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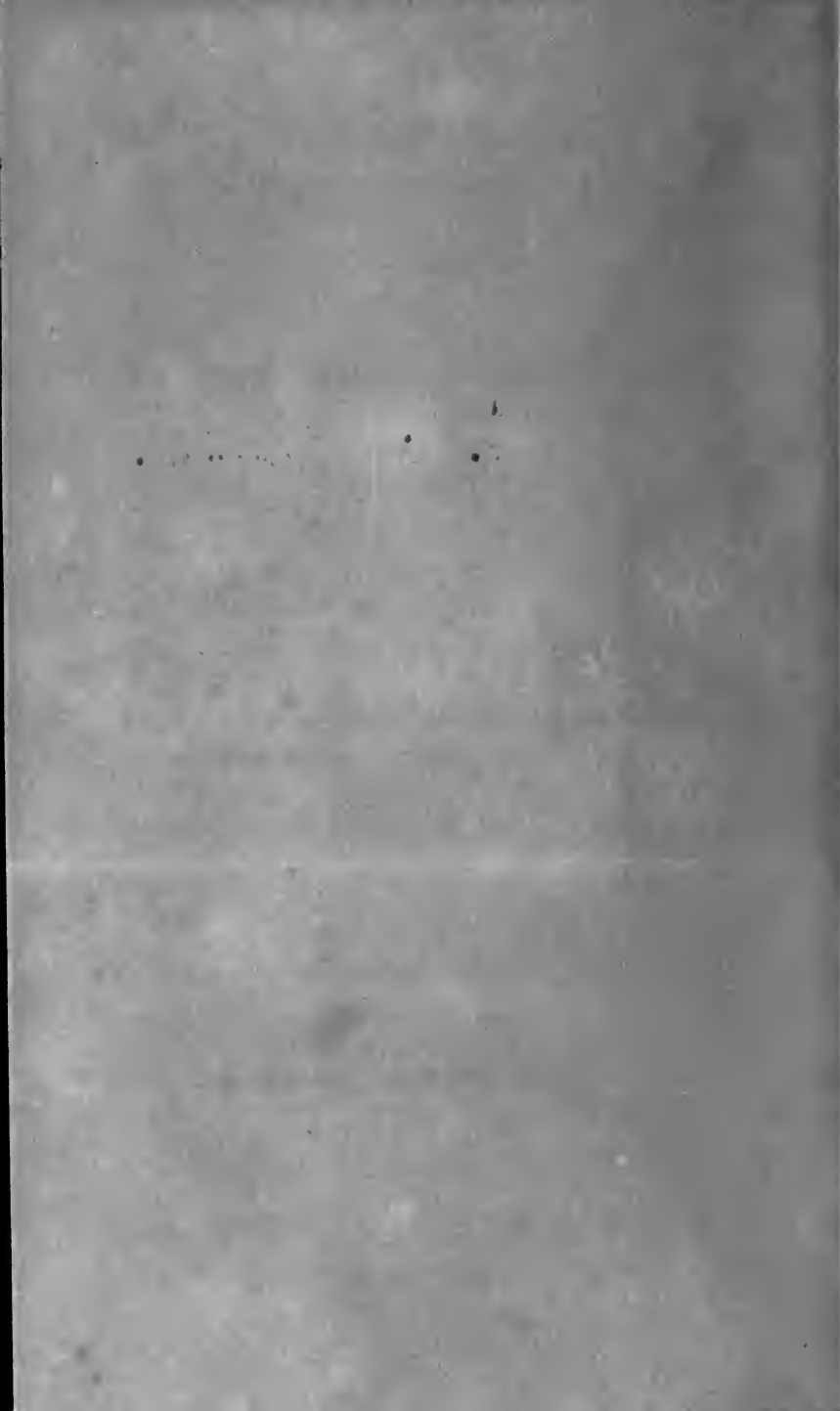
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FAMILIAR LETTERS

TO A

GENTLEMAN,

UPON A VARIETY OF

SEASONABLE AND IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

IN RELIGION.

BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE irregular heats and extravagancies of some late pretenders to extraordinary attainments in religion, their imaginary divine impulses, and ecstatic raptures, with other effects of their disordered fancies, have cast such a blemish upon the Christian profession, in the eyes of unsettled and unthinking people, that it is well if too many are not in danger of calling Christianity itself into question, from the manifestly false pretences and enthusiastic flights of some, who have put in a claim to so eminent an experience in the divine life. It is therefore thought needful, as well as seasonable at this time, that a brief and plain confirmation of the Christian religion be sent abroad among our people, to establish them in the foundation of our eternal hope. This has been my special motive to the publication of some of the first of the ensuing Letters.

On the other hand, whether for want of duly distinguishing between delusive appearances and the genuine effects of an effusion of the Holy Spirit, or from whatever cause, such has been the violent opposition of some to the late revival

of religion in the land, that the doctrine of special grace and of experimental piety seem now by too many not only rejected and opposed, but even treated with contempt; as if they had never before been heard of, or professed among us. This I take to be one of the darkest symptoms upon this land, that we have ever yet seen. It must on that account be not unseasonable, to represent to our people, in a clear and distinct view, the experiences of vital religion, which are necessary to constitute them Christians indeed. This is aimed at in the publication of the most of the following Letters.

The danger we are in of prevailing Antinomianism, and the actual prevalence that it has already obtained in some parts of the country, is a sufficient justification of the attempt I have made to set the foundation error of the Antinomians in a true light, and to discover its dangerous tendency.

If any are inclined to censure me for troubling the world with new discourses upon such subjects, as I had publicly treated on before; particularly the evidences of Christianity, the sovereignty of divine grace, faith, and justification; they may consider that these are most important points, and deserve the most particular illustration; that there is at this time a special call to remove the objections against them out of the way; and that this is now attempted in a

different manner from my former discourses on these subjects, and, I trust, with some additional evidence to the truth.

If any of my readers are so curious to inquire to whom these letters were directed, it is sufficient answer, that they are now by the press directed to them; and if they can improve them to their spiritual advantage, it will answer the end of their publication. May the blessing of God attend them to this purpose.

J. DICKINSON.

FAMILIAR LETTERS.

LETTER I.

THE DANGER OF INFIDELITY BRIEFLY REPRESENTED.

SIR—I heartily rejoice to hear from you, that you are at last come into a “resolution, immediately to enter upon a serious and impartial examination of the Christian religion.” What you observe is certainly true, that “this is an affair of too great consequence, to be carelessly neglected, to be decided at the club, or to be rejected by wholesale, with the too common arguments of mirth and raillery, sneer and banter.” I should therefore be inexcusable, should I refuse a compliance with your request, to “maintain a correspondence with you by letter; and assist you what I can, in your inquiries into the truth of Christianity, the nature of the Christian institution, and the character and qualifications of those who are entitled to the rewards therein promised.” But what can a gentleman of your capacities expect from *me*? And has not this cause been clearly and fully handled, especially of late, by a variety of authors? Has it not triumphed over all opposition? Have not its poor deluded opposers been covered with shame and confusion, in all their feeble attempts to subvert our faith, and to destroy the blessed hope of our future happiness? And are not these books in your hands?—Read them, Sir, with that attention which such an awful and important affair demands of you; and I think you cannot fail of obtaining conviction and satisfaction.

To your inquiry, "How shall I first enter upon a proper disquisition of this cause?" I answer in a few words. Consider the importance of it: Consider, I entreat you, that it is an eternal concern. Were this duly considered, it would be impossible for you to content yourself in such a state, wherein there is so much as a peradventure as to the dreadful and astonishing consequences of a disappointment.

You may perhaps have hitherto concluded all revealed religion to be but a mere cheat and imposture. You may have borne your part in the conversation at taverns or coffee houses against priestcraft, cant, and enthiasism. You may have ridiculed all pretences to vital piety; and exploded all the gospel doctrines respecting future rewards and punishments, as unreasonable, or unintelligible dreams and fictions.—Well! supposing you were in the right, what happiness, what comfort or satisfaction would your infidelity afford you? What rational man would envy you the consolation, of imagining yourself upon a level with the beasts, and of expecting that death will terminate all your hopes and fears?—What believer would part with the glorious hope of eternal and inexpressible happiness and joy, for the gloomy prospect of annihilation!

It is certain upon this supposition, the believer can be in no danger; he has nothing to lose, or to fear; but has every way the advantage of you. He has the present satisfaction of being a favourite of heaven. He has a continual source of support and comfort, amidst the darkest scenes of providence, from the gracious promises of the gospel. He can overcome the miseries of life and the terrors of death, with the ravishing view of a blessed immortality. And it is certain, if mistaken, he will never lament his disappointment: but sleep as quietly in a state of non-existence as you can do.

But perhaps I have mistaken your sentiments. You may possibly have given into an opinion of a future existence, though you have called the truth of the gospel into question:—Be it so. Yet upon this sup-

position also, the believer has vastly the advantage of you. He has all the happiness in this life which Christianity affords: and this you must be a stranger to. He can live in comfort, and die in peace. His religion deprives him of nothing which can any way contribute to his rational happiness and delight; but every way tends to subserve and promote them. And certainly (even upon your own principles) he may have as fair a claim to sincerity, in his endeavours to approve himself to the glorious Author of our being, as you can have; and consequently as good a prospect of future blessedness. So that, upon the whole, it is evident that he has nothing to fear from his principles, whether they be true or false. He has no cause for those stinging reflections: What if I am mistaken! What if my sentiments should prove false, when it comes to the decisive trial!

And now let us turn the tables, and consider the bitter fruits of your fatal mistake, if Christianity should at last prove true. You cannot but acknowledge, that there have been great numbers of men of the best moral qualifications, whose intellectual powers were no ways inferior to theirs on the other side of the question, who have professed the truth and experienced the power of that religion which you have despised. How many most excellent persons of the greatest integrity, learning, and sagacity, have at their peril appeared to stand by this cause; and have sacrificed their estates, their honours, and their lives, to the despised and persecuted doctrines of the cross! It is certain that you cannot have a greater assurance of being in the right than these men have had; and consequently there is at least a probability on their side, as much as on yours. You yourself, therefore, and all the unbelieving gentlemen of your acquaintance, who have any degree of modesty left, must necessarily own, that the cause possibly may turn out against them. And what if it should? I am even afraid to represent the consequences in a proper light; it will probably be esteemed preachment or cant; or be voted harsh, uncivil, or unmannerly treatment.

But, Sir, I would pray you to consider this matter, without any resentment of my rustic method of address. Consider it only as it is represented in the Scriptures; and in that view it will appear, that the dreadful confusion, the amazing horror, and the eternal misery, which will be the consequence of your infidelity, will be vastly beyond the utmost stretch of your most exalted apprehension or imagination. As soon as your soul is separated from your body, it will become the immediate object of the divine wrath; and how lightly soever you may think of these things at present, you will find, that is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. When the great Judge of the world shall descend from heaven, to take vengeance on all those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, where will our unbelieving gentlemen appear? Will not their mirth be quite spoiled, their sarcastic flouts and fleers be for ever over, when they must stand trembling at the left hand of their judge, having no possible refuge to betake themselves to, no plea to make for their infidelity, no place of retreat in a dissolving world to hide their heads! What comfort will it then afford them, to say, "Alas! how have we been deceived! We never thought it would have come to this! Now we have found to our cost, that there is something more in the doctrines of a final retribution than fable or fiction, priestcraft or fanaticism, however we have, in the gaiety of our temper rejected and despised them." Will they then be possessed of a sufficient bravery and presence of mind, to out-face their glorious Judge; and to hear with intrepidity the terrible sentence, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! Will they with their usual frolic humour, endure the execution of this sentence, and with sport and pastime, welter in the eternal flames of that furnace of fire, that is the destined abode of every final unbeliever?

Now, Sir, does it not infinitely concern you, to consider the case before you in this awful view, to compare and make a proper estimate of the inconceivably

different states of the believer and the infidel, both with respect to time and eternity; and to enter upon the disquisition you propose, with a mind duly impressed with the vast importance of your coming to a safe conclusion?

You tell me, that you "cannot, from the nature of things, see any necessity of such a way of salvation, as the gospel proposes. The light of nature teaches us, that God is merciful; and consequently that he will pardon sinners, upon their repentance and amendment of life." Let us then consider this case impartially.

I think there is no need of arguments to convince you that you are a sinner. Do but consider the natural tendency of your affections, appetites, and passions; and review the past conduct of your life; and a demonstration of this sad truth will unavoidably stare you in the face. Let any man enter into himself, and seriously consider the natural operations of his own mind, and he must necessarily find, that instead of a frequent and delightful contemplation of the perfections of the Divine nature, instead of a thankful acknowledgment of his obligations to the divine goodness and beneficence, and instead of that sublime pleasure and satisfaction, that should flow from the remembrance of his Creator and Benefactor, his affections are naturally following mean, low and unreasonable, if not vile and wicked, entertainments and gratifications. He will find, that all communications with his glorious Creator are naturally painful and uneasy to him: while every trifling amusement, and the vilest sensual object of his thoughts, find a more easy entrance, and a more peaceable rest in his soul. From hence it is most evident, that the heart is revolted from God, and that we have substituted the creature in his stead, as the object of our pursuit and delight. And besides this, who are there among the best of the children of men, whose consciences will not charge them with innumerable actual transgressions of the law of nature? From this view of the

case, you must therefore certainly find yourself in a state of moral pollution and guilt.

And can you in such a state as this, reflect upon a God of infinite purity and justice with comfort and courage? Will not conscience fly in your face, and upbraid you with your guilt and danger? Does not your reason tell you, that the great Creator and Governor of the world is too holy to approve, and too just to overlook such a fixed aversion to him, and such numerous sins and provocations against him as you cannot but charge to your own account?

But "God is merciful." True, he is so, to all proper objects of mercy, and in a way agreeable to the laws of his immutable justice and holiness. But can you suppose, that God will give up his justice and holiness, as a sacrifice to his mercy, out of compassion to those who deserve no pity from him, to those who refuse the offers of his mercy in the gospel, because disagreeable to their sinful desires and imaginations?

But "Repentance will entitle the sinner to pardon, without any other atonement." Are you sure of this? Certain it is, that mankind have always, in all ages, thought otherwise. What else was the meaning of those sacrifices, that have every where obtained, and what the meaning of those superstitious austerities, and severe penances, that have been so commonly practised in the heathen world, if some atonement beside repentance was not thought necessary to pacify an offended deity? Consider, I entreat you, that as sin is contrary to the divine nature, it must be the object of God's displeasure. As it is contrary to the rules of his governing the world, it must deserve punishing. If God be the rector and governor of the world, he must have some laws to govern by. If he has laws to govern by, they must have some penalties to enforce them; these must be executed, or else they would be but scare-crows, without truth or justice. I entreat you also to consider, how the repentance of a guilty criminal can answer the demands of

justice. What satisfaction will our sorrow for sin afford to the Divine Being? How will it repair the dishonour done to the perfections of his nature? How will it rectify our depraved appetites and passions, and qualify us for the enjoyment of his favour? How will it vindicate his holiness, and discover to the rational world, his natural aversion to sin and sinners? Or how will the fear of God's displeasure be a sufficient restraint to men's lusts and vicious appetites, if sinners may suppose, that when they have gratified their lusts and taken their swing in sin, they can repent when they please, and thereby have an access to the favour of God? In a word, what evidence can you possibly pretend to from the light of nature, that repentance only will satisfy the divine justice, and reconcile you to God?

But, after all, were it even supposed that repentance would necessarily give us a claim to mercy, without any other satisfaction to God's justice, it must then be another sort of repentance, than you seem to suppose. You must then allow that this repentance must be a thorough change of heart and life. For you can hardly suppose that we are qualified for God's favour, while all the powers of our souls are in direct opposition and aversion to him. And is this repentance in our power? Can we at pleasure renew our own souls, and give ourselves new affections, dispositions, desires, and delights? Can we change the bent and bias of our inclinations to the objects of sense, and bring ourselves to love God above all things, and to take our chief delight and complacency in him! This must be obtained in order to enjoy the favour of God. And yet it is manifestly out of our reach. It must be the effect of an almighty power.

I hope you may now see the necessity of a Saviour, both to expiate your sin and guilt, which your repentance can never do, and to sanctify your depraved soul, and make you meet for the service and enjoyment of God. If these are obtained, you must be certainly and eternally safe; but if you dare venture

into eternity without them, I must needs say you do not want courage.

You see, I have addressed you with unreserved freedom and familiarity. I have overlooked the distance of your character; and treated you as if we were in the same state of equality now as we shall quickly find ourselves before the tribunal of our glorious Judge. The cause requires this at my hands; and I should have been unfaithful, I had almost said unmerciful, to you, if I had not failed of the decorum which would have been my duty to have observed in any other case. I shall therefore depend upon your candid interpretation of this unpolished address, and your kind acceptance of the faithful designs and desires of,

Sir, your most obedient
humble servant.

LETTER II.

A BRIEF AND GENERAL VIEW OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

SIR—You tell me, “My letter had almost thrown you into a fit of the spleen.” But I cannot but hope, from your “awful concern lest you meet with the confusion I have therein described,” that it will have a better effect. I acknowledge, that “a pathetic declamation cannot be received for argument.” And that “your faith must be built upon evidences, that will reach the understanding, as well as the softer passions of the soul.” But what evidence do you desire or want of the truth of Christianity? Consider, Sir. Consult your books and your friends. Make your demands as large as you or they can contrive. And whatever rational evidence you are pleased to ask

for, shall be at your service. I have myself, with particular application, been considering, what reasonable evidence can possibly be consulted or desired, which the glorious God has not already given us in confirmation of the Christian institution, and I find nothing wanting, which we are capable of receiving. And I cannot but presume, that if you likewise would impartially and earnestly put yourself upon the same inquiry, you must meet with a full and complete satisfaction.

You will certainly acknowledge, that the great Creator is capable some way or other to communicate his will to intelligent beings, with sufficient evidence that the revelation is from him. Now, what I desire of you is to sit down, and consult upon some such means of doing this, as would strike your mind with the strongest conviction, obviate all your doubts, and give you the fullest confirmation of the divine original of such a revelation. When you are come to a point, consider the credentials of Christianity, and see whether you can find what you yourself would demand, and what you suppose most likely to give you satisfaction.

Would you expect from such a revelation a reasonable account of our first original? Look into the Mosaic history of the creation, and there you will find how the world, and how yourself originally sprung from the divine Fiat, and in what manner we are the offspring of God.

Would you expect a narrative of such circumstances of God's dispensations towards us from the beginning as would be correspondent with our constant experience and observation? The same history will inform you of those irregular affections and vitiated appetites and passions, which every man finds in himself, and which have brought such destruction and misery upon the world, in all its successive periods, since Adam's fall.

Would you expect that there should be early intimations of the method of our recovery from the state of sin and guilt, into which we had brought ourselves

by our apostasy? You will there also find the gracious promise, that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, and deliver us from the deadly effects of his malicious temptation.

Would you desire to find a particular prediction of the promised Saviour, by whom we are to obtain redemption, his lineage and descent; the time, place, and manner of his birth, the circumstances of his life, death and resurrection, a particular description of the nature, the subjects, and the continual progress of his kingdom? Read the prophecies of the Old Testament, and read the history of the New, and you will find such a correspondence and agreement as will afford you matter of fullest satisfaction, that they are both from God.

Would you expect that there should be some means to keep the promised Saviour in the continued view of God's people, before his actual and personal manifestation, and to keep alive their faith and hope in him? What were all their sacrifices, their legal purifications, their priesthood, and all their long train of rites and ceremonies, but institutions purposely adapted to that end?

Would you expect repeated and renewed testimonies from heaven, to the professing people of God, that their religion was from him, and that their faith and hope, excited by these typical institutions, were built upon a sure foundation? Such were the miracles frequently wrought among them, the manifestation of the divine presence in the Shekinah, their Urim and Thummim, their frequent oracles, their succession of prophets, whose predictions respecting the Jews themselves, and the nations round about them, were continually fulfilled and fulfilling before their eyes; and the accomplishment of many of them are apparently open and visible to us also.

Would you suppose, that near the predicted time of the Saviour's appearance, not only the Jewish nation, but all others that were acquainted with their sacred books, would live in raised expectation of this great and wonderful event? You will find in the Gospels,

in Josephus,* Tacitus,† and Suetonius,‡ that this was the case in fact.

Would you expect that when the Saviour did appear, he would by the holiness and beneficence of his life, and by numerous open and uncontested miracles, give such attestation to his divine mission, as would be sufficient evidence that he was indeed the Messiah so frequently predicted, and so earnestly expected? Does not the sacred historians answer your highest expectations in this respect? In them you find, that the dead were raised, the sick healed, the maim restored to the use of their limbs, the sight of the blind recovered, the deaf brought to their hearing, the lepers cleansed, the demons ejected; and, in a word, that the whole time of his ministry was a continued succession of the most beneficent and astonishing miracles; miracles as surprising in their nature, as their number, such as vastly exceeded the power of all created beings, and were therefore the strongest testimony from heaven, that this Saviour most certainly was, what he himself professed to be.

Would you expect that this Saviour should verify his divine mission to future times, by prophecies of succeeding events? Do not the evangelists afford you many instances of such predictions, which have been clearly and fully accomplished? In these historians you will find how he foretold the treason of Judas, the shameful fall of Peter, with the flight of all his disciples, in that gloomy, dreadful night, when the Shepherd was smitten, and the Sheep scattered. In these you will find, how he foretold the time and manner of his own death, the term of his continuance in the grave, with his glorious resurrection and ascension. You will there also find him foretelling the mission, divine inspiration, miraculous powers, and glorious success of his apostles, and their fellow-labourers in the gospel ministry. These historians do likewise set before you his particular prediction of the

* De Bell. Jud. Lib. vii. Cap. 31.

† Hist. Cap. 13.

‡ In Vespas. Cap. 4.

destruction of Jerusalem, and the abolition of the temple, with the prodigies which preceded, the tribulation which accompanied, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation which followed that amazing desolation. And does it not surprise you to find from Josephus, that the 24th chapter of Matthew, and the 21st chapter of Luke, are more like a history than a prophecy of that dreadful event?—If you should yet further expect some predictions from him, that extend to the present time, and are now visibly accomplished before your eyes, has he not foretold, and do you not find it true, that Jerusalem shall continue to be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled?

Would you expect, that when this Messiah, according to the prophecies concerning him, was cut off, he should declare himself the Son of God, with power by his resurrection from the dead? And has it not appeared true, that no precaution by sealing his tomb and setting a guard over it, could prevent his triumph over the grave, and his appearing to great numbers of his disciples, and frequently and familiarly conversing with some of them, for forty days together; and finally ascending up to heaven before their eyes.

Would you expect that his disciples, who were eye and ear witnesses of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and could not possibly be deceived in facts so open to all their senses, should at their peril preach this Saviour to the world, and continually undergo a life of painful travail and fatigue, poverty and reproach, opposition and persecution, to propagate his gospel; and that they would finally sacrifice their lives in the cause, and seal their doctrine with their blood? This they have done, and it is impossible that more could be done to raise their truth and sincerity above all suspicion.

Would you expect, that these disciples should be extraordinarily and peculiarly qualified for their great work, and sent forth to the nations with sufficient credentials to confirm their testimony and make their doctrines credible? What greater furniture can you

possibly suppose needful in such a case, than for a number of unlearned men and women to be instantaneously endued with an intimate and familiar acquaintance with all sorts of languages, and (not as pretended by some Energumens and the modern French prophets, have their organs of speech improved by the Devil, in pronouncing languages which they did not understand, but) capable constantly and familiarly to converse with every nation in their own proper speech, and with greatest propriety to write and transmit to posterity the history and religion of their Lord and master in a foreign language which they had never learned. Can you, sir, possibly imagine a greater and brighter display of the immediate agency and omnipotent power of the glorious author of our being, than thus at once to enlarge the mind, and furnish it with such an amazing extent of knowledge, while God himself has borne them witness, with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Suppose you should see some unlearned rustics with whom you are acquainted, pretending to a new revelation, and confirming their pretences by speaking familiarly all the languages of Europe, by healing the sick and decrepid with a word, raising the dead to life, and striking men dead by a word, revealing the secrets of other men's hearts, communicating these and such like powers to others by the imposition of their hands, and declaring to you that it was not by their own power or holiness that they performed these works; should you find the strictest holiness and conformity to the divine nature joined with these miraculous powers, would you not believe the truth of their pretensions? Would you not acknowledge that God was in them of a truth?

Would you expect that those men, who were sent out to preach and propagate a new religion in the world, should themselves be inspired with a prophetic spirit, and capable to foretell future events? And is not this also visibly a fact in the case before us? Have they not distinctly foretold the state and fate of the

church in all its periods until the consummation of all things? Do not we ourselves see their predictions exactly and circumstantially verified with respect to the rise, reign, and rage of anti-christ, and with respect to the Jews still continuing a distinct people and remaining in their unbelief, until God shall again graft them into the olive tree from whence they have been cut off?

Would you expect that the Messiah should prosper and succeed those disciples whom he should send out to propagate the gospel among the nations, by the conversion of multitudes to the faith; and do we not find, in fact, that he has assisted a few mean unlearned fishermen, without riches or power, art or eloquence, to triumph over all the prejudices in men's minds against the doctrines of the cross, over all the bitter opposition of the rulers of the world, all the riveted prepossessions among both Jews and Gentiles to their ancient religion, and all the learning of Greece and Rome, and to bring so great a part of the world into a professed subjection to the cross of Christ!

Would you expect that the religion of such a Saviour should be every way worthy of God, agreeable to all his glorious perfections, and every way suitable for man, perfective of his nature, and adapted to his welfare in every station, relation, and capacity that he sustains in this world, as well as to his eternal interest in the world to come? All this (I think) is what Deists themselves are forced to allow.

Would you expect some apparent influence of this religion upon the hearts and lives of those who sincerely profess it, and who commit their souls and eternal interests into the hands of this Saviour? And do not you yourself see this continually exemplified? Does not every body see, that they who cordially receive the Lord Jesus Christ for their Prince and Saviour, are distinguished from the rest of the world by the exercise of love both to God and man? Is not the change wrought in the hearts and lives of such, visible to every observer, in the blessed fruits of holiness,

righteousness, charity, and beneficence? This change they themselves profess to have experienced by their exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This experience they justify to the world by the steady conduct of their lives; and thus the great Redeemer approves himself indeed the great physician of souls by recovering all from their spiritual maladies who apply to him and depend upon him for a cure.

Would you expect a consistent and harmonious scheme of religion through all the parts of divine revelation? And is it not wonderful to observe, how the New Testament every way answers the design of the Old, and how all the numerous writers of these sacred books, notwithstanding their very different manner of writing, the very distant ages in which they wrote, and the very different circumstances of the church in their respective times of writing, have yet all taught the same doctrines, all described the same dangers, and all pointed out the same way to eternal salvation?

Thus, Sir, I have set before you, in the closest and most connected view, some brief hints of the credentials of Christianity. I know you are capable of extending your demands yet further, and of proposing something else that may still serve to reflect new light upon the Christian revelation: and there is yet much more at your service when you will be pleased to make your demands. You must, however, in the mean time, allow me the freedom to say, that the evidence now in view is sufficient to fill the mind of every unprejudiced person with a necessary and infallible certainty of the truth we are inquiring after. Deliberately consider each of these arguments separately and particularly; consider them all in their connection and relation to each other, and then try whether you can refuse your assent to the gospel of Christ.

There is, I am sensible, one objection ready to offer itself to your mind against all this; and that is, How do I know, that the great and principal facts upon which Christianity is especially built, may be depend-

ed upon as certainly true? How do I know the congruity of the prophecies with the event? How do I know the miraculous conception of the Lord Jesus Christ, the attestation of the angels to his birth, or that he wrought such miracles in confirmation of his divine mission, and that he rose again from the dead and ascended up to heaven? How do I know that his apostles were inspired with such extraordinary and divine gifts, or that they performed such miraculous operations?

To this I answer, that some of the evidences which I have offered, are what directly, upon the very first view, you may know, and cannot but know, to be certainly and infallibly true, if you will open your eyes to observe them. You do certainly know, that human nature is dreadfully corrupted and vitiated, that it is opposite to the holiness and purity of the Divine Being, and that there is therefore great necessity of a Saviour to bring us to God, and to rectify our depraved nature. You may certainly know, that there is a great variety of predictions of such a Saviour, dispersed through the whole Old Testament, and that the whole nation of the Jews always did, and still do, from thence, live in raised expectation of a Messiah. You may certainly know, that there were a great number of rites and ceremonies religiously observed and practised among the Jews; and that sacrificing, in particular, was not only enjoined upon them, but early and generally practised among all nations. For none of which things can there be any manner of reason given or imagined, unless they were types and adumbrations of an expected Saviour. You may certainly know, that the time prefixed in the Jewish prophecies for the manifestation of the Messiah, was the very time in which, by the concurring testimony both of the friends and enemies of Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ did appear. You may certainly know, that the Jewish prophets did foretell a suffering Saviour, a Saviour that should be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, that should make his soul an offering for sin, and that should be

cut off, but not for himself; and you are equally certain from all other historians, as well as from the evangelists, that our Lord Jesus Christ did undergo such opprobrium, misery, and death, as was foretold of the Messiah by the prophets. You may certainly know, that it was foretold in the prophets, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, and a lawgiver from between his feet, until the coming of the Messiah; but that after his death the Jewish sacrifices should cease, and their holy city and sanctuary be destroyed and made desolate: and that the event does assure us, that the circumstances of the Jewish nation did exactly answer to these prophecies, both before and after the death of Jesus Christ. You may certainly know, both by the Jewish and Christian prophecies, that under the gospel dispensation the Jews were to be rejected of God, and to continue despised and dispersed among all nations; but the Gentiles to come to the light of the Messiah, and see his righteousness and glory: and that the event is agreeable to the prediction. You may certainly know, that the rise of Antichrist was predicted to be after the fall of the Roman empire, when that could no longer let or restrain him; that he should appear under the guise of a minister of religion, in the temple of God; that he should pretend to all power, and signs, and lying wonders; that he should make war with the saints and overcome them; that he should reside in the great city that was then built upon seven mountains, and reigned over the kings of the earth, which was true of the city of Rome only. And you may consider, whether all this is not true of the pope and the Roman papacy. You may certainly know the amazing progress of the gospel in the first ages of Christianity, in the face of the most formidable and powerful opposition; and its continuing progress, against all the attempts of its heathen and papal enemies. You may know the excellency of its doctrines, and the glorious effects it hath upon the hearts and lives of true believers. You may know (as, blessed be God, multitudes do know by experience) how it conquers men's

corruptions, changes their natures, pacifies their consciences, fills their souls with light and joy, strengthens them against temptations, sweetens the afflictions of life, and fortifies them against all the pains and terrors of death. And you also may know, that this gospel is the gospel of Christ, and consequently that these wonderful effects, which so evidently carry a divine signature upon them, are produced by him. All these things, and others of a like nature which might be mentioned, are immediately open to your view, most visible and certain; and one would think, that these alone would satisfy the mind of a serious and impartial inquirer into the truth of Christianity. And especially when these are accompanied with such other credentials of our holy religion, which, though not so directly in view, yet, by necessary consequence, give us the same assurance and certainty of the truth.

But it is time I should come more directly to answer the objection, and to show you how it may by necessary consequence be known, that the facts upon which Christianity principally depends are certainly true.

You yourself must own, it is impossible that those doctrines can be false, which are attested by so many and such kind of miracles, as are said to be wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles. For God cannot set his seal to a lie; nor confirm a horrible imposture, by his immediate attestation from heaven.

You must own, that it is impossible for the apostles and other witnesses of those miraculous operations, to be themselves deceived, while they had all the means of certainty in the case before us, that ever any men had in any case whatsoever.

You must likewise own, that it is impossible for a great number of sober, judicious, and evidently honest men, to spend their lives in a continued conspiracy against their own ease, comfort, honour, life, and eternal welfare, for no other motive, but to deceive the world; and bring eternal ruin upon themselves and their fellow creatures; as these must have

done, if they knew those facts to be false, which they published at their peril, and sealed with their blood.

You must also own, that it was impossible to deceive the world about them, at the time when these facts were done, by reporting, that such miraculous operations were openly performed before them all, which none of them knew any thing about.

You will certainly own it is impossible that they could deceive the churches to whom they wrote, by vain pretences, that each one of these had themselves these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as tongues, miracles, healing, prophecy, and the like, when every one of them knew that there was nothing in it.

You must, in like manner, own it impossible for such multitudes of people, for so long a tract of time, to be imposed upon by pretences of miraculous operations; and none of them ever detect the imposture, so much as in one single instance, while all of them had the opportunity of doing it when they pleased, if the facts had not been true.

Can you imagine it any ways possible, that such multitudes in the first ages of Christianity, in such distant countries and nations, should conspire together to acknowledge these facts, and the doctrines founded on them at the peril of their lives; and no man among these professors themselves, or among the heretics and apostates that fell away from them, should discover the fraud, either living or dying?

You will certainly own it utterly impossible, that so many thousands, in so many lands, could, with joy and cheerfulness submit to such poor and afflicted lives, and to such cruel and barbarous deaths, as were the common lot of the first Christians, in confirmation of a religion, founded on facts which they knew to be false.

And you must acknowledge it also altogether impossible, at any time after these facts were pretended to be done, to palm the history of them upon the world, if it was false; and to persuade so many nations to receive it for truth. It were impossible to persuade any nation, and much more all the early

nations of Christendom, that at some distant forgotten age there were a number of men that came among them, taught them the doctrines of Christianity, confirmed the same by miracles, baptized them into the faith, and established a settled order of the ministry in their churches: from which time they have all of them professed the Christian faith; had the New Testament in their hands; and enjoyed a continued succession of ministers and ordinances. Let an attempt of this kind be made upon our Indians, and try, if any one man among them, can be imposed upon, to believe these things.

To this I may add, that it is absolutely impossible, at any one time, to have obtruded the inspired writings upon the world, if they were indeed spurious; and to have made all the Christian nations believe, that these were written in the apostolic age, speedily translated into divers languages, publicly kept, and publicly read and preached in their churches; that they and the fathers before them had always revered and esteemed them as the rule of their lives, and their guide to eternal happiness. What success, but scorn and derision, could be hoped for from such an attempt?

I may once more subjoin to all this, that it is at least highly improbable, that the early writers against Christianity should never deny these facts, if they were not notoriously true, when they could not want advantages to detect any fraud or deceit. And it is yet more improbable, that any of the adversaries of Christianity should confirm the truth of these facts, as we find some of them do, if they had not been most evidently and undoubtedly true.

And now, sir, what can be wanting, what can you demand or desire more, to confirm you in the faith of Christianity? It is established upon the veracity of God himself; upon those facts, by which he has from heaven attested to the truth of it; and these facts are verified by evidences, which cannot possibly deceive us. By believing therefore, we set to our seal that God is true: But "he that believeth not, maketh him

a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”

You may perhaps tell me, that if you had seen these miracles yourself, you would have believed them. But has not every body else the same claim to this sort of satisfaction as you; and the same reason to desire, to be eye and ear-witnesses of such miraculous operations? At this rate, miracles would cease to be miraculous, they would become common and familiar things; and no longer strike the mind with any conviction at all, any more than the ebbing and flowing of the sea, the rising and setting of the sun; or any other such displays of the divine power, in the common course of providence.

Upon the whole, there is no evidence wanting, to leave the unbeliever inexcusable. There is evidence every way sufficient, to satisfy the mind of an impartial inquirer after truth. And it is impossible for any man in the world to imagine any means of confirmation in this important truth, superior to what is herein set before you. How unreasonable would it therefore be, to require more evidence in a case, wherein we have already as much as we are possibly capable to receive? That it may be effectual to establish you in the faith, is and shall be the prayer of,

Sir, yours, &c.

LETTER III.

A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH, LIFE, PASSION, RESURRECTION, ASCENSION, AND FUTURE KINGDOM OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR, COLLECTED FROM THE PROPHECIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

SIR—I rejoice to hear from you, that any endeavours of mine have contributed in the least towards your satisfaction. I am thereby the more encouraged

to hope, that your remaining difficulties may easily be obviated; and, particularly, that it will not prove difficult to answer your present demand, to show you "how you may certainly know that the prophecies of the Old Testament had a direct reference to Jesus Christ." You may know this by the exact correspondence of the prediction with the event. That this, therefore, may be set before you in a proper light, I will endeavour to give you (in the form of a history) a brief representation of our blessed Saviour, gathered from the Old Testament, and leave you to compare this with the narrative of him in the New. If these agree, you thereby have a certain discovery of the divine original of these prophecies, since none but an omniscient mind could possibly foresee these events. And you have likewise the same certainty, that Jesus Christ is the predicted Messiah, and that his mission is divine, since what was foretold of the Messiah in the prophets is fulfilled in him.

The time of the manifestation of this glorious person, whom I am now to describe, was during the continuance of the kingdom of Judah, while a sceptre was in the hand, and a Lawgiver came from between the feet of that tribe, Gen. xlix. 10, while the second temple was yet standing, Mal. iii. 1. Hag. ii. 7, just four hundred and fifty Chaldee years after the decree went forth to restore and build Jerusalem, which was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, king of Persia, Dan. ix. 25.* This King likewise came into the world, and the God of heaven set up his everlasting kingdom at that season of the fourth or Roman monarchy, Dan. ii. 44, when there was an end put to the dreadful shaking of the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and indeed of all nations, by the wars of Alexander the Great, the four kingdoms that arose out of his conquests, and the Romans, the conquerors of them all; and when peace

* Daniel's seven weeks and threescore and two weeks, or 483 years, were to terminate at the death of the Messiah. We must therefore subtract from that number the 33 years of his life; and there remain 450 years to his birth.

was restored to the world, Hag. ii. 6, 7, 9; which happened when Augustus Cæsar was Emperor of Rome, and Herod the Great was King of Judea.

As to the pedigree or descent of our blessed Saviour, it must be considered with respect to the two different natures that were united in this glorious person. For how wonderful soever it may appear to us, the man Christ Jesus was also Immanuel, God with us, Isa. vii. 14. And that divine child which was born, and that Son which was given to us, (at the time before described) is the mighty God, and the everlasting Father, as well as the Prince of Peace, Isa. ix. 6. He is that God, whose throne is for ever and ever, Psal. xlv. 6. And though a man, yet such a man, as is also God's own fellow, Zech. xii. 7. Now, if we consider his descent, with respect to his divine person it must necessarily be, that though he be God the Father's Son, and begotten by him, Psal. ii. 7, yet his going forth must have been from of old, from everlasting, Micah v. 2. And it is accordingly true, that the Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way before his works of old: He was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was, Prov. viii. 22, 23. Being thus necessarily stopt from looking any further than to eternity, and to him that inhabits eternity, in considering the original of his divine person, I proceed to take notice, that in his human nature he descended from the loins of Abraham, Gen. xii. 3; of Isaac, Gen. xxvi. 4; and of Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 14; from the tribe of Judah, Gen. xlix. 10; and from the royal family of David, Psal. lxxxix. 35, 36:—and that in a way surprisingly different from any ordinary human generation, a virgin conceived and brought forth a Son, whose name is Immanuel; Isa. vii. 14. And this new thing did God create in the earth, that a woman hath compassed a man. Jer. xxxi. 22.

The place where our blessed Saviour was born was Bethlehem-Ephratah. This town, though but little among the thousands of Judah, was honoured with being the place out of which he came forth who is

the supreme ruler in Israel, Micah v. 2. Here he was born, but this was not the place of his chief and principal residence; that was Galilee of the nations. This people who had walked in darkness, saw this great light among them: even upon them who had dwelt in the land of the shadow of death hath this light shined. Isa. ix. 1, 2.

The circumstances of his appearing in the world, were low, mean, and abased; very different from the expectations men had entertained of the Messiah, and therefore he was despised and rejected of men, they hid their faces from him, he was despised, and they esteemed him not, Isa. liii. 3. Nay, many were astonished at him, his visage was so marred, more than any man; and his form more than the sons of men, Isa. lii. 14. So far was his appearance from that glory and majesty, that pomp and splendour, which was expected in the Messiah, that he was considered as a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people, Psal. xxii. 6. Even the priests and rulers themselves, who should have been the builders of the Jewish church, refused this stone, which is become the head of the corner. Psal. cxviii. 22. And the reason of this was, that they saw no form nor comeliness, no riches nor honour, no magnificence nor beauty in him, that they should desire him. Isa. liii. 2.

The characters, in which he appeared in the world, were those of a Prophet, Priest, and King: to each of which, it is proper to speak something particularly.

The Lord our God did, in the person of our blessed Saviour, raise up unto his people a prophet, like unto Moses, the greatest and most eminent prophet of the Jewish church: he put his words into his mouth, that he might speak unto them, whatsoever he commanded him; and held his people under the strongest injunction, upon their peril, to hearken to the words which this prophet should speak in his name, Deut. xviii. 18, 19. And as our Lord Jesus Christ was destined by God the Father unto the prophetic office, he cheerfully undertook it. Lo I come, says he, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to

do thy will, O my God: Yea thy law is within my heart, Psal. xl. 7, 8. And as he cheerfully undertook, so he diligently and faithfully discharged this sacred and important trust. He, as a wonderful counsellor, (Isa. ix. 6,) preached constantly to the people, and made known the whole mind and will of God to them; and could make this appeal to his heavenly Father, I have preached righteousness in the great congregation. Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation, Psal. xl. 9, 10. He constantly preached among the people the blessed and joyful news of a glorious salvation from their sin, guilt, danger, and misery. "The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because the Lord had anointed him to preach good tidings unto the meek, he sent him to bind up the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, and to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning; and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 3. He exercised most tender compassion to dark, doubting, and tempted souls. "The bruised reed did he not break, and the smoking flax did he not quench, until he brought forth judgment unto truth, Isa. xlii. 3. "He strengthened the weak hands; and confirmed the feeble knees; and said to them of a faint heart, be strong, fear not," Isa. xxxv. 3. He warned the careless and secure sinners of their misery and danger; and "proclaimed unto them the day of vengeance of our God," Isa. lxi. 2. He warned them to "be wise, to serve the Lord with fear; and to kiss the Son, lest he should be angry, and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little," Psal. ii. 10, 11, 12. He made the pathway of salvation plain, before the eyes of all those who believe in him, like

an "high way, where the wayfaring men, though fools, could not err," Isa. xxxv. 8. He considered his people as his flock; and took care of them, as a most watchful and careful shepherd. "He fed his flock like a shepherd, he gathered his lambs with his arm, he carried them in his bosom, and gently led those that were with young," Isa. xl. 11.

I next proceed to give you a view of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the great High Priest of our profession. As such, he undertook to make an atonement and expiation for our sins. "He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. God laid upon him the iniquity of us all; and he made his soul an offering for our sins," Isa. liii. 4, 5, 6, 10. Thus "he finished the transgression, made an end of sin; and made reconciliation for iniquity," Dan. ix. 24.—He likewise wrought out a perfect righteousness for sinners, whereby they should be justified before God, and accepted of him. "God raised up this righteous branch unto David, in whose day Judah is saved, and Israel dwells safely; and this is the name whereby he is called, the Lord our righteousness." Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. He is "one who speaks in righteousness, mighty to save," Isa. lxiii. 1. For "he has brought in everlasting righteousness," Dan. ix. 24. As a priest likewise, he brings us into a covenant relation to God. He is the messenger or angel of the covenant, Mal. iii. 1. "The Lord in an accepted time heard him; and in a day of salvation has helped him, has preserved him, and given him for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth," Isa. xlix. 8. "By the blood of his covenant, God has sent forth his prisoners out of the pit, wherein is no water;" and God has promised that "he will keep his mercy for him for evermore; and that his covenant shall stand fast with him," Psal. lxxxix. 28. Thus the counsel of peace was between God the Father and him. In a word, as our priest, he is our advocate with the Father; and "makes intercession for transgressors," Isa. liii. 12. Thus we see, that according

to God's oath concerning him, "he remaineth a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec," Psal. cx. 4.

This blessed Saviour sustained likewise the office of a king. God hath "set this his king upon his holy hill of Zion," Psal. ii. 6. "The throne of God (our Saviour) is for ever and ever; and the sceptre of his kingdom is a right sceptre," Psal. xlv. 6. As a king, he reigns in the hearts of his people, brings them into subjection to himself; and "makes them willing in the day of his power," Psal. cx. 3. As a king, "he sits at God's right hand; and rules in the midst of his enemies," Psal. cx. 1, 2. "In his majesty he rides forth prosperously; and his arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies," Psal. xlv. 4, 5. His regal office was not limited to the time of his bodily residence among us; "for of the increase of his government and peace there is no end. He sits upon the throne of David, and in his kingdom, to order it and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever," Isa. ix. 7. Such cause had "Zion to rejoice greatly, and the daughter of Jerusalem to shout; for, behold, her King came to her, just and having salvation," Zech. ix. 9.

Having thus shown, from the prophetic account of our blessed Saviour, the time of his manifestation, his descent, the place of his birth, and the place of his principal residence, with the circumstances of his appearing in the world, and the characters in which he appeared; I proceed to observe some of his distinguishing qualities, and the more remarkable incidents of his life and death.

As to his personal properties, he was perfectly innocent, and most exemplarily holy both in heart and life; and in that respect, fairer "than the children of men. Grace was poured into his lips, therefore God hath blessed him for ever," Psal. xlv. 2. He was "God's righteous servant, and there was no deceit found in his mouth," Isa. liii. 9. 11. He was "the Sun of righteousness, which arose upon his people, with healing under his wings," or in his rays, Mal. iv. 2.

He was of a meek and lowly disposition. This King of Zion came to her not only just, and having salvation, but showed himself lovely, by most astonishing condescensions, Zech. ix. 9. "He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them who plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame and spitting," Isa. l. 6. "Though he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth," Isa. liii. 7. "He did not cry nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets," Isa. xlii. 2.

He was endowed with astonishing wisdom and capacity. "The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," Isa. xi. 2, 3. Thus did "the servant of the Lord deal prudently, he was exalted and extolled, and was very high," Isa. lii. 13. He, and only he, of all the human race, could say, "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom, I am understanding, I have strength," Prov. viii. 14.

Previous to his entering upon his public ministry, there was a messenger sent before him, to prepare the hearts of God's people for his reception, whose "Voice cried in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed; and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," Isa. xl. 3, 4, 5. Thus God sent one to his people in the spirit of "Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers. He sent his messenger to prepare his way before him; and then the Lord whom they sought came suddenly to his temple," Mal. iv. 5, 6, and iii. 1.

When he entered upon his public ministry "God gave him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to the weary;"

and he was most painful and diligent in his work, he was "awakened morning by morning, his ear was awakened to hear," and vigorously to attend to the great business before him, Isa. l. 4. He began his ministry in the mountainous parts of Judea; and "how beautiful then upon the mountains were the feet of him who brought good tidings, who published peace, who brought good tidings of good, who published salvation, who said unto Zion, Thy God reigneth," Isa. lii. 7. As he resided in Galilee (as was before observed) so his ministry early and peculiarly enlightened those dark corners, "the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphthali; though they had dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, his light shined upon them," Isa. ix. 1, 2. But then his ministry was not limited to them. This star which came out of Jacob, (Num. xxiv. 17,) enlightened the whole land of Israel in that time of gross ignorance and thick darkness. They might all be called upon to "arise and shine, for their light was come, and the glory of the Lord was risen upon them;" though "darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people, yet the Lord arose upon them, and his glory was seen upon them," Isa. lx. 1, 2. "He preached righteousness in the great congregation," Psal. xl. 9. "He came into the temple," (Mal. iii. 1,) and by his preaching there made "the glory of that latter house, much greater than the glory of the former," which was built by Solomon, Hag. ii. 9. In what manner he fulfilled his ministry has been already considered.

In confirmation of his divine mission he wrought many wonderful miracles among the people, wherever he went. "The Lord their God came among them, he came to save them: then the eyes of the blind were opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man leaped as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sung," Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. "In that day, the deaf heard the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind saw out of obscurity and out of darkness, the meek also increased their joy in the Lord, and the poor among

men rejoiced in the holy one of Israel," Isa. xxix. 18, 19.

When the stretching out of Immanuel's wings had thus filled the land of Judah, it might have been expected that he would have met with a most joyful entertainment amongst the people: but the case was otherwise. Though "he was for a sanctuary to some," yet "he was for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;" and "many among them stumbled and fell, were broken, and snared, and taken." For "the testimony was bound up, and the law sealed among his disciples," Isa. viii. 8, 14, 15, 16, known indeed and understood by them, but kept hid as a secret from the body of the Jewish nation. Notwithstanding the indefatigable labours of our blessed Lord, in instructing this people, though "God made his mouth like a sharp sword, and made him a polished shaft in his quiver:" yet did he find cause to complain that he laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought, and in vain, Isa. xlix. 2, 4. "Who," among all the Jewish nation were there that "believed his report? and to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed? He was rejected and despised of them; and they hid their faces from him," Isa. liii. 1, 3. It is true, he had a considerable number of temporary followers; there appeared some numbers of "the children of Zion, who rejoiced greatly; and of the children of Jerusalem who shouted when they beheld their King come to them, just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass," Zech. ix. 9. But we shall quickly see, that this joy was all turned into hatred, and rage, and malice.

I proceed next to show the manner of our Saviour's sufferings, from the hands of this people. When their "rulers took counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed," Psal. ii. 2, he was betrayed into their hands, by "one of his familiar friends, in whom he trusted," Psal. xli. 9. They "wounded and

bruised him, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his STRIPES we might be healed," Isa. liii. 5. "He gave his back to the smiters;" and though they buffeted and spit upon him, yet such was his astonishing meekness and patience, that "he gave his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not his face from shame and spitting," Isa. l. 6. "They pierced his hands and feet," Psal. xxii. 16, and when they had nailed him to the cross, "they gave him gall for his meat; and in his thirst gave him vinegar to drink," Psal. lxix. 21. They mocked and upbraided, and even "laughed him to scorn, they shot out their lips, they shook their heads, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, that he would deliver him, let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him," Psal. xxii. 7, 8. In time, they "cut him off from the land of the living," Isa. liii. 8. "Thus was the Messiah cut off, but not for himself," Dan. ix. 26. "For the transgression of God's people was he stricken. He made his soul an offering for sin, and he poured out his soul unto death, that he might bear the sin of many, and make intercession for transgressors," Isa. liii. 8, 10, 12. After his death his murderers "parted his garments among them; and cast lots upon his vesture," Psal. xxii. 18. And being dead, "he made his grave with the rich," Isa. liii. 9. That is, he was buried in a rich man's tomb.

Thus I have followed our blessed Saviour to the grave. But could the grave detain him? Could it keep him prisoner? No! "I know that my Redeemer liveth; and that he shall stand at the latter day, upon the earth," Job xix. 25. His flesh might go to the grave, and rest in hope; for God would not leave his soul in hell; nor suffer his holy One to be so long under the power of death, as to see corruption, Psal. xvi. 9, 10. After "his soul was made an offering for sin, he saw his seed; and prolonged his days," Isa. liii. 10. He ascended to the right hand of God; and the Lord said to him, "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy

footstool," Psal. cx. 1. "He ascended on high, that he might lead captivity captive; and give gifts unto men," Psal. lxxviii. 16.

Having thus given you some account from the ancient prophecies, of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, I shall now proceed to show you some of the consequences of this great event.

And it may be proper in the first place to take notice, what were the effects of the Jews thus rejecting and murdering the Prince of life; and to show you, that the people of Titus, the Roman "prince came upon them, destroyed their city and the sanctuary, caused the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; and the abominations (or abominable armies) with their eagles (and superstitious rites) to overspread and to make them desolate," Dan. ix. 27. When "God had laid in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, and a sure foundation" for all that would believe in him, he then took notice of "the scornful men that ruled in Jerusalem. He laid judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, the hail swept away their refuge of lies; and the waters overflowed their hiding place. Their covenant with death was disannulled, and their agreement with hell could not stand; when the overflowing scourge passed through them; and they were trodden down by it, from the time it went forth it took them, for morning by morning it passed over them; by day and by night, until it was a vexation only to understand the report. For the Lord rose up as in mount Perazim, he went forth as in the valley of Gibeon; and a consumption was determined upon the whole earth," or upon the whole land, Isa. xxviii. 14—22. "The Lord numbered them to the sword; and they all bowed down to the slaughter; because when he called they did not answer, when he spake they did not hear; but did evil before his eyes, and chose that wherein he delighted not; therefore the Lord said unto them, Behold, my servants (the Christians) shall eat; but ye shall be hungry.

Behold, my servants shall drink; but ye shall be thirsty. Behold, my servants shall rejoice: but ye shall be ashamed. Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart: but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen, for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name;" Christians and not Jews, Isa. lxxv. 12—16.

Another consequence of the excision of the Messiah, and his pouring out his soul unto death, was the calling the Gentiles into a church state. "Behold God's servant whom he upholds, his elect in whom his soul delighted, he has put his spirit upon him; and he hath brought forth judgment unto the Gentiles. He has not failed nor been discouraged, 'till he has set judgment upon the earth; and the isles have waited for his law," Isa. xlii. 1, 4. "Then did the barren sing that did not bear; she broke forth into singing and cried aloud, that had not travailed with child; and more were the children of the desolate, than of the married wife. For she brake forth on the right hand and on the left; and her seed inherited the Gentiles; and made the desolate cities to be inhabited," Isa. liv. 1, 3. Thus was our Lord Jesus Christ "given for a light to the Gentiles, that he might be for salvation unto the ends of the earth," Isa. xlix. 6. And the Gentiles came to his light, and the kings to the brightness of his rising, Isa. lx. 3.

Thus you have had a general view of our blessed Saviour's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom, out of the Jewish prophets. I have not given you all (nor indeed a tenth part) of the predictions of the Messiah, that are to be found in the Old Testament; and yet I have by these brief hints, given you the advantage to consider, whether these prophecies did not in all circumstances exactly agree to the Lord Jesus Christ; and whether they did or possibly could agree to any other person in the world.

And now, sir, I leave it to yourself to judge, whether we can either have or desire greater certainty of any past event, than that these prophecies did directly refer to and were all accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suppose we had a certain direction, when to begin the forty-two months, or one thousand two hundred and sixty years of Antichrist's reign, as we have with respect to the beginning of Daniel's weeks; and that you should find by calculation that they should terminate in the year 1746; and being filled with expectations of the events of that year, should (when it comes) actually see all the Popish princes of Europe brought into subjection, the Protestant princes united in confederacy, the city of Rome sacked and burnt, and the Papal hierarchy every where overturned; the Turkish empire destroyed; and the Jews collected and brought into the Christian church: would you not acknowledge these prophecies to be of divine original; and the Pope and Roman papacy to be the Antichrist therein predicted? And would you not also live in certain expectation of all the other events, which are foretold as consequences of this revolution? You certainly would. And yet I must take the liberty to tell you, that there is a much brighter light shines upon the prophecies concerning our blessed Saviour, in their exact accomplishment, than this would prove, should all these circumstances concur, as is here supposed.

That the Lord may graciously grant both you and me a sincere faith in this blessed Saviour; and prepare us both for the great events that are hastening upon us, is the prayer of

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

THE CERTAINTY OF THOSE FACTS, UPON WHICH THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY DEPEND.

SIR—You mistake in supposing, that “my last letter has set the evidence of our Saviour’s divine mission, from the Old Testament prophecies, in the strongest light.” There might be much stronger light brought from the prophetic writings, in confirmation of this blessed truth; and yet you must allow me the freedom to tell you, that my letter justly demands of you a firmer assent, than you are pleased to express, to that fundamental article of our faith and hope. It represents to you more than “a strong probability, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.” Consider, I beseech you, whether it is possible, for any or for all created intelligences, to foresee and foretell such future events, as depend wholly upon the mere good pleasure of God; such events as are altogether out of the way of God’s ordinary dispensations of providence; and such events as had not the least probability from the known laws of nature, to have ever come to pass; and then to overrule the various revolutions of nature and providence in such a way, as is utterly inconsistent with, and in many instances altogether contrary to, the known stated methods of God’s governing the world, in order that those predictions (even in every particular circumstance) should be exactly accomplished. I entreat you, Sir, to consider the affair in this view, (for in this view it ought to be considered,) and then tell me, whether the evidences do not amount to more than a strong probability. And consider what evidence of this kind you yourself can possibly imagine, that would bring your mind into a full acquiescence in this truth, as certain and undoubted.

If there can be any reasonable doubt remaining, it must be for one of these following causes. Either,

1. It must be supposed, that the Jewish prophets had no such events in their eye; that the quoted predictions had a reference to something else; or perhaps no reference to any thing at all: but were the casual sallies of the several authors' fruitful fancies or imaginations.

But then, if this be supposed, how comes it to pass that they are so exactly verified? Certain it is, that the Jews supposed all these predictions to be divine inspirations, kept up stated memorials of them, and longed for their accomplishment. And it is equally certain, that at the very time when they ought to be expected, they were all fulfilled in every circumstance. This is an affair that demands your attention. Here are predictions of most wonderful and amazing events, such as no appearances that ever had been in the world could any way lead the minds of the prophets to think of or imagine. These events were foretold as to time, place, and many other particular circumstances, that you see a history of our Saviour's birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and future kingdom, could be made up out of these prophecies: and, to crown the whole, they have all been exactly fulfilled. Now, then, I have a right to demand, Were these from heaven or of men? Can the most licentious imagination apprehend these very numerous and various predictions to be the effects of capricious fancies; and their fulfilment a matter of mere chance or casualty? Then may the Epicurean philosophy take place again, and the world in its glory, order and symmetry, be reasonably believed to be the effect of a fortuitous concourse and jumble of atoms. I hope, this doubt is cleared out of your way, and I know of but one more that can remain; which is,

2. That there never were any such predictions of these things in the Jewish prophets; but that all of them were written since the events.

But, then, you must suppose that this was done by the Christians, without the privity of the Jews and others, who had these books in their hands; or that it was done by a joint confederacy of Christians and

Jews. If the former, you must imagine that the whole nation of the Jews, and all the other nations who had the Greek translation of the Jewish Bible in their hands, must be persuaded to believe, that they always had and always read those things in their Bible, which were never there; or else all of them to a man must be prevailed upon, out of complaisance to their greatest adversaries, to interpolate their Bibles, by inserting these predictions, and not leave to posterity a single copy unadulterated, to discover and correct the fraud. But if you choose the latter of those suppositions, that these prophecies were added to the Jewish Bibles by a joint confederacy of Christians and Jews, you must imagine, that the whole Jewish nation, in all their most distant dispersions, united in a confederacy to furnish the world with armour against their own infidelity, and to represent themselves as the most unreasonable and wicked of all mankind. These absurdities are, I am sure, too gross for you to entertain; and yet I may venture to challenge you to think of any other way, in which it is possible this could be done.

