thing peculiar to them as elect; and so the gospel-calls and invitations must be *universal*, and must respect men merely as sinners, for the sake of the elect themselves, though to them only they are made effectual.

THE END.

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A
R E P L Y
TO

Some Animadversions on the foregoing Essay.



DEAR SIR,

IN reply to your Animadversions on the foregoing Essay, I shall be very short.

You 'freely own, that unbelievers should be exhorted to believe, and plied with every scriptural motive to flee from the wrath to come.'—If you freely admit this, you must also agree with the whole design of the Essay, which was solely intended to establish that single point. But then you say, you 'would not plead any supposed ability in the creature as a foundation for these calls, but hold them in the strictest connection with this grand truth, It is, not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.' In this you are certainly right; but why suppose that I found these

calls on the creature's ability to comply with them, and that independent of the sovereignty and freedom of divine grace? You know, that man's *moral* inability, as well as the sovereignty of divine grace, are clearly maintained in the Essay. (See pages 243, 244, &c.) The consistency of both these with the gospel-calls to unbelievers, is shown at large; and nothing is denied but that kind of *physical* or *natural* inability which would render men excusable, and afford a just objection against these calls.

You 'cannot see how the delusions of Antichrist, to which surely the difference between the present and the apostolic times must be attributed, can make any difference as to the situation of men before God.'—If by *situation of men before God*, you mean *more acceptable* to him, such a sentiment never entered into my mind. To have answered this part of my remarks properly, you should have said, not that the *delusions* of Antichrist (for of these I say nothing), but that the *privilege* even of divine revelation itself does not aggravate the guilt of those who reject it. I affirm that it does, and you seem to do the same: Wherein then lies the difference?

You repeat your 'hearty agreement with the leading design of the first part of the Essay upon the gospel invitations, calls, and exhortations, to men in a state of unbelief; and would not be thought to deviate from this sentiment in any observations that

may follow.'—I cannot help thinking that you deviate from this sentiment in some of your observations; though I believe you may not be conscious of this, nor intend to contradict yourself.

But 'you are humbly of opinion, that these exhortations might have been more immediately grounded upon, and connected with the free and sovereign grace of God.'—I have shewn in my Essay, that the gospel invitations, calls and exhortations, are effects of God's grace to sinners; that they are means in his hand for bringing them to himself; and that he makes them effectual by his Spirit to the elect. Does not this view of them show, that they are grounded upon, and connected with sovereign grace?

You explain Isa. lv. by Rom. x. 9—13.; and tell me, 'that calling on the name of the Lord often includes the belief of the truth, and must do so in Isa. lv.; that calling upon the Lord is connected intimately with sovereignty, Rom. ix. and in Isaiah lv. with free grace; that we find no calls to repentance in the New Testament, but in connection with the belief of the truth.'—All this perfectly agrees with what I have written, and therefore ought not to be set in opposition to it.

You consider 'Simon Magus to have been in a different situation from the world at large, which

may account for the apostle's different mode of speaking to him; and that perhaps he had committed the sin which falls not under the promise of mercy.'—And what is the inference from this? Is it that sinners at large must not, like him, be exhorted to *repent*, and *pray* to God for forgiveness through the propitiation? Surely this cannot be your meaning.

You say, 'Acts xvii. 27. does not mean that the Gentiles could have found God to the saving of their souls, by their own natural endeavours.'—I never said it meant this? but that passage proves, that seeking the Lord is a natural duty, which the gospel does not set aside, nor represent as sinful.

Upon the second part of the Essay, you say, 'I would notice in the entry, that this part contains a number of objections against gospel calls to unbelievers. I do not deny the *principles* or *doctrines* contained in these objections, but only the *conclusion* or *inference* drawn from these principles. I hope this will not be thought a nice distinction; for the apostles held firmly the doctrine of free sovereign grace, though they reprobated the use which many made of it. The first objection (p. 242) can never be in the mouth of a believer; for if God requires nothing of us beyond the reach of our natural powers, then it must either be in the power of every man to believe the gospel or else none are required to believe

it?—Yet I have heard this objection in the mouth of professed believers; for even believers do not always argue rightly. Your answer to it, however, is just the substance of mine, though you labour to state some kind of difference; and therefore add,

