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THE REV. HERMAN HOOKER, M. A.,
AUTHOR OF THE "PORTION OF THE SOUL," &c.

VOL. IV.

LABORE



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LETTERS,
PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY;
DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE
THE NATURE AND TENDENCY
OF
THE GOSPEL.

BY THE REV. DAVID RUSSELL, D. D.
AUTHOR OF "A SURVEY OF THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS," "A VIEW OF THE
ADAMIC AND MEDIATORIAL DISPENSATIONS," &c.

"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."—1 John i. 4.

FROM THE FOURTH EDINBURGH EDITION,
WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY
BY
THE REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, PHILADELPHIA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
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THE same reasons may be given for the publication of this Volume, which were given for that of the former. As the Letters in both were occasioned by the particular circumstances and inquiries of the individuals to whom they were addressed, they were not written according to any principle of arrangement. This will account for their miscellaneous nature, and their particular structure. The object of the writer was not to enter at large into the subjects introduced, but to give such views of their scriptural import, as, in the circumstances of those to whom he was writing, seemed best to exhibit their practical and consolatory bearings. He commends the work to the blessing of God, and to the candid reception of the friends of truth.

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LETTER XVI.

HINTS ON THE PROPER METHOD OF INSTRUCTING
INQUIRERS.

Importance of declaring fully the demands of the Law—Not necessary to defer stating the Gospel till the mind appear to be awakened—All instruction to be connected with the doctrine of the Cross—Christ the centre of all Divine truth—The importance of stating correctly the ground of human obligation.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU will remember the conversation we had on the best method of introducing the truths of Scripture to an inquirer. This is a matter of very great importance: and, with a view to assist you in your endeavors to do good, I shall now, agreeably to my promise, suggest to you some hints on the subject. I feel it difficult to descend to minute particulars on it, because much must depend on the circumstances of individuals—on the way in which they have been accustomed to think on religious subjects, and on the kind of observations they may make on what is said to them; I shall therefore confine myself to general topics.

If we follow, as we ought, the examples of Scripture, we shall begin our instructions by directing the attention of an

inquirer to those parts of the word of God which treat most directly of the character of God, the state and character of man, and the gospel of peace. Men cannot be convinced of sin without some idea of the character and law of God; nor of their need of deliverance, without a conviction of guilt and a sense of danger; nor of the importance of salvation, without a sense of the evil and demerit of transgression. It is therefore proper to state, at the very commencement of our instructions, the righteous demands of the divine law, the condition of man as a sinner, and the utter impossibility of his being justified by deeds of his own. Such subjects, even when the inquirer is already acquainted with them, ought to be pressed on the conscience with the greatest seriousness; and the solemn language of Scripture regarding them ought to be employed, to awaken to a due sense of their importance.

It is not necessary, however, to refrain from stating the gospel till such statements as these appear to be clearly understood, and powerfully felt. The fact is, that scarcely is there an unbeliever in a country where the gospel has been preached, who is altogether destitute of a consciousness of guilt, and at all times free from distress of mind. There are remaining traces of the divine law in every man's heart, and there is a voice there which witnesses for God. Men may, and often do, make strong endeavors to obliterate all impressions of sin and of danger, and to silence the clamors of conscience; but, in defiance of all their efforts, conscience is not completely quieted, but at times causes no small concern and distress. Now, in this state of mind, that gospel which brings the salvation of God near to the guilty, is, when its glory is discerned, most acceptable to man. If then such is the experience of men

in general, it is not necessary to refrain from stating the gospel to them till a certain preparatory process has been gone through, subsequent to our admonitions. The apostles did not thus limit themselves. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, after he had charged his hearers with the guilt of murdering the promised Messiah, stated the sum of the gospel before they discovered that they felt the force of the charge. Acts ii. In the following history, we find him addressing the people of Israel on their sin in crucifying the Prince of Life, and, before any discovery had been made of this having been felt, preaching to them salvation through Jesus. Acts iii. 12—26, and iv. 11, 12. Paul followed the same course in Antioch in Pisidia. Acts xiii. 25—41.

To withhold the invitations of the gospel till we think a person sufficiently convinced of sin, and then to introduce them as something to which he is entitled, is to act very unscripturally. The gospel may be freely declared at all times; for there is such a connexion between one part of truth and all other parts of it, that if one part is understood and embraced, all others which are implied in it, even such as, in the order of nature, go before it, will follow it.

None, it is true, will believe the gospel without seeing that they stand in need of it; for without a conviction of sin and of danger, that evidence of its truth, which consists in its perfect suitableness to the guilty and ruined circumstances of man, and to the character and government of God, cannot be discerned. But it is only in connexion with the declarations of the gospel, that the law of God produces genuine penitence. All the agony which a conviction of guilt may occasion, will, while a sinner is unacquainted with the gospel, only lead him to despair, or to some self-righteous course. If he come to Christ under the

notion that his alarm and penitence qualify him for the benefit of the atonement, he is blind to the import and the glory of the saving truth. Such is the tendency of the preparatory schemes to which I advert.

It ought to be remembered, that, in the gospel itself, the guilt and the lost state of sinners are revealed; so that, if the more particular statements of these by themselves should have been without much or any effect, the view given of them in the gospel may, *along* with those statements, produce all that is necessary. It is impossible indeed to give a just exhibition of the gospel as a scheme of deliverance without, at the same time, declaring the guilt and condemnation of man, from which it is designed to save. On this principle, it is easy to see why Philip began with preaching Jesus, and why the apostles dwelt in all cases on the doctrines of Christ and him crucified. Not that they did so without exhibiting the divine law; but that they stated the law and the gospel together. I mean not that contrition is produced by nothing else than the revelation of mercy; or that conviction of guilt is not produced by the law. By the law, certainly, is the knowledge of sin; but the death of the beloved Son of God is the strongest demonstration that its awful curse cannot be dispensed with. It deserves particular notice, too, that, till a man believe the gospel, convictions of sin are *forced* upon him. Till then, he is afraid to take the law into close and proper consideration; but having seen the glory of the work of Christ, he says, "Search me, O God, and show me the errors of my way, and lead me in the way everlasting."

One man is led to see his guilt by a strong view of the law of God, as was the case with the jailor of Philippi:

Another, in hearing or reading of the cross of Christ, and that he died to expiate sin, is, in the first instance, struck with a conviction that sin must be exceeding sinful; and that as a sinner, he is exposed to extreme danger. The former, by comparing his spirit and deportment with the law, becomes sensible of guilt; and the latter, by pondering on the death of the Son of God, for the purpose of making atonement, and of magnifying and making honorable the divine law, becomes persuaded that there is in sin all that is base and malignant. The former may struggle against his convictions, and endeavor to escape from the light of the precepts and threatenings of Scriptures; but, if he be under divine teaching, he will find this to be impossible: The latter will naturally turn to the law, and on viewing it in itself, and in connexion with the cross, and on comparing himself with the delineation of its spirit in the character of Christ, he will be deeply impressed with a sense of his contrariety to it, and will humble himself in the dust. The former individual, should his convictions and alarm be blessed as the means of leading him to inquire after the gospel, and should the truth be perceived by him, will also be led to the cross; and there, however deeply he may have been convinced of sin before, he will become much more so, and the latter will feel that the attractive power of the love and the compassion of the Saviour increases in proportion as his sense of guilt and of his natural wretchedness comes to be deepened, though it was an affecting display of the divine love which, in the first instance, influenced his heart. It follows that, though every believer of the gospel sees his need of it, or, in other words, is convinced that he is a sinner, and that he can be saved only through Christ; yet it is not necessary that a person

should, for a certain period, experience a particular agonizing process of conviction and alarm, before he can derive comfort from the atonement. Some have been the subjects of such a process; but others, who have been as deeply sensible of sin, have been kept from feeling this horror of mind, by receiving clearer and more immediate views of the riches of redeeming grace.

The message of mercy sets before men a finished atonement,—the benefit of which is to be obtained, not in the way of striving to make ourselves better, but in that of believing or receiving the testimony of God as true. To this method of acceptance none are more opposed than those who deem themselves qualified for divine mercy. Their fancied qualifications blind their minds to the true glory of the gospel. What a mercy, when such are enabled from the heart to say, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ!” When, on looking back, they are made to see that all their endeavors, and even their religious services, have been designed to establish what God has determined to put down, and are led, from a conviction that there is nothing between them and everlasting perdition but the work of the Saviour, to cast themselves on him as their whole hope and confidence.

I would remind you, my dear friend, that some again are plunged into affliction, and are made to feel that all below is vanity; and feeling a want which nothing here can supply, they are led to inquire into their state. Object after object has been followed—here, there, and elsewhere, happiness has been sought, but all in vain. In the day of prosperity, the mind, though not satisfied, was diverted; but adversity has come, and all is involved in gloom. A man in such a day of distress comes to himself, as did the

prodigal son. Finding nothing substantial in the world on which to rest, he asks if there is any way of relief, and, if there be, what it is? In such circumstances, the gospel when stated to him and blessed of God for the enlightening of his mind, is found to be all that he needs. There is a conscience in man which often alarms the stoutest heart; but unhappily its voice is frequently stifled: yet when his forlorn and unprovided state is disclosed, the inability of the world to meet his necessities is discovered; and when in the gospel firm footing and the hand of a friend are presented to *him* who had neither, the voice of conscience is readily heard. To the blessed gospel of peace the heart bows with delight. The mind of the unhappy sufferer is softened, and he hears with pleasure of the blessedness of the servants of God, and of his unbounded goodness to all who return to him through Christ. Here the law, and the gospel, and the afflictions of life all concur to produce the effect.

Every opportunity should be embraced of pressing upon the mind, that the Scriptures address us as already guilty and condemned—as under the power of sinful principles—as wretched and helpless—and as altogether unworthy of the least of the divine mercies. This is to be done, not merely by stating the general doctrine of human depravity, but by fully depicting the character of man. We should employ the actions of the life to prove the state of the heart; for the fruit shows the nature of the tree, and the stream the nature of the fountain. If we confine our attention to the outward evils of the life, we act in relation to the soul as a man should do in regard to the body, who was all attention to some external eruption, and unmindful of the internal state of the system.

On the other hand, there is a vague general way of desecanting on the depravity of the heart, which makes no impression, because there is no delineation given of the workings of sin. Accordingly, it sometimes happens that persons who are loud and constant in their complaints of the corruptions of their hearts, are exceedingly offended if charged, however gently, with any particular transgression. The fact is, that such characters, in some way or other, consider the corruption of their hearts as an excuse for the sins of the life; or else they are the subjects of some vague and indefinite feelings, which they mistake for a conviction of depravity and helplessness.

Let us then bring the truth home to the heart. We shall be assisted in doing this by the many appeals of Scripture to the conscience, as to what we are and what we have done—what we suffer and what we dread—what we desire and what we need. In a great part of the first three chapters of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle dwells on the natural character of man; as also in the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, and in parallel passages. Much of human nature is seen in the gospel histories, and particularly in that of John. In the writings of the prophets we often meet with the most pointed descriptions of the human heart, and the ways of the world: In their writings there are also given the most striking representations of the present scene, and corresponding with the inward convictions that are generally felt regarding it. In Scripture history there is much both of the ways of God, and those of man, exhibited; and particularly in that part of it which is biographical. These all furnish matter for instruction, and serve to produce and to cherish serious impressions in the mind; and particularly when that consistent and full view

which the gospel gives of the divine character is stated along with them. In this way ought we to take the favorable opportunity which affliction presents, of leading the inquirer to the law of God, with its awful sanctions; and also to the gospel of peace, with its precious blessings. Thus will be mingled the law of Heaven, the message of mercy, and the providence of God; which all serve to illustrate each other. The first serves to awaken the conscience, the second to engage the affections, and the third, by means of the ills and sorrows of life to excite and influence the principle of self-preservation, and the desire of happiness. Some are, in the first instance, more accessible in one of these ways, and some in another, and hence that variety which marks the leadings of God in bringing sinners to himself. Now the great thing, surely, is to be indeed brought to him, and not the order in which the work commences.

We ought never, my dear friend, to forget that the great design of the Scriptures is to testify of Christ. John v. 39, 46. Rev. xix. 10. It is of the first importance to press upon inquirers the necessity of receiving this testimony, and the guilt of neglecting it. It will be found to be no easy thing to convince them of the sin of unbelief. They may be convinced, by the operation of the law upon the conscience, that they have neglected many good works, and have done many positive evil deeds,—in a word, they have in one way or other broken all the commandments; while they have no real conviction of the sin of unbelief. They may indeed in words allow that they are guilty of it; but what they mean by unbelief is, not the rejection of the testimony of the gospel, but the want of certain devotional

feelings, and holy dispositions; or perhaps the difficulty they have to persuade themselves that they are Christians. That any particular individual is a child of God, is no part of that testimony which God hath given in his word: This a man comes to know only when he has believed that message, which is true whether he believes it or not, and the rejection of which is the sin of unbelief. The Saviour has told us, that the great work of the Spirit is to convince the hearers of the gospel of sin; because they believe not in Him. John xvi. 8, 9. Now this conviction is produced by his persuading them of the truth of the gospel.

In endeavoring to instruct inquirers, it is then of the first importance to keep in view, that Christ and him crucified is the central point in which all the lines of divine truth meet and are united. This doctrine is that on which the apostles delighted to expatiate on all occasions, and in all circumstances. Not that with constant repetition they declared the same thing, but that, in all the many and various subjects which their ministry included, the doctrine of the cross held a prominent place, and was most closely interwoven with all their instructions. They were not satisfied with constant statements of the ground of acceptance, and of the impossibility of being justified by law; but dwelt on the whole of the divine commandments, and on the solemn warnings and denunciations connected with them, Acts xiv. 15—17; xvii. 22—31; xxiv. 25. Rom. ii. 1—6, 17—29. 1 Cor. vi. 7, 10. The medium through which the Spirit works is not the gospel exclusively,—but the whole of his word. John iv. 16, 18, 29. 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. He, of course, convinces the sinner, not only of the sin of unbelief, but of all other transgressions. When any part

of truth is impressed by Him upon the mind, it leads to the other parts of it; but a conviction of the guilt of unbelief does certainly distinguish the subjects of his influence.

With this view of His operations, the place given by the apostles to the doctrine of the cross is in perfect harmony. Accordingly there is not a doctrine in Scripture which they do not represent as having a relation to it; there is not an invitation, or promise, or threatening, or encouragement, that is not built on it; and there is not a branch of practical piety that is not enforced by the motives it exhibits. This is quite a different thing from representing unbelief as it were the only sin of the unconverted; or self-righteousness as almost the only sin of which they are in danger. To teach only one thing, and to teach all things in connexion with their proper centre, are quite distinct methods of instruction. This latter method will not narrow or cramp our instructions. There is no danger of unvarying sameness, if we keep in view the numberless connexions in which the Scriptures place the doctrines of God, while they still keep the work and character of the Saviour in view. Accordingly, in reading them, there is always a freshness in the truths they declare—there is always something new seen; and we find the bearings and the relations of the same truth to be endless.

In addressing mankind at large, they dwell in particular on that truth which contains the foundation of hope. The acceptance of a sinner does not depend upon his being acquainted with the whole of revelation, but upon his belief of the plain and short proclamation of mercy through Christ, which is soon stated and easily remembered—which is level to every capacity—and which commends itself to the conscience of every man.

It is an error to represent divine revelation in general as the object of justifying faith. The disbelief of any Scripture truth with which a person is acquainted is doubtless a sin ; but there is one radical comprehensive truth—namely, the testimony concerning Christ, the belief of which is the means of salvation.

The faithful statement of this testimony, and the affectionate statement of the promise of salvation to every one who believes it, which is implied in the encouraging declaration appended to it, “ He that believeth shall be saved,” ought not to be considered as an improper exhibition of consolatory topics. It were certainly highly unscriptural to address a person as a Christian who has not given evidence of having received the love of the truth, and to speak to him in this state as an actual partaker of the blessings of the gospel ; but it is a very different thing to preach to him, just as he stands, that blessed message of reconciliation which was proclaimed to the murderers of Christ, the impure Corinthians, the jailor at Philippi, and such-like characters. It were wrong to teach such that, *immediately* on their receiving the gospel testimony, they shall enjoy all the *high* consolations which are enjoyed by the advanced disciples of the Saviour ; for the exalted joys of the latter are connected with their matured assurance of faith, and their growth in grace : It were still worse to teach, that a recent convert may expect at once to enter on the enjoyment of the rich communications which are connected, as, for example, in the apostles, with a course of active labor and heavy persecutions in the cause of God. But still we may, in perfect consistency with these statements, set before them the promise of such comfort as was obtained by the Ethiopian Eunuch, and the jailor at Philippi. This is

quite a different thing from representing a sinner as called to appropriate the exalted joys referred to, while he has not embraced the gospel, or when he first receives it. But yet every sinner ought to be informed that the blood of Christ is all-sufficient to declare God to be just in forgiving him, ungodly as he is; and that, on believing the gospel, he shall obtain mercy.

On the testimony concerning the Saviour, with the belief of which salvation is connected, all our instructions should turn. Not that every discussion should have Christ for its immediate object, or that every other subject must be viewed as legal; but that every truth should be stated in relation to his work and character, and in connexion with the gospel, if not as expressly taught, at least as fully implied. We ought never, I may add, to confound names with things: It is not, for example, by constantly repeating the appellations and titles given to the Saviour, not by ringing changes on the names of his offices, that his doctrines are taught. His name is his *character*, and of this all other things are but illustrations. The histories, predictions, and figures of the Old Testament have all a reference, in one form or another, to his atonement, character, and salvation. Even Adam was a figure of our Lord. Rom. v. 14. The constitution established with him was introductory to the establishment of the gospel kingdom.

It is of great moment to guard inquirers against looking back to the fall as an apology for their sins, and indulging therefore in the vain dream that they are guiltless. Ezek. xviii. 2. Let them be called to reflect on this solemn fact, which is attested by their own conscience, as well as by Scripture—namely, that we all sin voluntarily, and of course are criminal. Let them be directed to the many

good things which they enjoy, and particularly to that gospel which proclaims to them a Saviour, and, through him, a blessing far surpassing the life lost in Adam. Set before them that glorious light which shines forth from the darkness that has followed the fall:—in a word, direct them to the second Adam.*

It is of great importance to show the inquirer that the Scriptures ascribe the necessity of the Spirit's influence to the depravity of the heart, and so to exhibit it as to deepen a sense of responsibility, of guilt, and of unworthiness. Our aim should be, to produce a feeling of helplessness, and a conviction that this, instead of excusing him, is the result of his own wickedness, and thus to induce him to implore mercy as a lost sinner; and such prayer, offered in the name of Jesus, will be heard. Till a sinner despairs of any help from himself, he will in reality reject the gospel, though in words he may assent to it. But let him be brought to feel his true situation, and he will fall into the arms of sovereign mercy, encouraged at once by the atonement of Christ, the invitations of the gospel, and the promised aid of the Spirit. The helplessness and depravity of sinners is met by a solemn assurance, that on coming to God in the name of his Son he will pour out upon them the influence of his Spirit. Prov. i. 23. Luke xi. 13.