But you tell me, "It appears the greatest difficulty to you, to come at any certainty of the truth of those facts, upon which the evidence of Christianity depends." And I readily acknowledge, that if these facts are not true, all our reasonings from prophecy, and miracles too, will come to nothing. It is therefore proper to consider this case more particularly. And in order that this may be brought into the closest view, and the conclusion necessarily force itself upon our minds, let us consider what consequences must follow upon the supposition, that these facts are not true. You can have no rational doubt of these things, but upon one of these suppositions; either,

1. That the Apostles, and other reporters of these facts, did themselves certainly know that their narratives of these miracles were all of them mere fictions and falsehoods, and that they never did in fact see any such miraculous works performed by Jesus Christ; that they never did see and converse with

him after his resurrection; and that they never had those miraculous gifts and powers themselves; nor ever instrumentally conveyed them to others.—Or,

2. That the reporters of these facts, and many thousands of others, had their senses and “imagination imposed upon,” and were made to believe that they did see, hear, and feel, such miraculous operations as were never performed.—Or else,

3. That this whole history was an after-game, and a mere piece of forgery obtruded upon the world, after the facts were pretended to be done.

These are all the suppositions that can possibly be made in this case. And I have already in my second letter offered you some proof, that they are all of them unreasonable and absurd. However, for your satisfaction, I will endeavour to show you under each of these suppositions, some of those absurdities that will necessarily follow from them.

In the first place, if it be supposed that the reporters of these facts did themselves certainly know that they were false, then it will follow, that thousands of others, before whom these miracles were said to be done, did also certainly know that they were mere fictions and fables. For they were as capable of certainty, whether they had seen those multitudes of plain, open, visible facts, which are reported, as the apostles were themselves. Upon this supposition, all Judea and Jerusalem must certainly know, that they never saw any such descent of the Holy Ghost in cloven tongues upon the apostles and company; and that they know nothing of those gifts of languages, which were pretended. The several churches throughout the world, among whom the apostles went, did certainly know that they saw no miracles wrought by them in confirmation of their mission; that they never had nor knew any thing about those miraculous gifts, which were said to be so common among them. And yet that all these conspired in the deceit (Jews, as well as Gentiles) to the utter subversion of the religion in which they had been educated; and multitudes of them at the expense of their honours,

estates, and lives, not one person among them all appearing to detect the villany. The Jews tamely submitting to the loss of their religion, and to the imputation of the blackest crime that ever was committed; and the Christian churches as tamely submitting to all that is shocking and terrible to nature, rather than contradict and disprove what they knew to be false. Nay, what is more surprising still, all of these, even the greatest enemies of Christianity among them, have not only allowed, but actually asserted the truth of these facts; which, upon this supposition, they might have so easily disproved, to the utter ruin of the Christian cause. And to crown all, there can be no motive in the world imagined, to put any of them upon acknowledging such notorious and abominable falsehoods. As I know, on the one hand, that you cannot swallow such gross absurdities as these; so I also know, on the other hand, that you have no way to avoid them, upon the supposition before us.

It may be further observed, that if the reporters of these miracles did themselves know, that their narratives were fictitious and false, it will also follow, that the most vile and wicked men that ever were in the world, and the most abandoned to all sense of virtue and piety, did draw up the best system of practical religion, the most worthy of God and man, that ever was known; that they, contrary to their inward principles, set the best examples, and walked according to the rules of this religion themselves; yea, without any known motive, spent their whole lives in a continued course of the greatest toil, fatigue, and misery, that ever men did, to promote this religion, to impress it upon the minds of others, and to teach them, according to it, to live in the love and fear of God. It will also follow, that these enemies of God and godliness (who were so profane, as against their own light to propagate this imposture, in the name of God Almighty) did not only give up the hopes of future happiness, but all the comforts of this life also, in vindication of this known falsehood; that to this end they ventured upon every

thing that is most terrible and affrighting to human nature, and even upon the most cruel and barbarous death, without the least possible hopes of advantage, either in this world or that which is to come. For they did know, and could not but know, that they were going themselves, and leading their followers, upon the pikes of their numerous and potent adversaries, without any prospect beyond the grave (upon the supposition before us) but of eternal damnation. And what still increases the absurdity of this supposition, is, not one of these ever retracted this known falsehood, even in the article of death: but boldly encountered the most shameful and painful death their adversaries could inflict, rather than confess the truth. What, sir, can you possibly imagine of such conduct as this? That these men were not mad and distracted, appears evidently by their works; which, though plain and familiar, were the most consistent, divine, and rational, that ever appeared in the world. Here must therefore be a continued scene of miracles, one way or other. It must at least be allowed miraculous, for so many men knowingly and continually to act in direct opposition to all their interests, comforts, and hopes; and run counter to all the principles of humanity, to all the springs of action, that were ever known among men.

Let us now try the second supposition; and inquire whether it is possible that the reporters of these facts, and all other spectators of them, had their senses imposed upon, by any ledgerdemain trick, juggle, or deceit? Whether, for instance, the senses of the apostles were imposed upon for some years together, while there were daily miracles wrought by their master, before their eyes? Whether the senses of whole multitudes were imposed upon, that they really thought they saw the sick healed, the dead raised, &c., and these things repeated again and again for a long tract of time, when there was indeed nothing at all in it? Whether the witnesses of our Lord's resurrection were imposed upon, when they supposed

they saw him after his death, ate and drank and conversed familiarly with him for forty days together, and beheld him taken up to Heaven before their eyes? And whether all the first churches were imposed upon when they imagined that they saw miracles repeatedly wrought among them; and had themselves miraculous gifts and powers? If these extravagant suppositions are allowed, of what service can our senses be to us; and how can we any way be certain of any thing whatsoever? We may as reasonably imagine, that our whole life has been one continued dream; and that in reality we never saw, heard, felt, thought, spake, or acted any thing at all. Here likewise you must necessarily allow a continued course of miracles, one way or other. At least it must be allowed miraculous, that so great a part of the world should all lose their senses together; and yet all of them imagine that they had all this time their senses in their full exercise.

Let us next consider, whether the last of the suppositions, that the whole history of the miracles wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, was an after-game, a mere piece of forgery, obtruded upon the world in some distant time after the facts were pretended to be done, will appear more reasonable than the others already considered.

I have spoken something to this in my second letter, to which I refer you: and shall now only add some hints further to illustrate the case before us. If this last case be supposed, the forgery must be palmed upon the world, either before or after Christianity had generally obtained. If this false history was thrust upon the world in some distant age after the facts were pretended to be done, before Christianity had generally obtained, it will then follow, that all the historians of those times (Christian, Jewish, and Pagan) have united in confederacy, to give us a false account of Christianity's immediately succeeding the crucifixion of Christ, not only in Judea, but in all parts of the Roman empire. That they do all agree in this report, is what you must acknowledge: but

how they came to unite in relating such matters of fact, which they all (upon this supposition) must know to be false, is what no man can possibly imagine. If this was done after Christianity had obtained, it will follow, that a great part of the world renounced the religion in which they had been educated, for the despised doctrine of the cross, and for a life of continued contempt, misery, and peril, without knowing the reason why; and altogether ignorant of the foundation upon which their new religion was built. For, if they professed Christianity, before they knew the history of Christ's life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension, and before they had heard of the apostles' progress and miraculous works, with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which accompanied their ministry; they then all agreed to sacrifice their most valuable temporal interests, and multitudes of them endured the most terrible deaths, in a cause which they knew nothing about, and none of them knew any manner of reason why they should do so. That is, in plain English, a great part of the world ran mad at once, most unaccountably; and from these mad men, Christianity is descended down to the present time.

It may be further observed, that upon the supposition before us, it will also follow, that in whatever distant age from these pretended facts, this history was palmed upon the world, all men at once must be persuaded to believe for truth, what they knew to be false. These histories declare, that they were written by the apostles and immediate disciples of our Lord, that the authors of these histories did propagate the gospel through the world, did send these writings to the churches to be kept in their hands, as the rule of their lives, and the directory of their conduct; and that in fact, multitudes of the several nations were proselyted unto, and baptized into the faith of Christianity. Now was it possible, at any time whatsoever, after those pretended facts, that these nations could be ignorant, whether these books and this religion were handed down to them by their progenitors?

Could not every one of the nations, who are in these books said to be converted to Christianity, at once conclude that they had never heard any thing of this nature before; and therefore, that these histories were all false and spurious; and consequently not worthy of the least notice? Is it possible, that the world should agree to venture both time and eternity upon such a known falsehood? Could all the world at once be gulled by such glaring and open forgery and deceit? In a word, these books were many of them directed to large societies of men, in different parts of the world, were early translated into divers languages, in which they are still extant, have been publicly kept and publicly read in the churches, have been appealed to by all parties and sects; and never called in question as a forgery, either by the friends or enemies of the Christian cause. All these things put together, we have as much certainty, that these histories are not, cannot be forgery or imposture, as we can have of any thing whatsoever, not immediately open to our senses.

Now, sir, let us sum up this evidence; and see what the conclusion must be.

All mankind must own, that if the history of these facts be true; if the Lord Jesus Christ did perform so many astonishing miracles for so long a time together, in justification of his divine mission; if he did himself rise from the dead, commission his apostles to their work, endow them with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, and empower them, by the imposition of their hands, to communicate the same miraculous gifts to others, here was certainly the greatest interposition of heaven in favour of the Christian institution, that can possibly be imagined or conceived. The power and veracity of God himself were at stake in this cause: for they were both appealed to in confirmation of the truth: and both in the most amazing manner displayed, in answer to that appeal. All doubting in this case is therefore a calling in question the truth and faithfulness of God himself, as well as his power.

If this history be not true, then all the known laws of nature were changed: all the motives and incentives to human actions, that ever had obtained in the world, have been entirely inverted: The wickedest men in the world have taken the greatest pains, and endured the greatest hardship and misery, to invent, practise, and propagate the most holy religion that ever was: and not only the apostles and first preachers of the gospel, but whole nations of men, and all sorts of men, Christian, Jew, and Pagan, were (no body can imagine how or why) confederated to propagate a known cheat against their own honour, interest, and safety: and multitudes of men, without any prospect of advantage here or hereafter, were brought most constantly and tenaciously to profess what they knew to be false, to exchange all the comforts and pleasures of life for shame and contempt, for banishments, scourgings, imprisonments, and death; in a word, voluntarily to expose themselves to be hated both of God and man, and that without any known motive whatsoever. This must be allowed, or else you must allow, that no man ever was or ever can be certain of any thing; as is more particularly considered above.

There now remains one of these three things a necessary conclusion from what has been said, either, (1.) That these consequences may be justified; or, (2.) That they are not regularly deduced from the premises; or, (3.) That the Christian religion is true, and of divine authority. I am persuaded you will not assume either of the two former of these conclusions: the latter therefore forces itself upon you.

That the Lord may direct you in the way of truth and path of life, is the prayer of

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

SOME OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED.

SIR—According to the direction given in your last, I shall use the greatest freedom in my answer, and laying aside all reserve, shall presume on your candour.

You “cannot see,” you tell me, “how those arguments of mine for the truth of Christianity, can admit of a rational and consistent answer.” How then can you be, but “almost persuaded to be a Christian?” How can you want “some general and easy directions, how to get rid of those doubts, which still hang upon your mind, from the various difficulties which are continually casting themselves in your way?” Do you deal thus with yourself in other cases, of infinitely less importance? Do you harass your mind with doubts about other things which are clearly evident to you, only because you meet with some difficulties which you cannot readily solve? This were the way to downright scepticism, in every thing which falls under your consideration, whether natural or moral. And at this rate you may call into question your own being, and all your rational powers, as well as every thing you see, hear, or feel. For I dare say, there are difficulties enough in any or all of these to puzzle the most sagacious philosopher that ever breathed, and to nonplus the inquiries of all the men in the world.

The question before you is, whether the facts upon which the evidence of Christianity depends, are clearly proved, and necessarily true? If so, there certainly must be some way to solve all those difficulties, whether you have found out the method to do it or not. You should likewise consider, that it is of no importance to the safety of your soul, whether you are,

or are not, capable to obviate all the objections which fall in your way; but it is of eternal importance, that you build on a sure foundation, and that you believe in the only begotten Son of God. This then should be your method in the case before you. First, see to your foundation; examine thoroughly, seriously, and impartially, whether the evidence for the truth of Christianity be such that you have reason to believe it, and that it would be reasonable not to believe it true. And then whatever difficulties may occur, do not dig up your foundation, and undermine your faith and hope. Do not give your adversary the advantage to keep you in a continued suspense, lest you live and die an unbeliever; and so have your objections removed when it is too late, when your conviction will but prove your confusion. I do not speak this to deter you from examining the most subtle objections which the greatest enemies of Christianity are able to throw in your way. The cause will bear the strictest scrutiny, the severest trial. And you can hardly imagine any difficulty, but what has been clearly and judiciously resolved by one or other of the late defenders of this glorious cause. But are you convinced that the arguments to prove the truth of Christianity, admit of no rational answer? Take then the apostle's advice, in all the further inquiries you shall make, to hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end.

This, then, is part of that general advice I would give you, that you may get rid of those doubts which still hang upon your mind. Follow it, and it will at least lessen your difficulties, and may make your way plain before you. But this is not the principal direction necessary to be taken in this case. It is of special consequence to see to it, that you experience the power of Christianity in your own heart. Reject this advice, and it is impossible that you should be rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith. But comply with it, and it is impossible that hell and earth can finally subvert your faith, and separate between Christ and your soul. By this means, this

great affair will be no longer with you a matter of mere speculation or empty opinion, but convincing experience; and nothing but your imperfections and temptations can ever make you hesitate about the truth of those things which you sensibly and continually feel the influence of upon all the powers and faculties of your mind. By this you will have the witness in yourself, a transcript of the gospel upon your heart, such a transcript as will answer to the original, like as the impress upon the wax to the signet; or as a well drawn picture to the lineaments of the face from whence it was taken. By this have multitudes of souls been established in the faith who have never been able critically to examine the external evidence upon which Christianity is founded. They have not been able to dispute for Christ, but they have dared to die for him. They have found the image of God imprinted on their souls by the gospel of God our Saviour: and therefore could not doubt the power of that cause which had produced so glorious an effect upon them. Make the experiment, Sir, and you will be forced to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be indeed your Saviour, when you feel that he hath actually saved you.

Let me therefore set before you some of the marks given of a real Christian, in the New Testament; that when you come to discover the lineaments of this divine image upon your soul, you may know the cause from the effect. In doing this, I should not descend into all the minute particulars of the Christian's character: but only set before you a few of the most plain and intelligible marks, by which a Christian indeed may be distinguished from all others; and by which he may most clearly discern that Christ is a Saviour indeed.

And first the most general mark, by which this may be known, is, that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. (2 Cor. v. 17.) That he is renewed in the spirit of his mind; and that he puts on the new man, which after God is created in right-

eousness and true holiness. (Eph. iv. 23, 24.) Here you may see, is represented a very remarkable and distinguishing change of state; a change which may be known by those who have had the blessed experience; and a change, that has been felt by all those, and none but those, who are Christians indeed.— Could you then find this blessed effect of your committing your soul and your eternal interests into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all the powers, passions, and appetites of your soul are renewed, you could not doubt the author of the wonderful change. You must own it to be from him, that you are brought to hate what you before loved, and to love what you before hated. Can you help but acknowledge this, when you find, that the thoughts and dispositions of your mind are new; and the chief subjects of your care and meditation are the things unseen and eternal: That the desires and affections of your soul are new, and placed upon the things that are above, where Christ Jesus sits at the right hand of God: that your views and apprehensions of yourself are new; and your haughty and selfish imaginations are changed to a humble and contrite spirit, that trembles at God's word: that your confidence and dependence are new; and instead of depending upon your good attainments, purposes, promises, reformations, or duties, you are endeavouring to be found in Christ Jesus, not having on your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. That your joys and satisfactions are new; and instead of rejoicing in your temporal and sensual acquisitions, you rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. That the objects of your love and complacency are new; and instead of loving the world and your idols, you esteem God's favour to be life, and his loving kindness to be better than life; and instead of loving the company of worldly and sensual persons, you have your only delight and complacency in men of serious vital piety; and have this evidence that you are passed from death to life, that you love the bre-

thren. That your appetites and passions are new; and instead of those boundless desires you were before actuated by, you are brought into a humble subjection to the will of God; and instead of those turbulent passions which before had the ascendant, you experience the blessed fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. And to sum up all, that your conversation is new; and that you live a life of holiness towards men endeavouring to fill up every station, relation, and capacity of life with duty; and striving to have your whole conversation as becomes the gospel of Christ.

This, Sir, is a brief summary of the true Christian character. This is the salvation (in its moral view) which our Lord Jesus Christ bestows in this world, upon all his sincere followers. No man ever failed of obtaining this, who by faith unfeigned brought his soul to Christ, and depended upon him, for his sanctifying renewing influences.

Now, secondly, another thing which all true Christians experience, and none but they, is the spiritual warfare. They have a warfare with their remaining corruptions. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, Gal. v. 7. And they see another law in their members, warring against the law of their minds, in order to bring them into captivity to the law of sin and death, Rom. vii. 23. They have still so many imperfections remaining in their hearts, in their duties, and in their conversations, as make them groan, being burthened; and cry out, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! When, therefore, you are heartily engaged in this war, and feel in yourself that you are continually led on to victory, can you doubt, who it is that approves himself the captain of your salvation? Can you doubt this when you sensibly feel in yourself a hatred to all sin, without any reserve, even to those sins which by constitution, or custom, are so nearly and intimately united to your affections, as to become your members, even a right

hand, a right foot, or a right eye? Can you doubt this, when you feel that you even hate vain thoughts; and that the irregularities of your heart and affections, as well as of your outward conduct, are matter of your continual grief and burthen: what you continually watch and pray and strive against? Can you doubt this, when it is your constant experience, that there is nothing more grievous to you, nothing more contrary to the governing desires of your soul, than the prevalence of these corruptions, and the deadness, formality, and distractions, which accompany your holy duties; and when you experience that it is your most ardent and impatient pursuit, to gain further victory over the imperfections of your heart and life; and to obtain more uninterrupted communion with God, in your religious approaches to him? Or, to sum up all in a word, can this be doubted, when (under the sharpest conflict, you can meet with from this quarter) you are able sincerely to say, that though when you would do good, evil is present with you; yet you delight in the law of the Lord, after the inward man?

You must, beside this intestine war, have the trial of another campaign. You will find enemies from without, as well as within, to maintain a continual conflict with. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world; and against spiritual wickedness in high places, Eph. vi. 12. This is what you have probably had no experience of. A prisoner in the hands of his enemies, led captive by them at their pleasure, has no acquaintance with the progress of wars and conflicts, battles and sieges; makes no attempts for victory and triumph: but submits to the injunctions of his conquerors; and the more cheerful his submission the more ease and comfort he will find. This you must acknowledge to be eminently true of such who without opposition, resign themselves voluntary prisoners into their enemies' hands; as all careless and secure sinners run into the hands of sin and Satan—but

when once persons come to be, in good earnest, engaged in the cause of Christ, what violent opposition do they meet with? What dreadful temptations do they often encounter, which carry their own evidence with them, from what quarter they come? This I warn you of beforehand, that when you come to the experience, you may not be discouraged, but established in the faith of that revelation, which you find experimentally true.

How frequently are Christians indeed called into this field of battle? How frequently are they assaulted with most violent and impetuous temptations; which will follow and hurry them, and sometimes foil them, notwithstanding all their good desires, godly resolutions, and most active endeavours after holiness?—What horrid and blasphemous thoughts are often injected into the minds of such, which though the greatest burden and abhorrence of their distressed souls, yet follow and haunt them wherever they go, and whatever they do, and especially at the seasons of their nearest approaches to God? What doubting apprehensions, what subtle, surprising reasonings, will be darted into the minds of some, even the most established Christians, against the very being of God, and the truth of Christianity, notwithstanding their highest rational conviction, and fullest satisfaction of the truth of these great fundamentals of religion?—What horrible and amazing dispositions and affections will seem to arise in the minds of some of the most devout and heavenly persons in the world; who in the dreadful conflict are sometimes made to roar by reason of the disquietness of their hearts? What distressing darkness, dejections, and despondings will some Christians be exercised with, after clear and satisfying evidences of God's favour, against all the comforting considerations which can be proposed; and notwithstanding all the former manifestations of the love of God to their souls? And do not these, and such like fiery darts of the wicked one, as clearly discover the agency of Satan, as if we saw him make his attacks in a visible appearance?

I am sensible, that many of these temptations are ordinarily imputed to bodily disease, because Satan frequently makes the fiercest attacks upon the weakest wall, where there is the greatest prospect of success. But though bodily disorder may expose us to darkness of every kind, yet what blasphemy can there be in the spleen? How came infidelity by a lodging in the humours of the body? Or how can any disordered temperature of the body produce in the mind (contrary to the habitual bent and bias of the renewed soul) such fierce, impetuous, and irresistible blasphemies against the glorious God, and the blessed Redeemer of the world? If this be only from bodily disease, how comes it to pass that many persons of vigorous health of body have met with the same distressing trials? Herein then the truth of Christianity is confirmed by experience, when the Christian meets with the very same trials which the Scripture forewarns him of: and the fierceness of the combat may not only establish him in the faith, but strengthen his hopes of victory. He sees the divine original of the Christian institution, by the enmity and opposition of the infernal powers against it. He feels the warfare just such as the Scriptures describe: and may therefore conclude that he has no temptation but what is common to men, and may confide in the captain of his salvation, that he is leading him on to victory.

Thirdly. Another instance, wherein the truth of Christianity is brought to be a matter of sensible experience, is the comfort, peace, and joy of a religious life. Our blessed Lord has told us, that his yoke is easy and his burthen light, Mat. xi. 30. Peace he leaves with his disciples, his peace he gives unto them, and this in a manner which the world cannot give, John xiv. 27. And the apostle represents Christians as rejoicing in Christ Jesus, without confidence in the flesh, Phil. iii. 3, and as having the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given unto them, Rom. v. 5. Now what doubt can remain in the heart of a Christian, of the truth and faithful-

ness of these promises, when he feels them actually fulfilled unto him; when he sensibly feels that Christ doth not leave him comfortless, but manifests himself to him, so as he doth not unto the world; when he joyfully feels the Spirit of God witnessing with his spirit, that he is a child of God!

You may perhaps esteem this to be all cant and delusion, enthusiasm or heated imagination: but is it reasonable in a man that was born blind to conclude, that because he himself has no idea of light and colours, therefore no man ever saw the sun; and that all pretences of delight from the beautiful appearances of the creation, are mere chicanery and deceit?

I hope, Sir, you will quickly be led forward by the Spirit of God into these blessed paths of joy and peace: and then you will need no other arguments to convince you of these glorious truths, than your own happy experience. Then with surprising delight, you will be able to feel the exercise of faith in the Son of God; and to apply the gracious promise, that him who comes to Christ, he will in no wise cast out. Then you will feel a most humbling and soul-abasing sense of your own vileness and unworthiness; and with sacred rapture admire, adore and praise the riches of that sovereign grace by which you are plucked out of the hands of sin and infidelity, and out of the jaws of death and hell; and become accepted in the beloved. Then a ray of (before unexperienced) light will break into your soul, and give you such a spiritual view of the divine perfections, as you never before had; such a discovery of redeeming love, as will fill you with wonder and praise. Then the world with all its empty pageantry will vanish out of sight; and you will be no longer emulous of the riches and grandeur of the greatest men in the world; nor of the pleasures of the most sensual epicure. Your soul will then be solaced with more pure and substantial joys, with delights more answerable to its desires, and more satisfying to its taste, than it is possible it should find from any of the vain amusements of time and sense. Then you will obtain such a sensible and affecting dis-

covery of the future glory, as will put your soul upon the wing; and excite your most ardent desires after the more intimate and eternal enjoyment of that blessed hope. In a word, then the light will shine out of darkness, and give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And if you are favoured with this delightful view, when you come to encounter the king of terrors, you will be able to stand the shock with courage, with comfort, and joy (as I have seen many do) from a delightful prospect of your future inheritance; and breathe out your last breath with that triumphant song—O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!

It is true, this is not always the happy frame of every sincere Christian. We are here in a militant state, and must often meet with sore conflicts from our spiritual enemies, as was before observed: but when these more exalted joys and comforts are wanting, believers have yet meat to eat which the world knows not of. The promises will still prove an anchor for their souls, to keep them sure and steadfast, in the most tempestuous season. They will find delight and comfort from the ordinances of God; and at least find occasional returns of sensible communion with him, which will make them rejoice more than when corn and wine and oil increase. And often in the midst of their greatest darkness, they will have sudden and surprising gleams of light and joy break into their souls, by which they will, before they are aware, become like the chariots of Amminadib. At least they will be able to look unto Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith; and comfort themselves by committing their souls to him, and venturing their eternal interests in his hand.

The Scriptures speak much of these feelings of the Spirit, the earnest of our future inheritance. The Spirit of God helps his children to sensible experience of their undoubted truth and reality; whereby they are established in the faith, strengthened for their spiritual encounters, and supported, under all the difficulties and trials they meet with, in their way to

the future inheritance. How light soever you may make of what has been said, I hope, Sir, you will live to rejoice in the delightful experience, as thousands of others have done; and thereby find occasion to say with them, we are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Fourthly. I may yet add another instance wherein the truth of Christianity is made matter of experience, which is the manner in which the great change is wrought and carried on in the heart of every sincere Christian. There is, I confess, a vast difference with respect to a variety of incidental circumstances, in the methods of the divine operation, in turning sinners from the power of Satan to God: and yet the Scripture account of this change, as to the substance of it, is always found to be exactly verified in all those, who, at adult years, are the happy subjects of God's converting grace. This has been continually confirmed, by the blessed experience of the children of God, in all the successive ages of the church.

How agreeably are we surprised to see a careless and secure sinner, who was going on in the pursuit of his lusts, hardened against all the solemn warnings which he had continually received from the word and ordinances and providences of God; and deaf to all the pathetic admonitions of his godly friends; to see such an one, I say, at once, by some ordinary passage in a sermon, in a book, or in conversation, thoroughly awakened out of his security, and put upon a serious and lasting inquiry, What he should do to be saved. His conscience can no more now, as at other times, wear off the impression; nor dare he return to his mirth and jollity, to his sensual and worldly pursuits—he can no more speak peace to his soul, from his general hopes or his good designs; nor rest in any thing short of an interest in Christ. Thus we see the promise verified, that Christ would send the Comforter to convince the world of sin; and find it most evidently true, that the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword. We

see a change made, that no means, no endeavours could ever effect till a divine power was exerted to bring it about.

How constantly does the thoroughly awakened sinner, find, by experience, the deficiency of all his legal attempts to quiet his conscience, and to establish his hopes of the favour of God? He sees his sins too great and numerous to be expiated by his imperfect performances. He feels his corrupt affections, appetites, and passions, too strong for his good purposes and resolutions. He is deeply sensible of so much defect and impurity in the best of his religious duties, as render them utterly unworthy the acceptance of an infinitely pure and holy God. He feels his heart so hard, and his affections so dead and carnal, that nothing but an Almighty power can quicken them. He knows by experience that he needs mercy, and that all his own refuges, and all endeavours in his own strength to relieve his distressed soul, are fruitless and vain. He finds it indeed the case of fallen man, that nothing but coming to Christ, with faith in him, and dependence upon him for righteousness and strength, can give rest to his labouring and weary soul. True it is, there are some convinced sinners that wear off their religious impressions, and stop short of these effects which I have now described: but these consequences are always found in all those whose convictions are abiding and effectual. By these they are always constrained to fly for refuge to Christ, and look to him for that life and peace which they can find no where else. You will readily allow that my station gives me the advantage of a particular acquaintance with the circumstances of distressed souls: and having conversed with very many under convictions, from time to time, I have always found the above observations exactly verified.

How surprising is the change made in convicted sinners, when a ray of divine light shines into their souls, and enables them to act faith in Christ, and to behold the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ! Now these mourners in Zion have appointed unto

them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called Trees of Righteousness. From this time, they become indeed new creatures in all spiritual respects. Their discovery of the excellency and sufficiency of Christ, whereby they are enabled cheerfully to trust their eternal interests in his hands, proves a continued source of love to God and man, and a principle that constantly inclines them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. We see this experimentally true, as the Scriptures represent it, that their faith works by love, purifies their hearts, and overcomes the world. There are indeed some hypocritical pretenders to faith in Christ, in whom we do not find these fruits and effects of it: but then there are (through the goodness of God) numbers of others, the tenor of whose future lives fully evidences that their faith is sincere; and that it produces all the effects which the Scriptures ascribe to it.

There is no room to impute this work to the irregular sallies of an over-heated imagination, when we see a thorough and lasting change both of heart and life. There is no room to suppose, that enthusiasm or fanaticism can have any hand in this change when we see the blessed effects of faith in Christ every way answers the description given thereof in the gospel; and when the believer visibly and in reality is become a new man, from the time of his receiving and relying upon the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and strength.

And as bad as times are, as stupid and unbelieving as the world in general appear, we have yet repeated examples of the blessed effects of faith, which I have now described; and of the verification of that precious truth, that to as many as receive the Lord Jesus Christ, to them is given power to become the children of God, even to them who believe in his name.

And now, Sir, if you will review what has been said, does it not evidently appear, that he who believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself,

when he finds the same change of heart, the same spiritual conflicts, the same joy, peace and comfort of soul, and all these wrought in the very same way and method, which the Scriptures so plainly and particularly describe? Can I doubt of the skill of that physician, or the efficacy of that medicine, whereby I am recovered from a dangerous disease, to health and comfort, exactly in the same method, and by the same sensible and progressive steps, as was foretold me?

And is not this truth made most clearly evident, not only to the persons themselves, but to all diligent observers, when you find the same experiences reported by all true believers in Christ, and all the same external and visible effects of their faith, conspicuous and open to every one's observation, not in one or two instances only, but in thousands of those who profess to have had these experiences? As we must necessarily acknowledge the skill of that physician, who effectually cures all that submit to his directions and applications: so we are constrained to acknowledge him for our Saviour, who in the very same way and manner, which he has proposed and promised, does actually and effectually save all those who believe in him, and in the way of his appointments trust to him for salvation.

In my former letters, I have laid before you some of the external evidences of Christianity: In this I have given you a brief sketch of those internal evidences which serve to confirm and illustrate the same important cause. By the former, the truth of the Christian religion is laid open to the understanding: by the latter, it is made matter of sensible experience to the heart. That the glorious Redeemer may enable you to feel the force of this reasoning, to your unspeakable comfort here and happiness hereafter, is the prayer of

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER VI.

SOME OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF
CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED AND ANSWERED.

SIR—I do not wonder to find you prejudiced against “the extravagant claim to extraordinary experiences in religion, lately made by some who are evidently under enthusiastic heats and delusions.” But I cannot see any force at all in your reasoning, that “Because there are many eminent professors of late, who really have nothing in them but heat and show, and yet make as high pretensions to the divine influences, and to special experience of the operations of the Spirit of God in their hearts, as any others can do; therefore all pretences of that kind may justly be suspected to flow from the same cause and to be the offspring of a like irregular fancy, and heated imagination.”

Do you indeed think it just arguing, because some men make vain and false shows of what they really are not, that therefore all other professors of religion are hypocrites, as well as they? Will it follow, because some men pretend to literature which they have not, therefore there are no men of learning in the world? Your discovery of false pretenders to religious experiences, does indeed give you just reason to presume, that some others may, but no reason to conclude, that all others must, in the same manner impose upon the world, by mere delusive appearances. If you have discovered any to be false and deceitful in their profession of religious experiences, it must be because you see something in their conduct which contradicts their profession. But what reason does this give you, to suspect those in whose conduct you see nothing which contradicts their profession. If you have reason to conclude the hypocrisy of the former sort, from the evidences which appear against them; you have also reason to conclude the sincerity of the latter sort, from the evidences which appear in

their favour, and which testify the reality of the change they profess. If you have ground to suspect the careless, the loose, the sensual professor, because he is such; by the same way of reasoning, you have ground to conclude in favour of the serious, the watchful, and mortified professor of religion, because he is such. If the licentious and profane, the fraudulent and unjust, the censorious and uncharitable, the despisers and calumniators of their brethren, are therefore to be suspected of false pretences to the divine influences; by the same arguments, they who are so changed as to become remarkably holy and righteous, meek and humble, charitable, benevolent, and beneficent, have a just claim to be esteemed sincere, and be credited in their profession of religious experiences. There are (through the mercy of God) numbers of such yet among us, all of whom have this change in its visible effects obvious to the world: and though some of them may be doubtful of their own state, yet all of them declare, that they have received all their attainments from the Lord Jesus Christ; they have looked to him, and depended upon him for them all; and have always found, that their progress in piety towards God, and in justice, kindness, and charity towards men, has borne proportion to their cheerful dependence upon Christ for righteousness and strength. If some men are liars, yet, others are credible and may be trusted, especially when they give us undoubted evidence of their truth and fidelity. Even so in the present case, if some men are hypocrites, and evidence themselves to be such, we have no reason from thence to suspect the truth of others' profession and experiences, whose wonderful change of life, and whose future conversation, are a continual testimony to the sincerity of the profession they make, and to the credibility of the experiences which they relate.

But it seems you are especially prejudiced against religious experiences, by the "irregular fancy and heated imagination" which you have observed in some pretenders to extraordinary attainments in re-

ligion; from whence you seem to argue, that because some of their "pretended experiences are extravagant flights of a disturbed brain, and evidently flow from pride, self-esteem, and uncharitableness towards others, and end in faction, division, and alienation of affection," that therefore, since some of their pretences are manifestly false and airy imaginations, you have just reasons to conclude that all the rest of their pretences are of the same sort, and flow from the same depraved mind.

I acknowledge, Sir, this is one of the most plausible objections, that ever I have heard of, against the internal evidences of Christianity. And, no doubt, our grand adversary, the devil, has had an especial hand in blowing up that false-fire, that he may turn away our eyes from the glory of the Lord arisen upon Zion. No doubt, Satan hath transformed himself into an angel of light, in the late extravagant heats which have appeared in some places, that so, by over-doing, he might undo, and might bring reproach on the wonderful work of divine grace, which has made such a glorious progress in these parts of the world. A permission of these dreadful delusions may be esteemed a just judgment of God upon such as have remained careless and secure in a remarkable season of grace, who have resisted the calls of the gospel, the convictions of their consciences, and the strivings of the Holy Spirit, that they might thereby be hardened in their prejudices against vital and experimental religion, and perhaps finally stumble and fall.

But how plausible soever your objection may be, your reasoning is far from conclusive. What inconsistency is there in the supposition, that a true convert may have some very false apprehensions and imaginations? That the same person may have a sanctified heart, and a confused head? And that he may build upon the true foundation, such wood, hay, and stubble, as must be burned up? Our blessed Saviour has undertaken to sanctify the hearts of all those who sincerely trust in him: but has never promised to

make them infallible in all their conduct. If, therefore, from a principle of love to God; these men should zealously endeavour to serve him, and yet, through heated imaginations, or erroneous apprehensions of their duty, in some cases, they should mistake their way; and suppose that they are doing God good service when they are acting counter to the true interests of Christ's kingdom. What then? Is it any absurdity to suppose they may act from a right principle, though in a wrong manner? The error is in their opinions, but not in their wills. Their hearts are engaged in God's service, though their heads mislead them. They may have experienced a real change (in the manner described in my last letter) though through ignorance and mistake their endeavours to serve God are in some instances irregular and sinful. They may have had real experiences in true and vital piety, though at present their imaginations are imposed on by enthusiasm and delusion. These allowances may be made, and ought to be made, for those who hold fast the fundamental principles of Christianity, and practical godliness; and for none but those. There ought to be such allowances made for those, because there is nothing in their character inconsistent with true and vital piety: yet there ought not to be such allowances made for any but those; because Christ has undertaken to lead his sincere followers into all necessary truth. I think I have good reason to conclude, that the case is truly, and in fact, just as I have here described it, with respect to numbers of those who have run into some of those irregularities you complain of. This appears, in that some of those who have been convinced of and penitently bewailed those mistakes, do yet, (their former irregularities notwithstanding) walk worthy their professed experience of a saving change, and approve themselves holy, humble, and charitable Christians. And I have the more hopes of others, who have not yet been convinced of their mistakes, upon account of their having been seduced into these errors, by such zealous leaders, of whose piety they have so great an

opinion. But you will, perhaps, inquire, what I can say for those leaders who have influenced others to these irregular heats? To which I must answer, that as far as I am acquainted with them, I have reason for a much better opinion of the hearts of some of them, than of their heads; and must bear them witness, that they have a zeal for God, though not in every thing according to knowledge.

But supposing, as you suppose, that some of the chief of these preachers were very wicked men, who cloaked their evil intentions under a show of zeal and extraordinary piety, the better to ensnare poor unwary souls into their delusions, to promote divisions and contentions in the land, and to compass their covert designs: My argument is, on this supposition, so much the stronger. Herein the power and love of the great Redeemer are so much the more conspicuous, that he has out-shot Satan with his own bow; and over-ruled those attempts, for the promotion of his own kingdom and interest, which were levelled against it.—Nothing is more visible, than that great numbers of poor sinners have been awakened; and brought to fly to Christ for refuge. Nothing is more apparent, than that the consequence of this has (in numerous instances) been the renovation of their lives and conversation, from a careless, sinful, sensual life, to a life of holiness, righteousness, kindness, and charity. In these, therefore, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is become glorious; whatever covert designs any of the instruments were actuated by. If these preached Christ even of envy and strife, What then? notwithstanding every way whether in pretence or in truth, Christ was preached; I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.—It is remarkable, that the doctrines of the gospel, particularly touching the misery of our natural state; the necessity of an interest in Christ, and the way of salvation by faith in him, were preached by them all (whatever human imaginations were mixed with them) and these had their effect in a peculiar manner. Our blessed Saviour has therein blessed his own institutions; and accomplished

the designs of his grace, whoever and whatever were the instruments, by whom these glorious effects have been produced. As far, therefore, as a sanctifying change in the hearts and lives of men has been effected, so far must we acknowledge this to be a work of God; and a display of the divine power of our blessed Saviour. The miracles of divine grace, which might be wrought by Judas, were as bright a discovery of the Redeemer's power and goodness, as those were which were wrought by the other apostles.

But you tell me, that "many of these new converts pretend to mighty experiences of divine impulses, raptures, ecstacies, and the like: But show forth no moral virtues, nor true love either to God or man." Well, sir, what follows from this? Are there not many others, who make no pretension to such mighty experiences of divine impulses, raptures, &c., that do show forth all moral virtues; and have a true love both to God and man? Is it a good argument, that because there are some mere enthusiasts, who pretend to such experiences which the Scriptures do not make the character of true Christians, therefore they are all mere enthusiasts, who even pretend to such experiences as the Scriptures do make the character of all true Christians? What is Christianity concerned with the ecstacies and heats of such men as you speak of? Where are these ecstasical heats described in the gospel, as the marks of the children of God? Be their experiences allowed to be according to their pretences, what follows from thence, but that if they have no moral virtues, these men's religion is vain; it is all enthusiastical, unscriptural and without foundation? But then on the other hand, the experiences which I have before described, are such as the Scriptures do make the marks and characters of the children of God: and many there are, that make no pretences to divine impulses, raptures, or ecstacies, who profess to have had these experiences, and justify their profession, by living in the love both of God and man. Now, I pray, how are

such concerned in the enthusiasm, of which you complain? Do not the experiences of these witness for them, as much as the experiences of the other witness against them? Here is a visible and effectual change wrought in them (just such a change as the Scriptures describe) by which they are brought into a conformity to the divine Nature, and live worthy of their profession and character.—Christ has promised the sanctification of the Spirit to his people, who depend upon him for it: and what greater evidence can there be of the faithfulness of the promise, than to see and feel its accomplishment?

But you further observe, that “the demeanour of many of these pretenders to religious experiences, is directly contrary to that morality, beneficence and charity, which are the ornament and glory of human nature.” And is not this a strong confirmation of my argument? I appeal to you yourself, Sir, whether you are not acquainted with many others, that pretend to the religious experiences which I have described, who are the brightest patterns of those graces and virtues, which are the ornament and glory of human nature. Here then is a plain and visible criterion, by which it may be known whose experiences are, and whose are not, from the Spirit of God.

“They are,” you say, “indeed converted, but it is to pride and vanity, to self-esteem and self-applause.” But are there not many others, who are converted to deep humility, self-loathing, and self-condemning?

“They are changed,” you say, “but it is to bitterness, reviling, censuring, and judging their neighbours, who are much better than they.” I allow this charge to be agreeable to their pretended experiences: But then, do not you see (blessed be God, I am sure I have seen) many others changed to meekness, kindness, and love, and brought to esteem others much better than themselves?

“Their boasted experiences,” you add, “only animate them to divisions, factions, and separations.” But is this the case of all, who make a profession of

religious experiences? No: we have cause to be thankful it is quite otherwise.

“They are,” you say, “often elated with rapturous joys and exultation, which seem to be the product of nothing but self-esteem, and an irregular heated imagination.” Here you inquire, “Must I esteem these to be the joy of the Holy Ghost, of which your last letter speaks? If not, how shall I know, that all pretences of this kind are not equally fictitious and imaginary?” This (I confess) deserves some attention. For perhaps no one thing has raised such prejudices in the minds of men against spiritual and religious experiences, as those airy raptures and causeless exultation, that in some instances have been seen of late.

I would therefore observe to you, that your own representation of those joyful transports, of which you complain, is sufficient to distinguish them from those joys of the Holy Ghost, of which I wrote to you. You rightly observe, that these false raptures are the product of an excited imagination. But you have no room to conclude this to be the case with respect to those spiritual joys and comforts, of which I wrote in my last. I have known a wretched despicable beggar, covered with rags and vermin, who imagined himself a king’s son, and expected to be treated accordingly: but how vain and ludicrous soever his imaginations were, I never thought it an argument, that there are no king’s sons in the world. He might probably entertain more transporting apprehensions of his imagined royalty, than they who really possess that dignity, which he so vainly pretended to. But must these latter be rejected as vain pretenders, because of the crazed imagination of such a miserable vagrant!

To apply this to the present case, I really allow, that all those joys and comforts which flow from imagination only, are always airy and chimerical, false and delusive. Thus, for instance, some will rejoice and triumph, from only imagining themselves favourites of heaven; some from being able to paint upon their imaginations the miracles, sufferings, re-

surrection, or ascension of Christ; some from an imaginary idea of the final appearing of Christ, and their own future glory, and the like: yet all this while the poor souls forget that there is one thing wanting, in order to make their joys reasonable and substantial; and that is good evidence of their interest in that Saviour, and his glorious salvation, of which they entertain such pleasing imaginations. They who have this evidence (in the manner described in my last) have a substantial foundation of comfort and joy, from having that salvation actually begun in their souls, which is the pledge and earnest of their eternal inheritance: while the others are like to find themselves as much deluded in their expectations of future happiness, as they are in the foundation of their hopes.

You further represent these rapturous joys to be the effect of self-esteem. And I readily acknowledge, that where it is so, it is always deceitful and vain. The divine influences are always humbling to the soul which enjoys them. They therefore are horribly profane who impute their own pride and vanity to the Spirit of God: and consequently they are miserably deceiving themselves, whose joy and comfort flow from an high opinion of their imaginary attainments in religion. They are a smoke in God's nostrils, who are saying, stand by thyself, come not nigh me, for I am holier than thou. But then on the contrary, when the humble soul is lying at God's feet, self-abasing and self-condemning, adoring the infinite riches of God's free grace to such a vile, worthless worm; and rejoicing in Jesus Christ without confidence in the flesh; these blessed effects are worthy the Spirit of God, by whom they are wrought. And it is always true, that the believer's sense of his own vileness, pollution and unworthiness, bears proportion to his joyful evidences of the divine favour.

You further object against the false pretenders you mention, that "their conduct does not justify their joyful assurance." This is indeed a good evidence against their high pretences to extraordinary attainments in religion. For I believe every Christian does

certainly make the same progress in holiness as he does in well-grounded comfort and joy. The objection therefore can no ways effect those with whom this is an experienced truth; who always find that their hope and joy quicken them in their spiritual course, invigorate their duties, and enlarge their desires and endeavours after a conformity to the whole will of God.

I must now leave this matter to your own reflections; you yourself must judge of the validity of your exceptions. Compare the picture you have drawn of some empty, enthusiastical pretenders to religious experiences, with the description I have given you of those, who have indeed experienced the divine life; and consider whether there be any real similitude, in any marks and lineaments of their countenances. In those are found pride and petulance: but in these, humility and self-abasement. In those, censoriousness and uncharitableness are the distinguishing characters: in these, a charitable preferring others to themselves. There you see schism, contention and faction: here, kindness, peace and brotherly love. There imaginary impulse, but here the word of God alone, is considered as the rule of life. There, joy and comfort are considered as the evidence of a good state: here, they are considered as the fruit of good evidence of faith in Christ, and of a renewed nature. There, religion is supposed to consist in rapture and ecstasy: here, in spiritual affections and in a heavenly conversation. There, we find men building their hope and comfort upon their imaginary attainments: but here, we find them making Christ Jesus their only refuge and hope. And to sum up all in a word, there are high pretences to religious experience without the fruits of holiness: but here, the happy effects of this change appear in the heart and life; and justify the profession to be true, and the experiences to be indeed what they are pretended to be.

Upon the whole, there is nothing more certain, than that the Scriptures represent what I have set before you, as the real characters of the children of

God. It is equally certain, that as an actual experience of the renewing change is, from the nature of things, absolutely necessary to salvation, so a sense of this change wrought in us is requisite to true peace and comfort, and there can be nothing but a want of due attention to this experience, or ignorance of the quality of that change they have sensibly experienced, which keeps believers in darkness and doubts about their state.—The subjects of this work can therefore have no greater evidence that it is from God, than sensibly to feel that it every way answers the original description. What greater evidence can they have of the truth of the gospel, than a sensible experience of the reality of its doctrines, and the truth of its promises, by this wonderful work of grace in their own hearts, which so visibly carries the divine signature both in its operation and effects; and is so manifestly distinguished from all false appearances and pretences? For my own part, I cannot but look upon the irregular heats, you speak of, as affording some convincing evidence in favour of the cause I am pleading. These things are foretold in the Scriptures. By these things Satan is endeavouring to support his own kingdom, as we may reasonably expect he would do. He knows, that he is most likely to play the surest game, when he transforms himself into an angel of light. And these false appearances serve for a foil, to discover the greater lustre in a true and real work of divine grace.

The only objection against all this, which I can foresee, is, that the persons I am characterizing, exist no where, save in my descriptions of them. But I need add no more to what I have said upon this already, than my attestation, that I have the comfort of an inward and intimate acquaintance with considerable numbers of such as those whom I have described. And if you, Sir, would seek out such for your chosen companions, your objections would die of themselves; and the argument I have insisted upon, would appear in its proper light and strength.

I know not what more can be needful to be added

upon this subject, but my hearty prayers, that the Spirit of Truth would lead us both into all truth; and that we may know by sensible experience what is the hope of Christ's calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; which has been justly; though but weakly and very imperfectly represented in these letters from,

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE VINDICATED; AND
SOME EXCEPTIONS AGAINST IT CONSIDERED AND ANSWERED.

SIR—You cannot imagine how much comfort you have ministered to me by your last. I greatly rejoice to hear, that “the more strictly you examine the cause, the greater evidence you find of the undoubted truth and certainty of the Christian religion:” But that “you are filled with confusion, to think how long you have lived at a distance from that blessed Saviour, who has wrought out such a glorious redemption for us.” And I am not at all surprised to hear you complain, that “you cannot entertain clear apprehensions of my discourse of experimental religion:” That though your last objections are silenced, there are others which fill your mind with greater difficulty, and are of much greater importance if I have given you a just view of the case.” And “that you cannot tell how you can ever be brought to a feeling sense of the doctrines of sovereign grace, which I so much insist on, while they appear to you so inconsistent with truth, and so unreasonable.” I am not, I say, surprised at this; for we are naturally prejudiced against these doctrines; and are not easily brought to receive them, by reason of the strong bias there is upon our minds to the contrary principles. I

shall then endeavour to consider your several objections; and how strong and plausible soever they may appear, I do not despair of giving you satisfaction.

You object, that "if we are of ourselves capable of no qualifying conditions of the divine favour, or (to use my own words) if we must feel that we depend on mere mercy, and that all our own refuges, and all our endeavours in our own strength to relieve our distressed souls, are fruitless and vain, you cannot tell to what purpose any of our endeavours are; or what good it will do us to use any means at all for our salvation.

In order to a clear solution of this difficulty, it seems needful to convince you, that this lost, impotent, deplorable state is the case in fact, of every unrenewed sinner, whatever objections we may frame in our minds against it: and therefore it is necessary, that he should sensibly perceive the case to be as it truly is. And then, it will be proper to show you, that the consequence you draw from this doctrine is unjust; and even directly contrary to the improvement you ought to make of it.

I begin with the first of these; and shall endeavour to convince you, that man is indeed in such a lost and helpless state, that he depends on mere mercy; and cannot bring himself into a claim to the divine favour, by any power or ability of his own. I shall not run into the scholastic controversies and subtle distinctions, with which this doctrine has been clouded by many of our wrangling disputers: but shall endeavour to set it in the most plain, easy, and practical light, that I am able.

I think, you must readily grant, that you cannot make an atonement for your sins, by any performances within your power. You are, Sir, to consider yourself as a sinner, as a criminal and delinquent in the sight of God. Your nature is corrupt and defiled. Your actual transgressions of the law of God have been very numerous; and perhaps some of them attended with special aggravations. All your sins

are directly repugnant to the perfections of the Divine nature; and consequently offensive to a pure and holy God. And what greatly increases the difficulty and danger of your case, is, that you are still continuing to act contrary to God in all you do, while your nature is unrenewed; and while you are without a principle of love to God. I am sure you will pardon this freedom; for it is necessary you should know the disease, in order to the cure. Judge then yourself, whether it can be supposed, that an omniscient heart-searching God can be pleased with any, even the most devout of your overt actions, when he knows that your heart is estranged from him, and your nature has no conformity to him; but your affections are glued to your several idols. How then can you be reconciled to God, by virtue of your own performances and attainments? Can you pay ten thousand talents with less than nothing? Can you please God by offending him, as you do by the obliquity of all your duties, the defects of your best devotions, and the sinful affections from whence they all flow? Or can you have those unworthy thoughts of an infinite, unchangeable God, as to hope you can make such impressions upon his affections, by acknowledging your offences, and imploring his mercy, as to excite his compassion and sympathy; and to make your impure and unholy nature agreeable to his infinite purity and holiness? Can your insincere and hypocritical duties (for such they are all at best, while they proceed from an unsanctified heart,) bring the glorious God to take complacency in what is directly contrary to his own nature? You cannot but see, that these proposals are most unreasonable and absurd. One of these things must certainly be true; either, first, that you have naturally, whilst in an unrenewed state, a principle of holiness, and love to God: or, secondly, that works flowing from an impure fountain, and from a principle of opposition and alienation to God, are yet pleasing to God, will serve to appease him, and will entitle you to his favour: or, thirdly, that you cannot, by any thing

you do, have a claim to God's favour, till your nature is renewed, and you can act from a principle of holiness and love to God. I think every man's experience will confute the first of these, who gives any attention at all to the natural dispositions of his own soul. The second is altogether inconsistent both with the nature of things, and with the nature of an infinitely pure and holy God: and, therefore; the third is necessarily true. It will not at all help the case, to allege in bar of what is here said, that Christ Jesus has made an atonement for us. For what is that to you, while you remain without an interest in him? Did Christ purchase for you a capacity to make an atonement for yourself? Did he die, that God might be pleased with what is contrary to his own nature, and pacified with such duties as can be no better than impure streams from a corrupt fountain?

Let reason sit judge in the case before us; and you must allow your case to be as I have described it. And it is equally evident, that you have no power to change your own heart, and to produce in yourself a new principle of love to God and conformity to him, by any endeavours of your own. It is evident from what has already been said, that our hearts and affections must be renewed and sanctified, before either our persons or services can be acceptable in the sight of God. And which way can this be compassed? If you take up resolutions, these will no longer stand you in stead, than the principle of fear, from which they proceed, is kept in action. If you execute these resolutions in some external reformations, this is but lopping off the branches, while the stock and the root of the tree are still alive; the affections and dispositions of the soul being still the same. If by fear, or other selfish motive, you something restrain the present more sensible exercise of your sinful appetites or passions, this is but damming up the stream, and forcing it into another channel; pull down the dam, and it will run where it did before. Certain it is, that every man naturally loves the world and the things of the world,

the objects of his sensual appetites ; and loves his lusts and idols more than God : and it is equally certain, that whatever restraints he may sometimes put upon these dispositions, an omniscient eye beholds the same principle in him notwithstanding : and consequently he can never please God, till there be in this respect a real and thorough change wrought in all the powers of his soul ; such a change as the Scriptures describe by a translation from darkness unto light, from death to life, and from the power of Satan unto God. And to suppose that any but he who first gave being to our souls, can give them a new being, in all spiritual or moral respects ; and make their dispositions, appetites, passions, contemplations, desires and delights, not only differing from, but directly contrary to what they were, is to ascribe to the creature what is the peculiar property and prerogative of the glorious God himself. Do you, Sir, but make the trial, and you will find, after all your endeavours, that the violation of your promises and resolutions, the deadness and hypocrisy of your duties, the prevalence of your sins, and the continued estrangement of your affections from God and Godliness, will give you more sensible conviction, than any method of reasoning can do, that there is a greater power needful, than your own, to make you a new creature.

It must therefore necessarily follow, that there is nothing you are able to do, can give you a claim to the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit. If any thing you can do, can give you a claim to the renewing and sanctifying influences of the divine grace, your claim must be either from merit or promise. Not of merit ; when you cannot of yourself so much as leave off sinning, and thereby running further into debt to the justice of God ; and this, even in and by the best of your duties. Your highest attainments therefore can merit nothing but the divine displeasure. Not of promise ; for where, I beseech you, has God promised to reward your insincerity, with his saving mercy ? And how vain are all pretences to serve God

sincerely, where there is not one grain of true holiness in the heart? Whatever moral honesty men in a state of nature may boast of, it is all but spiritual hypocrisy in the sight of a heart-searching God: and can bring none under the promise; which is made to faith unfeigned, the only simplicity and Godly sincerity, in the account of the gospel.

But I return to consider your objection more distinctly. "The Scriptures," you tell me, "promise, that he who seeks shall find." But, Sir, do not the Scriptures also inform us, that many shall seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able: that some ask, and receive not, because they ask amiss: and that he who does not ask in faith, nothing wavering, must not think he shall receive any thing of the Lord? There is indeed a promise to him who seeks in faith and sincerity: but what claim can he have to that promise, who has neither true faith nor sincerity? Will mocking God, and flattering him with your lips, while your heart is estranged from him, entitle you to the promise?

But you say, "All our divines tell us, that the most sinful and unworthy may have access to God through Christ; and this is the purport of all my reasoning with you." True, by faith in Christ they may: but God is a consuming fire to unbelievers. He that believeth not is condemned already. What claim therefore can they have to the favour of God upon Christ's account, who have never received him by faith; and consequently have no interest in him, nor in any of his saving benefits? Can they claim the benefits of the covenant of grace, who are themselves under the covenant of works, which curses them, for their not continuing in all things written in the book of the law to do them? I entreat you, Sir, to consider this case: it is of vast importance to you. If you have not good evidence of an interest in Christ, how can you pretend to the privileges purchased with his precious blood? How can you pretend to access to God through him; and a claim to the blessed influences of his Holy Spirit? How can unbelievers have a claim

to the favour of God by Christ, when he himself assures us, that the wrath of God abideth on them?

But "will not God have compassion on his creatures, when they do what they can to serve him?" What answer would a prince make to a condemned rebel in his shackles and dungeon that should make this plea for pardon? Would the criminal's doing what he can to serve his prince (which, in his present state, is nothing at all to any good purpose) atone for his past rebellion? Or would this qualify him for his prince's favour, while he yet retains the same enmity in his heart against him, and will not so much as submit to his sovereign good pleasure and mere mercy? The application is easy. And it belongs to you, Sir, to consider seriously, whether a sinner, who is dead in trespasses and sins, who is in a state of rebellion against God, and therefore under the condemning sentence of the law, can any more atone for his sins; or make a reasonable plea for grace and pardon, than the traitor aforesaid. But were your reasoning ever so just, it would afford you no grounds of comfort. For there never was, nor ever shall be, any man that can fairly make this plea in his own favour, and truly say he has done all he can in the mortifying his lusts, and in his endeavours to serve God. There will, after all his attempts, remain enough neglected, even of the external part of his duty, that was most in his own power, to condemn both his person and his services.

You complain, that "the arguments in the book I sent you, do not give you satisfaction."* Well, I have here added some further evidence, to what was there offered; and would now call upon you to consider, whether all these things put together does not make it evident, that you depend on mere mercy, and convince you of those Scripture truths, that it is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that showeth mercy; and that God giveth his saving grace only because it hath so seemed good in his sight.

* The True Scripture Doctrine, &c.

Consider, whether you can atone for past sins by present duties, by duties which are so polluted by the principle from which they flow, and which have so much carnality, selfishness, hypocrisy, and sinful defects cleaving to them, that if the iniquity of your most holy things be imputed, it must greatly increase the moral distance between God and you. Consider, whether while you are under the law, or covenant of works, you are capable not only to fulfil all its preceptive demands, and so not further expose yourself to its curses, but also to do something towards making satisfaction to God's justice for what you have already done amiss, and to merit his favour. Or consider, whether you have any claim to God's acceptance of your person upon Christ's account, without an interest in him, and whilst condemned already by his own mouth, and under the wrath of God for your unbelief. Consider, whether you can have any promise of acceptance to plead, while you remain under the curse both of the law and gospel. Consider, whether an omniscient and holy God can be either deluded or gratified with mere external shows of religion, when he knows you have a heart in you that is far from him. Consider, whether you can ever make the case better, by all your endeavours to change your own heart, and to create yourself anew in Christ Jesus, any more than you can produce a new world. Consider, whether you dare venture your eternity upon this issue, that you sincerely do what you can to serve God; and whether there be not such sinful defects cleaving to your best performances, as may justly condemn both you and them. Consider, again, whether if you should do all you can in the service of God, you would do any thing that would either fully come up to the terms of the covenant of grace, or bear the least proportion to that salvation which the gospel requires. Consider once more, whether the glorious God has not an absolute right to dispose of his own favours, just how, when, and where he pleases; and whether he has not assured us, that he will bestow his everlasting mercy upon none but

those who are really conformable to the terms of the covenant of grace.