‘Yet part of this objection comes in against all such exhortations to believe, as are founded upon some supposed ability or such connection being stated between seeking God and finding him, as is between work and hire; or even between the endeavours of a believer, and these endeavours being crowned with success.’—But cannot the wicked be exhorted to believe, repent, and seek the Lord, and be encouraged to this by a promise of success, (Isa. lv. 6, 7.), without sounding these exhortations on man’s ability, or making the success to depend on human merit? Are such exhortations and promises always to be suspected of having a dangerous and self-righteous tendency? Instead of taking such exhortations and promises in their plain and simple sense, must our main care always be to guard against some supposed self-righteous use of them, till we have explained away their whole force and spirit, and so distinguished and refined upon them, as to make men more afraid to comply with, than to reject them, lest they should be guilty of some exertion of mind or body, some good disposition or motion towards Christ, which is supposed to be the highest wickedness, and a despising the work of Christ.——You say,

‘Every religious exercise of a man confessedly ignorant of the truth is sinful. *intended* to supersede the work of Christ, or bring him within its reach, which is the same thing.’—I cannot comprehend how a man entirely ignorant of the truth should perform religious exercises with an *intention* to supersede the work of Christ, of which he confessedly knows nothing; far less can I see how he should in that situation strive to bring himself within its reach. But I can easily comprehend how a man *ignorant* of, or *disbelieving* God’s righteousness, may go about to establish his own righteousness; and I can also see how the gospel itself may be perverted into a self-righteous scheme, so as to supersede the work of Christ as the sole ground of acceptance. But it does not follow from all this, that every religious exercise is absolutely sinful till man finds rest in the work of Christ. His *conviction* of guilt; his *fear* of the divine displeasure threatened against it; his *despair* of relief from his own ability or merits; his glimmerings of *hope*, arising from something he hath heard of the gospel, which keeps him from utter despair; his *eager desire* to see its evidence and import; his *attention* to the word, and diligent *search* of the scriptures for this purpose; and his *prayer* to God that he would enlighten his mind to understand them, &c.; such religious exercises as these may have place in men before they enjoy rest in Christ; and shall we say they are absolutely sinful, or that they must necessarily be intended to supersede the

work of Christ? or deny that God ever leads men in this way to the knowledge of the truth?

‘Men are not saved (you observe) in a natural way, by the use of means, but in a supernatural sovereign way, by the belief of the truth: faith cometh by hearing the word of God’—Here the use of means is opposed to the sovereign grace of God, and the belief of the truth; and yet faith is said to come by means of hearing the word of God. This needs no answer, because it answers itself. If faith come by reading, hearing, or searching the word, then salvation comes by these means. Is it therefore quite natural, and within the compass of human power? You add,

‘Means suppose an end in view by the person using them, and that end more or less connected with the means. No man ignorant of the gospel can use means with a view to obtain the knowledge of the truth; all his endeavours, however sincere, are directed against the *one means* in the hand of God for saving guilty men.’—This reasoning at first sight appears plausible, but it proceeds upon a mistake of the case. I do not suppose, that a person who is entirely ignorant of the gospel, or who has never heard of it, will use any means with a view to obtain the knowledge of the truth. The person we are speaking of is one who has heard the gospel, and has been called to believe on Christ

for salvation; he is sensible he needs salvation,' but doubts if the gospel is true. However, he is so struck with its importance, that he *uses the means* of conviction, in searching the scriptures daily; and *the end* he proposes to himself in this is, to 'see whether those things are so,' (Acts xviii. 11.); and if it shall please the Lord to make the evidence of the truth to shine into his heart, then he is happy. Now, where is the absurdity of this? and how *are* such 'endeavours directed against the one means in the hand of God for saving guilty men?'

You say, 'It is not your sentiment, that the warrant for a man's calling acceptably upon God is the knowledge of his being a believer. It is the truth alone that warrants any man to draw near to God; and no man who does not believe it can see the warrant.'—This does not solve the difficulty arising from the sentiment I oppose. Perhaps you will understand it better in the form of syllogism. The command to call upon God is only addressed to believers; but I doubt my being a believer; therefore I doubt if the command is to me. The first proposition you strenuously maintain; the second you admit may be the case with a believer, until his faith works by love, or proves itself by its effects. The conclusion, therefore, is unavoidable, and the person in this situation is deterred from calling upon God, lest he should aggravate his guilt and condemnation.