It is the great work of the Spirit to testify of the person, character, and work of Christ, and so to lead us to see the true glory of his righteousness, and to rest our all upon it. John xvi. 13, 14. Hence the importance of leading an inquirer to every part of truth as it bears upon him, and of directing the anxious soul to seek the aid of this heavenly

* See a compendious view by the author of the Adamic and Mediatorial Dispensations. Part II. Section VII.

teacher. When taught by him, we see all truth in Jesus as its centre. It is, for example, in the Saviour, that the character of God is displayed and vindicated. John i. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6. Col. i. 15. Heb. i. 3. The fact of a distinction in the Godhead is never introduced as a matter of mere speculation, but to throw light on the plan of redemption through him. In the scheme of salvation, the Father appears declaring the displeasure of the Godhead; but in love sending the Son to make atonement, that he might be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly;—the Son as finishing his work on the cross, and then going into heaven, to act as Mediator on the ground of his accepted sacrifice;—and the Holy Spirit, as giving effect in the souls of men to the work of the Redeemer.

The *divinity* of the Saviour is taught us in connexion with his incarnation, Isaiah ix. 6.—with his character as a mighty deliverer, and an affectionate and tender shepherd. Isa. xl. 10, 11.—and to illustrate his character as a pattern of love and of condescension. Phil. ii. 5—8. The truth concerning his person as *Emmanuel*, is taught us in connexion with the different characters in which he appears as God and as man; with the cause of his sufferings, with the guilt of his persecutors, with the atonement he hath made for sin, with his victory over death and the powers of darkness, with his priestly character, and with his government of the Church and of all worlds. It is in him that we see the divine law and government honored, Isa. xlii. 21: From him come all the blessings of redemption, 1 Cor. i. 30, 31; his character is the pattern after which we are formed, Rom. viii. 29; 1 John iii. 2; the influence of the Spirit comes to us through him, John xvi. 7; and all holy principles are cherished by abiding in his word. Every privilege

is enjoyed through him :—In a word, the river of the water of life proceedeth “from the throne of God and of the Lamb;” and when we reach the full enjoyment of heavenly bliss, our song will be, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive all honor, and power, and glory; for he hath redeemed us to God by his own blood; and he hath made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father.”

Every duty is to be discharged “in his name,” or under the influence of his cross, and as the sacred act of a priest unto God through him. Col. iii. 17. The relative duties of husbands and wives—those of parents and children—and those of masters and servants, are enforced by motives drawn from his character. Eph. v. 22—33; vi. 1—9. Every duty which we owe to our neighbors, and likewise every personal duty, is enforced by the consideration of the mercies of God through him; as is evident from the commencement of the twelfth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, which is obviously connected with all the practical exhortations that follow, whether they relate to the most common affairs of life, or to the peculiar profession of Christians. In a word, all our obedience is to be yielded as a thank-offering and a “spiritual sacrifice,” Col. iii. 17. Heb. xiii. 15, 16, through him. Indeed if the doctrines of the gospel are not stated, we are endeavoring to build without a foundation. If, again, they be stated without habitually insisting on their sanctifying influence, the foundation will be left alone, and of course utterly useless; or, rather, we have not properly laid the foundation at all, for, if it be laid, the superstructure will in a measure rise.

It is of great moment, my dear friend, to point out the principles on which all duties are enforced in Scripture. It is true, that the peculiar motives of the gospel can only be re-

garded by those who know it ; but yet every man who has heard it is bound, by the authority of God, to believe it, and under its influence, to keep all his commandments. “ I will stretch out mine hand,” says God, “ and I will cut off them that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham ; and them that are turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after him.” We are thus taught, that God will not only punish the worshippers of false gods, and those who seek to unite the service of God and Mammon, and those that have apostatized from him, but also those who have *not sought* him, *nor inquired* after him. What is the duty of one man, then, is the duty of all men. There is a sense in which it is the duty of all to observe even the peculiar ordinances which were delivered by our Lord to Christians and to the Churches. They are not *immediately* called to keep them ; and it were sinful in them to partake of them while not believers of the gospel. Before the observance of these appointments, there is a *previous* duty to be discharged—namely, that of believing in Christ : for without faith there can be no proper principle of obedience in the mind. Yet still it is their duty to keep every divine precept, because they are solemnly called upon by God to keep all his commandments, Gal. iii. 10 ; and are at the same time called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In believing in him, the heart is turned towards God, and excited to keep every precept of his law ; so that the diseased soul is in the gospel presented with a cure. If men do not believe in him, they are not only guilty of the sin of unbelief, but are chargeable with all the evils which *result* from it. No man, then, ought to bless himself in this, that as he is not a Christian, he sins not in neglecting the appointments of the Saviour ; nor ought any

to imagine, that, because they make no profession, therefore they may do as they incline. It is a dangerous error to imagine that men are at liberty to assume a profession of religion, or not, at their pleasure. Not that this is a duty of prior concern to faith and a change of mind, but that all are called upon to receive the love of the truth, and to confess it with the mouth. Will a man deliberately hold up his face, and say, “I care not for God—I will not express the least regard for him; and since I feel and act thus, I am relieved from all obligation?” Can a man really persuade himself that his obligation to serve God arises from his declaring himself his servant? Yet this is the spirit of the conduct pursued by many. It is in vain for such to say, that many, who profess to be religious, are insincere; for this will not exculpate *them*. Every man shall bear his own burden, and shall give account of himself to God. It may be said, that it is more honest to give up with all pretensions to religion, than to make a hypocritical profession of it. No doubt it is so; but fearful indeed is that course which derives consistency from sin: and what terms can express the audacity of the man whose honesty consists in deliberate and avowed rebellion!

It must, then, be of the first importance to state distinctly the grounds of human obligations, and to expel the sinner from every false refuge.

With this remark I close for the present; and shall in my next letter, resume the general subject.—In the mean time, believe me to be yours, &c.

LETTER XVII.

HINTS ON THE BEST METHOD OF INSTRUCTING INQUIRERS.

The importance of understanding the way of acceptance—Error of the Jews on this subject—A similar error still prevalent—The happiness of those who are enlightened on this subject—The manner in which a Christian views sacred things—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RESUME the subject of my last letter by requesting your attention to the importance of informing inquirers of the nature of the Scripture doctrine of justification. This doctrine, you know, is the distinguishing glory of the gospel. The forgiveness of sin lies at the foundation of all true blessedness; and hence the apostles began their instructions with preaching this blessing to the world. When their testimony was believed, the guilty conscience found peace, and the troubled heart was filled with joy unutterable and full of glory.

It is of the utmost importance to have scriptural views of the ground of acceptance with God. In fact, the proper knowledge of this forms the key to the Bible. Erroneous notions in relation to this subject made the Jews to stumble at the doctrines of the cross. They had laid it down as an incontrovertible principle, that the great design of the Scriptures was to inform them what good things they were required to do in order to obtain everlasting life. They accordingly read them with this notion firmly fixed in their minds, and, of course, merely to ascertain what precepts they were called to obey, that they might finally be happy.

They did not see that the Bible declared them to be already guilty and condemned; and that, as the law demands perfect and perpetual obedience in thought, principle, and deed, they never could be justified by it. Though they searched the Scriptures, because they thought that in them was revealed the way to eternal life, they utterly misunderstood them. They were right in thinking that the way to eternal life is in them clearly disclosed; but they erred in supposing that the way there revealed was that of keeping the precepts and institutions of the law, in order thereby to merit the Divine favor.

The Old Testament no more teaches that salvation is by works of law than does the New. Its language is, "Come, let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness—it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry." "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Such passages, however, did not lead the Jews to turn the eyes of their minds to the Messiah, and the great work which he was to finish. There was a vail upon the hearts in reading Moses and the Prophets. The law of their revered leader was quite perverted. They rested in the law itself, without looking to him who is the end of it for justification to every one that believeth. Their minds were blind to the important fact, that the leading design of the Scriptures was to testify of the person and sacrifice of Christ: and to direct them, as guilty and helpless sinners, to his atonement for pardon and acceptance. The consequence was,

that when the Saviour appeared, "they would not come to him that they might have life;" and when his apostles preached him as the substance of the typical economy, "they contradicted and blasphemed." They totally misunderstood the important lessons taught on the subject in the passover, the daily sacrifice, and the unceasing flow of blood in the sanctuary. Almost all things were purged by blood; and without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins. These rites were explained by the promises and prophecies respecting the Messiah. It was declared that he should make his soul an offering for sin, and should bear the sin of many; and that, on these grounds, he should, by the knowledge of himself, justify many. It was likewise predicted, that he should finish transgression, and make an end of sin—make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness. To him, in a word, gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whoever believed in him should receive remission of sins. To all these precious statements, in which were written, in legible characters, the divine plan of justification through a propitiation, the pride and self-righteousness of their hearts had completely blinded them.

The Gentiles, who had not the benefit of the written revelation of the will of God, and who pursued not after the blessing of justification, but were living in a state of utter carelessness about it, when they heard the gospel, were not influenced towards it as the Jews were. No doubt the principle of self-righteousness, which is deeply rooted in the hearts of all men, was in them as well as in the Israelites; but it had not been cherished by them in relation to the Scriptures, as it had been by the Jews. The latter imagined that they already understood them, and had

the blessings which they unfold ; but this the former could not for a moment suppose. The result was, that when the Gentiles heard the gospel, they were not so prejudiced in relation to this subject as were the chosen people ; and, by the blessing of God, “they attained justification, even the justification which is by faith.” On the other hand, the Jews, who were busy in pursuing after the law, or the rule of principle according to which justification was to be obtained, did not attain to the knowledge of that principle, and, of course, did not attain to the blessing itself. Rom. ix. 30, 31. The very natural question, How did the Israelites fail of obtaining the knowledge of the divine plan of justification, seeing they had in their hands the revelation of Heaven upon the subject, and were employed in the study of it ? is thus satisfactorily answered. In searching this revelation, they did not examine it with a mind unfettered by prejudice, and open to whatever it might teach. On the contrary, they read the Scriptures with a firm conviction that they were designed to answer the question, “What shall I do that I may obtain life everlasting ?” They accordingly sought the knowledge of the divine method of justification not by looking simply to the testimony of God, but by converting every part of Scripture into a system of directions how best to merit the favor of Heaven. They of course “sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law ;” and so stumbled at the doctrine of salvation through faith in the finished work of the Redeemer.

The Scriptures, it is true, are designed to inform us of the whole of our duty, both to God and to man. They set before us the extent and obligation of the Divine law, and declare that every instance of transgression exposes to its curse. They do so for the purpose of vindicating the

character and government of God,—to convince us of sin,—to persuade us of our need of a Saviour,—and to teach us the nature of salvation. They exhibit our state as a state of disease, in order to show the suitableness of the remedy which they reveal. They do not tell us, then, that we are diseased, and call upon us to be well, without setting before us the means of recovery. What are exhortations to duty without exhibiting scriptural motives to obedience, but doing this foolish thing? Had the Jews understood this, they would not have viewed the Bible as a system of directions to obedience, by which, without regard to the Redeemer, they were to “enter into life.” The more clearly they saw, as they imagined, the directions in question, the better did they deem themselves acquainted with the plan of justification; and the more that they followed their fancied instructions, the nearer did they think themselves to the blessing of which they were in quest. No wonder that such characters stumbled at the doctrine of the cross. Such was the character of Paul when a Pharisee, and such was the character of those who, as he says, had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. Being ignorant of the divine plan of justification, they went about to establish their own self-righteous plan, and would not submit to that of God.

Not that their object was purely religious, for they mixed with it the pursuit of earthly things. We wonder at the gross absurdity of the idolater, whom the prophet represents as taking a tree, and employing one part to kindle a fire, and of another part of it making a god, and falling down and worshipping it. But what better or wiser were the Jews, who observed the same ordinances of religion, partly to establish their reputation among men and to promote

their worldly interests, and partly to establish a ground of confidence before God? What better or wiser are men still, when they attend to the forms of religion from a regard to reputation, or to promote some worldly and selfish design; and yet will trust to the very observances which spring from such motives as a ground of hope for eternity? It is not for such to smile at the sottish conduct of the man who makes a god of the very tree with which he had made a fire to warm himself, and to roast flesh for food. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun; we see but different modifications of the same principles.

Many, alas! are still in the same error as that of the Jews. They come to the Scriptures under the persuasion that it is their great design to tell them by what deeds and sacrifices of their own they may procure the favor of God, and eternal life. This pernicious sentiment blinds their minds to what is there said of the character of Christ, as the only medium of access to Jehovah,—the sole foundation of hope to a sinner,—and the only medium through which the blessing of redemption can be communicated to man.

Sometimes the error I now speak of is defended, by a reference to the case of the young man in the gospel. On this I have to remark, that the young man imagined that our Lord had come to teach men some *new* rules, by obedience to which life was to be obtained. Our Lord, in reply, spoke to him on his *own* principles; and the spirit of his reply is, “If life is to be had by obedience, there is no need that I should give any new commandments,—those already given are quite sufficient; for they include love to God and our neighbor which is the sum of all that can be required.” The young man answered, that he had

kept them all; and asked what he had lacked? The Saviour then called him to give all he had to the poor. Now, had the young man really loved God, he would have been ready to do so, when called to it by divine authority. The call was therefore fitted to bring his fancied obedience fully to the test. The covetousness of his heart was thus detected, and consequently his want of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. But while the Saviour endeavored to convince him of the real state of his heart, he at the same time called him to come to him, and to follow him bearing the cross. The call to come to him, was a call to believe in him; and the call to sell his all and follow him in the path of tribulation, was a call to confess him with the mouth,—to love him supremely,—and, like the soldier at the word of his commander, to be ready to renounce, without delay or reluctance, even what he might love most, and cheerfully to endure the most painful afflictions. The command to sell all and give to the poor was not meant for a general rule, but was given to try the character of this individual. The spirit of the precept is, that our will must implicitly bow to the will of our God. This case, then, exhibits no warrant for the notion I now speak of.

They who hold this sentiment read the preceptive parts of the word of God with this idea in their mind, “These are revealed to me that, by doing what they enjoin, I may obtain the favor of God, and at last be delivered from woe, and be called to eternal bliss.” They read with the same view the command to believe in Christ, and the calls of Scripture to come to him for life. These they join with the commandments which forbid murder or theft, and indeed with all the commandments which regard either God or man; and they consider faith and coming to Christ as

just *two* of the many duties which they are called to perform, in order that by this means they may entitle themselves to the favor of Heaven. They speak as if they had a certain quantity of actions to do, and a certain quantity of doctrines to believe. Faith in Christ is viewed as a work which must be performed as well as others, and which serves for little more than to make up the full tale of required duties. If they do raise it a little higher, it is only to exhibit eternal life as a kind of premium for believing. To the absurdity of calling on men to believe for believing's sake, as it were, they seem utterly blind. They see not the nature of the truth to be believed, nor the display which it affords of the true character of man, and the rich grace of God; and are strangers to the hallowing influence which it exerts upon the heart. They do not consider that in all that they do they are influenced by some sentiment, that faith is, of course, a principle of action, and not something abstract, of which the duties of obedience to the law are quite independent. If in every department, even of common life, faith in something or other must precede every voluntary step, why should it be thought strange that this should hold in religion?

That this is thought strange in regard to religion, is evident from the contempt often expressed for religious matters of belief. This is often done from a professed regard to what is rational; but do not the very persons who thus speak endeavor to make men change their conduct in worldly matters, by endeavoring to change their views and sentiments regarding them; and would they not think it irrational to act otherwise with those whom they wish to guide with reason, and not by blind force. Whether then is it more rational to expect a change of conduct without a

change of sentiment, or by means of it? I need not answer the question. Where there is a change of sentiment, there is of course a change in the belief or persuasion of the mind; and is not this just what the Scriptures teach in regard to religion? Some, however, who act on the principle I oppose, do not in words condemn faith, for they speak respectfully of it. This, however, is merely because the word often occurs in the Bible, and not from understanding. Hence they often say that it is right to believe as well as to act, evidently just because the two are joined in Scripture, without at all perceiving that it is by the belief of the medicinal truths of the gospel that proper principles of obedience are implanted; and that without it there can be no acceptable service rendered unto God.

When they read such passages of Scripture as treat of the atonement of Christ, and of the way of justification through him, they do so with the conviction that the thing taught in them is that the deficiencies in their obedience will be supplied by his merits. Still, then, the principle adverted to is in full operation, and governing their hearts. They act precisely as did the Jews in relation to the sacrifices of their ritual, which were viewed by them, not as acts of obedience, which ought to flow from love, and still less as figurative of the work of the Messiah, but as a kind of compensation for the defects which doubtless they would at times admit to be in their services. In a similar light is the sacrifice of Christ now considered by many; and I may add that Christian institutions are not seldom observed with the same views. It thus happens that the same use is now made of the one offering of the Saviour, that was formerly made of the many offerings that prefigured it; and that the appointments of the new covenant are perverted, as were those of the old dispensation.

On this principle, it is not difficult to account for the success of the Judaizing teachers, of whom so much is said in the epistle to the Galatians and other apostolic epistles. It is a great mistake to suppose that these teachers discarded Christ, and the doctrine that salvation is by grace from their system. We find Paul saying to their disciples, "Behold if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace." Now, it is evident that the apostle is reasoning with them on their own principles; and that he takes for granted they still professed to look for salvation by grace through Christ. Their teachers had artfully mixed truth and error together. They admitted that Jesus died for sin, and that faith in his work was necessary to acceptance with God; but they overturned all this by teaching at the same time, that obedience to the law of Moses was *also* necessary. The same place was in this way given to the observance of the law and to the atonement of Christ. The pride of man was, of course, nearly as much gratified as when the work of the Redeemer was not introduced at all.

