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AN

ESSAY

ON THE

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

BY

W. HAMILTON, D. D.

MINISTER OF STRATHBLANE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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IN the present publication, I had at first no other intention than, in compliance with the wish of some friends, to print in a separate form, and with a few additions, the chapter on Distress arising from the want of Assurance of Salvation, in "The Mourner in Zion Comforted." But since that volume appeared, Mr Erskine and his followers have propagated so many erroneous opinions on the Assurance of Salvation, as well as on the other topics intimately connected with that subject; that, in order to guard this important doctrine from mistake and misapprehension, I have been insensibly led to enlarge the following Essay far beyond my original design.

On the points discussed in the ensuing pages, the reader will find some valuable observations in the fourth Sermon, entitled Rational Evidences for Heaven, in the second volume of Boston's Sermons on Communion Occasions; and in a small Treatise on Faith in the fourth volume of President Edwards' Works. They are short, but precious articles; and

their re-publication in the form of Tracts would be a great service to the religious public.

Since my Remarks on Universal Redemption left the press, the Church has been furnished with several excellent antidotes to the pernicious tenets circulated by Mr Erskine and his disciples. The following publications are well worthy a careful perusal. A Sermon on Universal Pardon, by the Rev. David Davidson, of Broughty Ferry. Notes added to the Second edition of a Sermon on the Way of Salvation, by the Rev. David Russel, Dundee. Examination and Refutation of the Unscriptural Principles and Sentiments advocated by Mr Erskine; printed by J. & D. Collie, Edinburgh. An Essay on Justification by Faith, by Mr Barclay, Irvine. A Treatise on the Forgiveness of Sins, by the Rev. John Smyth, Glasgow. The Gareloch Heresy tried, by the Rev. Dr Burns, Paisley. A Reply to the Lay Member of the Church of Scotland, by the same. And the Doctrine of Universal Pardon considered and refuted in a series of Sermons by the Rev. Dr A. Thomson, Edinburgh.

Could argument decide the questions at issue; after the clear and able publications of Thomson, Burns, and Smyth, the debate would soon terminate. But, alas! there are some minds which no argument can reach, nor all the power of demonstration move. Some men are incapable of comprehending the meaning of the plainest statements, and others have the

baseness willfully to pervert what they cannot mistake.

The principal object most anxiously and earnestly inculcated, in the fifth chapter of my Remarks upon Universal Redemption, is, that a speculative belief of all the truths of revelation will not save us; and that we cannot be saved without receiving Christ for our own Saviour, and trusting in him for our own salvation. It was for this purpose that the chapter was opened with the following paragraphs. “If an Israelite, who understood the import of the Divine ordinance, had been asked how he expected to be cured of the bite of the fiery flying serpents; he would not have said by believing that the brazen serpent was the antidote to their sting, or that it had annihilated their poison, and had already secured the congregation against all danger from their attacks. He would have said that he expected a cure by looking at the serpent of brass. It was distinctly stated in the promise, ‘It shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he *looketh* upon *it*, the serpent of brass, shall live.’ And it is as plainly recorded in the narrative, that ‘if a serpent had bitten any man, when he *beheld* the serpent of brass, he lived.’

“From the beginning to the end of the sacred volume, Christ and his work are held up as the only objects of saving faith. Christ and his righteousness are the sum and centre of the whole expanse of revelation.

He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the ending. He is all, and in all. And saving faith is represented as *such a belief of the truth concerning him as leads the soul to rest, trust and depend on him and his righteousness, for all its salvation.*"

This fact is uniformly kept in view throughout the volume; and the chapter in question is studiously directed to its confirmation. It is then stated, "Though there can be no saving faith without the belief of this testimony," the scriptural record concerning Christ: "the belief of this, of any truth, of the whole truths of revelation is perfectly useless, *unless* it leads the soul to *receive* and rest on the Lord Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. The stung Israelite was not cured by simply believing the truth of the proclamation concerning the brazen serpent; but by actually looking at it. And we are not saved by *barely* believing the report concerning Christ; but by believing it **SO AS TO RECEIVE HIM FOR OUR OWN SAVIOUR, AND TRUST IN HIM FOR OUR OWN SALVATION.**" "Though faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; we must never for a moment forget the *oft-repeated* truth, that no faith is genuine which terminates in the *mere belief of doctrines*. The only faith which can either sanctify or save, is that which leads the *soul to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and make him all its salvation and all its desire.*" "I must affirm that we may assent to the truth of every

syllable in the creed, make ourselves masters of the whole doctrines of revelation, and cram our heads with the learning of libraries; and yet be as destitute of real religion, as before we began the laborious task.”

“ Whenever faith is mentioned in Scripture, whether in direct terms or figurative representations; it is **UNIFORMLY** spoken of in such language as to shew, its ultimate object is not the doctrinal propositions concerning Christ, but Christ himself; *and that it never can be sound and genuine till it lead the heart to trust in him entirely, and rest on him alone.*”

Whether the doctrine in the above language be true or false; the language itself is certainly free from ambiguity, and no man of common understanding can be at a loss to discover the doctrine which it asserts. But how are these statements regarded by modern Bereans? One of their number, calling himself a Lay Member of the Church of Scotland, in a Letter to Dr Burns and myself, quotes the following fragment of a paragraph from the midst of an argument against the notion that Christ died for all men alike; and which after separating it from the context and distorting it by altering the characters in which it was printed; presents it to his reader as evidence that I plead for the idea that all that is necessary for salvation, is the belief that Jesus is omnipotent and his atonement all-sufficient. “ The extent of the Redeemer’s death is a secret thing which belongs unto the Lord. It is enough for us to

know that his power is Almighty, and his atonement possessed of infinite value; that his heart is made of tenderness, his bowels melt with love." Here his transcript stops. The rest of the paragraph, which is as follows, is suppressed. " Omnipotence is requisite for the formation of a worm; and more is not required for the formation of a seraph. Less than the perfect righteousness of Immanuel could not have satisfied the demands of law and justice, and secured the salvation of a single soul: but more than this, if they had needed redemption, could not have been necessary for the salvation of the whole universe."

The reader may perhaps imagine that this paragraph lies far remote from the chapter which treats of Faith. This however is an apology which the Lay Member cannot plead. The paragraph which he quotes is in the very heart of the chapter on Faith. " Well then: but he has not read the chapter through; and has formed his opinion before he had discovered your real sentiments." But if he did not read the chapter through, he ought to have read it before he condemned it. Some who were not very scrupulous about justice when they wished to carry a point, admitted the propriety of judging no man, before they heard him, and knew what he did. But the Lay Member cannot have the benefit even of the awkward plea of condemning what he had not read. For in the fourth page of his Letter, he represents me as saying that " the be-

lief of the record which God has given of his Son, is not faith; that a man may believe every word of it, and not have faith; and that faith is a receiving and a resting on Christ alone for salvation." Though this, as the reader may observe by turning to the sixth page of this preface, is neither my language nor meaning; there is no part of the book where he can find a pretext for ascribing such words to me, except in the very chapter from which he makes his quotation.

There can be no doubt therefore that he read the chapter: but either from incapacity to comprehend the meaning of the plainest terms; or from a want of moral honesty to avow his convictions, he deliberately charges me with affirming the *reverse* of what he must have known that I maintain.

The doctrine for which he contends is, that saving faith consists in believing that we are the objects of God's love and shall be saved. It is for this purpose that he quotes, for censure, the paragraph already copied, p. seventh. And yet he reprobates me p. fourth, for denying that simple assent is saving faith.

He calls himself a member of the Church of Scotland; and yet he rejects, p. fourth, the definition given by that Church of faith, as a "receiving and resting on Christ alone for salvation."

He professes great zeal for the gospel: and yet though the Bible says He that believeth not shall be damned; he quotes as an object of his readers' avoid-

ance and aversion, “ **BEFORE** that singular individual could expect **SALVATION** he would **FIRST** be obliged to **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.**”

The zealous diffusion and the eager adoption of such tenets as are inculcated by his Tract and the publications issued from the same shop, ought to alarm the friends of religion, and excite their pity for the numbers who can be so easily corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Men of piety should exert themselves strenuously in the cause of God. Life is short. Our opportunities for usefulness will soon terminate for ever. But, till the day of trial come, we never can conceive the amount of ignorance and credulity that exists, and how many are at all times prepared to swallow any delusion that may be proposed.

W. H.

STRATHBLANE MANSE, }  
*March* 30, 1830. }

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ON THE  
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INTRODUCTION.

RESPECTING the assurance of salvation the Christian world has been long widely divided. Some have asserted that it is impossible to attain it, and that it is highly presumptuous either to ask or expect it: whilst others have affirmed that it is not only attainable but absolutely essential to the very nature of faith, and perfectly inseparable from a state of grace.

In matters of faith, we are not at liberty to call any man master. We have the Scriptures in our own hands: and by the authority of Him who gave them, we are commanded to search them, and to try by the law and the testimony every principle which is recommended to our belief, and every practice which is pressed upon our observance. On examining these conflicting opinions by the unerring standard of revelation, we shall find that neither the one nor the other is strictly correct. We shall find that, though the assurance of salvation is neither essential to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace, it is a

blessing which has been attained, which is still attainable, and which it is the duty of every believer to labour to secure.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IS NEITHER ESSENTIAL TO THE NATURE OF FAITH, NOR INSEPARABLE FROM A STATE OF GRACE.

IT must be observed that there is a wide difference betwixt the assurance of faith, and the assurance of hope or of salvation. The assurance of faith is the belief, the persuasion, or conviction of the truth and certainty of what God has revealed in his word. This is an assurance which is absolutely essential to the nature of faith, and without which we cannot justly be denominated believers at all. If we doubt or discredit what the Scriptures contain we are unbelievers. If from the proposition, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life;" we take away the certainty of what it states, or in other words, the assurance of the facts which it affirms: what is the consequence? We must either deny these precious truths entirely, or else be left in a state of awful uncertainty whether God has loved the world, whether he has given his only begotten Son for our

salvation, and whether faith possesses any connection with eternal life. And in the same manner, if we are not firmly convinced of the truth and certainty of every promise and declaration of the Bible, we cannot be said to believe them. We in reality are unbelievers; and expose ourselves to all the dreadful consequences of rejecting the testimony of the God of truth.

We may therefore safely maintain that the assurance of faith, or a clear and full conviction of the reality of the truth believed, is absolutely essential to the nature of faith. In fact, this assurance and faith are one and the same. They are only two names for the same thing. And none who understands the meaning of the language, will ever hesitate for a moment to admit that this assurance is absolutely necessary to the existence of religion in the heart.

But the assurance of hope, or of salvation, is quite another matter. This does not consist in the belief of what the Scriptures reveal, but in the knowledge which a Christian possesses of his own interest in the blessings of the Gospel and of his own right to eternal life. It is of this assurance that we are now to treat: it is of this assurance alone that the term is employed in the following pages: it is of this that we aver, that it is neither essential to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace. The essence of a thing is only another name for its nature: and an essential property is a quality necessary to the being of the ob-

ject to which it belongs; and which cannot be altered or destroyed, without changing the nature or destroying the existence of the subject in which it resides. Could the solidity of a stone be annihilated, the stone itself would lose its nature; and the existence of fire cannot survive the extinction of heat. If the assurance of salvation is essential to faith, either saving faith and assurance must be identically the same, or so thoroughly incorporated with each other as to be absolutely inseparable.

In such a case, the essence of saving faith would consist in the belief of our own safety; the necessity of the Spirit's influence to maintain our peace and joy would be superseded; the hope and comfort of believers could never be destroyed nor disturbed by temptation; the unregenerate would be as often required in the first act of faith to believe in their own salvation as to believe in Christ; faith would be incapable of degrees; those who believe in Christ would never be exhorted to seek assurance; it never would be promised as something distinct from faith, and as a blessing superadded to the possession of that grace; no provision would be made for the support and encouragement of doubting and disconsolate believers, the highest encomiums would be bestowed upon assurance, the dejected and desponding would be described as in a graceless state, and all would be represent-

ed as safe, who are secure and confident respecting their everlasting welfare.

But are these things so? Are we warranted to assert that they are consistent with either the letter or the spirit of the sacred records?

1. If the assurance of salvation is essential to faith, and inseparable from a state of grace; then the essence of faith must consist in the belief of our own salvation.

If assurance is essential to faith, and the two are indissolubly conjoined: though we may speak of them and reason about them, as if they were different, they must in reality be one and the same thing; and faith can no more be possessed without assurance, than scriptural assurance can be enjoyed without faith. To admit that they are distinct and separable, is to grant us the subject in debate. This is to renounce the idea of their necessary connection; to abandon the notion that assurance is essential to faith; and allow that the two may be divided, and the one attained without the other. But if in their own nature they are inseparable, and the one essential to the other: faith and assurance must be identical, and the essence of saving faith must consist in the belief of our own salvation.

Now, so far is this from being the case, that the Scriptures represent the essence of faith to consist, not in a belief of our own justification, acceptance with God, nor salvation; but in a belief of the testimony

of God, of the record which he has given concerning his Son. They describe faith by coming unto Christ, by fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, receiving Christ, believing on him, and trusting in him. Saving faith may therefore be said to be, not a mere belief of the truth in general, but such a belief as leads the soul to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, for spiritual life and salvation, and to rely on him for all the purposes for which he is offered to us in the Gospel.

Now, though from this act of the soul assurance of salvation may, and ought to result; it is at the same time evident that, however closely related, they are neither radically the same, nor inseparably united. By faith we pass from death unto life: by assurance we know that we have become the subjects of this blessed change. By faith we believe to the saving of the soul: by assurance we know that we have believed through grace. By faith we embrace the Saviour, and obtain an interest in all the blessings of his salvation: by assurance we know that Christ and all his fulness are become our own.

Now, though frequently conjoined, it is obvious that in themselves they are totally distinct, and that in the experience of Christians they often may be separated. Every living man has the possibility of enjoying health: but health and life are not inseparable. Every man who is possessed of reason, is capable of learning: but

every rational man is far from being a man of literature and science. Some may never have enjoyed an opportunity for cultivating their minds; and others, from the bustle of business or the decay of memory, may have lost much of the learning which they had once acquired. And in the same manner, though faith and assurance are closely allied, they are neither necessarily nor indissolubly connected. Faith may sometimes rise to a calm and settled assurance, and exult with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; and at other times be obliged to contend with weakness and imperfection, with doubts and fears. In some cases the Christian may know in whom he has believed: and in others be able only to say, Who knows but the Lord may be gracious? We may take a medicine fitted to remove our malady, under a full persuasion of its efficacy, and yet not be conscious for a time of a begun recovery. The well-known generosity of a man of philanthropy, who never was heard to have rejected a single application, may encourage us in our difficulties to solicit his aid; but till we actually receive his assistance, we may have many an anxious thought about the success of our petition. And a sinner may apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, completely convinced of his ability and willingness to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him; and yet be long doubtful whether he himself shall be made a partaker of salvation with eternal glory. Some may never arrive at

this blessed hope ; and others, who have enjoyed it for a season, may afterwards lose it. Many, who at one time imagined that their mountain stood strong, and that they never should be moved, have soon been perplexed and troubled.

In Scripture accordingly we find the assurance of salvation represented not as the essence, but as one of the fruits and effects of faith. For unless this is the case, why are we told that the tree is known by its fruits? why are we commanded to shew our faith by our works? why are we informed, that “ being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ; by whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God?” and why are those who have already believed through grace, required to make their calling and election sure? If assurance of salvation were essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace ; then every believer would be endowed with this inestimable blessing, and it would be as superfluous and absurd to exhort the people of God to seek it, as to enjoin the innocent to sue for pardon, or the seeing to pray for eye-sight.

To affirm therefore that the assurance of salvation is essential to the nature of faith, confounds the effect with the cause, the fruits and consequences with the nature and essence of faith.

2. To assert that the assurance of salvation is essential to the nature of faith, supersedes the necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to maintain our peace and joy.

In such a case, though his agency might be requisite to produce and preserve our faith, there could be no occasion for a separate exercise of his love and power to impart or continue assurance. The presence of the one would necessarily ensure the existence of the other. Faith could no more be severed from assurance, than the subject from its attributes, or the object from its essence.

The sacred Scriptures however intimate that, though faith, or real religion, tends to inspire peace, hope, and joy; still assurance does not flow from a work of grace by any natural and irresistible necessity, as heat from the fire, or light from the body of the sun. It is the gift of the Holy Ghost; who is not only the source of spiritual life and vigour, but also the author of peace and comfort; and who communicates or withholds them in any measure or proportion that he knows to be most for his own glory, and our best and eternal interests. He is the Spirit of adoption. It is he who makes known to us the things that are freely given us of God: who bears witness with our spirits that we are his children; who enables us to cry, Abba Father; and who blesses us with the earnest of our inheritance, and the first fruits of glory.

When our ways please the Lord, he makes our enemies be at peace with us. He makes his paths towards us mercy and truth; and fills us with a peace that passes all understanding, and a joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory. But if we rebel and vex the Holy Spirit, he will turn to be our enemy, and fight against us. He will withdraw the reviving, strengthening, and cheering influences of his grace: and, as all the ingenuity of man is utterly unable to produce light to supply the place of the sun; so, when he withholds the elevating and comforting communications of his love, all the contrivances of the Christian are totally inadequate for the removal of the trouble which he feels, and the restoration of the joys which he has forfeited.

This is a case of frequent occurrence. For, though by the provisions of the everlasting covenant, and the power and grace of the Saviour, all the children of God are effectually secured against apostacy and final perdition; yet, to manifest their own weakness, and teach them the necessity of habitual and unremitting dependence upon his care and protection, they are often left to bitter and long backslidings. Such however is the rooted aversion which he entertains to all sin, that he will not allow it to pass with impunity even in his own people. If they forsake his law and walk not in his judgments; if they break his statutes and keep not his commandments; to awaken them

to contrition, to recall them from their wanderings, and compel them to return and seek their rest and happiness in himself, he gives his judgments a commission to pursue them, lays bands on their loins, causes men ride over their heads, visits their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes, and makes their own wickedness correct them, and their backslidings reprove them. Under these painful visitations however it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish betwixt the corrections of a friend, and the rebukes of an adversary; betwixt the salutary chastisements of a parent, and the vindictive inflictions of a judge. In these circumstances, though still interested in all the riches of redeeming mercy; the believer, like a child under the frown of his father, is filled with alarm, and terrified lest he shall be cast out from the Divine presence, and given over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart.