Now, Sir, if you while ungenerate can neither make atonement for your past sin and guilt, nor come up to the demands of the law of nature: if you can neither please God by your sinful performances, nor impose upon him by your hypocritical shows: if you run further in debt by the sin in your very duties, instead of paying any thing of the old score: if you have no claim to acceptance on Christ's account, without a special interest in him; nor any claim to the benefits of the covenant of grace, till you actually comply with the terms of it: if both law and gospel condemn you in your present state; and nothing but omnipotence can change your heart, and make your state better: if God be a sovereign donor of his own favours; and you can have no promise to plead, while you remain under the curse and wrath of God, and a stranger to the covenants of promise: if even you yourself must allow all these things to be undoubted truths, it must then be true, even to demonstration, that (while in such a state) you are capable of no qualifying condition of the divine favour; and had need therefore to feel that you depend on mere mercy.

To conclude this head, if God himself may be believed in the case, He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth, Rom. ix. 18. 'Tis not for our sakes, that he bestows grace upon us, but for his holy name's sake, Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 31. He predestinates us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, Eph. i. 5, 6. He acts in this case according to his own sovereign pleasure, as a potter that hath power over his clay, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour: and we have no liberty to reply against God: it is insufferable arrogance for the thing formed to say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Rom. ix. 20, 21. Sir, as you yourself claim a sovereignty in the dispen-

sation of your favours, surely you will not dare to deny a like sovereignty in the eternal God. Believe it, the glorious God is a sovereign Benefactor; and he will be acknowledged as such, by all that ever partake of his saving mercy.

And now I am prepared to show you, that the consequence which you draw from this doctrine, is unjust, and even directly contrary to the improvement you ought to make of it.

And the reason I offer for this is, that a realizing belief of the truth before us directly tends to bring most glory to God, and most safety, comfort, and happiness to yourself. It is easy to conceive how it conduceth most to God's glory, for us to consider him as the fountain and foundation of all grace and mercy; and to consider all the favours we enjoy or hope for, as flowing from the mere goodness of his nature, and not from any motive or inducement which we can possibly lay before him. In this view of the case we do that honour to an infinite and eternal Being, as to suppose him a self-existent, independent, and immutable Sovereign: while, on the contrary, to imagine ourselves capable by any thing we can do to change his purposes, engage his affections, or excite and move his compassions towards us, is to conceive him to be altogether such an one as ourselves, liable to new impressions from our complaints or persuasions, mutable in his affections, and dependant upon our duties for the exercise of his grace. And I leave it to you to judge which of these apprehensions are most worthy of that God, who is infinitely exalted above us; and is without any variableness or shadow of turning. I leave it likewise to you to judge, which principle is most likely to subserve our best interests, that which does most honour, or that which does the most dishonour to God.

If we apply this to the present case, I ask in which way can we find most encouragement to seek or strive for mercy? In which way have we the best prospect of success? By entertaining false and dishonourable conceptions of the Divine Being, and denying to God

the glory which is due to his name? Or else by lying at the foot of a sovereign, and thereby ascribing to him the infinite perfections of his excellent nature? Though in this latter way, you can make no change in God, you will nevertheless have the evidence that he has made a change in you, and a comfortable prospect, that by bringing you to a submission to his sovereignty, he has a design of special favour to your soul.

If we should yet further continue our view of this case, it will appear, that submission to the mere sovereign mercy of God is most conducive to your own comfort, safety, and happiness. This consideration is a just foundation of comfort and hope, in that it obviates the darkness and discouragements, that would otherwise arise from a sense of your guilt and unworthiness, and from your impotence and unavoidable infirmity and imperfection in the service of God.

What hope could you find from your duties, when after your best endeavours, you could see so much deadness, formality, and hypocrisy, in your highest attainments? What hope from your reformations, when you find so much sin and corruption gaining ground against all your good purposes and resolutions? What hope from your good affections, when so much hardness of heart, worldly-mindedness, sensuality, and carnal dispositions, are separating between God and you? Can you quiet your soul by imposing upon an omniscient God, with your vain shows and flattering pretences? No, Sir, if you have any true discovery of your own heart, these considerations must continually perplex and distress your soul with distracting fears and despondencies, as long as you are thus compassing yourself about with sparks of your own kindling. For these defects and imperfections will certainly accompany your best resolutions, endeavours, and attainments. But, then, on the other hand, if you depend on mere mercy, and submit to God as the sovereign disposer of his own favours, you have good grounds of encouragement and hope.

Are your sins great, and greatly aggravated? The mercy of God exceeds them all. Have you no agreeable qualifications to recommend you to the favour of God? Multitudes of others have found mercy, who had no better qualifications than you have. Have you no special promise to depend upon as belonging to you while in an unconverted state? Yet is it not sufficient that you have gracious encouragement to leave all in the hands of that mercy which infinitely exceeds your highest apprehensions or imaginations? Are you incapable to come up to the terms of grace proposed in the gospel? There is yet hope in God's omnipotent mercy, that he will work in you both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure. He has done it for thousands of sinners no better than you.

Now, Sir, look around you; and see what refuge you can possibly betake yourself to. You are in the hands of justice; and which way can you make your escape? If you attempt to fly from God, you perish: but to fly to him, there is hope. He is sovereign in the donation of his favours, you have therefore as good a prospect of obtaining salvation (in the use of appointed means) as any unregenerate person in the world. Your defects and demerits need not be any discouragement: For his mercy triumphs over the guilt and unworthiness of the greatest sinners. Is it therefore not your greatest safety to lie at his feet, in the way of his appointments, where there is a blessed hope set before you? In this way you have the infinite mercy of God, the gracious encouragements of the gospel, the glorious success of so many thousands who have tried this method, to animate your diligence and hope. And there is no other way, in which you have any encouragement to expect renewing grace and pardoning, saving mercy.

Since you wholly depend upon God's free sovereign mercy, you should use the more diligent and earnest application, in all the ways of his appointment, that you may obtain it. Since you must obtain mercy of God, or perish, O with what diligence and importunity, with what ardour of soul, should you address the

throne of grace, for deliverance from your guilt and danger? Since in a way of sovereignty, God is pleased to bestow his special grace, with an interest in his Son, and his great salvation, at what time and by what means it shall seem best in his sight, you should therefore at all times, and in the use of all the means of grace, be seeking the Lord, while he may be found, and calling upon him while he is near.

Can it be thought just reasoning, that because you cannot help yourself, and there is none but God can help you, it is therefore in vain to apply to him for help? That because you have no claim to his favour, but lie at his mercy, you will not therefore seek mercy at his hands? Does not this, at the first view, appear contrary to all the methods of reasoning we should use in any other case? Can you promise yourself comfort, from such reasonings and such conclusions as these, in your last expiring moments, when your soul is entering upon its eternal and unchangeable state?

But you object, "If God in sovereignty designs mercy for us, we shall obtain it, whether we seek, or no: and if not, it is in vain to strive." To this it is sufficient to answer, that God never does in sovereignty appoint salvation for any, in the final wilful neglect of gospel means. He is sovereign in the appointment of the means, as well as of the end. The same glorious Sovereign, who assures us, that it is not for our sakes that he bestows his special grace upon us, but for his own name's sake, does also let us know, that he will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do this for them. Whence it follows, that if we have not a heart to seek with earnest diligence, for the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, there is no prospect we shall ever obtain. For God will make us feel the want of his mercy, and will make us esteem his salvation worthy of our care and pains; or leave us to the unhappy effects of our own madness and folly. But if we have hearts given us, to be humbly and earnestly attending upon the means of grace, it is an encouraging sign, that he

who has excited our diligence, intends to crown it with success.

You see, Sir, I have obeyed your commands; and have addressed you with as much plainness and familiarity as the cause requires, and you yourself have demanded.

That God may effectually bring you to submit to the terms of his grace, and enable you so to run, as that you may obtain, is the prayer of

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRUE SAVING FAITH, AND A DEAD TEMPORARY FAITH, DISTINCTLY CONSIDERED.

SIR—Your complaints do exactly answer my expectations. It is not your case alone, to have “unworthy apprehensions of God, vain trifling imaginations, and strange confusion of mind, accompanying the exercises of religion.” It is no new thing for those who are setting out in earnest in a religious course, to find by experience, that their “progress in religion bears no proportion to their purposes:” And that their “good designs and resolutions, come to but little more than outside appearances, and no way answer their hopes.” It is matter of thankfulness, that you have a feeling sense of this. I hope, if no other arguments will convince you of the truth of what was insisted on in my last, you will at least be convinced by your own experience, that you depend on mere mercy.

You “thank me for my plainness and faithfulness to a poor wretched infidel, who yet breathes, out of hell, by the mere patience of an affronted Saviour.” I had not only the warrant of your commands, but the vast importance of the concern before us, to

embolden me to lay by all reserves; and even to transgress the common rules of decorum and respect, in my former letters. And you need not "conjure me to retain the same freedom." I am no courtier: nor am I at all acquainted with the fashionable methods of the *beau monde*. I shall therefore apply myself according to my capacity, in my accustomed methods of address, to answer your desires.

You observe, "that I insinuate as if men may believe the truth of the gospel, without a saving faith in Christ, without an interest in him, or a claim to the benefits of his redemption. You "therefore desire I would give you the distinguishing characters of a saving faith, and show you wherein the difference lies, between a true faith and that which is common to hypocrites, as well as to Christians indeed."

I do indeed insist upon it, that men may notionally and doctrinally believe the truth of the gospel, without a saving faith in Christ, and without an interest in him, or a claim to the benefits of his redemption. This is a truth clearly taught in the Scriptures, and abundantly evident from the reason and nature of things. If any therefore should expect salvation, from a mere doctrinal and historical faith in Christ, they will in the conclusion find themselves disappointed and ashamed of their hope.

We read, John xii. 42, 43, of many of the chief rulers who believed in Christ, but dared not confess him; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. And will any man imagine, that such believers who dare not confess Christ before men, shall be confessed by him before his heavenly Father and his holy angels in the great day of retribution? Will any man imagine that our blessed Lord will own such of his sincere disciples and followers, who love the praise of men more than the praise of God? Here then is a clear instance of a doctrinal and historical faith, which was not saving; and could give no claim to the promise made to true believers. We have this matter further illustrated and confirmed by the apostle James, in the second chapter of his epis-

tle; where we are shown, that such a faith is dead, being alone; that it is but a carcase without breath. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Of such a faith we may therefore say with the same apostle, What doth it profit, though a man say that he has faith? Can faith save him?

But I need not multiply Scripture quotations in this case. It is what is continually confirmed to us by our own observation. How many do we see every day, who acknowledge the truth of the gospel, and yet live worldly, sensual, and vicious lives; who profess they know Christ, but in works deny him; who call themselves by his name, and yet value their lusts and idols above all the hopes of his salvation; and even run the venture of eternal perdition, rather than deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him? Now there can be nothing more certain, than that these men are utterly unqualified for the kingdom of God; and that they can have no special interest in him who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

As, on the one hand, there is a gracious promise of final salvation, to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ: He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: So, on the other hand, there is a sort of believers, who can have no claim to this promise, nor any interest in the salvation by Christ. It must therefore be of infinite consequence, that we have indeed the faith of God's elect that we may become the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; and therefore that our faith be distinct, in its nature and operations, from such an empty, lifeless, and fruitless belief, with which the formal, wordly, and sensual professor may deceive and destroy his own soul. From whence it appears, that your question is most important; and deserves a most careful and distinct answer; which I shall endeavour in the following particulars:

1. A true and saving faith, is a realizing and sensible impression of the truth of the gospel: whereas a dead faith is but a mere notional and speculative belief of it. Faith is by the apostle described, the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen: That which brings eternal things into a near view, and represents them unto the soul as undoubted realities. Whence it is, that the true believer, when he has experienced the defect of his own purposes and endeavours, when he is wearied out of all his false refuges, emptied of all hope in himself, and is brought to see and feel the danger and misery of his state by nature, he is then brought in earnest to look to Jesus, as the only refuge and safety of his soul. He then sees the incomparable excellency of a precious Saviour, breathes with ardent desire after him, repairs to him as the only fountain of his hope; and proportionably to the evidence of his interest in him, rejoices in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh. Now, the blessed Saviour and his glorious salvation is the subject of his serious, frequent, and delightful contemplation. Now, an interest in Christ is valued by him above all the world; and he is in earnest to obtain and maintain good evidence, that his hope in Christ is well founded. Now, the favour of God, and the concerns of the unseen and eternal world, appear of greater importance than every thing else. He now mourns under a sense of his former sins, he groans under the burden of his remaining corruptions and imperfections; and with earnest diligence follows after holiness, endeavouring to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. And in a word, he has such an impression of these invisible realities, that whatever temptations, desertions, or prevailing corruptions he may conflict with, nothing can so banish the great concern from his breast, as to make him habitually slothful and indifferent about it. Nothing can quiet him, short of having his heart and affections engaged in the things of God and godliness; and his appetites and passions under the restraint and governing influence of the law of the Spirit of life.

But now, on the other hand, if we take a view of the influence which a dead faith has upon the soul, it is evident, that this usually leaves the subjects of it secure and careless, trifling and indifferent, in the concerns of the eternal world. These appear to such a person but distant futurities, which do not engage his solemn attention, and make him in earnest solicitous about the event; nor give any effectual check to his inordinate appetites and passions. Or if (as it sometimes happens) any awakening dispensation alarms the conscience of such a person, to a distressing apprehension of his guilt and danger, drives him to duties and external reformatations, and makes him more careful and watchful in his conduct, he has yet no sensible impressive view of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. He either endeavours to pacify the justice of God, and his own conscience, by his duties and religious performances; and so lulls himself asleep again in his former security: or else continues to agonize under most dark, dreadful and unworthy apprehensions of the glorious God, as if he were implacable and irreconcilable to such sinners as he. Such a person would readily acknowledge, but he cannot feel this blessed truth, that Christ Jesus is a sufficient Saviour. He allows it to be truth; but it is to him such a truth, as has no effectual influence upon his heart and life. Though he owns this to be true: Yet he can never comfortably venture his soul and his eternal interest upon it, unless a ray of divine light shine into his soul, and give him a lively and sensible view of what he could before have but a slight and superficial apprehension of.

Here, then, you see an apparent difference between a true and a false faith. The one realizes the great truths of the gospel, by a lively and feeling discovery of them; giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The other gives but a lifeless and inactive assent to these important truths; the one influences the heart and affections, and by beholding with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, changes the soul into the same

image, from glory to glory: the other only swims in the head, and leaves the heart in a state either of security or despondency. The one is an abiding principle of divine life, from which there flow rivers of living water: the other is transient and unsteady, and leaves the soul short of any spiritual principle of life and activity.

2. A saving faith is an hearty consent to the terms of the gospel: while a dead faith is but a cold assent to the truth of it. Accordingly, a true faith is in the gospel described to be a receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ. To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God. Our blessed Redeemer is freely offering himself and his saving benefits to poor perishing sinners in the gospel. Our compliance with and acceptance of the gospel offer, are the terms of our interest in him, and constitute the faith of God's elect. They therefore, and they only, are true believers in Christ, who heartily acquiesce in the glorious method of a sinner's recovery from ruin by Jesus Christ; and heartily accept an offered Saviour in all his offices and benefits. A true believer, convinced of his natural blindness and ignorance, repairs to the Lord Jesus Christ, to enlighten his mind, to make his way plain before him, and to give him a clear, sensible, and spiritual acquaintance with the great things of his eternal peace. The true believer has found by experience his utter incapacity to procure the divine favour by the best of his duties, reformations, or moral performances, and that he has cause to be ashamed and confounded in his own sight, for the great defects of his highest attainments in religion: and therefore welcomes the Lord Jesus Christ to his soul, as the Lord his righteousness, repairs to him, and to him only, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; and builds all his hope of acceptance with God, upon what Christ has done and suffered for him. The true believer labours and is heavy laden with the sinfulness of his nature; and longs for a further victory over his corrupt affections, appetites, and passions, for more spirituality in his

duties, and for a further progress in piety and holiness; and therefore heartily desires and accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his sanctifier, as well as Saviour; and earnestly seeks after the renewing, strengthening, and quickening influences of his blessed Spirit. The true believer feels the necessity of this blessed Saviour in all his offices, relations, and characters. He sees him to be just such a Saviour as his soul wants; and therefore cheerfully accepts a whole Christ, with his whole heart, without any desire of other terms of acceptance with God. He may entertain dark apprehensions of himself, and complain heavily of the great defects of his faith and holiness: but he can never entertain hard thoughts of the gospel scheme; nor complain of the terms of salvation therein proposed. These appear to him the wisdom of God, and the power of God; and every way answer the exigencies of his state, and the desires of his soul.

But if, on the contrary, we consider the character of a dead faith, it is what never brings the soul to a full consent to the terms of the gospel, without some exception and reserve. The unsound believer may imagine, that he accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour: but what is the foundation and encouraging motive of his imaginary compliance with the gospel offer? Upon an impartial inquiry, it will always be found to be something in himself: his good affections, duties, moralities, reformations, promises or purposes. He endeavours by these to recommend himself to God; and on account of these, he hopes to find acceptance through Christ. Or if he feels ever so strong a desire of salvation by Christ, yet he is driven to it only by fear and self-love; and will renew his affection to his other lords, as soon as his awakening apprehensions are worn off. He does not feel his want of Christ's enlightening and enlivening influences: for he knows not what they mean. He submits not to the righteousness of Christ. For he is still endeavouring to procure acceptance with God from some good qualifications in his own, some duties which he performs, or some progress which he makes or designs to make

in his religious course. He cannot submit to Christ as his Lord. For there is some slothful indulgence, which he cannot forego, some darling lust which he cannot part with, some worldly idol which his heart is set upon, or some difficult duty which he must excuse himself from.

There is nothing more apparent, than the distinction between these two sorts of believers. The one comes to Christ destitute of all hope and help in himself; but sees enough in Christ to answer all his wants. The other is full in himself. The one looks to Christ to be his light. The other leans to his own understanding. The one makes mention of Christ's righteousness, and that only. The other hopes for an interest in Christ and his salvation, on account of his own attainments; and, in effect, expects justification by his own righteousness, for Christ's sake. The one being a guilty, polluted, unworthy soul, comes to the blessed Redeemer, without any qualification to recommend it; expecting from him alone all the supplies he wants, repairing to him for gold tried in the fire, that he may be rich; for eye-salve that he may see; and for white raiment, that he may be clothed. The other ordinarily raises his expectations from Christ, in proportion to his own imaginary qualifications and good disposition. The one as well desires salvation by Christ from pollution, as from guilt. The other has a reserve of some deceitful lust; and hugs some Delilah in his bosom, which he cannot be willing to part with. In fine, the one is willing to accept of the Lord Jesus Christ upon any terms. The other will not come to Christ, but upon terms of his own stating. But I shall find occasion to speak further to some of these things, under the following head.

3. A saving faith is a humble trust in and dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the author of our eternal salvation; but a dead faith always builds upon some false foundation, or upon none at all. A saving faith is often described in Scripture by a "trusting in the Lord, committing our way to him, resting on him," and other such like expressions;

which suppose a humble confidence in the abundant sufficiency of the Redeemer's merits, and the boundless riches of God's mercy in him. Accordingly, the true believer, in his greatest darkness and discouragement, ventures his soul and eternal interests in the hands of Christ, with, at least, a supporting and encouraging hope. His past sins may appear in the most affrighting forms, vastly numerous, dreadfully aggravated: however, he yet keeps his hope alive with this comforting consideration, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." He may be oppressed with the sense of the horrible defects of his duties and religious attainments; but he yet sees righteousness enough in Christ, for a safe foundation of confidence, though he find none in himself. This, and this alone, keeps his soul from sinking, answers the clamours of conscience, and disposes him to rely upon the free grace and mercy of God. He may be distressed with the prevalence of his inward corruptions; he may in an unguarded hour, be surprised and foiled by the power of his sinful appetites or passions, or by some unexpected temptation: but even in this case, his refuge is in that blessed advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And though, from sad experience of his own dreadful imperfections, he may be ready to question his state, and to fear lest he be deceived, and lest he should finally be ashamed of his hope, nevertheless he ventures that also in the hands of Christ, and depends upon him, that he will not leave his soul to a soul ruining deceit, but will guide him by his counsel, and afterwards bring him to glory. Such a dependence upon Christ the believer ordinarily exercises in his darkest hours and dullest frames. But when in the more lively exercise of grace, and when Christ is pleased to shine into the soul with clearer communications of his love, his confidence, like a rock in the sea, stands unmoved in the greatest tempests; and he knows whom he has believed, that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him, against that day. With this confidence he can even glory in

tribulation; he can cheerfully look death itself in the face, and triumph over the king of terrors.

But now if we take a view of a dead faith, we shall find in it the quite contrary properties. The insincere professor (as has been observed already) ordinarily raises his expectations and encouragements from something in himself. His good frames, his joys and comforts, his endeavours or designs to serve God, are what he has to depend upon: And upon these he does and will depend; and perhaps will never see his mistake, until it be too late. Some of these indeed do not find even this false foundation to build upon: but quiet their souls with a loose and general hope. They believe, that God is merciful, and that Jesus Christ came to save sinners; or they hope, they shall some time or another obtain grace, though they find none at present. Thus too many of them go on quietly in their sins, dwell at ease, and cry peace to their souls, until the flood of God's displeasure sweeps away their refuges of lies. Others there be, who by means of a better education, or from some awakening sense of their guilt and danger, cannot but see, that these beds are too short to stretch themselves upon; and therefore their faith is their torment. They believe in Christ as their judge; but not as their Saviour. They spend their lives in fears and anxieties, in disquietude and uneasiness of mind, as often as their consciences are awake, to entertain any serious apprehensions of a future and eternal world. Thus they live under a spirit of bondage; not being able to venture their guilty souls upon the pardoning mercy of God, and the infinite merit of the Redeemer's blood.

Nothing can be more apparent, than the distinction and difference here represented, between these two sorts of believers. The one, in all his straits, fears, difficulties and dangers, looks unto Christ as to a sure foundation of safety, confidence and hope: And though he may at some times doubt his interest in Christ, he can at no time deliberately place his confidence or expect safety for his soul any where

else, but in the mere mercy of God in Christ. The other leaves the soul asleep, or else seeks rest only from the righteousness of the law, from desires and endeavours of his own, and must either find comfort there, or no where. The one ventures all his interest, and all his hopes of grace and glory upon the faithfulness of the gospel promises, and the infinite mercy of God in Christ. The other sees no way to quiet the accusations of his conscience, and to obtain qualifications for salvation, by depending upon a naked promise. In a word, the one can see safety and security, in leaving all the concerns both of time and eternity in the hands of Christ. The other being ignorant of the righteousness of God, must make the righteousness of the law his refuge, or else live without the comfort of hope.

4. A saving faith subjects the soul to the sceptre and yoke of Christ: but a dead faith leaves the soul unrenewed and disobedient. A true faith purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; and he that hath this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as he is pure. A true faith unites the soul to Christ, as the branch is united to the vine; and thereby enables the man to bring forth much fruit. The true believer hates every false way, he mourns over, and watches, strives, and prays against all the corruptions of his nature, and all the imperfections of his heart and life. There is no known sin, which he indulges himself in; no known duty, which he willingly neglects; no difficulty which can deter him from following Christ; no temptation which can allure him from endeavouring a conformity to the whole will of God. Not as though he had already attained; or were already perfect. He has daily cause to lament his defects: but yet he can truly say, that he delights in the law of the Lord after the inward man; and accordingly endeavours in every station and relation, in all his conduct both to God and man, as well in secret as openly, to live a life of conformity to God, in all the duties he requires of him. And wherein he cannot attain, he is yet pressing towards perfection, and

groaning after a further progress in holiness, even in all instances, without reserve; nor yet satisfied without a final perseverance, to crown his sincerity.

But, on the other hand, the obedience of an insincere professor is very partial, defective, temporary, and but a matter of force and constraint upon the appetites and affections. If, with Herod, he reforms and does many things, yet he retains his Herodias, some darling corruption unmortified, or leaves some unpleasant duty neglected. Or if by the lashes of an awakened conscience, he is driven for a time to a more general reformation from all known sin, and to outward attendance upon all known duty, he finds no inward complacency in it, and therefore is like a dull horse, that will be kept on his way no longer than he feels a spur in his side.

Here, then, is a conspicuous difference between a true and false believer. The one has a principle of holiness, a delight in it, and an earnest and continuing desire after further proficiency in the divine life. The other only aims at so much holiness as he thinks will save him from hell, but cares for nothing more; and what he has, is excited by fear, or constrained by force, contrary to the natural tendency and bias of his soul. In fine, the one makes it the endeavour of his life to approve himself to a pure, holy, and omniscient God. The other rests in endeavours to quiet his conscience, and to silence its clamours and accusations.

5. A saving faith works by love to God and man, but a dead faith always falls short of both. The apostle assures us, that if we have all faith, so that we could remove mountains, and have not charity, we are nothing. Faith worketh by love; and the true believer keeps himself in the love of God, looking to the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. He delights in contemplating the glorious perfections of the Divine nature. His meditations upon God are sweet, and the thoughts of him precious to his soul. He values the favour of God as life, and his loving kindness as better than life. If he can have the glo-

rious God for his portion, and live in the light of his countenance, he can be content with straits and difficulties, trials, and afflictions, here in the world. He takes peculiar pleasure in the ordinances of God, and all the appointed means of a near approach into his special presence; and is especially pleased when favoured with sensible communion with God.— Though he cannot always walk so near to God, and find such sensible delight in him, yet he laments his absence when he withdraws; heavily complains of his own deadness, worldliness, or sensuality, which separates between God and his soul; and can find no true rest or satisfaction till he returns to God, and God to him. This is at least the ordinary course and tenor of the believer's life: and if at any time he should be so left of God as to grow forgetful of him, and have any prevalence of a dead, carnal, worldly frame in his soul, this darkens the evidence of his state, robs him of his comfort and peace, and will at length put him upon vigorous and active endeavours for obtaining a revival of his languishing graces by a fresh supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Thus, the true believer hath the love of God dwelling in him; and, from the same principle, he likewise loves his neighbour as himself. He maintains a life of justice, meekness, kindness, and beneficence towards all men; bears injuries; is ready to forgive; entertains the best opinions of men's states and actions that the case will allow; and endeavours to live in the exercise of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness. And as he thus maintains a love of benevolence to all men, he has, in a special manner, a love of complacency towards those who bear the marks of the divine image. These he delights in, on account of their being, or at least appearing to be, the children of God. He loves them for their heavenly Father's sake, as well as for those gracious qualifications which make the righteous more excellent than his neighbour. He loves the company of the saints. These are excellent, in whom is all his delight. He loves their piety, and studies

an imitation of them, wherein they follow Christ, and studies to equal, if not excel them, in their highest improvements in religion. He loves their persons, and hopes to join in concert with them in the eternal praises of God.

This is the real and genuine character of every true believer: while the highest attainments of a dead faith fall short of every part of this description. The false professor may imagine that he has something of the love of God in him: but upon a just view of the case it will appear, that it is only to an idol, the creature of his own imagination. If he seems to love God under an apprehension of his goodness and mercy, he yet dreads him on account of his justice, and has an inward aversion to his purity and holiness; so that the object of his love is an imaginary being, of infinite goodness and mercy, without either justice or holiness. If from the alarms of conscience, or some emotions of his natural affections, he may take some pleasure in religious exercises, this pleasure is short and transient, like the principle from whence it flows; he soon returns to carelessness and forgetfulness of God, and has his affections quickly engaged in wordly and sensual pursuits. And however he may deceive himself, in any supposed progress in religion, he can never satisfy his soul with having God for his portion. He can never in course keep up a life of spiritual mindedness and delight in God, and in a way of obedience to him, and communion with him.

The same defects are likewise found in the unsound believer with respect to his love to his neighbour. If he be not (as is too commonly found) unjust and deceitful, wrathful and contentious, hard-hearted and unkind, bitter and censorious, revengeful and implacable: yet he never loves the children of God as such. Whatever love he may have to any such from special intimate acquaintance, or from their being in the same cause, party or persuasion with himself (which is indeed no more than the exercise of self-love or self-esteem) he never loves the image of Christ in

every sect or party, in whom he finds it, nor can he love a conformity to the children of God in the holiness of their hearts and lives.

Here then you see an apparent difference in these two sorts of believers. The one loves God above all things: and indeed he that does not love him with a supreme love, does not love him as God, and consequently does not love him at all. But the other seeks the favour of God, from no other motive but fear of his displeasure, or some desire of happiness, and not from a sense of the excellency of his glorious perfections, and the blessedness of an interest in his favour. The one loves what God loves, hates what he hates, and loves and esteems himself but in proportion to his conformity unto God. The other retains his delight in his lusts and idols, and repairs to God because he durst not do otherwise. The one, like God himself, takes pleasure in doing good to all men, and takes special delight in all without distinction, who are partakers of the divine nature. The other, at the best, has his love to man influenced by selfish principles, and therefore takes most delight in those who are most conformable to his own sentiments or disposition.

Lest I should weary out your patience, I shall just mention but this one particular more—

6. A saving faith humbles the soul, and makes it low and vile in its own eyes: whereas a dead faith tends to exalt the mind with vain apprehensions of, or endeavours after some sufficiency or excellency of its own. The true believer has a deep sense of the greatness and aggravations of his sins, loathes himself on account of them, and adores the patience and long-suffering of God toward him, that has kept him out of hell. He is so sensible of the great defects of his duties, of the sinfulness of his heart, the imperfections of his life, and his utter unworthiness of any favour from God, that he cannot but entertain a most deep and sensible impression, that it must be a wonderful display of mere sovereign grace if ever he obtains salvation. It is always true, that the greater manifesta-

tion of God's love that is made to his soul, the greater sense he hath of his own nothingness and unworthiness, and the more he admires and adores the astonishing riches of free distinguishing grace to such a guilty polluted creature as he is. Though the true believer lives in the exercise of that charity towards others, which thinketh no evil, but believeth all things and hopeth all things; he yet always finds occasion to condemn himself, and to censure his own inward affections, and outward performances, religious duties and moral conduct, and therefore cannot but esteem others better than himself. In short the true believer always, while in this tabernacle, groans, being burdened. He finds occasions of a renewed repentance every day: he every day finds new cause to complain of himself, and new cause to commit a sinful and unworthy soul to the mere mercy of God in Christ.

On the contrary, a dead faith always either puffs up the vain mind with a haughty pleasing apprehension of its own attainments, makes it censorious and uncharitable, and inspires it with that proud pharisaical language, "I thank God, I am not as other men:" or else from the same haughty principle, either leaves the soul secure and easy in its good designs and purposes of future repentance, or impatient and desponding through want of those good qualifications which it supposes necessary.

I think, I need not enlarge upon this distinction; it is so apparent and manifest, and the characters so easy to be known.

And now, Sir, to sum up the whole in a short and easy view. If you have good evidence of a saving faith in Christ, you must have such a sensible impression of the truth of the gospel, as makes you feel the importance of your eternal concerns, and your necessity of an interest in Christ, and puts your soul upon earnest and active desires after him, as your only hope and safety. You must heartily approve the way of salvation which the gospel reveals, and heartily consent to the terms on which it is offered. You must accept of Christ as a free gift, bringing nothing with

you of your own, to recommend you to his acceptance. You must accept of him as your only righteousness, to justify you before God; and as your Prince as well as Saviour; consenting as well to be governed as to be saved, to be sanctified as to be justified by him. And as you must receive him, so you must confidently trust in him alone, as a sure foundation of safety and hope; and as a continuing fountain of all supplies of grace to your soul, whatever difficulties and discouragements you may meet with. And you must have this standing evidence of the sincerity of your faith, that it purifies your heart, and brings you to an earnest desire of, and endeavour after, habitual holiness of heart and life; that it works by love to God and man, and keeps up in your soul an abasing sense of your own vileness and utter unworthiness after all. This is that precious faith, to which the promises of the gospel are made, and to which no false professor can make any just pretence.

To conclude with a still shorter view of this case. When a realizing belief of the gospel, and a despair of all help in yourself, brings you to repair to Christ as your only safety, and to venture your soul, guilty as it is, upon the merit of his obedience, the sufficiency of his grace and strength, and the faithfulness of his promise; and heartily to submit to his rule and government; you cannot fail of the sanctifying influences of his Spirit, to qualify you for the eternal inheritance: for the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, has given you his word for it, that if you thus come to him, he will in no wise cast you out.

I might sum up this important point in a yet shorter view: If you so heartily approve of, and delight in the gospel way of salvation by Christ alone, that you can cheerfully venture your soul and your eternal interests upon it, as the sure and only foundation of hope and safety; you have then the faith of God's elect. And in this case, he that has bestowed such grace upon you, will carry on his own work in your soul, will give you those several qualifications and evidences of a gracious state which I have above des-

cribed; and will at last present you faultless before his throne, with exceeding joy. That you may have the delightful experience of such a progress of grace in your soul, is the prayer of

Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LEGAL AND EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE DISTINCTLY CONSIDERED.

SIR—You justly observe, “It is of infinite concern, that your repentance towards God as well as your faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, be sincere; and that you have therefore cause to be solicitous not to be deceived with a repentance which must be repented of.” And you have therefore just reason to desire, “a clear apprehension of the difference between a legal and evangelical repentance.” I shall, therefore endeavour, according to your desire, “to show you the difference, in as easy and familiar a light as I can.” And perhaps it may give a clearer view of the case, if I should show you first negatively, wherein the distinction does *not* consist, under a few particulars, before I proceed to a direct illustration of it.

It may then be observed, that a deep distress of mind on account of sinning against God, is common both to legal and evangelical repentance. Even Judas could cry out with agony of soul, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;” as well as the Psalmist groans out his complaint, that there was no rest in his bones because of his sins. A distressing sense of sin, in itself considered; is therefore no evidence for, nor against, the truth and sincerity of repentance.

Moreover a fearful apprehension of the divine displeasure, may be common to both sorts of penitents. Mere legal convictions may make sinners in Zion

afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrite; and destruction from God may be a terror to a holy Job, in as great reality, though not with such despairing infidelity, as to a Cain or Judas; that this can be no distinguishing mark of a true or false repentance.

I may add, dread of, and a temporary reformation from outward and known courses of sinning, may likewise be the consequence of both a legal and evangelical repentance. Ahab humbled himself, lay in sackcloth, and went softly; and Herod reformed many things, as well as David restrained his feet from every evil way. It is impossible for a sinner to give the reins to his lusts, while under the severe lashes of an awakened conscience: that a mere legal conviction must, while it lasts, procure an external reformation. Such a reformation, of itself, can therefore be no evidence of a sincere repentance, how great soever it may appear; and besure it can be no evidence against it.

Besides, men may be put upon diligence and activity in duty, by both a legal and evangelical repentance. An insincere repentance may bring men with the hypocritical Jews, to seek the Lord daily; and delight to know his ways, as a nation that did righteousness. In their afflictions they may seek him early. They may seek him and return; and inquire early after God. This may be the fruit of a legal repentance; as well as that a true repentance may and always does, bring men to lift up their hearts and their hands to God in the heavens. This therefore can be no distinguishing criterion in the case before us.

Once more, a comforting persuasion of having obtained pardoning mercy, is common to both kinds of penitents. God's ancient people when most incorrigible in their impiety, would trust in lying words, come and stand before him in the house that was called by his name; and say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations." The Israelites in the wilderness, concluded, that God was their Rock, and the most high God their Redeemer, when they flattered him with their lips, and lied to him with their tongues; and

their hearts were not right with him. And on the other hand, the true penitent may say with David, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin." A mere persuasion of forgiveness therefore, how comfortable or joyful soever, does not distinguish the nature of that repentance, on which such a persuasion is founded.

In short, it is not the deepest sense of sin or guilt; nor the most distressing sorrow on that account; it is not the fear of God's wrath, nor the greatest external reformation of life; it is not the most diligent external attendance upon all known duty; nor the most quieting persuasion of having made our peace with God; nor all these together, that will denominate a man sincerely penitent. For all these may be, and have been, attained by mere hypocrites; and often are found with the false, as well as true professor.

Having, by way of precaution, given you these remarks, I now proceed directly to consider the important case before us. And,

1. A legal repentance flows only from a sense of danger, and fear of wrath; but an evangelical repentance is a true mourning for sin; and an earnest desire of deliverance from it. When the conscience of a sinner is alarmed with a sense of his dreadful guilt and danger, it must necessarily remonstrate against those impieties, which threaten him with destruction and ruin. Thence those frights and terrors, which we so commonly see in awakened sinners. Their sins (especially some grosser enormities of their lives) stare them in the face, with their peculiar aggravations. Conscience draws up the indictment; and sets home the charge against them. The law passes the sentence, and condemns them without mercy. And what have they now in prospect, but a fearful looking for of fiery indignation to consume them? Now with what distress will they cry out, of the greatness and aggravations of their sins? With what amazement will they expect the dreadful issue of a sinful course? How ready are they now to take

up resolutions of a more watchful and holy life? Now they are brought upon their knees before God, to acknowledge their sins and to cry for mercy; and now conscience like a flaming sword, keeps them from their former course of impiety and sensual gratifications. And what is all this repentance, but mere terror and fear of hell? Let but conscience be pacified, and their fear blown over; and the dog will quick return to his vomit again, until some new alarm revive the conviction of their sin and danger, and their former process of repentance. Thus some will sin and repent, and repent and sin, all their lives; and yet lie open to eternal repentance after all. Or if the distress of conscience makes so deep an impression, and fixes such an abiding awe of particular sins upon the mind, that there remains a visible and continuing reformation: yet their lusts are but dammed up by their fears, and were but the dam broken down, they would run again in their former channel with renewed force. It is true, the law sometimes proves a school-master to drive sinners to Christ; and conviction of sin and a legal repentance, is a necessary preparative to a saving conversion; but this alone gives no claim to the promise of the gospel. The house may be thus empty, swept, and garnished, but for the reception of seven worse spirits than were driven out of it; and a sinner may thus escape the pollutions of the world, and yet have his latter end worse than his beginning.

If, on the other hand, we consider the character of a sincere gospel repentance, though such legal terrors may lead to its exercise, they do not belong to its nature; nor are they any part of its description.

Sin, itself, becomes the greatest burden and aversion to a truly penitent soul. I hate, says the Psalmist, every false way. O wretched man that I am, says the apostle, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! Thus the penitent groans being burdened; not for fear of hell, such fear being no part of a true repentance, though it may sometimes accompany a sincere and godly sorrow for sin. But this sorrow

arises from an affecting, humbling, mourning sense of sin, from a view of the sin of nature, with the hardness of the heart, and universal depravity of the affections which flow from it; and from a view of the numerous sins of practice, with their special aggravations. This is the grief, this the distress of a repenting sinner. It is necessary from the nature of a true repentance, that it must have respect both to the sin of nature and practice: though both of these are not at all times actually in the mind; and particularly thought of, and mourned for by the repenting sinner. The language of a true repentance is such as this, "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Mine iniquities are gone over mine head, as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me. Deliver me from all my transgressions. Let not my sins have dominion over me. Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord make haste to help me." As the true penitent longs for more and more victory over his corruptions, so is he most watchful, prayerful, and in earnest to mortify his lusts; and to cut off all supplies of sin. He mourns for all, he hates all his lusts; and is willing to spare none, no not so much as a right hand, or a right eye. As there is nothing so grievous to him as sin, so there is nothing which he so earnestly desires and pursues, as a nearer approach to that blessed state, where "nothing can enter which defileth or worketh abomination."

Here you see an apparent difference between being struck with fear, restrained by terror, and driven from a course of sinning by the lashes of an awakened conscience; between this, I say, and loathing ourselves in our own sight, for all our iniquities and abominations, with a groaning after grace and strength to conquer and mortify our corruptions, and to be free from the empire of sin. That is merely the fruit of self-love, which prompts the soul to fly from danger.

This is the exercise of a vital principle, which separates the soul from sin, and engages the whole man in a continued opposition against it.

2. A legal repentance flows from unbelief: but an evangelical repentance is always the fruit and consequence of a saving faith. I have shown you already, that a legal repentance is effected by fearful apprehensions of hell and damnation. And whence is this amazing and distracting fear and terror? Has not the gospel provided a glorious relief for such distresses; and opened a blessed door of hope for the greatest sinners? Is not pardon and salvation freely offered to all, that will accept a blessed Saviour and his saving benefits? Is not the blood of Christ sufficient to cleanse from all sins, however circumstanced, and however aggravated they may be? Why then do they not cheerfully fly for refuge to his hope set before them? Alas, they can see no safety in it! The law of God challenges their obedience; and condemns their disobedience. Conscience joins in, both with the precept and sentence of the law; and thence their only refuge is resolutions, reformations, duties, penance, or some such self-righteous methods to pacify God's justice, to quiet their consciences, and to lay a foundation of future hope. The defect of their endeavours and attainments, creates new terrors. Their terrors excite new endeavours. And thus they go on without attaining the law of righteousness; because they seek it not of faith; but as it were by the works of the law. They may, it is true, have some respect to Christ, in this their legal progress. They may hope, that God will accept them for Christ's sake. They may use his name in their prayers for pardon, while they dare not depend upon the merits of his blood, for the remission of their sins, and a freedom from condemnation. And what is all this, but a secret hope, that the redemption of Christ will add such merit to their frights and fears, reformations and duties, as to make them effectual to atone for their sins; and purchase the favour of God? So that all their

penitential shows and appearances are nothing but the workings of unbelief.

Let us now take a view of an evangelical repentance, and we shall find the characters of it directly repugnant to what has been considered. This must always be the consequence of a saving faith, and can never go before it. The sinner must have a realizing apprehension of the purity and holiness of the Divine nature, before he can loathe and hate his sins, on the account of their contrariety to God. He must have a feeling sense that there is pardoning mercy with God for sinners, before he can with courage and sincerity apply for forgiveness to a just and holy God. He must have a believing discovery of the way in which God is accessible by sinners, before he can have access with boldness to the throne of grace. He must see and feel, that there is safety in venturing a guilty soul in the hands of Christ and no where else, before he can look to his blood for cleansing from guilt; and to his grace and strength for victory over his corruptions. He must be united to Christ as a branch to the vine, before he can bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Without this he may be driven into desponding fears and to legal attempts for safety: but he cannot fly for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before him. The true penitent therefore approaches God's presence with a deep impression of his guilt and unworthiness, and of his just desert of an eternal rejection from God. But then he comes before a mercy-seat. Though he is forced to acknowledge that if God should mark iniquity, he could not stand before him; he yet remembers, that with God there is forgiveness that he may be feared, and that with him there is plenteous redemption. The true penitent looks to the blood of Christ, as what alone can cleanse away his numerous and aggravated sins; and from thence he takes encouragement to mourn in the Psalmist's language, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be

whiter than the snow." This is the prospect which both encourages and invigorates his cries for mercy, and embitters his sins to him, and which makes him loathe them all, and long for deliverance from them all. "Is God infinitely merciful and ready to forgive, (says the penitent soul) and have I been so basely ungrateful as to sin against such astonishing goodness, to affront and abuse such mercy and love! Is sin so hateful to God, that he has so severely punished it in the person of his own dear Son, how vile, how polluted and abominable must I then appear in the eyes of his holiness and justice, that am nothing but defilement and guilt, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, nothing but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores! Has the blessed Saviour suffered his Father's wrath for my sins! Have they nailed him to the cross, and brought him under the agonies of an accursed death; and shall I ever be reconciled to my lusts any more, and go on to crucify the Son of God afresh? Is there pardoning mercy to be had, and shall I slight the blood of Christ, set light by the gracious offer, and perish in sight of a Saviour? May I obtain strength from the Lord Jesus Christ, for the victory and dominion over my corruptions; and shall I not both resolve in his strength against them, and lie at his foot, that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, may make me free from the law of sin and death? Have I dishonoured God so much already, loaded my precious Saviour with so many horrible indignities, and brought such a weight of guilt upon myself? and is it not now high time to bid an utter defiance to my most darling lusts, the greatest enemies to God and my own soul?" Such as this is the language of a gospel repentance. And though there may be a sincere repentance without full evidence of an interest in Christ, there can be none without a believing view of the infinite merit of his blood, and the safety of bringing a guilty soul to that fountain for pardon and cleansing, as I will endeavour to show you more particularly.

You cannot but see the great distinction and even

contrariety, between a guilty flight of soul from God, like Adam after his fall; and a humbling self-condemning flight to God's pardoning mercy, like the prodigal when returning to his Father's house: Between legal, slavish self-righteous endeavours to atone for our sins, and make our peace with God, and repairing only to the blood of Christ for cleansing from all our sins: Between mourning for our guilt and danger, and mourning for our sins, as they are against God, against a precious Saviour, against infinite mercy and love: and, in a word, between attempting a new life by the strength of our own resolutions and endeavours; and looking only to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for grace and strength, as pardon and freedom against condemnation.

3. A legal repentance flows from an aversion to God and his holy law: But an evangelical repentance from love to both. The distress, the terror and amazement, that awakened sinners are under, arise from their dreadful apprehensions of God, and his terrible justice. They know that they have greatly provoked him, and are afraid of his wrath; and therefore want some covert, where they may hide themselves from his presence. They might before, perhaps, have some pleasing apprehensions of God, while they considered him as being all mercy without justice; and while they could hope for pardon, and yet live in their sins. But now, they have some sense of his holiness and justice, he appears an infinite enemy; and therefore most terrible to their souls. They are consulting indeed some way to be at peace with him; because they are afraid the controversy will issue in their destruction. They resolve upon new obedience, from the same motives that slaves obey their severe tyrannical masters; while the rule of their obedience is directly contrary to the bent, bias, and disposition of their souls. Were the penalty of the law taken away, their aversion to it would quickly appear, and they would soon embrace their beloved lusts, with the same pleasure and delight as formerly. This is frequently exemplified in those, who wear off their con-

victions and reformations together, and notwithstanding all their former religious appearances, discover the alienation of their hearts to God and his laws, by their sinful and sensual lives; and as the apostle expresses it, show themselves enemies in their minds, by their wicked works.

But on the contrary, the sincere gospel penitent, sees an admirable beauty and excellency in a life of holiness; and therefore groans after higher attainments in it. He is sensible how much he has transgressed the law of God, how very far he is departed from the purity and holiness of the Divine nature. This is the burden of his soul. Hence it is, that he walks in heaviness; and waters his couch with his tears. He mourns, not because the law is so strict, or the penalty so severe; for he esteems the law to be holy; and the commandment holy, just and good: but he mourns, that though the law be spiritual, he is carnal, sold under sin. He mourns, that his nature is so contrary to God, that his practice is so contrary to his will; and that he can make no better progress in mortifying the deeds of the flesh, in regulating his affections, appetites, and passions, and in living to God. So that with the mind he himself serves the law of God, though in much imperfection; and though by reason of his remaining carnality, he is forced to acknowledge and lament, that with the flesh he serves the law of sin. The true penitent is breathing with the same earnestness after sanctification, as after freedom from wrath. He does not want to have the law bend to his corruptions: but to have his heart and life fully subjected to the law and will of God. There is nothing he so much desires, besides an interest in Christ and the favour of God, as a freedom from sin, a proficiency in faith and holiness; and a life of communion and fellowship with God. "Oh," says the penitent believer, "what a wicked heart have I, that is so estranged from the holy nature of God; and from his righteous law! What a guilty wretch have I been, who have walked so contrary to the glorious God, have trampled upon his excellent perfections,

violated his holy law, and made so near an approach even to the nature of the devil! O for the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ; and the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit, to purify this sink of pollution; and to sanctify these depraved affections of my soul! 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!' Let this separating wall between God and my soul be broken down! Let me be a partaker of the divine nature; and be brought near to God, whatever else be denied me! "O that my ways were directed, that I might keep thy statutes! O let me not wander from thy commandments: but deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep thy word." Such as these are the aspirations of a sincere repentance. A language which flows from a true love to God and his law; and an earnest desire of conformity to both.

But you will inquire perhaps, is there no difference between repentance and love to God? Are not these different graces of the Spirit; and have they not their different exercises and operations? I answer, Yes; they are truly different and distinct: but they always have a joint exercise, in a truly gracious soul. As faith is truly distinct from repentance, and yet every child of God is a penitent believer: so is love likewise distinct from repentance, and yet neither of these graces can exist without the other. We cannot truly love God, unless our sins are made hateful to us in repentance. We cannot sincerely turn to God, until we value his favour, and take pleasure in a conformity to his will. As these graces therefore are joint productions of the blessed Spirit in our regeneration, so they are joint companions in the exercise of the divine love. From this reflection you may see the reason why some of the same things necessarily occur in this discourse of repentance, which you met with in my last letter, when treating upon the difference of a true and false faith.

By these hints, you may plainly see the very great difference between a legal and an evangelical penitent. The one looks upon God with dread, terror,

and aversion of soul. The other mourns his distance from him, and longs to be more transformed into his image and likeness. The one still loves his sins in his heart, though he mourns that there is a law to punish them. The other hates all his sins without reserve, and groans under the burden of them, because they are contrary to God and his holy law. The obedience of the one is by mere constraint. The imperfections of the other are matter of continual grief; and he is constantly longing and striving after greater degrees of grace and holiness. The one can find no inward and abiding complacency in the service of God. The other runs the ways of his commandments with delight; and takes more pleasure in obedience, than in any thing else.

4. A legal repentance ordinarily flows from discouragement and despondency; but an evangelical repentance, from encouraging hope. I have already considered how a legal repentance is excited and maintained by fetters of conscience, and fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. Some indeed by their external reformation pacify their consciences, get settled upon their lees, and cry out peace to their souls; and so their repentance and discouragements both come to an end. But whilst their concern continues, their desponding fears are the very life of it. Their sins, both for number and nature, appear dreadful to their affrighted consciences, as they frequently violate their purposes and promises of new obedience. They are therefore afraid that God will never pardon and accept such rebels as they have been; and though they dare not neglect duty, they come with horror into the presence of God, as an inexorable judge; and nothing to keep their souls from sinking into despair, but their good designs and endeavours, which yet are too defective to give them comfortable hope. And what is all this, but a most ungrateful undervaluing the blood of Christ, limiting the goodness and mercy of God, and an implicit denying the truth of the whole gospel of God our Saviour? Thus they are flying from the mercy of God, while they pretend to fly to it. But

I need not enlarge on this head, it being near of kin to what was observed under the last.

I proceed, therefore, to show on the other hand, that though the true gospel-penitent may have a deeper impression of the greatest and atrocious nature of his sin and guilt, than even the awakened, terrified, legalist himself, yet he dares not yield to any despairing thoughts of God's mercy. Faith opens the door of hope, and therefore the door of repentance, as I have observed before. True it is, that the gospel-penitent may meet with many discouraging doubts and fears; but these are his infirmity, not his repentance. The apostle tells us, "we are saved by hope." That is what gives life and activity to every grace, and to repentance in particular, as I have had occasion to hint before. And it is yet needful to observe further, that though a fear and jealousy of our own sincerity may be consistent with a true repentance; and perhaps sometimes serves to further its progress; yet all doubts of the faithfulness of the gospel promises, of the extensiveness of the divine mercy, or our exemption from the gospel offer; all apprehensions of our not being elected; of our having sinned away the day of grace; or of our having sinned against the Holy Ghost; all imaginations that our sins are so circumstanced as not to admit of pardoning mercy, or the like; these are directly destructive of, or inconsistent with, the actings of a true repentance. A sincere penitent looks over the highest mountains, which are raised before him, by the greatness of his sins, his own misgiving heart, or the temptations of Satan, into an ocean of infinite goodness and mercy. Thither he will fly; and there he will hope, let his case appear ever so dark; and though every thing seems to make against him. And the more lively and comfortable his hope is, the more he is humbled and abased for his sins, and the more vigorous are his endeavours after a life of new obedience. As repentance is a hatred of, and separation from all sin without reserve, it must certainly be a flight from, and an abhorrence of unbelief and des-

pair, the greatest of all sins. And the further the soul flies from these, the more it is conformed to the gospel of Christ; and the more is it in the way of mercy. It is not, therefore, sufficient, for the sincere penitent to be sensible that God is infinitely gracious; and that the blood of Christ is infinitely meritorious; and that there is forgiveness with God for the greatest sinners, if he still maintains some reserve in his mind, with respect to his own case. But he must be likewise persuaded, that he either already hath, or that he may obtain a personal interest in this redeeming pardoning mercy, in order to his approaching to God as a Father; and in order to his being in love with the ways of God; and to his serving him with cheerfulness and delight. This is not the only necessary, in order to the first exercise of a true repentance: but the sincere Christian will always find, that by whatever darkness, difficulty, or temptation, he is brought into a really discouraged desponding frame, he is thereby rendered so much the more incapable of godly sorrow for sin, or delighting in God, or of a spiritual performance of any duty of religion. We may be jealous and distrustful of ourselves, but we must not despond and be jealous of God, if we would maintain the exercise of any saving grace. "I confess, (says the truly penitent soul,) that my sins are like the stars of the firmament, and like the sand on the sea shore, for multitude; that they are of a scarlet and crimson dye; and that it is of the infinite patience of God, that such a guilty wretch is out of hell. But yet as great, as dreadfully aggravated as my sins may be, the merit of a Redeemer's blood is sufficient to atone for them all; and infinite mercy is still greater than my greatest sins. Though my iniquities have abounded, God has encouraged me to hope that his grace shall abound much more, to the returning sinner. It must be astonishing mercy, indeed, if I am saved; but such mercy is offered in the gospel: and blessed be God, I am not excluded from that gracious offer. Though I have naturally no power to comply with the terms upon which pardoning mercy

is set before me, yet the gospel provides a remedy in that case also, and I am encouraged to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for all supplies of grace. I will, therefore, cast my guilty soul at the footstool of a sovereign God, and rely on infinite mercy through a Redeemer. I will depend upon the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin. I will constantly repair to his fulness, that from thence I may receive even grace for grace; and in that way I will hope for the blessed sentence from his gracious mouth, 'thy sins which be many are forgiven thee.' O how will mercy triumph over such sins as mine! How great glory will God bring to the riches of his infinite grace in the salvation of such a sinner as I, if ever I am saved! How will heaven ring with eternal hallelujahs on my account! Surely I have sinned enough already. Let me no more add to the number and guilt of my sins, by distrust of God's mercy, or by doubting the faithfulness of his invitations and promises. Whether I have already obtained a saving interest in Christ or not, I am resolved to hope in his mercy, and to lie at his feet, whatever the issue be."

So great is the difference between a legal and an evangelical repentance; as great as between desponding fear and encouraging hope, as between being affrighted by a sight of our sins, into an incapacity to trust God, or serve him with delight, and being allured by his infinite mercy to seek his favour, expect forgiveness through the blood of his Son, and to serve him with the disposition of children.

5. A legal repentance is temporary; wearing off with the convictions of conscience, which occasion it; but an evangelical repentance is the daily exercise of the true Christian. We have too sad and numerous instances of such, who will for a while appear under the greatest remorse for their sins; and yet quickly wear off all their impressions, and return to the same course of impiety and sensuality, which occasioned their distress and terror; and thereby declare to the world, that their goodness, like Ephraim's, was but

“a morning cloud and an early dew.” And besides these, there seem to be some who quiet their consciences, and speak peace to their souls, from their having been in distress and terror for their sins, from their reformation of some grosser immoralities, and from a formal course of duty. They have repented, they think, and therefore conclude themselves at peace with God; and seem to have no great care or concern about, either their former impieties, or their daily transgressions. They conclude themselves in a converted state; and are therefore easy, careless, and secure. These may think and perhaps speak loftily of their experiences, they may be blown up with joyful apprehensions of their safe state: but have no impressions of their sins, no mourning after pardon, no groaning under the burden of a wicked heart, imperfect duties, and renewed provocations against God. I fear, we have too many such in the present times, who will go on flattering themselves in their own eyes, until their iniquities are found hateful. I might add, there are many that, while under the stings of an awakened conscience, will be driven to maintain a solemn watch over their hearts and lives, to be afraid of every sin, to be conscientiously careful to attend every known duty; and to be serious and earnest in the performance of it. Now, by this imaginary progress in religion they gradually wear off their convictions, and get from under the terrors of the law; and then their watchfulness and tenderness of conscience are forgot: they attend their duties in a careless manner, with a trifling, remiss frame of soul, while the great concerns of an unseen eternal world are but little in their minds; and all their religion is reduced to a mere cold formality. They still maintain the form; but are unconcerned about the power of godliness. In some such manner, a legal repentance always leaves the soul short of a real sanctifying saving change.

On the other hand, a saving evangelical repentance is a lasting principle of humble, self-abasing, self-condemning, mourning for, and abhorrence of all the

sins which the penitent discovers, both in his heart and life. The true penitent does not forget his past sins, and grow careless and unconcerned about them, as soon as he obtains peace in his conscience, and a comforting hope that he is reconciled to God: but the clearer evidences he obtains of the divine favour, the more does he loathe, abhor, and condemn himself for his sins, the more vile does he appear in his own eyes; and the more aggravated and enormous do his past sins represent themselves to him. A sense of pardoning mercy makes Paul appear to himself the chief of sinners, and speak of himself as a pattern of hope, to all that shall come after him. The true penitent not only continues to abhor himself on account of his past guilt and defilement, but finds daily cause to renew his repentance before God. He finds so much deadness, formality, and hypocrisy in his duties; so much carnality, worldly-mindedness, and unbelief in his heart; so much prevalence of his sinful affections, appetites, and passions; and so many defeats by the sin that easily besets him, that he cannot but groan, being burdened, while he is in this tabernacle. Repentance therefore is the daily continued exercise of the Christian indeed, until he puts off mortality. He will not leave off repenting, till he leaves off sinning; which is not attainable on this side heaven. "Have I hope, says the penitent soul, that God has pardoned my sins? What an instance of pardoning mercy is this! How adorable is that wonderful grace, which has plucked such a brand out of the fire! And am I still daily offending against such mercy and love! Am I still so formal, lifeless, and hypocritical! Am I yet doing so little for him, who has done so much for me! Ah vile sinful heart! Ah base ingratitude to such amazing goodness! Oh for more victory over my corruptions; for more thankfulness for such mercies; for more spirituality and heavenly mindedness! How often have I been mourning my infirmities; and must I yet have cause to mourn over the same defects? How often pursuing and designing a closer walk with God; but what a poor pro-

gress do I yet make, save in desires and endeavours? How would the iniquities of my best duties separate between God and my soul for ever, had I not the Redeemer's merit to plead! What need have I, every day, to have this polluted soul washed in the blood of Christ; and to repair to the glorious advocate with the Father, for the benefit of his intercession! Not a step can I take in my spiritual progress, without fresh supplies from the fountain of grace and strength; and yet how often am I provoking him to withdraw his influences, in whom is all my hope and confidence! 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!'" Thus the true penitent goes with his face Zion-ward, mourning as he goes. And thus in his highest attainments of comfort and joy, will he find cause to be deeply humbled before God, and to wrestle with him for renewed pardon; and new supplies of strengthening and quickening grace.