The apostle, in opposition to such doctrines, declares, that if justification come by the law, Christ is dead in vain. Now, his meaning must be, that if in any sense justification come by law, should it be only in part or along with the Redeemer's work, the essence of the gospel is overturned; for these men did not teach that it came wholly by law, but only in part. It appears, indeed, from their spirit and conduct, that to allow only that obedience to the law qualified for mercy, would have suited their scheme. Now, it is vain for men to imagine that because they do not

contend for *Jewish* rites, they therefore are not of the same principles with those perverters of the gospel of whom we so often read in the apostolic epistles. Surely if the sacrifice of Christ hold a similar place in modern schemes, as did the sacrifices of the Jews in the system of the early corrupters of the truth, the principles of both must at bottom be the same. If acceptance with God be expected on the ground of obedience to Christian appointments,—is not this the very principle which led the others to rely on Mosaic institutions? The Scriptures are in wisdom so written, as that, while they expose existing errors, they also expose the spirit from which they flow, and the radical principles on which they proceed; and so are applicable to the various perversions of the truth which appear in the world, whatever form they may assume.

It must, then, be of the very first moment for an inquirer to compare one part of Scripture with another, and carefully to examine the scope and connexion of every book, and of every passage, and of the connexion of the whole, with the Saviour.

In examining such passages as treat of corruptions of the truth, it will be found useful to observe the strong language employed respecting every false view of the way of acceptance with God. Of all corruptions of the gospel, that is the most dangerous which, while it seems to bring the divine righteousness very near to sinners, in reality sets it at as great a distance as if, in order to reach it, perfection of obedience to the law is necessary. The teachers whom Paul opposes in the epistle to the Galatians could say much on the glory of the Saviour, and on the necessity of his death to take away sin; but what did this avail when the acceptance of a sinner was made to depend on certain qual-

ifications? Such were the characters respecting whom he speaks as enemies of the cross of Christ, and as preachers of another gospel. In like manner, men may now say much concerning the dignity of the person and the glory of the work of Christ, and yet deprive what is said of all its use by insisting on the necessity of something being done on the part of the sinner, to *qualify* him for obtaining acceptance through Christ. Thus the inquirer is led to look to himself rather than to the atonement.

When the mind is at first awakened to a sense of want and of danger, the Bible is often resorted to for relief. The inquirer, in reading such parts of it as treat of the divine law and the institutions of Christ, is apt to view them by themselves, and not as connected with those parts of the Scriptures which treat of the present character of man, and of the way of acceptance with God. He may remain a stranger to the connexion and harmony of the doctrines of revelation, in consequence of overlooking the motives, taken from the gospel to enforce every duty; which motives are often interwoven with the preceptive parts of Scripture, and which are always to be understood as implied in them. Not seldom are such characters led to commence a course of reformation in their conduct, and even a struggle with the evils of their hearts, in the hope of, by this means, obtaining the divine favor. They may reform—they may pay great attention to the ordinances of religion, and in all their endeavors may be very earnest and deeply serious; but they are laboring to establish their own righteousness. Instead of looking to the cross of Christ for pardon and peace, they view what is said of it as either unintelligible, or as meant to give weight to their sorrows and obedience.

It sometimes happens that such inquirers, when they

read of the necessity of faith in order to salvation, imagine that they are not warranted to come to Christ immediately, because they do not find it in them: When they read of the necessity of being born again in order to be meet for the exercises and enjoyments of the kingdom of Christ, both here and in the heavenly world, and find that they are strangers to this change of heart, they conclude that until they are sensible of being the subjects of it, they ought not to believe in the Saviour, or to come to the gospel for peace to their perplexed souls. Sometimes, on reading what is said of the influence of the Holy Spirit, they deem it their present duty to do nothing, but to wait till he shall be pleased by some insensible impulse or impression, separate from the truth, to act upon their hearts. At other times, when they read of the effects and tokens of faith—as, for example, of love to the disciples of Christ—they think that, till they feel the effect of the truth, they need not look to the gospel for relief. I may add, that not seldom do they stumble at what is said of the divine purposes, and of the design of the Saviour in the work of redemption by his death.

Precious to a man in such circumstances is the benefit of a Christian friend who can guide him in his researches, and correct his mistakes,—who can prove to him from the divine word, properly examined and applied, that he errs in searching the Scriptures for the *mere* purpose of knowing *what he is to do* to obtain life, by showing him that all are already guilty and condemned,—that, as even but one transgression exposes to the curse of the law, we never can be justified by it,—that, while we were in this helpless condition, God sent his Son into the world to suffer and to die for sinners,—and that through his obedience unto death Jehovah appears at once just and merciful in forgiving sin,

and receiving the guilty into favor. The question, "What good things shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" is not that which the Bible was intended to answer. It indeed answers this question, but by showing that in order to obtain life in this way, perfect and perpetual obedience in heart and in conduct is necessary. The answer, of course, excludes all hope of justification by law in the case of every transgressor; and shuts up the way of salvation exhibited in the cross of the Saviour. The unutterably important question, "How can a sinner be pardoned and obtain everlasting life?" is that which is answered in the gospel, and to answer it is one great design of revelation.

The inquirer will be much favored, if he has a friend who can, besides this, show him from the Scriptures that the faith with which salvation is connected is the belief of the free and unrestricted proclamation of mercy through the atonement of Christ; and that therefore it cannot be an obstruction to the freeness of divine grace, but is rather a belief of it,—that we become new creatures in believing the gospel, and that therefore a consciousness of being regenerated is not by any means necessary to warrant us to go to the Saviour for mercy,—that no impulse or impression, coming from the Holy Spirit, can be necessary to warrant us to receive the testimony and promise of the God of truth, and that to wait for any thing of the kind, is to disobey the command given to all, to repent and believe the gospel; and is to expect, in addition to the revelation of God in his word, some new revelation by his Spirit, who never acts but by means of what is already revealed. It will be well if he be made to see that the effects and tokens of faith must necessarily follow and cannot exist before it; so that to look for them previously is at once unscriptural and absurd.

Love to Christians, for instance, is the fruit of faith in Christ; it is, in fact, loving him in them.

It will be of great moment to show him that he ought not to pry into the purposes of God, or the secrets of the Saviour, as if he wished to ascend into heaven to see that his name is written there; but rather to look at once to the gospel, in which he is most assuredly called upon and besought to come to the Redeemer for life. The general aspect of love to the human race, which is borne in the gospel, testifying the all-sufficiency of the atonement, as the foundation of the unrestricted invitations, by which all are alike welcome to participate in its virtue, is such that every individual is warranted to consider it a sufficient ground for his coming to the feast of mercy, and taking the enjoyment of all which is there provided. Since all are bidden, there is no necessity why one in particular should have a more special warrant than another to make his way clear. It is on this principle that the gospel directs us to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and proclaims the free forgiveness of sin to all who confide in it as the sole foundation of their hope. The message announcing this is well denominated "the gospel," or "good news." It testifies, in particular, that Immanuel appeared on earth to take away sin,—that he bare our sins (*i. e.* the punishment they deserved) in his own body on the accursed tree,—that he had made full atonement for sin,—and that in what he hath done God rests well pleased. There is now no room for the anxious inquiry of the troubled mind, "Where withal shall I come before the Lord?" He hath showed us in his word what is good, even that in which he is well pleased, and in this he calls us to rest. And what does he require of us as an expression of gratitude, love, and veneration, but that we

do justly, in imitation of his love to righteousness,—that we love mercy, as an imitation of that which we have received: and that, under a sense of his holiness and goodness, we walk humbly with him. Thus he has performed that good thing which he promised to the fathers: and hath given us that which comprises all good. In vain, then, does any unbeliever of this endeavor to work out something in himself to be a ground of peace before God, whether that something be called faith, a principle of grace in the heart, humility, sincerity, repentance, or in a word any thing whatsoever, though expressed in Scripture language. *It is not even the work of the Spirit in us, but the work of Christ without us, that is the foundation of pardon, and of the gift of eternal life.* The work of the Spirit consists in his opening the mind to the glory of the finished righteousness of the Saviour, and inclining the heart to rest exclusively upon it. The testimony of the gospel is, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” To give does not always mean to put in actual possession of a thing, but often means to exhibit or proclaim it as free for use. Those to whom the bread of life is, in John vi. 32, said to be given were unbelievers and so had not eternal life abiding in them. To them it was given in the sense of its being exhibited as free for their reception. And thus our Lord explains himself, when, in verse 50, he says, that this bread came down from heaven, that any may eat thereof, and not die. There is thus laid a sufficient ground for our personal confidence in the grace of God, and for our appropriating the blessings of redemption to our own particular benefit.

What saith the method of justification which is by faith? “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy

heart, that is the word of faith which the apostles preach ; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." When the import of this message is stated, the principle in man which leads him to seek acceptance by something done by himself, is decidedly met, and by the blessing of God may be overthrown. When the sinner, who has been laboring as in the fire to establish his own righteousness, comes to see that the word, which alone can give his soul rest, has been all the while in his hands—that it is the very word he was searching and professed to believe, but which he had perverted and misunderstood—he is struck with his blindness, and exults in the riches of the grace of God. He sees that he was engaged in a work as difficult as to climb the heavens, or to penetrate into the secrets of the invisible world,—in a work which implied either that Christ had not come into the world, or that he had not finished his undertaking in behalf of sinners. In the resurrection of the surety, he perceives the most decisive evidence of the dignity of his person, the perfection of his sacrifice, and the divine complacency in his character and work. In the testimony and promises of the gospel, he sees this work brought nigh to him, and he in consequence commits his all to it with confidence.

Thus he, who was before engaged in the tormenting and perplexing course of fighting in his own strength against the evil principles and propensities of his heart, in order to obtain the benefit of the work of Christ, and was happy or wretched according to his ideas of success or failure, is now convinced that the work finished by the Saviour is of itself perfect, and fully sufficient to save sinners. He sees

that all his attempts to add to it were vain,—that they were most criminal in the sight of God, and highly dishonorable to the Redeemer. His guilty soul in confiding in this work finds rest,—the tormenting fear and perplexing anxiety which agitated his heart give place to tranquillity and joy,—and the love of God is implanted in his heart.

If Jesus is not seen to be able to save to the uttermost, pitiable must the state of that man be who is alarmed by a sense of guilt! In proportion to the strength of his convictions of sin must be his distraction of mind in the prospect of dissolution. He may look to the right and to the left,—he may try many unscriptural expedients to obtain rest to his conscience: but it will be an unspeakable mercy if all of them fail to quiet his alarm. Blessed will he be if he finds that all of them are ineffectual, and comes to be persuaded that it is not by any thing he can do or can be brought to do, but by hearing with faith of what has been done by the Saviour, that he can ever enjoy well grounded rest in his soul. When a man is brought not to *do*, but “to *hear* that his soul may live,” he enters into rest. When the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shows them with the evidence and glory to his mind, conscience is pacified. Though in fact his convictions of guilt become stronger than before, they are deprived of the horror which formerly accompanied them, arising from the tormenting dread of punishment.

The sinner can now contemplate God as a father and a friend; and he finds his happiness in serving him and in being conformed to his will. Obedience to God is now viewed not merely as a duty in a subject to his government, but as itself the blessedness of the soul. The different parts of the divine word are seen as they bear on the cha-

rafter of Christ. Precepts and promises, doctrines and privileges, in a word, all the parts of revelation, are contemplated as they stand related to the Sun of the system. The heart enters into the views of the sacred writers who dwell on the character of the Redeemer, as the centre and the life of the whole, and in whose hands every part of truth becomes in a high degree, animating and enlivening.

“The Scriptures,” then, “are able to make us wise unto salvation” in no other way than “through faith in Christ Jesus.” He is thus all and in all. In the epistle to the Hebrews the subject is discussed at great length. There we have a key to the ancient history of Israel as an instructive exhibition of the character of Christ, and of that of mankind. There the Redeemer appears as infinitely superior to all the messengers of God,—as the true expiatory sacrifice—the great High Priest of the House of God—the King of the Church—the end of all the figurative rites—and the Lord of all worlds.

In a word, a Christian views all in connexion with the Saviour. If he thinks of God, it is as he is manifested in Immanuel,—if of the law of heaven, he views it as magnified and made honorable by his obedience unto death,—if of sin, he looks to it in the light of the cross, where its evil nature and its awful issue are wonderously displayed,—if he considers his duty, he feels it to be most powerfully enforced by the voice of him who from Calvary, beseeches him in accents of infinite love to flee from sin and to follow holiness and to abandon the vain hope of uniting disobedience and genuine enjoyment. When he forms his estimate of the world, it is by contemplating the character of him who, for the sake of sinners, became poor, and stooped to be a man of sorrows. In this he sees the light in which

God in our nature viewed the glories of the present scene. At the cross of his Lord the world is stripped of its delusive charms, and there he leaves it of choice. If he think of that misery which awaits the worshippers of present things, he turns to the bitterness of *his* heart who was the afflicted one, and from it he learns what the curse of the law includes: If he meditate on death, he looks to the death and the resurrection of his Lord; and on his finished work he rests his hope: If he anticipate the judgment, he remembers that he who shall fill the throne is he who made atonement for sin; and from the tribunal of judgment he turns to Calvary. There, though conscious of much guilt and great unworthiness, he confides in Him as his friend, his benefactor, and his brother; and his emotions are at once peaceful, joyful, and solemn. If his mind dwell, as often it must, on the scenes of eternity, he rests on him who is the resurrection and the life,—who liveth for evermore as a Priest upon his throne in the house of God, and over that kingdom which cannot be moved. When in this vale of tears, he anticipates the bliss of heaven, his eye fixes on the glory of his Lord, and he exults in the hope of being at last altogether like him.

Time would fail me were I to attempt to show you how every thing in Scripture, and in true religion, connects itself with the Saviour. Let these desultory hints suffice. When the mind of an inquirer is divinely taught to perceive the harmony of Scripture and its reference throughout to the character of Christ, he finds that all the parts of revelation open upon his understanding, and are felt in their due influence, in proportion as he becomes increasingly acquainted with the works and excellencies of the Friend of sinners. He is led from conviction to count all things but

loss for the knowledge of the glories of his Lord ; and he studies to grow in acquaintance with an object, at once so excellent in itself and so interesting to him.

It is however by no means necessary, as I have already hinted, that every thing in Scripture should be considered as directly and immediately referring to him. Far from it. Plain historical narratives ought not to be converted into allegories, in order to introduce him ; nor should types be overstrained and forced to speak in a far-fetched or an unnatural way. Much harm has been done by this manner of treating the word of God. The rule is, to keep by the interpretations of the Old Testament which we find in the New, and by the general principles of interpretation which are there established. If we do this, and are guided by the application of those examples and principles by sound judgment, and not by mere fancy,—and if we accompany all our inquiries with fervent and devout prayer to God for the constant guidance of his Holy Spirit, we shall not greatly err.

I have endeavored throughout, my dear friend, to keep general principles in view. It really is not by mere rules and directions minutely laid down that the Scriptures will be read with profit. General principles admit of many modifications, adapted to the varied and ever-varying circumstances of mankind. The great thing is to understand the way of a sinner's acceptance with God, and the nature of Christian obedience and enjoyment, as flowing from the knowledge and faith of that simple and yet majestic truth "which saves and sets the sinner free." We are very apt to think of labored discussions and complex directions ; and so to overlook the important and the encouraging fact, that the sum of all that is necessary to be believed in order

to salvation, is often in Scripture expressed in a single short and plain sentence, so that the weakest capacity may understand it.

The way of salvation is beautifully illustrated in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, by an allusion to the mode in which the Israelites were cured when bitten by serpents—namely, by looking to the serpents of brass. We have a simple exhibition of the same gospel in the words immediately following this allusion. There is another comprehensive and simple declaration of it in the passage where Paul denominates himself a ringleader among sinners, and exults in the thought that to save even such, Christ came into the world. In many other short sentences we have the substance of the gospel. This great truth has not seldom been understood and believed by very young children; and it has imparted unutterable consolation to many a mind, which, through infirmity and disease, was incapable of dwelling long with steadiness on any subject, far less of following a long train of argument. The substance of it was understood by Timothy while a child; and must have been understood by Samuel, David, Josiah, and other pious children, of whom mention is made in Scripture. In fact, the truth must be received in the spirit of a child. If a man will be wise, he must submit to be reckoned a fool by the men of this world. It is the glory of the gospel that it is adapted to man as such, whether barbarous or refined, learned or illiterate. If the individual has previously been ignorant of divine truth, yet when the nature of the gospel is once perceived, and its power is felt, knowledge will be easily gained; or, if he has had a previous knowledge of the Scriptures, it will soon be applied as it ought. Thus the entrance of the gospel giveth light to the soul. There

is in the gospel, considered as a whole, that which can occupy the powers of the most exalted angel, and that which, though despised by the wise of this world, can make even a child wise unto salvation.

I remain, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

ON JUSTIFICATION.

Introductory remarks--The nature of Justification--Improper nicely to distinguish between the obedience and the sufferings of Christ
—The ground of Justification--The moral meetness of the plan of redemption.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE BEEN requested by your correspondent here to write you some general thoughts on the Scripture doctrine of redemption, with a particular view to the subjects of justification, the renovation of the character, and the way in which the Scriptures introduce the divine purposes. With this request I cheerfully comply; and shall endeavor to meet your questions in a plain and simple manner.

The Scriptures unequivocally declare, that all mankind have lost both the favor and the moral image of God. By the loss of his favor we are all legally excluded from his family, and consequently can have no interest in its privileges. Since this loss has been incurred by guilt, it is necessary to its removal that our sins be pardoned, and our persons accepted as righteous. This is a change of *state* ;

but, as we have lost the image of God as well as his favor it is also necessary to our salvation, that we be conformed to the divine character by a change of *mind*. Could we suppose a sinner to be pardoned and admitted into the family of God while no change was effected on his character, he could derive scarcely any benefit from his pardon; because he could have no relish for the holy and spiritual services and enjoyments of the house of God. Were he even admitted into heaven, its hallowed society and its sacred glories would to him be intolerable; for happiness does not result from situation, but from an agreement between faculties and objects, desires and enjoyments. No change can take place in the divine mind, and of course a change must take place in ours; for happiness cannot be enjoyed while our desires and pleasures, our habits, principles, and pursuits, are all opposed to the character and will of God, and to the exercises and enjoyments of his temple. Were a prince to elevate a slave to a station of eminence, while all the habits of a state of slavery remained, this change of condition, without a change of views, feelings and dispositions, would embarrass and encumber. There is a suitability between circumstances and character, which is essential to ease and enjoyment; and it is the glory of the gospel, that, while it elevates to the family of God, it implants and cherishes a spirit becoming it. Christians are accordingly reminded of the high dignity of their calling, in order to induce them to act in character. This proceeds on a principle similar to that on which princes are reminded of their birth, connexions, and prospects, in order to elevate their minds above every thing unworthy of their rank. Christians are called to enter into the views and the man-

ners of the family into which they are brought : and in proportion as they act in character, they become assimilated to the heavenly world.