3. If the assurance of salvation be essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace, the hope and comfort of believers can never be destroyed nor disturbed by temptation.

The gifts and the callings of God are without repentance. He rests in his love; and whenever he begins a good work, he will perform it unto the day of Christ. Faith is one of his irrevocable communications. Wherever it is once implanted; whatever

checks and restraints it may suffer, it will survive all opposition and surmount every difficulty and danger. If therefore assurance were essential to the nature of faith, however furiously it might be attacked, and with whatever ingenuity and perseverance it might be assailed, our peace, hope, and confidence could no more be forfeited and lost than our faith. The whole would remain as firm and immoveable as the Rock of Ages.

It is notorious however that in violent and long continued temptation; many christians, who have retained their faith and accordingly remained in a state of grace, have been deprived of all hope and joy. They could no more doubt the leading doctrines of the gospel, than their own existence. They have believed and been sure that there is mercy with God, and plenteous redemption; that Christ is able to save to the uttermost, and that his blood cleanseth from all sin: but they could derive no more comfort from these precious truths, than if such language had been addressed to the inhabitants of another planet. They durst not indulge a suspicion of the power or grace of the adorable Redeemer: but neither could they entertain a hope for themselves. They have rashly and prematurely concluded that they were cast out from the Divine presence, and given up to blindness of mind and hardness of heart. What comfort did Zion possess, when she said, "The Lord hath forsaken me,

and my Lord hath forgotten me?" Where was the assurance of Asaph, when he asked, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" What consolation did Heman retain, when he cried, "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off?"

The most holy man that lives is not beyond the reach of Satan's assaults, nor secured against the most foul and blasphemous suggestions. If the devil when he said, "If thou be the Son of God;" had the audacity to endeavour to insinuate a doubt into the mind of our Lord concerning his Sonship; to what fears and jealousies must we be exposed respecting our adoption? Our blessed Redeemer was proof against his utmost efforts: but we frequently fall before his temptations. While we hold fast our belief of the gospel in general, we are induced to doubt our personal interest in its provisions, and reject the bright hopes and ineffable consolations which it contains.

Since therefore many, who at one time possessed peace and joy in believing, have afterwards been filled with alarm and terror: unless we are prepared to say that there is mutability with God, and that his gifts are uncertain and fluctuating, we must deny that assurance is essential to faith. But with God we know that there is no variableness, and that his gifts are beyond the danger of recall. We may therefore justly conclude

that assurance is not essential to faith; and that our peace may be lost without destroying our safety. The inmates of the ark might be scared with dreams, giddy with the agitation of the vessel, and terrified lest they should founder in the wide waste of waters. But though their happiness might be influenced by their fears and apprehensions, these could not affect their preservation. And though temptation may disturb or break our peace, it cannot endanger our salvation. For we are upheld not by our own strength or joy, but by the mighty power of God: and he is able to make us stand.

4. If assurance is essential to the nature of faith; the unregenerate would have been as often required, in the first act of faith, to believe in their own salvation as to believe in Christ.

Since, in such a case, faith and assurance were so closely allied, as to be either identically the same, or equally essential to the existence of each other; it would have been a matter of indifference whether the graceless had been exhorted, in the first instance, to believe in Christ, or to believe that they were saved men. At any rate the one form of address would have been as frequently employed as the other: or rather, since the supposed result must have been the same, and salvation obtained with equal certainty on either hypothesis, why was the process "divided into

two steps," when one would have sufficed? What prevented the ungodly from being called on to believe that they were the heirs of everlasting life, and to rejoice in their own safety and dignity?

But where within the whole compass of the sacred volume are such exhortations to be found?

Israel, or the church of the living God, is commanded to rejoice in him that made him, and the children of Zion to be joyful in their King. Strong consolation is provided for them, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. And these are repeatedly enjoined to rejoice in the Lord, and to rejoice alway.

But where are such exhortations addressed to the impenitent and hardened, to the profane and the profligate, to those who are living without God and without Christ in the world? Is this the character of the following admonitions? "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Repent and believe the Gospel." "Seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

With such exhortations the Scriptures abound. And will any man say that these are equivalent to a command to believe that we are in a state of salvation, and to rejoice in the Lord as our own God? Are repentance, humiliation, affliction, and mourning for our guilt and danger, the same as exultation in the favour of God, and triumph in our interest in the righteousness of our Redeemer?

The careless and secure, instead of being required to rejoice in the Lord, and confide in their own safety, have a very different task assigned them. They are commanded to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; to receive the salvation of the Gospel: and then, when they have made their calling and election sure, and obtained good hope through grace; they are enjoined to go on their way rejoicing, and to comfort their hearts with the prospect of everlasting felicity. But till then so far from authorizing them to appropriate the promises of God, the Scriptures declare that they

are of the works of the law and under a curse, the children of disobedience and wrath.

5. If assurance were essential to the nature of faith, faith itself would be incapable of degrees.

Assurance is evidently unsusceptible of any modification. We may have a darker or a clearer conception of a subject: and we may be more or less persuaded of the truth of a narrative: but in the nature of things we cannot be more or less sure of its reality. If we entertain any doubt at all of its truth, we are not sure, but uncertain of its existence. If we have any assurance whatever of our own salvation; we are convinced that Christ and all the blessings of the Gospel are our own, that the Lord is our God, and heaven our inheritance and home. More than this no assurance can impart: and less than this cannot be possessed where any assurance is enjoyed at all.

If therefore assurance were essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace; faith would be utterly incapable of different degrees. All believers would be alike. The tranquility, hope, and confidence of the whole would be the same. Those who have lived longest under the power of religion, who have given the greatest diligence to keep close to God, and made the greatest attainments in the spiritual life; could possess no more than a peace that passes all understanding, and a joy unspeakable and

full of glory: but, according to the theory in question, the youngest and feeblest in all the family of the faithful would possess no less. In such a case how could the Scriptures speak of the “weak in faith?” of the faith of some “growing exceedingly?” of faith as “a grain of mustard seed which is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, is the greatest among herbs?” In such a case, there could be no babes in Christ; and no tender plants in the garden of God. The trees would instantaneously start from the seed to their utmost size; and the men would be born in the complete maturity of their powers, and in the possession of the full measure of their stature. In such a case, their faith could not grow. It would be as perfect at the beginning as at the end of their course; and as firm and strong on the day when they enter the christian church, as at the hour when they reach the heights of the celestial Zion.

6. If assurance were essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace; then no exhortations would be given to believers to seek assurance, and to cultivate religious joy.

Every Christian, from the mere circumstance that he is a believer, would be infallibly possessed of assurance, and peace and joy would necessarily flow from its presence. It would be as idle to admonish him to seek the attainment of these blessings, as to enjoin us

to pray for the communication of life, or the saints in glory to ask the way to the kingdom of heaven.

But clear and unquestionable as this fact is; we find Paul thus addressing the very men whom he knew, that as they had been partakers of his sufferings, so should they also be of his consolation: "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? Though he was persuaded that the Hebrew converts were possessed of the things that accompany salvation, and had displayed a work of faith and a labour of love, which should not be forgotten of God; yet he desires every one of them to "shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Peter, writing to those who had obtained like precious faith with himself through the righteousness of God our Saviour, says, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." And often do the sacred writers pray for the peace, hope, and consolation of those, of whose faith they could not entertain a doubt; and exhort them to rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice always.

But if faith and assurance are inseparable, these prayers and exhortations are utterly superfluous. The presence of faith, without the labour or solicitude of the believers, would as inevitably have secured that assurance, peace and joy; as the presence of an opaque

substance will, in the effulgence of sunshine, ensure the existence of its shadow.

7. If assurance were essential to the nature of faith; it would not be promised as something distinct from faith, and as a blessing superadded to the enjoyment of that grace.

Were the two either identical or inseparable, the presence of the one would infallibly convey the possession of the other; and though they might be designated by different names, they would uniformly be represented as contemporary, and communicated simultaneously.

But so far is this from being the case, that the two are represented as not only distinct in nature, but as actually divided in time. For unless this is the fact, why does St. John declare, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life?" Why are we told that "the work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever?" Why are we informed that "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord?" And why are the peace, and hope, and joy, and the light of the Divine countenance, which constitute the substance and essence of assurance; invariably mentioned as blessings distinct from faith, and conferred through the special loving-kindness of

the Lord upon those who are already in a state of grace? Psalm iv. 6, xxxi. 16, lxvii. 1. Isa. liv. 13, lviii. 7—12. John xiv. 15—17. Rom. xv. 13. Phil. iv. 7. 2 Thess. iii. 16.

8. If assurance were essential to the nature of faith; no provision would be made for the support and encouragement of weak and timid, of desponding and forsaken believers.

Such characters would be utterly unknown. All men would either be in a state of high hope and overflowing joy, or in a state of utter insensibility, and of hardened impenitence and unbelief. A doubting or dejected, a feeble or sorrowful Christian could not be found. All who believe would know their calling and election of God, and be able with confidence to say "This God is our God for ever and ever." Amidst bodily trouble and temporal trials, they would possess their souls in patience. They would take pleasure in infirmities, and glory in tribulation. To mental distress and spiritual alarm they would be entire strangers. Whatever restlessness or terror they might have experienced in their unconverted state; from the day that the grace of God enters their hearts till they are raised to sit down with Christ on his throne, they would be as completely free from religious apprehension and perplexity, doubt, fear, and sorrow, as the spirits of the just made perfect. Their hope, anchored

on that which is within the veil, would for ever abide both sure and steadfast: and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, would perpetually keep their hearts and minds.

But with the Scriptures of truth in our hands; where we so often meet with complaints from the faithful, that their soul is cast down within them; that they are feeble and sore broken; that they have roared by reason of the disquietness of their heart; that they have been afflicted, and ready to die from their youth up; and that while they suffered the terrors of God they were distracted: with these Scriptures in our hands, where we find so many instances of believers complaining, "we go forward, but he is not there; backward, but we cannot perceive him;" where we hear them crying, "Lord, why castest thou off our soul? why hidest thou thy face from us? How long wilt thou hide thy face from us? How long shall we take counsel in our soul, having sorrow in our heart daily?" With these facts before us, shall we have the hardihood to say that the life of the believer is a course of constant sunshine and unbroken joy; and that the assurance of his personal interest in the provisions of the everlasting covenant, accompanies him from the commencement to the close of his pilgrimage? When we hear our adorable Redeemer declaring that he will not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; that he was anointed to preach good

tidings to the meek, and sent to bind up the broken-hearted; when we hear him pronouncing his first and best blessings upon the poor in spirit, and upon them that mourn: shall we dare to denounce these objects of Divine compassion and tenderness, as graceless and ungodly characters, who are under condemnation, and exposed to everlasting wretchedness and ruin?

But if we dare not curse those whom God has blessed: shall we, on the other hand, presume to assert that these people are possessed of the full assurance of hope, and rejoicing in the prospect of celestial bliss? Is sorrow akin to joy? Are those who are walking in darkness, overpowered with the blaze of light? Are those who are represented under the figures of bruised reeds and smoking flax; strong in faith, and animated by the heart-cheering knowledge of their own interest in the mercies of the everlasting Gospel? Are those who are complaining that the Lord hath forsaken them, and their Lord hath forgotten them; realizing the unchanging love of their Redeemer, and exulting in the blissful anticipations of eternal glory?

9. If assurance were essential to the nature of faith; it would have been regarded as a matter of the greatest moment, and the highest encomiums would have been pronounced upon those who possessed it.

We know the mighty importance attached to faith. It is the turning point in religion. He that possesses

it is safe: but he that is without it, cannot see life. But in what part of the sacred volume shall we find a similar value ascribed to assurance? Where is it either said or insinuated that the man who is destitute of assurance, is under a sentence of exclusion from the Divine presence and all the delights and honours of the world of bliss?

We have just now seen the kindly and soothing terms in which the Scriptures address the humble, the timid, the depressed, and mourning. And so far are they from eulogizing boldness, security and confidence, that they administer many strong admonitions to caution, diffidence, watchfulness, and jealousy of ourselves. They tell us that "happy is the man that feareth alway:" that "the first shall be last, and the last first:" that "not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." They inform us of the danger of trusting in ourselves that we are righteous; and of imagining that we are rich and increased with goods; and exhort us not to be high-minded, but to fear.

10. If assurance were essential to faith; then every one who labours under doubts and fears must be in a state of condemnation, and all must be safe who are secure and confident respecting their everlasting happiness.

In such a case, to be possessed of firm trust and

unshaken confidence in our own safety, would be an infallible proof of being in a state of grace ; and every degree of doubt and alarm would with equal certainty bespeak a state of condemnation and wrath. But we have lately seen that none are dearer to the heart of the Redeemer, nor enjoy a larger portion of his tenderness and care ; than the humble, the broken-hearted, the feeble-minded, who are walking in darkness, and going mourning without the sun. And it must now be added, that unless the heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience, and peace obtained through the soul's reliance on the righteousness of Christ ; to manifest calmness and tranquility and confidence, so far from being a favourable sign, is one of the most fatal and alarming symptoms that any wretched mortal can discover.

Salvation is an object of infinite importance. It augurs well of a man to hear him complaining of his doubts and fears about his eternal welfare. This shews that he has some concern about this subject, and encourages the hope that he is laying it seriously to heart. It is a most alarming circumstance to find any man, in an affair of such magnitude, too calm and confident. It naturally excites a suspicion that he has neither part nor lot in the matter ; for if he were aware of its immense value, he would from time to time discover a solicitude to examine the foundation of his hope and ascertain the safety of his state. If

you see two travellers ; the one, without ever looking after his luggage, making a great noise about the treasure which it contains ; and the other, without saying much about the matter, frequently examining if his baggage be secure ; you would be at no loss to pronounce which of them acted the most rational part, and was likely to be possessed of the greatest wealth. And the man who says least about his hopes, but gives the greatest diligence to make his calling and election sure, is generally more alive to religion, and far nearer the kingdom of heaven, than the professor, who flatters himself on the safety of his state, but is careless about the means of advancing his growth in grace, and promoting his progress in holiness and spirituality.

Anxiety and alarm are distressing and painful ; but they are at the same time salutary. If the man is already savingly converted, they will soon pass away, and the end will be peace : but if he is not yet reconciled to God, if they are of a sound and genuine nature, they will never leave him till he is established in the faith. But amongst all the melancholy objects which we meet, none is so affecting and overpowering as the sight of men, whose temper and conduct prove that they are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity ; and yet are perfectly secure and easy ; and, in spite of every remonstrance, persevere in the lulling and deceitful cry of Peace, peace, till their feet

stumble upon the dark mountains, and the shadows of death close for ever around them. If the christian be possessed of the assurance of faith; hypocrites and formalists have the confidence of presumption: and the blind boldness of the latter is often far more impregnable, than the peace and hope of the former. Whilst the strong man armed keepeth his house, there is frequently as great quietness within, as when it is brought under the power of a stronger than he. The dearest of God's saints have at times been in perplexity and despondence; when the foolish virgins were secure; and those who were farthest from acceptance with God, shew by their address to our Redeemer in the day of judgment, that they entertained the firmest persuasion of their safety. "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The Pharisees imagined that they never were in bondage: and none are more confident and fearless, than those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others.

If therefore these things are so; if the essence of faith does not consist in confidence in our own safety, but in the soul's reliance on Christ for salvation; if the assurance of our interest in the love of God is

the gift of the Holy Ghost, and forfeited by our secure and careless conduct; if during violent temptation, while we retain our belief of the truths of the gospel, we lose our hope and comfort; if the unregenerate are never required, as a substitute for faith, to believe in their own safety nor rejoice in the hope of heaven; if there are different degrees of faith, and yet assurance is incapable of degrees, and can never be enjoyed without strong faith: if those who have already believed through grace, are exhorted to seek assurance, and to rejoice in the Lord; if assurance is promised to believers as a blessing distinct from faith, and one that is superadded to it; if rich provision is made for the support and encouragement of weak, timid, desponding and forsaken believers; if no superlative importance is attached to assurance; if no intimation is given that the dejected and desponding are in a state of condemnation, nor the secure and confident in a state of safety: if all this is true, then we are compelled to affirm that the assurance of salvation is neither essential to the nature of faith nor inseparable from a state of grace; and that a man may be a child of God and an heir of heaven, though at times uncertain of his situation, and apprehensive of the issue of his hopes for eternal life. Assurance is an important and invaluable blessing: but it holds only a subordinate place. It must yield the palm to faith, repentance, contrition, humility, self-denial, love, and godly

fear. It is indispensable to our comfort ; but it is not necessary to our salvation. It contributes unspeakably to the happiness of the voyage ; but cannot affect either its safety or its success.

Many from the best motives may insist on the inseparable connection betwixt faith and assurance. But the intention is neither a test of truth nor a rule of duty. Many rash hands are stretched out to fix the ark of God. From whatever motive the tenet under consideration has been inculcated, it is destitute of foundation in the word of God ; and is calculated to do great mischief in the flock of Christ. It is fitted to make many sad, whom God has not made sad. It tends to break the bruised reeds ; and to crush those broken hearts, which the kind hands of our adored Redeemer are employed in binding up.

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## CHAPTER II.

### ON THE ATTAINABLENESS OF ASSURANCE.

HAVING endeavoured to provide for the comfort and establishment of those whose souls are broken and bowed down, from an apprehension that they are in a graceless condition, because they are destitute of the assurance of salvation ; in compassionate faithfulness

to a class far more numerous, and in a far more dangerous situation, it is now high time to shew, that the assurance of salvation is a blessing which has been attained, and which is still attainable.

That assurance is an attainable blessing is evident,

1. From the nature of faith itself.

The cause always precedes the effect. We must be in a state of grace before we can discover the fact : and be possessed of faith before we can enjoy assurance. While we are without faith, we are without God, without Christ, and without hope. We are of the works of the law, and under a curse. But when faith comes, we are no more under a curse. We are the children of God, and the heirs of promise. The word of Him who cannot lie, declares, "He that believeth shall be saved."

Now, faith is not merely a belief of the gospel as true, but an approbation of it as infinitely excellent, and exactly adapted to our circumstances. It is a receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices, and a resting on him for our own salvation. It leads us to renounce every other dependence, and cleave to him simply, and confide in him alone.