The difference between these two sorts of penitents is very apparent. There is the same difference, as the running of water in the paths after a shower, and the streams flowing from a living fountain of water: a legal repentance lasting no longer than the terrors which occasion it, but an evangelical repentance being a continued war with sin, till death sounds the retreat. Once more,

6. A legal repentance does at most produce, only a partial and external reformation, but an evangelical repentance is a total change of heart and life, and universal turning from sin to God. As some particular more gross iniquities most commonly lead the way to that distress and terror, which is the life of a legal and insincere repentance: so a reformation of those sins too frequently wears off the impression, and gives peace and rest to the troubled conscience, without any further change. Or, at best, there will be some darling lusts retained, some right hand or right eye spared, some sweet morsel rolled under the tongue. If the legal penitent be afraid of the sins of commission, he may still live in the omission or the careless

performance of known duty. Or, if he be more forward in the duties of God's immediate worship, he may still live in the acts of injustice, strife, and uncharitableness towards men. If he shows some zeal and activity in the service of God, he will yet, perhaps, have his heart and affections inordinately glued to the world; and pursue it as the object of his chief desire and delight. If he make conscience of all open actual sins, he yet little regards the sins of his heart, but lives in envy, malice, pride, carnal-mindedness, unbelief, or some other such heart-defiling sin. To finish his character, whatever seeming progress he may make in religion, his heart is not right with God: but is still going after his idols, still estranged from vital Christianity and the power of godliness. Like Ephraim, he is as a cake not turned, neither bread nor dough; or, like Laodicea, lukewarm, neither hot nor cold.

If we proceed to view the character of the sincere penitent, it is directly contrary to this. He finds indeed (as has been observed) continued occasion to lament the great imperfections of his heart and life; and accordingly seeks renewed pardon and cleansing in the blood of Christ. But though he has not already attained, nor is already perfect, he is yet pressing towards perfection. He is yet watching, striving against all his corruptions; yet aiming at and endeavouring after further conformity to God, in all holy conversation and godliness. He is never satisfied with a partial reformation, with external duty; or with any thing short of a life of vital piety. He does not renounce one lust, and retain another; content himself with first-table duties, in the neglect of the second; nor quiet himself in a life of mere formal godliness; nor can he rest, till he rejoices in the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and Godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God he has his conversation in the world. All the actings of his mind, as well as his external conduct, fall under his strictest cognizance and inspection; and he is careful to approve himself to him, who knows his

thoughts afar off. His reformation extends not only to the devotions of the church, but of his family and closet; not only to his conversation, but his thoughts and affections; not only to the worship of God, but to the duties of every relation he sustains among men; and in a word, his repentance produces heavenly mindedness, humility, meekness, charity, patience, forgiving of injuries, self-denial; and is accompanied with all other fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. "It is the desire of my soul (says the sincere penitent) to keep the way of the Lord; and not wickedly to depart from my God. I would refrain my feet from every evil way; and walk within my house with a perfect heart. I know I have to do with a God who trieth the heart; and hath pleasure in uprightness; I would therefore set the Lord always before me; and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. I know that my heart is deceitful above all things; and desperately wicked. I know that mine iniquities are ascended over mine head; for which I am bowed down greatly; and go mourning all the day long. But yet my desire is before the Lord; and my groaning is not hid from him. I can truly say, that I even hate vain thoughts: but God's law do I love. O that God would give me understanding, that I may keep his law, and observe it with my whole heart! I would be for God without any reserve: for I esteem his precepts concerning all things to be right, and I have inclined my heart to keep his statutes always, even unto the end.

To conclude, herein lies the great difference between a legal and an evangelical repentance: the one is an external reformation only, destitute of all the graces of the blessed Spirit. The other is an internal change, a change of the heart, of the will and affections, as well as of the outward conversation; a change which is accompanied with all the fruits and graces of the Spirit of God. The one aims at just as much religion as will keep the mind easy; and calm the ruffles of an awakened conscience. The other aims at a holy,

humble, watchful, and spiritual walk with God; and rests in no degree of attainments whatsoever.

Thus, sir, I have given you a general view of the difference between a legal and an evangelical repentance. You have not demanded this of me out of mere curiosity; or as a matter of mere speculation only: but in order to the exercise and practice of a repentance unto life, not to be repented of.

You should therefore remember who is exalted at God's right hand, to give repentance, as well as forgiveness of sins. Remember that you must depend only upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; and must accordingly lie at his footstool, to have this great and important change wrought in your heart. And, therefore, since you depend upon the mere sovereign grace of God in Christ, for the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit, you should be the more importunate in your cries to him, in the language of Ephraim, "turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God."

You should endeavour to review your past sins, and as particularly as you can, acknowledge them before God, with all their heinous circumstances and peculiar aggravations; and you should with peculiar ardour of soul wrestle with him for pardon and cleansing in the blood of Christ.

You should endeavour to see and be affected with the sin of your nature, as well as of your practice; of your heart as well as of your life; and with constant fervency cry to God for a new heart and a right spirit, for victory over your corruptions, and for grace to approve yourself to God in a life of new obedience, as well as for pardon and reconciliation to him.

You should be daily calling yourself to an account for your daily sins and imperfections; and daily confessing and lamenting them before God, that you may never have so much as the sins of one day unrepented of.

Though it be impossible that you can be sufficiently humbled before God, under an abasing sense of

your great sinfulness, unworthiness, and ingratitude to him, yet remember that "faithful saying, which is worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came to save sinners." Do not dishonour the infinite merit of the Redeemer's blood, by being afraid to trust it, for pardon and sanctification. Do not dishonour the infinite compassion of the Divine nature, by calling into question his being as ready to grant, as you heartily to seek, pardon and forgiveness of all your sins, how many and great soever they be. Be therefore humbled; be not discouraged. While you lament your sin and imperfection, adore the infinite riches of that grace and love, which has "opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness."

And to sum up the whole in a word: You must remember, that it is the essence of a true repentance to turn unto God; and therefore if you would evidence the sincerity of your repentance, you must give up yourself to God. You must choose him for your God and portion. You must watch at his gates; and wait at the posts of his doors. You must make a business of religion; and in a life of most active and earnest diligence, expect acceptance through the merits of Christ, and continued supplies of grace and strength from his fulness, to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

That the Lord would carry on his own work in your soul, and lead you from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, till you arrive where your faith will be turned into vision, and your repentance into eternal praises, is the prayer of

Yours, &c.

LETTER X.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER TO THE ROMANS CONTAINS THE DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTER OF A CONVERTED STATE.

SIR—I cannot but take comfort, from your melancholy complaint of the corruption you are struggling with; and your sense of the vileness and sinfulness of your heart, which make you groan, being burthened: because you therein breathe the language of a broken and contrite spirit, and give me hopes that you are offering to God the sacrifice, which he will not despise. “You took comfort,” you tell me, “from the seventh chapter to the Romans, finding there the like complaints with yours, in so eminent and exalted a Christian as the apostle Paul himself: but that prop is knocked from under you, by conversation with some persons of a superior reputation for religion, who assure you, that St. Paul is there giving the character of an unconverted person, under a conflict between his corruptions and the alarms of an awakened conscience, and that all those places of Scripture are to be interpreted in the same manner, which represent the like conflict in the soul.” Upon which you desire my sentiments.

What strange efforts are of late made against evangelical, vital, and experimental piety! How inconsistent are the methods used by those, who are so earnestly labouring in this undertaking! Is it not enough to put mankind into a dangerous security, by flattering them with a prospect of safety, without any experience of a work of grace in their hearts, but they must also torment and disquiet the minds of those who have been favoured with those blessed experiences, by persuading them, that remaining disallowed corruptions and imperfections are inconsistent with a state of grace, and with the favour of God! What do these men mean? Have they no feeling perception,

no affecting sense of the imperfections of their hearts and lives? Or, do they make it their practice, and esteem it their duty to give their corruptions a quiet residence in their hearts, and to maintain no conflict or struggle with them?

But it is my business to answer your demands, and to endeavour to convince you, that the apostle, in the 7th chapter to the Romans, is describing the conflict, which every true Christian experiences while he walks with God, and lives near to him.

In order to a fair and clear decision, it will be proper to take some very brief notice of the general scope and design of his epistle, in the first seven chapters. This seems to be summarily proposed in the first chapter, verse 17th: "Therein the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith." That is, we are justified before God, only by the righteousness of Christ received by faith; we continue in a justified state, by the renewed exercise of faith; and the whole life of a justified person is a life of faith in the Son of God, as well as his whole hope of eternal life is through faith in Christ. This doctrine is proved, by a representation of atrocious impiety and wickedness of the whole Gentile world, that even they who make the highest pretences to innocence, and who judge and censure others for such horrid impieties as are commonly practised among them, are all inexcusable and self-condemned on account of the wickedness perpetrated and indulged by themselves; being all of them violaters of the law and light of nature, as will leave them without excuse in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. This is plainly the apostle's argument, from the 18th verse of the first chapter. Whence it follows, that the Gentile world cannot possibly have any claim to justification by their own personal obedience; nor any other way, but by the righteousness of Christ received by faith.

The apostle next proceeds to show, that the Jew hath no better plea to make for his acceptance with God, on account of his own personal righteousness,

than the Gentile, though he rests in the law, and makes his boast of God, knows his will, and approves the things that are most excellent. For he also, in his natural attainments, breaks the law, dishonours God, and at the best performs but an external obedience, and reaches not the spirituality which the law requires. The Jew has indeed much every way, the advantage, in point of external privilege: but in point of justifying righteousness, he cannot be said to be better than the Gentile; no, in no wise! This is the argument from the 16th verse of the second, to the 9th verse of the third chapter. In which verse, and those following, the apostle sums up the argument in these remarkable words, which fully justify my interpretation of his scope and design: "For we have before proved, both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, 'there is none righteous; no, not one,' &c. That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." From those promises, he draws this conclusion in the 20th verse of the third chapter, &c. "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified in his sight. For by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God, without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." Which was the point to be proved.

But here may arise a question: What law is it that the apostle excludes from having any hand in our justification? To which it is answered: All the law that was obligatory both upon Jews and Gentiles. For they were both obnoxious to wrath, by their violation of the respective laws they were under; had "all sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And God deals with them all alike. He will justify them all by their faith in Jesus Christ, and no other-

wise; and thereby show, that "he is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also."

Having thus concluded his first argument, and proved from the guilt and impotence both of Jew and Gentile, that no man can be justified by the law of nature, by the law which was given to the Jews, nor any other way, but by the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, the Apostle proceeds to prove the same thing from Abraham's faith being imputed to him for righteousness; and from David's describing the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works, throughout the fourth chapter.

He then begins the fifth chapter by describing the glorious privileges of those who are thus justified by faith, and ends it by showing in what manner we partake of the righteousness of Christ, for our justification: that it is in the same manner as we are partakers of the sin and guilt of Adam to our condemnation. As Adam's sin was imputed to all whom he represented, unto their condemnation, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all whom he represented, and who believe in him, unto justification of life. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, many shall be made righteous."

After a solemn caution unto all, not to turn the grace of God into wantonness, and not to continue in sin, that grace may abound; and after enforcing this caution, from the obligation we are under by our baptism, to die unto sin, and walk in newness of life, as Christ died for us, and rose again from the dead, (as in the first part of the sixth chapter) the apostle goes on to show (in the latter part of that chapter) what was the privileged happy state of these Romans, to whom he wrote: That "sin had not dominion over them; for they were not under the law, but under grace:" That they were "made free from sin, and were become the servants of righteousness." And then throughout the whole seventh chapter, and the beginning of the eighth, he illustrates this matter; and

shows in what respect they are not under the law, and how, or in what respects, they are made free from sin.

This, Sir, appears plainly to be the scope and connection of the first seven chapters of the epistle to the Romans; as may be easily observed, by any one, that will impartially look into the case, without prejudice in favour of a party; or a preconceived opinion, which he is resolved to maintain.

And thus I am come to a more particular consideration of this seventh chapter; which, as was observed, is designed to clear up these two things. How we are made free from the law; and, How we are made free from sin, and become the servants of righteousness.

The first thing considered by the apostle, in this chapter, is in what respects these believing Romans were under grace and not under the law. But previous to a direct attention to this, it will be necessary to remove a stumbling block out of the way, by considering again, what law it is that the apostle refers to, when he declares these Romans not to be under the law, but under grace; to be dead to the law; and be delivered from the law, that being dead wherein they were held. Does he herein speak of the ceremonial law, or of the moral law, or of both?

To this I answer: The apostle here speaks of the law in the same sense, and uses the word in the same extent of signification, as in the foregoing parts of this epistle. It is the scope and design of this epistle —(as I have shown you) to prove that both Jew and Gentile must be justified only by the righteousness of Christ, received by faith; and not by their own observance of any law, which they are under. The law, therefore, in question, is that law, which the Gentiles have written in their hearts; and that law which the Jews rest in, boasting themselves of God, chap. ii. 14, 15, 17. It is that law, by the violation whereof both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; and against which all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. chap. iii. 9, 23. It is that law, without which

there could be no transgression, chap. iv. 15. And in a word, that law, by which every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. chap. iii. 19. The law, therefore, here must be taken in the largest extent of the word, including the whole will of God, any manner of way manifested, to any and every part of mankind, whether Jew or Gentile. Though it is evident, that the apostle hath in this seventh chapter a special reference to the moral law. This appears,

1. Because the law here referred to, is what these believing Romans has been married to, and been held by; as appears in the 4th and 6th verses. Now these Romans to whom the apostle wrote, were most of them (if not all of them) Gentiles; as he expressly declares, chap. i. 13, and chap. xi. 13, and were therefore never married to the Levitical or ceremonial law, never held by it; and consequently never delivered from it. It was the moral law only to which they had been married; and from that only they were therefore made free: and that consequently, must be what the apostle especially refers to, in this chapter.

2. Because the apostle, in exemplification of his meaning, instances in the moral law, and no other: the law by which concupiscence is known, and which forbids coveting, verse 7th. The law, which is spiritual, verse 14th. Whereas, the ceremonial law, considered in itself, was not spiritual, but made up of carnal ordinances. Heb. ix. 10. It is the law, in which the apostle delighted, after the inward man, verse 22d. But he was so far from taking delight in the ceremonial law, that he strongly and pathetically exclaims against the observation of it now that Christ is come, and represents the ordinances of this law, to be now become beggarly elements, Gal. iv. 9, and forward.

In fine, he instances in that law of God which he himself served with his mind, verse 25th. But his heart was not so set upon the observation of the ceremonial law, as to "desire again to be brought into bondage to it." From all which it is evident, if de-

monstration may be taken for evidence, that it is the moral law, which is principally designed by the apostle in this chapter and context, when he tells us, that no man can be justified by the law; and that believers are made free from the law, by their interest in Christ.

I am now prepared to consider, in what respects the apostle here represents believers to be "freed from the law," or to be "not under the law." And to set this matter in the clearest light, it will be proper to consider it,

1. Negatively: Showing in what sense they are not here represented, as being freed from the law. Particularly then,

They are not represented to be freed from the law, as it is a rule of moral conduct. No! "The law is holy; and the commandment holy, and just, and good," verse 12th. Believers "consent to the law, that it is good," verse 16th. "And with their mind they serve the law of God," verse 25th.

They are not freed from endeavours after, and delight in obedience to the law of God. "To will is present with them," even beyond their capacity of performance, verse 18th. "They would do good," even when "evil is present with them;" and "they delight in the law of God, after the inward man," verse 21st, and 22d.

I add, they are not freed from being grieved and burthened on the account of the imperfection of their obedience to the law of God: but must, on that account, "groan being burthened, while they are here in this tabernacle;" and must cry out with the apostle, "O wretched man, that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" verse 24th. And now let us attend,

2. To the affirmative description here given, of the believer's freedom from the law of God.

They are here represented as freed from their marriage relation to the law, or from the obligations of it, as a covenant of life. While in their carnal and unregenerate state, they were under the strictest bonds of

subjection to the law of nature, or the moral law. It rigorously exacted perfect obedience of them, as the only condition of their acceptance with God: and continuing in that state, they could have no righteousness at all to plead, but their own conformity to the whole demands of law; and they must obtain eternal life by perfect obedience, or not at all. But now that marriage covenant is dissolved by their faith in Christ. They are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, that they should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead. "They are delivered from the law, that being dead in which they were held;" verses 4th and 6th. They have, therefore, another righteousness to plead, without a perfect personal conformity to the law; and their hope of salvation is held by another tenure, built upon another foundation, an espousal to Christ, the one only husband, that is able to pay their debts to offended justice, and save them to the uttermost. They may now serve God in newness of spirit, from a new principle, from new motives, with new affections, with new hopes; and not in the "oldness of the letter;" verse 6th. Not from any expectation that by doing these things they should live in them; nor under the terror of the dreadful curses pronounced against "every one who continues not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." This is evidently the design of the first six verses of this chapter.

Moreover, they are freed from that spirit of bondage which they were once under, when their guilt, danger and misery were brought to their view by the law. This the apostle exemplifies, by representing his own state, when under a law work. "For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death;" verses 9th and 10th. That is, I thought myself once alive, was in a state of safety and without the curse in my own apprehension, while ignorant or thoughtless of the spirituality, extent, and

terror of the law of God; but when the commandment came home to my conscience, and I found what my state truly was, sin revived, rose up against me in its condemning power, or appeared to me in its own nature and aggravations, "exceeding sinful;" for "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" and so I found myself to be a guilty creature, a dead man, indeed, under the law, under its curse and damning sentence; and died to self-flattering hope, and confidence in the flesh. Now this is the very case of all awakened sinners, when the law comes near to conscience, lays the weight of their guilt upon them, and sets their danger of everlasting punishment before them. But now these believing Romans were delivered from this bondage to the law; there being "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus;" and "that being dead, wherein they were held."

I may add to this, that they were also freed from the irritating power of the law. When an awakened sinner first obtains a sensible view of the strictness, purity, and spirituality of the law, so of the vast number and dreadful aggravations of his sins, with the amazing wrath that hangs over his head; this fills his soul not only with horror and amazement, but with an impatient, disquieting anxiety, which unhinges his mind for duty, inflames his corruptions, and gives them the advantage against all his good purposes, resolves, and endeavours. So that the law, inhibiting sin, without giving power to avoid it, does but make the sinner's lusts, (like a torrent dammed up,) to swell the more, and to run with greater force, when they get vent; and "sin taking occasion by the commandment, works in the soul all manner of concupiscence, deceives the sinner, and slays him," as it is expressed, verse 8th and 11th. But these believing Romans were delivered from the law in this respect also. Having a discovery of the glorious way of salvation by Christ, and the safety of depending upon his righteousness, they were quickened by adoring views of redeeming mercy; actuated by a principle of love to God; and strengthened by

the divine influences of the Spirit of grace, to mortify their lusts, and to live a life of sincere and spiritual obedience; or as the apostle expresses it (verse 6,) to "serve God in newness of spirit; and not in the oldness of the letter."

These three things are most certainly represented in the context, as the servitude that unregenerate men are under to the law. This is too evident to be disputed. Believers are certainly represented as being delivered from the servitude of the law: whence it follows, that their freedom from the law, here treated of, must consist in those particulars which I have considered.

And now I am further to observe to you, that there is another glorious privilege of believers distinctly insisted upon in the sixth chapter, which is, as I hinted before, particularly illustrated in this; and that is, that they are "dead unto sin, and alive unto God. Sin has no more dominion over them," they "being not under the law, but under grace." They are "made free from sin, and become the servants of righteousness: and being made free from sin they are become the servants of God, have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life," chap. vi. 11, 14, 18, 22. This character of believers depends upon the other already considered. They being made free from the law, they are of consequence made free from sin likewise. A freedom from sin is the fruit of our freedom from the law; which is therefore first considered, and the consideration of this, superadded as an appendage to it, or a necessary consequence from it.

But how are we to understand these strong expressions? Are believers wholly freed from all sin? Are they arrived at a sinless state of perfection? Or in what other sense are they free from sin, and become servants of righteousness? This question the apostle answers, from the 14th verse of the seventh, to the 3d verse of the eighth chapter; and particularly exemplifies the case, by representing to us the state of his own soul with respect to the freedom from sin;

and the remaining conflict he yet had with his corruptions. In the foregoing verses he had shown us what he once was, when in a carnal state, and under the tyranny of the law. "I was alive without the law once," &c. And throughout that discourse he speaks wholly in the preterperfect tense, as of former matters, things already passed. From the 14th verse, and forward, he shows us what he now is, and speaks therefore only in the present tense, as being to describe this new state of freedom from sin. By altering thus his form of expression, in this change of tenses, we may plainly see, that there is such a transition as I am now supposing, and may easily know where it begins.

Thus, sir, I have endeavoured to set before you in the briefest and plainest manner I could, the scope and connection of the first seven chapters of this epistle to the Romans. By a due attendance to which, you cannot but discover how groundless and impertinent all the reasonings of those gentlemen are, of whom you speak.

However, that this may appear in a yet stronger light, I will now proceed to a direct refutation of the opinion, that the apostle is here personating and giving the character of an unconverted or unregenerate person, struggling under the convictions of an awakened conscience. And

1. It is undeniably certain, that the most holy of all the natural descendants of Adam, that ever were in the world, have had cause to make the same complaints of their remaining corruptions, as the apostle here does; and have all in like manner experienced what the apostle elsewhere calls "the flesh lusting against the spirit," and "the spirit against the flesh," Gal. v. 17. Have they not all of them some remaining carnality? The most improved saints comparatively but babes in Christ, and not so spiritual as they should be? Nay, are they not even sold under sin? It is true, they do not voluntarily, with Ahab, sell themselves to do wickedly; this would denote the full dominion and power of sin; but they are sold as cap-

tives, are sold against their will. Though for the general they make ever so great resistance, they have yet corruptions that do and will at times prevail against them, and bring them into captivity. Have they not all cause to acknowledge, that they do what they allow not, what they would not, and even what they hate? That they fall short of what they would do? And that when they would do good, evil is present with them? That they find a law in their members warring against the law of their mind? And don't they groan, being burdened, under a sense of what wretched men they are on these accounts? In other words, are there any of them that don't feel in themselves sinful affections, sinful imperfections, and sinful actions, that are the grief and burthen of their souls? Here let the appeal be made to all the generations of God's children, whether they do not find these things in themselves, even in their most watchful periods. I must needs say, it argues a dreadful ignorance of, or an unaccountable inattention to, the plague of their own heart, in them who have not a feeling and experimental apprehension of these things. It may therefore be justly presumed, that the apostle here complains of what every true Christian feels and laments. Or at least I may confidently say, that the experience of all the children of God is a refutation of the principal arguments against my interpretation of this chapter.

It may be added, in the language of another, "Those objections are chiefly owing to a mistaken notion of the case described here, from verse 14th; as if the apostle spoke of gross sinning in practice, with only some feeble reluctance of his will, and habitually transgressing, in a course of outward actions, through the power of some conquering and ruling lust, against the dictates of his natural conscience. Whereas, in truth, he does not own a customary indulgence to any the least sin in external practice, much less to any great wickedness and gross sins of presumption. But he evidently speaks in his complaint, of unallowed

frailties, or sins of infirmity, incident to the best of men. And if his language in representing the case seems too expressive and emphatical, we may fairly resolve this into his humility; a grace that always makes the Christian willing to see the worst of his case, and to lay himself low before God and man. From this principle, we must conceive it was, that this same apostle elsewhere describes himself under those debasing characters, 'The least of the apostles—Less than the least of saints—yea, The chief of sinners.' Though an eminent example of holiness, yet being not already perfect, he readily confesses it; and under a humbling, affecting sense of his imperfections and remaining corruptions, he breathes out his complaints in very animated and striking forms of speech. However, his self-abasing expressions (taken in this view) do all of them well consist with the brighter and commendatory representations he sometimes makes of himself, when considering his case in another light; and they are all reconcilable with every Scripture character of regenerate professors, as well as with the universal experience of real Christians, even the best upon earth. For do they not all own themselves conscious of 'indwelling sin,' and 'fleshly lusts that war against the soul?' Do not they all confess themselves not as yet perfectly enlarged to run the way of God's commandments; their graces not as yet perfectly free in their exercise, but often under a very sensible restraint, so that they cannot produce them into act, as they would, and ought; their corruptions insinuating and intermingling with their best performances of duty; their lusts, though by divine grace conquered within them, yet striving still for the mastery; yea, sometimes usurping the throne seemingly, and acting the tyrant over them for a season, against the fixed judgment and settled bent of their mind and heart; which, in the account of gospel grace, is the man? Now, looking upon themselves, if tried by the law and justice, as liable to be 'condemned with the world,' they have therefore no hope of being 'saved

by any works of righteousness, which they have done,' but only look for mercy, 'the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ,' to be magnified in their deliverance out of the present state of imperfection. In the mean time their sins, yea, their unavoidable infirmities, are their burden, under which they sigh and bemoan themselves; ashamed and grieved even for disallowed frailties, more than unregenerate sinners for their wilful and scandalous enormities. Is it any uncommon case for a child of God, in a repenting frame, passionately to lament in the strain of Rom. vii., judging himself for carnality, complaining of spiritual captivity, and crying out, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' nor finding any refuge, but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Where is there any injustice done to the inspired writer, or the least injury to Christianity, by supposing this to be the very case the apostle had in view? Or what one word is there in all his description of the case before him, but may be fairly accommodated to this interpretation? And what occasion then to suppose the apostle uses such a personation here, as some suppose, transferring to himself those odious things which belonged only to an unregenerate legalist, and putting them in his own case, merely out of modesty, and to avoid giving offence to the party re-proved?"

2. We find the apostle here giving characters of himself that are the distinguishing marks of a regenerate state; characters, that do not, that cannot, agree to any unconverted person in the world. It is, for instance, the peculiar property of a child of God, to hate that which is evil; and to have a will present with him to that which is good. No unregenerate person is able truly to say, that "he would do that which is good; and would not do that which is evil." The conscience indeed, and the judgment of an unregenerate man, may in some sense be said to be against the sin; but his will is for it, and the lusts of a depraved will, habitually govern the man; so that he

always inclines to sin, in one kind or another, in one degree or another, and does always actually indulge himself in sin, except only when under some special restraints by shame or fear of punishment. He can never be said to hate sin; though he may hate the misery that is likely to be the consequence of it; but he rather hates the law, that punishes sin. And to be sure, it cannot be said of any unregenerate man, that he hates evil and would do good, indefinitely: that is, that he hates all evil, and would do all good, without any distinction or reserve; as the apostle here affirms of himself. No! there is some Delilah in reserve, some bosom-lust retained, some methods of vital piety (either of heart or life) rejected by the greatest proficient in morality among the unconverted world. None but the truly regenerate can say with David, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things, to be right; and I hate every false way," Psal. cxix. 128.

To this I may add, that it is the distinguishing character of a child of God, to "delight in the law of the Lord, after the inward man." An unregenerate man may by the lashes of an awakened conscience, and terrors of the law, be kept under some slavish restraints, and be forced to some servile endeavours of obedience: but could he with a quiet conscience, and hopes of salvation, enjoy his choice, he would break through all these restraints, and always gratify his sinful and sensual inclinations. To have our inward man, our very mind and heart delighted in the law of God, is to have our souls delighted in a conformity to God; the law being but a transcript of his moral perfections. That is, in other words, it is to love God himself, to delight ourselves in his nature and government, to love to be like him in the inward man, having "the law written on the tables of our heart," which is the sum of all religion, the whole and only evidence of vital Christianity, all other marks and characters of a Christian indeed being contained in it. Whence it is, that the Psalmist so often mentions "his

delight in God's commandments, which he had loved," as a mark of his uprightness. No unregenerate professor does really delight in God, as the holy and righteous Governor and Judge of the world; and therefore no unregenerate person can truly say, as the apostle here, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man."

I may likewise add, that it is the distinguishing character of a child of God, to groan under the burden of the body of death, to long for deliverance from it, and to have a war maintained between the "law of his members," and the "law of his mind." Awakened sinners may groan under a sense of guilt and danger; and have a war between their consciences and their lusts. But they are believers, and none but they, who groan under the burden of their heart-corruptions; and after a further progress in holiness. Unrenewed sinners may have a "law in their members," warring against their awakened consciences: but they have no contrary "law in their minds," no such habitual bent of soul, or stated and settled disposition of their affections, as has the force of a law with them, and maintains a constant war with their inward corruptions, their vain imaginations, sinful appetites and passions. They do indeed love the Lord, that thus hate evil, Psal. xcvi. 10. And they who thus "fight the good fight of faith," will "lay hold on eternal life," 1 Tim. vi. 12. It is one characteristic of a true believer, that he resists sin, in all the lusts thereof, even the most secret, and hidden from the eye of the world. Every creature has its antipathies: the new creature, as well as any other; and as sin is the greatest contrariety to its temper and taste, to its interests and comforts, the Divine nature always is disposed to exert itself in an opposition to indwelling sin, studying to mortify it more and more.

3. The apostle is here giving the character of a person who has a twofold principle in him, the one a governing principle, that may be called himself: the other a subdued principle, which is "not he, but sin that

dwelleth in him." Now can any unconverted person in the world truly say, it is not he, that transgresseth the law, when the natural bent and disposition of his soul is to "evil, only to evil, and that continually," notwithstanding all the restraints of the law and checks of conscience, and when all the sins of his heart and life are imputed to him, and will be punished upon him, if he remain in his present state? Can any unconverted person in the world say, that he himself (all in him which in God's account can be called himself) serves the law of God, though with his flesh (his remaining carnal affections and appetites) the law of sin; when it is certain, that every unconverted man is, both with his mind and flesh, a servant to sin, and free from righteousness, as the apostle assures us, in the sixth chapter of this epistle, verses 16, 17, 20.

4. What justifies my interpretation beyond all reasonable opposition, is, that the apostle draws that conclusion from those very characters here given of himself, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." chap. viii. 1, 2. Two things do here appear to me certain and unquestionable. One is, that the first verse of this 8th chapter is here represented (as plainly as any thing can be represented by words) as a necessary consequence or just inference from the premises, and from the characters the apostle had there given of himself, and is therefore a full proof, that every one in the same spiritual state described in the latter part of the preceding chapter, is in Christ Jesus, and freed from condemnation. "There is THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION," &c. Wherefore? Because they who are in Christ Jesus are "freed from sin," and do "not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit," as before described, and particularly because "they themselves do serve the law of God," as expressed in the verse imme-

diately foregoing. This construction is necessary, to make the connection of this verse with what went before, congruous and rational. Nay, it is the construction which the apostle himself purposely leads us to, in the 2d verse. "FOR the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." As if he had said, they who are in Christ Jesus cannot be under condemnation, since they are made "free from the law (from the dominion, though not from the remains) of sin and death;" which I have already shown you to be my case, in the foregoing description of my spiritual state and experience, and in the characters I have given of myself. Another thing that appears to me most certain and evident is, that the apostle speaks of himself here (in this 2d verse of chapter viii.) in the same manner, and to the same purpose, as he spoke of himself in the latter part of the foregoing chapter; and that these words, with the following verses, are the sum and conclusion of that whole discourse. This was the point the apostle was undertaking to explain; this the subject of the preceding chapter, as I have already shown; in this he speaks the first person, as in the former chapter; this is a natural and rational summoning up or drawing the conclusion of the whole, "The law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made ME free from the law of sin and death." Whence it follows, that those characters in the latter part of the seventh chapter, belong to none but such who are in Christ Jesus, and by him freed from condemnation, and from the law of sin and death.

And now, I leave it to you, sir, to judge, whether we have not reason to conclude that the apostle is here speaking of himself, when in a renewed or regenerate state; and thereby representing the conflict which the children of God, in their highest attainments, have with their remaining corruptions; since there is so plain a transition, (by the change of the tense,) from considering what he once had been, to a representation of what he now was, at the time of

writing this epistle. Have we not reason to conclude this, when all, (the very best,) of the children of God do always experience the same struggle with their corruptions as is here described? May we not confidently draw this conclusion, when we find that the characters here given are applicable to none but the regenerate only? None but they "hate that which is evil;" and have "a will present with them to that which is good." To be sure none but they hate all evil, and have a will to all good, without reserve or distinction. None but they "delight in the law of the Lord, after the inward man." None but they groan under the burthen of "the body of death;" and maintain a constant "war with the law of sin in their members." May we not safely maintain this conclusion against all opposition, when we find a person described under the influence of a twofold principle, corruption and grace? The former so brought into subjection that its actings are not to be attributed, strictly speaking, to him, (being so contrary to the new man, his predominant principle, according to which God accounts of us, and denominates us,) but are imputable only to the remains of the old man, or indwelling sin. The latter having such an empire in his soul, as to be called himself, so that, (notwithstanding his corruptions and the outbreakings of them,) he can say, "I myself can serve the law of God." In fine, this conclusion most certainly appears to be necessary and unquestionable, that they must be in a regenerate state, who are delivered from condemnation, and who "walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit;" and who are by "the law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, made free from the law of sin and death;" as the apostle shows to be his own case, according to the description he had before given of himself. To suppose that he here personates a professor unregenerate, must, upon the whole, appear utterly inconsistent with the case here described in these passages; and, therefore, such an exposition, as altogether forced, is not to be received.

But after all, you will, perhaps, object, that my interpretation tends to make men secure and careless, bold and presumptuous, in a state and course of sin.

I answer, it is so far from this, that it has a direct contrary tendency. It is a solemn admonition to the children of God, to be upon their guard, since they have such a domestic enemy to deal with. And a like admonition it is to all careless, secure, and habitual sinners, not to flatter themselves with a vain presumptuous hope of their regenerate state, on any pretences whatsoever.

It is here the character of a Christian indeed, that he hates evil, all evil, without reserve. If, therefore, they who retain any favourite lust, and roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, cry peace to their souls, they are sleeping upon the top of a mast. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. The peace of such is all a delusion; and a most false, absurd, and dangerous peace.

It is here likewise the character of a true Christian, that he does not allow so much as his imperfections; that when these prevail, they are without his consent, and against his will. These are what he would not, and among the evils which he hates. They therefore are entertaining but a vain dream of a safe state, who are knowingly and deliberately living in a way of sinning, and who customarily allow any moral imperfection. They will certainly in the conclusion be rejected, among the workers of iniquity.

It is here also represented as the property of every sincere Christian, that he has a "will present," with him "to that which is good;" that "he consents to the law that is good;" and that "he delights in the law of God after the inward man;" that is, in other words, (as I have shown) he truly loves God and godliness. Here is therefore no foundation for them to think well of their state, whose whole religion is constrained by fear; and whose heart and affections are not sincerely engaged in the service of God. As for them who love the world and their idols more

than God and a life of sincere universal obedience to him, such are in the "bonds of iniquity," and have "no part or lot in this matter."

It is moreover given as the mark of a true Christian, that he groans after deliverance from the body of death; not only from guilt and danger, but from the remainders of his corruption, and maintains a constant war against the "law of sin in his members." What encouragement is there therefore for such an one to hope well of his state, that does not make it his business to keep his heart, and to watch over his lips and life; that does not wrestle with God for deliverance from, and greater victory over his corruptions; and that does not look upon his remaining imperfections as the great burden of his life?

It is furthermore given in the character of the true Christian, that he thankfully expects this deliverance only by Jesus Christ. The apostle's answer to the question, "Who shall deliver me?" is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord."—I thankfully look unto God, in and through Jesus Christ, as a sure refuge in this difficulty; and as the fountain of life, from whence I may safely expect my needed supplies. All unbelievers, therefore, as excluded from any unjustifiable pretence to this character, have no room left them to think well of their state.

In fine, the Christian here described, is one who "with his mind does himself serve the law of God." He has had "God's law put into his mind," and he "serves God with his spirit." His whole man, all that can be called himself, is engaged in a life of gospel obedience. What can they, therefore, have to do with the peace and comfort, which is here offered to Christians indeed, who are grossly defective, partial, and unsteady in their obedience; whose minds are wavering, and whose hearts are divided between the service of God and their idols? "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways; and let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord," James i. 7, 8.

Now, to conclude this long letter, I will only further observe, that you may here find, in a summary and concise representation, the true characters of the children of God; as well as matter of conviction to those who cannot, and of consolation to those who can, apply these marks to themselves. If upon an impartial examination, you can justify your claim to the characters here given, let no man rob you of the comfort and hope thereby set before you. But if you cannot find such marks in yourself, never rest till you obtain these evidences of a converted state.

That the Lord may comfort your heart, and establish you in every good word and work, to do his will, is the prayer of,

Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XI.

THE DOCTRINE OF A SINNER'S JUSTIFICATION, BY THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED.

SIR—It is indeed as you represent it, “a matter of great consequence, to have a right view of the way and means by which God will be reconciled to you, and by which you may have a title to life eternal.”

“You are, as you have all along been, in great difficulties on the question: and cannot see into the doctrine of a sinner's justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. You have been lately reading upon that subject; and find many arguments against it that you cannot get over. Your author represents it as unscriptural and unreasonable: you therefore desire me to give you a right view of that doctrine, and to answer your objections against it.”

There is, indeed, sir, no cause for you to “suspect,

that you shall wear out my patience." I gladly embrace the opportunity to do any thing in my power to give you satisfaction, and to assist you in your greatest concern, which you have reason to be most solicitous about. I shall, therefore, according to your desire, endeavour in the first place to give a brief view of the doctrine of our justification; by the imputed righteousness of Christ, before I proceed to consider your objections against it.

I shall first consider what we are to understand by justification, and in what sense that expression is used in Scripture. Should I herein follow some of our wrangling disputants, I know not how many distinct meanings of the word justification I might set before you. But this would be to darken counsel, by words without knowledge; the term having one invariable meaning, throughout the whole Bible. It always (as far as I have been able to observe) constantly signifies being "esteemed, declared, manifested, or pronounced righteous." This is what the original word, both in the Old and New Testament, naturally signifies; and in this sense only, it is always used. I need not therefore undertake to give instances of the use of the word in this sense, since in all instances it is used in this sense only. This, I believe, must be acknowledged by every one, that will thoroughly and impartially examine the case. I think there can no text be found, where justification is used for making us inherently righteous.

But though this word has one invariable signification, it is used in Scripture in a threefold respect: either for our present justification in the sight of God, for our justification before men and, our own consciences, or for our justification at the tribunal of our Judge at the last day. It is the first of these that falls under our present consideration: which is to be considered as our acquittance from guilt, and our acceptance with God as righteous in his sight. It is to be considered as a sentence of absolution and acceptance by the great Judge of the world. As justification,

therefore, is always considered in Scripture as a forensic or juridical sentence, it should be carefully distinguished from the infusion of a principle of grace, or inherent righteousness. Justification is usually in Scripture opposed to condemnation. As this latter therefore does not imply the rendering men wicked and guilty, but pronouncing them so: even so the former likewise cannot mean rendering men righteous, but sententially declaring and pronouncing them so. Were this duly attended to, many of the objections made against our doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, would vanish of course. You will be pleased, therefore, all along to carry this in your mind, that I am not considering how we should become inherently righteous, by a renovation of our nature: but how we may be acquitted from guilt, and accepted as righteous, by the sentence of our glorious Judge.

I proceed to consider what we are to understand by the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

To impute, is to judge or esteem any matter, character, or quality, whether good or evil, to belong to a person as his. And may either refer to what was originally his, antecedently to such imputation, or to what was not antecedently his, but becomes so by virtue of such imputation only. The Scriptures abound with instances of both these sorts of imputation.

We have many instances in Scripture of imputing that to a person, which was originally his own, and performed by him antecedently to such imputation. Thus, sin, is said to be imputed to a sinner, when he is judged or treated as an offender. "Let not my Lord," says Shimei, "impute iniquity unto me," 2 Sam. xix. 19. And thus righteousness is imputed to the saint, when he is judged or acknowledged righteous (in a qualified sense) with relation to a particular fact, done in conformity to the preceptive part of the divine law. "Then stood up Phineas, and executed judgment, and it was imputed to him for righteousness," Psalm cvi. 31. But this is not the imputation

now to be considered, which respects a justification, that is proposed as the relief of a sinful, perishing world, against the penalty of the condemning law, and implies a change of the sinner's state, from guilt to grace, from death to life, in a relative sense.

I proceed then to observe that also may be said to be imputed to a person, which was not his own originally or antecedently; but is judged and esteemed to belong to him, and is his on account of such imputation only. Thus, a debt is imputed to a surety; and the surety's payment of a debt is imputed to the principal debtor, and is pleadable by him in discharge from his creditor's demands. "If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, (says Paul of Onesimus) put that on my account, (Greek) impute it unto me." Thus our sins are imputed unto Christ; inasmuch as he, in the character of our surety, has undertaken to discharge those debts to the justice of God. And thus his righteousness is imputed unto us; it having been wrought out in our place and stead, and given to God in payment on our behalf.

These things being premised, we are to understand the imputation in question, to be God's gracious donation of the perfect righteousness of Christ to believers, and his acceptance of their persons as righteous, on the account thereof. Their sins being imputed to him, and his obedience being imputed to them, they are in virtue hereof both acquitted from guilt, and accepted as righteous before God.

We are not therefore to understand our justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ as implying and supporting, that God does esteem believers to be what indeed they are not. He esteems them to be poor, sinful, imperfect men, who have no otherwise satisfied the claims of his justice, and the demands of the law, than by the obedience of their surety: Which is really by a gracious imputation become theirs, and they are on the account thereof become indeed righteous in God's sight, although antecedent to that imputation, they were legally condemned criminals, and

though they yet remain inherently imperfect and sinful creatures.

We are further to consider, that this righteousness of Christ is imputed to none but believers, but is (as the apostle expresses it) revealed from faith to faith. It is not imputed before we have faith, as the Antinomians dream, nor is the imputation delayed till the fruits and effects of faith in an obedient life appear, as some other seem to suppose, but it is imputed at and upon our believing. It shall be imputed, if we believe, Rom. iv. 24. Faith is the receiving an offered Saviour (John i. 12,) in his person, his offices, and all his benefits, and therefore it is a receiving his righteousness, which is one of his benefits, freely offered in the gospel, to all that will accept it.

So I am prepared to observe to you, that we are to understand our justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ to signify and imply. "A gracious sentence of God, whereby a sinner antecedently guilty in his sight, is upon his believing in Christ, acquitted from guilt, accepted as righteous, and entitled to all the benefits of the covenant of grace, on account of what Christ has done and suffered for him."

Thus, Sir, I have endeavoured in as few words as possible to give you a just and clear view of the doctrine before us; and am now ready to consider your objections.

You first object, that "the imputation of our sins to Christ, or the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, are no where mentioned in the word of God; that the terms and expressions used in this case, are certainly of human invention; and the doctrine therefore to be suspected, as having its origin rather from our scholastic divines, than from the oracles of God."

Your first supposition is, that the imputation of our sins, to Christ, is no where mentioned in the word of God. If you mean by this, that we no where in Scripture find that proposition, in so many express words, that our sins are imputed to Christ, this is true: but I hope to show you it is altogether impertinent. But if you mean by this, that we can no where find

full, clear, and undeniable evidence from Scripture, of the imputation of the sins of believers to Christ, I will endeavour immediately to convince you of your mistake.

The whole Levitical dispensation was purposely designed to represent this comfortable truth to us. This was the end of all their sacrifices, and bloody oblations for the remissions of their sins. They did not imagine, or at least God did not design they should imagine, that their sin and guilt were actually, to all intents and purposes, transferred from the offender to the victim; but they were hereby led to look to Christ, the Antitype of all their sin-offerings, in faith and hope, that their sins should all be imputed to him; and themselves through the merit of his sacrifice, be acquitted from guilt. This design of all their expiatory sacrifices was more clearly exhibited to them, in the institution of the scape-goat; where the imputation of our sins to Christ was in the most lively manner represented. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat; and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat; and shall send him away, by the hand of a fit man, into the wilderness; and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto the land not inhabited." Lev. xvi. 21, 22. Here was a plain and express communication, or transferring of guilt from God's people to the scape-goat. All the iniquities of God's people, all their transgressions in all their sins, were laid upon his head. He bore upon him all their iniquities; or in other words, their sins were imputed to him. Now you cannot suppose, that all the hopes of the children of Israel terminated upon this goat. You must suppose, that they looked to the great Antitype, to whom their guilt was indeed to be transferred, and their sins imputed; and from whom they expected their discharge and justification. Hence it plainly appears, that all the hopes, which the church of God in all the ages and dispensations thereof have entertained, of the forgive-

ness of sin and reconciliation to God, was through the imputation of their sins to Christ, the substance of all the Levitical shadows, and the only true sin-offering.

The same doctrine which was so plainly pointed out by these typical rites, is fully and abundantly confirmed by very many plain and clear passages of Scripture, which cannot, with any appearance of propriety, be construed in any other sense, than that I am pleading for. Thus, Isaiah iii. 6. 11: "The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all." "For he shall bear their iniquities." 2 Cor. v. 21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Gal. iii. 13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." 1 Pet. ii. 24: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Many other texts to the like purpose might be quoted; but these are every way sufficient to decide this point.

If the iniquity of us all could be laid upon Christ, and he bear our iniquities, no other way but by imputation, it then appears from Isa. liiii. that our iniquities were imputed to him. And I think, the adversaries of this doctrine can make no rational pretence to any other way, in which our sins can be said to be laid upon Christ, and he be said to bear our iniquities.

If Christ has been made sin for us, according to 2 Cor. v. he must be made sin for us, (and treated as a sinner,) either by his own personal fault, or by the imputation of our sin to him. I can think of no other possible way in which this can be supposed, but one of these two. Now the blasphemy of the former supposition obliges us to reject it with abhorrence; and therefore the latter must be allowed.

If Christ hath been made a curse for us, according to Gal. iii. he must then have the violation of the law imputed to him; otherwise the curse of it could not in justice have been inflicted upon him. To inflict the curse, or penalty of the law, upon one no ways chargeable with the violation of it, is contrary to the

justice both of God and man. And I can imagine no other way, by which our blessed Saviour could be chargeable with the violation of the law of God, and thereby be obnoxious to the curse of it, but through the imputation of our sin and guilt to him.

If our blessed Saviour bore our sins in his own body, and was punished for our sins upon the cross, according to 1 Pet. ii. our sins then must be laid to his charge, and punished upon him, either by imputation or some other way. Here then let our adversaries speak sense, and tell us, if they can, what other way this could possibly be done.

Pardon me, Sir, if I am forced to tell you, that it is too trifling an evasion to be adopted by men of learning and sense, to urge against us, that the word imputation is not used in this case in Scripture, when so many expressions are used in Scripture, which fully and necessarily imply it, and are of the same significancy. True, we do not read in express words that our sins were imputed to Christ; but we do read in express words, that our iniquities were laid upon him; that he bore them; that he was made sin, or legally reputed a sinner, on the account of them; that he bore them in his own body, or was punished for them, upon the cross; and bore the curse of the law, which we had violated. And if all this do not amount to the same thing as the imputation of our sins to Christ, I must for ever despair of understanding the meaning of the most plain and familiar expressions.

Dear Sir, allow me the freedom to observe to you, that you have been guilty of innumerable sins. If these have not been imputed to Christ, if he hath not borne your sins, if he hath not satisfied the divine justice on account of them, they must yet be imputed to you, and you must bear your iniquity yourself; you must yet be under the guilt of all your sins, and under all the curses of the broken law. A thought which will administer but little comfort here, and less at the tribunal of Christ, if this should then be found to be your case. A thought big with horror!

I now proceed to consider whether the "imputa-

tion of Christ's righteousness to us," is no where mentioned in the word of God. I must here again acknowledge, that this proposition, "Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers," is no where to be found in the Scriptures, in express terms. But then we have so many full and clear testimonies in Scripture, to the doctrine contained in that proposition, that there can be no reason to call the truth of it into question. Thus, Jer. xxiii. 6, "This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." Rom. iii. 25, 26, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins; to declare at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. v. 18, 19, "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners: so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Rom. viii. 3, 4, "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Rom. x. 4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth." 1 Cor. i. 30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 2 Cor. v. 21, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

I might have added very many more texts of Scripture to the same purpose: but how can more be needful, to satisfy any man, of the truth of our justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, who attentively reads, and impartially weighs, these cited texts, without prejudice against the doctrine, or a bias to some favourite scheme? Let it be considered, here we are expressly assured, that Christ is the Lord our Righteousness; that it is by his righteousness we obtain remission of sins; that by his right-

eousness God is the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus: that by his righteousness we have justification of life, and by his obedience we are made righteous; that by his being sent for sin and condemning sin, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us; that he is the end of the law for righteousness to the believer; that he is of God made unto us righteousness; and we are made the righteousness of God in him. Is it possible, that the doctrine I am pleading for, should be expressed in plainer and stronger terms? The word impute, or imputation, is not indeed found in these texts; but the thing intended by it, is plainly found there. Let that be allowed, and I shall maintain no controversy with you about the meaning or use of a word. Let it be allowed, that Christ has fulfilled the righteousness of the law for believers; that his righteousness has become theirs; that they have thereby remission of sins, are justified before God, and made righteous: let these things be owned, and it will not be of so great importance, whether you consent to the propriety of the word imputation, in this case, or not. Now these things you must allow, or deny the very language of the quoted texts: and by allowing these things, you will allow all that is intended by those who plead for the imputation of Christ's righteousness. But why must the word impute, or imputation, be found fault with? Be pleased to read the fourth chapter to the Romans, and observe how often righteousness is there said to be imputed to them that believe. Though the righteousness there said to be imputed, is not expressly called the righteousness of Christ, yet that is fully implied. For it was a righteousness, whereby Abraham was justified, ver. 2. A righteousness without works, ver. 6. A righteousness by which our sins are covered, that the Lord will not impute them, ver. 6, 7. A righteousness by which God is the Father of all them that believe, ver. 11. And a righteousness through which Abraham had the promise that he should be the heir of the world, ver. 13. Now can any man pretend to a personal righteousness which all these characters

are fairly applicable to? Or can these characters justly be applied to any other, save the righteousness of Christ only?

I hope, by this time, you are convinced, that the Scripture is not a stranger to the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. I would therefore, Sir, intreat you to consider, it is of infinite consequence, that you yourself be not a stranger to that faith, by which you may receive this righteousness, may have this imputed to you, and may in virtue of this be accepted (your person and your sincere performances) as righteous before God.

But I have been too tedious in my answer to your first objection. I therefore hasten to consider what you have further to object against this important truth.

“Your author,” you tell me, “argues, that if faith be imputed for righteousness unto the justification of a sinner, then Christ’s obedience cannot be imputed to that end; unless our faith and Christ’s righteousness be supposed to be the same thing: That there is nothing more evident, than that faith (which is so often said to be imputed for righteousness, Rom. iv.) is properly our own personal righteousness: That the word faith, (in Greek,) signifies faithfulness, as well as believing; and includes evangelical obedience in the nature of it: That God deals with us as moral agents; and imputes to us the righteousness which we personally have, and not that which we personally have not.”

I take this to be the most plausible, and the most weighty objection against the doctrine under consideration, that has ever been made: and it therefore deserves to be distinctly taken notice of. I shall accordingly endeavour to show, that the faith which is imputed unto righteousness (for so, I think, should the words be rendered) does not include obedience in the nature of it. I shall proceed to prove, that the faith which is imputed to believers unto their justification, is not their own personal righteousness. And then endeavour to make it evident, that if your construc-

tion of those passages in Rom. iv. were granted, it would make nothing against the doctrine of our justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

I am first to show, that the faith which is imputed unto righteousness, does not include obedience in the nature of it; considering faith in its reference to justification, or, (as some express themselves) in its office of justifying. For, though a true and lively faith has its influence in purifying the hearts and lives of men, and producing obedience; yet it is of the very nature of faith, to exclude all opinion of merit in ourselves, to respect the promise of God's mercy, and directly send us to Christ for justification and acceptance with God, through his merits and righteousness. So that justifying faith as such, does not include in its nature works of obedience. I need not use many arguments to prove this; the apostle having in the plainest and strongest terms declared it. It is the very scope and design of the apostle's argument in this fourth chapter to the Romans, to prove, that we are justified by faith without works. This was the argument of the preceding chapter; which is confirmed and illustrated in this, by the examples of Abraham and David. "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory: but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God; and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, is the reward reckoned not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness, without works," Rom. v. 2, 6.

The apostle is here using a variety of unanswerable arguments, against the doctrine I am now impleading. He argues, that if Abraham's faith had included works or obedience in it, he would have had whereof to glory. All works, all acts of obedience whatsoever, are formally our own, being done by ourselves; and therefore may be gloried in, as such:

but Abraham had not whereof to glory before God; and therefore Abraham's faith did not include works of obedience in the nature of it, considering it as counted to him for righteousness. He next shows us, that if we had the benefit of justification as a reward, upon the account of any works, of any obedience whatsoever, the reward would not be of grace, but of debt. For by whatever law, by whatever covenant-transaction, a reward becomes due to any sort of works, or obedience, it is however become due; and may be claimed as a debt, upon the performance of such works, or obedience. Whence it follows, that no sort of obedience either legal or evangelical, can be included in the nature of a justifying faith, as such, if we are justified of grace, not of debt. He shows us, that where faith is imputed, unto righteousness, it is imputed to him that worketh not, that doeth no works of righteousness at all, dependeth upon none at all of his own doing, in order to his justification: and therefore it cannot possibly be, that such faith has any sort of works, any sort of obedience, included in the nature of it, as it is a justifying faith. It justifies only as it receives a divine gift, freely offered; or in the apostle's language, as it believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly. Here is no room left for any evasion. After ever so many critical distinctions are made, Him that worketh not, is him that worketh not. He moreover shows us, that the faith under consideration is a believing on him that justifieth the ungodly; and therefore cannot include evangelical obedience in the nature of it; unless evangelical obedience, and ungodliness, be the same thing. It is true, that a person when justified, or when exercising that faith through which he is justified, ceases to be in his state and habitual course ungodly; for he has a faith which not only sends him to Christ for justification, but for sanctification too, and which not only embraces the promise, but the precept too, and is a vital active principle of obedience. But then there is no moment of time intervenes between his state of ungodliness and his justification. He further shows,

that God imputeth righteousness, for our justification, without works: and therefore obedience cannot be included in the nature of justifying faith, as such; unless obedience be without works also. Here likewise the expressions are strong and plain. There is no room for shift, or cavil. When all the most plausible pretences in the world are made to avoid the force of these expressions, without works, is without works still.

How admirable does the pretence, which I am opposing appear, when the apostle does, with his own pen, in as strong and pointed language as can be used, obviate the pretence, reject it, and refute it; and that, too, in the very context upon which it is founded. I need therefore offer no other arguments to clear this point: it is effectually done to my hand by the apostle himself: and his reasoning ought to take place against all objections. Could we be justified by any sort of works or obedience, personally performed by us, we should have whereof to glory: and were our justification a reward given on account of any works of obedience of ours, it would be of debt, and not of grace. But both these things are inconsistent with God's gracious dispensation towards us. He imputeth righteousness to him that worketh not; he justifieth the ungodly; he imputeth righteousness without works: and therefore the faith, which is imputed unto righteousness, does not, cannot, as such, include any sort of obedience in the nature of it.

I proceed now to prove to you, that the faith which is imputed to believers unto their justification, is not their own personal righteousness. This will evidently appear, if you duly consider these following arguments:

That righteousness, by which a sinner is justified, is the righteousness of God. "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith," Rom. i. 17. "We are made the righteousness of God in him," 1 Cor. v. 21. "The righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe," Rom. iii. 24. Now it cannot be true, that the

righteousness of God, and our own inherent personal righteousness are the same thing. If it be pretended, that faith is the gift of God, and as such it is the righteousness of God, the answer is easy. Faith, considered in itself, as a principle, is ours subjectively; and considered in its exercise, it is ours formally, or our own personal act; and in that respect, so far as it is any righteousness at all, it is our own personal righteousness: and therefore as it is our own personal righteousness, it can no more properly be said to be the righteousness of God, than our breath can be said to be the breath of God, our words to be the words of God, or our locomotion to be the motion of God. For our power to breathe, to speak, or to move, is as truly the gift of God, as our power to believe. Besides, all pretences of this kind are utterly excluded by the quoted texts. For if faith cannot with any propriety be said to be revealed from faith to faith; if we cannot with any propriety say, that faith is a righteousness by faith of Jesus Christ; then faith is not the righteousness of God, by which we are justified: and therefore we cannot be justified by faith, as it is our own inherent personal righteousness, and yet be justified by the righteousness of God.

Moreover, we are said to be made righteous by the obedience of Christ, Rom. v. 19. And to be justified by the blood of Christ, Rom. v. 9. But faith, so it is our personal inherent righteousness, is in no respect the obedience of Christ, or the blood of Christ: And therefore faith, as it is our personal inherent righteousness, can in no respect be that righteousness, by which we are justified, or made righteous before God.

Furthermore, faith as it is our personal inherent righteousness, is our own: but the righteousness by which we are justified, is not our own. "Not having my own righteousness," Phil. iii. 9. And therefore, faith, as our personal inherent righteousness, does not justify us before God.

I will only add, if faith, as it is our inherent personal righteousness, cannot answer the demands of

the moral law, it cannot justify us, consistently with the perfections of the Divine nature: but the former is true, and therefore the latter. If "there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law," Gal. iii. 21. But this was impossible in the case of fallen man, as being utterly inconsistent with the Divine perfections. I think, no man will pretend, that our personal inherent righteousness can answer the demands of the moral law. I shall therefore only endeavour to show you, how it is utterly inconsistent with the Divine perfections, that sinners should be justified by any righteousness which will not answer the demands of the moral law.

It cannot be agreeable to the justice of God, that we should be justified by any righteousness, which will not answer the demands of the moral law. For which reason, "God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," Rom. viii. 3, 4. It is by "declaring Christ's righteousness (by which the demands of the moral law are satisfied) that God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus," Rom. iii. 26. The glorious God justly gave us the law, as the rule of our obedience; justly required our perfect conformity to it; and justly annexed the penalties to it in case of disobedience. The law was founded upon, and flowed from the justice of the Divine nature. Obedience to it was required, and the penalties of it were annexed, by the rectoral justice of the great Governor of the world. And the justice of God is now the same that it was when this law was first given, and with the same inflexible severity requires, that it be fulfilled, and not a tittle of it pass away, or be destroyed. The same justice, which annexed the penalties, must be satisfied for the violation of the law, in such manner as that the honor of a righteous judge may be secured, and the penalty of the law fulfilled. Whence it follows, that no personal inherent righteousness of ours whatsoever can justify us before God,

consistently with his rectoral justice; because it cannot answer the demands of the moral law.

It is altogether impertinent, to pretend, that Christ has procured easier terms, than obedience to the law of nature. And that our sincere obedience to the gospel is now the condition of our justification. For the question still recurs, which way is the moral law fulfilled? Has Christ fulfilled that for us, and in our place and stead: or has he not? If he has, we then have a better righteousness, to plead for our justification, than any personal inherent righteousness of our own. But if he has not, the law has still its full challenges upon us (penal, as well as preceptive) notwithstanding any righteousness of our own, and we cannot be justified upon this bottom, consistently with the justice of God.