This subject will be better illustrated by considering man as diseased, as well as condemned,—in both which lights he is represented in Scripture. Should a man be imprisoned and condemned to death for a breach of the laws, and should he, while in this state, be seized with the jail fever to such a degree as to insure his death by the disease, independently of a public execution according to his sentence, and were he in this state to receive a pardon from his prince,—of what use would it be to him? His prison doors are set open, but the diseased man cannot leave prison: his life is spared by his prince, but it falls a victim to his disorder—a disorder, too, occasioned by his crime; so that the benefit of his pardon he cannot enjoy, further than this—that he escapes the shame of a public execution. But if his prince, at the time he pardoned him, could rebuke his disorder, and restore him to health, then, and only then, could the benefits of the pardon be enjoyed. The same is the case with mankind. We are under a judicial sentence of condemnation; but we are, at the same time, under the power of the disease of sin,—we are depraved in heart, alienated from God, hostile to his true character and will, and utterly averse from the holy and spiritual blessings and pleasures of his family. Though we cannot but seek happiness, we naturally seek it not in God, but in the creature. The favor of God in his true character is not the object of desire,—the thought of immediate fellowship with him rather pains than attracts us; and a life beyond the grave, in a state of separation from the objects of sense, is

considered the ruin of our happiness rather than its perfection. This temper of the heart, as well as the dread consequent on a sense of guilt, causes us to shun all serious thoughts of death and of eternity.

If, then, we are not delivered from this moral malady, of what use could forgiveness be to us? We should still be miserable; for sin and wretchedness are inseparable, being, in the very nature of things, connected together by a law as steady and invariable as that which regulates the planets. The misery consequent upon sin does not arise from the arbitrary frown of Heaven, or from the positive infliction of superior power, as if the cause of it were that Omnipotence directs its severe pressure by mere will against the worms of the dust. Far from us be every such thought. When the divine law denounces the infliction of punishment, it declares what will, in the very nature of things, be the effect of sin to the transgressor; it adds its sanction to the constitution of nature. Heaven and hell are chiefly to be considered as the names of opposite characters; the former of which is connected with happy effects and consequences, and the latter with all that is wretched and miserable. Not that either the idea of place or that of the direct and judicial interposition of Jehovah is excluded; but that his power is to be viewed as employed in placing the impenitent in such circumstances as shall fully allow their unhallowed principles to produce their natural and bitter fruits. They shall be removed from all earthly enjoyments, and also brought into close contact with their Judge; the consequence of which must be the most acute misery. God is consuming fire; and as it is the nature of fire to burn and to consume whatever is combustible when in contact with it, so, in like manner, such is the nature of the

God of purity and holiness, and such his relation to his rational creatures, that wherever beings of a character opposite to his are brought near him, they are, in the very nature of things, rendered unhappy. This must be awfully experienced in that state where, separated from all objects of sense, and in the immediate presence of God, they shall feel the natural effects consequent on sin. In this world there are many things to divert the attention, and to occupy the heart ; but in the invisible state the mind will be left to itself. Think it *must* ; and think of God, and of its own character and condition it *must* ; and being obliged to turn to itself, it will become its own tormentor. Of course, there can be no deliverance from misery, but by a change of the mind from sin to holiness. Till spiritual health is restored, or, in other words, till we are conformed to the character of God, we cannot be happy. If it is the design of God to make us blessed, he must, in order to this, make us holy ; for even the Almighty, with reverence be it said, cannot otherwise make us truly happy. Hence our Lord has said, “Except a man be born of water—even of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He does not ascribe this to the mere will of God, but traces it to the very nature of things. He does not say he *shall* not enter, but “he *cannot* enter into the kingdom of God ;” and this is true in relation to this life, as well as that which is to come.

Sin, then, is the disease and the bane of our souls : and be where we may, we cannot be happy if its poison is left to rage in our hearts. To complete our salvation, the Redeemer therefore died not only to expiate our guilt, but to sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of regeneration, even the renewing of the Holy Ghost, that he might pre-

sent us to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that we should be holy and without blemish.

These two blessings—restoration to the family of God, and restoration to spiritual health—though in themselves distinct, are communicated together. The former is obtained by the death of Christ, as a medium of forgiveness every way worthy of God; the latter is obtained by the knowledge of this fact, and of the truths illustrated by the revelation of it. Pardon is connected with faith in the gospel of Christ, and the guilty of every class are called upon to believe it, in order to their justification before God.

Having made these general remarks, allow me, my dear friend, to call your attention more particularly to the ground of a sinner's acceptance before God,—the consideration of which will naturally lead to the study of other branches of the doctrine of redemption. It is of the first importance to have scriptural views of the doctrine of justification; “for it spreads itself through the whole system of divine truth; and according as it is either fully established, or superficially touched—clearly understood, or imperfectly apprehended—will the whole of religion rise in genuine glory as a solid structure, or totter to its base.”

The term justification is generally used in a forensic sense, and refers to the proceedings in a court of judicature. It is with this, however, as with most cases in which the ways of God allude to the proceedings of men; for although there are points of resemblance, there are also points of dissimilarity between the one and the other. In ordinary cases among men, the ground of justification is in the actual personal character of the accused. He is found innocent, and is therefore honorably acquitted. In an

earthly court, indeed, a prisoner may be acquitted for want of evidence, when there is scarcely any doubt of his guilt; but though he escapes the direct punishment of law, he is not fully justified, because, being a suspected character, he is not confided in, and does not regain his former standing in society. In so far, therefore, as his justification is incomplete, the reason is that his character is not fully cleared. But the only ground of the justification of a sinner before God is the atonement of Christ. This blessing does not consist in making a person righteous by infusing into him righteous principles or dispositions, and so changing his character, but in absolving him from the guilt of his sins, and receiving him into favor, and so changing his state in relation to God as his offended Judge. It is the deed of God as a judge; and it stands opposed to a sentence of condemnation. Accordingly it is said that "the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." "It is God that justifieth," saith the apostle, "who is he that condemneth?" Among men a person who is condemned may be pardoned, but cannot be justified; for justification in its original and proper sense is incompatible with pardon; it declares the charges brought against the prisoner to be false, and that he is fully entitled to all the privileges of a good citizen. Such is the original and proper sense of the term, and accordingly it is often used in Scripture to signify approbation or a public vindication of the character and conduct of those who are said to be justified. The justification of a sinner, however, according to the gospel, signifies his being discharged from the condemnatory sentence of the law by a free pardon of all his sins, and the acceptance of him into a state of favor as though he were righteous. In this deed of the Judge he

is treated as though his character were righteous, for the sake of the perfect work of the Redeemer.

Pardon and justification are therefore substantially the same blessing, so far as the removal of the penal consequences of guilt is concerned. The latter accordingly is opposed, as I have already mentioned, to condemnation; and we are said to be justified from sin. The term pardon taken by itself expresses the nature of the fundamental part of the blessing, and the judicial term justification refers to the medium through which it is bestowed. Pardon respects man as a sinner, and God as gracious in bestowing the favor; but justification considers man as a believer in the propitiation of Christ, and God as righteous governor discharging him from condemnation through the expiatory work of the Mediator, and accepting him as righteous for the sake of the righteousness of his surety. Accordingly the term righteousness is frequently used to signify the blessing of justification. "If righteousness, (that is justification,) come by law, then Christ is dead in vain." Gal. ii. 21. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him *unto* righteousness—that is, unto justification." Rom. iv. 5.

I would in connexion with this subject remind you, that the term righteousness is sometimes used to signify the whole salvation of the gospel; but it is because it is bestowed in the way of righteousness, and because it chiefly consists in righteousness. Thus the prayer, "Let thy priests be clothed in righteousness," is answered by saying, "I will clothe her priests with salvation." Sometimes it is used in the sense of benignity or mercy; Psalm xxxvi. 10: ciii. 17., but it is because the loving kindness of God flows to sinners in a channel honorable to the divine rectitude

and government. "Deliver me," says the Psalmist, "and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." Psal. li. 14. Now, by righteousness he means mercy or loving-kindness, as is evident from the first verse of the Psalm; but not mere mercy, for he expects the blessing through what was signified by the cleansing of the unclean with a bunch of hyssop dipt in the water of purification; and this we learn from the New Testament was the blood of Christ. Psal. li. 7, compared with Heb. ix. 13, 14, and Num. xix. 17, 18. Wherever, therefore, it denotes *that* mercy or goodness which is the origin of redemption, it also refers to the righteous and holy medium through which it is bestowed.

The ground on which a sinner is constituted righteous in the eye of the law, or, in other words, is treated as though he were righteous, is the righteousness of Christ; and hence the term justification is employed to express the nature and medium of his forgiveness. Pardon, indeed, is frequently used among men to signify merely the discharge of the guilty from the *direct* punishment of the law, and not the restoration to favor and its consequent advantages; and hence a subject whose life and estate had both been forfeited is said to be pardoned when his life is spared, though his estate should not be restored, and though his former intercourse with his Prince should not be allowed, even when every moral as well as every legal barrier is removed, but the forgiveness that is with God includes deliverance from the whole desert of transgression. The penalty of the law includes the deprivation of the divine favor and the suffering of the divine vengeance; both which are comprehended in the final sentence of the wicked, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and

his angels." Neither of these singly, but both of them together, constitute the curse of the law ; and therefore, if a sinner is not delivered from both, he is not fully pardoned. When pardon is distinguished from a restoration to a state of favor and acceptance, it is used in the common signification of deliverance from the direct and positive infliction of punishment, and in distinction from that high state of favor into which we are brought through the mediation of Christ.—When used in the full sense of the blessing comprehended in justification, it includes not only forgiveness in this restricted sense, but the blessing of restoration to the divine favor, as though the individual were righteous.

This view of the subject is confirmed by the reasoning of the apostle on the meaning of the Psalmist, when he says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." This passage is quoted as a description of the blessedness of the man "to whom God imputeth righteousness without works," Rom. iv. 6—8. It follows, therefore, that the forgiveness of transgression, the covering of iniquity, and the non-imputation of sin, are all expressions amounting in effect to the same with the imputation of righteousness. It is also evident from the connexion that the imputation of righteousness is the same with justification ; and that justification is the same with forgiveness, or at least that they are so inexpressibly connected as to be used interchangeably. Not to impute sin is not to lay it to the charge of the guilty person to his condemnation ; and not treating him as a sinner, is of the same amount with treating him as righteous, or, in other words, justifying him.

I need not say, that though forgiveness, in the full sense

of the favor, restores to a state of acceptance with God, it can, strictly speaking, go no farther than to a restoration of what was lost by transgression. It follows, therefore, that it does not necessarily include a title to that new paradise, and that exalted bliss, which shall be enjoyed in heaven, and an earnest of which is enjoyed on earth. The Scriptures, however, represent these blessings as inseparably connected. They who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gifts of righteousness, or justification, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ; and as sin hath reigned unto death, even so doth grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Such is the glory of the work of Christ, that God hath promised that all who believe in it, and so are treated as righteous for the sake of it, shall become members of a new and glorious community under him as the head, and shall, as adopted children, reign in the possession of that eternal life which is the reward of the Redeemer's work. We are accordingly said to become the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; for to as many as believe in him, the Saviour gives the privilege of adoption into the family of his Father. In forgiving sin God acts as a Sovereign Benefactor; but, at the same time, as the Supreme Ruler, pardoning offences against his government, so that pardon is a public, and not merely a personal act. And while he thus forgives sin, he grants us a place in his family, and a title to the heavenly kingdom. Pardon then is connected with that judicial act, by which we are graciously treated as one with the Saviour, and being so, become joint heirs with him of the celestial inheritance.

That these blessings are inseparably connected is evident from this, that when the apostle Paul is reasoning on the

ground of a sinner's justification, he represents an interest in the heavenly inheritance as the privilege of all who are justified, and as their privilege considered as *children of God*, and consequently heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Reasoning on this subject, he says, "If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect;" and again, "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise." He closes his reasoning on justification by saying, "If ye be Christ's, then ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise;" and by applying the circumstances of the difference between a child and heir under age, and one who has reached maturity, to the difference of the circumstances of the people of God under the Old and New Testaments. Having stated, in his epistle to Titus, the spring and means of our salvation, he adds, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Such then is the glory of the work of Christ, that when treated as though righteous for the sake of it, we are not only pardoned and restored to the divine favor, but called to participate in the glory of Him in whom Jehovah is well pleased. Believing in Christ, we are viewed as one with him, and being so, we are treated by God as though his work were ours—that is, we are treated as though we were righteous for the sake of His righteousness. Rom. v. 19. 1 Cor. i. 30. Rom. viii. 1.

Do not, my dear friend, attempt nicely to distinguish between what has been called the active and the passive righteousness of the Saviour: You will gain no advantage by distinctions which ascribe our deliverance from wrath to the latter, and our possession of eternal life to the former. We are said, in Rom. v. 9, to be justified by his

blood; and, in verse 19, we are said to be constituted righteous by his obedience. Now, in the former verse, his blood does not exclude his obedience; and, in the latter, his obedience does not exclude his blood. In consequence, indeed, of the nature of our faculties, we must in some respects distinguish between his obedience and his sufferings, in order that we may the more easily understand the whole glories of his character: But it is quite a different thing to make nice distinctions between them the ground of bestowing separate blessings and of separate exercises of faith, in order to our receiving them. The fact is, that he suffered when he obeyed, and he obeyed when he suffered. His obedience, indeed, eminently consisted in his laying down his life, for the sheep; and hence, speaking of this manifestation of love he says, "This commandment have I received of my Father." It was in offering up the body which had been prepared him as a sacrifice for sin that he did the will of his Father. His sufferings and death are expressed by active terms, such as that he gave himself for our sins,—gave himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God,—gave himself a ransom,—laid down his life,—and offered up himself to God. It is by his being made sin—that is, a sin-offering for us, that we are made the righteousness of God in Him—that is, we are justified fully before God by Him. Having said that "It is God that justifieth," the apostle adds, "it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." It is, therefore, by the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, together with his priestly mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, that the whole blessings of redemption are obtained. When the ground or reason of his exaltation is stated, it is accord-

ingly declared to be his having humbled himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Philip. ii. 6—11.

In fact his giving up his life is eminently that one righteousness by which we are justified. All that preceded his death must be considered as leading to it, and as having its end in it. The redeemed, when in the enjoyment, not only of deliverance from wrath, but of all the blessings of eternal life, express their gratitude by ascribing the whole of their salvation and blessedness to his love in having redeemed them by his blood, and called them through it to be kings and priests unto God, even his Father. I do not mean by this reasoning that to the death of Christ, exclusive of what preceded it, our redemption is to be ascribed, for this were in substance to do what I have blamed. I mean that as the whole bliss of heaven, as well as deliverance from wrath, is traced to his death, it is wrong to represent it as the fruit only of what is called his active righteousness. It is improper, therefore, to divide his work into parts, and to ascribe one blessing to the virtue of this part, and another to the virtue of that. It ought rather to be viewed as one grand whole, by which "the law is magnified and made honorable," the claims of justice are satisfied, and the divine righteousness fully declared, both in the forgiveness of sin and in the bestowment of eternal life. The simplicity of the truth is thus made more apparent, and the mind will the less readily lose sight of that glorious work exhibited in the wondrous history of the Man of Sorrows.

Perhaps some have been led to the improper use of the division of the righteousness of Christ of which I now speak, by confining their attention to the pain endured in

his sufferings ; and not sufficiently considering the hallowed principles, motives, and views which actuated him. The latter, it is true, ought never to be considered apart from the former ; but neither should the former exclude the latter, for both of them are connected with the full vindication of the government of heaven. To the principles, views, and motives of the sufferer of God obviously refers, when, expressing his complacency in his work, he says “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity : therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” Indeed we can have no proper view of the sufferings of Christ, if we do not deeply consider the exalted and sacred principles which they called forth and displayed ; and, on the other hand, we cannot understand the glory of these principles aright unless we ponder on the awful nature and severity of his sufferings. If either of them be viewed apart from the other, the full nature, design, and influence of both cannot be perceived or felt. All that preceded his death was connected with it, and leading to it : By it was his work finished ; and hence the attention is in Scripture particularly directed to it ; but still it is when viewed as a grand whole that the glory of his righteousness is best understood. In like manner it is by tracing the whole blessings of the gospel to it as one great work that its stupendous result is most distinctly discerned.

Consider, for a little, more particularly the ground of our justification. We are told that God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God. I need not say that he could not be made sin itself, for sin is an action and not a person. Neither

did God really account him a sinner, for His judgment is always according to truth; and he well knew that he had no sin. On the contrary, he delighted in him as distinguished by every excellence, even at the very time that he bruised him and put him to grief. You must be sensible that the sinfulness and moral pollution of our sins could not by any constitution ever become his: It is in the highest degree absurd to suppose for a moment, that the act, the criminality, or the moral turpitude of sin can be transferred from the actual sinner to one who is innocent. In direct opposition to such an idea, the Scriptures invariably speak of the sin for which the Redeemer suffered as not his but ours: "He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for *our* iniquities. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of *us all*. For the transgressions of *my people*," says God, "was he stricken." "Christ died for *our* sins, according to the Scriptures." "He bore *our* sins in his own body on the tree."

The Scriptures employ the word sin not only to denote an action morally evil, but also the guilt of the offender and the punishment which the law has denounced against it. Thus, when a man is pardoned, his sin is said to be taken away. Now, as it is impossible that a deed which has been done can be taken away, the expression must refer to the guilt or the punishment legally attached to sin. Thus they who suffered for sin are said to bear their iniquity. Lev. v. 1. xxiv. 15, and Ezek. xlv. 10, 12. This mode of speech naturally arose from the offering of sacrifices to which the guilt of the people had been typically transferred. It was thus taught that the bad act might be done by one person, and the punishment be inflicted on another.

The later indeed only endured suffering, for not being himself the criminal, he was not, strictly speaking, punished, but he endured that which was the punishment of the sin of another.