And while we cast on him all our care, and rely on him for righteousness and strength : is it credible that we never can ascertain whence we look for safety, and where we have fixed our trust? We may at times

doubt our acceptance. The number and enormity of our offences, our frequent falls and deplorable imperfections, may occasionally inspire a fear of the genuineness of our faith, and create a suspicion he will reject our application. But amidst all our weakness and inconsistency, our views never change of his glory and grace. Our souls still lean on him entirely, and our hearts continue to follow hard after him. We dare not let go our hold, nor change the foundation of our hope: but hearing the general calls and invitations of the gospel, we apply them to our own case; and never can be satisfied till we have cleared up our own interest in their provisions and our personal right to the rich and precious blessings which they proclaim. The grand ambition of the believer is to convert the general and indefinite language of revelation into special, individual addresses; and as he travels through the sacred pages to be able to say, "This promise is mine, this mercy and that blessing are my own: the pardon, the peace, the righteousness, and strength of which I read belong to me; Jesus has loved me, and given himself for me: this God is my God for ever and ever.

'Tis mine, the covenant of his grace,  
 And every promise mine!  
 All sprung from everlasting love,  
 And seal'd by blood divine.

On my unworthy favour'd head,  
 Its blessings all unite ;  
 Blessings more num'rous than the stars,  
 More lasting, and more bright."

And though he may not at all times possess the object of his desire, it surely is attainable. The language of the gospel is as general as that of the law. And if he knows, from the indefinite language of the law, though he is named neither in its precepts nor penalties, that he is under its obligation and answerable to its authority: when the Spirit of all grace unfolds the glorious import, and illustrates the universal extent of the gospel calls and promises; can the believer be at a loss, though he finds his name in none of its announcements, to argue from its general unlimited invitations, his own right to its offers, and his own warrant to embrace all its invaluable provisions?

2. From the change which believers undergo at regeneration.

When we are admitted into the family of God, we not only receive a new name, but are likewise made partakers of a new nature. We are not only invested with a title to the kingdom of heaven, but also with a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Old habits are broken off, and new ones formed. We are made to dislike the things which we formerly loved, and pursue the things which

we previously shunned and hated. We are made to experience a radical and total transformation; for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. Whom God did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." And so absolutely essential is this renovation of nature, and this conformity to the image of the Saviour, to the existence of religion in the heart, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Now, shall a man undergo such a great and astonishing change; and after all be unable to ascertain its existence? Shall we be renewed in the spirit of our minds, created again in Christ Jesus unto good works, and rendered not merely reformed or altered men, but new creatures; and after all, are we to imagine that it is impossible in any case to arrive at a knowledge of the fact, and that we must through the whole of life remain ignorant of this blessed and gracious transformation?

If any great alteration takes place in our outward circumstances; if from a state of poverty we are raised to affluence; if from pining sickness we are restored to health; if by patient application to study, from being ignorant and illiterate, we acquire literature and science; we soon become sensible of the agreeable improvement. The delightful transition is

not published to the world, and concealed from ourselves : we are the first to know it. And shall we imagine that a man may be the subject of the greatest of all changes ; a change whose effects shall follow him beyond the bounds of all that is visible, and impress its own character on the whole of his endless existence ; and yet never discover the interesting and momentous fact ? From trifling with religion and keenly pursuing the vanities and follies of time and of sense, shall he become earnest for everlasting bliss, and fix his affections supremely on God and things divine ; from neglecting his immortal part, and despising the adorable Redeemer, shall Jesus become precious to his soul, all his salvation and all his desire ; from coolly following the multitude to do evil, and walking in the sight of his own eyes and in the ways of his own heart, shall he flee from the wrath to come, strive to enter in at the strait gate, and labour to take the kingdom of heaven by violence : shall he experience all this, and yet never perceive that he has undergone the slightest alteration in his desires and occupations ? Is the path to heaven so like the road to hell ; the life of faith so much a-kin to the course of the world ; the confines of light so similar to the regions of darkness ; that we may be transported from the gloom and horrors of a graceless, and ruined condition, into the light and purity, the high hopes and glorious liberty

of the sons of God, without ever discerning the smallest difference?

The change may be accomplished suddenly or slowly; it may be produced openly and visibly; or take place in a manner secret and unobserved: for there are diversities of operations; and in forming the soul anew, the Holy Spirit is not confined to any particular mode, nor restrained by any fixed and immutable law. He acts according to the good pleasure of his will. But still in whatever way the change takes place, at whatever age, or by whatever means it is accomplished; the consequences are great and lasting; so that from the effect we are at no loss to ascertain the nature and reality of the cause. The descent of the dew may escape observation: but when we see it lying on the grass all around, we are certain that it must have fallen. A child can give no account of the commencement of his existence, nor of the time and manner in which his soul joined his body; but no sooner does he arrive at the exercise of reason, than he is convinced that his being must have had a beginning, and that at some time or other his soul must have been united to his body. And the Christian too may be unable to tell exactly by what means he was brought to the knowledge of the truth, or to describe distinctly how the blessed change began, and was carried on. He may have learned much from this sermon, and more from that. He may have profit-

ed much by one exercise or ordinance, and more by another. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how; for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." But though unable to describe the process, by which he was brought from nature to grace: yet when he is established in the faith, he must find a great and total difference betwixt what he was once and what he is now; so that, like the man whom our Lord had cured of his blindness, who declared, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see;" when the believer takes a calm and enlightened survey of his present state in contrast with his past condition, he also will be able to say, "One thing I know, that whereas by nature I neither knew God nor loved him, the desire of my heart is now to him and to the remembrance of his name; whereas I walked according to the course of this world, and lived in the vanity of my mind; now my heart's desire and prayer are, that Christ may be magnified in me, whether that shall be by life or by death: for whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee." And if such is the result which a Christian's examination of his own experience is calculated to afford; is it not obvious that the assurance of salvation may at

times be attained ; and that he shall be able to discover his calling and election of God ?

3. From the love which the Lord Jesus Christ bears to his people.

He has loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness he has drawn them. From love to us he left the throne of heaven, assumed our nature, suffered, bled, and died. From love to us he rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high, watches over all our interests, guides us by his council, protects us by his power, and keeps us as the apple of his eye. Now, can we suppose that he has so long taken such a deep and tender interest in our welfare ; and that during the whole of our pilgrimage, he will conceal from us every discovery of his peculiar and endearing love ? Would he die for our redemption, and with the feelings of a brother, intercede for us in the presence of his Father ; and after all, leave us, till our dying day, in a state of painful uncertainty whether we shall be saved or lost ? We cannot for a moment entertain such a harsh and dishonourable thought. For the correction of our faults, or the trial of our faith and patience, he may for a season withdraw the light of his countenance, and involve us in perplexity and trouble. But the strong affection which he bears us, the numerous and costly proofs which he has given of his ardent and

everlasting regard, are all a security and pledge that sooner or later we shall be honoured with the manifestation of his favour, and blessed with a foretaste of our future and eternal joy.

That believers may arrive at a knowledge of their salvation may be inferred,

4. From the testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to our adoption.

It is by the agency of the Holy Ghost that we are qualified for the discharge of our different duties, and furnished with our spiritual enjoyments. It is he who assists us in prayer; who strengthens us with might in the inner man; who guides us into all truth; and gives us an unction from the Holy One, whereby we know all things. It is his office to glorify Christ: for he receives of the things of Christ, and shews them to us. It is he who expels the spirit of bondage unto fear; and who is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Every believer may not at all times be blessed with the same measure of his influences: for if there are seasons when he can come boldly to the throne of grace, and fill his mouth with arguments; there are also occasions on which he can make his requests only with groanings which cannot be uttered. But though we may not at all times be equally favoured with his presence and aid: he never totally withdraws these in-

estimable blessings. He abides with us for ever. He dwells with us, and is in us. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Now, is every believer blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit? does he act as the Spirit of adoption? take of the things of Christ, and shew them to us? and even bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God? and yet is it credible that the believer, through the whole of his pilgrimage, shall never be able to discover the high dignity to which he is raised, and the invaluable privileges to which he is entitled? Though it is the prerogative of the Holy Ghost to search the deep things of God, and to unfold the mysteries of Christ, and though he is endowed with omniscience and omnipotence: is he unable to make his voice be heard, and render his communications intelligible?

5. Assurance is a blessing which has been attained.

In the Psalms we frequently find David speaking of his gracious relation to God: calling himself his servant, and the Lord the portion of his inheritance. With all the confidence and calmness of one who had the witness in himself that he was born from above, and that he was an heir of the righteousness of faith; he declares on his death-bed, that God had made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. Job possessed the same

exalted and delightful attainment, when he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." And did not Paul too enjoy the same sublime and animating confidence, when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day?" Was it not in consequence of this assurance that he declared, "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, who loved me, and gave himself for me?" Was it not under the influence of the same strong and glorious hope, that on the survey of his long career, and in the near prospect of its violent and bloody termination; with holy boldness and sacred triumph he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day?"

From such language, it is evident that these holy men had no doubt of their own interest in the covenant of grace. And is it credible that this precious blessing was imparted to them, and that it will be withheld from others, who walk in their steps and are

partakers of their faith? Is there partiality or respect of persons with God? Shall one man be saved by grace through faith; and shall another man who cleaves to grace through faith, be lost? And shall one man by the exercise of faith on the Son of God, arrive at the assurance of his own eternal safety; and shall another man, who seeks the same blessing in the same manner, be prevented from ever reaching it?

That this blessing was intended for the benefit of all believers who seek it, in the manner which God has prescribed in his word, is manifest,

6. From the exhortations which in Scripture are given to secure it.

In one place we are exhorted to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure;” and in another to “give the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” But if it be impossible to obtain a knowledge of our own salvation, for what purpose were these injunctions left on record? Were they written merely to tantalize us with empty and fallacious hopes, and excite our industry in a direction absolutely unavailing? Men destitute of sensibility, and completely hardened in crime, may sport with the feelings of their fellow-creatures, and amuse them with hopes which they never intend to realize: but the Father of mercies and the God of love never enjoins

any duty that is impracticable, nor inspires any expectations which he has no intention to fulfil.

On the same principle therefore on which I believe that truth, honesty, and sobriety are all practicable duties, because they are inculcated in the Bible; from the exhortations to make our calling and election sure, and to give diligence to the full assurance of hope, I am also obliged to believe that the assurance of salvation is an attainable blessing. These injunctions to seek it are a pledge of the love and veracity of the Lord, that, if we employ the diligence which he has prescribed, and in the manner which he has directed, we shall not labour in vain, nor spend our strength for nought, but shall most certainly know, if we follow on to know Him.

This conclusion is confirmed,

#### 7. By the promises of God.

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. He that believeth hath the witness in himself.” Believers are represented as possessing the first-fruits of the Spirit; as knowing their calling and election of God; as rejoicing in hope of his glory; as now the sons of God, but that it doth not yet appear what they shall be; as knowing that they are of God, and as having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And our blessed Lord himself declares, “He that

loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

From all these facts taken together; from the peculiar and appropriating nature of faith itself; from the total renovation which is experienced at conversion; from the love which Christ entertains towards his people; from the office of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of adoption; from the example of the saints; from the exhortations to seek assurance; and the promises to bestow it, we are warranted to maintain that the assurance of hope is an attainable blessing; and that it is brought within the reach of every Christian, and that it is his duty to secure it. If any man can live coolly without it, this is of itself sufficient to destroy the credit of his christianity. The matter is too momentous to be left in suspence: and the means of arriving at a clear decision, are so abundant, that every man who is really religious may by persevering diligence obtain the most full and ample certainty. The contrast betwixt a state of nature and a state of grace is so great; that, if we are doubtful whether we have actually passed from the one to the other, we have great reason to fear that this indecision haunts us, not because the boundaries are ill-defined, but because we are still on the wrong

side of the line. We cannot reap where we have not sown, nor gather where we have not scattered. If we are still carnal, and minding earthly things; we cannot possess the fruits of the Spirit, nor enjoy, in a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, the evidence of our title to heaven. The man, who is not sensible of a mighty moral revolution within him, has sad cause to conclude that he is still in his sins. To cry for peace, and clamour in such a situation for comfort, is at the peril of all the interests of his soul. Peace, obtained without an entire change of nature, is only the forerunner of everlasting ruin.

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### CHAPTER III.

ON THE MEANS BY WHICH ASSURANCE IS OBTAINED.

SINCE we have seen that assurance is attainable; it becomes a most interesting question; How is this invaluable blessing to be acquired?

The language of mortals is too feeble to express the importance of a sound scriptural answer to this inquiry. It is not to the ministers of religion, nor to our brethren in the christian church, that we must submit the grounds on which we come to a favourable decision on this incomparably momentous subject. A season of darkness and desertion may arrive, when our

heart will meditate terror, and our faces gather paleness; and when our ever-watchful enemy will endeavour to raze the foundations of hope, and strive by a thousand arts to persuade us that our peace is false, and our expectations delusive. Affliction and trouble, disease and dissolution, are approaching: and when heart and flesh are fainting and failing, and every thing around and within us is shaking and dissolving, it is no easy matter to retain that calmness and tranquility which we possessed when death and eternity seemed at a distance; and to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day." The judgment seat is before us: and it is a serious thing indeed to undergo the scrutiny of Him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, who knows what is in us, and who will bring all our thoughts and deeds under review, and render to each of us according to our works.

In a matter of such unspeakable importance, involving alike our present peace and our everlasting safety; we cannot proceed with too much caution, nor examine too carefully the nature of the evidence on which we conclude that we are Christ's, and he is ours. Building for eternity, we have need to dig deep, and lay the foundation on a rock; that, amidst all the tempests and trials that come, the fabric may stand immoveable, and our souls be kept in perfect peace.

But is this the nature of that assurance which arises from assuming, without either faith or repentance, our interest in Christ? from believing that he died for all, and that all men are redeemed, pardoned, and justified by his death? or from a consciousness that we believe the general statements of the Gospel, such as that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, and that he is the propitiation for sin? Each of these opinions will require a little consideration.

## SECTION I.

ASSURANCE IS NOT OBTAINED BY ASSUMING AN INTEREST IN CHRIST.

Some suppose that assurance is to be acquired by assuming, without either faith or repentance, our own interest in Christ; by believing that he died for all; and that all are redeemed, pardoned, and justified by his death. It will be best to state this scheme in their own words. "So long as it is received as truth, that God's forgiveness is bestowed only on those who possess some particular quality, such as faith or repentance, or sincerity—so long are men necessarily compelled to regard their possession of these qualities as the ground of their confidence before God. They may conceive that there is forgiveness in God through Christ sufficient for all men, and they may hold, that there is no confidence to be placed in any thing else;

but while they believe that this forgiveness does not actually come out to any man, until he possesses this quality of faith or repentance, they must necessarily have hope or fear before God, just according as they consider themselves possessed of these qualities or not." "Many suppose that the gospel is an *offer* of pardon to all men, and that those who believe in the offer, or who close with the offer, receive the pardon. But this statement really denies that a man is pardoned until he believes. And thus it throws his whole confidence on his having believed, or his having closed with the offer. The *offer* of the gospel does not refer to the pardon, but to the *enjoyment of the pardon.*" "If I ask what is it to believe in Christ? I receive for answer, that it is that Christ died for those who should believe on him. Why, is not this moving in a circle? Is it not absolutely nothing? Is it not a shifting sand, which affords no rest to the wearied soul? Well, but they say, after we have believed this general truth, we have a right to assume our own interest in it. And why not at first? What is the use of making two steps instead of one?" "When it is said that he (Christ) was delivered for our offences, it cannot mean that he was delivered *in order that we might offend*; it evidently means, that he was delivered *because we had offended.* And so in the last clause of the sentence, the *for* must have the same

interpretation; he was raised again not *in order that we might be justified, but because we were pardoned.*"\*

Such, in the words of one of its advocates, is the scheme proposed for attaining assurance. The theory is abundantly simple. In a matter however of such matchless importance, and where mistakes are so numerous and fatal; we are not at liberty to inquire what is most easy, or agreeable. Our business is to ascertain what bears the stamp of truth, and will abide the scrutiny of the holy and heart-searching God.

Were the premises true, that Christ has redeemed and pardoned all, the conclusion would necessarily follow, that faith and repentance are superfluous, and that every man may safely assume his interest in the Redeemer's righteousness. But are the premises true?

1. Is it true that all have an interest in Christ?

There can be no doubt of the power of the Redeemer, and the infinite worth of his righteousness. If within the whole compass of revelation there is one truth which shines with a more bright and steady lustre than another, it is the precious, the glorious fact, that Christ is an almighty Saviour, and has wrought

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\* Mr Erskine's Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend, by a Lady. pp. 14, 15, 16, 24, 63, 64.

out a complete and all-sufficient salvation. His blood cleanseth from all sin; and he is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him. And whilst the blessings of his salvation are innumerable and immense; they are presented freely to all, and pressed upon the acceptance of every child of Adam. The calls of the gospel are universal, and its offers are free. "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."

But because his power is almighty, and his obedience and sufferings are possessed of infinite value; does it therefore follow that all are redeemed by his blood, and justified freely by his grace?

The resources of nature are inexhaustible; and possess enough for the subsistence and enjoyment of all who live. But is every man endowed with health, strength, and affluence, or even with a competent share of temporal comforts? Literature and science are every where spreading around us their charms, and inviting us on to the contemplation of the wonders they disclose, and the possession of the delights which they impart. But are all rational intelligent and learned? The duties of morality and the exercises of piety are within the reach of the whole human race, and urged on the attention and observance of all. But can you say that every one is upright,

honest, devout, and faithfully fulfilling the various obligations which he owes to God and man? The power of God is almighty. He can do all things; neither is there any thing too hard for him. But can you say all are equally benefited by its exercise, and alike preserved from distress and danger, and encompassed with deliverance and safety?

And though the righteousness of Immanuel is infinite, and possessed of a value sufficient to communicate an eternity of bliss to worlds unnumbered: dare we affirm that all men are redeemed by his blood, and possessed of an interest in the blessings purchased by his death?