I must further observe, it cannot be agreeable to the holiness of God, that sinners should be justified by any righteousness whatsoever, which does not fully answer the demands of the moral law. The moral law is, as it were, a copy or transcript of the holiness of God; and must therefore be a perpetual and unalterable rule of righteousness to man. There can strictly be no righteousness but by a complete conformity to this law; and hence none can, consistently with God's holiness, be accepted by him as righteous, who have not a full conformity to this original and only rule of righteousness, to plead in their favour. If, therefore, we can have no such perfect conformity to the moral law, to plead before God, on account of our own personal inherent righteousness, or any other way, but on the account of the imputed righteousness of Christ only, then faith, as it is our own personal inherent righteousness, cannot justify us, consistently with the rectoral holiness of God.

I may add, it cannot be agreeable to the truth of God, that we should be justified by any righteousness, which will not fully answer the demands of the moral law. God has pronounced every one cursed, who "continues not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." If, therefore, we have not

a full conformity to "all things written in the book of the law," if we have not a perfect obedience to its precepts, nor a full satisfaction for the violation of them, to plead in our favour, then either we must lie under the curse, or God' must break his word. The latter you dare not suppose; and the former is, in its nature, absolutely inconsistent with our justification.

I know of but one answer, that can with any colour of reason, be made to these arguments; and that is, that Christ's fulfilling the law for us is our legal righteousness; as freeing us from the rigorous demands, and from the curses of the moral law; but that our faith, including sincere obedience in its nature, is our evangelical righteousness, whereby we ourselves personally fulfil the gospel, and are hereby justified before God. According to this distinction, Christ's righteousness is the matter or ground of our justification, taken negatively, as it lies in absolving us from the curse of the law, and declaring our sins forgiven; but our own righteousness the matter or ground of our justification, considered positively, as it lies in pronouncing us righteous, and entitled to the blessing. Now the least that can be said against this notion, is, that it eclipses the honour of Christ as the Lord our righteousness, and leaves man whereof to glory. But the consideration of this, will of course bring me to the last thing I proposed in the answer to your objection.

If your construction of those passages in the fourth chapter to the Romans were granted; and faith, as including evangelical obedience in it, is imputed to us for righteousness, yet this would make nothing against our justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. For allowing, that faith be our personal evangelical righteousness, and that as such it will justify us, or render us acceptable to God, so far as it goes, we must yet have Christ's righteousness imputed to us, or else lie under the curse of the moral law, as I have already proved.

If faith, including sincere obedience in it, be imputed to us for righteousness, this our personal right-

eousness must be imputed to us, not for what it is not, but for what in truth it is, that is, an imperfect righteousness. God cannot judge that to be perfect, which is really imperfect. For his judgment ever is according to truth. And a weak imperfect faith (as that of the best is) cannot constitute a perfect righteousness. Whence it follows, that we cannot on account of this our personal righteousness be effectually and thoroughly justified; we cannot be perfectly acquitted from guilt and condemnation; we cannot be entitled to complete happiness and eternal life, by virtue of our own righteousness: and therefore it is of the last necessity that we have some other and better righteousness, even a perfect one, to plead; or else we must perish eternally. At least, we cannot at present be justified, on the footing of our own righteousness, so long as we are in this imperfect state: but must wait for justification of life, as a distant future benefit, not to be received till we are made perfect in holiness. Whereas, by the whole current of Scripture it appears, that justification is a present benefit, taking place in the life which now is. Believers have not a mere promise that they shall be justified: but such are in the most express terms represented in Scripture as already justified, as actually pardoned and "made accepted in the beloved," as "passed from death to life," and reinstated in God's special favour, so that "there is now no condemnation to them," but they are now the heirs of salvation.

Thus, Sir, I have given you some of the reasons I have against your author's interpretation of those passages in the fourth chapter to the Romans. Many other arguments might be added, further to illustrate the truth; and to refute all pretences of this kind; but I am afraid I have been already too tedious; and I hope, what is already said may prove sufficient for your satisfaction.

You desire me "to give you a brief view of my sentiments of those passages; and to show you in what sense I understand faith to be imputed to us for righteousness. You tell me, that you cannot understand

how faith's being imputed to us for righteousness, can intend that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us."

The common interpretation of these passages by our Protestant divines, from the beginning of the reformation, is, that faith is imputed for righteousness, not subjectively or as it is an act of our own, and our personal righteousness: but objectively, or as it hath respect to its object, and apprehends the righteousness of Christ. That is, as faith is the band of the union between Christ and the soul, and interests us in him and his justifying righteousness, it is "imputed to us for righteousness." Thus, it is the righteousness of faith, as faith is the term or mean of our interest in Christ's righteousness: and yet it is the righteousness of Christ, as he was the immediate subject and author of it, or as it was wrought out by him. Our faith is in a like manner said to be "the faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom. iii. 22) as Christ's righteousness is here said to be the righteousness of faith. Our faith is not called the faith of Christ, as it is his personal act, (Christ does not believe for us) but as it receives the Lord Jesus Christ, and gives us an interest in him. Nor is our faith our righteousness, as it is our personal act (our faith has not fulfilled the law, nor answered the demands of vindictive justice) but it is our righteousness, as it interests us in what Christ has done and suffered for us, whereby the law is fulfilled, and justice satisfied. In the former case, the object is put for the act: the faith of Christ, for believing in Christ. And there can no reason be given, why with the same propriety, in the latter case, the act may not be put for the object; the righteousness of faith, for righteousness by or through faith: and why faith may not be counted for the righteousness obtained by believing. It is remarkable, that the apostle expressly speaks of faith in this view, every where else besides this context: and therefore he ought to be here also understood in this sense, to make his doctrine consistent. In this sense faith is our justifying righteousness; as a condemned malefactor's ac-

cepting his prince's pardon is his deliverance from execution: or as a beggar's accepting an alms is his preservative from starving. As in these cases it is not the act of receiving Christ but the benefit received, that is the preservation: So in that case it is not the act of receiving Christ, but the benefit received by faith, that is the believer's righteousness.

But "you cannot understand how faith's being imputed to us for righteousness, can intend that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us." Well then, let it be even supposed, that faith is here taken subjectively; and that it was Abraham's faith itself, considered as an act of his own, that was imputed to him. It may notwithstanding be set in such a view, as will secure the truth of the doctrine I am pleading for, if the text be considered as it is in the original Greek. "His faith was imputed unto righteousness." That is, as he was reckoned, judged, or esteemed of God to be a sound believer, so the faith which was imputed or reckoned to him, was unto righteousness; was instrumental to his attaining of righteousness; was the means that "by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon him, unto justification of life;" or in other words, was the means of his interest in that righteousness of Christ, by which he was justified. In this sense, the imputation respects his faith; and intends an approbation and acknowledgment of it as true and sincere, and effectual to its proper purposes. He was approved of God, as having a true and sound faith, a faith effectual, as an applying means, unto righteousness, and thereby unto justification; a faith which interested him in Christ and his righteousness, and thereby entitled him unto acceptance with God, and eternal life. He was judged to be such a believer, as to have a right according to the terms of the covenant of grace, to "have righteousness imputed to him without works," as it is expressed in verse 6th. According to this view of the case, imputation is considered in this context in both the senses, before explained. Abraham was reckoned or esteemed a true believer; in consequence whereof, a justifying

righteousness was imputed to him, "even the righteousness of God without the law."

I think, I have before sufficiently proved to you, that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ received by faith, and cannot be justified by any personal inherent righteousness of our own. This has been illustrated from the nature of things, and confirmed by full and plain Scripture testimony: and this upon an impartial search and inquiry, I think, would appear to you to be the whole scope and design of the gospel of Christ. I have now removed your great difficulty out of the way, and shown you how this doctrine, so plainly taught every where else, may be true in a full consistence with those texts, which in your apprehension seemed to make against it. I would now propose one method more, to confirm you in the important truth under consideration: and that, if duly attended to, cannot fail.

Allow me, Sir, the freedom to advise you, that you place yourself in the presence of the infinitely great and glorious God, and give yourself to meditation, on such subjects particularly as may tend to enlighten and establish you in the present truth. With this view solemnly contemplate God's infinite justice, his infinite purity and holiness, his infinite abhorrence of sin and sinners, especially as to be seen in the glass of Christ's sufferings. Also contemplate your own state and moral character, both by nature and practice. Contemplate the sinful defects of the best works of righteousness that ever you have done, the pollutions mingled with the best duties that ever you performed. Contemplate the unbelief which accompanied the highest actings of faith you were ever capable of; the formality and hypocrisy which has mixed with your devoutest prayers; the desultory thoughts and dead frames which have accompanied you to the most sacred ordinances of God's house; the frequent violations of the most solemn resolutions and covenant obligations by which you have bound your soul to the Lord. And in a word, contemplate the greatness of your sins, their vast number, and dreadful

aggravations; with the nothingness of your best performances and highest attainments in religion; how much you have done against God, and how little for him. And then consider what plea you have to make before this infinitely great, this absolutely just, this perfectly pure and holy God, for justification in his sight, and acceptance with him. Will you plead your acting of faith in him and his promises? Alas, how will your prevailing unbelief fly in your face, and put you to silence! Will you plead your personal obedience, and works of righteousness that you have done? Alas, how will a vast degree of sin and unrighteousness cover and confound you! Will you plead your sincerity before God? But what will you do with that prevalent formality and hypocrisy, which your own conscience will accuse and convince you of? Will you not be forced at last to cry out with David, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?"—and with Job, "Behold, I am vile! What shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." Will you not then see your necessity of a more perfect righteousness, to plead before God, than any personal inherent righteousness of your own, to cover your dreadful sinfulness and infinite defects, and to render you acceptable to God, notwithstanding all the challenges which the justice, the holiness, and the law of God, together with your own conscience, have against you? Surely, on due reflection, you must see yourself in perishing necessity of Christ, and his righteousness, to recommend you to the Divine favour.

Dear Sir, I intreat you to consider in season what you must consider first or last: and let you and I be now solemnly careful to lay our foundation sure, that we may meet with comfort at the great trial, and receive the "well done" of our Judge, in that awful and great day; which is the prayer of,

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER XII.

WHETHER WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO
THE GOSPEL, AS A NEW LAW OF GRACE.

SIR—I can with greater encouragement use my endeavours to remove your difficulties, and to satisfy your desires, since “you do not throw difficulties, either in your own way or in mine, out of any conceived prejudice, or from ostentation, or wrangling disposition, but from a sincere desire of building your hope upon the sure foundation laid in Zion.” Would all men act from views so worthy of this great concern, it would be a likely means, not only to put an end to the prevailing confusions among us, but to give a triumphant progress to the truth, and to establish men in the faith delivered to the saints.

“You have (you say) been so sensibly affected by my last, and are so fully convinced of the danger of mistaking your way, that you are the more solicitous to be set right, and have your remaining difficulties removed; and therefore you entreat me to bear with you, while you propose your strongest objection against the doctrine I suppose to be of so great importance. Your author (you say) tells you that our blessed Saviour has purchased for us new and easier conditions of life; and instead of the sinless obedience required by the moral law, he has now given us a new law of grace, which only requires faith with sincere obedience to the gospel, as the condition of our justification and acceptance with God. Whence it is a necessary consequence, that our justification, or title to eternal life, depends not upon Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, but upon our faith, including sincere obedience to the gospel, as the condition to which it is promised: and that as our obedience is imperfect, so our state of justification is imperfect also, and we shall not be perfectly justified till our obedience be perfected.”

That I may distinctly consider this case, I shall en-

deavour in the first place, to make some proper inquiries and reflections upon this scheme, and offer some objections against it, and then take notice of the arguments which you have brought to support it.

I would first inquire, where you find any thing in Scripture of our Saviour's purchasing this new law of grace, whereby faith and sincere obedience are made the conditions of our justification? Perhaps your author is silent upon that head; and, for my part, I do not know that I have ever read any thing at all about it, in the word of God. We read often, of our blessed Saviour's "giving himself a ransom for us;" of his "being a propitiation for our sins;" of his being "the Lord our righteousness;" of his having "brought in everlasting righteousness;" of "his being the end of the law for righteousness, unto every one that believeth;" and of his being "of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" with many other like representations of his procuring a justifying righteousness for us. But of his purchasing this new law of grace, not one word is to be found in the Scriptures. May we not justly suppose, that if this scheme were right, we should have it plainly represented to us in the oracles of God, and not to be left to grope in the dark, and to find out by far fetched consequences, what is the foundation of our practice and hope? How vast is the difference between the one and the other side of this question! On the one side, we have, (or at least we think we have) very numerous, plain, express Scripture authorities for our justification by the righteousness of Christ. On the other side, there is a deep silence throughout the whole word of God, about any purchase of a new law, such a law of favourable terms; and about those new conditions of our justification, those easier terms, our faith and sincere obedience. This scheme therefore may be presumed to be at best of human invention.

I would further inquire, whether in the nature of things there can be any justification at all, upon such conditions as you speak of? I have shown you, that

justification is always to be understood of our being esteemed, declared, manifested, or pronounced righteous. Now then, if our evangelical obedience be imperfect, we are still unrighteous, by our remaining sin and disobedience against this (imaginary) new law of grace; and consequently God cannot judge and declare us righteous by virtue of our obedience. For "his judgment is according to truth," as I observed to you in my last letter. Certain it is, that no man upon earth is, or can be perfectly sincere, perfectly believing, or perfectly obedient to the gospel. His defects will be greater than his attainments, and his disobedience will be greater than his obedience, under his highest improvements, as long as he lives. He knows nothing of himself, that does not know this to be fact. He must therefore ever be more unrighteous, than righteous, as long as he lives; and accordingly he that can make no wrong judgment of things, will judge and esteem him to be as he is, so that the man must live and die unjustified, and appear at the bar of Christ in the same state.

To speak of an imperfect or defective state of justification, seems to be a most egregious trifling in this awful concern. We either are justified, or we are not, either God does pronounce us righteous, or he does not. Now, if he does, we are free from guilt, and fully accepted of him; but if he does not, we are under guilt, and a sentence of condemnation. There can be no medium, no middle state between that of justification and that of condemnation. However, were it even granted, that we might be imperfectly justified, in proportion to our conformity to this supposed new law, we must at the best live and die but imperfectly justified, and (as I before observed) must appear at the bar of Christ in the same state in which we die, and consequently be but imperfectly justified for ever, without some further remedy be provided beyond the grave. Thus, this doctrine of justification upon the footing of personal obedience to a new law, is better adapted to a Popish purgatory than to the Protestant profession and hope.

I would again inquire, whether it be possible in the nature of things, that we may have any sincere obedience in this new law of grace, before we are justified; and consequently whether it is possible that we may be justified by sincere obedience, before we have any acting of gracious sincerity, or any true obedience at all? faith indeed does precede our justification, in order of nature; but not in time. There is no moment of time, wherein a man is a true believer, and yet not justified before God: and therefore, there cannot be a moment of time for faith to be operative, and bring forth the fruits of new obedience, prior to our justification. "The righteousness of God is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." Rom. iii. 22. This is the constant language of the Scripture, "We are justified by faith;" and "he that believeth, is not condemned." Therefore, as there can be no condemned, no unjustified believer, at any time whatsoever, nor any time at all for either legal or evangelical obedience between the first act of faith and our passing out of a state of condemnation into a state of justification, hence our sincere obedience must be the consequence, and therefore cannot be the condition of our justification.

Besides, as there can be no sincere obedience antecedent to our interest in Christ and union to him, it hence appears that our sincere obedience must necessarily be the consequence of our justification; and therefore cannot be the condition of it. I think, every body will allow that man to be in a justified state, who is interested in Christ, and united to him. Now, our Lord himself assures us, that we cannot bring forth the fruits of new obedience, till we are united to him. John vi. 4, 5. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: so no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me, ye can do nothing." Or, as it may be rendered, "Severed from

me ye can bear none," can bring forth no fruit at all.* There cannot be a greater solecism, than to speak of a sincerely obedient Christless sinner: and therefore there cannot be a greater inconsistency, than for that to be the condition of our justification, which is the fruit and effect of our interest in Christ, and so the consequence of our justified state.

These, Sir, are some of the many inconveniences, that attend this your scheme: which one would think should awaken your attention, and make you look well about you, before you venture your eternal interests upon such an unscriptural and inconsistent foundation.

I proceed now to offer some other objections against the doctrine you propose. And here one obvious exception against this doctrine is, that it "perverts the gospel of the grace of God," and makes it properly and strictly a covenant of works. The condition of the covenant of works was this; "The man that doth these things, shall live by them." Rom. x. 5. And the condition of our justification, according to this new scheme is this: "The man that doth these things" (i. e. that performs sincere obedience to this new law of grace) shall live by them." Where then is the difference, between the old covenant of works, and this new imaginary law of grace? What gave denomination to the covenant of works, was, that it required works of obedience as the condition of it. And does not this pretended new law of grace require works or obedience as a covenant-condition; and does it not therefore deserve the denomination of a covenant of works, as much as the other? If we run a parallel between the first covenant and this imaginary new law of grace, they will be found in all things to agree, as a covenant of works. Thus, the old covenant of works was a law with sanctions, requiring obedience, as the matter of that righteousness, by which man was to be justified. And this imaginary

* Compare the original with John xx. 7, and James iii. 12.

new covenant is likewise styled a law of grace, which requires sincere obedience, as the condition of our justification. Justification, according to the tenor of the old covenant of works, was of debt: and thus it is likewise according to the tenor of this pretended new law of grace. An obligation to give a reward for service performed, makes it a debt, upon the service being performed; and it can be claimed as such, whatever proportion there is between the reward, and the service by which it becomes due. The old covenant of works, when it exacted obedience, yet gave no new strength for the performance of it: and thus it is likewise in the present case. For unless we are united to Christ, and interested in his righteousness, we can have no security of new supplies of grace and strength as we need them. Whatever pretences to gracious assistance, the patrons of this new law of grace may make; they do not pretend that God has by covenant secured to us fresh supplies of grace, for persevering obedience. According to the tenor of the old covenant of works, justification was suspended, forfeited, and lost, upon the non-performance of the required obedience: and just thus it is likewise according to the tenor of this pretended new law of grace. I must therefore again demand, wherein this new law does any way differ from a proper covenant of works?

If it be pretended, that the conditions of this new covenant are much easier than the condition of the old covenant of works, which required perfect, and this but imperfect obedience, as the term of our acceptance with God: I answer, this supposition would not alter the general nature of the covenant. Works are works, obedience is obedience, whether perfect or imperfect. The condition of each covenant is works; and works come into the very formal nature of each, as they are covenants. And therefore how the one can be either more or less a covenant of works than the other, I know not. Besides, it is a great mistake, to suppose, that the conditions of this imaginary new law or covenant are easier than the

conditions of the old covenant of works. The case is much otherwise. He with whom the first covenant was made, had sufficient power and ability to fulfil all its conditions, and fully to come up to all its demands. But fallen creatures are utterly incapable to perform sincere, though imperfect, obedience; they have naturally no sincerity, no truth in the inward parts, no principle of new obedience; nor does this pretended covenant supply them with any, as before observed. And therefore whatever pretences are made, that these conditions are easier, they are indeed rather harder to be complied with, than the conditions of the first covenant. It is more difficult for a man without legs to walk, than for a perfect vigorous lively man to run.

If it be further pretended, that this law of grace differs from the covenant of works, in that faith is, according to this scheme, made the principal condition of the new covenant: this is but an empty pretence. For faith is here considered but as an act of obedience, and as being seminally or virtually all evangelical obedience, including the same in the nature of it; so that this faith is nothing else but a constitutive part and active principle of the works required, and not distinct from them in the office of justifying. And was not Adam as much obliged by the covenant of works, to act faith in the conditional promise of life, and to subject himself to the authority of the legislator, as we can be by this new law of grace? Let the case therefore be looked upon in any view, in every view; and this pretended new law, or covenant, of mild and favourable terms, will be found to be as truly a covenant of works, as the first covenant made with Adam. There will indeed appear some circumstantial differences, between that covenant and this. For instance, that covenant was appointed and enjoined by God as a sovereign: whereas this, (as is pretended) was purchased by the blood of Christ, and is the law of a Mediator. That covenant admitted no renovation, when violated: but this leaves room for recovery, upon condition of repentance and future

obedience, to such transgressors, as do not happen to die in the sad interval of unbelief and insincerity. And that covenant required perfect; this accepts of imperfect obedience. But these things are only circumstances; and enter not into the nature of a covenant-condition. From whatever inducement God was pleased to propose these conditions; whatever be the consequence of their violation; and whatever degree of obedience be required in order to justification; yet (according to this new divinity) sincere, persevering obedience is the stated condition of each of these covenants. This, and this only, was what rendered the first covenant a covenant of works; and therefore, when all the pretences are made, that can be made, the second covenant, upon this scheme, is as strictly and properly a covenant of works, as the first was.

You seem to be aware of this consequence, and therefore demand of me, "Why it may not be supposed agreeable to the divine perfections, to require of man a life of obedience now, proportioned to his present abilities, as the condition of his justification, as well as to make with him a covenant of works at first, proportioned to his primitive powers and capacities?" To which I answer,

I have already shown you, that it is impossible that any covenant requiring sincere obedience, as the condition of our justification, can be proportioned to our present abilities. For we have no natural ability for any sincere obedience at all. "We are dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1. "The carnal mind in us is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Rom. viii. 7. But this is what I may have further occasion to inculcate, before I have finished this letter.

I would now only add, that the Scriptures represent to us an irreconcilable opposition, between our being saved by works, and our being saved by the grace revealed in the gospel. I have shown you in my last, how strongly faith and works are opposed to each other, with respect to our justification. And

I must also observe, that works and grace are in like manner opposed, as irreconcilably inconsistent with each other, in this grand concern. "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace: But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work," Rom. xi. 6. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast," Eph. ii. 8, 9. "Now to him that worketh, is the reward reckoned, not of grace, but of debt," Rom. iv. 4. Here are the most plain, express, and peremptory declarations, that can be made in human language, of the utter inconsistency of works and grace, the impossibility of their concurring in the affair of our justification and interest in God's saving mercy. Whence it plainly appears, that we must be saved by grace alone, or by works alone. And if the former, it must be by the first covenant of works. But if the latter, then not by any works, by no obedience at all, as the condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

You have indeed undertaken to obviate all such arguments against your scheme, by pretending that "where works are rejected as having no hand in our justification, and as being inconsistent with the grace of the gospel, it must be legal obedience which is there intended, whereas, the obedience pleaded for, is evangelical. It is not supposed, that we are justified by obedience to the moral law: but by sincere obedience to the gospel institutions."

But I entreat you to consider, that if we are indeed justified by sincere obedience to the gospel, we must be justified by the works of the law, by obedience to the moral law; and therefore not by the faith of Christ, as revealed in the gospel. This appears evident from such considerations as these. The moral law is the very rule and standard of all our obedience to God; if, therefore, we obtain justification by sincere obedience, we must obtain it by a conformity to the moral law, without which there can be no obedience at all, and therefore no sincere obedience. All

the duty and obedience which we can owe to God as rational creatures, is comprised in that comprehensive summary of the moral law, to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves:" and there neither is, nor can be any obedience sincere and acceptable to God, but what flows from this principle of love, the source of all practical conformity to the moral law. Besides, the gospel does not make void the law, as a rule of obedience; but establishes it; and, therefore, our justification by sincere obedience to the gospel, is a justification by the deeds of the law, or by a conformity to it as the rule of life. It is no just objection against this, that there are some positive precepts in the gospel, which are not discoverable by the light of nature, nor directly required by the moral law; for though these positive duties, such as receiving baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and faith in Jesus Christ, the Mediator, considered as an act of obedience to the gospel command, be not directly required, yet they are by necessary consequence enjoined in that fundamental statute of the moral law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ wrought out the work of redemption for us, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," Rom. viii. 4. If therefore he wrought out our redemption in order to procure justification for us on the condition of sincere obedience, then our sincere obedience is a "fulfilling the righteousness of the law in us." For it can no other way be fulfilled in us, upon that supposition. This then, I think is a plain case, that we must upon this scheme be justified by the works of the law, by a personal conformity to it, and by our own fulfilling the righteousness of it. Here is no place for your distinction of legal and evangelical obedience. All obedience is legal, when performed from legal motives and to a legal end, as it is if performed in order to our obtaining justification and acceptance with God, upon like conditions with those proposed in the moral law; which I have

already shown to be the case here before us, according to this scheme of a new law of grace.

Here it will therefore be proper to pause a little, and consider whether a depending upon such legal obedience for a claim to God's favour, can be consistent with our salvation by the faith of Christ, as revealed in the gospel. The apostle is full and plain upon this head. "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified in his sight. But now the righteousness without the law is manifest, being witnessed by the law and the prophets," Rom. iii. 20, 21. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ; that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," Gal. ii. 16. "But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law," Rom. ix. 31, 32. "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," Phil. iii. 9.

But you have another answer to make to such texts as these, which are so strongly pointed against any dependence upon legal obedience. "There are some, you tell me, who plead, that the legal obedience, or the works of the law, which the apostle opposes to the grace and faith of the gospel, intends no more than a conformity to the ceremonial law: and in that view of the case, those texts of Scripture, wherein such legality is condemned, are no ways inconsistent with, or opposite to, the doctrine you are pleading for."

I thought I had fully obviated this objection in one of my former letters to you, wherein I endeavoured to set before you the apostle's scope and design in his epistle to the Romans, especially in the seventh chapter: and if you will review that letter with proper attention, I think you will find sufficient matter of

satisfaction. It is strange, that any man who has ever read that epistle to the Romans, wherein the case before us is so distinctly considered, can espouse such a trifling pretence, as this to me most evidently is. The apostle there speaks of a law, by which "the doers (supposing there were any) shall be justified before God," (chap. ii. 13) of a law, which the Gentiles may (in part, at least) discover by the light of nature, and thereby be in some measure a law to themselves, verse 14. But can any man pretend, that we could be justified before God by an observance of the ceremonial law? or that the Gentiles, without revelation, could have understood the ceremonial law, so as to have been a law to themselves? The apostle is there treating of a law, by which "both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin," and by which they had "the knowledge of sin," chap. iii. 9; 20, and vii. 7. But could the Gentiles be under sin, or have the knowledge of sin, by the ceremonial law, which was no law to them? How then could they be capable of any transgression of it? The apostle there treats of a law, whereby "every mouth may be stopped; and all the world become guilty before God:" and a law which is "established by faith," chap. iii. 19, 31. Neither of which can in any sense be true of the ceremonial law. The apostle instances in moral precepts, as belonging to the law which he treats of, chap. ii. 21, 22. and vii. 7. The apostle exemplifies the works of the law, of which he treats in the case of Abraham, (chap. iv.) who lived hundreds of years before the exhibition of the ceremonial law: and therefore they could not be the works of the ceremonial law, that are there opposed to faith. I may add, the apostle treats of a law, to which the believing Romans had been married, chap. vii. 4. A law, "the righteousness of which must be fulfilled in us," chap. viii. 4. A law, according to which "the man that doth these things, shall live by them," chap. x. 5. Gal. iii. 12. A "law which if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of, his uncircumcision shall be counted for circumcision," chap. ii. 26. "A law which worketh:

wrath," chap. iv. 15, and a law, by which "we are under the curse for sin," Gal. iii. 10. None of which characters are properly applicable to the ceremonial law. Upon the whole, then, it is evident, even to demonstration, that it is the moral law, of which he "concludes that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law; that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ: and if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." In a word, all dependence for justification upon any works, either of the ceremonial or moral law, is directly opposite to the grace of the gospel, and to the way of salvation by the faith of Jesus Christ.

But you tell me, that "if it be allowed to be the works of the moral law, to which the apostle refers, it must imply an apprehension and vain imagination of a perfect conformity to that law. And that the apostle only condemned the hope of those, who imagined that they had merited salvation, by their perfect obedience to the moral law."

This (if possible) is a more trifling pretence than the former, for which there is not the least shadow of a foundation. The Jews and Judaizing Christians, knew themselves to be sinners. They had the Bible, which every where taught them their imperfect and sinful state. Their continual expiatory sacrifices, their laying their sins upon the head of the scape goat, their annual confessing themselves sinners on the day of atonement, with all their legal purifications, were continual monitors to them of the imperfections of their obedience. And as this was the case of the Jews, we may more strongly conclude that the Gentiles, newly converted from their demon-worship, could make no such pretence. So that had the apostle only disputed against this pretence, he had only contended with his own shadow. He condemns our dependence upon the works of the law; and is not our imperfect obedience, as truly the works of the law, as perfect obedience could be? Can it be supposed, that depending upon perfect obedience, which fulfils the law,

will condemn us, but that to depend upon imperfect obedience, which does not fulfil the law, will not condemn us in the sight of God!

Indeed, Sir, I cannot but compassionate the case of those men, who by so many artful shifts and evasions are putting some gloss or other upon such numerous, clear, and plain texts of Scripture, to make them consistent with their beloved schemes; and perhaps to keep their consciences easy, in a dependence upon their own obedience for their justification. But I have been too long upon this head. I must therefore more briefly mention some other just prejudices against this scheme.

Another exception then to this scheme is, that it is inconsistent with, and repugnant to, the various representations which the Scriptures give us of the redemption by CHRIST, and of the method in which our salvation is wrought out by him. "He was made to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 21. "He his own self bare our sins, in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii. 24. Now how can it in any sense whatever be possibly true, that our Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us, unless it be understood in the imputative sense? Or, that he bare our sins in his own body, if he only undertook to purchase for us a grant of pardon and reconciliation with God, upon the condition of our sincere obedience; and unless our sins were imputed to him? He is likewise said to give his life a ransom for us, Mat. xx. 28. And can prisoners be said to be ransomed out of their enemy's hands, who are only put under advantages to work out their own liberty and deliverance? Upon the payment of a ransom, the consenting captives are immediately released; and as the prophet expresses it with respect to the case before us, liberty is proclaimed to the captives. He is moreover represented as an atonement for our sins; and an atonement which believers have actually received. "By whom we have received the atonement," Rom. v. 11. And can Divine justice be satisfied for our sins;

and we not freely acquitted and justified? Can we have received the atonement by faith, when it yet depends upon our future conduct, and upon our sincere obedience, whether we shall ever receive the benefit of it? He is also represented, as having "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13. And how can it with any propriety be said, that believers are actually redeemed from the curse, when they are still under the curse, and must continue so until by a course of sincere persevering obedience, they get themselves acquitted and justified? Or how could our blessed Saviour be made a curse for us, when neither our guilt was imputed to him; nor his sufferings were imputed to us? He might indeed upon this supposition be said to suffer for our advantage and benefit, but he could not be made a curse for us, in our stead, when no curse due to us was laid upon him; nor we freed from any curse by his sufferings, without procuring our deliverance by our own sincere persevering obedience. He is likewise represented as our surety, a surety of a better testament, Heb. vii. 22. And has the surety paid the debt; but the bond not cancelled, nor the debtor released from payment? Does divine justice demand the payment of the debt in order to satisfaction, and the performance of the conditions in order to our justification, of both the surety and the principal debtor? He is moreover represented as "the Lord our Righteousness," Jer. xxiii. 6. And is said "to be made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 31. "He is our peace," Eph. ii. 14. But I know not how Christ can be ours for any of these purposes, unless upon our receiving him by faith, these benefits are with him freely given us, actually imputed or imparted to us, and we considered as invested with them, and partakers of them. For instance, can Christ be our righteousness, and we, notwithstanding, have no righteousness that will justify us before God, till we have wrought out a righteousness of our own, by a persevering course of sincere obedience? Can he be our peace,

and we not be at peace with God upon our faith in him, until by a course of sincere obedience we are justified and interested in the Divine favour? The time would fail me, should I particularly insist upon all the various representations of CHRIST'S redemption in Scripture; and show they are all directly repugnant to this scheme of yours. I shall therefore mention but an instance or two more; and then submit it to your own serious reflection. We are said "to be justified by his blood; and reconciled to God by his death," Rom. v. 9, 10. But can we be justified by his blood, and yet justified by our own obedience? Are we reconciled to God by the death of Christ, and yet not reconciled to God, but by a continued progress of our own obedience! Dare you, Sir, venture to attribute that to your own obedience, which is attributed by the Spirit of God to the blood and death of Christ?

But perhaps you will make the same remarks upon what I have now offered, as you did upon my last, and tell me, that "your author does indeed suppose some conditions of our interest in the benefits procured by Christ for us; and do not they who are of the other side of the question also suppose our interest therein to be conditional? Do not they suppose faith to be the condition of our interest in Christ, and all the benefits he had purchased for us? Where then is the difference? Why is a conditional interest in the benefits purchased by Christ so very offensive in the one scheme, and so innocent and inoffensive in the other?"

In answer to this, you must allow me the freedom to tell you, that this plea takes its rise from a very great inattention to the subject before us. You know, Sir, that I have, in my former letters, largely and particularly shown you, that faith is no otherwise a condition of our interest in Christ, and the benefits of his redemption, than a beggar's receiving an alms is a condition of his having the benefit of it; or than a condemned malefactor's accepting a free pardon is the condition of his reprieve from execution, and res-

toration to his prince's favour. And is there no difference between partaking of a free gift, on no other condition than a thankful acceptance, and having the offer of a favour on the condition of long continued services, of very difficult and uncertain performance? Is there no difference between expecting justification from no righteousness of our own, but only from the righteousness of Christ, received by faith, and our supposing this alone an insufficient foundation of confidence, and therefore look to some righteousness of our own as the condition of our acceptance with God? The difference is just as great as between any other contradictory propositions. Upon the one supposition, Christ himself has performed all the proper conditions of our justification, and freely bestows the benefit, on our grateful acceptance: whereas, upon the other supposition, Christ has not performed the conditions of our justification, but only procured for us the privilege to perform them ourselves. Upon the one supposition, we are justified on account of Christ's obedience; but on the other supposition, we are justified on the account of our own obedience. Upon the one supposition, Christ has merited justification for us without works; but upon the other supposition, he has merited justification for us by our works. And in fine, upon the one supposition, the first act of saving faith gives an immediate and continuing interest in the favour of God; but upon the other supposition, faith is but the introduction of that life of sincere obedience, which is properly the condition of our obtaining and enjoying the Divine favour.

Sir, it belongs now to you, seriously and impartially to reflect and consider which opinion is most likely to be true: whether, that which renounces all confidence in the flesh, and proposes no condition of justification, but our hearty approbation and acceptance of, and dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone, as the way wherein the glory of the righteousness, wisdom, love, and mercy, of God is exalted, and sinful man justly debased, and brought to the foot of an infinite Sovereign; or, that opinion which denies this

honour to the Redeemer's merits, and to sovereign grace, and proposes our own performances and attainments, as conditions of our justification and acceptance with God. I have now been showing you, that the former is the Scripture representation of the case; and methinks, any one that has had a just and sensible discovery of his own depravity and spiritual impotence, must know by experience, that it is the only way in which he can entertain comfortable expectations of safety and happiness.

Another objection against this opinion is, that it is destructive of practical religion, subversive to a life of true holiness. Whatever sentiments we entertain, and whatever principles we espouse, we must yet remember, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and he that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as he is pure." The "doctrine of Christ" is, in all its parts, a "doctrine according to godliness." If it therefore appears, upon an impartial examination of this case, that these principles of your author are inconsistent with, and repugnant to that holiness, which is a necessary qualification for the kingdom of heaven, there can no other argument be wanting against this scheme, to convince us, that it cannot be agreeable to him, "who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." But lest I be misunderstood, and exposed to a censure for uncharitableness, I would premise, that I cannot but hope, that there are some who adhere to these principles, whose hearts are sounder than their heads; and who are truly holy in body and spirit, by a dependence very different from their profession. This is what may be reasonably hoped, not only from the exemplary lives of some who embrace these tenets, but from their prayers, of a truly evangelical strain, which we ought to suppose the language of their hearts, and which we ought to hope, will find audience with God, notwithstanding the error of their judgments. I must nevertheless insist upon it, that such cannot be truly holy, whose hearts and lives are

conformable to the principles I am opposing. Not all their religious purposes, promises, resolutions, reformations, not all their fastings, external mortifications, macerations of their bodies, vows, meditations, prayers, or other endeavours they may use, can be productive of holiness, upon these principles. Men may by such means put some restraint upon their corruptions, they may, in a slavish manner, perform some hypocritical duties, and thereby may quiet their consciences, obtain a reputation amongst men, and entertain hopes of heaven: but they must yet remain strangers to any true love to God, delight in him, and conformity of heart and affections to him; wherein the essence of holiness consists. This will appear, from such considerations as these: It is an incontestible truth, that we cannot be holy, before we have a principle of holiness; that we cannot perform vital actions, without a source and principle of life. It is equally certain, that we naturally have not this principle of spiritual life; but "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, only evil continually." It is also certain, that faith in Christ is contemporary with (though in order of nature it flows from, and is successive to) the first principles of spiritual life; and it is from our union to Christ by faith, that we derive from him supplies of grace and strength, and that the whole progress of holiness is carried on in the soul. It is therefore necessary, that we be first united to Christ, the head of influences, and fountain of all holiness, and so be habitually alive to God, before we can actually live to God, as I have observed before. All our attainments in religion, without a vital principle within, will be but as a carcase without breath; or as streams from a corrupt fountain. Whence it follows, that they who are looking to sincere obedience for justification, must be strangers to true holiness; they not having first committed their souls to Christ, depended upon him alone for righteousness and strength, and thereby obtained supplies of grace for a life of holiness, from that only fountain of life. To seek justification from our sanctification, is to in-

vert the order and method of our salvation; it is to produce the cause from the effect, to fetch the fountain from the streams. We must first by a new living principle be enabled to act faith in Christ, to receive him, and thereby be united to him, and be justified in the sight of God; otherwise all our religious and moral duties will be in vain, a sacrifice without a heart, mere legal or slavish performances, that have nothing of true holiness in them. "We must be created in Christ Jesus unto good works," if we would "walk in them," Eph. ii. 10. "We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind," if we would "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," Eph. iv. 23. We must be "quicken together with him," Col. ii. 13. We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all," Heb. x. 10. It is of Christ's fulness, that we all receive, and grace for grace," John i. 16. And "as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can we, except we abide in Christ," John xv. 4.

Moreover, I think, it will be readily allowed, that we cannot live a life of holiness, while we remain children and servants of sin and Satan. It must also be allowed, that the whole world of mankind are either the children of God, or the children of the devil. This distribution divides the whole human race, 1 John iii. 10. Now, then, if we are the children of God, we are already in a justified state, and therefore cannot depend upon our sincere obedience for justification: but if the children of the devil, we cannot be holy, whatever pretences to sincere obedience we may make. An unjustified child of God, or a holy child of the devil, are each of them the greatest solecism that can be thought of. We become children of God by the same means by which we are justified. "We are justified by faith," Rom. iii. 24; and "we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Gal. iii. 26. But all they which have not this faith, and are not thereby become the children of God, and justified in his sight, are so blinded by the god of this world, that

they are utterly incapable, in their present state, of a life of true holiness. "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. iv. 4.

I may add to this, that the natural disposition of every one, while without an interest in Christ, and in an unjustified state, is utterly repugnant to, and inconsistent with a life of holiness. The character and state of all such is, that they are "servants of sin, and free from righteousness," Rom. vi. 17, 20. They are "dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1. They are "after the flesh, and mind the things of the flesh," Rom. viii. 5. Their "carnal mind is enmity to God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Rom. viii. 7. This is the case of every man while in a natural state; a case which can never be remedied, until "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, make us free from the law of sin and death," Rom. viii. 2. And I even appeal to yourself to determine, whether life and death, light and darkness, God and Belial, cannot as well be reconciled, as these characters made consistent with a life of holiness. It is therefore evident, that we can have no sincere obedience until we are justified; and that we cannot live a holy life, while we depend upon sincere obedience for justification.

I will only subjoin, that we may not expect the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit of Christ, while we depend upon our own sincere obedience for justification. He has indeed made us gracious promises, that if we receive him, we shall have the privilege to become the children of God, and if we trust in him we shall never be ashamed. But we must expect no better, than to "follow after the law of righteousness, and not attain to it, if we seek it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law," Rom. ix. 31, 32. I have already shown you, Christ did not undertake our redemption to the end that he might assist us in working out a righteousness of our own, for our justification; nor may we expect any

saving grace from him, until we depend upon him alone to do all in us and for us. When he is made of God unto righteousness, through faith, we may then, but not till then, expect from him the supply of the Spirit, for progressive sanctification and redemption. They may rejoice in Christ Jesus (and none but they) who have no confidence in the flesh. Look, Sir, through the whole Bible, and see if you can any where find encouragement to expect a progress of quickening and sanctifying influences from Christ, without an interest in him, or dependence upon him; and while repairing to your own personal obedience as your refuge and hope. In fine, as you can have no principle of holiness in yourself, but are under the influence of sin and Satan, and under the power of affections and dispositions utterly inconsistent with true holiness, so are you without any grounded expectations of the divine influence to renew and sanctify you, while you are building upon this false foundation; I mean while you are doing so practically, as well as speculatively.

I cannot but hope, Sir, notwithstanding your present wavering and unsettled posture, you have had some experience of the truth of what I am now setting before you in your own soul. Look back and consider, how often you have found all your self-righteous resolutions, self-confident promises, and endeavours in your own strength to mortify your corruptions, and to maintain a closer walk with God, too weak a foundation to build upon, and how insufficient they have been to produce that new obedience, which you have proposed and expected: but how often you have found, on the contrary, that a humble and cheerful dependence upon Christ for righteousness and strength, has invigorated your soul in your spiritual progress. How often have you found a legal frame has clipped the wings of your devotion; while a believing dependence upon the riches of God's infinite mercy in Christ, has enabled you to "mount up with wings as the eagle, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint!" Reflect upon your own experience,

and consider how often you have found, that even the restraints of the law, when you have acted upon no higher motive, have rather irritated and strengthened those corruptions, which you have endeavoured to mortify: how often you have found, that nothing but faith in Christ, and a realizing sense of the love of God in him, could give you the victory, engage your heart to the service of God, and make the ways of holiness pleasant and delightful to you. These things are the common experience of the children of God; and a standing evidence to them, of the truth which I am representing to you.

Have patience with me, while I mention one exception more to the scheme you have proposed, which is, that this doctrine is highly destructive to the comfort of a life of religion; and subversive of that joy and peace, which may be found in believing. The Scriptures inform us, that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and exhort us to "rejoice evermore, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, without confidence in the flesh." This was one end of Christ's coming into the world, that we might "serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life." They who are "justified by faith, have peace with God" and should "rejoice in hope of his glory." This, the Calvinist principles, or (if you will allow me the expression) the Scripture principles, lay a good foundation for. True scriptural joy is the joy of faith. We may have "strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us. We know whom we have trusted that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him against that day." Though our frames may be very mutable, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice." He has undertaken for us; "he will never leave us nor forsake us;" and therefore we may "hold fast our confidence, unto the end." The more cheerfully and firmly we trust in him, the more shall we increase in holiness and in comfort, and the

more sure will be the foundation of our eternal hope. This the Scripture teaches; this our own experience confirms; we may therefore go on our way rejoicing. But now let us look on the other side of the question.

We depend upon our sincere obedience for justification; but alas! how shall we know, whether we have any gracious sincerity or not? We have yet many corruptions remaining, great defects in our duties, frequent violations of our good purposes and designs; and the doubt is, can these things be consistent with sincerity? Our consciences upbraid us, that we do not do what we can in our endeavours after sincere obedience. And hence what a dreadful perplexity, what diffidence, darkness, and legal terrors, must every serious person be thrown into by these principles? Here is no place, (as upon the other principles,) to commit this case also to Christ, and in a way of cheerful dependence and diligence to expect grace and sincerity from him; for, upon these principles, we must be well assured of our actual sincerity, before we can look to Christ for acceptance. And therefore there is no place for comfort, or for quiet, but from a careless inadvertency. However, supposing we may find some satisfying evidence of our sincerity, at certain seasons, under special reformation and enlargements, what will become of our hopes, when a contrary frame prevails? Can we then flatter ourselves with our sincerity? Must not our hopes and fears keep pace with our frames; and our whole life be a dreadful fluctuating between both, with respect to the infinite, eternal concern before us? And is not this to be called "the spirit of bondage again to fear?"

What room can there be upon this plan, for the spirit of adoption? How can the "Spirit witness with our spirits, that we are children of God?" How can we experience the sealings of the Holy Spirit; or the earnest of our future inheritance? How can we have the full assurance of hope? Or how can we make our calling and election sure? We must upon those

principles, give up all pretensions to these glorious comforts, benefits, and privileges of the children of God, while our hope is built upon this precarious foundation, and depends upon the doubtful and uncertain performance of persevering sincere obedience. Let us suppose the best which can be supposed, that we should make a comforting and encouraging progress in a life of sincere obedience; yet how do we yet know but death may seize us in an unguarded hour, and find us actually playing the hypocrite? In this case, what will become of all our religious duties and all our hopes? And what will become of our souls to all eternity? I must confess, Sir, I could see nothing before me but horror and despair, if I had no better foundation of confidence and hope towards God, than my own righteousness.

Every experienced Christian must acknowledge, that the chief comfort of a religious life, flows from the lively actings of love to God in Christ. But how can there be the comfort of love, when at the best we are in an awful suspense, whether God be our friend, or our enemy?—What grounds of horror (instead of the pleasing exercise of love) must we constantly experience, while we are afraid we have an infinite enemy to deal with? What strangers, in this case, must we be to the joy, which flows from a refreshing view, that “this God is our God, and will be our guide even to death, and our portion for ever?” How unacquainted must we be with the sublime pleasures of communion with God, while we approach his presence under such an uncertain prospect of his favour, and under grounds for prevailing fear of an eternal separation from him? And what aggravates the case is, that this not only now is, but must continue to be our dark and disconsolate circumstance, as long as we live, if we remain under the governing influence of these principles I am imploring.

I may add to this, that a cheerful progress in all gospel-holiness is necessary to our true comfort and happiness, while we are here in this vale of tears.

“In keeping of God’s commands there is great reward. This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.” But I have shown you already, that this scheme I am opposing, affords no principle of new obedience, allows no foundation for a comfortable progress in the divine life. Here is no certainty of forgiveness to be obtained, and therefore no delightful incentive to the mortification of our lusts and corruptions. Upon this plan, we are in perpetual danger of the curse of the law, on account of our defects; and there is therefore no room for that pleasure, which would otherwise be found in running the way of God’s commands. Here can be no assured confidence in the divine assistance or acceptance, no absolute affiance in the riches of God’s free grace in Christ, and therefore nothing to melt the heart and conscience into love and subjection; nothing to inflame our affections, and fill us with gratitude to God, for “blessing us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus;” nothing to excite us to live to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” The principles of the scheme you propose, are slavish; and the obedience must be of the same kind with the principles from whence it flows; and consequently we must be utter strangers to that love, delight, and satisfaction, which children might find in the service of their heavenly Father, so long as our obedience is thus excited from fear and constraint; or at best only from such uncertain hopes, as wholly depend upon our own righteousness, as the condition of acceptance with God. Blessed be God, the gospel teaches us a more pleasant and delightful religion, the service of love, and the obedience of faith, which is truly its own reward.

And now, sir, suffer me freely to expostulate with you on this subject. Do not you know that the doctrine which you and your author plead for, is

substantially the same with the Popish doctrine upon the head of remission of sins, and acceptance with God; and that this very doctrine was one of the greatest occasions of our glorious Reformation from Popery? Read, Sir, the many elaborate treatises written by our first Reformers; and you will find this doctrine set in its proper light. You will find all your author's cavils, shifts, and evasions justly exposed, all his arguments distinctly answered, and the dangerous error stripped of all that plausible dress, with which it now again makes its appearance. You will find, that the doctrine of justification was esteemed by all our excellent Reformers, as well as by Luther, *Articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesix*, the article by which the church must either stand or fall. And shall we again build up those things, which that glorious army of martyrs destroyed? Shall we again revive Popery in one of its most considerable branches? Is not this to open the door to other Popish delusions and practical errors, as penances, pilgrimages, a monastic life, celibacy, and other austerities, to supply the defects of our sincere obedience, and patch up a righteousness of our own to justify us? I wish there were not too much occasion given for this apprehension, by some in the present times, who would fain be reputed Protestants.* You will, perhaps, think me too severe in this discourse; but search into the cause, as I have done, and you will find it otherwise.

And why must this hydra be digged out of its grave, and revived? What advantage can be hoped for by this scheme? Were this doctrine true, would not sincere obedience, done from a principle of spiritual life and holiness, and a dependence upon Christ alone, to do all in us and for us, and to recommend us to the divine favour, be accepted of God, as well, as if it had been done in our own strength, and with

* See for instance, Mr. Law's Christian Perfection, and Serious Call. Books, that would be deservedly esteemed and prized, were it not for this Popish taint.

a view to establish our own righteousness? Will Christ reject us at last, for doing too much honour to his infinite merit, and to the rich and free grace of God in him? What if you should find your reasoning false and deceitful, when it comes to the great trial? Dare you venture your eternity upon it, that in this case you cannot be deceived? If the reformation in general, and the most excellent men for learning, sagacity and piety, that the reformed churches could ever boast of, should be found on the side of truth at the day of judgment, in determining that we cannot be justified on the footing of a moderated covenant of works, or the easy terms you plead for, what will become of all those, who have built their eternal hope on that foundation; not only notionally, I mean, but practically.

But I have outgone my intended limits, and shall therefore only add (after my hearty prayers, that your hope may be built upon a sure foundation) that I am with great respect,

Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XIII.

THE NOTION OF A FIRST JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, AND A SECONDARY JUSTIFICATION BY SINCERE OBEDIENCE, DISCUSSED AND CONFUTED.

SIR,—You must conclude I have spent my time but idly, if I should yet be “unacquainted with your author’s meaning; and not fully understand, in what sense he supposes our sincere obedience to be the condition of our justification.” It is scarcely possible, that he should with any appearance of plausibility offer any thing new in defence of these principles, or that has not been often advanced, and often refuted, long before either you or I were born. And in particular, what you now propose, is but the old popish

doctrine newly vampt; which has been repeatedly answered by all our old Protestant writers.

You tell me, "Your author acknowledges, that our first justification is by faith alone; that is God accepts us as being meet probationers for salvation, upon our hearty assent to the truth of the gospel, and our being heartily willing to take Christ's yoke upon us, and obey him: and this is the justification of which the apostle Paul speaks, that it is by faith without the works of the law. But our secondary justification, or continued title to the favour of God, is by our works, or by a course of sincere obedience to the gospel. Of this the apostle James speaks, when he tells us, that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

Sir, you cannot be insensible, that this plea is utterly inconsistent with the evasions before offered. We are therefore now to hear no more of your former distinctions, that the apostle Paul refers to legal, and not evangelical works, when he excludes all works from having any part in our justification. We are to hear no more of the apostle's referring to the ceremonial law, when he opposes the law to grace, and tells us, "that if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." You now acknowledge, that the justification of which the apostle Paul speaks, is by faith alone. All other pleas for the scheme, which I oppose, must consequently be given up; and it must be put upon this single issue. I shall now therefore proceed to consider, whether this foundation will bear the weight, which you are putting upon it.

It is worthy of consideration, that there is nothing of this new distinction, of a first and a secondary justification, to be found in the Scriptures. I look upon it as an arbitrary distinction, coined to serve a purpose, and to help out a tottering scheme, which could no other way be supported. The apostle Paul, it is true, speaks of our justification in one respect, and the apostle James in another, as I have formerly observed to you: but each of them retains one invariable view of their subject, and continues the same idea of the justification about which they treat. There is not a

word spoken by either of them, of a first and second, of an original, and an additional justification. Indeed the Scriptures know nothing at all of this distinction. The children of God learn nothing of it from their own experience. And you must pardon me, Sir, if I must demand some better foundation of my eternal hope, than the subtle inventions of such men, who would establish and vindicate their principles by new and unscriptural doctrines of religion, which have no foundation at all, but their own teeming imagination. This is the common source of all the errors which obtain among us. Men of learning and parts, sufficiently apprehensive of their own capacities, instead of a humble subjecting their reason to the wisdom of God in his word, are first for forming schemes, which appear to them most reasonable; these they take for principles: and then they must force some construction or other upon the most opposite texts of Scripture, and invent some arbitrary distinctions, to obviate the difficulties that lie in their way. This is plainly the case before us. It does look reasonable to the Papists, to the Socinians, to the Arminians, and to the Neonomians, that our obedience should be wholly excluded from a part in our justification. It is true, the Scripture, does in multitudes of most plain and familiar expressions, in the most express and strongest language, utterly exclude it. But there must be one unnatural construction, or another, forced upon these texts of Scripture, to make them consistent with their scheme; which they take for a postulatam whatever is said in the Scripture to the contrary. When this refuge fails, the present distinction is coined, to support the sinking cause. It were a sufficient answer to all these pretences, to say, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. And he that seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

But I have this further objection against the distinction you mention, that it is not only a human device, without any appearance of Scripture warrant;

but is utterly inconsistent with the Scripture doctrine of justification. There is so much ascribed in the Scripture, to what they call our first justification, as leaves no possible room for a second. I have observed something of this to you, upon another occasion, in a former letter; and you must bear with me, if you here meet with some repetition, in order to set the present case in a true and proper light. By virtue of the righteousness imputed to us, and received through faith, we have a free pardon of all our sins. Rom. iv. 5, 6, 7. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven; and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." By virtue of this justification we are freed from the wrath of God, and actually reconciled to him, Rom. v. 9, 10. "Much more then being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son: much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." By this justification we are made righteous in the sight of God, Rom. v. 18, 19. "By the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, many shall be made righteous." By this justification we have the adoption of children, John i. 12. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name." By this justification we have the spirit of adoption, peace with God, and a joyful prospect of our eternal inheritance, Rom. v. 1, 2. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." By this justification, we are sanctified, and receive needed supplies of grace, Heb. x. 10. "By the which will we are sanc-

tified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all," Rom. v. 17. "For 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." By this justification, we are secured of perseverance in grace, against all charges, accusations, persecutions, and malignant endeavours of hell and earth to the contrary, Rom. viii. 33, 35. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?" And, in a word, by this justification, we are entitled to, and shall shortly be possessed of, eternal glory. Rom. viii. 30. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." And now, Sir, what is there left for your secondary justification to do? We have God himself, pardon, peace, with all the benefits, comforts, and privileges of the children of God in this life, and eternal glory hereafter, bestowed upon us, or made over to us, in consequence of what you call the first justification. Your secondary justification must therefore be a mere imaginary thing, an unaccountable fiction; which has as little foundation in the nature of things, as it has in the word of God.

I may add to this, that our continuance in a justified state is by the same means by which we were first justified. It is true, believers, (as well as others,) are daily sinning, in thought, word, and deed; and there may therefore appear some difficulty in conceiving how our once being justified by faith, can secure to us a remission of future sins. It cannot be supposed, that our sins are actually pardoned before they are committed; or our guilt cancelled before it was contracted. How then can one single justification stand us in stead, through the future scenes of sin and guilt, and entitle us to eternal glory, notwithstanding a repeated forfeiture of the divine favour, and notwithstanding our renewed deserts of God's wrath and displeasure? This deserves some particular consideration. I shall therefore endeavour, in a

few words, to solve this difficulty, before I proceed distinctly to consider in what manner our justification is continued.

Let it then be observed, that as the meritorious procuring cause of our justification, with all its benefits, of grace here and glory hereafter, was at once completed: "the body of Christ was offered once for all," and by his obedience unto death he brought in everlasting righteousness. So the believer, upon his first being actually interested in the redemption by Christ, and receiving his righteousness through faith, is at once unalterably acquitted from condemnation, reinstated in the paternal favour of God, and secured in such a continuing progress of grace and holiness, as will end in eternal glory. "For by one offering, Christ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Heb. x. 14. As our Lord Jesus Christ by "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," has "finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness," Dan. ix. 24; "So by faith that is in him, we receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified," Acts xxvi. 18; and "are complete in him." Col. ii. 10. He, therefore, "that believeth, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life," John v. 24; and is "blessed with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly things in Christ," Eph. i. 3.

But this notwithstanding, though our justification, as to the meritorious procuring cause of it, be at once perfected and completed; and by virtue of the immutability of God's counsel, the infinite merit of the righteousness imputed, the stability of the covenant of grace, and the faithfulness of the promises, the believer immutably remains a child of God, and an heir of eternal glory. He nevertheless by reason of his daily sins and imperfections, stands in daily need of a renewed application of the benefits of Christ's redemption to his soul, and in daily need of pardon and justification. But then it should be remembered, that

this is not a secondary justification, distinct from the former; but the same renewed and confirmed. If the believer sins, he hath an advocate with the Father, to make continual intercession for him, for renewed pardon and grace, and for a continuance of his justified state. "He ever liveth to make intercession for them; who needeth not daily as those high priests, after the order of Aaron, to offer sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." Heb. vii. 25. 27.

These things being premised, the question now recurs, by what means are believers continued in a justified state? To which I answer as before, by the same means by which they were at first brought into it. 'The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith,' Rom. i. 7. That is, as a noted commentator expounds these words, the beginning, the continuance, and the consummation of our justification, is by faith. "Now the just shall live by faith," Heb. x. 38. Not only are the ungodly justified by faith; but the just, or those that are in a justified state, shall live by faith, shall obtain new supplies of pardoning and sanctifying grace through faith. And thence "the life which the believer lives in the flesh," is said to be "by the faith of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20.

Let any serious Christian consider, what refuge he can betake himself to, in order to quiet the accusations of his conscience for sin committed; and to obtain renewed pardon for his frequent transgressions and constant imperfections. Dare he venture into the presence of God, and challenge pardon on account of his own sincere obedience? Will he plead before the eternal Majesty, the milder terms of this (imaginary) new law of grace, and tell the Almighty, this easy condition was purchased for him by the blood of Christ, that his own works should justify him; that he sincerely desires and endeavours to obey God, and therefore pleads the benefit of that new covenant of works; and entreats pardon and acceptance, for his sincere obedience, according to the tenor of it? If this be an article of our creed, why should it not be like-

wise an article of our devotion? But yet, I think, the patrons of this scheme cannot be so hardy, as to plead it before the throne of God. And I may venture to say, that every sensible humble Christian will use a quite contrary argument in prayer for pardon and acceptance with God. Such a man will find no plea to make at the throne of grace, but the infinite merits of the glorious Redeemer, with the boundless riches of God's free mercy in Christ. He can find no other source of continuing peace and hope, but a humble trust and confidence in the merit and righteousness of Christ. He durst not plead his own attainments before God, nor trust in them, as justly recommending and entitling him to his favour; but repairs by faith immediately to the righteousness of Christ alone, for renewed pardon and acceptance. Thus you see, that as the Scriptures propose a way very different from that of our own obedience, for the continuance of our justification, so the children of God have a quite contrary refuge for peace and pardon; and it would even shock a Christian ear, to hear any devotions exactly adjusted and proportioned to these principles. It is therefore evident, that all pretences of this kind should be rejected by those who would not be finally ashamed of their hope.