You will perceive then, my dear friend, that when the apostle says that the Saviour was made sin for us, he means that he was made a *sin-offering* for us. This is agreeable to the language of the Old Testament, where the term sin is often used to signify a sin-offering. Thus, in Leviticus iv. 3, the word that signifies sin is rendered sin-offering,—the word “offering” being supplied, though not distinguished in the usual way by *Italics*. The same remark applies to what is said of the *law* of the sin-offering, Lev. vi. 25; and accordingly to make a beast a sin-offering is expressed by making it sin. Num. vi. 11; viii. 12. Nor is this peculiar to the Old Testament, for the same use is made of the term in several places of the New. Rom. viii. 3. Heb. ix. 28; x. 6, 8; xiii. 11. God therefore made him who knew no sin to be a sin-offering, by constituting him with his own voluntary consent the representative and substitute of sinners, and by inflicting on him in this character the full desert of transgression. Could we for a moment suppose that he had really been made the transgressor, and that the culpability of sin had been transferred, what need had there been for repentance, or a change of mind in the sinner? or what room would there have been for the forgiveness of iniquity? The Redeemer in the most voluntary manner took the place of transgressors, and became answerable for them. Our sins indeed never could become his—they still are and ever must be ours; but their *effects* were transferred to him.

It is unscriptural, however, to represent the union be-

tween him and his people as of such a nature as renders them one person, in consequence of which they may *demand* salvation and eternal life as their right. The Saviour has an equitable claim for the bestowment of these blessings on believers, but to *them* they are matters of undeserved favor. The Scriptures accordingly invariably represent the hopes of the most eminent characters as entirely built on the riches of divine mercy, flowing to them through the work of the Mediator. By a divine constitution, he voluntarily stood in the sinner's place, as though he had himself been the transgressor; just as the sin-offerings under the law was in mercy reckoned to have the sins of the people put upon his head. In the latter case all was figurative, for sin could not be expiated by the blood of bulls and of goats: but the sacrifice of Christ really took away sin. The Saviour, in consequence of having taken the place of the guilty, speaks of the sins of his people as if they were his own. Psalm xl. 12; lxix. 5. Not that they were his own, for that was impossible, since the turpitude and criminality of sin are inseparable from the act, and must belong to the sinner: but that he had become as really answerable for them, as though they were his own. He accordingly suffered their desert, being treated as *though* he had been the actual transgressor. This is a very different thing from his becoming a sinner, as if our sins had actually become his. That they could ever by any deed of his, or of another, become *his* sins, is in the very nature of things impossible; for though the actions of one person may and often do affect others, they never can become actually theirs. Though Jesus suffered for sin, he died the just for the unjust. We ought most carefully to distinguish between his personal innocence and excellence, and the re-

lative responsibility for the sins of his people, which of his own accord he took upon himself. We ought likewise to distinguish between the judicial consequences of sin, and its polluting influence. It were therefore extremely wrong to speak of him as a sinner; for the effects of sin only were transferred to him, and nothing more *could* be transferred to him.

In like manner his righteousness cannot in point of fact be actually that of his people; but they are treated as though it were theirs, and accordingly they reap the benefit of it. When sinners are blessed with redemption solely for the sake of his righteousness, it is accounted as theirs, just as when he suffered for their sins they were accounted as his. Still his work is his own, and never can be ours; but the effects of it are enjoyed by us as much as *though it were ours*. We receive the benefit of his work as a covenanted reward to Him, though to us it is the gift of pure unmerited favor; just as He suffered the desert of our sins as an expression of the divine displeasure against us, though personally considered he continued the object of the divine complacency. This is all that is meant by our sins having been reckoned as his, and his righteousness being reckoned as ours. There is no reference to a transfusion of qualities, but to a transference of fruits and consequences. When, for instance, we are told that the design of Christ's being made sin for us was in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, the meaning is not that we are made righteous and holy as God himself is: We are no more by this means made holy as God is holy, than Christ is made sinful as we are. Righteousness here stands opposed to condemnation; and to be made the righteousness of God, is but another expression for our being com-

pletely justified. Justification is accordingly expressed by our being made, or constituted righteous. Rom. v. 19. By our being made the righteousness of God in the Saviour, we are to understand his fully pardoning our sins, and freeing us completely from the guilt and punishment due to them, for the sake of the sufferings of the surety in our stead. The apostle, when treating of the way in which sinners are justified, calls it the righteousness of God; and says that the law and the prophets bear witness to it. Justification is called His righteousness, then, because it is God that justifieth. His plan of justification is by faith in the propitiatory work of his Son, for the sake of whom the blessing is bestowed. This is analogous to the common practice among men, who not seldom, in showing kindness to unworthy characters, do it for the sake of one who is worthy. The worthiness, however, of the character for whose sake the kindness is expressed does not render it a matter of debt; for it is nevertheless a matter of free favor to the receiver.

You may relieve the prodigal son of an esteemed friend from regard to departed worth, while at the same time you tell the unworthy youth that you do it not for his sake, but that of his father. This were a manifestation at once of a due regard to the memory of the dead, and of free favor to the living. The son is treated as though the excellence of the father were his; but his being so is as much a matter of favor as if it had been quite irrespective of the character of another. For the sake of the work of Christ, in like manner, God justifieth the ungodly on their believing the gospel.

You will observe, my friend, that I am speaking at present of a change in the sinner's state, by which he passes

from a state of condemnation to a state of forgiveness and acceptance; and not of a change of character. But it ought never to be for a moment forgotten, that he who is made of God unto us righteousness, or justification, is also made unto us sanctification; and that the latter is the ultimate object of the former. The method employed to reconcile the exercise of mercy with the claims of justice, is the moral means of effecting a change in our principles and spirit, by which we come to resemble the Saviour. There is accordingly a moral meetness in the mode of communicating mercy through the atonement of Christ. Our offended Judge had love enough in his heart to have saved the guilty without an atonement, had this been consistent with the honor of his perfection, the claims of his law, the good of the intelligent universe, and the highest good even of the pardoned themselves. But as such a proceeding must have dishonored his government, and have held up an encouragement to rebellion, his love was manifested in a way which, by the union of mercy and truth—of righteousness and peace, sheds the most exhilarating light on the sanctions of his law, and the justice of his government.

The atonement, therefore, was necessary, not in consequence of any thing like implacability, or a stern, unrelenting character in God, nor even because of a reluctance in him, however small, to the exercise of mercy; but from the necessity there was that the triumphs of mercy should be in full accordance with the claims of justice. From pure and self-moved love he delivered up his own Son to be a sacrifice for sin; and through the honorable medium of his mediation he now pours forth the fulness of his goodness. The atonement of Christ, then, is not the price, but the fruit of his love. To represent his love as purchased is to

dishonor his name, and to eclipse the glory of the gospel. The love of Jehovah is self-moved, and there is a richness and a freeness in it altogether worthy of him. It was with him as with a righteous governor, who, whatever personal kindness he may bear to an offender, and however keenly he may feel for and pity him, cannot as a magistrate pass by the offence without some public and adequate expression of his displeasure against it, that, while mercy is exercised, justice and the general good may not be sacrificed. Now, in the atonement of Christ, there is an adequate expression of the divine displeasure against sin, in consequence of the infinite value of his blood. By the value of the Saviour's obedience unto death is to be understood its tendency to accomplish the end designed by it. If so, it is easy to see how the dignity of his person gives value to his sufferings, because it affords such a remarkable display of the justice of the divine law, and of the holiness of the divine character, as to maintain the honor of Jehovah, and to secure the stability of his government in the dispensation of mercy. A law would destroy itself if delivered in these terms.—“You are commanded to obey, but you shall be pardoned if you transgress.” How different the manner in which God hath manifested his love, and how dignified as well as tender does his mercy appear!

This view of the subject ought not, my dear friend, to be considered as a limitation of the divine power. When you say of a good man that he could not commit murder, you do not question his strength, but you deny that he would use it in an improper way. This surely is not to dishonor him: it is on the contrary to commend him. The application of this to God is easily made. If a judge allow a criminal to escape from justice in consequence of some un-

principled compromise, or for the sake of a bribe, though the love of life would excite a momentary gratitude in the breast of the favored culprit, yet never could he respect the unprincipled character even of the man who had thus saved his life. I need not say that the gratitude of the former of these must be of a selfish and base description, and the kindness of the latter unworthy of the name.

Mercy dispensed in any other way than that exhibited in the gospel were cruelty to the community at large. The execution of a just penalty as much belongs to a good and gracious governor, as the prescribing of good and equitable laws: They are, indeed, one and the same thing when viewed in relation to the collective system. The grace of God is, indeed, absolutely sovereign and free; but it is exercised through a medium which exhibits it as in strict accordance with infinite wisdom, and with the unbending equity of the divine government. Mercy and grace, if dispensed contrary to law and justice, were in fact also contrary to goodness, because opposed to the general interest of the intelligent creation. The sufferings of the Redeemer became the soil out of which every excellence grew to infinite perfection: They were the means of exciting and manifesting all the righteousness that human nature in union with Deity could exhibit; and thus they at once glorified God, and benefited his creatures. While they expiated sin, they so manifested the divine character as to be the great means of furnishing a remedy for the moral maladies of man, and at the same time the strongest preservative of all holy intelligences from the commission of sin. The Scriptures, accordingly, represent the work of the Redeemer as the cause of heartfelt joy to the whole of the heavenly hosts. What a different view had been given of

God if sin had been pardoned without a proper expression of the divine displeasure against it ; and who can calculate the evil effects which in that case had been produced on the moral system ! Had his grace been manifested in this way after all that his law had said, how could he have been revered ? Such is not the grace of Jehovah, but the foolish fondness of weak compassion, which even men when possessed of magnanimity are above. Even in the brightest displays of his goodness, he is not exhibited as a Being who is all mercy and fond indulgence, but as a God of justice and unsullied holiness, while at the same time he appears as the God of love. His grace did not prevent the condemnation of sinners, but delivers them from it : It does not induce him to dispense with the high claims of his law, but to magnify and to make it honorable in the means of forgiveness. If it is said that because God is love, we may therefore expect him to save sinners without an atonement, it may be replied that he is also just, and that therefore we need not expect him to show mercy at all. The latter argument is as good as the former, because his justice is equal to his mercy. An offence committed against the king as a man, or as a private individual, he may forgive without any public satisfaction ; but an offence committed against him as a king, and of course against the state through him, is a crime which cannot thus be passed over without betraying his trust, and invading both law and justice. The royal prerogative in pardoning offences, it is presumed, will ever be exercised according to the design and spirit of the law, and not to its dishonor and the consequent injury of society.

Whence is it that men plead for the divine mercy at the expense of the divine justice, but from an unwillingness to

admit what is implied in the Scripture doctrine of redemption? Often is there a vague, or even a confident, reliance on the divine mercy thus viewed apart from justice, at the very time when the gospel displays the most delightful harmony between it and the high claims of the divine righteousness. From this display the mind turns away; and pertinaciously clings to a kind of mercy which is nothing but pitiful weakness, or an unprincipled indifference to all that is just and venerable. It is doubtless true that Jehovah delighteth in mercy; but to suppose that he exercises it at the expense of righteousness, and consequently to the ruin of his creatures, is to impeach his character, and to contradict the whole tenor of the gospel. An error on this subject is fearfully dangerous. The most important and interesting question that can possibly engage our attention is—How shall a sinful and polluted creature find acceptance with the God of truth and of holiness? we need a revelation which can support the mind in the clearest view of the divine character, the most enlarged view of the divine law, and the fullest view of our own guilt and pollution,—a revelation which can with these views furnish a ground of hope in the hour of dissolution, and in the immediate prospect of standing before Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire.

Now, the Redeemer, by his obedience unto death, hath vindicated and glorified the perfection of God, and satisfied the claims of his law: He hath displayed his justice and holiness, by exhibiting the evil of sin, its awful consequences, and the divine abhorrence of it. In this wonderful transaction the riches of his grace and the rectitude of his character are made manifest in perfect harmony; and his infinite knowledge and wisdom are laid open in this combi-

nation of righteousness and mercy. The law of God is thus magnified and made honorable: so that the Saviour might well say, "Then restored I that which I took not away." Psalm lxi. 4. The justice of Heaven, which in connexion with the law appeared to be an insuperable bar to the salvation of sinners, is more illustriously glorified in their redemption than it could have been in their universal condemnation. This is a revelation of the divine character, in which there is such a combination of mercy and justice—such a display of God as at once a kind Father and a righteous Judge—and such a suitableness to the circumstances of a sinner ready to perish, as is admirably calculated to relieve the mind of the most guilty of men, in the most deplorable circumstances in which he can possibly find himself in this world of woe.

It is refreshing to dwell on this plan of salvation, and to observe the progress of the new creation as it advances from its commencement to its consummation. There is an unspeakable happiness in tracing the marks of that love which moved the Saviour to engage in this work. To his blessed cross all must be ascribed. Through his work God hath become propitious to sinners; and hence it is said that his anger is turned away: Not that there is in him a change from hatred to love; for the propitiation of Christ respects not the production of love, but its consistent and righteous manifestation. Anger in man is often a turbulent passion prompting to revenge; but when applied to God, it must be separated from every thing that implies mutability, imperfection, or evil: It expresses his decided abhorrence of sin, and his determination to punish it: It is not the sudden effervescence of passion, but the wise, calm, and dignified expression of his high regard for truth, recti-

tude, and goodness, and his benevolent zeal for the moral order and happiness of the universe. He is to be considered in the light of a public ruler, vindicating, for public and not for private purposes, his government from contempt. In reference to mankind there are two aspects in which he ought to be regarded. He is the common father; he is also the righteous governor. And it is in the latter character that wrath is ascribed to him. It is necessary in the administration of the moral kingdom which he has established, that he maintain the honor of his government. But this is not in the least inconsistent with the benevolence of personal feeling towards offenders, for his wrath is of a judicial character. In civil society, punishments are necessary; and the magistrate who inflicts them is said to be an avenger to execute *wrath* upon him that doeth evil. This by no means implies that he punishes with passion or personal hatred: On the contrary, every thing like this in a judge is reprobated in all civilized countries; and the most severe judgments are pronounced and executed, not only with calmness, solemnity, and dignity, but often with deep and tender sympathy and commiseration. You will see, then, that when God is said to turn from his anger, the meaning is, that as the grounds on which he had, in his just displeasure, separated sinners from his fellowship are honorably removed, he can now, in the harmonious exercise of all his perfections, reverse the sentence of condemnation, and embrace them as his children.

The way in which sinners come to be partakers of the benefits of redemption, I shall consider in my next letter.

—In the mean time,

I remain, &c.

LETTER XIX.

ON FAITH AS THE MEDIUM OF JUSTIFICATION.

The nature of faith—Its connexion with Justification—The evil of discussions about the manner of believing—Importance of the object of Faith—Hindrances to it—Its influence corresponds with the nature of its object—Is connected with trust in the Saviour—Has its immediate issue in coming to Christ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my former letter I considered the nature and the ground of Justification: Allow me now to direct your attention to the medium through which this blessing is obtained.

I need not tell you that Faith is this medium. Sinners become partakers of the blessings that flow from the atonement by believing the gospel. In regard to the nature of faith, I have only to remind you that it is giving credit to a report. Like every other simple operation of mind, it does not admit of strict definition: yet every person may easily understand what it is. The general nature of it must in all cases be the same, however different may be its objects, degrees, or effects. The Scriptures accordingly use the term faith in the same sense in which it is employed in common life. When applied to the gospel it means giving full credit to the divine testimony concerning the person, character, and atonement of Christ, and to the promise, that whosoever believeth on him shall have everlasting life. A prejudice has been contracted by some against this view of it, in consequence of their having confounded the mere profession of faith with faith itself. Many, indeed, pro-

ness to believe in Christ who are evidently strangers to religion: but the Scriptures refute the pretensions of such, not by giving labored descriptions of faith, but by distinctly stating the truth to be believed, and as distinctly stating what are the natural effects of believing it; they declare that the salvation of Christ is a present and not merely a future salvation. If a man then profess to believe the gospel while he lives in the indulgence of sin, he must either be making a hypocritical profession, or deceiving himself by believing *that* to be the gospel which is altogether different from it. If this is not allowed, then the declarations of Scripture respecting the sanctifying influence of the truth are falsified. "But let God be true, and every man a liar." To the law and to the testimony let the appeal ever be made. In the word of God, the conduct of Christians is frequently appealed to as demonstrating the excellence of their principles; and these principles are always represented as flowing from the natural influence of the object of their faith. In religion there are no useless truths—no harmless errors.

The apostles invariably direct men to the testimony which they are called to believe, and to the evidence of its truth which accompanies and is contained in it; and in this way endeavor to produce faith in it. Their aim in preaching the gospel was to convince men of its being true; and, taking it for granted that all knew what it was to believe a truth, they never perplexed their hearers by bewildering distinctions about faith itself. The difference between believing man and believing God arises from the unutterably high importance of the testimony of the gospel above every human report, and the full credit due to God, who neither deceives nor can be deceived; and accordingly faith in Him

is illustrated by faith in man. 1 John v. 9. Many, however, are deeply perplexed in consequence of overlooking the truth to be believed, and of an anxious desire to discover in what *manner* they ought to believe. They view faith as some difficult condition which must be performed, in order to entitle them to the salvation of Christ. They do not see how a persuasion of the truth of the divine testimony can save the guilty and give peace to the conscience, because they discern not the freeness of the grace of God, and have mistaken views of the nature of his salvation: In a word, they look on faith as an arduous and complicated work, which must be done by them in a particular way; and they expect to be justified by it as a work. This is in fact seeking to be justified by works of law, under the name of faith; and is but a refined way of perverting the gospel. Faith is indeed the intelligent, voluntary exercise of the mind; but it is an exercise of the mind to which we never in common life attach any idea of merit;—and hence the reasoning of Scripture on the difference between justification by faith and by works. Who ever supposes that the exercise of the malefactor's mind, when he believes that the pardon sent him has the royal signature, merits that blessing? And what more merit can there be in a sinner's believing the message of reconciliation, which declares that "God was by Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them?" As well might a man imagine that there is a merit in his believing that the sun shines, when it is before him in its meridian lustre. The common sense of mankind tells them that there can be no merit whatsoever in believing the report of a credible witness. Accordingly, such as oppose the doctrine of salvation by grace, and yet are unwilling directly to teach that it is

obtained by works, contend that faith in Scripture is to be understood in an unusual sense, and not in its ordinary meaning; They include in it most, if not all, of its effects—even every pious and benevolent disposition of heart, which is in fact to identify it with the complete fulfilment of the law. According to this scheme, salvation is of faith that it might be by merit. I need not say that this is directly to contradict the doctrine of Scripture.