You are greatly alarmed at my introducing Cornelius as an example, because, you say, he is often adduced in favour of such doctrines as oppose the grace of God. If Cornelius was a man not in a state of favour with God, you think it cannot be shewn in his case, that 'it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.' Then you give an account of Old Testament saints waiting for the consolation of Israel,—their flocking to John's baptism,—taking the kingdom of heaven by force,—knowing only the baptism of John,—and needing to be taught the way of God more perfectly, Acts xviii. 25. xix. 1—7.; and having classed Cornelius among such, you ask, 'If it is not intended to lead us to think that God has respect to human worth in salvation, how came the name of Cornelius at all to be mentioned on this subject? If your view of Cornelius's case was the same as already stated, surely his example could never more or less illustrate the point in hand, viz. the calling of dead] sinners, and total unbelievers, to credit the divine testimony, nor had any connection whatever with unbelievers using means with a view to obtain salvation.'—Though I do not altogether agree with your account of Cornelius, which makes him not only a Jewish but a Christian proselyte yet I believe he was a devout man, fearing God, with all his house; that he gave much alms to the people, prayed to God always, and knew the word which was published throughout

all Judea, Acts x. 2, 37.; as many others in those parts did, Acts ii. 22. I can even admit, that, like the twelve tribes of Israel, he instantly served God day and night, hoping in the promise of the Messiah to come, Acts xxvi. 7.; though it was not yet revealed to him more than to the apostles themselves, that Gentiles, such as he was, were to be upon an equal footing, or fellow-heirs with the seed of Abraham in Messiah's kingdom, Eph. iii. 5, 6. Acts x. 28, 45. But notwithstanding all this, Cornelius had yet to *hear* the word of the gospel from Peter's mouth, and *believe* it, Acts xv. 7.; he had to be told words whereby he and his house should be *saved*, chap. xi. 14.; and, in his believing and receiving the Holy Ghost, the church at Jerusalem perceived that God had also to the Gentiles granted *repentance unto life*, ver. 18. And this is all that is said of any one who is converted to the Christian faith, either from Judaism or heathenism. None have the true Christian faith, but such as believe that the Messiah has come in the flesh—that Jesus of Nazareth is he—that he was delivered for the offences, and raised again for the justification of his people—and that whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins, 1 John iv. 2. v. 1. John viii. 24. 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4. Rom. iv. 24, 25. x. 9. Acts x. 43. And it will be hard to prove, that Cornelius had this faith before the gospel was preached to him by Peter. But not to insist upon this, I know not what ground you have to imagine

that I adduce Cornelius to shew that God has respect to *human worth* in salvation. My words are, 'I freely grant that none will search the scriptures in earnest, but those who expect to find some benefit from them; nor will any man truly call upon God, but he that believes that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; but all this while he may not know that he is a believer; he may yet, like Cornelius, be to learn words whereby he may be saved; and it is his duty, like him, to be eager to hear them, as means of his salvation; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Here I neither affirm nor deny that Cornelius was a believer, (though I know he was a believer in the God of Israel), but only that he had yet to learn words whereby he might be saved, Acts xi. 14. and that he was eager to hear them, chap. x. 33. which is surly the duty of all to whom the gospel comes.

You say 'you do not understand the nice distinction of *natural* and *spiritual* death. We are always in danger by our own wisdom to lose the simplicity of the truth. I understand spiritual death to imply as much deadness to the divine life, and as great an incapacity of enjoying it, as natural death implies ignorance of, and incapacity for enjoying natural life. I take it, that the scriptures suppose, that it is as impossible for a man to quicken himself, in whole or in part, or to move one step nearer to God,

as it is for a dead body to quicken itself again to natural life,' &c.—The distinction between *natural* and *spiritual* death is not a nice one, the effects of human wisdom, nor contrary to the simplicity of the truth; but is a plain scriptural distinction, and easily understood. Do you not understand, that a dead body can commit no sin, but a spiritually dead soul can; that the gospel is not suited to quicken a dead body, but it is suited to quicken a dead soul; that therefore it is absurd to speak of preaching the gospel to dead bodies, but very proper to preach it to spiritually dead sinners, and to call them to faith and repentance? Now, this is all the use which I make of that distinction. I no where affirm, that the spiritually dead can quicken themselves, any more than the naturally dead: On the contrary, I all along maintain, that this is the work of God, by means of his word and Spirit.