That we may have a further view of the absurdity of this distinction, let us consider a little how this scheme will hang together; and see whether it will not necessarily destroy itself.

The patrons of the distinction do so much honour to the Scriptures, which every where attribute our justification to faith, as to allow, that our first justification is by faith alone. But what are we to understand by that faith, by which this first justification is obtained? The Papists tell us, that it is an infusion of a new principle of grace and charity. The Socinians and Arminians (at least some of them) teach, that it is the *to credere*, or an assent to the gospel revelation, which justifies, as it is an act of our own, and an instance of obedience to the divine command. Some of our more modern refiners upon this scheme

choose to define this faith, by which we obtain our first justification, to be a receiving Christ as our Lord and Saviour; and tell us, that a submitting to his government, has as great a hand in our justification, as our relying upon his merit, or hoping for salvation on account of what he has done and suffered for us. I think, all of them agree in this, that faith justifies as it is an assent to the truth of the gospel, and an entrance upon a life of obedience. None of them suppose this first justification to be our acceptance with God, "as righteous, by the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

Now then what room is there for this distinction? Is not faith, in this consideration of it, as much an act of obedience, as any other point of conformity to the divine command, which we are capable of? And is it not supposed to justify us, as it is our subjection to the new law of grace, and as it is our first act of obedience? What then do they mean by telling us of a first justification by faith alone, and of a secondary justification by works; when they really intend, that the beginning, the progress, and the conclusion of our justification is by obedience only! This may easily be brought to a short and determinate issue. Either faith does justify us as it is a work of ours, and an act of obedience; or it justifies us as it is the means of our receiving Christ's righteousness, and having the same actually applied to us, for our justification and acceptance with God. There is no other way, in which we can be supposed to be justified by faith. All the distinctions, that the most exuberant fancies of men can light upon, are reducible to one of these two. Now if the latter of these be assumed, the controversy is ended: We have a righteousness to plead, that is sufficiently perfect, and that will stand us instead; there is no need of our new obedience, in order to make up its defects, and procure a secondary justification. But if the former of these be assumed, then our first justification is as truly by works, as the second; and the whole is by obedience only. How

much more fair and ingenious would it therefore be, for the abettors of these principles to speak out, and tell us plainly, that we are justified only by works, and that faith has nothing to do in our justification, but as it is our own work, and an act of obedience; than thus to endeavour to hide the deformity of their scheme, as contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel, by the paint and varnish of this plausible, but groundless distinction?

If we should proceed to consider the nature of their secondary justification, and the obedience by which it is obtained, there will appear to be as little foundation for this new distinction from thence, as from the former view. Will every act of our sincere obedience justify us? Or must it be a progress of obedience to the end of our lives? If the former, we have not only a first and second, but a thousand-fold justification. If the latter, we can have no justification at all, so long as we live; and have therefore very little reason to expect it after we are dead. For as death leaves us, judgment will find us, as I have observed to you in another letter. Should you suppose, that our justification is progressive, and bears proportion to our sanctification, you must then allow, that we cannot be completely justified, till we are completely sanctified; which we are not to expect in this life. Should you suppose, we shall be justified in our expiring moments, just as we are breathing our last, even this will be before our obedience is finished, or our sanctification perfected; and therefore there can be no more reason assigned for it, at that period, either from Scripture or the nature of things, than there could have been perhaps a thousand times before. So that in whatever view we consider the case, this distinction, and the whole scheme founded on it, is a mere scene of confusion, in the highest degree repugnant both to Scripture and reason.

And now I am ready to attend to your reasoning, in favour of these principles.

“I must acknowledge (you say) that we are justified upon covenant works. Now a covenant must

have conditions, to be fulfilled by both parties: and consequently the benefits of the covenant must depend upon the performance of those conditions, and be suspended, when the conditions are violated. Whence it is necessary to suppose, that there are some continuing conditions required of us, in order to our complete justification."

There is no need to debate with you the propriety of the word *conditions* in this case; because it may be used in a sound sense. But I know nothing in the nature of any covenant, except a covenant of works, that makes such conditions as you speak of, necessary to it. Whereas, if you consider the covenant of grace in all the exhibitions of it, it is a covenant of promise, as styled, Eph. ii. 12. Thence those who are interested in this covenant, are called "the children of the promise," Rom. ix. 8. And "the heirs of the promise," Heb. vi. 17. Thus the tenor of this covenant, when made with Adam, was, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head," Gen. iii. 15. And thus when made with Abraham, it consisted of a promise, that "in him all the families of the earth should be blessed," Gen. xii. 3. In neither of these cases, was there any condition added: it was barely a declaration of mercy to guilty sinners. And yet the apostle expressly calls this "a covenant, which was confirmed of God in Christ," and says, "The inheritance God gave to Abraham by promise," Gal. iii. 17, 18. And what is there that should make this inconsistent with the nature of a covenant? Cannot you, Sir, covenant with a beggar, to bestow upon him what treasure you please, upon the only condition of his thankful acceptance? Cannot a prince covenant with his rebel subjects, to pardon them, and receive them into his favour, upon the only condition of their acknowledging his sovereignty and accepting his pardon? Would not this be truly and formally a covenant; and a covenant with strongest obligations to the performance, especially if confirmed by an oath, as the glorious God has condescended to confirm the covenant of grace? Heb. vi. 18.

You further argue, that "good works and a life of sincere obedience are absolutely necessary to salvation, without which no man can see the Lord, and therefore necessary to our justification, which is but our title to eternal life. And a right or title to eternal life is promised to obedience. Rev. xxii. 14. 'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life; and enter in through the gates into the city.' Heaven is a recompense of reward. And God has particularly promised to his people, that he will proportion the dispensations of his grace, to the good or evil behaviour of his people, in the eighteenth and thirty-third chapters of Ezekiel."

Do you indeed, Sir, suppose, that there is no difference between justification and sanctification? They are both, it is true, necessary to salvation; but are they both necessary in the same respects, in the same place, and order, and to the same ends? Are they both necessary, as what equally entitle us to the continuing favour of God, to grace here, and glory hereafter? Holiness or new obedience is necessary as a qualification, disposing or fitting us for the enjoyment of God, and possession of the heavenly glory. But how will it follow from hence, that it is necessary, as the condition of our reconciliation to God, and of our being kept by his power, through faith unto salvation? How will it follow, that because we cannot be saved without holiness, that therefore we must be saved for it, and upon the account of it? It is necessary to an heir's possession of an estate, given him by his father's will, that he live and enjoy his reason: yet it is not his life and reason, but his father's donation, which gives him the title. Even so in the present case, our life and activity are necessary to our possessing the eternal inheritance: but it is the free grace of God in Christ which gives us the title. "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God," Eph. ii. 8.

As to the Scriptures cited by you, they are altogether impertinent to your purpose. You should

prove, if you would confirm your point in view, that we are justified by works; and that our works give us the title to salvation. But all that you do prove by the cited Scriptures is, that good works are necessary to salvation; which is a truth equally allowed by both parties in the present controversy, and a consequence equally resulting from the principles of both.

The first text indeed which you quote, does in the English translation, seem to look something in your favour. But then read in the original, and all that appearance is lost. I think it should thus be read, "Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have power, privilege, or liberty for the tree of life." And it is on all hands granted, that none will ever have the power, privilege, or liberty, to enter the external inheritance, but those who are sanctified. The whole question is, from whence this power is derived; upon what title this liberty or privilege is founded? Whether only from the righteousness of Christ imputed? Or from their sincere conformity to the (pretended) new law of grace? To this the text says nothing at all: nor can any argument be drawn from it, either on the one or the other side of the question.

But heaven is a recompense of reward. What then? May not a reward be given, not of debt, but of mere grace; without any claim by personal merit, without any motive from covenant conditions performed, or any other incentive at all, but the mere goodness and kindness of the donor? How then does this prove the covenant conditions you are pleading for? You may, Sir, if you please, without any previous covenant, reward your slave's towardliness, with freedom and with a good estate; though this be what he can have no claim to by his obedience. His person and services being your property, the reward must flow wholly from your kindness and bounty. And thus, in the present case, though eternal life be a reward, it is a reward of mere bounty and goodness, it is

the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom. vi. 23.

What you urge from the 18th and 33d chapters of Ezekiel is as little to your purpose. This will evidently appear, if you consider that these chapters have a special reference to a temporal salvation, from the calamities that Israel felt or feared from the Chaldean war. They were part of them already in captivity; and the remainder in dreadful expectation of the succeeding carnage and desolation, which made a swift approach upon them. They on this account complain of God's dispensations as unequal, and of their own misery as remediless. In answer to which complaints, God is pleased by the prophet to justify his dispensations towards them; and to let them know that his dealings with them were according to their doings: that their reformation would avert his judgments; but their apostasy and declension from his service, would both heighten his displeasure and their punishment. That this was the design of the 18th chapter, appears evident from the whole foregoing context, where their dreadful destruction by the Babylonians was expressly predicted and threatened, which gave occasion to obviate their objections against God's dealings with them, and to give them a just view of the true source and cause of their misery and ruin. That this was also the design of the 33d chapter, is most evident from the express words of the context, as every one may see that will read from the 26th to the 29th verse, where sword, famine, pestilence, and utter desolation are expressly denounced, and declared to be the evils referred to in this discourse. Now what just argument can be drawn from hence? Will it follow, because God proportions his providential dispensations to the external conduct of his professing covenant people, that therefore we are justified by works; or that our eternal salvation is the immediate fruit of our own obedience? Will it follow, that because Ahab's threatened temporal destruction was prevented by his external reformation, that therefore

he was justified and eternally saved upon the account of it? No; it is plain that all the arguments to the present purpose, from these chapters, are altogether impertinent. And the pleas commonly taken from hence against perseverance in grace, because the righteous are represented as turning from their righteousness, are nothing at all to the purpose for which they are used.

But after all, were it even supposed, that these chapters referred to God's dispensations toward men in relation to their eternal state, how would they confirm the principles you are pleading for? They would indeed show us that there is a necessary connexion between a life of disobedience and our salvation, and between a life of obedience and our perdition, which is a truth allowed on both sides of the present question. But as to the meritorious, procuring, and entitling cause of our salvation, or the foundation of our right and title to eternal life, there is nothing spoken of in these chapters. If you would find these things explained by the prophet Ezekiel, read the 36th chapter of his prophecy, where the doctrine which you oppose, is strongly asserted, and particularly illustrated. You will there find it is God "that takes away the heart of stone from his people, and gives them a heart of flesh;" that "causes them to walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments, and do them;" and that it is "not for their sakes that he does this, but for his own name's sake;" and that when this is done for them, they will have cause to "be ashamed and confounded for their own ways;" and to "loathe themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and abominations." You will there find, that though God "will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do this for them;" yet this is not the condition of their acceptance: he will bestow his special grace "for his own name's sake," and "not for their sakes." Now you will acknowledge, that the other chapters must be taken in the same view with this; and then, though it will appear that he who repenteth and continueth in obedience to the end, and none but he, shall obtain salvation at

last, yet that this repentance and new obedience flow from God's sovereign grace, and is the fruit of a justified state. The same thing may be observed concerning any other texts of Scripture which you can possibly cite, to the like purpose. And I must here observe to you, it is a sure evidence of the weakness of that cause, that can be no better defended. There are multitudes of plain and positive texts of Scripture, which ascribe our justification to faith, and to the righteousness of Christ alone; as I have had occasion to show you already. These must be interpreted away at any rate, because they do not agree with this scheme, which must by all means be supported. But then, what evidence have we from Scripture for this doctrine, which is so strenuously contended for? None but this, that holiness and new obedience are necessary to salvation; which is just so much, (and no more,) to the purpose, as if you should attempt to prove your point from the first verse of Genesis.

You proceed to argue, that "repentance for sin, which includes new obedience in the nature of it, is not only made absolutely necessary to salvation, but has the promise of pardon annexed to it; and is therefore plainly proposed in Scripture, as the condition of our justification."

This is but a repetition of the former argument, in other words. The question before us is not, What is necessary to our salvation: but what is the condition of our justification? It is not the question whether pardon and salvation be necessarily connected to repentance and new obedience: but what it is that gives us a title to this pardon and salvation; and whence it is, that this repentance and new obedience flow, by which we are qualified to partake of saving benefits. The Scriptures assure us, that this is the righteousness of Christ received by faith; and what you now offer, is no way inconsistent with the many declarations of this kind, throughout the whole word of God. If it were granted, that whatever are the requisites in them that shall be saved, and whatever qualifications have the promise of pardon and salvation annexed to them,

are the conditions of our justification, it would then follow that perseverance is a condition of our justification; and consequently all dispute about being justified in this present life, is at an end, as I have observed before. For the benefit is suspended, till the condition on which it depends, is accomplished. Besides, I think, all men must allow, that if repentance be the fruit and consequence of our justification, it cannot be the condition of it. There can be nothing more preposterous, than to suppose an effect to be a condition of the cause producing it. And the Scriptures assure us, that repentance is the fruit and consequence of our justification. Thus is it particularly represented to us. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 28, 31: "A new heart also will I give you; and a new spirit will I put within you;—and ye shall be my people; and I will be your God—Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good; and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations." Thus likewise, Zech. xii. 10: "And I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." In which texts you see, there is first a new heart and a new spirit; they are first in a justified state, they are God's people and he is their God; they are first renewed and have a spirit of grace and supplication; they have first the exercise of faith, they look upon him whom they have pierced; and then follows their repentance, as an immediate and necessary consequence of their regenerate, justified state. This truth is most evident, not only from the Scripture representation of this matter: but also from the nature of a true and sincere repentance. We must be united to Christ, and have a principle of life, before we can perform vital actions. We must have the dispositions of our souls renewed, before we can hate sin, and heartily mourn after a deliverance

from what is naturally pleasant and delightful to us. We must first have faith in Christ's blood, before we can repair to it for cleansing from pollution and guilt. We must first have a principle of love to holiness, before we can live a life of new obedience. The legal terrors, resolutions and endeavours, which precede our justification, are very far short of a true repentance; and therefore can have no promise of pardon and salvation made to them. It is therefore evident, that though an evangelical repentance does immediately succeed (and in its beginnings is even contemporary with) a true justifying faith: Yet it is in the order of nature an effect and fruit of it; and consequently cannot be the condition of our justification.

And now I proceed to the consideration of your last argument, for the vindication of these principles. "It seems (you say) that our obedience must be the condition of our justification, because the process of the final judgment will be put upon that issue, and every man will be judged in that awful day, according to his works."

To which I answer, that I can see no manner of consequence in this reasoning, because God of his infinite grace and bounty will be pleased to reward the obedience of believers at the eternal judgment, that therefore our obedience is the condition of our present justification. You yourself, Sir, have been so good to the young gentleman, your sister's son, as to take him out of prison, to pay his debts, to adopt him into our family, to call him by your own name, and treat him as your own child: and I am told, that you intend to reward his dutifulness to you, by giving him the preference to your daughters, and by making him the heir of your solid estate. If it should be so, would it from thence appear that his dutiful behaviour was the condition of your taking him out of prison, and adopting him into your family? No Sir, you know that this was an act of mere compassion and kindness. Apply this to the case here before us, and you will see the fate of your argument. You are besides to consider that it is no where said

in Scripture that we are at the last day to be rewarded for our good works, but according to them. The reward which believers shall receive, will be a reward of mere grace; and will of God's infinite goodness be proportioned to, but not merited by their obedience. Let it also be considered, in our justification in this life, Christ is considered in the special character of our Redeemer, our Propitiation, our High Priest; and accordingly applies the benefits of his redemption to our souls, that we may be accepted in him; but in the great day of accounts he will appear in the special character of our judge, publicly owning and rewarding those graces, which he has enabled us to exercise, and that obedience which he has excited and strengthened us to perform. In our justification here, he is glorifying the riches of his redeeming mercy and love: In the day of judgment, he will glorify his rectoral holiness and equity, as well as his infinite bounty; and let the intelligent world see, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Here, he justifies the ungodly, by acquitting them from guilt, and imputing righteousness without works: there, he will reward the godly, by crowning their piety and holiness with eternal life. Here, our justification is the foundation and fountain of our new obedience, as I have before shown you: there we are to receive the reward of our obedience already performed and finished. In our justification here, Christ acts from the motives only of his sovereign grace and love: in the final sentence, he will proceed according to the rules of distributive, remunerative justice, in adjusting and proportioning rewards. So that from the nature of things it is agreeable, that we should here be justified by faith only: but there judged according to our works.

And now, Sir, will you indulge me the same freedom which you have hitherto borne with; and allow me to be your faithful monitor, in an instance or two?

I would first put you in mind, that it is of much greater consequence to your highest interests to make

it evident to yourself, that you are indeed justified in the sight of God, than to exercise your mind with this arbitrary distinction of a first and second justification. If you are indeed interested in Christ by faith, if you do indeed experience a change of heart and life in consequence of your faith in him; and make a progress in the divine life, in the mortification of your corruptions, in love to God and your neighbour, and in heavenly mindedness and spirituality, you will not be examined at the bar of your judge, about your acquaintance with these modern distinctions; or, whether those qualifications, which will then be gloriously rewarded, are the fruits of the first, or the conditions of a secondary justification.

I would again entreat you to consider, that the life of a Christian is a life of faith in the Son of God. We are not only justified by faith; but we are saved by faith; and the just must live by faith. Whatever becomes of this debate, you may be therefore certain, that you can be no longer safe, than while you are humbly committing your soul to Christ as to the author of your eternal salvation, depending upon him as the Lord your righteousness; and expecting all supplies of grace from his fulness. And believe me, Sir, a lively exercise of faith in Christ will afford you more present comfort, will much more quicken you in devotion and true holiness; and more strengthen and establish you in every good work, in your progress to the heavenly kingdom, than all your studies in these fruitless doctrines, about a first and secondary justification.

I will take leave to add once more, that the way to heaven is certainly a way of holiness; and without holiness you can never see God. It therefore concerns you to look to the fountain of holiness for all supplies of grace, to watch over your heart and life, to endeavour and pray for a holy conformity to the whole will of God; and amidst, and after all, to bring your great defects to the blood of Christ for pardon; and continually implore the divine influences, that the work of grace may be carried on in your soul

with power, 'till you arrive without spot and blameless, before the throne of your sovereign and righteous Judge.

That you may thus be directed safe amidst all the snares and delusions in your way, is the prayer of,

Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XIV.

THE APOSTLE JAMES'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS, IN HIS SECOND CHAPTER, DISTINCTLY REVIEWED, AND SET IN ITS GENUINE LIGHT, BY A COMPARISON WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

SIR—You “acknowledge, that if it were not for one difficulty in your way, you should think the evidence offered against the doctrine you have proposed, must be conclusive: but you do not know how to give into a scheme, that is not only expressly contradicted, but particularly refuted, in the word of God. The apostle Paul (you say) does indeed seem to speak in favour of my principles: but he ought to be interpreted by the apostle James, who expressly rejects my interpretation of St. Paul's discourses on the subject before us. What appearance therefore soever there may be, in favour of my principles, in St. Paul's epistles, these must not be understood in direct contradiction to the express declarations of another inspired writer. You therefore desire me to show, how it is possible to reconcile my scheme with the doctrine of St. James, in the second chapter of his epistle, from the fourteenth verse to the end.”

If this be all your remaining difficulty, I hope it will not prove a hard matter to give you full satisfaction, that the doctrine of the apostle James in the place referred to, is no ways inconsistent with the

doctrine of our justification by faith, so plainly and fully taught by the apostle Paul in all his epistles; and therefore, that our justification by works (in the sense that I oppose it) has no foundation at all in the whole word of God.

That this may be set in a proper light, there are two or three things necessary to be premised, and distinctly considered, previous to a direct and immediate view of the consistency and concurrence of these two apostles, in the doctrine of a sinner's justification by faith, notwithstanding their seeming disagreement and repugnancy.

It should first be premised, that these two apostles must be understood in such a sense, as will make them consistent. We must take this for a principle, that whatever becomes of our schemes, on one side or the other, the Spirit of God cannot be inconsistent with himself, nor teach contrary doctrines. That interpretation therefore must be right, which will make them consistent; and that must be rejected, which sets them at variance, and makes their doctrines utterly irreconcilable.

It should be likewise premised, that the apostle James must be understood in such a sense, as will make him consistent with himself. We may not suppose, that he teaches such a doctrine in this part of the second chapter, as is repugnant to the doctrine which he himself teaches elsewhere, in the same epistle. Let us then see if we cannot find the doctrine I am pleading for, taught in this very epistle of James. Particularly in chap. i. 5, 6, 7: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth, is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind, and tossed. For let not that man think, that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." From whence I argue, if faith be the way to divine acceptance and audience of our prayers, the means by which our duties will find a gracious reception with God, and without which they will be re-

jected; then we are justified by faith, and not by works. For it is undoubtedly true, that what justifies our obedience, and renders that acceptable to God, does likewise justify our persons, and render them acceptable to him. And our works can have no hand in justifying our persons, if our works themselves are justified by faith; but condemned and rejected without it, as the apostle teaches us in the cited text. So we learn from chap. v. 15, 16, that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man is the prayer of faith.

Moreover, if spiritual wisdom, or practical holiness, be the fruit and effect of faith (as we are told that it is, in the quoted text) then our justification and acceptance with God (by which we do, and without which we cannot obtain the divine influences to our progressive sanctification) is by faith, and not by works. I think no man will pretend, that we are so acceptable to God, as to obtain his sanctifying influences, in a progress of wisdom and grace, before we are justified: or that we are sanctified by faith, and justified by works. Whence it follows, that faith is the mean or term of our justification, because it is the mean or term of our sanctification; and that a holy life cannot be the condition of our acceptance with God, because it is the consequence and fruit of that faith, by which we find acceptance with him.

Another text to the same purpose, we find, in chap. ii. 5, "Hearken my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which God hath promised to them that love him?" It might be read, Hath not God chosen the poor to be rich, (as a similar phrase is translated, Rom. viii. 29,) to be rich with or by faith, and heirs. Does not this plainly teach us, that as the end of God's choosing the poor, was that they might be spiritually rich, so that it is faith which enriches them, and constitutes them heirs of the kingdom? And you will readily own, that if we are heirs of the kingdom by faith, we are justified by faith. The kingdom is prepared for them that love God: and faith is the source of that love to God, by which we are

qualified for the kingdom. Faith worketh by love, Gal. v. 6. And therefore faith is the term or medium of our acceptance with God, and title to the kingdom. These texts must therefore be remembered in our explication of the context you refer to, that we may not represent the apostle as teaching contradictions or inconsistencies.

It must also be premised, that we should understand the reasonings and conclusions of the two apostles, Paul and James, according to the professed scope and design of their discourses, and according to the subject they are professedly treating upon: and we should consider the expressions they each of them use upon the point in view, not as words occasionally and transiently spoken; but as what relate to, and are connected with, the subject matter professedly undertaken to be explained. This must be always allowed to be a natural and rational rule, which ought to be strictly adhered to, in the interpretation of Scripture. Now, then, let us look a little into this case; and see if we do not find the scope and design of these two apostles very different, where they speak so very differently of justification by faith and by works.

Paul designedly handles this question,—How a guilty, condemned, and convinced sinner shall get reconciled to God, find acceptance with him, and have a title to the heavenly inheritance? He treats of such “who are under sin, whose mouths must be stopped, who are all become guilty before God; and who have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” Rom. iii. 9, 19, 23. He considers the impossibility in the nature of the thing, that such as these can be justified by works: because when they have done all they can do, they yet in their highest attainments continue sinners, and remain under guilt. This is the plain and manifest scope of the two first and part of the third chapters to the Romans. He thence proceeds to show in which way, and which only, they may hope for acceptance with God, in the remaining part of the third, and in the following chapters of that epistle. This cannot be by the deeds of the law.

But it must be "by the righteousness of God without the law, by the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ;" and "by faith without the deeds of the law," v. 21, 22, 28. This is the subject, that the Apostle Paul keeps constantly in view, in his epistle to the Romans and Galatians.

But then on the contrary, the apostle James designedly handles this question, whether careless licentious professors of Christianity may presume upon their obtaining salvation, from their doctrinal faith, or from their notional and historical assent to the truth of the Gospel? And thence he takes occasion distinctly to consider, which way a Christian's faith may be justified, his profession vindicated and evidenced to be sincere and true. He discourses of "a man that saith he hath faith, and hath not works, (v. 14,) of one that hath a faith without charity, (v. 15, 16,) of "a faith that hath not works, but is dead being alone," (v. 17,) a faith, that is but like a body without spirit, or a carcase without breath, (v. 26.)

These are the respective questions handled by these two apostles; and their answers are adapted to the subjects professedly handled by them. They give the very same answers to each of these questions, that a judicious Calvinist divine would now give. Should an awakened sinner, under a sense of his guilt and danger, inquire of one of our divines, how he may obtain a pardon of his sins, a reconciliation to God, and a title to eternal life, would he not answer, with the apostle Paul, that he must "seek righteousness by faith, and not as it were by the works of the law:" for "by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in his sight:" that he must "be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." But then, on the other hand, should any vain professor, that turns the grace of God into wantonness, yet say that he has faith, and flatter himself with salvation, from his historical doctrinal belief of the gospel, while living a careless and sensual life; would

he not be told in the language of the apostle James, that such a faith will not save him; that the very devils have such a faith, as well as he; that faith without works is a dead faith, and but a carcase without breath; that he must have works to justify his pretence to faith; and must show his faith by his works, or his hopes are vain, and he a vain man to entertain such hopes. Now, what shadow of disagreement would appear in these different answers, to such very different subjects in question?

After this view of the case, it is now to be considered, from which of these apostles we may expect to have the doctrine of a sinner's justification before God explained and set in its proper light: whether from him who is purposely handling this subject; or from him who is not purposely handling this matter, but treating on a very different subject? This is an inquiry very easily answered, and being answered the whole difficulty vanishes of course.

These things being premised, I proceed to consider the subject before us more directly and particularly: And by taking notice of the doctrines respectively taught by these apostles, shall endeavour to show, that there is no disagreement at all between them; nor any thing at all in this discourse of the apostle James, which you refer to, that is in the least repugnant to our justification by faith, without works of righteousness done by us.

This will appear evident, if we consider, in the first place, that these apostles are treating of a different faith. The one of them has not the same idea, and does not mean the same thing with the other, when they discourse of faith, and its influence upon our justification. You remember, I have formerly shown you at large, in a letter purposely written on that subject, that there are two sorts of faith mentioned and described in the Scripture. By the one we are, and by the other we are not, justified before God. Now the apostle Paul speaks of the former of these; and the apostle James of the latter. There is therefore the greatest truth and propriety in what each of these

apostles speak of faith, taking it in the notion which they respectively intend. It is true, that by the faith of God's elect we are justified and saved: It is also true, that the faith of the vain man, or empty professor, a bare national, historical, fruitless faith, will not save us. The apostle Paul speaks of a living faith, "by which the just shall live," Rom. i. 17. The apostle James speaks of a dead faith, which is but as a "body without the spirit," v. 17, 26. The apostle Paul speaks of a "faith which worketh by love," Gal. v. 6. The apostle James speaks of a "faith which hath not works;" and which is destitute of mercy or charity, v. 16, 17. Paul treats of a special faith, by which "we are the children of God," Gal. iii. 26. James of a faith, which is common to the devils, v. 19. Paul treats of a faith, by which "we shall be saved," Rom. x. 9. James of a faith which "cannot save us," v. 14. Paul treats of a faith, by which we are "justified, without the deeds of the law," Rom. iii. 28. James, on the contrary, speaks of a faith which "being alone, without works," is such as will not justify us, v. 24. Now, can it possibly be true of the same faith, that it is both alive, and dead; that it worketh by love, and yet hath not works, but is without love and mercy; that by it we are the children of God; and yet not distinguished from the devil by it; that we are saved by it, and not saved by it; that we are justified by it without works, and are not justified by this alone without works? If these are not some of the highest contradictions, I know not what in the world either is or can be so. The consequence therefore is inevitable, either that these contrary characters and accounts of faith cannot be both true; or else that it is a different faith, which these apostles speak of. You dare not assume the former of these consequences; and therefore must allow the latter to be necessarily true. You must allow it to be true, that Paul speaks of one kind of faith, and James of another. And what argument can now be fairly drawn from this discourse of the apostle James, but this only, that a lifeless, fruitless,

inoperative faith will not justify or save us? And who but sensual libertines, ever thought that it would? If you suppose James to be here speaking of a true lively faith, you must suppose him to contradict, not only the apostle Paul, but our blessed Lord himself, and the Holy Ghost, in multitudes of plain and express passages of Scripture, which are every where dispersed through the Bible, that ascribe our justification before God to faith only. Here then the controversy is brought to a point. And what conclusion will you now come into? Is it not time to give up your scheme, and ingenuously acknowledge, that as the apostle James is here saying nothing to the subject before us, there can nothing be inferred from what he says, against the doctrine which you oppose.

It is also further evident, that the apostle James in the context referred to, is saying nothing contrary to the doctrine so constantly taught by the apostle Paul, of our being justified before God by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, nor any thing in favour of our justification before God by our own works; this, I say, is further evident, because he is not there treating of our justification, as it is the relief of a guilty world, and imports the acceptance of our persons before God; nor is he saying any thing at all about this, one way or another. But he is treating of the justification of our faith, or demonstration of the sincerity of our profession by its proper evidences: Which justification, he shows us, is by works.—Whereas the apostle Paul is always treating only of justification as it is the relief of an awakened sinner, and imports the acceptance of our persons, when he tells us that we are justified by faith, without works. I have formerly shown you, that though the word justification (in its general notion) has always one unvaried meaning and uniform signification in Scripture, yet it is frequently applied in both these respects. It is indeed most usually to be understood for the acceptance of our persons with God, and respects our interest in his favour: but it sometimes also intends a vindication of our character as believ-

ers, and such a manifestation of the sincerity of our faith and profession, by the necessary practical evidences, as will give them a just estimation and acceptance with our own consciences, or with our fellow creatures. Thus the word is used, Deut. xxv. 1. Job. xxxiii. 32. Luke vii. 35. Rom. iii. 4. and elsewhere. And I am now to show you, that the apostle Paul understands the word in the former of these senses; but the apostle James in the latter.

By justification the apostle Paul intends the remission of sins, Rom. iii. 25. Our receiving the gift of righteousness, Rom. v. 17. And our being entitled thereby to grace here, and glory hereafter, Rom. v. 1, 2.

But by justification, the apostle James intends no more than the approving ourselves sound believers evidencing the sincerity of our faith, or manifesting the truth of our profession, and so the safety of our state. If this appears to be so, upon a particular examination of the case, you must own, that there is no place for any argument in favour of your scheme, from this context. Let us then consider this matter distinctly and impartially.

It may be presumed, that the apostle James is not treating of the justification of our persons in the sight of God, in that there is not one character of such justification, to be seen in his whole discourse. There is nothing spoken about our obtaining pardon of sin, nothing of our persons being made righteous in the sight of God, nothing of our being entitled to future glory, by the works unto which our justification is ascribed. No more can therefore be proved from this apostle, but that we are in some respect justified by works. Yet not so justified, as to obtain remission of sins and reconciliation to God, or to be entitled to an inheritance in the future glory, by our works. For of these things, or of any thing else which implies them, he says nothing at all. But this may be more fully and clearly evinced, by the following considerations.

It is evident in the first place, from the occasion of

this discourse, as it is represented to us in the first sixteen verses of this chapter. They professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and yet had respect to persons; making a criminal distinction between the rich and poor, of the same Christian faith and profession with themselves; as appears from the four first verses of the chapter. They despised the poor; and thereby violated that royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," v. 6, 8. "They respected persons," they "committed sin, and were convinced of the law as transgressors," v. 9. They exposed themselves to "have judgment without mercy," if they thus "showed no mercy," v. 13. And would such as these pretend to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? "What doth it profit, if a man say, that he hath faith, but hath not works? Can that faith save him?" What profit can that faith be to them, which leaves them so uncharitable and unmerciful, that they can see, "a brother or sister naked, or destitute of daily food," and only "say to them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled: but notwithstanding, they give them not those things which are needful to the body," v. 14, 15, 16. This is plainly the occasion of this discourse. They pretended to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: but brought forth fruit quite contrary to their pretensions. How then could they justify their pretensions? How could they justify their profession of faith, against the charge of hypocrisy, and prove it to be sincere and saving? They could never in this sense, be justified any way, but in that of evidence, by a life correspondent to their profession. Their faith must be justified or evidenced by their works. I may allude to that, Isa. xliii. 9, "Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified." Otherwise let them pretend what they would to faith, while they lived without brotherly love, and good works, it was but an empty pretence; and their profession wanted the proper witnesses to justify it. Thus the argument is natural and easy; and the conclusion necessarily follows. But then on the other hand, if we consider justification as meaning our re-

conciliation to God, and our personal acceptance with him, the apostle's arguments will appear very lame and defective, and the conclusion will never follow from the premises, for it will by no means follow, because a lifeless fruitless faith, destitute of mercy and obedience to the royal law of love, will not justify us before God, that therefore good works in truth will justify us before God. It will by no means follow, because we cannot be accepted of God and saved, by a false and insincere profession of faith; that therefore we can be accepted of God and saved, by such obedience as we are capable to perform. The inference is therefore necessary, that the apostle must be so understood, as will secure the connection of his discourse, and the force of his argument; which cannot be done, if we consider him as speaking of justification in any other sense than that which I am now pleading for.

Further, that the justification here treated of, is the justification of our faith and sincerity, but not of our persons, is evident likewise from the consequence, the apostle draws from the foregoing premises, which he undertakes to prove and vindicate in the following verses: Which is, "Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone," verse 17. This is the point which he undertakes to prove: And accordingly this is the conclusion of the whole when he has finished his reasoning on the subject. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works, is dead also," verse 6. As a breathless, spiritless corpse, that cannot act or move, is evidently dead, so a speculative belief, that does not influence a man's life and actions, is evidently dead; a dead thing, in itself, argues a dead soul, and is dead to the purposes and offices of gospel faith. We must therefore understand all the arguments here used, to refer to this point only. They are all brought to prove, that faith which is without [or severed from] works, is dead: And that therefore there is a necessity of works to justify our faith, or to make it manifest that it is not a dead faith. Were justification here taken in the other sense, his

arguments would not only be utterly inconclusive; but his reasoning quite foreign to his subject, which may not be supposed: And therefore it necessarily is the justification of our faith or Christian profession, and not of our persons, which the apostle James is here treating of.

This is also evident from every one of the arguments, used by the apostle in this context. Every one of them will bring out the conclusion now mentioned: But neither of them, separately considered, nor all of them connected, have any appearance of an argument in proof of our personal justification (or our persons being made righteous) before God, by our good works.

The first argument seems but ironically proposed. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works: Show me thy faith without thy works; and I will show thee my faith by my works," verse 18. As if he should have said: Have you indeed faith without works! I pray, show me your faith without works, if you can. For my part, I know of no such way of manifesting the truth of faith; I resolve to take a contrary method; and will show you my faith, will evidence the sincerity of it, and justify my profession of faith, by my works. Here the argument is very clear and full, in favour of the interpretation I am pleading for. And here we have an index, to point out the meaning of the word justification, in the subsequent discourse. It cannot import more than a manifestative justification. Indeed it signifies the same thing with showing our faith, or evidencing the truth of our profession, and so of our justified state. But now let us see how this argument will conclude for the other side of the question. The argument ought to be thus stated. Our faith must be shown and manifested by our works: therefore our good works will justify our persons before God, and render us righteous and acceptable in his sight. I think every body will own, that the Spirit of God don't reason at that rate; and therefore that justification before God, which is the sinner's relief against the challenges of his law and justice, cannot be the subject here treated of.

The second argument here used, is, that a fruitless and inoperative faith, though it be good as far as it goes, yet is no other than what the devils have; he is therefore a vain man, who depends upon acceptance with God by such a dead faith. "Thou believest there is one God; thou dost well; the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works, is dead," verse 19, 20. Here the apostle expressly shows us what it is he had undertaken to prove: Which is, that a bare, fruitless, historical faith cannot save us, because it is common to the very devils. Here he expressly shows, who it is he is disputing with: it is a vain man, who vainly expects to be saved by an idle faith, and empty profession of the gospel, without any fruit of obedience. And here he does again expressly assert the principle, which was the subject of his discourse, and the only point to be proved, that faith without works, is dead. So that there is no room to debate what was the design of this argument. By this he effectually proves, that the faith which justifies our persons, must be justified by good works; otherwise we are but vain men, and our hope is but a vain hope, which will leave us among unpardoned devils at last. But not so much as the least colour of an argument can be found here, that our persons are justified before God by good works: whence it follows, that the justification here treated of, must necessarily be the justification of our faith, of our Christian character and profession; and not of our persons, in regard of their state, before God.

A third argument here brought by the apostle to prove his point, is, "Abraham's being justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar," verse 21. Now, it appears from a variety of the strongest and clearest evidences, that the apostle did not (could not) refer to the justification of Abraham's person in the sight of God, but to the justification of his faith and sincerity only, in this instance before us.

This appears, in the first place, because Abraham was in a justified state, by an everlasting covenant, thirty years before his offering his son Isaac upon the

altar. It was so long, or near so long before this, that the glorious God himself made the promise to him, in Gen. xvii. 7. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." And it was more than so long before this, that Abraham had this testimony given him in Gen. xv. 6, "That he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness." Yea, he was a believer so long before, as his first leaving his father's house. "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out," Heb. xi. 8. How then could his offering his son Isaac, be the mean or term of the justification of his person before God, when he had faith unfeigned, had righteousness imputed to him, and an everlasting covenant made with him so long a time before? Besides, if works could have justified his person, he would have been justified by works long before this. For his whole story shows, that he had lived in a course of holy, fruitful obedience, from the time of his justification till this time. There cannot therefore be any fair pretence made, that the justification of his person is here referred to. No; this good work was not in the least constitutive, but only evidential, of his personal justification before God.

Further, it appears by the story itself, to which the apostle refers, that it was only a manifestative justification, a justification of his faith and sincerity, and so declarative of the justified state of his person, that Abraham obtained by offering his son Isaac upon the altar. The glorious God condescends to treat with him after the manner of men; and by an assumption of human affections, to declare concerning him, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me," Gen. xxii. 12. This, then, was the justification of which the apostle treats, Abraham's making it known, that he feared God, and that his faith and profession were sincere. For this is all the justification, which can be proved from this text in Genesis, to which he refers.

We may not suppose, that an inspired apostle quoted Scripture impertinently: and yet we cannot suppose the Scripture referred to, was any thing at all to his purpose, unless we understand him to be speaking of justification in the sense I am pleading for. In this sense, therefore, and this only, did the apostle design to prove our justification by works, by the argument now before us. Abraham's obedience witnessed to the truth of his faith: and so his real state of justification before God was made apparent.

This also appears by the apostle's illustration of this argument, in verse 22. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" How was it that faith wrought with his works? Not as a joint condition of his justification before God. He was justified in the sight of God long before this, as I have shown you already: and the apostle Paul assures us, that his justification was by faith without works, Rom. iv. 4, 5. Therefore faith could not co-operate with his works, to the justification of his person, when "righteousness was imputed to him that worked not, but believed on him that justified the ungodly." This sense being rejected and contradicted by the Spirit of God himself, must consequently by no means be admitted: nor is there any other interpretation, which can (with the least show of reason) be given to these words, but that which I am pleading for. Accordingly we read, Heb. x. 17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son." His faith was signally operative; not a dead faith; and therefore sincere. This was visibly demonstrated by the good works which it produced. Such works must be the productions of a true and lively faith. And we may see in this instance, how faith wrought with his works, exciting, directing, assisting him in them: and thereby may see, that it was not such a faith, as the apostle is here complaining of. "By works was his faith made perfect." How was it made perfect? The grace of faith, considered in itself, was neither the better nor

the worse, neither more nor less perfect, for the works which followed it: save, as the exercise of faith in doing them might tend to strengthen and improve the habit. But the meaning seems to be, that it was discovered and proved to be a perfect (true and lively) faith, by its consequences and effects. His faith was a perfect or sincere faith, when it was imputed to him for righteousness, thirty years before this. But this noble act of obedience evinced the truth of his faith, justified his profession and character, witnessed to his being a true believer; and made it "known, that he indeed feared God, seeing he withheld not his son, his only son, from him." In this view of the case, the argument is clear and pertinent, and the evidence full and convincing: but considered according to the other construction of the words, it affords no conclusion to the purpose. It is no consequence, that because Abraham's faith was operative, therefore his good works made him righteous, or had any hand in the justification of his person before God: or, that because his good works were an evidence that his faith was perfect and upright, therefore his good works were a condition of his justification in the sight of God, with respect to his person and state.

The same thing likewise appears from the 23d verse. "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God; and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God." There can be nothing more pertinent, natural, and easy, than the application of these words to the purpose which I have proposed. That eminent instance of Abraham's obedience did most convincingly evidence the truth and sincerity of his faith; and abundantly verify the report in the Scripture, that Abraham did believe God; and that he had such a faith, as was the means of rendering him righteous and accepted with God. Thus the Scripture was fulfilled, and clearly manifested to be true. But then, on the other hand, if justification be considered in the sense which you plead for, this argument would be so far from concluding in favour of the point to be

proved, that it would be directly opposite and contradictory to it. For how could Abraham's being "justified by works, fulfil the Scripture, which saith," he was "justified by faith;" if justification be in both places taken in the same sense, for absolute justification of the person before God? How could his works being imputed for righteousness, fulfil that Scripture which assures us that "his faith was imputed for righteousness;" unless faith and works are the same thing, and there be no difference at all between believing and obeying? Certain it is, that the apostle Paul understood the argument to conclude quite the contrary, when he undertook to prove from this very text, that "righteousness is imputed to him that worketh not;" and that it "is imputed without works:" and therefore the apostle James must be understood in such a sense, as will make both his arguments conclusive, and his doctrine consistent with the other inspired writings. I shall only add, as to the clause, "And was called the friend of God;" it does not mean, that Abraham's works made him the friend of God; but they declared him so. His obedience did not put him in the state of a friend; but being upon trial found faithful, he obtained this testimony, that he was the friend of God, a justified believer. Now Abraham being the "father of all them that believe," an eminent example of faith, and pattern of justification, the apostle subjoins, v. 24, "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." In a like sense, even as Christ is said to be justified in (or by) the spirit, so a Christian man is justified by the fruit of the Spirit, in a holy life, i. e. declared approved of God. By works a man that says he has faith, is thus justified, and not by faith only; not by a faith that hath not works attending it; not by a faith which is alone, or by itself, destitute of its proper fruits and evidences. Some of the best critics in the Greek language tell us, the exclusive particle *ΜΟΝΟΝ* (v. 24.) as here placed after the word faith, has the force of an adjective; and they read it, *Fide solitaria*, faith which is alone.

A fourth argument is taken from the instance of Rahab, v. 25. "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" Upon which the same remarks may be made, as on the instance of Abraham. Rahab feared the God of Israel, and was a true believer, and therefore personally justified in the sight of God, before her sending out the spies another way. For she had received the spies by faith. Heb. xi. 31. And consequently she certainly had faith, before she received them. A noble confession whereof we find her making to these spies, before she dismissed them. See Josh. ii. 10, 11. What justification therefore could she possibly obtain by these works, but the justification of her faith, since she was really in a justified state before?

And now I am come to the conclusion of this whole dissertation, which is, "For as the body without, (or severed from,) the spirit is dead, so faith without, (or severed from,) works is dead also," v. 26. This, as I observed before, clearly shows what was the apostle's design in his whole discourse. For every conclusion of an argument justly prosecuted, must be naturally deduced from the premises, and consist of the principal subject matter to be proved, as we see is the case before us. But if justification were here taken in the sense which you espouse, the arguments would all of them be inconclusive; and that conclusion would be quite foreign to the purpose. This consequence, therefore, of my foregoing discourse necessarily forces itself upon you, that the apostle was not here treating of the justification of our persons before God, in regard to their state; but of our faith, in point of sincerity; and therefore there can be no argument brought from this context, for our justification by works, in the sense you plead for.

Thus, Sir, you have seen, that the apostle Paul and James were treating of very different subjects, and their determinations were adapted to the doctrines which they undertook to explain. And thence it is a just inference made by an eminent divine upon

this subject, that "the principal designs of the two apostles being so distant, there is no repugnancy in their assertions, though their words make an appearance thereof; for they do not speak *ad idem*; nor of things *eodem respectu*. James doth not inquire, how a guilty, convicted sinner, cast and condemned by the law, should be justified before God? And Paul speaks to nothing else. Wherefore apply the expressions of each of them to their proper design and scope, (as we must do, or we depart from all sober rules of interpretation, and make it impossible to understand either of them aright,) and there is no disagreement, or appearance of it between them."

And it may be yet further remarked, that these apostles had very different persons to deal with, in their respective epistles; and their addresses were accordingly accommodated to the state of the parties to whom they wrote. The apostle Paul's business either lay with such, who being newly converted from heathenism, were biassed by the principles taught by the light of nature and always received by them, to indulge the vain thought, that they must render themselves acceptable to God, and be justified in his sight, by their own personal righteousness and obedience to the law. An opinion greatly strengthened by the numerous false teachers, who were "desirous to be teachers of the law, though they understood neither what they said, nor whereof they affirmed." Or else his business lay with Judaizing Christians, who being zealous of the Levitical dispensation and constitution, expected justification by their conformity to it. Of this sort of professors the apostle observes, that "they were soon removed, from him that called them into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel." Gal. i. 6. And that "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they had not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Rom. x. 3. His concern was therefore to discover their dangerous and destructive mistake; and to represent to them the way,

the true and only way, in which they might hope for justification in the sight of God. That it is "not by works of righteousness which they had done, but of God's mercy," they must be "saved;" that they must be "justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;" and that in the justification of a sinner, "righteousness is imputed without works," and received by faith only.

On the contrary, James being concerned with carnal professors of Christianity, who perverted the doctrines of grace to encourage themselves in a careless licentious life, does at large convince them of the necessity of holiness, as the fruit and evidence of a true and saving faith, and the means to qualify them for the kingdom of heaven. He therefore puts them upon examining into the truth of their faith, and foundation of their hope, and shows them by the arguments already considered, what alone will justify their profession of faith, and give them good grounds to conclude the safety of their state.

They therefore who over magnify works, and depend upon them as the condition of their justification before God, are admonished by the apostle Paul to consider that they are building upon the sand, and that they must renounce their false confidence, or perish. "For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified: and if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain," Gal. ii. 16. 27. This solemn truth does indeed, Sir, call for your earnest attention.

On the other hand, they who depreciate good works, and neglect them as of no consequence to eternal salvation, are called upon by the apostle James to consider, how empty their profession, how dead their faith, and how vain their hope of salvation is. For if men may go to heaven without holiness, why may not the devils go there too, who have faith, (such as it is,) as well as they? We must have a living faith, or a dead hope. Our faith must purify our hearts, and renew our conversations; or leave us among the

impure and ungodly for ever. It concerns "every one, therefore, so to speak and so to do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." James ii. 12.

Upon the whole then, as you are taught by the one apostle how dangerous it is to build upon any other foundation than Christ only; for "Christ Jesus is our hope," and "other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus:" so are you admonished by the other apostle, that you can have no interest in Christ nor title to his salvation, but by a faith which purifies the heart, works by love, and is justified by a subsequent life of holiness and new obedience.

The extremes on both sides of the question, are equally dangerous. He that joins good works with faith, as equally the terms of justification before God, virtually rejects the Saviour's sufficiency; substitutes his own righteousness in the room of the righteousness of God; and consequently his expectations must perish. He that separates good works from faith, in his life and conversation, as though they were not requisite to salvation, will be found very unfit for the heavenly world, when the decree goes forth, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

Suffer me then to conclude, Sir, with an earnest entreaty, that, as you love your soul, you would leave off unprofitable disputes; and not distract your mind, and carry away your thoughts from practical godliness, by such an earnest application to these controverted points: but see to it, that you come to the footstool of divine grace, as a lost, unworthy, perishing sinner; that you depend only upon the riches of God's free sovereign grace, to draw you to Christ, and give you an interest in him; that you look to Christ Jesus alone for righteousness and strength; and cheerfully trust in him as a safe foundation of confidence and hope. See to it, that the life which you live in the flesh, be by the faith of the Son of God: and as you look to his righteousness only for the safety of your state, so likewise repair by faith to his fulness for all supplies of grace, whereby you may make a progress

in holiness. See to it, that you do not quiet your conscience with a dead faith; but always remember, that "he who hath this hope in Christ, purifies himself even as he is pure;" and that as your person cannot be justified, but by faith in Christ, so your faith cannot be justified, but by a careful diligence in maintaining good works. Having therefore "with the heart believed unto righteousness," be in a humble dependence upon Christ, "steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: and your labour will not be in vain in the Lord."

That you may be kept by the power of God through faith, and receive the end of your faith, the salvation of your soul, is the prayer of,

Sir, Yours, &c.



LETTER XV.

WHEREIN IS CONSIDERED IN WHAT RESPECTS GOOD WORKS ARE NECESSARY; AND OUR OBLIGATIONS TO THEM REPRESENTED AND URGED.

SIR—Your observation is just, that "it would be unsuitable and unseasonable to make apologies for this further trouble (as you are pleased to call it) after I have given you so many assurances of my cheerful readiness, to contribute all in my power to your best interest." Indeed, Sir, I have found nothing troublesome in the whole progress of our correspondence, excepting some dark apprehensions of late, lest you would "frustrate the grace of God," in "seeking righteousness, not by faith," but "as it were by the works of the law." But it now greatly animates my endeavours to serve you, to find those fears on my part so happily removed, by finding "the difficulties on your part obviated, in that important point, and you satisfied with respect to the foundation of your

hope." I am sensible, that the principles which I have been pleading for, are "commonly loaded with opprobrious invectives, as being destructive of an holy life, and subversive of morality and godliness." But I think I have already given you sufficient evidence, that all these insinuations are mere calumnies; and that there is no other possible foundation, than what I have represented to you, for a life of true holiness and piety. I appeal to your own observation and experience, whether in general there be any that live more holy lives and more honour their profession, than they who most strictly adhere to the doctrines of special grace and depend upon Christ alone for righteousness and strength: and whether they, on the contrary who depend upon their good works for a title to the divine favour do not too commonly show the weakness of their foundation, by the carelessness and unfruitfulness of their lives.

The question which you propose, is however worthy of a distinct consideration, "How far and in what respects are our good works necessary to salvation?"

In order to give you a proper view of this case, it will be needful to answer this question both negatively and positively: or to show you wherein our good works ought to have no place, or be at all looked to or depended upon; and then to show you wherein good works ought to have place, and in what respect they are necessary to every Christian indeed, that would entertain a well grounded hope of eternal life.

In my negative answer to this question, I must first observe that we are not to do good works, in order to change God's purposes and designs towards us, or to excite his benevolence and compassion to us. I suspect, it is too common a case, for men to depend upon their penitent frames, their duties, their reformations, their works of charity, or other religious exercises, as what will excite affections, passions, or compassions in the glorious God, correspondent to what they find in themselves. And thence, when conscience upbraids the sinner for his past provoca-

tions to God, he hopes to appease his displeasure, by his remorse, by his duties, or by his more careful future conduct: and now "he is delivered to do all these abominations," his account is balanced, and he begins upon a new score. Thence it is that his hopes and fears bear proportion to his frames and carriages. Every serious pang, every religious duty or moral practice, which his conscience approves, will raise his dejected hopes; and give him comforting expectations of the divine favour. But it should always be remembered, that the change to be hoped for by our duties, religious frames, or moral conduct, must be in ourselves, and not in God. "He is of one mind, and who can turn him? He is the Lord, he changeth not." We are therefore not to look to our good works, but to the Redeemer's merits, and the infinite mercy of the Divine nature, as what will render God propitious to us. Though we are only to hope for mercy in a way of duty, it is not because this will render God more willing to bestow it; but because it is the way, which God has appointed, to render us more disposed and ready to receive it. It is an imagination very unworthy of God, to suppose, that we can move him to the exercise of compassion, whose very nature is goodness and love itself; that we can excite any mercy in him, whose infinite mercy endures for ever: or that we can procure any change of purpose in him, who is without any variableness or shadow of turning. When the glorious God treats with us, as if he were a partaker of human affections and passions, this in mere condescension to our weakness; we being incapable to behold him as he is. Surely it is not to lead us into apprehensions, that he is altogether such an one as ourselves. Our business, therefore, is, to come to Christ and learn of him, to bow our necks to his yoke, to do good works from faith in Christ, and out of love and obedience to him; and in that way to hope in God for mercy, for Christ's sake, and for his own sake; and not for ours. We are to obey him as a gracious sovereign; and to hope in him as the sovereign author and donor of his

own favours. We are to hope in his mercy, not because we can allure him to the exercise of it, or recommend ourselves to him, by any thing we can do; but because he is "infinite in goodness, and delighteth in mercy." "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," Rom. xi. 29.

I may add, we are not to do good works with a view to qualify us for our reception of Christ by faith, or for our interest in him. Multitudes seem most dangerously to deceive their souls in this matter. It is but too common a case for men to quiet their consciences, and to entertain hopes of salvation, from apprehensions, that they endeavour to be found in a way of duty, they endeavour to mortify their lusts, and to live a holy life; and therefore, though guilty of many defects both in their duties and conversations, they hope God will accept them upon Christ's account, that the merits of Christ will make up the defects of their performances, and his blood cleanse them from the guilt of their sins. If they should fall into some more gross and enormous sin, or grow careless and remiss in duty, they will then, perhaps, fall into a panic, and terrify themselves with apprehensions, that Christ will not accept such as they are: but when they have reformed their conduct, their fears blow over, and they revive their hopes, that they shall yet obtain mercy for Christ's sake. And what is the natural language of all this, but that they shall obtain an interest in Christ by their good works; and when they have done their part, he will do the rest, will make up the defects of their attainments, and give such a value to their sincere (though imperfect) obedience, that this shall recommend them to the favour and acceptance of God. As though the glorious Redeemer undertook our ransom, for no other end, than to render our deficient duties meritorious, and our sins innocent and inoffensive. This legal and self-righteous principle seems generally to obtain with the careless, carnal world. And when sinners come under conviction of their guilt and danger, they are yet influenced by the same legal disposition, though

it appear in another form. What distressing fears and terrors do they usually agonize under? How impossible it is to give them any sensible view of the hope that is set before them! But what stands in the way? Their sins are great, their hearts are hard, their duties formal and hypocritical, their corruptions prevalent, that they cannot think Christ will accept such as they are; and therefore they dare not venture their souls and their eternal interests upon him. Were the case otherwise, could they subdue their stubborn hearts, could they get a victory over these corruptions, sanctify their depraved affections, and be more spiritual in their duties; or in other words, could they themselves begin their own salvation, then they could depend upon Christ to carry on the work in their souls; and then they could hope that God would accept them for Christ's sake. But all this is to substitute our own righteousness in the place and stead of the righteousness of Christ: or, at best, to divide the work of our salvation between Christ and ourselves.

Will you bear with me, Sir, if I am forced to express my fears, that you are yet under too great remainders of this unhappy disposition. I rejoice in your recovery from your late dangerous mistake. I cannot but hope, that you have "chosen the good part," which shall not be taken from you. But what mean the frequent returns of your desponding hours? Whence do your hopes and fears bear proportion to your present frames? What occasions those many dark apprehensions, not only that you have not yet an interest in Christ, but that you shall never attain to it? I entreat you to consider, that Christ came to save sinners; and that we must come to him, and trust in him as sinners, having no valuable qualification of our own to entitle us to his favour, nothing but our guilt and pollution, and his sufficiency to plead for our acceptance with, and interest in him. In proportion as you look to your own qualifications to recommend you to Christ, so far you practically make a Saviour of your good works, and reject the terms of salvation by Jesus Christ. As it is certain, that you can

have no good works, which are acceptable to God for any saving purpose, till you have faith in Christ; so it is also certain, that you need not seek for any in order to your cheerful trust in him and dependence upon him, to justify you by his righteousness, to sanctify you by his Spirit, and to "make you an heir according to the hope of eternal life." The gospel brings glorious tidings of salvation to perishing sinners. It exempts and excludes none who will come to Christ for life, who will come to him as lost sinners, under a sense of their guilt and unworthiness; who will "buy of him wine and milk, without money and without price;" and who will "take the water of life freely." Be their sins ever so great, "his blood will cleanse them from all their sins." Be their hearts ever so hard, "he will take away their hearts of stone, and give them hearts of flesh." Be they ever so destitute of any gracious qualification, "of his fulness they shall receive, even grace for grace." Whatever their case may be, they may safely trust in him, as the author of eternal salvation. But this, alas! is the misery and ruin of multitudes, who are pretending to seek salvation by Christ, that they are for dividing the work of their salvation between him and them: and by subtracting the honour of their salvation from him, who will do all or nothing for them, though "they follow after the law of righteousness, they do not obtain it; because they seek it, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." Here then you see that good works have no place at all. We are to look after no recommending qualifications for an interest in Christ: but to come to him guilty and miserable as we are, that he may be all and in all, be all to us, and do all in us and for us. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Matt. ix. 13.

I must further add, that we are not to do good works, in expectation that we shall by them obtain a title to the future inheritance. Heaven is a purchased possession. Our title to it, our qualification for it, our perseverance in the way that leads thither, and our

eternal enjoyment of the glorious inheritance, are all purchased by the blood of Christ. In all these respects Christ Jesus is our hope; and when "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, we must rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh." It cannot be too deeply impressed upon our hearts, that it is "not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but of his mercy, that God saveth us." It is mere mercy in the eternal contrivance of our salvation by Christ; mere mercy, in his incarnation, humiliation, obedience and sufferings for us; mere mercy in the application of his redemption to our souls; mere mercy that "we are kept by the power of God, through faith to salvation;" and mere mercy that Christ will at last "present us faultless before the throne of God, with exceeding joy." It is "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein we are made accepted in the beloved." Our good works cannot have any share in purchasing our title to this salvation. They cannot make atonement for our sins; because the iniquity of our most holy things stands in need of atonement. They cannot give us a covenant-right to mercy; because we are antecedently sinners, and obnoxious to the curses of the broken law. They cannot make us meet for salvation; because by their imperfections they still leave us open to the curse; and because they cannot sanctify our nature, and give us new hearts. Nor can they give us any claim to the special influences of the Spirit of God; because then our sanctification would be of debt and not of grace. What then can they do? No more, than to bring us to the foot of a sovereign God, to wait upon him in the way of his appointments, that "he would work in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

You will remember, that I am here speaking of our being entitled to salvation by our good works; and not of their usefulness to our spiritual and eternal welfare. In the former sense, they must be utterly disclaimed; and all righteousnesses esteemed but as filthy rags; as I have particularly shown you in some former letters. In the latter sense, they must be dili-

gently and painfully pursued, and attended to; as I shall more fully set before you. Our business therefore is with most earnest application to "watch daily at wisdom's gates, and wait at the posts of her doors," to use our most active endeavours in all the ways of godliness, righteousness, and charity, doing all in the name of Christ, and when we have done all we can, to come still as lost, guilty, worthless and helpless sinners, self-loathing and self-condemning, to the throne of mercy, acknowledging that to us belongs shame and confusion of face; and that we have nothing to plead but the riches of redeeming love, and the boundless grace of God in Christ, for the acceptance either of our persons or services. In our highest attainments, we should come before God with that language of faith, Dan. ix. 18, "We do not present our supplications before thee, for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."