The apostle says, that to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for, or unto, righteousness—or justification, as the word righteousness here means. Rom. v. 5. Gal. ii. 21. We are here taught that, on believing the gospel testimony concerning the work of Christ, a sinner is treated as though *he were* righteous for the sake of that work. This is the simple meaning of the expression, “His faith is counted unto justification.” A Christian, of course, does not *work out* his justification by believing: but on the contrary, he believes *unto it*, or he thus comes to obtain it as a gift of God through the work of Christ. Rom. x. 5—10. The apostle uses the expression “counted unto” when explaining the language employed concerning Abraham in Genesis xv. 6; but he means the same thing as when he in his usual manner, says that we are justified by faith. This expression, it has been observed, may be explained by what is said of the faith of such as were miraculously cured. Our Lord said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” “According to your faith be it unto you.” It was the power of Christ that cured them, yet they were cured by it only when they believed he *had* it, and consequently came to him for the benefit of it; So it is the work of Christ by which a sinner is justified: but he is justified by it only when he be-

believes in his sufficiency to justify him, and in the confidence of this, commits his all into his hands: "As to him that worketh not for his cure, but believed on him that healed the diseased, his faith was counted unto healing; so to him that worketh not for his justification, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted unto justification." To count, or impute, signifies in this connexion to reckon to one what does not properly belong to him, in consequence of which he is treated as though it *did* belong to him. Thus it was said to the Levites, "And this your heave-offering shall be reckoned (or counted) unto you as though it were the corn of the threshing-floor, and as the fulness of the wine-press," Num. xviii. 27, that is, they should be treated as though they had offered that which they did not offer. Paul, speaking to Philemon of Onesimus, says, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account," that is, treat me as though I were the debtor. Speaking of the Gentiles, he says, "If the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision." Now when it is said that his uncircumcision shall be counted unto him for circumcision, the meaning cannot be that it is actually counted to him; for it is a merely negative thing, and therefore cannot properly be reckoned to him: the meaning must be, that he shall be treated *as though he were* circumcised, by having granted all the blessings of the separated people of God, of whose separation to Jehovah circumcision in its highest sense was a sign. In like manner, when God is said to have counted faith unto Abraham unto his justification, the meaning is, that when he believed in the promise of the Messiah, he was treated as a righteous person for the sake of him in whom he believed.

When God is said to count faith unto justification, the meaning is, that he justifies us through the medium of that which in fact is nothing—that is, nothing in us, nothing that can from its nature be in any sense or degree the meritorious cause of our acceptance before him. It therefore amounts simply to this, that he justifies, or treats us as though we were righteous, of pure free favor, or without any meritorious cause in us, for the sake of that righteousness on which our faith terminates, which is reckoned to us as though it were our own, in order to our enjoying its reward in our justification. To have faith counted unto righteousness is the same thing then with being “justified by faith.”

To impute sin is to lay it to the charge of the offender, in order to his condemnation; and what is this but to treat him as a guilty person? Not to impute sin, therefore, cannot mean that the offended person actually comes to think that the offender has committed no offence, but simply that he treats him *as though* he had not. To suppose, for example, that when Shimei begged of David not to impute iniquity to him, he meant to ask that the king would actually deem him innocent, were perfectly absurd. At the very moment that the request was presented, Shimei said, “For thy servant doth know that I have sinned.” All he intended was to express his earnest desire that David would not treat him as an offender by *punishing* him as his offence deserved. In like manner, when God justifies a sinner through faith in the atonement, the meaning is not that he looks to him through a false medium, and deems him to be what he is not, for God must ever judge of him as he really is; but that for the sake of that sacrifice in which he believes he treats him as *though he were* righteous.

Faith justifies, as it credits the full sufficiency of the atonement to justify us, guilty as we stand, before God, and as it has its immediate issue in submitting to the righteousness of God, or to the divine plan of acceptance through Christ. The confidence in the Saviour which is thus produced unites the believer to Him, who thus comes to be treated as one with Him. But it were as improper to say that faith itself is the ground of confidence, as to say that the weary man rests on his act of resting, and not on the thing he bears upon, which would be quite absurd. The whole efficacy of faith in the matter of justification arises from its object; it is but the medium through which the blessings of redemption are communicated, and not the cause of their communication.

Faith ought not to be considered as the condition of the new covenant. It is necessary that a man eat bread before it can nourish him,—not however as a condition, but because, from the very nature of the thing, bread cannot otherwise be of service: so it is with the faith of the gospel. The whole efficacy of faith in the matter of justification arises from its object, in which is contained the real ground of our acceptance with God. Accordingly, it is not by the belief of any or every thing whatever that God has testified, without regard to its nature, that we are justified, but by the belief of the *particular* testimony which he hath given concerning Christ, in which is revealed the sole ground of forgiveness—namely, the perfect righteousness of the Saviour. Rom. iv. 23—25; v. 18, 19. The work completely finished by him is the only foundation of acceptance; and the benefit of that work is conveyed to sinners by means of the divine testimony or report concerning it. There is a wide difference between doing a thing ourselves,

and believing that it is already done by another. The former is labor—the latter is not ; and hence the reasoning of Scripture on the difference between being justified before God by works of law and by faith in Christ. Rom. iv. 3, 4, 5. Gal. iii. 2, 12. Even a child may understand the difference between being justified by what we *do*, and being justified by or according to what we *believe*.

Great is the perplexity in which many are involved in consequence of analyzing the operations of their minds, without keeping the gospel itself steadily in view. When we believe any faithful testimony, the declaration believed affects us agreeably to its nature ; and we are no farther sensible of doing so than as it thus impresses us. Faith is built upon evidence ; and when the evidence of the truth of any testimony impresses the mind, we instantly give it credit. If a person of veracity testify to us any thing of importance, and give such evidence of its truth as the case may require, do we not instantly believe him without reasoning on the manner of doing so ? Were a person told good news respecting his affairs and his family, his mind would at once fix on the intelligence communicated ; and, if satisfied of its truth, he would rejoice and immediately take the necessary consequent measures. It would never occur to him to spend his time in inquiring whether the exercise of his mind in believing the tidings was of the right kind. When we contemplate an object, our minds are not employed in thinking of the manner of seeing it ; we think only of the thing seen. If, when looking on any painting, or on any interesting piece of scenery, we begin to reason on the laws of optics, and get into a discussion relative to the way in which the power of vision is produced, we in-

stantly forget the object before us. In like manner, in believing the gospel, we are not directly thinking of any exercise of our minds, but only of the thing believed, and its relation to our eternal interest. Keep then the object of faith in view ; for it is by hearing of it, and not by any abstruse reasoning, that the belief of the heart cometh. Rom. x. 17. It is not by analyzing the workings of our minds when believing in Christ that the heart is purified. When we ruminate and reason on the manner of believing, we forget the great truth to be believed. In this state of mind, though the object of faith were in some respects before us, yet the heart, being occupied with its own operations, must be kept from discerning the glory and feeling the influence of the doctrines of the cross.

These remarks apply not only to the case of those who are kept from the truth by perplexed views of the nature of faith, but also to those whose views of it are just ; for while the former are held from the great object of faith by their confused notions of faith in it, the latter are sometimes so much occupied with what they deem their *clear* views of this subject, that they forget the truth to be believed as much as the others. The more scriptural our views of the truth really are, the more shall we live out of ourselves, the more humbly shall we glory in the cross of Christ, and the less shall we feel disposed to boast of any real or fancied difference between us and others. The human heart is deceitful, and there are dangers on all hands. The remedy is to dwell on the word of the living God, and to beware of being turned from it by the inconsistencies of any who, by their self-complacency and contempt of others, make it manifest that, with all their professions of humility

and of confidence in the divine mercy, they belong to the same class with him who said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

The doctrine of salvation through the work of Christ is in itself most encouraging and gladdening; and the effect of believing it is peace of conscience before God, and a degree of enjoyment proportioned to the sense we have of the divine favor through the atonement. But if we have mistaken the nature of the gospel, or doubt its truth, or have the mind drawn off to something else which, though called the gospel, and believed to be it, is in reality distinct from it, or opposed to it, we cannot of course enjoy what the truth, when discerned in its true import and glory, is fitted to impart. The great question respecting faith is—What is the thing believed? Is it the truth of God, or is it not? Most carefully ought we to examine what we believe, and try it by the word of God. That which many believe is not the gospel, but something falsely so called. They believe this something firmly; but what of that? Salvation is not connected with the belief of whatever we may *think* is the gospel, but with the belief of what in reality *is* the gospel.

When we consider the many erroneous systems which have been sincerely believed to be the gospel, we must be satisfied that a man may be really convinced by external evidence, and even by parts of internal evidence, that the Scriptures are a revelation from God; while by misunderstanding what this revelation is, he may be believing another gospel. To constitute a man a Christian, the belief of Christianity *itself* is necessary, and not merely that the Bible is divine. In other cases, we always act on a similar principle; for we should never think of calling a

man a follower of the philosopher Bacon, merely because he believed that the writings bearing his name were written by him, if he denied the principles which they teach. I need not say then that the mere consciousness of believing something which is deemed to be the gospel cannot be an evidence that we believe the truth. The question is, what is it that we take to be the gospel? Is it really the testimony of God? This demands the most careful attention, and an answer must be sought in the divine record itself. Not a few have long studied the Scriptures, and in many things have been useful to Christians, who have manifested total ignorance of the true character of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him. Now we cannot, properly speaking, believe what we do not understand in the meaning of the reporter. Not to understand him is really to disbelieve him; for not only do we credit what is untrue, but from this are necessarily led to disbelieve the real truth of the testimony. A person therefore who believes that Jesus is a Saviour in a different sense from that intended in the Bible, believes an untruth, and disbelieves the genuine gospel of peace: but all the while he may, on the ground I have mentioned, be persuaded that the Scriptures are divine. Thus Agrippa is said to have believed the Prophets, because he believed that they were inspired: but, as he mistook their contents, he did not in the full and proper sense believe them; for to do this was to believe what they *meant*, and this, I need not say, could only proceed from a right *understanding* of their meaning. Though we should be persuaded of a person's veracity, yet if we misunderstand what he says, we may believe the very opposite of what he has declared; and therefore, though in one sense we believe him, in another we do not: That is,

we believe him to be a man of truth, but the thing he has declared we do not perceive, and of course do not credit. I am far from meaning that unbelief is owing to simple ignorance, or merely to a false perception : it is not so. The erroneous views which men, with the Bible in their hands, form of the gospel of Christ, are owing to their aversion to its holy and humbling doctrines. All I mean at present is to show the unutterable importance of the question, "What do I believe to be the gospel of Christ?" You cannot fail to see its importance, if you consider, that not only is forgiveness connected with the belief of the truth, but the change of the mind and progressive sanctification are affected by its means. James i. 18. 1 Peter i. 2, 3 ; ii. 2. Error, you know, cannot renew or sanctify the heart, but must rather corrupt it; so that the mind gets more and more diseased by it, and may ultimately come short of the salvation of God; and hence the many warnings of Scripture against corruptions of the truth.

Some have discarded self-examination, so far as the subject of faith is concerned, because, say they, when a man believes, he must be conscious of it, and therefore self-examination is unnecessary. Now, it is true, that when a man believes a report, he is immediately conscious that he believes it, even as he is conscious that he hears, sees, and feels, otherwise he could not, like the first Christian, profess his faith, and say in sincerity, "I believe." But it ought to be remembered that consciousness respects only, what is passing in the mind, and does not of itself determine its truth or falsehood. The question then is, "Of what am I conscious of believing, and how does it accord with Scripture?" A person, as I have already stated to you, may be really convinced by external and even by certain parts

of internal evidence, that the Scriptures contain a revelation from God, while, by misunderstanding what the subject of this revelation is, he may be believing another gospel. Here, therefore, there is room for self-examination. On the same principle, when a professing Christian examines his state by the Scriptures as the test of it, he of course takes it for granted that they are true. When he brings his creed to this standard, he is not inquiring if the Scriptures are divine, but whether he rightly understands the testimony of God; and when he brings his spirit and conduct to this test, he is simply examining how far they accord with what are there declared to be the natural effects of faith in its genuine import. Now, as no fruits can be tokens of faith but such as we know to proceed from it, this latter examination ultimately resolves itself into the same thing with the former. The Jews were as conscious that they believed Moses as any can be that they believe in Christ; and they might perhaps say, as has been done by some, that they had no more authority for believing that his writings were true than they had to believe the sentiments which they ascribed to him; but say what they might, his writings were true, but the conclusions which they drew from them were false. So is it with many in relation to the gospel. The gospel itself is infallibly true; but what they think is the gospel is in reality something very different indeed.

The Scriptures, accordingly, are full of warnings against false doctrines, and perversions of the truth. They call upon men to bring every thing to the law and to the testimony,—to prove all things,—to try the spirits whether they are of God, to cease to hear the instructions that causeth to err,—and to hold fast that which is good. The

apostles manifest the greatest care to instruct men in what they are called to believe. Their great object was to hold up to the view of perishing sinners “the word of the truth of the gospel,”—to impress them with a sense of its importance and excellence,—to illustrate its nature,—and to exhibit that divine evidence by which it is fully confirmed. They urged men to believe it by every argument which reason, conscience, and revelation could suggest. The same method ought still to be employed, for men now, as well as then, may believe that to be the gospel which is contrary to it. Often, alas! they do not seriously study it, but take their views on trust; and when they receive not the love of the truth, whether they are altogether careless about, or examine it with a dishonest heart, they are permitted to embrace strong delusions and to believe a lie.

This may be illustrated by the case of the Jews in the days of our Lord’s ministry. They believed that a deliverer was promised in the Scriptures, and firmly did they believe this: but they expected him to be a temporal Saviour, which it never was designed that he should be. Of course they did not believe what the prophets had said and meant, but a false interpretation of their language. This was not believing the truth, but a falsehood; and hence our Lord said unto them, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.” To believe Moses was not merely to believe that he was sent of God, but to believe what was meant in his prophecies and law. The belief of what was different from or contrary to this, was not believing, but disbelieving him. Some, accordingly, are said to have believed in Christ, to whom he would not commit himself, because he knew that though his miracles had convinced them that he was the Messiah, they

did not believe him to be so in the Scripture sense. John i. 23—25. The people on one occasion intended to take our Lord and make him a king. John vi. 14. They believed that a prophet was to come, and that Jesus was he; but they did not understand, and so did not believe, what was prophesied of his character and the design of his coming. Their faith, then, was the belief of a lie; for it was a persuasion that he should be an earthly prince, and a deliverer from the Roman yoke. To believe in the great Prophet, was to credit what was intended in the Scriptures which spake of him: In like manner, to believe the gospel, is to believe what the Scriptures *mean* by it, and not merely something so called, but which is not really it.

Many delude themselves by imagining that the gospel is but a new law, requiring only sincere though imperfect obedience. Now, the design of the gospel is to train us up to perfect obedience by gradually delivering us from the dominion of sin, and at last perfecting our likeness to God in the heavenly world. It is thus that it blesses us with perfect *happiness*; for true enjoyment springs from conformity to God, and is proportioned to the degree of this conformity. We are restored at once to holiness and happiness by the revelation of the divine character in the manner of our redemption through Christ. It is foolish to represent sincere obedience as peculiar to a certain class, for all men yield that degree of obedience which the heart is inclined to, and which they find convenient; Matth. xxiii. 23—26, and beyond this what is called sincere obedience is never carried by the very people who trust in it.

Multitudes in this country imagine that they believe the gospel because they never directly called the divinity of it in question, but have admitted its truth through life: but

the fact is, they have never seriously examined it. They have been taught from infancy that it is the word of God, and have never taken the trouble to inquire into it, because never properly impressed by it. It is with it as with ten thousand things which men may have heard, and never thought of questioning, because they felt no particular interest in them. Such things, however, they cannot be said to believe. If "faith is the confident persuasion of the truth and certainty of the divine promises which exhibit things hoped for, and the conviction upon evidence of the reality of things not seen," it is of course neither unfounded presumption nor absurd credulity. Heb. xi. 1. That traditional admission of the truth of revelation to which I refer, is not belief upon evidence, but is a careless assent to the general declaration that the Scriptures are divine, without the knowledge of the great truth which they testify. Many, for example, imagine they believe the gospel when they believe that they shall be justified partly by their own works, and partly by the sacrifice of Christ. His work is thus viewed as designed to supply the deficiency of human merit; and the benefit of it is considered as the reward of diligent exertion. It may seem strange that such should look to the merits of the Saviour at all; but the fact is, even they wish to retain his merits as it were in reserve, that, in case the scale of their sins should outweigh that of their fancied good qualities, they may have something additional to trust to. Now this is not believing the gospel, which is a proclamation of free mercy to the chief of sinners, and which declares that "no other foundation than that of the work of Christ can be laid," and that "if salvation be of grace, it is no more of work, otherwise grace is no more free favor; and if it be of work, it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more

work." We are thus explicitly taught that we must be justified, either wholly by works of our own, or wholly by free grace through the work of Christ. The former we cannot be ; to the latter, then, we are shut up, and if we reject this plan of acceptance, we must perish. Gal. v. 1—6 ; vi. 14.

The glory and suitableness of this truth constitute the grand evidence of its divinity, so that while these are not perceived, the gospel is not at all understood, and cannot be believed. This is the case even with persons who can speak scripturally of the truth, if they do not live under its influence. We may not be able to express in words the exact nature of the defect which there must be in the views of such : but still there is some essential deficiency and error in their ideas which, while subsisting in their minds, must keep them from really discerning the intrinsic beauty, excellence, and glory of the gospel. With all their verbal orthodoxy, there is some essential quality in the truth which is not properly perceived, and some error inconsistent with the faith of it retained, in consequence of which it is made to them another gospel.

It is not enough that such characters are sincere in their profession. Sincerity is unquestionably essential to true religion ; but a man may sincerely believe error as well as truth, and may sincerely think that things are pleasing to God, which are really an abomination in his sight. Saul of Tarsus was conscientious in persecuting Christians, yet he afterwards reckoned himself a ringleader among sinners for so doing ; and our Lord told his disciples that some who killed them would think they did God service. These examples show us the high importance of having the conscience instructed and formed by the word of God.

It is true that we must act as we think right ; but since we have the means of knowing the truth, it is our bounden duty and true interest to compare our views and sentiments with the word of God, under the conviction that we are very apt to think well of what we are inclined to, and that in this case the error of the conscience, instead of excusing evil, is itself criminal. John iii. 19—21. John xv. 24.