On the second objection, (p. 253) you say, 'I am not fond of any distinction being made between such unbelievers as have heard, and such as have not heard the gospel, except that the first class are *more guilty*, and shall receive the greater condemnation.'—And what other difference do I make between them? Yet you express yourself as not fond of this distinction, though nothing is plainer in scripture. But it is worth your while to consider more particularly how the circumstance of their having heard the gospel makes them *more guilty*. That

you dislike the distinction altogether appears from what follows:

‘I dread that sovereignty be somehow affected by this distinction; for it would appear to me, in reading that part of your Essay, a more natural thing for such *prepared persons* to be saved, than the thief on the cross, Paul, &c. who were overpowered in the midst of their sins, by a view of the sovereign goodness of God.’—If by *prepared persons* you mean persons endued with good qualifications, fitting them for salvation, there are none such supposed in my Essay. But if you mean those who have heard the gospel, and enjoy the means of salvation, I know not why you should distinguish such from the thief on the cross, or from Paul. I think it not only more *natural*, but *scriptural*, that a man should be saved by means of the gospel, than without it, and by attending to it, rather than by shutting his ears against it: nor can I see how this affects the sovereignty of God, unless it can be shewn, that his sovereignty admits of no *means*, or does not open men’s hearts to *attend* unto the gospel.

You think ‘the gospel comes not calling upon men to use means to partake of its benefits; it comes declaring the one thing needful, the one grand remedy, and calling upon men, on pain of damnation, to fly to it for refuge, assuring them of safety in doing so.’—This appears to me a contradiction.

unless we suppose that *flying for refuge* means nothing; that it neither implies a consideration of our danger, a concern for relief, a belief of the remedy, nor an application for mercy. You say,

‘I can see nothing out of the ordinary line of cause and effect, when I see a man diligently using means for faith and repentance, and by and by assuring me, that his search had been successful; at least, whatever appears here I can observe no sovereignty.’—Can you observe no sovereignty in the conversion of the Jews at Berea, because they searched the scriptures?—nor of Lydia, because she attended unto the things spoken by Paul?—nor of the prodigal son, because he found his father in seeking him? Were these, and such like instances, quite in the ordinary line of natural cause and effect, without any interposition of sovereign supernatural grace? Do subordinate causes exclude the supreme? Is it inconsistent with sovereignty to work by means, or to stir up men to attend unto them, and then give them their proper effect?

‘Many (you say,) are and have been thus employed; but I sincerely believe, when the gospel shines unexpectedly into their minds, they will find that they have been as criminally, not to say idly, employed, as if they had been gratifying the lusts of the flesh, and following all manner of iniquity with greediness.’—I admit, that it is highly, nay, damnably criminal, for any to reject the gospel,

and to be seeking salvation independent of, or in opposition to, the one remedy therein exhibited; and that if the gospel should ever shine into the minds of such, they will be deeply convinced of their guilt in this respect. I can also admit, that every thing which hinders a man from having immediate relief from the gospel as soon as he hears it, is sinful, and the effect of ignorance and unbelief. But to affirm, that a man who is concerned about the state of his soul, considering his ways, hearing the gospel, searching the scriptures for its evidence and import, and praying to God to open his understanding to perceive it, is as criminally employed as if he were gratifying the lusts of the flesh, and following all manner of iniquity with greediness, appears to me extremely harsh, and of the most dangerous tendency. Let men reason and speculate as they will, their consciences must ever dissent from such a sentiment as this, whilst they retain any sense of right and wrong. I cannot therefore allow myself to think, but that the employment you thus reprobate is something of a very different nature from what I have stated.

You observe upon the third objection, (p. 258.) that 'prayer is no more a duty of natural religion, than the whole law; but would it not be a criminal thing in a man to attempt to be accepted of God in prayer, except through Jesus Christ.'—I shall answer this by another question: would it have been

criminal in the heathens to worship God as manifested to them in creation and providence, unless they had also known his character as fully manifested in Christ? If it would, why does the apostle blame them for withholding that worship? Rom. i. 21 But this subject is out of our way. We are upon the calls of the Gospel to those who have heard it. The gospel both shows the way of access to God, and at the same time calls men to seek him. Is the command, therefore, to the wicked, to seek and call upon the Lord for mercy, like the publican, of the same import with, Be perfect, Keep the whole law, This do, & thou shalt live? And was this Peter's meaning when he exhorted Simon Magus to repent, and pray to God, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him? I know you do not think so.

On the fourth objection, (p. 262.) you say, 'I am far from classing conversion, faith, repentance, &c. with the works of the law. But men now-a-days retain scripture words, without the apostolic ideas affixed to them; and we may see as many establishing their own righteousness by what they term faith, repentance, conversion, regeneration, as by the works of the law; and this error, as being more refined, is more dangerous than the other.'