I shall only subjoin, that we must not depend upon our good works for a progressive sanctification, for renewed supplies of grace, and for a continued progress in holiness and comfort, unto God's heavenly kingdom. It is a dangerous mistake, which too many seem to fall into, that we are to depend upon Christ alone for justifying righteousness: but trust to our own active endeavours for inherent righteousness, for victory over our corruptions, and for a conformity of heart and life unto the divine nature and will. Thence it is that although they carry on a dreadful struggle with their corruptions, yet these, notwithstanding all their purposes, promises, vows, watchings, fastings, and other mechanical endeavours, will still prevail, and often throw them into great perplexity and confusion. They are sensible, that God demands their hearts; and that it is impossible, their external reformation should be acceptable, while their hearts are far from him, and led away with divers lusts. With what agony and toil do they therefore worry with their carnal and sensual affections, their impetuous appetites and passions; using various methods of mortification and discipline, to correct the disorders of

their nature; and are still but rolling a stone up hill, which as soon as they let go, is at the bottom again. They are sensible, that God requires sincerity in the inward man in all the duties of religious worship. They therefore groan under the burden of their religious defects, their deadness, formality and wandering thoughts in their approaches to God; condemn every duty they perform, and resolve upon more watchfulness and care for the future: but, alas! the difficulty remains; and they are ready to sink under discouraging apprehensions of their hypocrisy. Indeed, when they gain a little ground, their hopes are revived, and their endeavours animated: but when deadness and corruption prevail, their distress and fear return and prevail with them, their spirits sink, and they are ready to be quite discouraged. How many poor souls are thus labouring in the very fire, making a toilsome and melancholy drudgery of religion, by their legal attempts, and their spirit of bondage?

How far these characters are applicable to yourself, Sir, you can best tell. But this I know by experience, that so far as this legal disposition prevails in us, it will not only darken our way, but check our progress in grace and holiness. If you would make any proficiency in your spiritual course, you ought to remember, that the divine life must be carried on in the soul, in the same manner, and by the same means, that it was begun there. We are not only justified by faith; but we must be sanctified by faith too; and of Christ's fulness must receive, even grace for grace. A cheerful dependence upon Christ for all supplies of grace and strength, is the way to obtain his quickening, comforting, and strengthening influences; to have our hearts enlarged in the service of God; and to run the way of his commandments with delight. We must be dead to the law (to all dependence upon it and hope from it) if we would live unto God. Gal. ii. 19. Though we must discharge the duties of the law, and live in conformity to it: yet these must be done with a gospel spirit, from gospel principles and

motives. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh," and "for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Would you then maintain a truly spiritual life, "The life which you live in the flesh, must, be by the faith of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20. Would you maintain a conversation worthy of your holy profession, "your good conversation," must be "in Christ," 1 Pet. iii. 16. Would you live in the love of God and your neighbour, it is "faith which works by love," Gal. v. 6. Would you get a victory over the world, and all its allurements, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 4. Would you be able to withstand temptations, it is "the shield of faith, by which you will be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked," Eph. vi. 16. Would you walk honestly as in the day," you "must put on the Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. xiii. 13, 14. Would you be strengthened in the service of God against all opposition, you must "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," Eph. vi. 10. Would you have your heart purified from sinful lusts, appetites and passions, you must get "your heart purified by faith," Acts xv. 9. Would you go on in your way rejoicing, you must "rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh," Phil. iii. 3. Would you persevere in the fear and service of God, "you must be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. i. 5. Sir, it is not your business to run without legs, or fly without wings; but to go "forth in the strength of the Lord God." Despair of all sufficiency of your own, to mortify your corruptions, and quicken your soul in the ways of God and godliness. Humbly repair to the Lord Jesus Christ, and cheerfully trust in him for grace and strength, to make a successful progress in your spiritual course. Let not your imperfections or corruptions discourage you; nor let your good purposes or performances be the ground of your hopes: but in a diligent use of gospel means, "commit your way to the Lord, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass." I think,

you cannot so far misunderstand me, as to suppose I am exhorting you to depend on Christ for holiness, in the careless neglect of good works. This would be presumption and not faith. No! I am exhorting you to a realizing impression, that your good works will not sanctify your heart, your affections, or conversation; when you have done all you can, that you must rely wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you may rely confidently upon him, to fulfil the good pleasure of his goodness in your soul: and carry you on from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, till you come to the measure of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. Thus I have shown you negatively in some instances, to what purposes our good works are not necessary, and in what respects they may not be depended upon.

I proceed in the next place to show you affirmatively, in what respects they are of necessity; and to what purposes they must be done by all those who would approve themselves Christians indeed.

1. Then good works are necessary, as being one design of our election, redemption, and effectual vocation. They are one end of our election. "God hath chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love," Eph. i. 4. And it is by a life of good works, and a progress in holiness, that we are to make it evident to ourselves, that we were "chosen unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." And accordingly we are exhorted in this way, "to give diligence to make our calling and election sure," 2 Pet. i. 10. Good works are likewise one end and design of our redemption in Christ. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Tit. ii. 14. And they who are indeed interested in this redemption, who indeed have believed in God our Saviour, who sincerely trust in Christ for needed supplies, will feel the power of his grace, quickening their souls, and exciting in them a zealous carefulness to main-

tain good works: and therefore such have no grounds to conclude upon their interest in Christ, who live careless, sensual lives, in the neglect of duty to God, of righteousness or charity to men; or in a willing indulgence of any way of sinning. I may add, good works are also the end of our vocation. "God hath called us unto holiness," 1 Thess. iv. 7. We are accordingly instructed, that "as he which hath called us is holy, so we should be holy in all manner of conversation," 1 Pet. i. 15. None therefore have any grounds to flatter themselves with the dream of a regenerate state, while they indulge themselves in any sinful way, or live in the neglect of good works; whatever experiences they may pretend to, or whatever joys and comforts they may entertain. "This we are to affirm constantly, that they which believe in God, must be, and will be careful to maintain good works," Tit. iii. 8. Though good works are not the fountain and foundation of a renewed nature, they are always the streams that flow from that fountain, and the superstructure upon that foundation. Though they do not sanctify us, they are the natural and necessary actings and operations of a sanctified heart. An unholy life gives the lie to our profession of a holy state; and infers on us the just denomination of liars. 1 John ii. 4. It defeats all pretensions to effectual calling; it contradicts the very end of conversion; and is contrary to the unalterable tendency of the new nature. Grace is given for exercise; and is a vital, operative principle. We shall therefore receive the grace of God in vain, if the principle be not exerted in agreeable practice.

2. Good works are necessary, as they belong to the way leading to heaven, and are preparative for the possession of it. They are so necessary in this respect, that it is certain, that no man who has the opportunity after his conversion for a life of good works, will ever get to heaven in any other way. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. We must not only "enter in at the strait gate," but walk in "the narrow way which leadeth

unto life." Christ is the supreme and comprehensive way: but holiness is a subordinate and subservient way. Neither do any walk in Christ, unless they walk before him in true holiness. They who would hope for heaven hereafter, must have it begun in their souls here. Their hearts must be in some measure conformed to the Divine nature and will, that they may be attempered and qualified for the enjoyments and employments of the heavenly world. How could such men find comfort and pleasure in the eternal service of God, to whom his service here is ungrateful and burdensome? None therefore are in the way to heaven, but they who by a life of holiness are preparing, and labouring after a "meetness to be a partaker of an inheritance among the saints in light." There is nothing more certain, than that a life of sin and impiety, sloth and irreligion, leads down to the chambers of death: and it is therefore equally certain, that Christ Jesus leads none to heaven in that road. It is true, indeed, that we may be in the way to heaven, while compassed with many infirmities, while groaning under much deadness and formality in duty, while liable to many involuntary surprises into sin, while greatly defective in our religious attainments, and in our conduct both towards God and man. But they have not this hope, who live in the wilful neglect of known duty, who deliberately indulge themselves in known ways of sinning against God. Who roll any iniquity as a sweet morsel under their tongue; or live in an allowed violation of the laws of righteousness, charity, and peace towards men. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And if any man have the Spirit of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit in him will be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:" and "they who live in the Spirit, will also walk in the Spirit." We must "by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality," if we would inherit eternal life.

3. Good works are necessary as acts of obedience to God's commands; and a just acknowledgment of

his dominion over us. By right of creation, the blessed God has an unalienable claim to homage and honour from us. By the immutable laws of our very being and nature, as his creatures and dependents, we are under bonds of subjection and obedience to him. The grace of the gospel does not cancel those natural obligations, or lessen the force of them. Christ came not to destroy the law: nor do we make void the law through faith, but rather establish it. The great God has not laid down his right of sovereignty and dominion over us, by affording us a medium of reconciliation to himself, and a title to eternal happiness: but rather has that way laid us under further and stronger obligations to obedience. Our freedom from the curse and severe demands of the moral law, as a covenant of life, is so far from freeing us of our duty towards it as a rule of practice, or excusing us from a careful observance of its precepts, that the glorious liberty we are made partakers of, is given us for this very end, "that we may serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives." Though the moral law be presented to us now under some different respects and considerations, from what it was originally, yet the same law remains the rule of obedience, confirmed and enforced, (as such,) by the gospel itself. Whence it follows, that to live a careless, sinful, sensual, worldly life, in the neglect of our duty towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves, is more aggravated rebellion against God, than the same life of impiety would have been under the covenant of works. For now a life of impiety is not only a violation of the precepts of the law, but of the gospel too. And the greater discoveries God has been pleased to make of his glorious perfections, the greater manifestations he has made of his goodness and mercy, the greater are our obligations to obedience, and consequently the greater will be our rebellion, as well as ingratitude, if we continue disobedient. We are therefore to consider, that instead of God's suspending his right of dominion, or abating our obligations to obedience, under the pre-

sent dispensation of the gospel light and love, he requires and expects of us greater watchfulness and care to please and honour him, greater purity and holiness, than under the more legal and imperfect dispensation of Moses. It is undoubtedly true, that those sins and imperfections which were consistent with a state of grace, under the Mosaic dispensation, are not so now under the Christian dispensation; wherein not only we have more light and knowledge, but Christians indeed do obtain more purifying and quickening influences of the Spirit, than they then ordinarily did. There is therefore no room to extenuate our falls into sin, by the examples of the Jewish saints. For though that ministration was glorious, yet "the ministration of the Spirit is more glorious, has a glory that vastly excelleth," 2 Cor. iii. 8, 9, 10. By the "beholding of which glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory;" v. 18. Our enjoying the promises of the gospel lays us under the strongest and most indispensable obligations, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," and to "perfect holiness in the fear of God;" 2 Cor. vii. 1. God forbid that any of us "should continue in sin, that grace may abound;" or turn "the grace of God into lasciviousness." This would determine us to be "ungodly men, who deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude 4. Hence it is, that the disobedience of gospel sinners will bring upon them the greatest and most dreadful damnation. See Heb. x. 29.

4. Good works are necessary, as expressions of our gratitude to God for all his goodness to us, more especially for gospel grace, and most especially for the gracious influences of his blessed Spirit. Impossible it is, for us to have any due conception, how great our debt of gratitude is, to our infinite benefactor. "He has made us, and not we ourselves, his hands have framed and fashioned us round about." He has preserved us through innumerable difficulties and dangers, and all our lives continually followed us

with loving kindness and tender mercies. He has made this mighty globe for our use, with all its amazing variety of furniture, fitted to supply us with whatever is necessary, convenient, comfortable, or delightful. He has distinguished us very much from the greatest part of our fellow creatures, by the abundance of our enjoyments, and the greatness of our privileges. And if all these, and the innumerable other instances of the inexpressible kindness and goodness of God to us, be not sufficient to excite our gratitude, and to attract our affections to such an infinite fountain of benevolence, yet certainly our redemption by Jesus Christ, our enjoyment of gospel ordinances, our advantages to live to God in this world, and to be eternally happy in the enjoyment of him in the future state of everlasting light and love, are enough to carry our minds beyond admiration, and even to overwhelm them with astonishment. And what returns does the glorious God expect from us, for all this? No more, than the love and obedience of our thankful hearts and fruitful lives: No more, than to live to him, and delight in him, gratefully to receive, and faithfully to improve the benefits he is bestowing upon us. He requires nothing of us, but that we should be ready to every good work, out of love and gratitude to God. How unworthy shall we therefore be for ever, of one smile of his countenance, or the least favour and kindness, if the infinite goodness of God, his infinite love and compassion in Christ, do not constrain us, to renounce our lusts and idols, and make it our delightful endeavour to seek and serve him! He may well expostulate with such, as with his ancient people, "Will ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise!" He justly may, and certainly will exclude from the glory and blessedness of his eternal praises, those who have not hearts to love him, and serve him, and praise him here. They who have ever tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have any becoming sense of their obligations to him, will study what they shall render to the Lord for all his benefits; they will de-

light in endeavours to glorify him; they will be solicitously careful of a constant conformity to his will, and take a peculiar pleasure and pains in following after holiness.

5. As I have distinctly considered in my last, good works are necessary evidences of the truth and sincerity of our faith in Christ. And I need only add here, It is a faithful saying, which cannot be too much insisted upon, that they who pretend to have believed in God, must be careful to maintain good works. All their profession of religion, all their imaginary faith in Christ, all their peace and joy, all their appearance in the cause of truth, all their seeming zeal for the glory of God, the interest of religion, and the conversion and salvation of sinners, or whatever else they may suppose evidences of their renewed state, will prove but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, without a real life of good works. Such are greatly to be pitied, who can have peace from any supposed experiences of grace, while they walk in the imaginations of their own hearts. The Lord Jesus Christ will own none as belonging to him, but those who are a peculiar people, in some measure, zealous of good works. He will in the day of accounts declare to all others, that he never knew them, and sentence them to depart from him, as workers of iniquity. But to this I have spoken particularly already, and therefore shall only subjoin here, that obedience is the genuine exercise, and therefore a necessary evidence of faith unfeigned. What are good works, but works of faith; or faith in operation, exciting other graces to their proper action and exercise? Without we exemplify the "obedience of faith, our faith is vain."

6. Good works are necessary to honour our profession, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and to bring glory to his name. There is nothing infers a greater scandal upon our holy religion, than the unsanctified lives of its professors. This gives occasion to the enemies of the cross of Christ, to blaspheme his name, and speak evil of the way of truth; to call religion itself a cheat; and judge all that make

an appearance of holiness, to be hypocrites and false pretenders. This casts a stumbling block in the way of poor souls, that are beginning to look Zionward; and proves a sad temptation to apostasy. This hardness secures sinners in their sinful courses, and pacifies their consciences, from the thought that such who make pretences to religion, are impious and wicked, as well as they. And what is still worse, "if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners," this brings great dishonour upon our blessed Saviour, as though he were the minister of sin, and has a dreadful tendency to render the means of grace ineffectual, to quench the Spirit, and to drive the very form, as well as power of godliness out of the world. You therefore see the necessity of good works and of a holy life, if we have any value for the interest of Christ's kingdom in the world, any pity to the precious souls of men, any regard to the honour of our blessed Saviour, and the holy religion which we profess, and any desire to escape having the guilt of other men's sins, as well as our own, charged to our account in the day of Christ. If there be any force in these and many other like motives, to prompt us to a life of holiness, we who profess ourselves Christians, should approve ourselves "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth the praises of him, who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light," 1 Pet. ii. 9. Indeed the chief end of man is to glorify God! It is the design of our creation: and it is the design of our redemption. "For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's," 1 Cor. vi. 20. It is the design of our baptism and profession, and of all our experience of the operations of the Spirit of grace, and should be the scope of all our conversation and practice. But how shall we act in correspondence to this design, unless "we care for the things of the Lord, that we may be holy, both in body and spirit, diligently following every good work?" We should study, "whatever we do, to do all to the

glory of God," 1 Cor. x. 31. And to this purpose it is necessary, that we "follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." For "by breaking the law, we dishonour God:" but "herein is he glorified, that we bear much fruit," in an exemplary and useful life.

7. Good works are likewise necessary to our inward peace and comfort. We often see that observation verified, that the "wicked are like a troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;" and that "there is no peace to the wicked." They must have seared consciences indeed, who can have peaceable minds in a progress of sin, and in the neglect of practical godliness. A truly tender conscience will always remonstrate against the indulgence of any sin, either of omission or commission. And how unhappy and uncomfortable a life is it to have our own hearts condemning us, to have a worm gnawing in our breasts, to have conscience applying the terrors of the law, and representing to us our guilt and danger? And yet this cannot be avoided without a life of good works. We cannot have grounds of rejoicing, but from "the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world," 2 Cor. i. 12. As they who live careless and sensual lives, cannot have good evidences of a renewed nature and a safe state, they must necessarily be strangers to that joy and comfort, which flows from the refreshing views of an interest in the covenant of grace, and from the sense of our having the eternal God for our father and friend, compassionately to provide for us here, and to make us eternally happy in the enjoyment of himself. They must likewise be altogether strangers to the unspeakable consolation which flows from a life of communion with God. For this is never obtained without a progress of holiness and good works. If therefore we would have the continual feast of a peaceful conscience; if we would enjoy a comfortable view of the divine favour, and "rejoice in hope of the glory of

God;" if we would find by blessed experience, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace;" if we would obtain the feelings of the blessed Spirit, the earnest of our eternal inheritance, and the foretaste of heavenly happiness, which are enjoyments vastly preferable to all the pleasures of sense, we must "add to our faith virtue," and maintain a life of holiness and good works. For "if we say, that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth," 1 John i. 6. But "then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all God's commandments. Great peace have they which love his law, and nothing shall offend them," Psalms cxix. 6, 165.

I might in several other particulars exemplify to you the necessity of good works: but you will probably acknowledge, that I have said enough already to take off the odium cast upon us, as if we denied the necessity of good works in reference to salvation. I shall therefore only add,

8. Good works are necessary in order to our escaping eternal ruin and misery. I have shown you indeed, and I think it sufficiently proved, that they are not necessary as an atonement for our sins, or as what will appease the wrath of God, and procure us an acquittance from guilt, and a right to be freed from condemnation. But still it is nevertheless certain, that in fact no man will escape the amazing horrors of eternal perdition, who has had opportunity for a religious life, and yet has not been fruitful in good works. This will be the final test, to prove our sincerity towards God: and the eternal judgment will turn upon this evidence. The great judge of the world will quickly appear, and "his reward will be with him, to render unto every man according as his works have been;" and then he will inflict on those "who are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," Rom. ii. 8, 9.

As therefore it is not a small matter to inhabit the dreadful flames of hell, the seat of enraged justice and

burning vengeance, through eternal ages, it cannot but be of the greatest importance to take pains to escape it: to "repent and obey the gospel," to watch and pray, to be active and diligent in all the ways of religion, if so be "we may be accounted worthy to escape," that tremendous misery, and made meet to "stand before the Son of Man." We have no other choice before us, but to be holy here, or unhappy for ever. We must obtain grace from God, and live to him in the exercise of grace, or be separated from his presence for ever, as unmeet objects of his favour. And will not all readily acknowledge, that the former is infinitely to be preferred by every one, who has any just value for his present interest, or for his eternal happiness! How absurd is it in the view of common reason, to "love death," or choose an "evident token of perdition," by being the servants of sin," and "obeying it in the lusts thereof!"

I hope, Sir, I have now answered not only your question, but your expectation. And yet that I may obviate all mistakes, I will endeavour to give you a review of the whole, in some plain, familiar, and practical directions.

If you suppose yourself in an unregenerate state, be found most earnestly diligent in the duties of religion, in the use of the means of grace, and in endeavours of a conformity of life to the will of God, as the way in which God will be inquired of by you, that he may bestow his converting and sanctifying grace upon you. It is true, that God is the sovereign author and donor of his own special favours: but it is also true, that he has given you no encouragement to hope for them, in any other way but that of duty. In this way therefore do you be found; pleading with him for the influences of his Holy Spirit, to draw you to Christ, and to work the work of faith with power in your soul. In this way you may hope in his mercy, not indeed for the sake of your duties, but for the sake of Christ's infinite merits, and the boundless grace and goodness of the Divine nature. But in the neglect of this way of duty, you have not the least

encouragement from the word of God, to hope for the renewing influences of the blessed Spirit; without which you are undone eternally.

However, though even an unregenerate man must thus "strive to enter in at the strait gate," you must yet consider and realize to yourself, that you are utterly incapable of that obedience which the gospel requires, without faith in Christ. Faith is the first act of evangelical obedience, the root of all other graces, and the principle of all such religious duties as God will own and accept. For "without faith it is impossible to please God," Heb. xi. 6. You must "live in the Spirit," before you can "walk in the Spirit." Your first business therefore is, not only earnestly to pray to God, that he would draw you to Christ: but you must endeavour to look to this precious Saviour, as to a sufficient fountain of all grace, trusting your soul in his hands, with encouraging hope of justification by his righteousness, and sanctification by his Spirit. If your faith be sincere, you thereby lay a foundation of spiritual and acceptable obedience: but if not, the best works that you can perform, will be only external, hypocritical, legal, and slavish performances. You must therefore be brought to act faith in Christ for holiness, as the beginning of that salvation which you hope to obtain from him. You are not to look upon a life of holiness and spiritual obedience, as the condition of your salvation, but as the salvation itself, which you hope for, actually begun in your soul; and you have as much warrant from the invitations and promises of the gospel, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for this renovation of your nature by his Spirit, as for the justification of your person by his blood, or for an eternal inheritance with the saints in light. And you must accordingly depend upon him for it, and ask it of him in faith, or never obtain it.

I have proposed these things to you, upon the supposition that you have not satisfying evidences of a converted state. Let us now then suppose the case to be otherwise; and you comfortably persuaded that

you have experienced the happy change. An humble and cheerful dependence upon Christ for new supplies of grace, must still be the source of your persevering obedience. Go on then to trust in him; and you will find that he will not fail your expectations. You will find, that his grace is sufficient for you.

But do not deceive yourself with an imagination of your trusting in Christ, amidst a course of sinful negligence and inactivity. Remember, that good works are of indispensable obligation, and of absolute necessity in the respects before mentioned. You must not only trust in Christ to fulfil his good pleasure in you: but you must live to him, in the exercise of that grace and strength, which you derive from him. In a humble confidence in his sanctifying and quickening influences, you must "take heed to yourself, and keep your soul with all diligence;" you must see to it, that "your heart be right with God;" that you delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man;" that you maintain a strict watch over your affections, as well as conversation; that you neglect no known duty, toward God or man; that you carefully improve your time, and other talents committed to your trust; and endeavour, in a constant course, to maintain a holy, humble, fruitful, thankful life. And remember, that one instance of good works, which God requires of you, is a daily repentance of your sinful defects; and a daily mourning after a further progress in holiness. After an espousal to Christ by faith, this is the way, and the only way of comfort here and happiness hereafter.

That I might set this important point in as clear a light as possible, I have laboured to represent it in different views; and thereby have necessarily run into some repetitions, for which I depend upon your candour. Now, that the Lord would bless my endeavours for your best good, is the prayer of,

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER XVI.

THE NATURE OF THE BELIEVER'S UNION TO CHRIST BRIEFLY EXPLAINED AND THE NECESSITY OF IT ASSERTED AND DEFENDED.

SIR—If you mean no more by your “ignorance of the nature of that union to Christ, which I so often mentioned,” but that you cannot form any adequate idea of this incomprehensible mystery, it is nothing wonderful. There are multitudes of things, whose existence you are most intimately acquainted with, yet of whose special manner of existence you can have no idea. You have no reason therefore to doubt of the believer's union to Christ, because you do not understand the mode of it, any more than you have to doubt of the union of your own soul and body, because you do not understand the mode of it. It is a sufficient confirmation of the truth of this doctrine, that it is revealed in the word of God. It is sufficient for our present imperfect state, to know so much of the nature of this union as God has been pleased to reveal in the blessed Oracles of truth. It is your mistake, to suppose, that “our divines do but occasionally mention this doctrine; but do not pretend to explain it.” Numbers of divines have written well upon the delightful subject: though, I confess, it is too little considered by many of our practical writers (as it ought to be considered) as being the foundation of both our practice and hope. Were it more distinctly considered, more particularly explained, and more frequently insisted upon, improved and applied, both from the pulpit and the press, than it is, it would be a probable means to check the growth of those dangerous errors, which prevail among us; and to give men a deeper sense of the necessity of experimental vital piety, in order to a well grounded hope of the favour of God. You have therefore reason to de-

sire "a just, plain, and familiar view of this doctrine." And I shall endeavour according to your desire, in as plain and easy a manner as I can, to give a brief and distinct answer to your several questions.

Your first question is, "What is the nature of that union to Christ, which the Scriptures speak of; and what are we to understand by it?"

In answer to this question, it may be proper in the first place, to give you a brief view of the various representations of this union, in the word of God; and from thence proceed to take some notice of the special nature of it, as it is represented in the Scriptures.

It is sometimes represented by the strongest expressions that human language can admit, and even compared to the union between God the Father and God the Son. Thus, John xviii. 11, 21, 22, 23. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. That they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

This union is sometimes represented in Scripture by lively metaphors and resemblances.

It is compared to the union of a vine and its branches. Thus, John xv. 4, 5: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, and ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

It is compared to the union of our meat and drink with our bodies. Thus, John vi. 56, 57: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

It is frequently compared to the union of the body to the head. Thus, Eph. iv. 15, 16: "But speaking

the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying itself in love."

It is sometimes compared to the conjugal union. Thus, Eph. v. 23, 30: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the saviour of the body. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones." Rom. vii. 4: "Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

It is likewise compared to the union of a building, whereof Christ is considered as the foundation or chief corner stone. Thus, 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6: "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion, a chief corner stone, elect, precious."

I might add, that this union is sometimes represented in Scripture by an identity or sameness of spirit. Thus, 1 Cor. vi. 17: "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

It is sometimes represented by an identity of body. Thus, 1 Cor. xii. 12, 27: "For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of that body being many, are one body; so also is Christ. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

It is also represented by an identity of interest. Matt. xxv. 40. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Christ and believers have one common Father. John xx. 17. "I

ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." They have one common inheritance. Rom. viii. 17. "Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." And they have one common place of eternal residence. John xiv. 3. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

From this brief and general view of the scriptural representations of our union with Christ, I now proceed to consider, somewhat distinctly, what is the special nature of this union, and what we are to understand by it. Now it may not be improper, in the first place, to consider it negatively, and say what it is not, before I enter upon an affirmative explication and illustration of it.

I need not take any pains to convince you, that this union is not an essential or personal union. The union of the Trinity in the Godhead, is essential: the union of the divine and human nature in Christ is personal. But it were blasphemy, to suppose either of these kinds of union, in the case before us. Should we suppose the former, we should attribute divine perfection to ourselves. Should we suppose the latter, we should make ourselves joint-mediators of the covenant, with the glorious Redeemer. Either of which is too horribly profane, to find any admission into our minds. Though Christ and believers are one, as he and the Father are one, this is to be understood with respect to the resemblance there is, in point of reality and nearness of union; and not with respect to the nature and kind of it.

It is likewise unnecessary to endeavour to prove to you, that this union is not of the same kind with those natural and local unions, with which we are acquainted. Though the word UNION is apt to carry away our minds into an imagination of a contact, mixture, inhesion, or the like, we are to remember, that these are too gross and low conceptions of this astonishing mystery, to be entertained by us. We are to remember, that our union is to him who is by

the right hand of God exalted, and who is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

These things need not be insisted upon; the mere proposing of them compels your assent. But it seems there is another thing requires more particular consideration, which is, that the union I am treating of, is not to be considered as a mere civil or political union. It is through want of a right view of this gospel mystery, that you tell me, "You can understand no more by our being united to Christ, than a near relation to him as our Lord and Saviour;" and "if there be any more implied in it, than a relative and political union (you confess) you have no idea of it." I hope Sir, your internal experience has in this case gone beyond your speculation: your state, I think, must otherwise be most dangerous and miserable. If you will view the scriptural representations which I have already given of this matter, you must see, that there is much more than a mere relative, civil, or political union, implied in these emphatical expressions, of being one with Christ, as he is one with the Father; of abiding in him and he in us; of being united as the vine and the branches; of being so joined to the Lord, as to be one Spirit with him; of being the body of Christ, and members in particular; with others of the like nature. It is impossible to give any rational construction of these and the like passages of Scripture, upon the supposition of a mere political union. And you must acknowledge, that a political or relative union is not peculiar to believers. "All power is given to Christ both in heaven and earth." Angels, men, and devils are in this sense united under the kingdom and government of the Lord Jesus Christ; and shall accordingly be all accountable to him in the day of retribution. This therefore cannot be the meaning of the union in question.

I shall now proceed to consider affirmatively, (according to the light given us in the Scripture) what the nature of this union is. And here,

1. It must be considered as a mystical union. This

(says the Apostle) is a great mystery, Eph. v. 32. So great, as to admit of no clear and full illustration, at least in this imperfect state. From whence we have a further evidence, that it is not a mere relative and political union, in which there is nothing mysterious, nothing but what is familiar and easy enough to be understood; while the union under consideration, is altogether incomprehensible. The reality and certainty of this union is clearly revealed, and the blessed effects of it are experienced by all the children of God; but the manner of it (like the divine person, God incarnate, to whom we are united) is not only above our knowledge, but above our search and inquiry. This may perhaps be matter of prejudice in the minds of some, against the doctrine before us, that it is inscrutable and unintelligible: but the same objection lies against the most important articles of our faith and hope; and even against many undoubted certainties in the kingdom of nature as well as of grace. There is the same reason to doubt of the union of the three Persons in the Godhead, of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Son of God, and even the union of our own souls and bodies. We may have reason to believe, what our reason cannot search out or inquire into: And when that is the case, the more mysterious and unsearchable is the modus of any thing, which God hath revealed, the more it should be the subject of our acknowledgment and admiration. Thus in the present case, because this is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes; therefore should we adore the wonderful dispensation of grace, and rejoice and be glad in it.

2. I must also observe to you, that this is a spiritual union. Such an union whereby being joined to the Lord we are one Spirit with him, 1 Cor. vi. 17, by which we may understand, that believers partake of the same divine Spirit, and the same divine influences and operations, with our blessed Mediator and Master: This difference being excepted, that we have only lower degrees of the divine communications; "but to him God giveth not the Spirit by measure."

We partake of the rays; he of the full sun of divine light and grace; and in him are all the treasures of grace, as in the repository or fountain from whence we derive those supplies which we are partakers of. The blessed Spirit, who is in Christ an infinite fountain of all grace, communicates some emanations of the same grace to us, whereby we are (though in a low and imperfect degree) conformed to the divine will, made partakers of the divine nature, have Christ dwelling in us, and we in him. I confess, I am afraid, in this mysterious depth of divine wisdom and grace, of "darkening counsel by words without knowledge." I shall therefore not adventure to inquire into the modality of this unity of Spirit in Christ and believers; but only endeavour to consider it in a Scriptural and practical light: in such a light, as it is necessary it should be considered and understood, by all that would obtain a sure foundation of hope, and needed supplies of grace and strength, for a holy and spiritual walk with God.

Let it then be first observed, that by this union believers have all needful supplies of grace treasured up for them in Christ. In which respect, it is said, "All things are theirs: for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 1 Cor. iii. 21, 23. "In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: and we are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power," Col. ii. 3, 10. By which means believers are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. i. 3. And Christ is "made of God unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30. By these and other like texts of Scripture, believers have matter of great consolation, even in their sharpest temptations and lowest frames; in that how dead soever their affections may be, and how dark soever their circumstances may appear, they have an inexhaustible fountain of grace treasured up for them in Christ; and by virtue of their union to him, they have an interest in his person, they have an interest in his graces, and are secure of all necessary communications of

grace as he shall see their case requires. The believer's refuge, therefore, in all his trials, in all his prevailing darkness, deadness, temptation, and imperfection, is to act faith in Christ, for grace to help in time of need. There is a sufficient stock laid up for him in the hands of Christ; and if he will reach forth the hand of the soul, and by a believing view of the fulness of Christ be ready to receive, he shall surely find the "grace of Christ sufficient for him," and "the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness." If he will "eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood," that is, if he will exercise a lively faith in him, he shall by virtue of this communication of the Spirit of grace, "dwell in Christ and Christ in him," John vi. 56.

Hence also believers, by being joined to the Lord, are one Spirit with him in another respect. They "have the same mind in them, that is in Christ Jesus." They have the interest of the Redemer's kingdom at heart, as their own interest. They have their wills in some measure subjected to the will of Christ. They who abide in him, do carefully endeavour to walk even as he walked, to make him their exemplar, in the regulation of their affections, appetites, passions, and of their whole conduct and conversation; in their aims, desires, delights, love to, and zeal for the service of God; in love to the brethren, and in their diligence and activity in doing the work he has appointed them, while it is day. "He that thus keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in Christ and Christ in him: and hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the spirit which he hath given us," 1 John iii. 24. But, "he that hath not thus the spirit of Christ, is none of his," Rom. vii. 9.

And hence believers shall finally be perfected when they come to receive the full communications of his grace, in the future world. It is by their union to Christ, and supplies derived from the fulness which is in him, that glorified saints attain to the perfection of knowledge and grace. By this are they perfectly delivered from all remainders of sin and corruption: by this are all the powers and faculties of their souls

brought into a glorious conformity unto Christ himself, that "they shall be like him, when they see him as he is:" and by this they are completely qualified for the ravishing joys of the heavenly state, and the eternal praises of redeeming love. "In the dispensation of the fulness of times, God will gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth, even in him. That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ," Eph. i. 10, 12. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me," John xvii. 23, 24.

Here, Sir, it will be proper to make a pause; and to consider this with a special application to your own state. It is proper to consider where it is that you are looking for supplies of grace; to your own good purposes and endeavours, to your prayers, meditations, good affections, and resolutions; or to this inexhaustible treasury of grace, that there is in Christ, to be obtained by the renewed exercise of faith in him. It is proper to consider, whether you are indeed joined to the Lord; and have one Spirit with him. Whether you have a sensible experience of the blessed operations of the Holy Spirit, divorcing you from your idols, mortifying your corrupt appetites and passions, quickening your graces, and inflaming your affections to God and godliness; at least, whether you are groaning under the burden of your imperfections; and groaning after the quickening influence of the divine Spirit in your soul, to bring and keep you nearer to God; and whether the Spirit does thus help your infirmities, with groanings that cannot be uttered. It is proper to consider, whether you have the evidence of your union to Christ, by your being a partaker of the Divine nature, by your steady desire and endeavour of conformity and subjection to the divine will, by your having the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom at heart, and by keeping your eye upon his glorious example, that you may follow his steps; and

whether you are still looking to him by faith, for his quickening influences, and for an interest in his intercession, whensoever you find yourself come short in these attainments. You will pardon this digression, when you consider by what motive it is occasioned. You will remember, that I am not explaining this fundamental principle of Christianity, as a mere matter of speculation, or to entertain your curiosity; but that you may know what is the hope of your calling, what the foundation of your confidence; and where the returns are to be made for all your experience of grace and life. But it is time I should proceed to some further description of the nature of that union to Christ under consideration. I shall but briefly hint a few particulars more.

3. Then there is such an union between Christ and believers, whereby the whole church becomes the body of Christ; and all true believers are members in particular. "He is given to be head over all things to his church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," Eph. i. 22, 23. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," 1 Cor. xiii. 27. "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," Ephes. iii. 15. The whole church, whether militant or triumphant, are by their union to Christ one church, one family, and one body, whereof Christ himself is the head. The family in heaven indeed, as adult children, have their inheritance in possession, while the family on earth as minors in their non-age, have only necessary supplies for their support, and comfort and growth, until they come unto "a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." But then the fulness of the glory in the one, and the gradual progress of grace in the other, are both the product of their union to Christ. And as the whole church is the body of Christ, so each particular believer is a member of that body; and hath both his body and soul united unto the person of Christ; by an union that can never be dissolved, by an union that will not only continue with the soul, in its separate and interme-

diate state; but will also continue with the body, in its state of dissolution, whereby its glorious resurrection and final renovation will be secured; and "them which sleep IN Jesus, will God bring with him."

4. This union is such, that Christ and believers have one common interest. I have hinted at this before, but it requires some more particular illustration. It should then be observed, that in the great design of reconciling sinners to God, and preparing a chosen number for eternal glory, Christ and the church were one mystical person: so one, that what he did was imputed to them, as if done by them; and what they deserved was imputed to him, as if he had been personally obnoxious. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS;" Jer. xxiii. 6. And the church, by virtue of this union to Christ, is considered as the same person, and has the same characters ascribed to her. "This is the name wherewith SHE shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness;" Jer. xxxiii. 16. This identity of person was founded on the eternal covenant of redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ was foreordained to the office and work of a Saviour and Mediator, before the foundation of the world; 1 Pet. i. 29. And "we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world; and predestinated unto the adoption of children by him;" and thus "we become accepted in the beloved;" Eph. i. 4, 5, 6. And as he was foreordained to the work and office of a Redeemer, so likewise to all that grace, righteousness, strength, and glory required thereunto; not only to that which was peculiar to himself, but to that also, which was needful to be communicated to the church, and to all that should ever believe on him, in their state of probation here, or perfection hereafter. And on the other hand, as believers were chosen in him, so they were chosen to be partakers with him, in that common stock or depositum committed to him, for both their present and eternal interest and happiness. Thus the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes our righteousness,

his sufferings our atonement; and he is a fountain opened for all supplies of grace, upon our union to him by faith. "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree;" 1 Pet. ii. 24. And "we are complete in him;" Col. ii. 10. Thus likewise, the believer's sufferings in his cause, are the sufferings of Christ; Col. i. 24. "In all their afflictions he is afflicted;" Isa. lxiii. 9. The believer's graces are the graces of Christ, owned by and derived from him; and "of his fulness they all receive, and grace for grace;" John i. 16. And the believer's good "conversation is in Christ;" 1 Pet. iii. 16. In fine, the whole interest of the church is the interest of Christ, and is by him taken care of, and provided for as his own: and the whole interest of Christ is the interest of the church; and the believer is most nearly affected with the interest of Christ's kingdom, as what most nearly concerns him. Thus is the church united to Christ; and thus has he "graven her upon the palms of his hands, and her walls are continually before him."

5. The union between Christ and believers is such as that they have thereby one common relation. He is the everlasting Father, their head, their husband, their brother, their friend, theirs by all relations of nearest intimacy. His Father is their Father, his brethren are their brethren, and his God is their God. "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," John xx. 17. Thus are believers distinguished from the rest of the world, dignified and exalted above all those who are esteemed great and honourable among men, by their near relation to him who is higher than the highest, and is the Prince of the kings of the earth.

6. The union between Christ and believers is such, that they have thereby one common inheritance. They being "children, are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," Rom. viii. 17. "And if I go, (says the blessed Saviour,) and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also," John xiv. 3. There

is nothing can break the band of union between Christ and believers: the union will not be dissolved, but perfected by death. "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," Rom. viii. 38, 39. This is the hope of their calling. This the inheritance of the saints, that when they have a little longer struggled with the temptations and imperfections, distresses and calamities, of this militant state, they shall arrive safe at the end of their desires and hopes, and be ever with the Lord. They shall be like to Christ, when they see him as he is. They shall dwell in his presence, and partake of the joys at his right hand for evermore.

Thus I have given you a very brief and general view of the believer's union to Christ, according to the representation of it in the Scriptures, and am now prepared to answer your second question?

You next inquire, "How this union is effected and accomplished?"

To this it is a sufficient answer, that this union is accomplished by the omnipotent agency of the Spirit of God, as the author and efficient: and by faith, as the bond of union. Vain, therefore, are their pretences, and they have but a delusive and destructive hope, who ascribe all the change in conversion, to mere moral suasion, or to the exercise of our own natural powers or endeavours only. It is beyond the power of men or means, to persuade a sinner into this strict and intimate union with Christ. It infinitely exceeds the capacity of any such sinful worms as we are, to make ourselves one with the Lord Jesus Christ, "as the Father and he are one." No! "We dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit," 1 John iv. 13. And "by one spirit we are all baptized into one body," 1 Cor. xii. 13. Vain likewise is the pretence of an eternal union to Christ, or of an union to him, from the time of his passion, or of his finishing the work of our redemption. For it

is to them, and none but them, "who receive him and believe on his name, that he gives power to become the sons of God," John i. 12. And "Christ dwells in our hearts by faith," Eph. iii. 17. The blessed Spirit shining with a ray of divine light into the soul of a sinner, thereby discovers to him his own misery and impotence; and shows him the fulness and excellency of Christ, the freeness of the gospel-offer, the faithfulness of the promises, and the readiness of this precious Saviour to accept and save such guilty perishing sinners as he is. This divine light enkindles the sinner's desires after Christ, represents him worthy to be chosen and trusted; by which his will is brought into a hearty compliance with the gospel offer. Thus this admirable union is accomplished. Thus by the omnipotent power of divine grace, the sinner is drawn to Christ and made one with him, in a way most agreeable and delightful to himself, with the concurring act of his own will; and with his full and free consent and choice.

I now proceed unto your third question; "Of what necessity or usefulness unto practical godliness, is it, that we should have a just acquaintance with this doctrine of our union to Jesus Christ?"

In answer to this, I must observe, that I have already somewhat anticipated this inquiry. You may perceive by what has been already said upon this subject, that it is not a point of mere unnecessary speculation, of no use or influence upon practical and vital religion. And I would now endeavour to show you, that this is the foundation of all practical godliness; and that it is from ignorance of, or inattention to this foundation of our practice and hope, that so many dangerous errors have obtained in the Christian Church. This may be represented to you in the first place, by considering this matter with a special application to the subject, upon which I have lately written so particularly and largely to you.

I am first then to show you, that our justification before God does necessarily and immediately depend upon our vital union to Jesus Christ. It must be con-

fessed by all men, who know any thing of human nature, and have any belief of a divine revelation, that we have all sinned; and that we are all become guilty before God. And which way shall guilty sinners be reconciled to God? This, Sir, is the most important concern in the world. Consider the question with an attention worthy of its infinite consequence. Can you quiet your conscience, with hopes of appeasing the divine justice by your reformations, good endeavours, or duties? Alas! they are all so defective and sinful, that the iniquity of your holy things will greatly increase the score; and add to the weight of your guilt. Will you flatter your hopes, from the mercy and goodness of the divine nature? But what claim can you have to mercy, when open to the inexorable demands of justice? Do you expect acceptance with God upon Christ's account? This is indeed a sure foundation of hope, for all who are interested in Christ and united to him. But what pretence can you make to the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of his redemption, if you have no interest in him; or in any of his saving benefits? If you have an interest in him, you are united to him, as I have already demonstrated. If you have not an interest in him, you have no plea to make for justification and acceptance with God upon his account. Our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed made a sufficient atonement for sin. He has wrought out a perfect righteousness for sinners, whereby they may be acquitted from guilt, reconciled to God, and freely justified in his sight. But what is this to impenitent unbelievers, who have never been drawn to Christ by the powerful influences of his Holy Spirit, who have never received him by faith, so have never belonged to him; and therefore could never have any part in either his active or passive obedience. "If a man abide not in me (says our blessed Lord) he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned," John xv. 6. This therefore is a sufficient evidence of the truth of what I have before written to you upon the doctrine of jus-

tification. We cannot be justified by works. We cannot be justified by a conformity to any imaginary law of grace without a vital union to Christ by faith. For "he that believeth not is condemned already," John iii. 18. And "he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life," 1 John v. 12. But then on the other hand, being united to his person, we are united to his benefits; and partake with him in all the merits of his obedience, in his righteousness, victories, graces, and inheritance. This then shows you, what necessity there is of your acquaintance with the doctrine of our union to Christ. There is a necessity of it, that you may know what is the foundation of your eternal hope, how you may find acceptance with God, and how "you may know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; and be made conformable to his death."

Moreover, our sanctification does likewise immediately and necessarily depend upon a vital union unto the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures do indeed exhort us "to be holy, as our Father which is in heaven is holy;" and to that end exhort us, to "watch and pray," to "crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts," to "mortify our members which are upon earth;" and to "place our affections upon things that are above;" and to the like exercises of religious duty. But they no where exhort us to attempt these in our own strength; or to expect a renewed nature by any performance of them within our power. To attempt our sanctification merely by our own endeavours, were to press oil out of a flint. For "in the Lord, shall men say, we have righteousness and strength; his grace, and that only 'is sufficient for us,' and without him we can do nothing." I have shown you, that all supplies of grace are treasured up in Christ for us; and that we are to receive them all out of his fulness. How then can we partake of them, whilst estranged and disunited from him? Can a branch cut off from the vine, bring forth fruit? "No more can we, except we abide in him," John xv. 4. Can the branches of an olive tree flourish without the root? Sure we can-

not "bear the root; but the root must bear us;" and we must therefore "be grafted in, if we would partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree," Rom. xi. 17. Can we live and act, when separated from our life? "Christ is our life," Col. iii. 4. And until he quicken us, "we are dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1. In a word, our carnal minds are enmity to God, we are altogether as an unclean thing: And when love to God can be the production of enmity itself; and purity and holiness, of nothing but defilement and uncleanness, then, but not till then, can we be holy without an union to Jesus Christ. If therefore, you would obtain that "holiness without which no man can see the Lord," you must with active diligence repair to him for it. You must by faith depend upon him, as the fountain of all grace. You must receive all from him; and give him the glory of all you receive.

Our communion with God does likewise wholly depend upon our union to Jesus Christ. I have already shown you, that all sanctifying grace is derived from our union to Jesus Christ; and I think, I need not use arguments to prove, that we cannot exercise grace before we have it. All quickening, comforting, strengthening grace must flow from the same source, as converting and sanctifying grace. Would you be humbled and abased before God, you must learn "of Christ to be meek and lowly of heart," Mat. vi. 29. Would you have your affections placed upon things above, you must remember, that "you are dead, and that your life is hid with Christ in God," Col. iii. 2, 3. Would you have enlargement of soul, and cheerful hope in God's mercy, when you approach his presence, "Christ in you is the hope of glory," Col. i. 27. "In whom you have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him," Eph. iii. 12. And "be accepted in the beloved," Eph. i. 6. Would you enjoy the earnest of the future inheritance, it must be "upon your believing in him, that you are sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of your inheritance," Eph. i. 13, 14. Would you have joy

and peace in believing, you must "rejoice in Christ Jesus without confidence in the flesh," Phil. iii. 3. Would you have the communications of the divine love to your soul, it must be from Christ's "loving you; and manifesting himself to you," John xiv. 22. To conclude, certain it is, that without union there can be no communion; and it therefore concerns you not only to consider, whether you are indeed united to Christ, and have access to God through faith in him; but also, whether your deadness, formality and distractions in duty, which you so often complain of, are not owing to the want of a cheerful dependence upon Christ, as the head of influences; or else to your vain attempts to quicken your soul by some endeavours of your own, without looking to him for the incomes of his Spirit and grace.

I may add once more, our perseverance in grace here, and our perfection of grace in glory, do necessarily depend upon our union to Christ. As we are accepted in the beloved, so it is by "Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, that we are rooted and grounded in love," Eph. iii. 17. "We stand by faith in him," Rom. xi. 20. It is because Christ "lives, that we live also," John xiv. 19. And if we do "live, it is not we, but Christ liveth in us," Gal. i. 20. We have no source of spiritual life, but in him. No stability in the exercises of spiritual life, but by continual supplies of grace from him. It is because "none can pluck us out of Christ's hand," that we shall "have eternal life; and never perish," John x. 28. Here, and here only, is the believer's stability and security, he belongs to Christ, is a "member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" and will the blessed Saviour neglect his own body? Will he have any of his members to perish? Is it in the power of hell or earth, of sin or Satan, to prevail against him? Or can he who is the same "yesterday, to-day and for ever," change the purposes of love and eternal kindness towards those whom he has once loved and united to himself? And are not all the promises of the believer's perseverance, yea and amen

in Christ, with whom the believer is one mystical and spiritual person? Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than the blessed Redeemer shall forget or neglect the members of his body and the objects of his love: they were eternally chosen in him, they are his by covenant, they are united to him by faith, their interest is his, and he is gone to take possession of their inheritance, that where he is they may be also. Thus are we kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation. But how could we stand one day or hour against the efforts of our own corruptions, the craft, malice, and power of Satan's temptations, and the snares and entanglements of a wicked world; if we were not founded upon this rock?

And now, Sir, you are to judge whether there be not more than a doctrinal acquaintance with our union to Christ necessary for us, if we would either be justified in the sight of God; obtain that holiness without which no man can see the Lord, live near to God; or "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

From what has been said, you cannot but see that it should be your great inquiry, how this union may be obtained, if you have not the evidence of it, or how it should be evidenced to yourself, if you are in doubt about it.

If you have no evidence of your union to Christ, it concerns you to realize your natural enmity of heart to God, deeply to affect your soul with a sense of the dreadful misery of a Christless state, and to lament before God the pollution of your nature, the hardness of your heart, the guilt of your sins, and the amazing destruction and perdition unto which you are thereby exposed. It concerns you, (as I have often advised you,) to rely on mercy, to come to the footstool of sovereign grace, self-loathing and self-condemning, pleading with importunate ardour, for the powerful influences of the blessed Spirit to draw and unite you to Christ. It concerns you, to be careful and diligent in your attendance upon all the duties of religious worship; and to be "steadfast and immoveable, al-

ways abounding in the work of the Lord, if you would not have your labour in vain in the Lord." It concerns you, though watchful, active, and diligent, yet utterly to despair of all help in yourself, and to maintain a lively impression, that all the progress of spiritual life must flow from your union to Jesus Christ; and that you must therefore rely upon him only, to do all in you and for you. It likewise concerns you, to look unto Jesus Christ, not only as a sufficient but a compassionate Saviour, willing to receive you to mercy in your present state, how bad soever; and therefore to endeavour a cheerful and immediate compliance with the gospel offer, without waiting for moral qualifications to recommend you to the Redeemer's acceptance; and let Christ Jesus be your steady hope and confidence, whatever darkness, difficulties, trials, or temptations, you may meet withal in your way.

If you are in doubt about your state, and in an uncomfortable suspense whether you are united to Christ or not; do not rest satisfied in such a case, wherein your eternal ALL is at stake, and in precarious uncertainty. But labour to resolve your doubts, by the lively exercise of faith; and by a humble, cheerful confidence and delight in the blessed Saviour. Then may you know that "he dwells in your heart by faith," when you are "rooted and grounded in love;" Eph. iii. 17. Labour to evidence your union to Christ, by having your "heart purified by faith;" and your affections spiritual and heavenly. Then may you know that "you are risen with Christ, when you seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God;" and when you "place your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth;" Col. iii. 1, 2. Labour to clear up this doubt, by the exercise of all the several graces of the Spirit of life. If you live in the exercise of faith, repentance, love to God, humility, hope in Christ, desire after, and delight in him; if you bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

meekness, temperance, "hereby may you know that he abideth in you, by the Spirit which he hath given you;" 1 John iii. 24. Labour likewise to clear up this difficulty, not only by the life, but by the growth of grace. If you grow more humble, self-abasing, and self-condemning: if you grow more penitent, and more passionately groan under the burden of, and mourn after deliverance from all our sins: if your love to God increases, and you take more delight in him and in his ways; or at least long after a life of nearer communion with him, with more ardent desire: if you are more spiritual in your thoughts, meditations, and affections; more heavenly in your conversation; and more careful of your respective duties both to God and man; then may you know that "Christ abideth in you and you in him; in that you bring forth much fruit;" John xv. 5.

If you get satisfying evidences of your union to Christ, adore, admire, and praise the infinite condescension, and the astonishing love of the glorious Redeemer, in taking such dust and ashes, such sin and pollution, into union with himself. Contemplate the amazing transaction of love with admiration; and let "the love of Christ constrain you, to live to the praise of the glory of that grace, by which you become accepted in the Beloved."

That Christ may abide in you and you in him, that you may win Christ, and be found in him at his appearance and kingdom, and that you may reign with him for ever, is the prayer of,

Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XVII.

ANTINOMIAN ABUSES OF THE DOCTRINE OF BELIEVERS' UNION TO CHRIST, OR PLEAS FROM IT FOR LICENTIOUSNESS AND SECURITY IN SINNING, CONSIDERED AND OBIATED.

SIR,—Allow me the freedom to tell you, that the consequences you draw from the doctrine of our union to Christ, as I have represented it, are without any foundation; and that a just view of the case must convince you, that this doctrine gives no “advantage to licentious and latitudinarian principles,” but the direct contrary. I shall therefore endeavour, according to your desire, to consider the Antinomian principles you are pleased to propose, and see whether they “naturally follow from what I taught in my last.”

“You do not see (you tell me) if the principles I teach are allowed, how the Antinomians can be charged with error, in supposing that the true believer has no cause to repent of his sins, or to entertain any disquietude of mind with respect to them, since he is united to Christ, and all his sins are charged to Christ's account, whereby he has satisfied for them all. Why therefore should the believer be concerned about a debt, which is fully discharged? Justice is satisfied with respect to him; Christ delights in him, as a member of his own body; the Spirit of God dwells in him, notwithstanding of his sins and imperfections. Why may he not therefore be perfectly easy with respect to sin; and look upon it (as a modern Antinomian expresses himself) unworthy of our least regards?” To this I answer,

1. That no man who is practically conformed to this Antinomian principle, can know himself to be a believer; and therefore there can be no foundation for this reasoning, in any person whatsoever. Were your arguing allowed to be just, it can take place with none but those who have infallible evidence of

their union to Christ; which is impossible any man should have, who is not burthened with his sins, who does not hate them, and groan after deliverance from them. Repentance is the genuine and necessary fruit of a true faith. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn," Zech. xii. 10. "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God," Ezek. xvi. 63. "And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that are not good; and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations," Ezek. xxxvi. 28. 31. It is the true believer, and he only, that is capable aright to mourn for sin, truly to hate it, and to groan under the burden of it. Unbelievers may mourn under a sense of their guilt and danger; but this is not to repent of sin. It is the believer only, who sorrows for sin, as sin; who hates all sin; who groans, being burdened, from a sense of his sinfulness; and who cries out with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" What room can there be for those licentious conclusions you speak of? Who is the person that can thus rock his conscience to sleep, under the prevalence of his lusts, from the doctrine of our union to Christ, as I have described it? Must it be supposed to be one who is united to Christ; or one who is not united to Christ? Surely not the former; for how can he be indolent, careless, and secure in the commission of sin, from the doctrine of our union to Christ, who has no evidence of this being his case; nor can have any such evidence, until he is poor in spirit, and thereby qualified for the kingdom of heaven, Matt. v. 3. Until he is one that mourns for his sins, and comes under the promise of comfort; v. 4. And until he is of a contrite and humble spirit; for with such, and only with such, has the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, promised to dwell? Isa. lvii. 15. And I think, I

need not endeavour to prove, that he who is not united to Christ, has no shadow of a plea or pretence to make for carelessness and security in sin, from the doctrine before us. Whence it follows, that all pretences of this kind are without any rational foundation. They only proceed from men's delight in sin, in a life of sensual ease and carnal security: and not at all from the precious truth before us. This sacred truth may indeed be perverted and abused; and so may all the other doctrines of the gospel. 2 Pet. iii. 16. But they who thus turn the grace of God into wantonness, do it at the peril of their souls; and will find but little comfort in it, when they come to make up their accounts. Whatever extravagant pretences men's licentious dispositions may prompt them to, they must in the conclusion find it true, that a life of continued repentance of sin, a life of continued self-abasement and self-judging, and a life of repeated and renewed mourning after pardon of, and victory over our remaining corruptions, is a necessary fruit and evidence of our union to Christ; and belongs to the way which leadeth to life eternal, and in which the saints walk to heaven. If therefore we would not too late be found with a lie in our right hand, we must, with Daniel, pray to the Lord, and make our confession. Dan. ix. 4. We must, with the church, acknowledge ourselves as an unclean thing. Isa. lxiv. 6. We must, with Job, even abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes. Job. xlii. 6. We must, with Ephraim, bemoan ourselves. Jer. xxxi. 18. And with David, have our hearts fail us, on account of the number and aggravations of our sins. Psal. xl. 12. For these are the characters, these the dispositions of those, who are indeed united to Christ.

2. There is greater guilt in the sins of believers than in the sins of others. They have therefore greater cause to be humbled for them, and to lament them before God. They are indeed united to Christ, reconciled to God, freed from all condemnation, and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life: the satisfying evidences of which blessed state must carry

them above any tormenting fears of hell and eternal perdition; and deliver them from that legal repentance, which is the product of desponding thoughts, and a fear of amazement. But is there no other motive to repentance but slavish fears of hell? Does not a true repentance and a genuine sorrow for sin, always flow from an affecting sense of the contrariety of sin to the nature and will of God; from a sense of the ingratitude there is in sin, to a bountiful Benefactor and a compassionate Saviour; and from a sense of the dishonour to God's name, the violation of his law, the abuse of his mercy and love, the affront and provocation to his Holy Spirit, the distance procured between God and us, and the prejudice to others, as well as to our own souls, occasioned by our sinning against God. Now, in all these respects, the sins of believers are more aggravated than the sins of other men. They are distinguished from the most of the world, by renewing and saving grace: and must it not cut them to the heart, to think of their vile ingratitude to such an infinitely kind and beneficent friend; and of their horrid abuse of such unmerited mercy and love! They are united to Christ, washed in his precious blood, and justified by his righteousness; and can they be content to load him with indignities, who has not thought his own blood too dear a ransom for their souls; and who has by the power of his grace plucked them out of the guilt and danger of a perishing world, and made them heirs of the eternal inheritance! They have felt the divine influences and consolations of the blessed Spirit; and have tasted that the Lord is gracious: and shall they by their sins grieve the Spirit of God, provoke him to withdraw, and to withhold his quickening and comforting influences from them! They are the friends and children of God, the sworn subjects of the eternal Majesty; yea, even the spouse of Jesus Christ. And shall such make little account of sin! Is this thy kindness to thy Friend! Is it a light thing for a child to rebel against his compassionate Father; for a subject to take up arms against his Prince; or for a wife to

violate her marriage vows? Certainly the sins of believers are aggravated in proportion to the various obligations they are under: and though they have no cause of desponding and discouraging fears, they have the greatest cause to groan under the burden of their sins, and to groan after deliverance from them. Their union to Christ is so far from extenuating their sins, that it renders them more heinous in the sight of God; and is the strongest reason why they should watch against them, lament and hate them. For this reason, God may justly expostulate with them upon their sinning against him, as in Deut. xxxii. 6. "Do ye thus repulse the Lord, O foolish people and unwise! Is not he thy Father, that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?"