Unbelief does not arise from mere ignorance, and is not an error of the understanding only. It springs from aversion of heart to the holy and humbling nature of the truth ; and hence unbelievers are represented as hating the light and shutting their eyes lest they should see it. Whatever qualities in the truth are perceived by them, they do not appear excellent in their eyes, but, on the contrary, call forth their dislike. Indeed, were not the gospel in some measure known, men could not hate it, nor could they disbelieve or reject it. A proper discernment of it is however inseparably connected with the belief of it, and with the love and approbation of the heart towards it. The man who is taught of God sees a beauty, a grandeur, and a glory in it which charm and purify the soul. The measure known by unbelievers of that which constitutes the excellence of it, occasions to them pain, because it disturbs their peace ; and the principle of dislike works secretly perhaps, but powerfully in their hearts, so as to keep them from discerning its true glory. So far are they from being excusable, that, on the contrary, it requires the most criminal exertions on their part to shut out from them that marvellous light which shines around them in the gospel. What they do see in it is so opposite to some one or other of their beloved principles and pursuits, that they feel unwilling to follow up their inquiries, and shut their minds

to its light. Often do they speak as if the evidence of sense were necessary, and excuse themselves by affecting to lament the want of this kind of evidence, which, in matters of pure faith, it is absurd to expect. They have seen as much of the truth as convinces them, that, if they follow it, they must abandon their present course; and feeling the uneasiness already caused by its discoveries, they strive to forget it, and endeavor to enjoy themselves in their unhallowed indulgences. 1 John iii. 20.

The perception of the evidence of holy truth must very materially depend on the state of the heart; for were it otherwise, the same evidence presented to minds capable of understanding it, would invariably produce the same impression and conviction. In regard to matters purely intellectual, or which involve nothing connected with our interests or pursuits, the state of the heart is of little consequence; but it is not so with declarations concerning matters that regard our affections, and the reception of which involves the abandonment of present favorite pursuits, the sacrifice of much that is dear to us, and the most important practical consequences. You will perceive, then, that though in cases in which the heart has no concern, faith will always correspond with the evidence presented, it is otherwise with a testimony concerning things which thwart our inclination; which require a total relinquishment of a beloved system; and which, while they are unseen and at a considerable distance, will expose us to the present reproach of the multitude by whom they are despised. It follows, therefore, that as faith does not always correspond with actual evidence, but with evidence only as it strikes the mind, there is a fearful meaning in such expressions as these: "Their eyes have they closed."—"They say

unto God, depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”—“Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot *bear* my word.”—“The ignorance that is in them because of the blindness,” or rather “the hardness, obduracy, or callousness of their heart.”

There is a wide difference between natural, or physical, and moral inability. The former consists in a defect or want of capacity in a man's mind or body, by which he is rendered incapable of knowing or doing any thing, though he be ever so desirous of doing so. Natural inability, therefore, as it arises from some object *without* the will, is quite unconnected with responsibility, and so cannot be criminal. Moral inability consists in a disinclination, or opposition, of the *will itself* to any thing, so great that the mind, though acting freely—that is choosing without any external compulsion or restraint—invariably follows the opposite. The former, morally considered, is neither good nor evil: the latter is blameable when it is a disinclination to good, and praiseworthy when it is a disinclination to evil. The brethren of Joseph, we are told, “could not speak peaceably to him.” And why so? Not surely because they were under a natural, that is, a physical inability, to speak kindly to him; for no external power guided their tongues; but entirely because they were under the government of envy and hatred. Gen. xxxvii. 4. If a dutiful and affectionate son had been waiting on Benhadad in Hazael's stead, he could not have smothered him as did Hazael; 2 Kings viii. 15; and why not? but because of his sense of duty and his filial affection. Now the greater this moral inability to do evil is, the more excellent is that being in whom it resides; and hence the moral glory of God who

cannot lie, and cannot deny himself. On the other hand, the greater the moral inability to do good, the more depraved, guilty, and odious, is the subject of it.

Mistakes on this subject have sometimes arisen from the sense often put on the word *cannot* in regard to it. The word is employed in two senses. It sometimes denotes that which is literally impossible, as when we say, man *cannot* overthrow the work of God, the blind *cannot* see, and we *cannot*, by taking thought, add one cubit to our stature. But it is often used to express the mere want of will or inclination. Some have eyes full of adultery, and *cannot* cease from sin. The man who had retired to rest with his family, said to his neighbor, "I *cannot* rise and give thee." We every day hear people, when asked to do a thing which they dislike to do, say, I cannot do it; really, I cannot. Now we quite understand them to mean, that they are strongly averse, or unwilling to do the thing. And why then do we not understand the Scriptures, when, in similar language, they express the unwillingness of sinners to return to God?

These distinctions are not far-fetched, or matters of mere speculation. What man is there who, if charged with neglecting the duty of his place, could say in truth that he was unable to do it at the time, however much he was inclined to do it, would fail to adduce this fact in his defence? Now if this distinction is practically made by all when any present interest is concerned, and is never questioned but in reference to religion, is it not evident that the cause of this difference lies in the blinding influence of sin? Perfect freedom consists in a man's acting agreeably to his own inclination, without any compulsion or restraint. Freedom arising from a man's motives being in a state of equi-

librium were a power to act without reason—a power, if it may be so called, certainly far from being desirable, it being only that of a madman. As a free agent, man will act agreeably to his own mind; and, of course, as divine things are in their very nature disagreeable to him, he freely chooses the contrary, because they accord with the desires of his heart. There is as great a connexion between men's voluntary actions and their internal principles, as between the nature of a tree and that of its fruit. This, however, is never in other cases held to be an excuse for what is wrong; and why should it be so with regard to religion? Were a thief upon his trial to assert that such was his propensity to steal, that he could not keep his hands from the goods of his neighbor—or were a murderer to affirm that such was the hatred which he bore to the deceased, that, when an opportunity offered, he could not but imbrue his hands in his blood—what judge or jury would listen to such a plea? Both of these declarations might in certain respects be true; but this, instead of being a reason why the parties should be acquitted, would be the strongest reason why they should be condemned. Were it otherwise, moral government would be overturned, law would be at an end, and the prince of darkness himself were least deserving of punishment. But this cannot be. Such is the enmity of the heart against God, that it cannot seek his glory; but is not this the very ground of condemnation? There is nothing to hinder men from believing the gospel but their own sinful disposition. “Their ear,” says the prophet, “is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken.” But why? The answer is added, “behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach—

they have no delight in it." And can it for a moment be supposed that this spirit is blameless?

Every day men believe many things as true, of which there is far less evidence than is given them of the truth of the gospel; and the reason is, they have no dislike to the things of this world, but hate the things that are of God. John v. 43. 1 John v. 9, 10. John viii. 47. Rom. viii. 7. There are truths also which command the faith of the mind, whether willing or unwilling: But there are truths, on the other hand, the evidence of which may be resisted by a mind full of prejudice, pride, and self-conceit, and governed by vicious propensities. Such a character does not seriously, calmly, and candidly, examine the statements laid before him; the love of sin, and an unwillingness to follow where truth might lead him, make him wish that he may find the arguments by which they are supported unsatisfactory; and he listens most eagerly to every objection that is made to them, and retains most firmly all that can prepossess him against them. That such persons should remain unbelievers need cause no surprise: But is it not evident that it is their own fault that they are not convinced? For their unbelief is not owing to dulness or incapacity, but to the depravity of their heart. The Saviour has explicitly declared, that, if any man will do his will, or, in other words, is really determined to follow truth wherever it may lead him, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. John vii. 17.

The influence of faith arises from the nature of the thing believed. If we credit good news we rejoice, and if bad news we are grieved: If we believe a threatening, and are unable to avoid the impending evil, we are afraid: If

we believe the promise of a trifle we are little affected, but if we credit that of an invaluable gift, we are quite elated, —we rely on him who made it, and we expect the promised good according to his word. Thus it is the nature of the thing believed, and the concern we have in it, from which the influence of faith springs. There is an exact correspondence between the former and the latter of these, whatever be the object of belief.

If, then, it is the nature of the thing believed which affects us, faith must be a belief of the character and qualities, as well as the existence and truth of its object. The faith of the gospel is not merely a belief that Jesus died, but that he died for sin, and that he hath made atonement for it ;—not only that he rose from the dead, but that he did so in a public character, on account of the justification of the ungodly, and as a token of the perfection of his sacrifice,—not only that he suffered on earth and is now blessed in heaven, but a belief of the character of God as thus exhibited, and the manifestation of which is the glory of the gospel. When thus understood, the plan of salvation is perceived to be every way worthy of God, full of his excellence, and highly illustrative of all his perfections. It is also perceived to be in all respects suited to the state and the wants of sinners, and divinely rich and free in the bestowment of salvation. If the gospel is not discerned in this light, then it is not believed to be what it really is.

All the glory and excellency of the gospel is in itself, and therefore ought not to be distinguished from it. The truth, then, cannot be said to be believed unless its glory and importance be so. It is as *truths* or realities that the doctrines of the gospel are the objects of faith, but the belief of them includes a belief of their qualities or proper-

ties. The gospel is not only a true saying, but a saying divinely excellent in itself, and supremely interesting to us; and if it is not perceived in this light, then it is not believed to be what it is. In other words, the truth is not believed. The faith of the gospel is not merely the belief of certain facts, but also, and chiefly, of the import of these facts. The Jewish rulers believed a bare fact, when they were persuaded that Jesus had risen from the dead, while they did not believe the truths which are connected with and arise out of that fact. Though faith be the belief of the testimony of a credible witness, it is very wrong to say that the faith of the gospel is a belief of the bare facts only of which it testifies, apart from their import. The difference between believers and others lies in the different apprehensions which they have of the same object. In the eyes of one, the gospel in its true nature appears to be foolishness; in the eyes of the other it appears to be full of heavenly wisdom and glory. The reason why the former deems it foolishness, is that he is governed by sin, while the latter is brought by divine teaching to have a just apprehension of the character of God as revealed in Christ. That system with which the carnal mind is delighted cannot be the truth in its genuine purity and excellence, but a system congenial with some or other of the evil principles of the heart. 1 Cor. ii. 14. To such a mind the true glory of the truth does not appear, and error is embraced in its stead. The faith of the gospel is of course a conviction of its truth, arising from a spiritual discernment of such a glory, wisdom, and excellence in it as satisfies the mind that a scheme at once so glorious in itself, and so adapted to the relations both of God and of man, could have none but Jehovah for its author.

The degree of our faith, then, will be in proportion to the degree in which the truth is thus perceived by us. Our faith rests on the import the gospel itself as the great evidence of its divinity, and of course flows from the knowledge of it. Hence we read of the full assurance of understanding, and hence too knowledge and faith are used to express the same idea. Psalm lxxxix. 14, 15. Isaiah liii. 11. It may be said, that as a man must either believe or disbelieve a report, there can be no degrees of faith. But let it be remembered, that though even at first, the gospel is believed in as far as it is discerned, yet as it is often very imperfectly understood, the faith of it is but weak, so that it is only when the individual's views of it are enlarged, that his faith acquires maturity, inasmuch as it not only then embraces more of the truth, and thus increases in extent, but also because every new discovery, which is made of any of its parts, throws greater light on those which are already known, and on the glorious connexion and harmony of the whole, so that faith grows more intense, not merely in regard to the discoveries newly vouchsafed, but also in regard to those which were previously possessed.

If any one put the question—Am I a believer? let him be asked, not in what manner, but what *thing* he has believed; and let him also be directed to the fruits of the Spirit as described in Scripture. If a man say he has faith, and has not works, the Scriptures do not for a moment argue the matter with him, whether his faith has or wants this or the other ingredient, but they at once pronounce it dead, or a mere profession, and not a reality. James ii. 26. We are in the habit of saying a dead man, though the body is only destitute of life, because we see only the body: in like manner, a profession of faith, unaccompanied

with the power of godliness, is called a dead faith, because we know the existence of faith only by a *consistent* profession of it. We in like manner read of loving in word and in tongue as distinguished from loving in deed and truth; but we never infer from this that the former is really love, but of a different nature from the latter: We consider the former as a mere profession, or a nonentity, and not as a reality. Compare James ii. 15, 16, with 1 John iii. 17, 18, and James ii. 26.

I do not mean that, where the gospel is believed, the truth will in every individual produce exactly the same effects in every respect. To persons of different abilities, of different dispositions, and in different circumstances, the same truths will appear in somewhat different lights. Take a number of persons, some of whom are quick and others slow of understanding,—some naturally distinguished by warmth of feeling and ardor of affection, and others naturally cold and stoical,—some very timid, and others almost strangers to fear,—some constitutionally inclined to melancholy, and others who have a constant flow of high spirits, and you will find that the same things will affect them differently, even when all of them receive the truth. Different degrees of faith will therefore be found among Christians, and shades of difference too in its result, even where it may be said to be equally strong. Still greater varieties will be found in the effects where there are different degrees of faith, and hence the strong are called to bear with the weak, and to imitate the kindness of the great and good Shepherd who guides his flock with the utmost tenderness and care, and with a wise and affectionate regard to their strength, and the nature of their circumstances.

The belief of the gospel is necessarily connected with

trust in the work of the Saviour. This arises from the nature of the thing believed, which is good news, respecting the work and character of Christ, and includes promises the most interesting to us. The belief of bad news cannot produce trust, and neither can a report in which we have no interest. David believed that Absalom was dead, but he could not be said to trust that he was so. Jacob, on the other hand, when he believed the declaration that Joseph was alive and in prosperity, also trusted in it, and left all behind him on the ground of it. A belief in the hateful character of another will not produce trust, but a belief in the excellence of his character will. Bad news will, according to their nature, produce, when believed, grief, fear, or aversion: good news alone will cause joy, confidence, and love.

Now, so glorious, suitable, and interesting are the declarations and blessings of the gospel,—such is the character of God there unfolded,—and such the glory of the Saviour's work of which it testifies, that the belief of it must be accompanied with the relinquishment of every false ground of confidence, and with trust in the atonement for the present and final blessedness of the soul. Heb. vi. 18. 1 Peter ii. 4—6. Persuaded of the truth that salvation is to be had through Christ, the sinner comes to him, or trusts the salvation of his soul in his hands. Jer. iii. 22, 23. John vi. 68. Isaiah lv. 5. The one perfect offering of the Son of God thus becomes the sole ground on which the mind rests its hope of mercy. “Behold,” says God, “I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone: He that believeth shall not make haste.” Believing in Christ, he is as it were bonded into Him, the living rock and partaker of his life and his sta-

bility. And being treated as one with the Saviour, the work of the surety is reckoned to him as though it were his own. Rom. vi. 1—14. In proportion then, to the strength of his faith will be his feeling of security. If a man dreads that that on which he is standing is about to give way, he is in haste to be gone. The agitation of his mind excites him to flee. Thus the people of Israel felt when the earth opened to swallow up Dathan and Abiram. But he who believes in the atonement of Christ will trust in it with unsuspecting confidence. Never shall he find the ground on which he rests crumbling beneath his feet. While he holds fast the testimony of God he shall not feel the trembling agitation of that man's mind who is resting his eternity on any thing short of the perfect work of the Redeemer. Piteable, indeed, is the state of a sinner who, even on the confines of the grave, is busied with the inquiry, "Have I done enough to procure for me the favor of God?" Blessed truly is the Christian who, believing in the atonement of Christ, is freed from the torment of a misgiving conscience by Scriptural confidence in God as just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. In a word, could a sinner believe in Jesus, and yet deem his salvation a trifling affair, he would not go to him for it; but the promise to faith supposes that this cannot be. It supposes that the man who believes the gospel sees its unutterable importance, and the indispensable necessity, as well as the full freeness of that salvation which it is its glory to exhibit, and that he will be led to renounce all self-dependence, and to rest all his hope on the atonement. And being thus joined to the Saviour, as the superstructure is to the foundation on which it rests, he is treated as one with him in law, inasmuch as he obtains the benefits of his work, as though he had done

it himself. And hence we read that there is no condemnation to them who are *in* Christ Jesus.

Exhortations to believe in Christ, and to trust in him, are accordingly given indiscriminately in Scripture. The attention is not there fixed on truth in the abstract. If a promise has been made us, we may either say we believe it, or that we trust it will be fulfilled. These two expressions convey the same idea. The former, strictly speaking, may be said to respect the promise, and the latter the person who makes it. Abraham had confidence in God that he would give him the promised seed and inheritance; and the Israelites that he would conduct them in safety through the Red Sea. On the same principle, when we believe that Jesus is able and ready to save us, we must trust in him. 2 Tim. i. 12. The latter exercise is, strictly speaking, the effect of the former; but such logical precision is not used in Scripture. The two are so connected, that the one is put for the other. We have access to God with confidence by the faith of Christ. When the sinner is led to the Saviour, his mind is not engaged in speculating on its own operations, so that the whole will appear to be one exercise. Though he is believing the truth, and committing himself to his Lord, he is not thinking of these as exercises of his, an employment which is generally useless, and often injurious. Such discussions are superceded by the attractive and completely absorbing object of his faith and confidence. He does not dwell with self-complacency on the idea that now he is doing his duty,—at least in the way of believing and coming to Christ; and that as he is doing so in a right manner, he may now expect the divine favor: But he is so engaged with the manifestation of the divine character in the salvation of sinners through the

atonement, that he thinks of himself only as an ungodly sinner, and of that glorious Deliverer who graciously invites him to come to him for rest. At the same time it ought to be remembered, that when he finds the truth purifying his heart, he is increasingly sensible that he has indeed embraced the genuine gospel of Christ.

The belief of the gospel is connected with an application of its interesting statements to our *own* particular case. "The entire truth is allowed to enter into the mind, and the believer says—All this relates to me." The discoveries of revelation are seen and felt to be realities. When we hear of another being in the jaws of death, we may feel little interest in the matter, and may talk of it with indifference; but if placed in his situation, cold speculation would give place to heartfelt interest. Did we hear that the plague was raging in the opposite hemisphere, we might feel but little affected; but were we told that it had entered our own house, we should at once feel deeply interested. The matter would then be brought home to ourselves. Now God does not tell us of another class of beings or of another world which is under his curse, but that this is the case with our world, and with *ourselves* individually. We are thus made to feel when his testimony is believed that we are ourselves sinners ready to perish, and that to us is the mercy of God proclaimed through the sacrifice of his beloved Son. Witness the instances of the woman of Samaria, John iv. 28, 29. the Philippian jailor, Acts xvi. 29, 30. and of the Thessalonians, 1 Thes. i. 5. Such characters are "convinced of all, and judged of all: the secrets of their hearts are made manifest;" and the divinity of the truth is felt. Whatever part of divine truth does not affect us is not believed by us, for we are interested in the whole.