The Bible recognizes no interest in Christ but what is produced by the Holy Spirit, when he works faith in us, and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. For unless this is the case, why are we told that by "one Spirit are we all baptized into one body?" that God is faithful by whom we are "called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord?" that of Him are we "in Christ Jesus, who of God is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" and that Christ dwells in our "heart by faith?" 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13: i. 9, 30. Ephes. iii. 17.

If all men have an interest in Christ before they believe; if they are born with such an interest, how could the Apostle speak of some who were in Christ

before him? of our being by nature the branches of a wild olive-tree, and by faith grafted into a good olive-tree? and why did Christ say, “if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered?” Can a false unfruitful professor be more completely separated from Christ after this ejection, than he was by nature? Rom. xvi. 7; xi. 23, 24. John xv. 6.

If all men have an interest in Christ by birth; why was the Gospel revealed, and ordered to be preached, to compel men to come in to Christ? and how could any adults be said to receive Christ, and put him on? How could we be told that before we believe, we are shut up under the law? that we are of the works of the law, and under a curse? without Christ, having no hope? And what could the Apostle mean by saying, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” If all alike have an interest in Christ, a believer could not find a better companion than an infidel; and Christ and Belial must for years be dwelling very peaceably together in the hearts of millions. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15; 1 Cor. vi. 15—17; Gal. iii. 10; Ephes. ii. 12.

And whilst the Bible informs us, that no man is in Christ until he believes; it also most distinctly teaches

us, that, whenever this interest is produced, the man is delivered from the curse of the law, reconciled to God, possessed of a right to heaven, and a title to all the riches of grace and the treasures of glory. He is a new creature. He brings forth much fruit. He lives by faith. He walks with God. He is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He is blessed with the first fruits of the Spirit. He dwells in God, and God in him. He shall never come into condemnation, but have everlasting life. That this is the very least that is implied by having an interest in Christ, is manifest from such Scriptures as the following. Gal. ii. 20; iii. 13, 29; Rev. v. 9; Col. i. 12, 13, 21, 22; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. ii. 20; John xv. 5; Rom. vi. 22, viii. 1, 23.

But dare we say, either of the world at large, or of the professors of religion in a body, that they are crucified with Christ? living by faith on the Son of God? and followers of him as dear children? Dare we say that their body is dead because of sin, and their spirit is life because of righteousness? that they have their conversation in heaven, and their fruit unto holiness? that they are the heirs of eternal life; and shall never perish, nor come into condemnation? that they shall overcome, and inherit all things?

While the world lies in wickedness, and the broad road is crowded, we dare not make such assertions. But unless, in the face of all that denounces the con-

demnation and ruin of the impenitent and unbelieving, we are prepared to maintain their safety, we cannot in the scriptural sense of the terms admit that all are redeemed and interested in Christ. The righteousness of Christ is infinite, and the calls and invitations of the gospel are addressed indiscriminately to all: but till he actually believe in Christ, no man is interested in him: and every man who has an interest in him, is sanctified, and shall most certainly be kept by his power through faith unto salvation.

And if we dare not say that all are interested in Christ; are we warranted to affirm,

2. That all men in their natural state are justified, or even pardoned?

This is repeatedly asserted in the broadest and most unequivocal terms: and to give force to the averment, we are informed that “the *offer* of the Gospel does not refer to the pardon, but to *the enjoyment of the pardon.*” “Pardon,” we are elsewhere told by the same author, “is another name for holy compassion:” it is God in Christ reconciling the world to himself:” “it is a manifestation of the Divine character in Christ:” “the pardon truly is Jesus Christ.”\*

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\* Erskine on the Fulness and Freeness of the Gospel. pp. 122, 124, 168, 172.

In other cases there is a wide difference betwixt an offer and the enjoyment of the offered favour. The offer of a sum of money is a very different thing from its possession. The person who offers it, may change his mind, or become unable to fulfil his generous intentions. Now, are we equally benefited by his offer, whether his money reach us or not? An offer is not only different from the enjoyment of the thing offered, but even from a gift, a legacy, or a pardon. If these are entrusted to faithful men; they will with equal certainty be put into our hands, whether we know or are ignorant of their existence, whether we believe or discredit the report of their reality.

And is the case different with respect to the Gospel? Do all who hear the gospel actually enjoy the pardon which it proclaims? The promise "ask, and ye shall receive;" is certainly an offer of the blessings to be sought in prayer. But at the very time that the Bible says, "ye have not, because ye ask not:" are we to believe, whether this offer is accepted or rejected, that it gives us equally the enjoyment of the blessings which we are encouraged to supplicate? And are all men, whether they embrace or refuse the offers of the gospel, alike blessed with the remission of their sins and acceptance with God? The guests, who were bidden, had undoubtedly an offer of the supper. But though they declined the invitation; from the mere circumstance of having been invited,

did they actually enjoy all the delights of the entertainment; even though the king said, and faithfully kept his word, that none of those men who were bidden should taste of his supper? By its coming into the world, the world certainly had an offer of light. By coming to his own, his own surely had an offer of Christ. Those to whom he stretched out his hands all day; to whom Wisdom cried aloud; to whom the Apostles preached the Gospel, and declared that to them the word of salvation was sent; and those with whom God reasoned and remonstrated, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you: all these most assuredly received at least an offer of pardon. But when his own did not receive Christ; when the world was condemned for preferring the darkness to the light; when the hearers of the Apostles rejected the counsel of God against themselves; and when God in anger declared, Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh: dare we say that they enjoyed either pardon or any other spiritual blessing?

The gospel contains the offer of far more than pardon. It contains the offer of Christ, of God, of the

Holy Spirit, of all the riches of grace, and glories of heaven. If therefore the mere offer of the gospel secures the enjoyment of pardon; why should this observation be limited to pardon? What is to prevent its including all the blessings which this dispensation contains for time and eternity? Why this arbitrary and capricious distinction? Why stop at the threshold, and hesitate boldly to enter in and take possession of the palace? Why scruple to affirm at once universal salvation; and to tell the world that all who have the offer of the gospel, actually enjoy God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit; and are sanctified, and saved, and heirs of eternal life?

But to say no more about the identity of an offer with the enjoyment of the offered benefit, we must go on, and observe that the Scriptures inform us that when sin is forgiven, God's anger is turned away, and he comforts us. When sin is forgiven, it is blotted out; it is forgotten; it is cast into the depths of the sea; the righteousness of Christ is imputed; spiritual blessings are imparted; and eternal salvation invariably follows. Isa. xii. 1, i. 18, xliv. 22; Psalm xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 6—8; Ephes. i. 7.

Now, if every sin except unbelief is forgiven before we repent and believe, and even before we were born; why do the saints so fervently implore the remission of their iniquities, and so earnestly deprecate the imputation of their offences? why do the sacred

writers so powerfully remonstrate against every transgression of the Divine law, and so sedulously guard believers against all manner of evil?

If it is said that all sin is forgiven except unbelief, or the sin of rejecting the gospel: it must be remembered that unbelief is only one sin. In that case we never could have met with the word "sins" in the New Testament. Christ would not have said, "if ye believe not, ye shall die in your sins." We should not have read of some men's "sins" going before hand into judgment, and of some whom they follow after. Believers would have been warned against no sin at all; and unbelievers would have been admonished only to resist unbelief.

If therefore all sin except unbelief is pardoned, why are believers and unbelievers alike anxiously exhorted to avoid every sin forbidden in the Decalogue? Why is the wrath of God revealed against *all* unrighteousness and ungodliness of men? Why are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation? And why is the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together beneath the burden of the Divine displeasure at the sins of men?

Shall we be told that men are ignorant of their privilege? that few know that they are pardoned, and are able to plead their privilege; and therefore the

Divine displeasure continues, and their punishment goes on?

In reply we must say that though they are ignorant of their pardon, God must know it. And what would we think of the magistrate, who, after he knew that the prisoner had obtained his sovereign's free pardon, should order his punishment to proceed, merely because the prisoner was ignorant of the fact? And are we to suppose, after our pardon has not only been purchased by our Redeemer, but even granted and proclaimed by the Judge of all the earth; that he himself, merely because they are ignorant of the fact, will subject multitudes to temporal and eternal misery?

Nothing can be more opposite than grace and nature, love and wrath. Now, if all men are redeemed and pardoned; instead of representing all by nature as being in a state of grace, reconciled to God, and blessed with the remission of sins; why does the Bible declare that by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins; of the works of the law, and under a curse? Why did the Apostles never address their audiences as redeemed and pardoned; and argue with them concerning their interest in the love of God, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Why did they uniformly tell the carnal and unconverted, that they were without God and without hope; and reason with them of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to

come? Why, from the beginning to the end of the sacred volume; instead of finding a single instance in which the graceless and hardened are described as redeemed and pardoned, are they without one exception pronounced stout-hearted, and far from righteousness, the children of disobedience and of wrath?

Since the Scriptures so clearly and expressly exclude the idea of universal pardon; very little need be said to expose the notion of universal justification. Justification is far more than the mere remission of sin, and deliverance from condemnation. This is the accepting of us as righteous in the sight of God, and entitling us to the enjoyment of his presence and favour.

But if we are destitute of the first, it is as impossible that we can possess the last; as that a man who is unable to climb a mountain, is capable of finding his way to another planet. Besides the Bible so frequently connects justification with salvation; that if all were justified, all must be infallibly saved: Rom. v. 8—10, viii. 30. But how can we assert the doctrine of universal salvation, when we are told; that wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat? and are assured that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel?

We are now prepared to inquire,

3. Are faith and repentance unnecessary for the attainment of pardon and justification; and is every man entitled to assume his own interest in Christ without repenting, or believing the gospel?

If it could have been proved that all are redeemed and pardoned, then we must at once have acknowledged that faith and repentance are superfluous, and that every man may without them safely assume his interest in Christ. But since we have no evidence that all are redeemed and pardoned; faith and repentance may still retain their place, and no man may be entitled to assume his interest in Christ till he actually believe on him.

The necessity of faith and repentance, in order to the remission of sin and the possession of an interest in the righteousness of Christ, appears to be inculcated in Scripture, in a variety of forms, and with uncommon clearness and force. But though this truth seems to stare us in the face on every page of the sacred volume; is it possible that this is a complete delusion, and that the inspired writers never intended to assert or insinuate that faith and repentance have the slightest connection with the forgiveness of sins, and an interest in Christ? Though the gospel is preached for the obedience of faith; though in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; though salvation is of faith that it might be by grace; though Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every

one that believeth; though his righteousness shall be imputed to us if we believe; though we are told, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins; that he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned: Are we after all to conclude that faith is needless for securing the benefits of the Redeemer's death; and that unbelievers possess the same interest as believers in his righteousness? When the Apostle says there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus; this implies that condemnation rests on all who are out of him. When Christ says I am the way, and the truth, and the life; this is the same as if he had said, I am the only way, and the truth, and the life. And when we are told that he that believeth shall receive remission of sins; that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth; and that his righteousness shall be imputed to us if we believe: what else can this mean than that believers alone have remission of sins; and that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to none, except those who believe? And yet in the face of these plain and solemn averments, shall it be maintained that the infidel has the same part as the believer in the righteousness of the Son of God? Acts x. 43; Rom. iv. 24, x. 4.

When the Baptist and his blessed Master preached the doctrine of repentance; when the Apostles went

out, and preached that men should repent; when God commandeth all men every where to repent; when we hear of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; when we are informed that he who covereth his sins shall not prosper, but that whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy; when the whole Bible is replete with the kindest encouragements to the penitent, and the most tremendous denunciations against the careless and the hardened; shall we have the presumption to affirm that repentance has no connection with the remission of sin, and that the impenitent are as completely pardoned as the penitent? Prov. xxviii. 13; 1 Kings viii. 30—50; Isa. lv. 7, i. 20; Luke xiii. 1—5.

Faith and repentance must either be possessed of some place, and of some importance, under the gospel or they must be possessed of none. If they occupy no place and possess no importance; then why are they, in scripture, inculcated with such frequency and force? Why is such a transcendent value ascribed to them; as to represent them as constituting the very turning point betwixt grace and nature, salvation, and perdition? Mark xvi. 26. Luke xiii. 1—5.

But if they retain a place and serve any purpose under this dispensation of mercy, they must be exercised either before or after our sins are forgiven and we are interested in Christ. If their exercise is placed before we are pardoned and interested in Christ: then

the question is decided. We have obtained all for which we are contending, the priority of faith and repentance to our being pardoned and justified. But if they are of no use till after we are pardoned and justified: then, what service can they render at all? If, according to the theory under consideration, all our guilt was blotted out before we were born; we can have no sin to deplore. Instead of sorrow and mourning, exultation and gladness would be more suitable to our situation: and when the angels are rejoicing over our felicity, it would ill become us to sadden the scene with our tears and lamentations. And if we have no sin to repent of; are we to repent of the high honour to which we are raised, and the boundless happiness to which we are introduced?

If our pardon and justification precede faith and repentance; why are faith and repentance uniformly represented as previously necessary to our being forgiven and accepted? Why are we commanded to repent and be converted that our sins may be blotted out? to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins? Why must the gospel be preached to open the eyes of men, "and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ? Why did Jesus declare that he came not to call the "righteous but

sinner to repentance?" Why is there no joy in heaven over the sinner until he repents? Why was Simon Magus exhorted to repent of his wickedness, and pray God, if peradventure the thought of his heart might be forgiven him? Why are we told that, "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us: but that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?" What is the meaning of all this language, if pardon precedes repentance? If pardon is prior to repentance; why, instead of being exhorted, in a single instance, to repent because we are forgiven; are we enjoined without one exception to confess, repent, and forsake our sins, in order that we may be forgiven? Why are we required to pray for remission; and assured that the sin against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable, because those who commit it cannot be renewed to repentance? Acts ii. 38; iii. 19; xxvi. 18; viii. 22: Mat. ix. 13: Luke xv. 10: 1 John i. 8, 9: Heb. vi. 4—6.

If we are pardoned and justified before we believe; why is every form of expression, which can denote priority, employed to express the necessity of faith previously to our being pardoned and justified? When sin is blotted out, righteousness is imputed. Psalm xxxii. 1, 2, compared with Romans iv. 6—8. But to whom is this righteousness imputed? To believers, or unbelievers? To believers most undoubtedly.

“The righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ is unto all, and upon all them that believe.” Was their justification past when Christ rose from the dead? If it was; why did the Apostle, when writing long after that event, say? “It is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.” Why did he add? “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for ours also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.” Do we believe because we are justified? No: the scripture doctrine is, “We have believed that we might be justified.” It is in effectual calling that the Holy Spirit works faith in us. But are any justified before they are called? No: unless they are likewise glorified before they are called. For the Apostle says, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Finding that such is the invariable language of the sacred writings; we certainly are warranted to maintain that faith must precede justification and the forgiveness of sin. Rom. iii. 22—30; iv. 23, 24; viii. 30: Gal. ii. 16: 1 Cor. vi. 11: Tit. iii. 5—7.

Some may be disposed to ask, if we shall leave this topic without noticing the supposed demonstration from Rom. iv. 25, that justification or at least pardon

goes before faith? “What is the import of the expression ‘raised again for our justification?’ Does it mean, raised again in order that we may be justified? It may appear at first sight to have this meaning, but it is not the true meaning, as a moment’s consideration will discover. The meaning of the preposition *for* here, must be determined by its meaning in the first clause of the sentence. The whole sentence is ‘who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.’ Now, when it is said he ‘was delivered for our offences,’ it cannot mean that he was delivered *in order that we might offend*; it evidently means, that he was delivered *because we had offended*. And so in the last clause of the sentence, the *for* must have the same interpretation; he was raised again not *in order that we might be justified*, but *because we were pardoned.*” \*

This paragraph is a complete specimen of the critical powers of its author, and its tendency is to lead the reader to suppose that it was the Apostle’s design to contrast “offences” with “pardon.” If any writer really believes that the original word denotes pardon; his ignorance of Greek disqualifies him from pronouncing any opinion upon the meaning of any thing written in that language. But if, whilst he knows

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\* Erskine’s Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters,  
pp. 63, 64.

that the word denotes "justification," he wishes to make the merely English reader believe that it signifies "pardon;" this betrays such a want of fairness as to render his assertions unworthy of the slightest attention.

If we must retain, through a whole verse, the meaning which a word has in one clause; what sense are we to make of such passages as John i. 10, where the same word has no less than three different significations? "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Here "world" denotes the earth, the creation, and the inhabitants of the earth.

If we are to interpret the meaning of "for" in the one clause, by the meaning which it has in the other; why not go farther, and explain the whole of the one clause, by the whole of the other? Now, is this critic prepared either to translate the verse, "Who was delivered because he had made us to offend; and raised again because he had justified us?" or to render it, "Who was delivered because we had offended, and raised again because we had secured our own justification?"

But unless we are disposed to adopt such a version, we may safely admit that Christ was delivered to expiate our offences, and that the expiation was finished at his death; without asserting that all were justified at his resurrection. Though his atonement was com-

pleted at his death, the work of justifying may notwithstanding be carried on till time shall be no longer. And unless this is the case, how could the Apostle have, in the verse immediately preceding, represented justification as posterior to faith, saying, "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it," the righteousness of Christ, "was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it *shall* be imputed, *if we believe* on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead?" If all were justified, for it must be remembered that the word in question signifies justification and not pardon; why is it affirmed that he was exalted to give repentance and remission of sin? Why are faith and repentance, as we have just now seen, uniformly declared to precede pardon and justification? And, since justification infallibly ensures eternal life; if all were justified at his resurrection, *why do any perish?* Rom. v. 8—10, viii. 30—34.

We must now take leave of this subject, by saying that, if faith and repentance retain a place under the gospel; and are declared by Him in whose hands are our life and breath, and whose are all our ways, to precede the forgiveness of sin, and our acceptance with God; if He who holds the keys of hell and of death, and who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens; if He has assured us that except we repent we shall perish, and that he that believeth not shall not see life: it betrays no ordinary degree of

hardihood, and is accompanied by no common peril, to tell the guilty, blinded, perverse, and perishing children of men; that, notwithstanding all that He has said, they shall be saved without either faith or repentance, if they will only assume their interest in Christ, believe that they are safe, and go on rejoicing in their security. In every age, multitudes have been striving to evade the obligation to repent to the acknowledgment of the truth, and to discover some substitute for faith in the Son of God. This is the first time, that any man under the profession of a regard to the honour of the Redeemer, gravely recommended an assumption of an interest in his righteousness, as a substitute for faith in his person and work. Such a scheme is what they have been long seeking in vain: and when they hear it proposed under a profession of superior zeal for religion, they will hail it with delight, and embrace it with avidity.