3. It is true of believers, as well as of others, that except they repent they shall surely perish. They are indeed safe in the hands of Christ: and none shall pluck them out of his hands: he will preserve them to his heavenly kingdom. But then he will save them in his own way, in the way of a repeated, renewed exercise of repentance, as well as faith, and in no other way. If any are not in that way, they are not in Christ's way: and have therefore reason to suspect their union to Christ, and to conclude, that they are not in the path of life. Their eternal interest does therefore loudly call upon them, to mourn for their sins, to hate and forsake them, lest they perish eternally. True believers will not indeed finally perish, for whom God justifies, he will also glorify. But then the believer's perseverance is subserved by a fear of caution; nor are there any true believers, but penitent believers: and therefore, whoever are habitually careless in their walk, and impenitent for their sins, will fall short of salvation, whatever pretences to faith in Christ they may make. There is but one way to heaven; and whoever gets there, must attain the glorious salvation, by obtaining assistance, from the powerful influences of divine grace, to keep that way. They must be enabled to go weeping and mourning, with their faces towards Zion. They must offer to

God "the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit." They must "loathe themselves in their own sight, for their iniquities and abominations." Every other road but this, leads down to the chambers of death. Believers, therefore, as well as others, have cause to "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear." They have not cause indeed (as is before observed) of a legal and slavish fear: but they have cause of a jealousy of themselves, lest they miss their way and fall short of their hope. They have cause to "watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation." Mat. xxvi. 41. They have cause "to keep under their body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means they should be cast away," 1 Cor. ix. 37. And to "judge themselves, that so they may not be condemned with the world," 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32. They have cause to "follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. They have cause to "repent and turn themselves from all their transgressions, that their iniquity do not prove their ruin," Ezek. xviii. 30. Believers themselves would "fall into condemnation, and their iniquities be their ruin," should they live careless, sinful, impenitent lives. There is no salvation promised, there is no salvation possible, to any who live such lives. They who are kept by the power of God, are kept through faith (an operative faith, which is accompanied with all the graces of the blessed Spirit) unto the salvation which shall be revealed in the last time, 1 Pet. i. 5. The doctrine of our union to Christ does therefore allow no plea for licentiousness, since Christ is a Prince, as well as a Saviour, to all who are in him, to give them repentance, as well as forgiveness of sins, Acts v. 31. And they who do not live in the exercise of repentance, whatever pretences they may make unto an union to Christ by faith, have not the faith of God's elect, are none of his; nor are they likely ever to partake of his salvation. It therefore concerns such "filthy dreamers," to awake and consider their danger, "who are at ease in Zion, who flatter themselves in their own eyes:

for their iniquities must (first or last) be found hateful.”

You go on to argue; “It appears a contradiction to teach, that the believer is perfectly righteous in the sight of God, by virtue of his union to Christ, and by the imputation of his righteousness; and yet that he is sinful and polluted in God’s sight, at the same time. If he be united to Christ, and interested in his righteousness, he is perfectly righteous: And if he be perfectly righteous, he cannot be sinful; and therefore cannot have cause to repent of his sins, to grieve for them, or seek pardon of them.” In answer to this, I would entreat you to consider,

1. That this is to blend together justification and sanctification, as if they were the same thing. There is not the least shadow of a consequence, that because believers are interested in a perfect righteousness, and are thereby perfectly justified in the sight of God, therefore their sanctification is complete, and they perfectly holy. God may “blot out our transgressions as a cloud, and cast our iniquities into the depths of the sea,” by a gracious pardon, when yet we have cause to acknowledge ourselves “altogether as an unclean thing, and that if he should mark iniquity, we could not stand;” that “if he should contend with us, we could not answer him one of a thousand.” And is that an argument why we should be bold and careless in sinning, because God has been infinitely gracious in pardoning our sins? Is it an argument why we should securely and ungratefully abuse our heavenly Father, because he has laid us under the strongest obligations to love and serve him? But it seems to be the drift of those whom you would personate in this argument, that the believer’s violation of the law of God is no sin, that their not being under the law, but under grace, makes it no ways criminal in them to transgress the law; and their being united to Christ legalizes even the grossest transgressions both of the law and gospel. If this be intended, I must observe to you, that in order to a just deducing of this conclusion, it must be

supposed, that the law of God is wholly vacated, and ceases to be a rule of life; though the apostle assures us, that "the law is not made void by faith, but established." Rom. iii. 31. It must also be supposed, that holiness of life is not required by the gospel of Christ; though the whole design of the gospel is to promote holiness; and we are expressly told, that "the grace of God which brings salvation, teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." Tit. ii. 11, 12. And it must even be supposed, that the nature of the glorious God himself must be changed; that he can look upon sin with approbation; and be pleased with what is most opposite to his own purity and rectitude. It must be supposed that David's murder and adultery, that Peter's denying his Lord, with cursing and swearing, &c. were acceptable to God. What blasphemy, what subversion of the very light and law of nature, are contained in such principles as these!—But you will say, perhaps, that it does not obviate the difficulty, to show the inconsistency and incongruity of these principles, while the question yet remains, whether they do not (how wicked soever) necessarily follow from my doctrine of our union to Christ. To which it is sufficient to answer, that by virtue of a believer's union to Christ, his righteousness is imputed, to answer the demands of the justice and law of God; and thereby to reconcile the believer to God: but not to legalize his sinful actions. It is to procure him a pardon for past sins; and not a license for future transgressions. It is to free him from the guilt and condemning power of sin; but not to change the nature, and destroy the inseparable essential desert of sin. It is true, that the believer is hereby interested in God's covenant mercy and love; and therefore secure of a gradual sanctification, whereof his repentance, hatred of, and sorrow for sin, is a peculiar and principal part. Whence it follows, that we must mourn for our sins, repent of, and hate them, in or-

der to evidence our union to Christ, and interest in him; and not live contentedly in sin, from a vain dream of our union to him. There can be no such thing in nature, as an impenitent true believer; and therefore all conclusions of this kind are groundless and impious.

2. It is a fact most notorious, and admits of no dispute, that believers have not a perfect personal and inherent righteousness in the sight of God; and therefore the doctrine under consideration affords no handle for such licentious pleas, as you have suggested. Christ's righteousness imputed to us, it is true, is perfect; and therefore our justification is perfect too by virtue of our interest in it, so that on that account we have no cause of any disquietude and uneasiness. But what is our own personal righteousness? It is filthy rags, Isa. lxiv. 6. It is loss and dung, Phil. iii. 8. And if we say, we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; and the truth is not in us, 1 John i. 8. Have we no cause therefore to lament the imperfection of our own righteousness, because Christ's righteousness is perfect? Have we no cause to lament the great defects of our sanctification, because our justification is perfect? Have we no matter of uneasiness on account of our non-conformity to the holiness of God, because his vindictive justice is satisfied? Have we no occasion to lament, that we are no more prepared and ripened for heaven, because we hope to escape hell? Have we no reason to lament the dishonour we do to God, because he has in infinite mercy been pleased to pardon our sins, and make us heirs of glory? And in fine, have we no sins to repent of, when "in many things we all offend," and when our offences are peculiarly aggravated, by our distinguishing privileges and obligations? I speak these things upon the supposition that we have an assurance of a justified state; which (as I have before proved) no man ever had, or can have, while he makes light of sinning. It is little likely, that they are true believers who believe in Christ for a pardon only; or that they are true

penitents, whose only motive is the penalty, and not the turpitude of sin, which should make us loathe it, and ourselves for it, though conscious of a pardon.

You further observe, that "the Antinomians argue from the doctrine of our union to Christ, as I have proposed it, that the sins of believers do really belong to Christ, as the sins of the hand really belong to the head, unto which those hands are united. Accordingly he actually bare our sins, suffered for us, and God laid upon him the iniquities of us all. The sins that the believer commits, do therefore truly belong to Christ; and not to the believer himself. They are his sins, not ours. They are already accounted for by him; and consequently are not now to be repented of by us. You suspect, you say, that there are too many among us, which quiet themselves with such dangerous pretences, while going on in sinful practices; that these seem to found their erroneous principles upon the doctrine taught in my last: And you desire me to consider, whether they do not naturally flow from it."

There needs no other answer to this, than to show you, that our sins are to be considered in a threefold respect. They are to be considered with respect to their pollution, or contrariety to the holiness of God; with respect to their innate guilt, or contrariety to the preceptive will of God; and with respect to their desert, or relation to the penalty denounced against them by the justice and law of God. It is in the latter sense only, that our blessed Saviour bare our sins, and was made sin for us; and that our sins are by virtue of our union to Christ imputed to him, and esteemed as his. If this be distinctly considered, the case will appear most plain and evident.

If we consider sin with respect to its blot or pollution, it is the abominable thing which God's soul hates. It is what he "is of purer eyes than to behold;" and what he cannot look on but with abhorrence and detestation. Now it were the greatest blasphemy to suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ did in this sense take our sins upon him, so as to be pol-

luted and defiled with them. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled; (and in this respect,) separate from sinners." He was "a Lamb without spot and without blemish." He was God's "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." In this sense then, sin belongs even to the believer himself, notwithstanding his union to Christ. The pollution of his sin was never transferred to Christ. But every sin he commits, pollutes and defiles his soul, gives him new cause of humiliation and repentance, new cause to fly by faith to the blood of Christ for cleansing; and to the grace of Christ for the sanctifying, renewing influences of his Holy Spirit. Hence we find David complaining, that "his wounds stink and corrupt, because of his foolishness; that his loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in his flesh;" Psalm xxxviii. 5. 7. And hence we likewise find him so humbly and earnestly praying, that he may be "purged with hyssop and made clean, washed and made whiter than the snow;" Psalm li. 7. It is not the privilege of believers, that their sins have less pollution in them than the sins of others; or that they are less displeasing to God: but their privilege is, that they being united to Christ, they have grace given them to apply for cleansing to the fountain set open for sin and uncleanness; and that they have an advocate with the Father, to make intercession for them. It is therefore certain, that all such who do not improve this privilege, who do not repair to the blood of Christ for cleansing, but remain careless and secure in their sins, were never yet united to Christ, never cleansed from their filthiness; but are, notwithstanding all their vain dreams of an union to Christ, liable to meet with that final sentence, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

If we consider sin with respect to its innate guilt, or contrariety to the law of God, the sins of believers, as well as others, are a transgression of God's law, a contempt of his dominion and authority, a repugnancy to his nature and will, a dishonour to his name, and an injury to his kingdom and interest in the world;

in all which respects, they bring guilt upon the souls of the offenders, in proportion to the nature and aggravations of the transgressions. Now I hope, none will be so daringly blasphemous, as to suppose that our sins are in this respect transferred to Christ; that the blessed Saviour of the world has transgressed the law of God, or dishonoured his holy name. "For he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. He always did those things which pleased his heavenly Father." There is no possibility, from the nature of things, that the innate guilt of sin, or the *reatus culpæ*, (as the schools express it,) can be transferred from one person to another. Whoever represents the person of the offender, and is his surety, bears the punishment he deserved; yet the original guilt, the obliquity, the enormity, fault or crime of the offence, lies at the offender's door; and can lie no where else. Whence it follows, that the believer's union to Christ can no way change the nature of his sinful actions, and make that guiltless and innocent, whilst repugnant to the nature and law of God. Though it deliver from the penalty, it cannot remove the native enormity of sin: it still remains, and cannot but remain abominable to God, and worthy of eternal death. Whence God is displeased with believers, when they sin against him. "The thing David had done displeased the Lord;" 1 Sam. xi. 27. "The Lord was angry with Moses;" Deut. iv. 21. "He was very angry with Aaron;" Deut. ix. 20. Though he be a Father, he is a provoked Father, when his children "forsake his law, and walk not in his judgments;" and therefore he "visits their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes;" though "he does not utterly take away his loving kindness from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail;" Psalm lxxxix. 30, 31, 32. Have not believers therefore cause to be deeply affected with their sins, to lament them before God, and penitently to fly to the blood of Christ for pardon, when they render them guilty in the sight of God, are provoking and displeasing to him, and justly deserve his eternal wrath?

But if we proceed in the last place, to consider sin with respect to its law desert, or demerit with regard to the penalty annexed to it, by the justice and law of God, in this sense Christ bare our sins, for us; and took upon him all the iniquities of those, who are interested in and united to him. "He bare our sins in his own body upon the tree:" that is, he bare the punishment due to us for sin, when he offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross. "He was made a curse for us;" and underwent the curse that was due to us. He was made a surety of the better Testament; and so the dreadful debt was transferred, from the principal debtors, to him; and he being a surety for strangers, was made to smart for it. Thus believers partake of the blessedness ascribed to him, "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; and unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." And "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." They are acquitted from the guilt of all their former sins, upon their exercising faith in Christ. "Through faith in his blood, Christ's righteousness is declared for the remission of their sins THAT ARE PAST." Rom. iii. 25. But how will their state of justification be continued, and their sins past pardoned, but in the way of renewed exercise of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God? How will they make any progress in the divine life, but by a renewed flight to the fountain of grace, for new supplies of spiritual life and strength? From whence then can any man fetch arguments, for a careless indifference about his sins, unless he be also careless and indifferent about the favour of God, and his own eternal welfare? "Let no man deceive himself with vain words;" nor dream of "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," while he can sin without care or fear. For, because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Eph. v. 5, 6.

You go on to argue, "If believers are united to Christ, in the manner described, so that his obedience to the law was performed on their behalf, and is be-

come their obedience, it then follows, that they have in Christ fulfilled the law in all respects; and it can therefore have no more demands upon them; and consequently they can be no more chargeable with sin; nor have occasion to be concerned about it. For "where there is no law, there is no transgression."

In answer to this objection, I shall first endeavour to show you, in what respects our blessed Saviour has in our place and stead answered the demands of the law, and thereby delivered the believer from its power and dominion: and then proceed to show, in what respects the law has still a claim, to the believer's observance, notwithstanding his interest in, and union to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our blessed Redeemer has these several ways fulfilled the law for believers: he has fulfilled all the penal demands of it; and hath "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" Gal. iii. 13. We being guilty criminals, the law condemns us to deserved punishment; and the justice of God demands satisfaction. The blessed Saviour has therefore stepped in between us and the avenging justice of God; and has received the flaming sword into his own bowels. Justice is satisfied, and the guilty offender released, upon his acting faith in this blessed surety. The law does moreover require of us a perfect, active obedience, as we are rational and moral agents; and accordingly the original terms of our acceptance with God were, "Do this and live." "The man which doth these things shall live by them. But cursed is every one that continueth not in all things of the law to do them." Now Christ has in this respect, also answered the demands of the law. He has "fulfilled all righteousness;" and taken away the power of the law, as it is the "strength of sin," as it is a "killing letter," and "ministration of death," on the behalf of all that believe in him; that it no longer demands perfect personal obedience as the condition of their acceptance with God. In this respect believers are "not under the law, but under grace;" Rom. vi. 14. Thus Christ has performed a

passive obedience, to answer the penalty of the law, and an active obedience, to fulfil the precept of it, whereby justice is satisfied, God reconciled, and the believer made accepted in the beloved. I may add to this, that there is an infinite merit in this twofold obedience of our blessed Mediator. He being an infinite person, the value of his obedience was proportioned to the glory and dignity of his Divine nature; and he has, therefore, by his fulfilling the law, purchased all grace here and glory hereafter, for all who shall believe in him, and be thereby united to him. Thus then, the believer's "first husband is dead; that they are loosed from the law of their husband: and they are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that they may be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead;" as the apostle argues, Rom. vii. 2. 4.

And now in order to answer the second part of my promise, and show you in what respect the law has still a claim to the believer's observance, I must remind you of what I have formerly observed to you, that the moral law is also to be considered as a rule of living, as the standard or directory of our conduct. As such, it is a copy or transcript of the divine perfections, in particular of his rectitude, justice, and holiness; and therefore is immutable, like the infinitely glorious nature from whence it was derived. It is utterly inconsistent with the infinite perfections of the glorious God, for him to give us a rule of life contrary to what is contained in the moral law. Should the law in this sense be abrogated and buried, the holiness and justice of God must be buried in the ruins of it. Now though our blessed Saviour has in this sense also fulfilled the law, he has fulfilled it to establish it, and not to vacate or destroy it. He has fulfilled it as our exemplar, to give us a pattern of obedience, that we may walk in his steps. He hath fulfilled it to glorify his heavenly Father, that in imitation of him we also may glorify him, by bringing forth much fruit. In this respect then, the law retains its full demand upon us. "Do we then make void the law by

faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the law;" Rom. iii. 31. With respect to the law, as a rule of life, our blessed Saviour assures us, that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than one tittle of the law to fail;" Luke xvi. 17. How vile and abominable therefore are those pretences, that there remains no law to regulate our conduct; that we are under no bonds to obedience; that we have no law to transgress; and therefore no sins to lament! Has the blessed Saviour shed his precious blood to open a door to licentiousness? Has he come to legalize a lawless, careless, worldly, and sensual life? No surely, he came with a quite contrary view; "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" Tit. ii. 14. The law must certainly be either the rule of our conduct, while we live, or the rule of our final trial and condemnation, in the day of Christ. Though our conformity to the law, as a rule of life, be neither an atonement for our sins, nor a purchase of the divine favour, nor the covenant condition of our pardon and acceptance with God; yet it is in the nature of things, and in the doctrine of the gospel, the believer's path-way to eternal life. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;" 1 John ii. 4. "He that saith, he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked;" 1 John ii. 6. "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law;" 1 John iii. 4. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments;" 1 John v. 3. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' ye do well;" James ii. 8.

And now, Sir, it belongs to you to consider, whether the Antinomians have any handle at all for their licentious principles, from the doctrine of our union to Christ, rightly considered and understood. If no man can have any good evidence of his union to Christ, without a repentance and humiliation for his offences against God, then no man can have reason to be easy and secure in sinning, from a pre-

sumption of his union to Christ. If the sins of believers are by virtue of their union to Christ more aggravated, than the sins of other men, they have more cause than others to lament their sins before God, and to be deeply humbled on the account of them. If believers, as well as others, must repent of their sins, or perish, they have then the same cause, which others have to mourn for their sins, and with the greatest detestation to renounce and forsake them. If believers, by means of their union to Christ, though perfectly justified, are yet not perfectly sanctified, but in many things do all offend; if Christ has not taken away the pollution of sin, and personal innate guilt, though he has borne the curse, and taken away the penalty of sin from believers; if the law still remains a rule of obedience to believers; and if their deviation from, or violation of that rule, be of the nature of sin, and brings them under guilt and defilement, they have then cause to be humbled for their sins, to groan under the burthen of them, and ardently to pant after deliverance from their remaining body of death. All the premises are (I think) fully proved; and the consequences cannot therefore be fairly denied. Whence it follows, that whoever quiet their conscience with such vain pretences, expose themselves to the dreadful consequences of a licentious life, divine rejection, and a wrath unto the uttermost.

Thus I have briefly answered your several pleas in favour of the libertines of the present age, by reasonings, which cannot fail of giving you satisfaction, if duly considered. You will be pleased to bear with me, whilst I offer one answer more, which will equally obviate all your objections; and discover them all to be groundless, unreasonable and irreligious.

You will readily allow, if it be impossible from the nature of things, that any one who is truly united to Jesus Christ, should be habitually careless and at ease, indifferent and indolent in a way of sinning, that your objections are then all groundless, and with-

out any rational foundation. And that this is so, may be made abundantly clear and evident.

If a true and sincere love to God, be a necessary consequence of our union to Jesus Christ, and be also utterly inconsistent with those licentious conclusions, which you have mentioned; it will then follow that it is impossible from the nature of things, that any one who is truly united to Jesus Christ, should be careless, easy, and indifferent in a way of sinning. That all who are united to Jesus Christ, do habitually love God, and dwell in the love of God, is expressly asserted by the apostle, 1 John iv. 16. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." And it is also necessary from the very nature of our union to Christ. Being united to Christ, we shall partake of all the graces of the blessed Spirit, which are in Christ, as in a fountain or repository to be communicated unto us; as I have shown you before, that this need not be insisted on.

Let us therefore proceed to consider, whether the love of God be, from the nature of it, compatible or consistent with a carelessness and indifference about sinning against him. Can we love God, and be careless and indifferent about affronting him, and loading him with indignity, at the same time? Can we love God, and yet be content to dishonour his name, violate his laws, and trample his sacred authority and attributes under the feet of our lusts? This cannot be, till love and hatred, friendship and enmity, become the same thing, and not to be distinguished. Our profession of love would hardly be voted sincere by one of our fellow creatures, who should find us easy and indifferent about injuring his interest and reputation, and loading him with contempt and indignity. Does not the love of God especially consist in a desire of, and delight in a conformity to the divine nature and will? That they who love God, dwell in God and God in them; that as he is, so are they in this world, 1 John iv. 16, 17. And can they delight in a conformity to God, and

yet be easy and content when they act most contrary to his will, and in the highest repugnance to all his glorious and infinite perfections? Does not the love of God consist in a hatred of sin, and of whatever is displeasing in his sight? "Ye that love the Lord hate evil," Psal. xcvi. 10. And can there be any thing more inconsistent, than being careless and indifferent about falling into such circumstances as are peculiarly hateful and abhorrent to us? Does not the love of God imply a love to his law; and a delight in complying with his holy will in all things? "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day," Psal. cxix. 97. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man," Rom. vii. 22. And is it consistent, is it not the highest contradiction, to love the law of God, to delight in an observance of it, and a conformity to it, and yet be indifferent and unconcerned about a violation of it, or a non-conformity to it? Does not the love of God, in the nature of it, imply a life of actual obedience? "If ye love me, keep my commandments," John xiv. 15, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love," John xv. 10. And can any thing be more contradictory, than keeping God's commandments, and a careless indifference about breaking them? Is there no gratitude in our love to God, no sense of our obligations to his infinite goodness and compassion; and no sense of our ungrateful abuse of his amazing dispensations of benignity and mercy, in our ransom from hell, by the blood of his Son, in our gospel privileges and advantages, in our participation of his special distinguishing grace, and in our hopes of glory? Is the love of the Father a light thing with us, in choosing us before others from the foundation of the world, in giving his own Son to redeem and save us; and in sending his Holy Spirit to fulfil his good pleasure in our souls, and fit us for heaven? Is the blood of the Saviour a light thing with us, whereby we are ransomed from death and hell, and made heirs of the future glory? Is the sanctifying, comforting and quickening influence of the blessed Spirit a light

thing with us, whereby we are brought near to God, enabled to obtain communion with him, and are qualified for the eternal inheritance? Can we dishonour the Father, trample upon the blood of the Son, and grieve the Holy Spirit, without care, concern or fear; and yet make pretences to an union to Christ, and to the love of God? A vain dream! A most inconsistent and contradictory pretence?

I hope, I have by this time given you sufficient evidence, of the weakness and impiety of those objections, you have alleged in favour of the Antinomians: and would therefore only just add this further remark, That though we should never dishonour our blessed Saviour, by doubting of his sufficiency for us, be our case what it will; though we should never indulge distracting doubts and fears, which will drive us from God, unfit us for duty, and bring dishonour upon that infinite mercy in which we hope; and though we should not presently dig up our foundations, and call all our hopes and experiences into question, because of our disallowed infirmities: Yet if we are united to Christ, we cannot fail of mourning for our sins, and bringing them to the blood of Christ for pardon; we cannot fail to groan being burdened, and to esteem our sins the heaviest burden we have in the world: Though we may and ought to rejoice always, in the riches of redeeming mercy and love, yet we cannot but lament and groan always after deliverance from the remaining body of death.

You proceed to object, that "if my doctrine of the believers' union to Christ be true, you cannot see how we can prove our justification by our sanctification. For according to that scheme, our justification depends wholly upon our union to Christ: but nothing at all upon our sanctification. Is it not then the most rational proceeding, to prove our justification by that on which it depends, rather than by that on which it does not depend; by that which justifies us, rather than by that which does not justify us? How can we prove our justification by that which procures

no freedom from guilt, no title to the favour of God, no claim to eternal salvation?"

In answer to which I must entreat you to consider, whether there be any way so certain to prove the existence of the cause, as by the production of the effect: and whether there be any way whatsoever to evidence that there is a cause, if there be no effect; or if the effect be utterly unknown. How do we know the existence of God; but by his word and works, which are visible effects of his being; and thereby visible evidences and discoveries of his glorious perfections? To apply this to the present case. How can we evidence our union to Christ, and our acceptance with God thereby, but by the actings of grace, and the fruits of righteousness, which are the effects of it? The subject matter to be made evident to our consciences, is this, that we have received the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, so are united to him: and thereby justified in the sight of God. Well; if this be so, "the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20. "We are purifying ourselves, even as he is pure," 1 John iii. 3. If we "have received Christ Jesus the Lord, we also walk in him," Col. ii. 6. And do we, upon an impartial trial, find this so? Do we live in a humble constant dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the fountain of all grace; and the author of our eternal salvation? Do we hate every false way; and crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts? Do we live in the love of God, and carefully and seriously attend every way of known duty towards him? Do we live in the love of our neighbour; and are we conscientious in the performing the duties of every relation and character we sustain? And do we lament before God the imperfections we find in these attainments; and earnestly pray and strive for a further progress in holiness? This, all this, is the necessary fruit of our union to Christ, and of our justification before God thereby: Is not this therefore the proper and only evidence thereof? And is there any thing

without this, which can give us any Scripture evidence of our justification? The Antinomians may pretend to evidence their justification by their joy and comfort: But how came they by their joy and comfort, if they have not previous evidence of their justified state? How can they rejoice in the favour of God, before they have good evidence of their interest in it? Without this, their joy is groundless, and is an evidence of nothing in the present case, but their willingness to deceive themselves. With this, there is no need of joy for that evidence, of what is already confirmed by a much better witness. I therefore conclude, that as the Scripture no where makes, and as the reason and order of things no way allow, joy and comfort to be evidences of our justified state, we should see to it, that we clear up our title to the divine favour, by better evidence. And what other can we possibly find, but what I am now pleading for? This, the Apostle assures us, is the proper evidence, by which the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin," and "whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God." 1 John iii. 9, 10. They therefore, who reject this evidence, would do well to consider, whose children they be, according to this determination of the Apostle.

Upon the whole then, our union to Christ is so far from affording the least plea for licentiousness, that it should be considered as the strongest argument, and the most powerful incentive to a humble, penitent, watchful, holy and heavenly life. Are we united to Christ? Are we "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones?" Surely then we must derive vital influences from such a fountain of spiritual life; and be partakers of his holiness. If we find not this blessed effect in some good degree, in vain are our pretences to an interest in Christ, or union to him. Are we united to Christ, and thereby made partakers of his inestimable benefits? Surely then it concerns us to endeavour to live answerably to so high a dignity, and such an honourable relation. Surely it con-

cerns us to testify our gratitude to such an infinite Benefactor, by living to the praise of the glory of his grace and love. With what abhorrence therefore should such licentious thoughts, as you have suggested, be entertained by all the true disciples of the holy JESUS, as not fit to be so much as once named among saints!

If you can have patience with me, I would briefly offer one argument more, in favour of the doctrine I have insisted upon; which must recommend it as infinitely preferable in point of safety, to either of the contrary extremes. By acting up to these principles of mine, you can be in no danger, as to the future and final event, since you will be built upon Christ Jesus the sure foundation of hope, and by grace derived from him, bring forth those fruits of holiness and righteousness, which must end in eternal life. If the Arminians are right, you also are right. For you have the same sincerity, the same good works, which any of them may have to depend upon for justification and salvation. And it can be no prejudice to your salvation, that you obtained these in a way of dependence upon Christ only, as well as in a way of diligent activity. If the Antinomians are right, you also are right. For you depend only upon Christ for righteousness and strength, as well as they; and it can no ways be injurious to you, that you have insisted upon the necessity of holiness, as the way leading to eternal life. But now, to turn the tables, if they who plead for justification by works, are at last found in a mistake; and instead of building upon Christ Jesus, and the sovereign grace of God in him, are built upon the sand: or if they who disclaim the necessity of holiness, are too late found in a mistake, and sorted among the workers of iniquity, what will become of their hopes! How dreadful will their disappointments be!

That you may be found united to Christ, and may be built up in faith and holiness, with peace and comfort, unto God's heavenly kingdom, is the earnest desire and prayer of,

Sir, Yours, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

PARTICULAR ADVICE AND DIRECTION FOR A CLOSE AND COMFORTABLE WALK WITH GOD.

SIR—You justly observe, that “according to my former letters, a religious life must be a course of serious, earnest, and assiduous application.” And you have therefore good reason to be “solicitous in your inquiry, how you must give diligence to make your calling and election sure; and how you shall find that peace and pleasure I speak of, in your walk with God?” But there is no cause at all of any apprehension, that you “shall weary me out, with the continual burthensome tasks you are imposing upon me.” Indeed, Sir, you can no way gratify me more, than by putting it in my power, to be any way serviceable to your best interest. I sincerely thank you, that you are now giving me the satisfaction of proposing “some directions for a close walk with God.” It is an affair of the utmost consequence to myself, as well as to you: an affair too little considered, even by those of whom we must hope the better things that accompany salvation: and in an affair, in which I have cause with shame to confess, that my remissness has turned to my unspeakable disadvantage. Let us then, as in the presence of God, resolve by the assistance of his Spirit and grace, not only to consult, but to practise such methods of piety as may be likely means to sweeten the fatigues of life, prepare us to encounter the last enemy, and give us a refreshing prospect of our future inheritance.

I shall endeavour (according to your desire) to be plain, familiar and practical, in the directions and counsels which I am now to lay before you.

And here my advice to you is,

1. That you endeavour to obtain and maintain a deep impression of this important truth, that you have

but one business to do; and that every affair and conduct of human life must be calculated for, and subservient to, that one great end of your being. God has made us for himself, to glorify and enjoy him. We are but "pilgrims and strangers upon earth;" and "have here no continuing city." There is another state before us, a state of everlasting residence, a state where we must be unspeakably and inconceivably happy or miserable, to all eternity. Our whole work therefore is, to be "pressing towards the mark for the prize of our high calling;" to be looking to, and preparing for, "another and better country, even an heavenly." This, I say, is our whole business, and therefore not to be enterprised as a secondary concern; not to be crowded into a corner, to make room for more agreeable entertainments; nor to be attended only at our vacant hours, when disencumbered from our worldly business and sensual gratifications. "To fear God and keep his commandments, is the whole of man." You will not so far misunderstand me, as to suppose that I am inculcating the necessity of a recluse life, wholly taken up in devotion, wholly separated from the common business and society of the world. No! I am only recommending to you and to myself, a due sense that we are under obligations in point of duty and interest, to serve God, and thereby to promote our eternal welfare, as well at one time as another, and as much in one business of life as another; as much in our secular affairs, domestic concerns, company, and diversions, as in the special duties of religion and devotion. Though these call for the more solemn engagement of the whole soul in their performance, being immediately directed to God himself, yet the other also are to be done in obedience to God, and with an eye to his glory. So that we have but one business, though we have a great many duties of various kinds belonging to it.

Resolve then, to engage in, and to endeavour to manage every affair of common life, out of duty to God, with a spiritual frame of soul, and with a hearty desire therein to "show yourself approved unto God.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Consider therefore, that you have the same God to deal with, the same omniscient eye to observe and remember your thoughts, views, affections, frames, language, and behaviour, while conversant in the common affairs of life, as when upon your knees in your closet or family, or in the public worship of God's house, and that the same upright views, the same holy desires, the same faith in Christ, are necessary in the one, as in the other, if you would have them acceptable to God. This consideration duly impressed, is the true philosopher's stone, that turns all to gold. This will make every thing serve as a fresh gale, to waft us forward to our desired harbour.

2. Be solemnly careful to attend upon all the ordinances of God, without any reserve. The duties and ordinances of religion belong to the way which God has appointed us to walk in, in order to our salvation: and we must be found in his way, as we would expect his presence and blessing. Herein be, therefore, careful to have no reserve. Let every duty, whether of the closet, the family, or public worship, be diligently and constantly maintained, each in its proper season. Live in the omission of none of them; nor let any ordinary occurrence or excuse divert and put you by, when the proper season and opportunity calls for your attendance on them. You are under the same obligations at all times, as at any time, to perform duty, and to observe all duties as to observe any; for they are all required by the same authority, and to be performed to the same object, and for the same end. He, therefore, who lives in the wilful neglect of any known duty, does thereby turn his back upon God and his salvation. Herein then, the greatest care should be exercised, that we may "prove, (or know and do,) what is the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God," concerning us.

You should also remember, that the duties of religious worship are to be performed to an omniscient and heart-searching God; a God who cannot be de-

ceived, and will not be mocked; a God, who "will be sanctified in all them that come nigh him," and who will highly resent our "flattering him with our lips, and lying to him with our tongues, when our hearts are far from him." You should therefore be careful, by previous meditation; to obtain a lively sense of the infinite perfections of the glorious God to be worshipped, of the nature and importance of the duty to be attended; and to have your affections inflamed and much engaged, when you come into God's immediate presence, in any ordinance of religious worship. You should "keep your heart with all diligence;" watch against, and carefully suppress every roving and wandering thought, endeavour to retain a lively impression of the divine presence; and to keep up a devout spiritual frame of soul, while in the performance of the worship of God. Our transactions with God, in the duties of religious worship, above all things call for the greatest seriousness, watchfulness, and care. And all the pains we can take in this matter, will prove too little; we shall still have cause to lament our great defects; and to mourn after the pardon of the iniquity of our holy things, through the blood of Christ.

3. Remember, that as you rely on mercy, so you have a mercy-seat to repair to; and that you may sow in hope. It is true, that we neither have nor can have any claim to the mercy of God, on account of any thing that we do or are able to do in religion. "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." But yet it is also true, that the infinite mercy of God is more than equal to all our unworthiness, to all our difficulties, and to all our wants. "There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared; and with him is plentiful redemption." And "God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses." You should approach the presence of God, not only with a most abasing sense of your sinfulness, pollution, and unworthiness; and with most earnest im-

portunity for the influences of his Spirit and grace: but also with a humble confidence in the riches of his infinite mercy; and with a supporting hope, that for his own sake, and for his Son's sake, (though not for yours) he will accept, pardon, sanctify, and save you. While you are entertaining hard thoughts of God, giving into desponding frames, and nourishing your distracting, discouraging fears, you are dishonouring God our Saviour, grieving the Holy Spirit, hardening your own heart, and going further and further from mercy. Come therefore before God, self-loathing and self-condemning, yet not with a distrustful dread: but come to him with expectation and dependence. Plead the merits of his Son; plead the riches of his boundless grace; yea, plead your own misery and want before him: hope in his mercy, and wait for his salvation.

4. Review your past life; and be as particular as you can, in your repentance toward God, as also in setting all things right with your neighbour. It is our duty particularly to confess and lament our sins before God; those especially which are peculiarly aggravated, or have been willingly and customarily indulged. It is our duty particularly to make up all breaches with our neighbour, and to repair all injuries we have done him, as far as possible. It is therefore necessary, to call ourselves to account for all the past conduct of our lives, both toward God and man.

Look back then to your early age, and bring the sins of your youth to remembrance. Confess them particularly, lament them before God, and lift up your ardent and frequent petitions to him, that he would not remember the sins of your youth, nor your transgressions. Continue your review to the successive periods of your life. Consider what duties you have omitted, whether personal or relative; what parts of instituted worship you have neglected, or by a careless, hypocritical, and trifling performance, have slighted and profaned, whether in your closet, in the family, or in the house of God. Consider what relations you have sustained, and what have been your special defects in each of them. Humble yourself in the sight

of God, on account of them all; cry to him for pardon, in the blood of Christ; and for grace and strength to serve him acceptably, by a right discharge of your respective duties, in each station and circumstance of life, as well as by a due performance of the several offices of devotion. Consider your many sins of commission, according to their respective natures and aggravations. Confess them before God; and confess the innumerable multitude which were unobserved when committed, or forgotten since. Endeavour to impress a just sense of their number, enormity and guilt, upon your conscience, till you are forced to groan out that language of a repenting soul: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me." Endeavour to bring them all (those which you can remember, by a particular enumeration; those which you cannot remember, by a general confession) to the fountain set open for sin and for uncleanness. Pray for faith, and endeavour to trust in the infinite merits of the Redeemer's blood, and the infinite mercy of the God of all grace, for a free pardon of all your sins, how extensive soever in their number, how great soever in their aggravations. Thus endeavour to have your past account balanced by the blood of Christ.

In like manner, be careful to review the defects of the duties, and the violations of the precepts, of the second table of the moral law. Consider whether there be none who have offered you injuries and indignities; and see to it, that from your heart you forgive them their trespasses, and that you remember each of them at the throne of grace, seeking mercy for them, as for your own soul. Consider what differences and controversies you have maintained with any man, and in the most kind and condescending manner, attempt all reasonable methods of reconciliation, committing the case to God by prayer. Consider, whether in the course of your life you have not some way or other been injurious to your neighbour by word or

deed, in your commerce or conversation, and never rest till you have made reparation and satisfaction, if any thing of that kind can be remembered. Consider whether there be no enmity or rancour of spirit, no prejudice or ill-will, harboured in your breast against any man; and never rest till you feel an universal benevolence to every individual of the human race, and have that love in exercise, which is the fulfilling of the law. Consider whether you have learned of Christ to be meek and lowly of heart, to live in peace and kindness, and be excited by the gentleness of Christ, to maintain the exercise of those fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. Consider whether you have practised sufficient liberality towards the poor and indigent, and consult how you may now so cast your bread upon the water, as to find it again after many days. And in a word, seek pardon through the blood of Christ for all your past defects; and consult how you may, for the future, render yourself the most extensive blessing to the world, while you live in it.

5. Be very careful, faithfully to discharge the respective duties of the several relations you sustain. God having placed you, Sir, in a station of public trust, he calls upon you in the language of Jehoshaphat to his judges: "Take heed what ye do, for you judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment; therefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you, take heed and do it." It would be arrogance in me, to pretend to direct you in the particular duties of your honourable station, and the particular methods of discharging them. It is your concern, in the execution of your trust, to approve yourself a minister of God to his people for their good; a terror, not to good works, but to the evil; the patron and defender of the oppressed and injured, and an impartial restrainer and punisher of the vicious and immoral; a shining pattern of a regular life; and one that seeks the welfare of your people.

Allow me further to observe,

As you are likewise remarkably blessed in your

conjugal relation, that a full compliance with the laws of Christianity will greatly add to your mutual happiness. I do not mean by this, to recommend to you that love, tender affection, and most obliging kindness, which the word of God enjoins upon all in that relation, and which is so absolutely necessary to all such, in order to their present comfort or future happiness, since in these things you have practically declared to the world, that you stand in no need of a monitor. But what I would particularly offer to your consideration, is, that the soul is the principal part of human nature, and consequently the principal object of love and regard, in that near and intimate relation. It should, therefore, be the chief care of those who are thus nearly united, to live together as "fellow heirs of the grace of life;" to assist, counsel, quicken, and comfort one another in the ways of God and godliness; and to consult all proper methods to promote each other's spiritual and eternal welfare. Thus the bands of union and motives of dearest affection will be more than doubled. This will render such persons blessings to each other indeed, and lay a foundation for joy to all eternity.

You are peculiarly favoured with regard to a pleasant and delightful offspring. And upon the birth of each of your children, the Lord does, (as it were,) say unto you, as Pharaoh's daughter to Moses' mother, "Take this child, and nurse it for me." You should accordingly take early care, to endeavour the forming their minds to the knowledge, fear, and service of God. You should not only teach them their Catechism, whereby a summary of Christian doctrines may be laid up in their memories, but study in a plain, easy, and familiar manner, to adapt your instructions to their understandings, and endeavour to acquaint them with the great things of their eternal peace. You should endeavour not only to give them a doctrinal, but a practical acquaintance with the duties of Christianity; and as soon as possible put them upon the stated exercise of religious duty. You should; in the most kind, affectionate manner possible,

endeavour to restrain their vicious inclinations and practices, and instil into them principles of reverence to the aged, of honour and gratitude to their parents, of kindness and love to one another, and of piety and mercy to the indigent and distressed. You should, with constant and importunate ardour of soul, wrestle with God for their spiritual welfare; and even "travail in birth, to see Christ formed in their souls." This is the way to make them indeed blessings in their generation, to make them happy while they live, happy when they die, and happy for ever. By this means, therefore, show that you love them indeed.

To this I must add, that you are under a like obligation to take care of the souls of your servants, as of your children; and in like manner to instruct them, and to impress upon their minds the vast concerns of eternity. For you should always remember, that the soul of your meanest servant is of more value than this whole world.

I shall only subjoin under this head, that you sustain the character of a neighbour, unto which are many duties annexed. The poor you have always with you, to whom you owe charitable and compassionate relief. You have frequent occasions of conversation, which should be good to the use of edifying, that you may administer grace to the hearers. You have special interest in and influence upon many; this you should improve with care, for their spiritual advantage. You will find frequent occasion to exhort and reprove others, which should be done with such unaffected seriousness and kindness, condescension and humility, as will both touch the conscience, and engage the affections; and thereby have a prospect of success. In fine, you should watch for opportunities to do what service you can, both to the bodies and souls of your neighbours; and thereby fulfil the royal law of love.

6. Walk by rule, in an exact observance of stated devotions. We are exhorted to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time; to be always abounding in the

work of the Lord; doing the duty of every day, in its day; of every season, in its season. And to time things to the best advantage, to methodize things well, and be steady to some certain rules of proceedings, will very much befriend a life of religion. We are counselled to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; to pray without ceasing, and to meditate on God's law day and night. Nothing can be of greater importance to our present or future happiness than a careful compliance with these divine precepts.

You should therefore begin the day with God. When you wake in the morning; let God have your first thoughts. Lift up your heart to him, with thankfulness for the preservation of the night; and in supplication to him for his presence with you, in the duties of the succeeding day. After such ejaculations, before you rise from bed, you will do well to consider with yourself, what are the duties before you this day, whereby God may be most glorified, your spiritual interests best subserved, and you most useful in your generation. Whilst arising from bed and dressing yourself, entertain meditations upon subjects suited to the occasion, such as the necessity of your resurrection from spiritual death, or the certainty and consequences of the final resurrection at the great day of Christ's appearing and kingdom; the necessity of your being clothed with the righteousness of Christ; or the glorious livery, in which you hope to appear before the tribunal of your judge, when you shall shine as the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever. These, or such like meditations, a variety whereof will readily offer to your mind, may be an excellent means to put your soul into a proper frame for the duties before you.

When risen from bed, retire as soon as you conveniently can into your closet. Read some portion of the word of God; mixing it with faith, giving a close attention, making devout reflections, and occasional ejaculations of prayer and praise, according to the subject-matter you are entertained with. After reading, pause awhile, and endeavour to affect your

mind with lively impressions of the infinite perfections of the glorious Majesty before whom you are approaching. Lift up your eyes to God, with fervent aspirations after the influences of his blessed Spirit, to "help your infirmities," to "teach you to pray," as you ought; and to "make intercessions for you, with groanings which cannot be uttered." Thus in the name of Christ bow your knees before God, with an awful sense of the infinite distance between him and you, and of your entire unworthiness of his favour; yet with a humble hope and confidence in his infinite grace and mercy in Christ; and keep up a strict and continual guard over your thoughts and affections, that they do not wander from the business before you, and render the duty a mere superficial lip-service.

From your closet proceed to the duties of family-worship. Call your whole household together; let none be absent. Read a chapter in the sacred Bible; and I would advise you commonly to read in course, that the whole word of God may be read in your family. Perhaps it may be an agreeable practice, and most for edification, to read in the Old Testament one part of the day, and in the New Testament the other. I would advise you to sing part of a psalm; and then pray with your family. Which done, gravely dismiss them to their respective secular occasions.

Having thus carried yourself and family through the morning sacrifices, do not suppose, that you are now discharged from all religious and spiritual concerns, until the return of the stated times of divine worship; but keep your soul diligently, study to preserve and cherish still a spiritual frame. Intermix frequent occasional meditations and ejaculations, with all the business you are engaged in. After dinner, I would advise you to retire again into your closet for some exercises of devotion. Imitate David and Daniel in the frequency of your secret retirements; and make it your stated rule, at evening, in the morning, and at noon to pray, and to let God hear your voice.

Choose some convenient time every day for reli-

gious meditation, and solemn reflection. Daily spend half an hour, at least, in this useful and delightful employment; and more, when your circumstances will allow it. Let the time be stated; and let no ordinary avocation prevent your duly attending upon this exercise, at the return of the appointed season. Perhaps experience will teach you, with the Patriarch Isaac, to choose the evening for this service. But this depends upon the respective business and circumstances of life, and dispositions of mind, of each particular person. The whole word of God will afford you matter for your meditation; that you have a large field before you, enough to keep you happily employed to all eternity: but the perfections of the Divine nature, the astonishing work of redemption by Jesus Christ, the glorious excellency of his person, and the wonderful benefits of his salvation, the incomparable glories of the heavenly world, the preciousness of your soul, with its various wants, and the like, should be the most common, as they are the most important subjects of your contemplation. Engage in this business, as in the presence of God, call in your thoughts from every foreign concern, and keep them closely engaged. Deeply muse, until the fire burns: meditate on divine and eternal things, till they become real and visible to the eyes of your mind; even till your soul is brought, (if it pleases God) to the top of Pisgah, and to a view of the heavenly Canaan. But I need not insist upon the methods of performing this duty. By a faithful and steady attendance upon it, your experience will quickly teach you the best manner of its performance.

And now being brought to the close of the day, end it as you began it, with respect to the duties both of your closet and family. And when you betake yourself to your rest, review the conduct of the day past; and consider what matter of repentance, or of thanksgiving, is thereby before you. Solemnly interrogate yourself, whether you are fit to die, and what your state is like to prove, if you should this night awake in the

eternal world. Your answer to this momentous question must either excite your diligence to flee from the wrath to come; or animate your love and gratitude to God, and your zeal for his service, in hope of the glory to be revealed. To conclude, endeavour to improve your waking minutes on your bed (whether before you first fall asleep, or when you shall awake in the night) in religious and divine meditation. So, when you wake and rise in the morning, still be with God.

Thus I have set before you a method of filling up your time with duty; with such duties, as will every one of them tend to promote your progress to eternal bliss. And I need now only further put you in mind, that besides these daily exercises of religion, there are seasons wherein the whole day should be taken up in the immediate service of God; excepting when we are called off by works of necessity and mercy. Such as the Lord's day, which ought to be so strictly sanctified, that we should not so much as allow ourselves to think our own thoughts, or to speak our own words. Such are likewise occasional days of humiliation and thanksgiving, which the Scripture calls our Sabbaths. The frequent and devout celebration of these days may prove of eminent usefulness to promote the life and power of godliness. The Scriptures do not indeed direct how often these should be attended. They are a free-will offering; and the state of your soul, with the dispensations of Providence towards yourself, your family, or the church of God; and the respective business, whether temporal or spiritual, which you have before you, will be a sufficient direction, as to the time and manner of performing these duties.

I would suggest here one thing more: you would do wisely to keep an exact account in writing, of your daily expenditure of time. Before you go to bed, recollect and record (at least in some brief hints) the business you have done, the duties performed, the mercies received, the frames of your soul, the dispensations of Providence, with the sins and imperfections

of the day past. Let this be done so, that you yourself, upon a review, can understand it; though there may be some occurrences requiring a veil of obscurity to be thrown over them, that they may not be understood by others, if ever your papers should fall into their hands. By this means, you may always have before you, what special reformation is wanting, what special obligations you are under to God; and what proficiency you make in the school of Christ.

7. Walk by faith in the Son of God. Whatever you do, let faith in Christ be kept in daily exercise, and run through all your duties from first to last. I have adapted my former directions to that state of suspense, which you are in, with respect to your conversion to God. "You have sometimes (you tell me) refreshing and encouraging hope, that you have some experience of those marks of converting grace, which I have described." Be it then supposed (as I trust there is ground to suppose) that the hope you have at times is well founded; in this case, your compliance with these directions is the best means of a successful and delightful progress towards your heavenly inheritance. But you complain that "you often conflict with distressing doubts and fears, that the prevalence of your corruptions, the formality and hypocrisy of your duties, and the dead carnal frames which you feel in yourself too frequently, are utterly inconsistent with well-grounded hopes of a renewed and sanctified soul." Were your case indeed according to your fears, what better method could be proposed, than to attend the directions here given, in order to seek after the renewing influences of the Spirit of God?

But I must observe to you, there is one thing that is eminently of importance, and which seems yet wanting in order to your maintaining a heavenly conversation, and a comfortable walk with God. To walk with God, is to walk in Christ, and to have the life which we live in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God. It is by faith, in Christ, that we have access to the throne of grace. "By whom also we

have access by faith, into this grace wherein we stand," Rom. v. 2. It is by faith in Christ, that our persons and services find acceptance with God. "Who hath made us accepted in the beloved," Eph. i. 6. It is by faith in Christ, that our corruptions are mortified, and our hearts cleansed. "Purifying their hearts by faith," Acts xv. 9. It is by faith in Christ, that we are enabled to tread the world and its idol-vanities under our feet. "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 4. It is by faith, that we enjoy the consolations and pleasures of a religious life. "We have joy and peace in believing," Rom. xv. 13. It is by faith in Christ, and by our "holding fast our confidence firm unto the end," that we are rendered stable and steadfast in our religious course, and enabled to persevere to the end. "Thou standest by faith: Be not high minded, but fear," Rom. xi. 20. It is by faith, that we obtain the sealings of the blessed Spirit, and the earnest of our future inheritance. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance," Eph. i. 13, 14. And in a word, it is by faith, that we keep the mark for the prize of our high calling in view, and are actuated to the diligent pursuit of the recompense of reward. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; and the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi. 1. Thus you see, that if you would walk with God, you must walk by faith in the Son of God. Here therefore it seems needful to give you some plain and familiar directions.

And I would first direct you to look to Jesus as the author and finisher of your faith. "You are, (you say,) uncertain whether you have a true faith or not?" Look then to this fountain of all grace, to get your doubts removed, to be freed from this uncomfortable suspense of mind, and to be sensibly, as well as really, united to that glorious head of all spiritual influences. Be frequently lifting up your soul to him with such aspirations as these: "Blessed Je-

sus! thou knowest the distracting doubts and fears I am exercised with, and my perplexing uncertainty of an interest in and union unto thee by faith. A difficulty which thou only canst remove, by the operations of thy Holy Spirit. Thou hast invited me to come unto thee, to buy wine and milk without money and without price; and to take of the waters of life freely. O Lord, I desire, I resolve to comply with the gracious invitation. Lord, I would believe: help thou mine unbelief. Thou hast promised, that if I come unto thee, thou wilt in no wise cast me out. Lord, I would come at thy call. Draw me, and I shall run after thee. Thou didst come to seek and to save that which was lost; and to call sinners to repentance. As a lost perishing sinner, I would therefore look unto thee for pardon, sanctification, and eternal salvation. Thou only hast the words of eternal life. To thee, therefore, I repair, as to the fountain of life, and the foundation of all my hope, that of thy fulness I may receive, even grace for grace. Here is my last refuge. Look, blessed Lord, upon a poor, guilty, polluted soul! Replenish me with thy grace. Give me that faith, whereby I may comply with thy gracious invitations, rely upon thy precious promises, and derive all supplies of grace from the inexhaustible treasury of thy grace and goodness."

You must endeavour, likewise, to act faith in Christ for your justification, and for your acceptance with God in the duties of religion; to rely upon him as the Lord your righteousness; and to make mention of his righteousness, even of that only. I have spoken particularly to this in some of my former letters, to which I shall only add, you must approach the presence of God under a deep impression of your guilt, pollution, and unworthiness, and yet with a humble dependence upon the infinite merit and righteousness of Christ for access unto God the Father, and acceptance in the beloved. You must live in a humble confidence in Christ, as the propitiation for your sins; as your continual advocate with the Father; and as

a constant source of righteousness and strength to your soul. And all your expectations of pardoning, sanctifying, and saving mercy must be derived only from Jesus Christ, who is our hope, the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof.

You must also act faith in Christ for quickening, and strengthening, as well as justifying grace. Do your corruptions prevail? Bring them to the cross of Christ. Look to and humbly depend upon the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, to make you free from the law of sin and death. Do dead, carnal, or formal frames prevail upon you? Strive to quicken your soul by enlivening meditations on the amazing transactions of redeeming love; and firmly rely upon Christ, for the quickening influences of his Spirit. You will always find your soul enlivened, your graces invigorated, and your affections spiritualized, in proportion to your humble, steady, cheerful dependence upon Christ for all those supplies of grace you stand in need of. Thus then, wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ: and be of good courage; and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord. So shall you mount up with wings as the eagle, you shall run and not be weary, you shall walk and not faint.

I will now subjoin, that you must live by faith under all your various circumstances of life, and under all the different dispensations of God's holy providence. Are you in the dark and under inward trials? Remember that we walk by faith, not by sight. Be humbled, but not discouraged, by your deadness, darkness, temptations or corruptions: for however your spiritual frames, affections, or dispositions of soul may change, yet Christ Jesus is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and may be safely trusted for deliverance, how distressing soever your condition. Hence, when you walk in darkness, and see no light, yet trust in the name of the Lord, and (by faith in Christ) stay yourself upon your God. Are you under outward afflictions, and adverse dispensations of providence? Act faith in the promises; all of which are

in Christ Yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God: and humbly hope, that, according to God's gracious promise, all things shall work together for your good; and that your light affliction which is but for a moment, will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But you are in doubt about your interest in the promises: well, let your hearty acceptance of Christ, and your humble dependence upon the promises of him, remove your doubts. Act always under the influence of this maxim, that "you cannot trust too little to yourself, nor too much to Christ." To conclude, If you want spiritual life, Christ Jesus is our life: you must look to and depend upon him for it. If you want light, he also is the light of men; and his Spirit must be a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk you in it." If you want comfort, your consolation must be in Christ; and you must rejoice in Christ Jesus, without confidence in the flesh. Would you live near to God? Draw near with a full assurance of faith. Would you have a victory over the sting and terror of death? You must be delivered from this bondage, and obtain the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Would you live in the prospect of a blessed immortality? Christ in you is the hope of glory. Thus to live is Christ, and then to die is gain: gain unspeakable! To depart and to be with Christ, which is far better than to abide in the flesh, under the happiest circumstances of life, even amidst all the honours, pleasures, and riches of this vain perishing world.

Thus I have given you some brief general hints concerning that walk with God, which he who would be a Christian indeed, and would possess the peace of God in his soul, should endeavour to maintain. Your own experience in the divine life will teach you how to improve upon these directions, and to make a continual progress, from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, till you come to the perfection of grace in glory.

Now, that the God of all grace may grant you the

supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in his sanctifying, quickening, and comforting influences; and that he would guide you by his counsel, and keep you by his power through faith unto salvation, is the prayer of,

Sir,

Your sincere friend,

And servant.

THE END.

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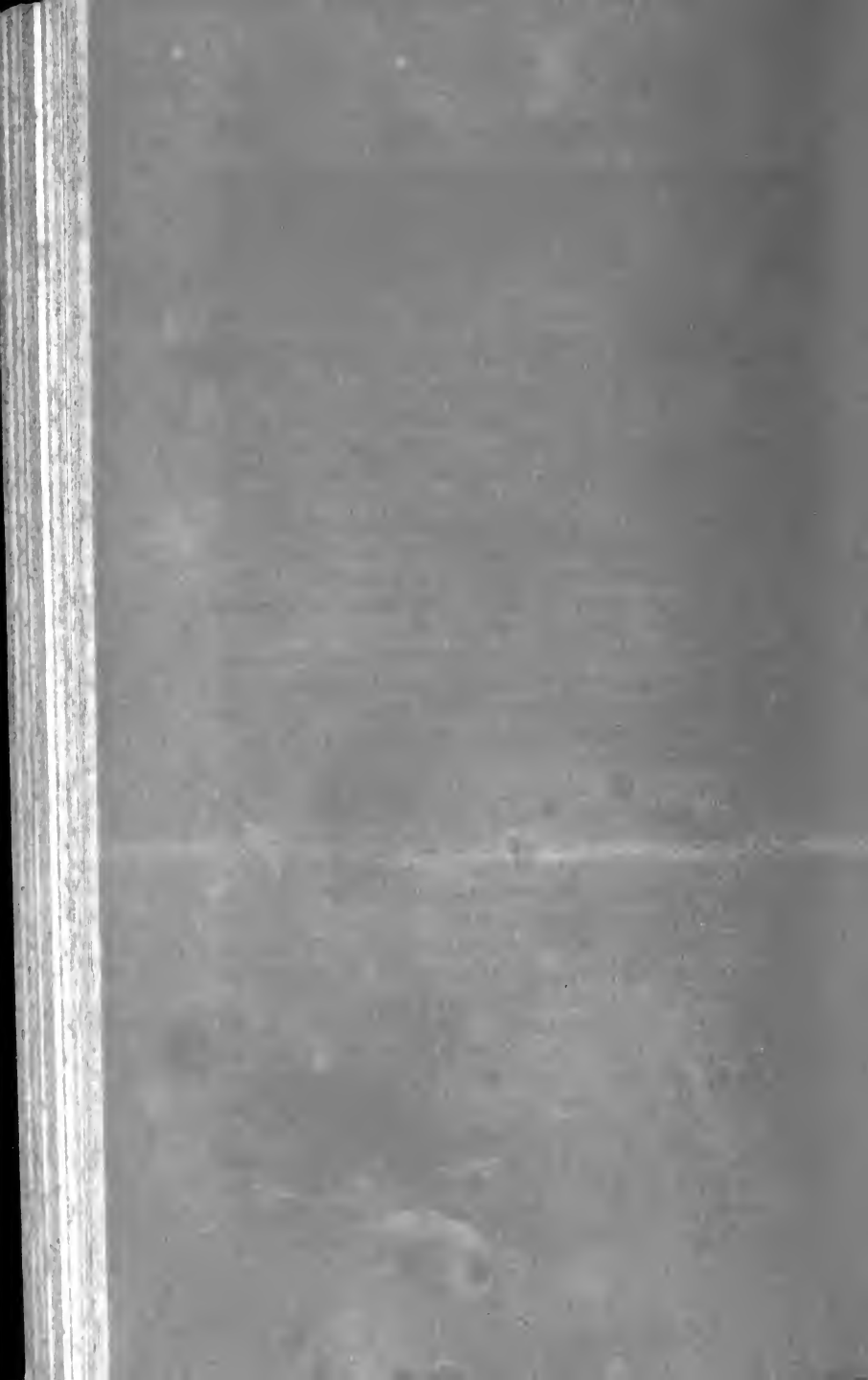
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