I freely grant all this: The gospel indeed has often been converted into a law of works, or scheme

of self righteousness, by being clogged with certain laborious conditions, under the names of *faith repentance, conversion, &c.*, to which sinners have been called, and urged, in order to make their peace with God, or at least to qualify them for being justified through Christ. This has a most pernicious effect, as it hides, or sets at a distance, the absolutely *free* and *immediate* ground of relief held forth in the gospel to the chief of sinners, (the belief of which alone can produce true repentance and conversion,) and leads a person to seek his comfort in the first instance from something to be wrought in, or done by him, instead of the finished work of Christ, from which he expects no relief, but through the medium of an opinion that he is a better man. This, I suppose, is what you have in view; and I highly commend your jealousy for the purity of the gospel: On this, I hope, we shall never differ; but I cannot see that any thing I have advanced on the Calls and Invitations of the Gospel, should have given the least ground for suspicion on this head.

Though many have affixed wrong ideas to scripture expressions, we are not on that account to disuse them, or even to discover an apprehension that they have a tendency to mislead. Scripture words are best adapted to convey the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit, and it would be an unwarrantable refinement on the doctrine of free grace, to scruple to make use of any expressions which our

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Lord, or his apostles; used in calling sinners to believe, to repent, or to be converted. * * * *

THE END

E X T R A C T

From a Letter of the Rev. Mr. Romaine's.



I HAVE ever had such awful apprehensions of the care of souls, that I durst not (though often solicited) undertake it. Ever since I knew the plague of my own heart, I have found myself plagued to death with watching over it. What must it be to watch over two or three thousand? who is sufficient for this? I feel myself as unfit for it, as to have the government of the world upon my shoulders; but being appointed to this church, not only without my seeking, but also against my will, and having an undoubted call from God, therefore my sufficiency for the work being of God, I dare not stand out. I have been forced to say, 'Here am I, send me;' and although he has enabled me to depend upon him, for to do his will, both in me and by me, yet I find the flesh resisting and putting forth a multitude of doubts and fears, in order to discourage me; besides, I had formed a fine plan, and it is all now broke to pieces; I had hoped that at this time of life, the Lord would have spared me a little; and given me some holy-days of rest before I went hence; and indeed I began to enjoy them; but they are all fled and gone; the Lord has called me to the sharpest engagement I ever had, and likely to last for life. I can see nothing before me but opposition, and that from unreasonable and wicked men;—a divided parish—an angry clergy—a wicked Sodom to live in,—and to live in it on purpose to testify of its deeds that they are evil,—and on purpose to invite the most wicked, to come and be saved freely by the grace of Jesus. Besides all these, an enemy I have, whom I do not want to make my friend, and who hates me with a perfect hatred; a most subtle enemy, who has cheated me again and again. Was not my cause good, and my master almighty, how durst I attempt to pull down the pillars of the Devil's kingdom? But because I despair of

doing any thing myself, therefore I make the Lord my strength, and go to battle in the power of his might. I am sure all will be well so long as I am kept humble. O! pray that I may be a good soldier of Jesus Christ; but above all, ask for me humility; an humble man can come to no harm, he will ever be trusting in the Lord, because he finds nothing in himself to trust in; while he gives God great glory by trusting much in him, God gives him great grace, and this grace is to keep alive an abiding sense of what he is in himself, to shew him his ignorance and helplessness, to open to him daily more of the mystery of iniquity, to discover to him the stirrings of corruptions which others feel not, and make him sensible of these even in duties and ordinances, that he may loath himself and his very best works. These are the fruits of true grace, and he that is under the teaching of the Holy Spirit will abound in them; the more he does in the heart the more he humbles it. The great design of his grace, is to bring the proud sinner low, and then to keep him low. When he has brought us low, we do not like to be kept there, we want to get up again; our foolish desire is that he may do something in us, for which we may have a good opinion of ourselves; and so with this thought we are apt to wish, O that I was more holy! O that I could but pray better! O that I 'was more spiritual in duties! O that I was but thankful enough.' If you could come to the true motive of these wishes, specious as they appear, you would find them spring from the secret workings of a proud, self-righteous spirit; take off their fine cloak of holiness, and their language and meaning is plainly this. 'I wish God would give me something for which I might be better pleased with myself.' If this was the case, would not the eye be turned inward upon this very good self, and be drawn off from looking to Jesus? and so far as self is made something, Christ is made nothing; you may depend upon this as one of the surest axioms of divinity, whatsoever it be which makes you *pleased* with yourself, that is not true grace; & whatsoever makes you *displeased* with yourself, is not true grace, unless it bring you humble to Christ, and make you put more trust and confidence in him.

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