But is an assumption of an interest in Christ, the process which the Scriptures point out for securing the blessings purchased by his death? Is this what they intend by the work of God? Is this what is understood by striving to enter in at the strait gate, and taking the kingdom of heaven by violence? Is it thus that we are to win Christ and be found in him? Is this assumption the work of God; and is nothing less sufficient to produce it, than the mighty power which was exerted in raising Christ from the dead?

If we are to trust the scriptural statements of the manner in which a soul is brought into a saving relation to the Lord Jesus Christ; we must without hesitation maintain that a man may live and die, clinging tenaciously to this assumption, and yet be destitute of either part or lot in the gospel.

## SECTION II.

ASSURANCE DOES NOT CONSIST IN A CONSCIOUSNESS THAT WE BELIEVE  
THE GENERAL STATEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL.

Many imagine that our consciousness that we believe the gospel report, is sufficient to assure us of our own salvation. They are accustomed to reason as follows. "The Bible tells us, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life; that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost; that he died for the ungodly, and is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

"Now, can you be at any loss to discover whether you believe or disbelieve these declarations? When a man informs you that your deceased friend has appointed you his heir; and bequeathed to you a legacy of a thousand a year: are you unable to determine whether or not you credit this intelligence? And

with the Scriptures of truth in your hands, affirming that Christ is the propitiation for sin, and the Saviour of the world; can any thing be easier than to decide whether or not you believe their announcements?

“ If you believe them, you are safe. The word of that God who said, ‘ He that believeth shall be saved,’ is pledged for your security. You may go on your way rejoicing: for till you enter the gates of glory, you never can obtain more firm and infallible evidence for your everlasting happiness. But if whilst you admit that God has loved the world, and Christ has died for the ungodly; you doubt if God loves you, and Christ has died for you, you make God a liar. For what else than a charge of falsehood against God can be the consequence of acknowledging that you are an inhabitant of the world, and that you are ungodly; and yet, though God says he loves the world, and Christ died for the ungodly, denying that he loves you, and gave Christ to die for you?”

This is what is called assurance from the direct act of faith; from the belief of what God has revealed in his word, independently of all evidence from a work of grace in the heart. Those who plead for this assurance, are hostile to that comfort which is derived from what is called the reflex act of faith, or sanctification. They imagine that the latter is in its own nature changeable, uncertain, and of a legal tendency: but they consider the former as clear, strong, steady,

and what is calculated to destroy every self-righteous bias.

This theory proceeds upon the supposition, that the essence of saving faith consists in believing the general declarations of the gospel, such as that Christ is the Saviour of the world and the propitiation for sin, or our own Saviour ; and that we are to discover the existence of this belief, by our consciousness, or the operations of our own minds.

If the first of these notions were correct, there could be little occasion to dispute about the second. If the essence of saving faith consist in merely believing such propositions as that Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, that he died for the ungodly ; or that he died for us : in other words, if all were real Christians who simply believe these things ; then we should not hesitate to allow that our consciousness is a sufficient evidence of our faith. For no man in his sound judgment can be at a loss to recount the articles of his creed, or unable to tell us what he believes. But if we cannot grant that such is the essence of saving faith, we must pause before we concede that consciousness is either the only or a sufficient proof of the presence of such a faith.

Now, we are unable to grant that a bare assent to the truth, or a mere belief of the doctrines of Christianity, is saving faith. There can be no faith without such a belief. " All Scripture is given by inspiration

of God." It is all founded on the same authority ; directed to the same blessed ends ; and alike entitled to our instant and absolute confidence. On the same principle, therefore, on which we are informed, that, whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all : we are obliged to affirm, that, whosoever shall acknowledge the truth of the whole word of God, with the exception of one article, has no faith whatever, but is an unbeliever. But still, whilst we admit the importance of every proposition in the sacred volume, and strenuously contend for the necessity of believing all that it contains ; we cannot consent to the opinion that saving faith consists in merely believing the doctrines of the gospel, or assenting to the truth of even all that the Bible reveals. This belief is widely different from saving faith in its object, nature, origin, and effects.

1. This belief differs from saving faith in its object.

To prevent mistakes respecting the object of faith, and convey clear and distinct ideas of the subject ; it is described in Scripture, both in direct terms and by figurative representations. But in whatever form the subject is introduced, it is invariably implied, that faith does not terminate upon any doctrinal propositions, but upon Christ and his work. It employs the calls, invitations, and promises of the gospel, to unite the soul to Jesus, and give the believer an interest

in his righteousness. Never did the Apostles, either in their sermons or epistles exhort the unconverted to believe that God loved them, that Christ died for them ; nor assert that, by simply believing the truths which were stated, they should be saved. They invariably held up Christ and his work as the ultimate object of faith, and enjoined their hearers to believe on him. When the faith of believers is mentioned, it is said to be faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. “ The verb and the noun in question,” believe and faith, “ occur upwards of fifty times in the New Testament, with the preposition *εἰς* (on) governing the object of them ; and in not one of these instances is that object a proposition to be believed ; whereas the same words occur nineteen times, construed with the conjunction *ὅτι* (that) and in all these cases the object is a proposition either expressed or plainly and definitively referred to. The one form runs thus, Believe *on* God, *on* me, *on* my name, *on* the Son of God, &c. the other runs, Believe *that* I came forth from God, *that* thou hast sent me, *that* Jesus is the Christ, &c.”\* But to believe on a person, is quite a different thing from believing a doctrinal truth. To believe a doctrine is merely to be convinced of its reality. To believe on Christ is to trust in him for our own salvation, and to rest on him for all the blessed purposes for which he is offered.

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\* The Old Doctrine of Faith, by the Rev. James Carlile, p. 48.

To believe that Jesus is the Messiah, or the Son of God is merely to be persuaded of the truth of these facts ; but this persuasion is not necessarily connected with any exercise of the heart, nor reliance on him for our own salvation, which the Scriptures represent as essential to faith.

This conclusion is confirmed by the figures employed to illustrate the nature of faith. It is often represented by looking to Christ, by turning to him, coming to him, fleeing to him. Now, is it credible that words so strongly expressive of activity, denote no more than a passive belief that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. When faith is described by entering into the ark ; looking at the brazen serpent ; fleeing for protection to the city of refuge : can we seriously suppose that all this means no more, than our coolly standing still where we are, and believing that we are already safe, the objects of Divine love, and redeemed by the blood of Christ ? Unbelief, which is the opposite of faith, does not consist in doubting our own safety, or that Christ died for us ; but in denying the record which God has given concerning him and refusing to trust in him for our own salvation.

It is true that the Scriptures declare, that “ whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” But then, in the judgment of Mr Scott,\* this means,

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\* Works Vol. I. p. 461.  
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that "His faith is the effect and evidence of his regeneration, and not the *cause* of it. This is generally allowed to be the order of construction, where he says "Every one that loveth is born of God; and every one that doeth righteousness is born of God. And by what rule do we reverse it when speaking of *faith*?"

Granting, however, that this language was intended to describe the nature of faith; to any man who connects it with the other scriptural accounts of that grace, and remembers that faith is the gift of God, that it leads its possessor to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to live in heaven and have his conversation there; these words of the Apostle can create no difficulty nor confusion. He immediately explains and limits his meaning, and places it beyond the possibility of mistake or doubt: by adding, that he who possesses this faith, "is born of God;" and that this faith includes love in its very essence, and manifests its reality both by love to God and the brethren. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that over-

cometh the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 1—4. But will any man deliberately affirm, that the chief rulers who believed on Christ, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; that Judas, who declared that he had sinned in that he had betrayed the innocent blood: were born of God, loved his people, kept his commandments, and overcame the world? Were the devils, who knew who he was, born of God? John iii. 42. Luke iv. 41.

The Apostle in fact teaches us that faith and regeneration are correlatives; and that he who is unregenerate and destitute of love to God and the brethren, is an unbeliever.

2. This belief differs widely from saving faith in its nature.

If there were no dead faith; if all faith were alike; if the same name were never applied to things apparently similar, but in reality essentially different; in other words, were there only one kind of faith, and no other could exist: then every man, who possesses any thing which passes by the name of faith, would be a believer. No matter whether it were a bare belief of the truth, or a belief of it with the heart; he would in either case be a believer, and perfectly safe for eternity.

But when in every other case we find that there is

an immense difference betwixt the substance and the shadow, betwixt the form and the power: dare we say that all faith is alike; and that, if the creed be correct we need not inquire after the state of the heart? When we read of some who have a name that they live, but are dead; of some whose hearts were far from God, though they approached him daily as a people that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of God; and of others who deceive themselves by being hearers of the word, without doing its work; are we to suppose that there is no false nor spurious faith; and that every thing which bears this name is equally profitable and precious? When we hear of a faith which is dead being alone; of some that believed, but Jesus would not commit himself unto them; of a distinction betwixt believing, and being his disciples indeed; of some who held the truth in unrighteousness; of Simon Magus who believed, while he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; and are told that the devils believe and tremble: we dare not assert that all faith is alike, and that our state is safe because we believe that Jesus died for the ungodly. Though the gospel is addressed indiscriminately to all, and faith includes a belief of what it reveals; the essence of saving faith no more consists in believing its general statements, or that we are safe, or that Christ died for us; than the essence of obedience consists in believing that we have fulfilled the

righteousness of the law, or that its commands and threatenings are addressed to us individually. Without believing that we are comprehended both in the precepts and penalties of the law, we will not submit to its authority, nor dread its denunciations. And though in saving faith there is uniformly a belief of the general and precious invitations of the glorious gospel; faith no more stops there, than obedience confines itself to the belief of the universal extent and the equitable character of the law. They who obey the law regard its precepts concerning all things to be right; and cordially comply with its requisitions. And in the faith that saves the soul, there is not only a belief of the gospel as true, but an admiration of the grace which it reveals, a cordial acceptance of the salvation which it contains, and a firm and grateful reliance on the righteousness of Him who, though he knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Did this fact require additional confirmation, it would be found in the representations which the Scriptures give of the nature of saving faith. It is described by hearing, hearkening to, yielding to, and obeying the gospel. It is declared to be unfeigned, to be a believing with the heart; with all the heart; to be a receiving the things freely given of God; a receiving the truth in love; a receiving of the word with gladness; a receiving of Christ; a putting on of the

Lord Jesus Christ; a taking hold of his strength; an eating of his flesh, and a drinking of his blood. And when in these, and in almost every description of faith, we find the exercise of the affections, or the reliance of the heart on the glorious Redeemer included: is it warrantable to affirm, that faith is a mere belief of the doctrines of Christianity, or a bare assent to the truth of the gospel?

I say in almost every description of faith: for sometimes its nature is stated more concisely; and the exercise of the heart, as in that passage which has been lately quoted, 1 John v. 1, is not expressly mentioned. But even in such cases, though the exercise of the heart is not especially noticed, it is unquestionably understood. Sometimes the same individual has a number of names: as Coniah, Jeconiah, and Jehoiachin. But because these are not all enumerated, in any one passage, where the father of Salathiel is introduced; does it therefore follow that they do not all belong to him? The attributes of God are mentioned separately. But because the whole are not repeated every time that any one of them is made the subject of contemplation: are we to infer that the others are either denied or undervalued? And after the inspired penmen, have in different parts of their writings, so distinctly stated the various elements which enter into the nature of faith; are we at liberty to conclude, because the whole of these qualities are not

enumerated every time that faith is named; that it was their intention to exclude every thing from its nature except the property which they at that particular moment are illustrating? Writing under the influence of the same Spirit, every sentence which they have recorded is possessed of the same authority. However widely the description of the various ingredients in the nature of faith may be scattered over the Holy Scriptures; every principle which is enumerated, is as essential to its nature, and as necessary to give us a full and perfect idea of its character; as if the Holy Spirit had brought them all into one chapter or verse, and subjected the whole to our view at a single glance.

When, therefore, we so frequently find saving faith declared to be unfeigned, to be with the heart, and with all the heart: we are compelled to affirm that these qualities are essential to its existence; and that their presence is taken for granted, even in those accounts of its nature where they are not expressly mentioned.

3. This belief differs widely from saving faith in its origin.

Saving faith is the gift of God. Man neither possesses it naturally, nor can produce it by his own powers. For faith is a spiritual principle: and man by nature is carnal. He is sensual not having the Spirit. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit

of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot please God. But when faith is so precious in the sight of God; if man either possessed it in his natural condition, or could acquire it for himself, how could it be said that he cannot please God?

Being utterly unable to acquire it for himself, it is declared to be the gift of God, to be the effect of his operation. Coming to Christ is a phrase descriptive of believing on him. But Jesus says "No man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father." It is also called a gift of the Spirit; and we are told that no man can even call Christ Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

But to believe speculatively that Jesus is the Christ, or assent to the truths of the gospel; is no more beyond the reach of our natural powers, than to believe the discoveries of Science, or assent to the conclusions of Arithmetic. Multitudes believe the doctrines of Christianity on the authority of their parents and teachers. They never doubt them. They are firmly persuaded of their reality; while all along they are strangers to their saving and transforming power. Such was the faith of the apostates, heretics, and temporary professors mentioned in Scripture, who endured for a while, and afterwards fell away. John vi. 66. Heb. vi. 4—8. 1 John ii. 19

But can we say that their faith was the gift of the Spirit? that it was wrought in them by God? and revealed unto them by our Father in heaven. Mat. xvi. 15—17. xi. 25. The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable. If it had been implanted in the heart by his hand; however much tried and shaken, it would not have failed, but have nobly surmounted all opposition, and have endured unto the end. Luke xvi. 31, 32. John iv. 12, 14: vi. 47—55.

4. This belief differs widely from saving faith in its effects.

Saving faith uniformly purifies the heart and works by love. It humbles its possessor, and inspires him with lowly ideas of his own attainments and services. It creates a lively solicitude for the improvement and welfare of all mankind, and endears the Redeemer to the soul. They who savingly believe are born of God: they are the children of God, and the heirs of promise. The least degree of this faith ensures eternal life. Without distinction betwixt weak, or strong faith, the word is passed, "He that believeth shall be saved." And therefore though the faith of Peter was mixed with doubts and sad misgivings; since it was real, it was not allowed to fail.

But can we ascribe such effects as these to a mere assent to the truth? to a belief of the general doctrines of the gospel? to the conviction that Christ is the

Son of God, and the Saviour of the world? As we denominate a picture from its original, and give the man the name of what he professes, though destitute of its reality: those who possess such a persuasion are, both in common language and in Scripture, designated believers. But can we truly say of such men that they are sanctified through the truth? that to them Christ is precious? that they are born of God? that God dwells in them and they in him? that they live by faith, and walk with God? that they are partakers of the divine nature, and shall inherit eternal life?

Compared with the faith of the operation of God, it is not faith at all; and no more entitled to that name, than the picture of the tree can properly be called an oak, or his statue can be styled the king. Such a faith is unprofitable and vain. It cannot sanctify the nature, and therefore is unable to save the soul. It cannot subdue our iniquities, and therefore it is incapable of giving spiritual life to our hearts. It cannot introduce us to the exercises and enjoyments of grace; and must therefore be utterly unfit to carry us into the world of glory.

Such a feigned and spurious faith may be connected with much religious knowledge as well as moral decorum. As Mr Scott observes "A dead corpse may have every limb, organ, and vessel, in exact order and proportion: while a living man may want an eye, a

leg, or hand, or be otherwise mutilated, defective, and ill proportioned." Some real christians are very deficient in their information, whilst many ungodly men are masters of the whole system of revelation. But whatever truth the former know, they have received it in love, and are solicitous to be instructed fully in the whole will of God. But while the latter can define every doctrine in the Bible, and assent to the truth of all that it reveals; they are strangers to the faith that saves the soul. They hold the truth; but it is in unrighteousness. They believe; but, like Simon the Sorcerer, their hearts are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. They have faith: but they want works. And "faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." If we are not possessed of a new nature; we may subscribe to the truth of every syllable which the Bible contains, and yet be eternally undone. For unless we are born again, believe what we will, we are of our father the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

Enough, I trust, has been said, to expose the notion that saving faith consists in a mere assent to the truths of christianity. It differs from such an assent in every

important and leading characteristic. It differs from it in its object, its nature, origin, and effects.

And if the foundation fail, there is no necessity for spending time to bring down the superstructure. It will fall of its own accord. If saving faith does not consist in a speculative belief of the doctrines of the gospel: no genuine assurance can be derived from a consciousness that we possess such a belief. Indeed the testimony of consciousness, when unsupported by other evidence, is at all times a very suspicious proof either of a man's state or character. When the mind is enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and the heart purified by grace; the testimony of our consciousness to this blessed and glorious transformation, is invaluable. It is in this happy situation that the Holy Spirit gives his attestation to the reality of our regeneration. It is then that he bears witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God.

But when separated from the enlightening and renovating work of the Holy Spirit, the testimony of consciousness is merely an index of our own opinion and belief. It proves what notion we entertain of ourselves; but it affords no test of our moral character or religious state. At some happy moments, when the Holy Ghost shines into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, and unfold to us the sincerity of our

own faith and love ; we are able to realize our union to the Redeemer, and exult in the anticipation of our everlasting presence with him in the world of purity and peace. Our hearts condemn us not ; and we have confidence before him. But if the Spirit of all grace withdraw the light of his countenance, and suspend the heart-cheering supplies of his power and love ; we are filled with alarm and trouble, with perplexity and darkness.

Real christians are habitually humble diffident and cautious. They have the worm-wood and gall of a natural condition still in remembrance : and they well know the worth of the object at stake. But of all the men whom the earth carries, none are more bold, confident and secure than the graceless and ungodly. Strangers to the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and destitute alike of spiritual experience and discernment ; they are totally unable to distinguish the things that differ. They cannot tell what are the circumstances which characterize a state of nature, nor what are those which indicate a state of grace. A man ignorant of letters is unable to determine whether the paper with which he is presented, is a post-bill or an excise document. To the blind, all colours are alike. And a man who never was brought under the power of religion, cannot from his personal knowledge perceive the contrast betwixt the way of peace and the way of death ; and will advance with as much alacrity on the

road to destruction, as if he had taken the path to everlasting bliss.

Opposite causes frequently produce effects very similar in appearance. The lethargy of disease is as profound as the slumber of health. The sleep of death is more unbroken than the repose of the living. The peace of the seared conscience is more undisturbed than the rest of the heart which has been purged by the blood of sprinkling. From his past falls and remaining imperfections, the believer learns not to be high-minded, but to fear; and the stirrings of corruption and the assaults of Satan often fill him with apprehensions and keep him at all times humble and watchful. But dead in tresspasses and sins, how can the graceless be disquieted by the deceitfulness of their hearts, or harassed and dismayed by the onsets of Satan? As Boston says somewhere, "Many a groan is heard from the sick-bed, but none from the grave." Many a fear distracts the heart of the contrite: but no complaint escapes from the lips, nor any uneasiness nor alarm saddens the soul of the carnal. All is buried in the reign of darkness, and subjected to the silence and insensibility of death.

If therefore you leave men to decide their eternal condition by their consciousness, the first will always keep foremost; the basest will fancy that they stand highest in the divine esteem; and the brightest of the

celestial crowns would be seized by those, whom the righteous Judge will consign to endless perdition. Saul was conscious that he had kept the commandment of the Lord, when returning from its violation. There is a generation clean in their own eyes, while they are not washed from their iniquity. Who ever were more conscious of their own freedom than the Jews, when in bondage to their own lusts and passions? Or who ever possessed a stronger consciousness of his own worth than the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not like other men, nor the Publican who went down to his house justified, while he himself was condemned?

This blind boldness and fatal presumption last through life, and go down with the graceless to the grave. They feed on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned them aside, they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in our right hand? They have no bands in their death: and nothing breaks the dreadful spell by which they are bound, till they are encompassed with the horrors of a ruined eternity. Mat. vii. 21—23.

Let every reader who values his own present spiritual prosperity and everlasting welfare, guard against this rock on which others have made shipwreck; and never rest till he obtain better evidence than that furnished by his own opinion or belief of his own in-

terest in Christ, and of his right through him to everlasting life.

Much of the mischief which we have cause to deplore, has arisen from confounding the warrant to believe on Christ, with the evidence that we are believers. Our warrant to believe is the word of God. This extends to the whole human race. The universal calls and the free offers of the gospel, are an ample encouragement and an absolute authority to every child of Adam, to go to Christ, and believe on him for his own salvation. What more can the vilest and most worthless of the species desire, than the declaration that the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost; the commandment, addressed without distinction to all to believe on his name; and the positive promise, that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life?

These invitations are directed indiscriminately to all, and form a warrant to every man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by such general invitations as these that hope is first raised in the guilty breast, and the trembling steps of the rebellious wanderer are turned into the way of peace. Without such gracious and unlimited encouragement: the sinner when awakened to a view of his criminality and danger; terrified and overwhelmed by the number and enormity of his offences, would instantly conclude

that his case could admit of no remedy nor relief, and sit down in despair and die. But the kind and comprehensive language of the gospel reaches the most forlorn and wounded heart, and emboldens the most wretched and dejected to look to Christ that they may live, and believe on him that they may be saved.

But our evidence that we are believers, that we have actually gone to Christ, entrusted our interests into his hands, and believed on him to the saving of the soul; is quite another matter. This does not consist in the calls, invitations and promises of the gospel; but in the fruits and effects of faith; in what proves that we have believed the testimony of God, and are made partakers of the grace that is in Christ. The word of God, the addresses of the gospel, only unfold the nature of this dispensation of mercy, and tell us what has been done for the salvation of men: but they cannot inform us of the treatment which we have given the message of peace. This is information which must be learned, not from an examination of the record, but of our own hearts and lives. The calls and invitations are the common property of the species. But unless all men shall actually be saved; the mere existence of these calls and invitations, except they are believed and embraced, will not save us.

Were a king freely to pardon the whole of a rebellious province: his royal proclamation, whether it was known or unknown, welcomed or rejected, would en-

sure the safety of all. But would this be the case if the pardon were restricted to those who were qualified in a particular manner, from age, character, or any other consideration? In such a case, before any individual could derive the smallest advantage from its provisions, he must be able to shew, that he is possessed of the requisite qualification. If the gospel had proclaimed the free forgiveness of all the children of men; in whatever manner he would have regarded it, every individual would have been perfectly safe. But since it is an authoratative command on all men to accept its blessings, accompanied with a positive promise of salvation to all who believe and embrace it; and since instead of ensuring the peace and safety of those who reject or disregard it, it denounces against them indignation and wrath; it is manifest, that unless we believe it and embrace it, the mere possession of the record cannot save us. If the salvation is left without us, we must be without salvation. If we neglect to lay hold of it, and make it our own, amidst all the rich and inexhaustible promises of the gospel, we must perish.

### SECTION III.

ON THE MEANS BY WHICH ASSURANCE IS OBTAINED.

THE cause uniformly precedes the effect. The tree must exist before the fruit: the fountain be-

fore its stream: light before vision: and faith before assurance.

To those who have the Bible in their hands, and admit its authority, it is needless to prove that we are saved only through Christ Jesus. The unbroken testimony of the pages of inspiration is, that whilst he is able to save to the uttermost, there is salvation in no other.

And it is just as evident that salvation is of faith. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Till therefore we possess faith, we are not christians. We have no connection with the Redeemer. We are under sentence of condemnation, and exposed to all the consequences of our sins. Whenever we believe assurance becomes attainable. But any peace, hope, or confidence which we entertain before we possess faith in Christ, is false and spurious. It is only presumption and delusion: and will infallibly mislead us to our utter confusion and everlasting ruin.

Since therefore assurance is so inseparably connected with faith, the question is, How are we to ascertain the existence of faith? for whatever proves that we are believers, lays a foundation for assurance, and authorises us to infer our own interest in the everlasting gospel.

Faith comes from Christ, and it leads to him. It

exalts him in our esteem, and endears him to our hearts. It unites the soul to him; and renders him in our happiness and in our hopes all in all. From the commencement to the close of its course, faith is occupied with him supremely, and cleaves to him only. It is that grace by which we receive and rest on him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel. Its presence may be invariably known by,

1. Leading us to an entire renunciation of all dependence on our own righteousness for acceptance with God.

Before faith comes, we are righteous in our own esteem. We may not be so good as we ought, nor so good as we wish: but still we imagine that on the whole there are many excellencies in our character; and that at any rate we are equal, if not greatly superior, to most of our neighbours. We may be chargeable with omissions, defects, or even with positive offences: but still, after all, we are not thoroughly depraved, and totally helpless. Our general integrity, our benevolence, or our religious observances, will compensate for our trivial faults, or occasional deviations from the paths of rectitude and piety. But whatever may be the delusion to which we have recourse; while ignorant of the righteousness of God, we go about to establish a righteousness of our own, and submit not unto the righteousness of God. Like

the Apostle, we are alive without the law; but when the commandment comes, sin revives, and we die.

But when we see our own character in the light of the holy law; we discover a most appalling and insupportable sight. We find that we are altogether as an unclean thing, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We find that those hearts, which we had regarded as pure and generous, are deceitful above all things and desparately wicked. Sin, which we considered as a trifling and insignificant evil; we find is exceedingly sinful, and the abominable thing which God hates. With a holy God above us, a righteous tribunal in view, and an endless existence before us; we would not venture into eternity with such a deficient, worm-eaten and worthless righteousness, for all that the earth possesses and the whole creation contains. Each believer can say for himself: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

This is one thing absolutely essential to the nature of faith. As long as we retain the smallest depend-

ence on our own righteousness, whether in the form of morality or religion; we are strangers to the faith of the gospel. We are seeking righteousness by the works of the law. We are guilty of high treason against the righteousness of Christ, and entail on ourselves all the curses of the law. His righteousness can no more be blended with our own, than the service of God with that of Mammon. Faith ensures justification. But on the authority of the Apostle we know, that whenever there is an attempt to establish a righteousness by the law; justification is forfeited; there is a fall from grace; and the man has no faith whatever. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace,"

2. By a cordial reliance for our acceptance before God on the righteousness of Christ.

When convinced of our sinfulness, we find that we not only need the forgiveness of our offences, but a righteousness to fit us for standing in the presence and enjoying the favour of God. Vast and invaluable as the pardon of sin is, it sinks as far below the worth of righteousness; as the deliverance from hell and from the society of the devil and his angels, falls below the possession of heaven and the enjoyment of the covenant-fulness of an infinite and an all-sufficient God. We carry within us a precious and immortal spirit,

which is possessed of large capacities and strong and vigorous powers. In the presence, in the love, and in the image of the Most High, there is enough not only to fill and feast our hearts, but to transport and ravish a universe, and endure unimpaired through an endless existence.

But, granting that every stain of guilt were erased, that every iniquity were blotted out and all our perverseness and rebellion were forgotten; how are benefits so sublime and unbounded to be secured? How are we to earn a title to their possession? What claim can we advance to the least in all their number? Sooner with our contracted arm may we grasp the stars, or call worlds into being with our feeble word; than by our personal exertions merit a right to the smallest in the whole of this bright assemblage of blessings.

The right however which we need is here. Jesus has not only discharged our debt, but as our surety has fulfilled all righteousness, magnified the law and made it honourable. He has not only restored what he took not away, but raised us to an elevation higher than that from which we fell, and conferred on us a title to a felicity more vast and invaluable than that which we have forfeited. He has purchased an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and secured the privilege of becoming not only the subjects, but the friends; not only the servants but the sons of God.

This righteousness is perfect in all its parts, and possessed of infinite value: for it is the righteousness of Him, who is God as well as man; and who is in all, and through all, and over all. He became man that he might obey and suffer. But never had the eyes of angels fastened on such a production of Omnipotence as the human nature of our Lord. No evil emotion could ever penetrate his soul. It was pure as his own eternal Godhead. And his body, which was consecrated, ennobled and enshrined by his Divinity, was a more sacred and interesting object, than the dazzling magnificence of the wide creation: while the majesty of the indwelling Deity gave to all his actions, and sufferings, an unknown, inexhaustible and infinite dignity and worth.

Thus perfectly prepared and divinely furnished, he embarked in the arduous undertaking of expiating our transgressions, and in bringing in an everlasting righteousness. The work was difficult, and far beyond the reach of the whole of the hosts of God. But by him every difficulty was successfully surmounted, and the whole task nobly and completely accomplished. He withdrew not from the service till he could say, "Father, I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

This is a righteousness capable of rescuing a rebellious universe from guilt and wretchedness, and investing them in an immensity of bliss and an eternity

of glory. "If by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."

But infinitely pure and perfect as it is, it was provided for our benefit, and wrought out for our sakes. He was wounded for our transgressions: he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. He who knew no sin, was made a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This righteousness the believer embraces. On this he places his dependence in life and his hope in death. From this he derives his comfort now, and here he fixes his trust for eternity. "Let the wise man glory in his wisdom, let the mighty man glory in his might, let the rich man glory in his riches: I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

When he discovers his own guilt and misery, and the absolute perfection and ineffable excellences of this righteousness, the believer requires no force nor compulsion to embrace it. When the avenger of blood was at his heels, did the man-slayer require any vio-

lence to urge him on to the asylum where he might lodge secure? When the deluge of wrath was descending, and all around becoming one watery waste, was any force necessary to shut Noah up in the ark where he might abide in safety amidst the wreck and horrors of a sinking world? And when conscience writes bitter things against him, and makes him possess the iniquities of his youth; when the heavens are gathering blackness, and before him he sees, at the opening into eternity, the piercing eyes of Omniscience looking fully on him through the terrors of insulted, incensed omnipotent justice: does the believer need any compulsion to drive him out of his own lying refuges, and constrain him to betake himself to the Divine and All-sufficient righteousness of Immanuel? No. He repairs to it with eagerness, and clings to it with a tenacity that time cannot relax, nor all the agonies of death dissolve. We speak of trust, dependence, and reliance on this righteousness. These however are terms far too feeble to express the affection towards it, which the believer feels. He prefers it to his chief joy; glories in it as all his salvation and all his desire, and determines to know nothing else. Divinely precious and infinitely perfect as it is, there is no part of it with which he can dispense. Less than this cannot reach his wretched case, nor impart the blessings that he wants. His polluted and never-dying soul needs it all: and therefore he embraces it wholly, and rests on it alone.

### 3. By love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To you that believe he is precious. He is possessed of every attribute and excellence. He is infinitely great, and eternally blessed and glorious. He is the perfection of majesty and beauty. He is altogether lovely, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

But though the believer admires and adores him for his infinite perfections and eternal excellencies; the whole derive an immense and inexpressible charm from the wonders of redeeming mercy, and the tenderness and generosity of his saving grace. He has loved us and given himself for us. It is this astonishing fact that over-powers the hosts of heaven, and calls forth their most enraptured and melting strains of adoring grateful praise. And it is this circumstance which in our world of distance and darkness, dwells nearest the believer's heart, and produces the most powerful and affecting impression on his spirit. Jesus is supreme in his esteem, and unutterably dear to his soul. The Christian cannot live without him. He renounces all for his sake. Whatever obligations he may owe his earthly benefactors, or whatever providential comforts he may enjoy, they shrink into insignificance when compared with the blessings in time and through eternity which flow from the mediation of Immanuel. He may have a taste for what is sublime and magnificent in nature, and delight to contem-

plate the manifestations of Divine power, wisdom, and goodness spread so abundantly every where around him : but the best and the brightest of them all have no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth ; and drawing away his thoughts and his eyes from the whole, he says to his Redeemer and Lord, “ Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee.”

#### 4. By obedience to his will.

“ If ye love me keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Such is the language of our blessed Lord : and every one who believes on his name, feels its force, and lives under its purifying and transforming power. No matter to what service or suffering he may be assigned : no matter whether the duty to which he is called be easy or difficult, safe or hazardous : he makes no hesitation nor delay. His language is, “ Here am I : the Lord do with me that which seemeth good in his sight.” The love of Christ constrains him. He is not his own. He is bought with a price : and therefore he labours to glorify God in his body and spirit which are his. Whatever his hand finds to do, he does with his might : and counts not his life dear to himself, provided that Christ shall be magnified in his body whether it be by life, or by

death. In this manner faith appeared in the case of the great Apostle of the Gentiles; and in that long list of Worthies, recorded in the eleventh of the Hebrews, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, and obtained promises. In this manner faith manifests itself in the case of every Christian. The love of Christ constrains him : and he lives not to himself, but to him who died for him, and rose again.

#### 5. By conformity to his image.

He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one : for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. We are sanctified through the truth. Our hearts are purified by faith. And though, in the present life, our holiness is far from being complete our renovation is begun, and our resemblance to Christ is real. " Whom God did foreknow, them also did he predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." From the day that we know the truth as it is in Jesus, old things pass away, and all things become new; and all things are of God. The same mind which was in Christ is in us, and we are in the world, even as he was in the world. We live by the same rule : mind the same things : pursue the same ends. Like him we set the Lord continually before us ; his law is in our heart ; we are employed in his service ; it is our meat to do his will, and finish his work. Heaven is a holy place : the

habitation of a holy God: and the seat of holy delights and spiritual enjoyments. But all the vessels of mercy are afore prepared unto glory, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Accordingly, the immediate vision of Immanuel's face in the world above, does not begin our transformation into his image, but merely perfects the assimilation which grace had commenced in the world below. When he appears we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is. Beholding openly his glory, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

#### 6. By longings for his presence.

Sin banished us from the Divine presence; and reduced us to the state of strangers, aliens, and enemies. It threw insurmountable obstacles in the way to God: and deprived us alike of the ability and inclination to return. But in Christ Jesus, we, who formerly were far off, are made nigh by his blood. He is our peace. He has broken down the walls of separation. He has opened up a way into the holiest of all. Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. So that we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Knowing that life lies in his favour; and that our blessedness through eternity will consist in being near him, and in seeing him as he is, every believer loves his society now, and longs to enjoy all the pure and

exquisite delights to be derived from elevating and ennobling communion with him. It is for this purpose that he searches the Scriptures, and makes the word of Christ dwell in him richly. It is for this purpose that he pours out his soul in prayer, and is found so often prostrate before the throne of grace. And it is for this purpose that he attends the preaching of the gospel, and frequents the ordinances of religion. In these exercises he has something more exalted and interesting in view, than merely to get his information enlarged, or his frames and affections excited and enlivened. His strong and intense desire is to see Jesus; to behold his glory; to lift up his soul before him; and enjoy those sublime and endearing tokens of his presence and approbation which fill and feast the heart, and afford a foretaste of celestial bliss.

#### 7. By delight in spiritual enjoyments.

The riches of Christ are unsearchable. It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. The stores of nature, the bounties of providence, and the treasures of saving mercy, are all in his hands and completely at his disposal. Knowledge, pardon, righteousness, and strength, present grace and future glory are all at his command and dispensed according to the good pleasure of his goodness.

Each of his gifts is invaluable. Their full possession will constitute the substance of our heavenly in-

heritance; and their partial and limited acquisition at present, forms the first-fruits of the Spirit, and furnishes us with an anticipation of our future and everlasting portion.

Every one therefore who knows the worth of salvation, and is seriously desirous of being blessed with the presence of God through eternity; has a strong and intense longing now for religious employments and spiritual delights. He thirsts not for wealth nor fame, but for God, the living God, that he may see his beauty and behold his glory. However large and precious communications of grace he may receive; so far are they from filling and satisfying his desires, that they only excite a more ardent longing and vigorous effort to secure the sublime honours and ineffable enjoyments which he has not yet obtained. Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, he presses on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus: and can never be satisfied till he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and filled with all the fullness of God.

Such are the things which accompany salvation: and by such things as these we are to judge of the soundness of our faith and the safety of our state. The illustration might have been greatly extended. Many additional articles might have been introduced.

For real religion, which is another name for faith and its effects, includes every branch of practical godliness. It renovates our nature, and produces a thorough transformation upon our heart and life. It leads to humility and self-denial. It inspires love to God and man; and constrains us to undertake and accomplish all that is within our power for the advancement of the Divine honour and the present and everlasting welfare of our brethren.

But though the subject might have been illustrated at much greater length; the little that has been already stated, may suffice to enable any man, who conscientiously enters upon the inquiry, to ascertain his own situation in the sight of God. If his conscience bear him witness in the Holy Ghost, that he has cordially renounced all dependence upon his own righteousness; that he places his entire trust for acceptance with God on the righteousness of Christ; that he loves the Lord Jesus with his whole heart; that he is submissive to the Redeemer's authority and devoted to his honour; that he is growing in conformity to his image, and is solicitous for more close communion with him; that he delights in religious exercises and longs for spiritual enjoyments: if any man's conscience bears him witness in the Holy Ghost that this is his case, it is a token for good. It proves that he has passed from death to life; and has obtained that faith which saves the soul. To such the scriptures speak in

the language of encouragement and promise. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted, Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

But without such fruits of righteousness as these, we have no evidence of our own interest in the blessings of the great salvation. Our faith is vain: and we are yet in our sins. The same authority which informs us of the power, the grace, and the all sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, also describes the character of his people; and whilst it announces that salvation is of faith that it might be by grace, it likewise proclaims the renovating influence and transforming efficacy of that faith by which we are saved. It tells us that this faith purifieth the heart, and worketh by love; that by it we are sanctified, and that it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; that it is a living fruitful principle, and productive of good works; and that we receive

the Spirit, and Christ dwells in the heart by faith. And it also informs us that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; that he walks not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Now, are we at liberty to pick and choose amongst the declarations of Scripture? Is the Bible more worthy of our confidence, when it says, He that believeth shall be saved; than when it assures us, that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; and faith without works is dead? Is it one God who has proclaimed the necessity of faith, and another that has published the importance of works? Is it one God who has revealed the connection betwixt faith and salvation; and another who has stated the strong and indissoluble ties that bind faith to obedience, to godliness, and to every branch of goodness? All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and though the whole may not refer to subjects equally momentous, every sentence which it contains is founded on the same authority, and possessed of the same eternal truth and unchanging certainty. To trifle with its declarations is the mark of crime and folly; and to resist and disregard them, is inevitable destruction.

But while every sentence on the face of the sacred pages is possessed of the same authority and truth; on examining their contents we find that they all concur to prove that the gospel contains a holy salvation. Were we chosen in Christ before the foundation of

the world? It was that we might be holy and without blame before him in love. Did Christ come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost? It was also to destroy the works of the devil, and save his people from their sins. Did Jesus love us, and give himself for us? It was to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Are we called to the knowledge and enjoyment of the gospel? We are saved and called with a holy calling, and translated from darkness to light, that we may walk before God in newness of life; and be blessed not only with a right to heaven, but also with a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

If therefore we are destitute of these effects of the grace of Christ; believe what we may, and expect what we please, our faith is vain and we are still dead in trespasses and sins. Without regeneration we cannot enter the kingdom of grace; and unless we take our passage through its territories, we shall find no access to the kingdom of heaven, and shall be driven in disgrace from the gates of glory. John iii. 3. Heb. xii. 14.

Whilst destitute of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, let me ask, To what are you trusting for salvation? Is it to your religious knowledge? Religious knowledge is unquestionably good in its own place: and it is criminal and dangerous for a soul to be without it.

But where is any promise or security that knowledge shall of itself save you? Is this security derived from the example of those apostates, who were once enlightened, and had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but afterwards were entangled therein and overcome? Is this promise to be found in the declaration, Though "I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and have not charity, I am nothing?" Heb. vi. 4—6. 2 Pet. ii. 20. 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

While destitute of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are you trusting to your external reformation, your moral duties, or religious observances? All these things also are good in themselves, and without them we can lay no valid claim to the christian character. For if we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But however important and valuable in their own place, can these things save us? Where is there any engagement expressed or implied to that purpose within the whole compass of the sacred oracles? Can such a conclusion be drawn from the denunciations against formality and hypocrisy, against having a name to live while we are dead, and the form of godliness while strangers to its power?

While destitute of a clean heart and a right spirit, can we be saved by a belief of the truths of revelation?

The truths of the gospel are inestimable, Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. One sentence, such as "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth; the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" is infinitely more precious than mountains of gold, or the wealth of worlds. But while the heart is unaffected, and the life unsanctified; can the cold unfeeling barren assent of the understanding to these, or any of the truths of revelation, ensure the salvation of the soul? Does the addition of a new name alter the nature of a substance? Will the labelling of arsenic with the title of cassia, destroy its deleterious qualities, and endow it with a restorative and invigorating energy? Bake it into bread; place it in the hands of a popish priest; let him exhaust on it all the energies of his ritual; consecrate it, and form it into his host; will this annihilate its poisonous properties, and impart to it a medicinal or nourishing power? And while his heart remains the same; will a graceless man by assuming the epithet of a believer, or by actually yielding his assent to the doctrines of christianity, raise his moral worth, or improve his situation in the sight of God? Judas was enrolled amongst the disciples, and the Apostles baptized Simon the Sorcerer. But whilst the hearts of these two wretched men remained in the gall of bitterness and bond of in-

iquity; could they have averted their dreadful doom and become heirs of eternal life, by the addition of a few articles to their creed; and, supposing that they had not previously possessed such a faith, by believing that Jesus was the Christ; that God loved them; and had sent his Son to redeem them? Arsenic is still deadly, though in the consecrated wafer. The carnal heart, though in conjunction with the soundest creed, is enmity against God, and debarred all entrance into his kingdom. And therefore whilst they retained their corruptions; no belief which they could have entertained, could have been of the smallest service.

And if your faith continues barren; though like them you believe that God loves you, that Christ is the Saviour of the world, and shed his blood to save you; what can such a faith profit you? Are you to make Christ the minister of sin? Did he die to break down the strong and eternal bulwarks of truth and holiness? and pave a road to heaven, along which the rebellious children of men might in daily succession transport to the world of glory all the filth and impurity that darken and disgrace our globe? If you fancy that such a faith will prove your passport to Paradise, produce your authority. Is it to be found in that language which can never be too often repeated; "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God? Faith, if it hath not works is dead, being

alone? For as the body without the spirit is dead; so faith, if it hath not works, is dead also?"

While destitute of a new nature, will a firm persuasion either in your head or in your heart that your souls are safe, and that Christ will certainly save you; enable you to surmount every difficulty and danger, and arrive in triumph in the regions of everlasting light?

But pray was it ever known that a man's fancy, opinion or belief, changed the nature of things, and transformed a lie into the truth? Is every man competent for the situation, for which in his self-sufficiency he thinks himself qualified? Does the dying man's belief that he is recovering, avert the stroke of death, and send him back to the duties and enjoyments of life? Does the firmness of the Roman Catholic belief in Transubstantiation, convert the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord? The Astronomer knows that the sun is stationary, and that the earth and planets are perpetually revolving round him: but does the inflexibility of the infallible Church in the belief of the contrary, stop their progress, and put the sun in motion? Did the belief of the Leodiceans that they were rich and increased with goods, bless them with spiritual wealth, and open up to them the celestial treasures? Did the persuasion of the Jews that they never were in bondage, secure to them the freedom of the sons of God? Does the belief of their

peace and safety prevent the sudden destruction of the impenitent? 1 Thes. v. 3. And while you are destitute of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, will your belief that you are a believer, and that Christ will undoubtedly save you; put you in possession of salvation? Where, within the whole extent of Scripture is there one promise, by which God pledges himself to bestow eternal life on all who are confident of their safety, and are persuaded in their hearts that Christ will save them? Is this such an inference as you are warranted to draw from such declarations as these? "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." "Ye are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts." Is this such a conclusion as we are compelled to form from the parable spoken against those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others? and from the declaration that the first shall be last, and the last first? If the mere hope, belief, or persuasion that we shall be saved, could ensure our safety; why have the Scriptures so frequently enjoined self-examination? cautioned us so seriously against self-deception? and exhorted us not to be high-minded, but fear; and to take heed when we think we stand, lest we fall? If every man's belief were to be the measure at once of his state and his attainments, these

cautions and exhortations would have been superfluous; and the more secure and confident men become their faith must have been the stronger, and their safety the greater. These cautions and exhortations shew, that however a man's notion of his state may affect his own peace and comfort, it has not the slightest influence on his situation in the sight of God. If he is in a state of grace, his belief in his own salvation will enable him more joyfully to advance in the way to everlasting life: but if he is in a carnal graceless condition, it will only make him proceed with greater boldness in the road to eternal ruin. In the latter case his destruction is just as certain after he adopts the fancy that he is safe as it was before: and though he clings to his strong delusion and firmly believes his own lie, the strength and firmness of his confidence cannot convert this falsehood into a fact, nor avert the misery on which he is blindly and resolutely rushing.

Perhaps you may be disposed to reply, that this is putting a case which ought not to be supposed; and that there never was an instance of an unregenerate man who was possessed of such a faith.

But whilst faith is confined to the understanding, and does not affect the heart, whilst it is merely speculative, and has nothing spiritual, nor necessarily and essentially holy in its nature; I would like to know what faith a christian can entertain, which a hypocrite,

a formalist, and a self-deceiver is unable to acquire? Is it that Jesus is the Son of God? This fact was undoubtedly acknowledged by the chief rulers who believed on him, but durst not confess him, John xii. 42; and the devils were not suffered to speak, because they knew who he was.

Is it that Jesus is the Saviour of the world? the only Saviour, an infinite and all-sufficient Saviour? This is the creed of the great majority of Christendom; but though they extol his saving power, and profess that they know him, while in works they deny him; dare you maintain that they are on the road to everlasting life?

Is it that Jesus has loved us, and given himself for us? Indeed! Is this a barrier which the ungodly find it impossible to pass? Is there really any thing to prevent Satan and his own wicked heart, at the very time that he is dead in sins, imposing on a man the belief that God loves him, and Christ has died for him? Multitudes are perpetually deceiving themselves with the cry of peace, when there is no peace. They fancy that they stand high in the Divine esteem, and are precious before God, while they are an abomination in his sight. Mat. vii. 21—23.

Is it the belief that we shall certainly and infallibly be saved? Well. Is this a persuasion that is beyond the reach of nature? Will every man who only confidently assumes his own pardon and justification, and

firmly and inflexibly believes that he shall be saved, without failure gain the world of bliss? This belief is most abundant; and if all who entertain it shall actually succeed, the realms of everlasting peace must be crowded. But are there none who shall be ashamed of their hope? Will no disappointment nor confusion be experienced in the day of decision among those who imagined that they were favourites with the Most High?

Is it supposed that there is something so purifying in the persuasion that Christ has loved us and died for us, that the carnal heart cannot resist its sanctifying influence? and that holiness will invariably follow from assuming our own pardon and acceptance, and confiding firmly in our own salvation?

Until the grace of God change it, I know nothing either in the form of judgment or mercy, which the human heart is unable to withstand. It can set at defiance the revelation of Divine wrath; and in the midst of calamities and desolations, revolt more and more. When loaded with benefits, it can abuse them: and trample under foot the bounties of Providence, and convert the blessings of religion into the means of gratifying its depravity, and ministering to its basest passions and vilest propensities. The knowledge that Jesus was the Christ, did not discourage Herod from attempting to cut him off in his infancy. The fact that he did many miracles of power and mercy, was

the very circumstance that goaded on the chief priests and the Pharisees to combine to put him to death. And notwithstanding all the displays which Judas had seen of his glory; and all the experience that he possessed of his love, for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver, he was capable of betraying him to his murderers.

After such specimens of the human heart, what manifestations of Divine power or goodness, is it incapable of abusing? When men could act on the principle, This is the HEIR, come, let us kill him: what atrocity is it unable to perpetrate? Will it find any difficulty in persuading a graceless man that, if Christ has loved him and died for him, he may do what he pleases, and riot with safety in his fancied lawless liberty?

The experiment of what can be accomplished by assuming an interest in the love of God and a right to eternal life, has already been tried to a prodigious extent: but with what success? Were the Jews who believed that the Lord was their God, sanctified by that belief? Was the Pharisee as much holier than the Publican, as he believed that he was a greater favourite of Heaven? Was the savage temper of the barbarous servant subdued or softened, who actually knew that his Lord had forgiven him a debt of a thousand talents: and yet he no sooner found his fellow-servant who owed him only fifty pence, than he seized him by the

throat, and rigorously exacted payment of the contemptible sum? Have we never heard of men, who have despised the riches of the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God : and instead of being led to repentance, after their hardness and impenitent heart have treasured up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath? of men, who after they had cast off what was good, crying unto the Lord, My God, we know thee? If you wish to have a fair specimen of the marvellous powers of assumption and confidence, look at the proceedings of any knot of blind zealots, or at the transactions of his Holiness and his infallible Church. While they arrogate to themselves a monopoly of the Divine favour, and fearlessly hurl their anathemas against all who hesitate to subscribe to their dogmas and submit to their dictates : can we suppose that they have any misgivings respecting the soundness of their own faith, or any want of confidence in the safety of their souls? But amidst all their complacent and unhesitating reliance on their exclusive right to the love of God and the joys of paradise, dare you say that either the Pope and his infallibles, or any class of bigots are the best examples of Scriptural piety and christian beneficence? Had those men any doubt of the Redeemer's saving power, or any apprehension of their own want of interest in the blessings of his death ; who possessed the dead faith condemned by James? or had those professors

any apprehension of their own salvation, who turned the grace of Christ into lasciviousness and continued in sin that grace might abound? Of their own salvation they never entertained a doubt: for the one believed that they were genuine believers, and therefore from the inseparable connection betwixt faith and salvation must have imagined themselves sure of eternal life: and unless the other cherished the same persuasion, how could they have regarded themselves as the subjects of grace, and even of abounding grace? But so far from being sanctified by this belief, the one were destitute of good works, and the others were degraded by every abomination.

Facts such as these ought to shake our reliance on the sanctifying powers either of an assumption of an interest in the love of God and the death of Christ, or of a confident trust in our own salvation; and they ought to lead us to take care that we are leaning on the Rock of Ages, and making Christ and his work all our dependence, hope, and joy.

From ignorance of the Spirit's agency to produce and maintain faith; some have long been in quest of some doctrinal proposition, which shall operate as a spell, which shall charm away the hardness and insensibility of the corrupt heart, and infallibly ensure the salvation of the soul. But the truth is, that, within the whole range of the oracles of God, no set of words

is possessed of such a supernatural power : otherwise the sons of benevolence would long ago have reiterated them with such a plainness and a force, that they would have been understood in every language, and produced their marvellous effect in every land, and driven impiety, vice and misery from every quarter of the globe. But amidst all the importance and value of every sentence of revealed truth, it is neither the speculative belief of one class of phrases nor of another, that will save us. Genuine faith is a spiritual principle. It is the purchase of Christ : for we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in him ; and he is the author, as well as the finisher of our faith. It is bestowed by God ; for by grace are we saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. It is the work of the Holy Ghost : for the fruit of the Spirit is faith ; and if no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, much less can he believe, but by the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. xii. 3. Mat. xi. 25—27 ; xvi. 15—17. It is unfeigned. It is seated in the heart. It leads its possessor to renounce all for the righteousness of Christ ; to trust for acceptance to him entirely ; and live to him alone. It is neither dead nor barren ; but manifests its presence and its power by the fruits of righteousness and the labours of love. He who has this faith, is a partaker not only of a new, but of the Divine nature : he bears the image and possesses the Spirit of Jesus.

Speculative belief is attained by the carnal, and christian conduct has been imitated by the worldly. But this faith never was lodged in a carnal heart. It is completely beyond the reach of nature ; and cannot be counterfeited by hypocrites and formalists : and therefore the man who possesses it has a decisive evidence of his gracious state, and an ample warrant to cherish the hope of eternal life. But if our faith is of a different description, and destitute of these effects : unless God cancel every declaration like these, “ Faith is dead, being alone ;” and “ except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ;” believe what we may, and entertain what hopes we please, our condition is alike deplorable and desperate. While these declarations retain a place in the sacred pages, they proclaim the utter uselessness of every faith which does not work by love, and the total vanity of every expectation which is not accompanied with a clean heart and a right spirit.

The practice of trying our faith by our works, is by some, loaded with hard names, and charged with many dangerous and pernicious consequences. It is reprobated as legal and self-righteous, as a mixing of the law with the gospel, and as calculated to withdraw our trust from the work of Christ, and place it on our own attainments and efforts.

But if it is so legal and hurtful, why was it practis-

ed with such frequency and care by the saints mentioned in Scripture? After the most diligent examination of themselves, fearful of deception, they carried the matter to God; saying, Search us, O God, and know our heart; try us, and know our thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in thy way everlasting. Their rejoicing was this, the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they had their conversation in the world. And their comfort was the testimony of the Spirit, bearing witness with their spirit, that they were the the sons of God.

If it is so legal and ruinous, why are we told that it is the course which will be followed in the day of decision? Instead of informing us that we shall be judged according to our faith, and have our eternity decided according as we believe or disbelieve our interest in the love of God, that Christ died for us, and that we are in a state of salvation; we are assured that all shall be judged according to their works, and receive according to the deeds done in the body. Were the belief of men to fix their future condition, we should not read of such sad reverses in the day of doom; of the children of the kingdom being cast out; and the first becoming last, and the last first.

If it is so legal and destructive, why are we so often enjoined to adopt the practice? We are commanded

not only to search the Scriptures, but also to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; to prove our ownelves; to shew our faith by our works: and to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us. Every man is exhorted to prove his own work; and told that then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. We are informed that the tree is known by its fruit: that we know that God dwelleth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us; and that we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. We are assured that if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged: and are commanded to take heed how we build even on the true foundation, because every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. And it is added, If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Now is there any thing self-righteous or perilous in following the approved example of the faithful? in applying the rule, which in the last day will be adopted by our blessed Lord? and in complying with his own express and repeated injunctions to try ourselves and prove our own works? At this rate nothing could be more dangerous than to pray, sanctify the Sabbath, attend religious ordinances, and practise

equity, temperance and kindness : for such conduct is as much calculated as self-examination, to lead the mind away from the true foundation, and foster a self-righteous spirit.

But let not the bugbear of a bad name deter any man from yielding obedience to the revealed will of Christ. Better incur the reproach of legality by doing what he has commanded, than become the victim of a spurious doctrinal system, and incur his condemnation by disregarding his authority and rejecting his grace. The man who has no works to shew is destitute of faith : and is as much a despiser of the grace of the gospel, as he is a rebel against the obligations of the law.

The danger of self-righteousness from judging of our faith by our works, is perfectly imaginary. Because the antidote will not cure unless it is employed ; does any man dream that his application of the medicine has infused its virtue into the prescription ? The application does not put the virtue into the medicine, but into the man. Noah's entering the ark did not give it strength and buoyancy : but this entering secured to him the benefit of its strength and buoyancy. And can any man in his senses imagine that his believing in Christ, and manifesting the reality of his faith by his works, endow the gospel with its saving power ? The saving efficacy resides in the gospel : but without believing it with a living operative faith,

he can derive no more advantage from this dispensation of mercy; than a patient from a medicine that is not employed, or Noah from the ark which he had not entered. The patient relies for a cure, under God, on the medicine, and not on the act of taking it. Noah trusted for his preservation to the ark, and not to the process by which he had gone on board. And the believer depends for his salvation, not on the nature of his faith but the all-sufficiency of the righteousness which it embraces. But knowing that faith worketh by love: if on examination he find, that he is destitute of that goodness, righteousness, and truth which it uniformly produces, he is compelled to conclude that there is something wrong: that he has mistaken some quack prescription for the gospel specific: and he is thus enabled, before the day of visitation close, to betake himself to the hope set before him, and lay firm hold on the great salvation. In this manner self-examination extends the triumphs of faith, by multiplying the number of those who are driven out of their lying refuges, and shut up to the righteousness of Christ. The opposite practice neither ensures obedience to the law nor submission to the gospel. A man's opinion does not alter his condition. His believing that he is safe, while in reality he is in a state of condemnation; does not transfer him to the ranks of the redeemed, and put him in possession of salvation. But terrified lest by such an exercise he should con-

tract the dreadful guilt of legality, he shuns self-examination. He goes blindly and resolutely on crying peace, peace, when there is no peace; and never suspects that he is clinging to a strong delusion, till death dissolves the pleasing dream; when the bright, but deceitful vision for ever vanishes, and to his horror he discovers that the gloom of eternal darkness surrounds him. Notwithstanding all the outcry against legality, the antinomian theory of faith, is in fact as much opposed to the gospel as the law; and is as much calculated to prevent its votaries from believing in Christ as from rendering obedience to the law of God.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### ON THE DUTY OF LABOURING TO POSSESS ASSURANCE.

THE duty of seeking this blessing cannot admit a moment's doubt, if we consider either the command of God, or the numerous advantages with which the assurance of salvation is attended.

1. The command of God on the subject is clear and explicit. He has distinctly enjoined every christian to prove his own work, and said that then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. He

has required us to cultivate sincere brotherly love, that we may know that we are of the truth, and may assure our hearts before him. He has charged us to shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end; and to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

When nothing more than his authority is requisite to oblige us to adopt any practice or pursuit; after he has so clearly and repeatedly inculcated the duty of acquiring assurance, it must be at our peril that we despise or neglect an injunction so express and solemn. If the man forfeits all right to the name of an obedient subject of his government; who, in defiance of the commandments to keep holy the sabbath, to be just, honest, and temperate, lives in the violation of all those precepts: can we with any more propriety or truth be denominated his faithful and obedient servants; if, notwithstanding all the frequency and earnestness with which he has enforced the duty of securing a knowledge of our own salvation, we refuse to give diligence to attain the full assurance of hope?

2. The advantages with which the assurance of salvation is attended, are numerous and invaluable.

It dignifies and ennobles the soul. For what can raise the mind to a higher elevation; give it a more decisive superiority over all that is low, grovelling and base; or fill it with a more exalted and delightful con-

sciousness of its own real dignity, its renovated grandeur, and the boundless extent of the glory and felicity to which it shall ultimately rise; than to know that we are the children of God, the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the heirs of his eternal kingdom? Can any honour or distinction be more joyous and transporting, than to have a sense of our reconciliation to God, and of our interest in redeeming love, demonstrated to our understanding, and impressed upon our hearts; and to be able, amidst all the duties and labours, the trials and distresses of life, to say, "This God is my God for ever and ever, and Jesus is my beloved and my friend?"

It sanctifies and purifies the heart, and renders its possessor active in the cause of God and goodness. Having the love of God shed abroad in his soul by the Holy Ghost, possessed of the spirit of adoption, and knowing his calling and election of God; the believer feels an alliance to Deity, breathes the air of paradise, has fellowship with the happy spirits before the throne, and transfuses into his temper and conduct, something of the unsullied purity and seraphic ardour, which adorn the characters, and dignify the services of the inhabitants of heaven. Where was there a man that ever rose higher in faith, or love, or holiness; a man whose soul was more completely free from the dross and dregs of mortality; a man who followed the Lord more fully, and was more zealously devoted to his hon-

our; a man who had acquired more of an angel's mind, and possessed more of the spirit of his adorable Master, than Paul? But the great spring of all his activity, the rich source of all his consolations, the grand impelling principle which carried him forward with such matchless energy in his divine career, was a knowledge of his union to the Lord Jesus Christ, and of his interest in the great salvation. "The love of Christ," says he, "constraineth me. I know whom I have believed. The life that I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." And did we possess the same blessed assurance in the same high and solid degree, it would still produce the same glorious and transforming effects. We would not reckon with flesh and blood. The love of Christ would constrain us to live not to ourselves but to him, who died for us and rose again. We would spend and be spent in his service, and be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

It supports and cheers the mind under the various trials and distresses of life. Without this assurance, the mind, in a time of trouble and danger, is in a state of perpetual agitation and distraction; like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. But this assurance proves an anchor to the soul, which keeps it sure and stedfast; gives stability to the sublime and bliss-creating expectations of the mind; and preserves

it amidst all the attacks and all the foes that can assail it, in perfect serenity and unbroken peace. Our condition may be low, and our lot calamitous; our worldly affairs may be in disorder, and our friends may prove false and treacherous; the dear companions of our youth may be sleeping in the dust, and our once happy habitations may be laid in darkness and desolation by the ravages of calamity and the inroads of death: but none of these things can move us, when we know that we have God for our portion, Jesus for our Saviour, and heaven for our inheritance and home. By disclosing the extent of our security, and giving a present subsistence to the objects of our hopes, it disarms adversity of its gloom, death of its sting, and the grave of its horrors. It has carried thousands comfortably, joyfully, through the greatest fight of afflictions, and brought them off with more than victory. It will enable us to take a calm and steady survey of all the terrific forms in which tribulation can possibly assail us, and then to say, in the intrepid tone and holy triumph of the Apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other

creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If therefore you would wish to live in the enjoyment of the blessings for which you pray; to grow in grace; to walk with God; to possess the glorious liberty of his children; and to command every day a more exact and ample foretaste of heaven: take care to have your hearts fully assured of your union to the Saviour and interest in the riches of his grace. If you would wish to possess the precious blessings which Christ has purchased; the peace, the liberty, the sacred vigour, and the sublime, and spiritual hope, and consolation which he bestows: strive more and more to realize the safety of your state, and comfort your hearts with knowing in whom you have believed. If you would wish when you die to enter on the full fruition of your Lord; to get rid of the body of death; to see Jesus as he is; to walk with him in white; and to be made exceedingly and eternally glad in the light of his countenance and the joys of his salvation: give diligence to make your calling and election sure, and banish all darkness and doubt respecting your own right to the blessings of the everlasting gospel, and the whole covenant-fulness of an infinite and all sufficient God. Assurance is a powerful mean of reducing to your immediate enjoyment all the riches of grace, and of solacing yourselves with the anticipation of glory. And if we know that the man who

has no value for the ordinances of religion, and no solicitude to live under the power of the gospel; by his carelessness and indifference demonstrates that he has no solicitude to see God, and gain the delights of heaven: how can we believe that you have any real desire for either the riches of grace or the treasures of glory; while you decline to employ the measure which God has appointed and blessed for giving you the present enjoyment of the one, and the best and purest representation of the other?

Indifference to the subject of assurance, is a most alarming and fatal symptom. A man may be a Christian without at all times knowing his calling and election of God. But when salvation is our all; when it is not more connected with the honour of God, than our own eternal welfare; when the means of securing assurance are so obvious and easy, and God has so repeatedly and forcibly enjoined us to secure it: how can that man be possessed either of a regard for the Divine authority, or concern for his own spiritual improvement and everlasting welfare, who lives in the neglect of such an important and indispensable duty? Afloat on the troubled and stormy ocean of time; where dangers are so numerous and secret; where so few reach the haven of peace and safety, and such multitudes make shipwreck of the faith, and drown themselves in perdition: are you unable to tell in what direction you are steering, or coolly allowing

your vessel to drift about at the mercy of every wind and current? When furnished with chart and compass, and all that is requisite to ensure the safety and success of the voyage: have you lost, or never found your reckoning, and yet tamely permit days and weeks to pass over you, without any rational or vigorous effort to dispel your suspense, and ascertain with exactness your place and your tendency? Is it thus that you manifest your solicitude for your own salvation; and your determination to seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof? Is it thus that you are to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life? Is it thus that you are to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and take the kingdom of heaven by violence?

What could we think of that man's integrity, who should imagine it enough to know that God is the friend and patron of honesty, and has enjoined it on all; but cannot tell whether he himself is honest and upright? What could we think of the loyalty or patriotism of that man, who should consider it enough to know that all are required to serve their king and their country; but is unable to tell whether he himself is in the service of his native state, or of its inveterate and implacable foe? And when assurance is pressed upon every Christian, and the means of acquiring it are so obvious and easy; how can we give that man credit for any genuine religion, who thinks it enough

to believe in the omnipotence of Immanuel's power, and the all-sufficiency of his atonement, the universal extent of the gospel calls, and the absolute freeness of its offers, without believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for his own salvation, and accepting these calls and invitations for his own personal benefit? Can a man be any more entitled to the name of a believer, without embracing the general calls and promises of the gospel for his own salvation; than to the name of an obedient subject of the law, without personally complying with the commands which it has indiscriminately addressed to all?

Consult, as you please, either Scripture or common sense, and you will find; that though the believer may sometimes be destitute of the assurance of salvation, he is never destitute of solicitude respecting that momentous and invaluable subject: and that the man who can remain at his ease, while unable to tell whether he shall be saved or lost, by that ease and indifference broadly publishes his own infidelity and proclaims his own condemnation. His listlessness and apathy on a matter of such infinite magnitude, prove a hard heart and a darkened understanding; and demonstrate that he is in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. A christian can never be at rest till his doubts and fears are dispelled; and till he is able to say, I know in whom I have believed; and am persuaded that he will keep what I have commit-

ted to him against that day. The matter is too momentous to be left in a state of suspence. Nothing less than clearness and certainty can satisfy him, and these, at whatever cost, he must obtain: and he will earnestly and perseveringly follow after them till he is blessed to secure them.

Perhaps some may be saying, "Gladly would I get assurance if I could. There is nothing that I value more. What should I do, were I to gain the whole creation, and be deprived of the favour, and banished from the presence of God? For whom have I in heaven but him? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides him. But I cannot tell if I have faith: and without faith, I know that there is no salvation. What must I do to assure my heart, that I possess the faith which is of the operation of God?"

Look back to the preceding chapter, to the marks there enumerated by which saving faith may be known, and then look inward to the state of your soul. Have you renounced every thing for Christ? Are you trusting in him simply for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? Are you resting on him and his righteousness entirely; and cleaving to him with your whole heart? Is this your case? Then what says the answer of God concerning you? "Let him take hold of my strength, and he shall make peace with me. Blessed is the man that trust-

eth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ."

Where are your affections fixed? Where have you placed your chief joy? Is Christ supreme in your esteem and precious to your heart? Do you love his society, and long for more close and ennobling communion with him? Or can you live peacefully and comfortably without him? "Live without him! He is all my salvation and all my desire. To whom can I go but unto him? he has the words of eternal life. Live without him! As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me, while they say unto me, Where is thy God? Oh that I knew where I might find him! I would come near unto him, even unto his seat, yea I would order my cause before him."

While you prefer his favour to your chief joy; while his glory and grace engage and engross your affections; and your soul thirsts for God: can you call yourself a reprobate? an outcast from his presence? or an alien from his friendship? Who told you of his loveliness and glory? What rivetted your attachment to him, and constrained you to renounce all for his sake? Why have your former pleasures lost their attraction? Why have the things that are seen and temporal ceased to command your whole attention, or even to divide your hearts? Whence this mighty, and, at one time, unexpected revolution? Has it

been accomplished by Satan or his agents? Does he sow discord in his own dominions, or employ measures to disunite and weaken his kingdom?

Do these desires and longings which you experience, ever lodge in graceless and ungodly hearts? Do you ever find the men of the world grieved, ashamed, and heart-broken, for their ignorance, their coldness, their stupidity, deadness and unbelief? Do you ever hear them crying, When shall we come and appear before God? Oh that we knew where we might find him? Give them wealth, honour, pleasure and amusement; and what will they care for all the riches of redeeming mercy, and all the vast ineffable blessings of saving love? The presence, therefore of these spiritual desires and gracious principles, prove that you are possessed of another and a better spirit; that you are born from above; and created again in Christ Jesus. It is of such as you that the Redeemer says, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." It is of such as you that it is said, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place,

with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

But if all this cannot relieve you; if you can take comfort neither from what you have formerly experienced nor what you at present feel; go to Jesus as if you had never gone before. All without exception are invited: and the worst that applies is made heartily, and inexpressibly welcome. To meet every case its invitations are expressed in the most general and comprehensive terms that language can afford. They are such as these. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is a-thirst Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

Can your heart desire more rich precious and ample encouragement than this? Is not this such a salvation as you need? a salvation unto all and upon all them that embrace it? Take courage then, and go to the blessed and adorable Redeemer. Believe on him: submit to him: trust in him. Your safety is there. He has fulfilled all righteousness. He has magnified the law, and made it honourable. He has blotted out the hand-writing which was against us; and cleared

away every obstacle and impediment which blocked up our return to God. And to secure for yourself all the immense and unsearchable blessings of his salvation, you have nothing more to do than to renounce your own lying refuges, and to make him all your salvation and all your desire; to rest on him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; to know nothing but him, and confide in nothing but his righteousness and grace.

Are you still afraid to come? Do you fear that the blessings are too great and glorious to be intended for a creature so vile, guilty, and abominable as you? Pray tell me, who but the poor want charity? who but the sick need a physician? who but the lost and perishing require a Saviour? Now Jesus came, not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; to seek and to save that which was lost. It is therefore to such as you that the word of this salvation is sent. Though addressed to all, it is especially directed to you. Believe in it: and you will find that the saying, which is worthy of all acceptation; is, when applied to yourself, true and faithful, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Wait for no qualification to warrant you to believe, or give you a right to the enjoyment of so great a blessing. Your warrant lies in his own word, in the call, invitation, offer, and promise of the gospel. Your right is to be found, not in your own preparation or

exercises, but in his word of truth, the general and unlimited invitations of the Bible. Salvation is all of grace. It is presented to you at this moment as a free gift: and though you could wait till the consummation of all things, if even then you were to receive it, you must accept it as a gift. And as such it is offered to you this moment.

“ But when I can find my name neither in the calls nor in the promises of the gospel; what authority have I for concluding that its invitations and offers are meant for me?” But pray, Are you named either in the precepts or penalties of the law? But because you are not named in either, does it follow that you are exempted from both? you know that the law comes from God; that it speaks in general terms; and by the universality of its language comprehends every human creature. And when the gospel comes from God; when it is enjoined to be preached in all the world to every creature; and uses terms that admit of no limitation nor exception: what other inference can you draw from these facts, than that it is designed for you? that you are included in its invitations? and that the whole of its vast and ineffable blessings are pressed on your acceptance? The highest saint now in heaven, in the days of his pilgrimage had no more special nor peculiar warrant than this, to embolden him to believe on Christ for his own salvation. By its general language, addressed indiscriminately to the

human race, to men, the sons of men, the lost; you have all the authority of the God of love and truth, to embrace for your personal salvation the universal invitations and rich promises of the gospel. Your right to believe in Christ, and rely on him for all the blessings of his purchase could not be rendered more clear and unquestionable, even though you were the only inhabitant of the earth, or saw your name engrossed in the calls and offers of this matchless dispensation of mercy. In that case you could have no more to rely on than the word of the true and unchangeable God: and with the Bible in your hands, and these precious invitations and promises before your eyes, you have nothing less than the same word to depend on.

It is at our peril that we either doubt or deny that each of us is individually addressed in every call and invitation of this scheme of mercy. The commands and threatenings of the law are not more universal than the calls and invitation of the gospel. If therefore the man would be regarded as a rebel against the the Divine authority, who should maintain that he was free from all obligation to obedience, because his name was not to be found in the whole decalogue; can we be chargeable with less guilt and presumption, in affirming, because we cannot discover our names in any corner of the gospel, that therefore we are excluded from its general, unrestricted, universal calls and invitations? The whole comprehends the parts.

What is spoken to all, belongs to each. And the free, generous, and unlimited language of the gospel, demonstrates that you are as really included in its invitations and offers, as in the the precepts and penalties of the law.

I must here leave the matter. I have endeavoured to shew that the assurance of salvation is neither essential to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace. I have attempted to prove that it is an attainable blessing. I have pointed out the means by which it may be secured, and stated some facts to illustrate the duty and importance of possessing it.

The success of this feeble effort depends on the blessing of the Spirit of all grace. May he mercifully prosper the undertaking for the direction establishment and comfort of his own people; and overrule it to rouse some of the secure and thoughtless to attend to what belongs to their peace! It is a poor miserable thing to live without God in the world: and it is dreadful to pass into eternity without hope. But what words can express the blessedness of the man, who knows in whom he has believed; and has the witness within him that he is born again, that he is a child of God, and if a child, then an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. All things are his. For him to live is Christ, and to die is gain. He can intelligently, and in the full extent of their comfort and joy adopt the strains of our sacred bard:—

“ When I can read my title clear  
To mansions in the skies ;  
I bid farewell to every fear,  
And wipe my weeping eyes.

Should earth against my soul engage,  
And hellish darts be hurl'd ;  
Then I can smile at Satan's rage,  
And face a frowning world.

Let cares like a wild deluge come,  
And storms of sorrow fall,  
May I but safely reach my home,  
My God, my heav'n, my all.

There shall I bathe my weary soul  
In seas of heavenly rest,  
And not a wave of trouble roll  
Across my peaceful breast.

WATTS.

THE END.

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