When the unutterably important statements of the Bible are brought home to ourselves, we reap the benefits of its rich treasures as much as if it had been written exclusively for us. This appropriation of the truth of God necessarily attracts the heart to it, and excludes from our thoughts all interfering subjects. It follows, that he who refuses to risk his character or interest in the world for the sake of it, does not really believe it. Such is the nature of the gospel, that he who is taught its true glory must be convinced that it is the basis of confidence and hope—of courage and of joy. Where it is not seen in this light, it is not believed, whatever may be the confession of the mouth.

It is not enough that a man believes that Jesus is in *some* sense a Saviour. He must believe that he is a Saviour in the Scripture sense of the appellation. Now, if the sense in which he understands him to be a Saviour does not furnish him with a ground of confidence before God, his view of his character must be false and defective, or, in other words, it does not correspond with what is testified concerning Him. We accordingly find that the hearers of the gospel who, in the parable of the sower, are represented by the good ground, have their faith distinguished as an understanding of the word. Matth. xiii. 23. The stony-ground hearers were not hypocrites, for they had at one time joy in listening to the gospel, which must have arisen from something they believed. They were self-deceived, for in this something they rested as the real meaning of the divine testimony; which it was not, and so lulled themselves into false security. The nature of the error of such persons it may be impossible precisely to express in words, but it must consist in some self-righteous dependence. Though in words they admit all that is testified of

Christ, there is undoubtedly some error held by them which is inconsistent with, and subversive of the real import of the gospel: Thus the Corinthians, who professed to believe in the resurrection of Christ, are represented as overturning that fact by denying its import in denying the resurrection of his people. 1 Cor. xv. 11—19. Similar is the case with those of whom I now speak.

What should we think of a person who, while he spoke loudly and strongly of the integrity and resources of another, would not trust him with the least part of his property; or who, while he boasted of the wisdom and prudence of a friend, would not trust him with the management of the smallest concern? Surely we could not for a moment suppose that he believed what he said; and can we imagine that he who trusts not in the Saviour is really a believer of the gospel because he *says* he believes it. He who does not trust in the Redeemer surely does not believe in the perfection of his atonement, nor in the freeness of divine grace, and must be looking for something more to encourage him to put his confidence in him.

Were a person, on seeing a river one unbroken sheet of ice, to declare that he believed it might be crossed, and did he, when brought to the test, refuse to venture on it, even though he would by this means shorten his journey, or obtain some considerable advantage, it would be manifest that what he had expressed was not really the conviction, but the careless speculation of his mind. He had not given the matter that attention which was requisite to his forming an opinion of it; though, while there was nothing to excite his interest in it, he could easily persuade himself that he believed the river might be ventured on. The case, however, was very different when his expressed opinion was to be acted on.

In like manner the gospel is, with many, a matter of mere speculation; it is not seen to be a reality, and of course is not believed, and cannot be confided in. In this state of mind the transforming power of the gospel, which ever accompanies the belief of it, is not felt, and neither safety nor purity can be attained by it. Though in words the freeness of divine grace is allowed, it is not really perceived.—Something else than the unfettered invitations of the Saviour is deemed necessary to warrant a confident approach to him. Faith is sometimes considered as this something.—It is viewed as some mysterious principle, the nature of which cannot be defined, but which is quite different from the belief of the gospel. When this principle is supposed to be obtained, the hopes of the man are high, and great joy is expressed. But when examined, it is found that this joy does not spring from a conviction that the genuine gospel of Christ is true, for such do not expect any comfort from that.—They imagine that of the truth of the gospel they never had a doubt, because they have received it as a tradition from their fathers. The fact is, that the ground of their joy is not in the testimony of God, but in themselves. How different is this from the doctrine of Scripture, which represents peace and joy as the result of believing the truth. Rom. xv. 13. 1 Pet. i. 8. What, then, can be more evident, than that where such notions predominate, the free invitations of the gospel are not understood, and cannot be accepted?

Were a feast freely provided for a body of people who were perishing with hunger, and proclamation to be made to them indiscriminately, saying, "Whosoever will, let him come and partake of the feast freely," would not every one who believed this instantly accept of the invitation? He

would see that he was described by his necessities, and that no more particular invitation was requisite to warrant him to go and partake of what had been generously provided. Should any one of this body of people lay hold of the word *will*, in the proclamation, and say, since the language of it is, "whosoever *will*," I must first inquire if I am truly willing before I can be entitled to go, it would be evident that he did not believe that the invitation was to all, but to a select number, distinguished by a particular disposition. The consequence would be, that the invitation, describing the whole as perishing with hunger, and not by any other descriptive name, would be rejected. They again who believed the proclamation as it stood would trust in the kindness of the generous benefactor who had made it, and in this confidence would go to him for relief. It is true, that if unwilling to go, a person would not go; but it is equally true, that his willingness, though necessary to his going, would be no part of the warrant of any one of this body to go. A mistake as to this has been the cause of much perplexity and sin in relation to the gospel feast. This, like every other similitude, halts at a certain point, for bodily food is not immediately enjoyed when the report concerning it is believed. But no sooner is the gospel believed to be a true saying, than it is seen to be worthy of all acceptance, so that the person who believes it immediately enters on the enjoyment of the precious blessing, inasmuch as he cannot fail to asquiesce in a plan of salvation, which thus commends itself at once to his conscience and his heart, and to take the enjoyment of the peace and the consolation which the message is so fitted to impart. And what is this but taking of the water of life freely, or, in other words, accepting the boon which

the gospel declares to be the gift of God to all who will receive it? There is no room then for supposing that besides believing there is required an effort as it were, to excite the mind to a particular state of feeling, in order to a cordial acceptance of the gift of God, for if at the very moment that the gospel is seen to be true, it is also seen to be worthy of all acceptance, it follows that in the very exercise of believing, the individual, to use the language of Scripture, submits himself unto the righteousness of God, and so places his confidence in the Saviour, on the ground of the evidence presented in the gospel itself. Thus Abraham and the other Patriarchs, in the very instant that they were persuaded of the truth of the promises, embraced them. Heb. xi. 13.

Many an anxious inquirer has felt as if the great difficulty were to believe that Christ is willing to receive *him*. Such a difficulty is met by the wondrous fact, that he assumed our nature, and subjected himself to all the many and varied kind of evils into which we had plunged ourselves, and bore that curse to which we were liable for the express purpose that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life. He accordingly, invites every sinner of every description to come to him that he may obtain the benefit of his work.

Never question his willingness to receive you at once, just as you are:—He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins. Go to him then, that you may obtain forgiveness—that you may be freed from the fetters of sin—that you may be transformed into his likeness, and may have all your wants abundantly supplied. Ponder his exhortations to the Laodiceans and you will be convinced that all his blessings are to be had with-

out money and without price. Isaiah iv. 1—3. Rev. iii. 18. You will thus be led to go to him in the confidence that he is able and willing to receive, and to bless you, whatever your circumstances may be.

So long as the truth is not understood and believed, it will not be confided in, but as soon as believed it will become the object of trust. In Scripture, accordingly, faith is considered as having its immediate issue in coming to Christ; and hence is treated as the same thing. A knowledge of the unlimited bounty of Heaven, and of Jesus as the dispenser of this bounty, is necessarily followed by an application to him. John iv. 10. In coming to Christ we rest our eternity on him as the foundation which has been laid in Zion, in opposition to all other grounds of confidence. This calms the mind, and inspires it with the purest principles of obedience. Having committed all to the Redeemer, we go forward in the firm persuasion that our all is safe.

Keep then your heart fixed on the great object of faith, that you may be carried beyond perplexing questions concerning your own exercises, by the transforming glory of the gospel. May you experience much of that peace which passeth understanding, and which keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

ON THE GRACIOUS AND CONSOLATORY NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

The nature of Divine Grace—Mistakes in regard to it—No preparatory work necessary to qualify for it—The Invitations of the Gospel are addressed to all—Remarks on the history of the brazen serpent—Some improper prayers noticed—Remarks on Isaiah lv.—Mistakes in regard to the object of Faith—The means by which Faith is produced—Improper inference drawn from the necessity of it in order to salvation.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I called your attention to faith, as the medium through which we are justified in the sight of God; allow me now to direct your thoughts to the gracious and consolatory nature of the gospel.

The name given to the message of reconciliation is expressive of its joyful import:—it is emphatically termed the Gospel, that is, the Good News. The heaven-taught sinner, when, on looking to his past career, he finds that nothing but matter of anguish and alarm meets him, can find rest in nothing but in the delightful declaration, that there is a propitiation with God, that he may be feared. It gladdens his heart to know that the blessings of forgiveness is the gift of Heaven through faith in the atonement. He hears the gracious call of the Redeemer to come to him, and that call he obeys. At first, indeed, he may have his fears as well as his joys, in consequence of the obscurity of his views, and the feebleness of his faith; but as he advances, his way becomes clearer, and his confidence greater.

There is no need for hesitation in coming to Christ at the beginning of our course any more than at the end of it. At no time is there ground for the suspicion expressed in such language as this, "If I perish, I will perish at his feet," as if all the confidence we are warranted to maintain were like that of the lepers at the gate of Samaria, or that of Esther, when, in the face of an interdict, she ventured into the presence of Ahasuerus with supplications for her people. 2 Kings vii. 3,—4. Esther iv. 16. It is highly improper to compare the bare probability of escape from famine on the one hand, or from enemies on the other, with the certain security of him who flees to the hope set before him. How derogatory to the character of the God of mercy to compare the trembling expectation founded on the possibility of a fit of capricious kindness seizing an eastern despot, with the peace in which the heart may repose when it rests on the gracious assurances of the gospel!

You will observe that I have repeatedly used the term *warrant* in relation to coming to Christ; and in regard to this I shall now say a few words:—In strict language, a warrant means an authority or right to do a thing, but the gospel does much more than authorize a sinner to come to the Saviour. It commands, entreats, and beseeches every one who hears it to come to him, and threatens condemnation on every soul that will not come to him "for life." All I mean by the expression is, the reason or ground which a sinner has to expect mercy and eternal life in coming to Him. I have applied it to *coming* to Christ only, and not to Faith, of which coming to him is strictly the effect. In regard to Faith I would remark, that the evidence of a report's being true is the only thing that can warrant a man to believe it. The gospel is true whether we believe it or

not; and the evidence of its truth is that which warrants us to believe it, or in other words, it is the ground on which we credit it. I mention these things to you from a conviction that the term warrant is liable to be misapprehended, and that it has often been very improperly employed. Since the knowledge of the Saviour, by whom redemption is obtained, and of the grace by which it is bestowed, can only be had by means of the testimony of God it is easy to see how the actual enjoyment of salvation, comes by faith in that testimony.

I need not say, then, that this method of justification is illustrative of the exceeding riches of the grace of God. Much, however, is often said of this grace, while, in fact, it is viewed rather as a piece of justice than a display of unmerited favor. Numbers speak as if, in case God had not extended mercy to man, we had been hardly dealt with. This is to deny his grace altogether; for if the demands of the law are not equitable, there can be no justice in the sentence of condemnation, and to call relief from such a sentence by the name of grace, were to add insult to injury. Far from this is the character of God. In the plan of mercy through Christ, the richest blessings are bestowed on the guilty and unworthy. To deny the grace of God we must lower the standard of duty, and to derogate from the perfection of that standard is to lessen the necessity, and of course the glory of divine mercy. Often do men overlook the justice of their condemnation, and forget that God is infinitely wise in all his procedure, and hence speak as if his grace were nearly allied to caprice. This leads to the abuse of it, and has frequently exposed it to reproach.

Mistaken views of it are at the bottom of the complaints

of those who say they are willing to receive salvation from Christ, yea that they are anxious to receive it, and who virtually complain of him as unwilling to bestow it. The fact is, they are not willing to receive it as poor helpless sinners, and as a matter of pure favor. They are averse to the humbling doctrines of the cross, being too proud to live on mere alms, and are wishing for something in or about themselves as a ground of confidence before God. If willing to receive it in His way, there is nothing that can exclude them from it. Jesus came to save sinners, even the chief of sinners. He invites every one to come to him, and promises that whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out. He says whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely. The gospel feast is prepared, and all are invited, yea even besought to partake of it.

It often happens that when these precious truths are stated, the reply is, "I am waiting for a day of power." Now, though our depravity renders the exertion of divine power necessary to the renovation of our minds, it is and always was our duty to give the whole heart to God. How foolish, then, is it in any to call a mere form of religion by the name of waiting at the pool for a day of power! Of the whole period of Christ's administration in his exalted state, it may be said that it is the day of his power, as distinguished from the period of his humiliation. In regard to each individual, the day on which he first believed may be called the day on which divine power renovated his heart: but of the present moment it may be said to every sinner, "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." If any one is waiting for some imaginary time when God will be more willing to justify him through

Christ than he is at present, he will find himself greatly mistaken. The reason of his condemnation, if he continue in unbelief, will be, that he would not come to the Saviour for life, but persisted in wishing that God would work in him something in which he might glory as the ground of his acceptance. Since in regard to each individual the day of salvation is limited to his life, every one is called and entreated to come to the Saviour *now*, in the confidence that in Him God is well pleased, and ready to receive all who come to him.

The Saviour has been lifted up on the cross as the serpent of brass was upon the pole; and as the stung Israelites were called to look to the latter in the confidence of being cured, so the language of Christ is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Now, what would have been your feelings had you seen the brazen serpent elevated on the pole, had you known its healing virtue in numerous cases, and yet had you seen a wretched Israelite, poisoned in his vitals, and mourning in excruciating torture, turning his eyes from the only object that could restore his health, applying to this and the other physician, and using this and the other medicine, in the vain hope of curing his disorder? Would you not have at once pitied his folly, and have felt indignant at his impiety? What better had been his case if he had said that he did not expect a *complete* cure of his malady by the means he was using, but only wished that he might get it abated, and be brought to a state of convalescence before he could think of looking to the serpent of brass for its total removal? If the disease could thus far be conquered without looking as commanded, why might it not be perfectly removed, and of what use, then, were the brazen serpent

at all, and what wisdom or goodness were there in the appointment of it?

But when, on the other hand, a stung Israelite abandoned all hope of being cured, or even having his disorder lessened by any human means whatsoever, and turned his languid eye to the serpent of brass, in the confidence of being relieved, and found his malady removed, how much would this honor God, and how much would it gratify every benevolent heart! And is it not far more gratifying to see a sinner abandoning the vain hope of deliverance by deeds of his own, or even of having his maladies partially removed by preparatory means, and looking simply to the cross at once for pardon and for purity? The heavenly Physician is able and ready to cure all who come to Him. They need not endeavor to be somewhat better before they come to him, for he can cure them as they are.

This blessed truth was preached by the apostles to all indiscriminately, and every one was called to receive it guilty as he stood. It is a matter of deep regret when it is obscured by labored descriptions of certain previous holy dispositions as necessary in those who would come to the Saviour. The gospel itself is thus treated as incapable of profiting any but those who are so qualified; and to attain these pre-requisites becomes the painful struggle of many sincere inquirers. They are busy in endeavoring to feel in a particular way, and to act in a particular manner, in order to prepare themselves for believing the gospel. They pray often and fervently that God would enable them to reach the great object of their desire; which is just praying that God would enable them to do something which may be to them a ground of acceptance before him. Is not this to ask that something may be

wrought in them to procure the divine favor, instead of looking to that work which the Saviour hath already finished as the sole foundation of peace with God? Is it not to ask salvation in a way which supersedes the necessity of that work? Yet such is the spirit of the prayers of many, even when praying to be enabled to believe in Christ; for what they mean by faith in him is some work to be performed, on the ground of which they expect acceptance, or which comes to the same thing, they hope to be rewarded by the benefit of the righteousness of Christ.

It is a striking proof of the self-righteous pride of the heart, that the most unfettered proclamations of mercy are made to bend to its purposes; as, for example, the following delightful invitation of Heaven, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price."

This thirst is not a holy thirst after spiritual blessings; for the persons addressed are represented as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not," and likewise as disinclined to listen to the voice of God; which cannot be the character of those whose hearts in any measure have been renewed. Yet many have been deprived of the relief and happiness which this free proclamation of divine mercy and goodness is fitted to impart, in consequence of looking into themselves in the first instance, and striving to find or to attain a holy disposition of heart before coming to Christ. They have mourned the want of a spiritual thirst for the sacred blessings of the gospel, because they deemed this necessary to entitle them to acceptance; and have thus perverted to a self-righteous purpose the very words of mercy and

of grace. It ought never to be forgotten that it is not of that hungering and thirsting after righteousness of which our Lord speaks in his sermon on the Mount, that the prophet is here speaking, but of that natural thirst after happiness which is common to all men. This desire of happiness is *in itself* no part of our depravity, for it is essential to the constitution of every rational being; and even when it is most sinfully directed—when it seeks gratification in the most wicked and impious pursuits, or vents itself in the most ungodly opposition to the providence and will of Heaven, yet, as it is connected with wretchedness, it is kindly met in this unrestricted proclamation of mercy. Whatever be the cause of unhappiness,—whether it proceed from the losses and afflictions so common in life, from disappointed pride, the misery attendant on the way of rebellion, remorse of conscience, the prevalence of the worst and most hateful of passions, or the torment attendant on self-righteous courses,—in a word, proceed from what it may, this proclamation of the gospel is addressed to its unhappy victims, and graciously calls them to turn from their vain and wretched pursuits, and invites them to partake of true, substantial, and permanent blessedness. It says, “hear, and you shall be happy,”—that is, believe the gospel of peace, and ye shall experience that true enjoyment which is suited to your faculties, which will completely fill them, and which will free you from all your restless and tormenting desires. It is not, therefore, merely of convinced, or, as they are often called, sensible sinners, that the prophet speaks, but of all the family of Adam, who are universally subject more or less to the pain consequent on unsatisfied desires. They have all departed from God, the only spring of genuine happiness, and never can they be

happy till they return to him. Though they feel themselves wretched, or at least unsatisfied, they know not the cause; and even when told it, they are naturally unwilling to allow it to be what it is, and obstinately cleave to the broken cisterns which have so often disappointed them. With much long-suffering, however, the Lord continues in this and in many other proclamations of love kindly to call on them to leave the polluted waters after which they are in quest, and to come to the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Many, my dear friend, put away from themselves the consolations of the gospel, from the notion that they must first believe that they are believers, and then only come to Christ for pardon, as a blessing to which they are entitled. But the fact that they are believers is not the object of faith. Forgetful of this, however, they begin, not with believing the testimony of God, but with ransacking their hearts for some evidence that they are in a state of salvation; and if they fancy that they have found some marks of this kind, they will professedly thank God that they are not like others, and sit down at ease, vainly supposing that this confidence is the faith of the gospel. How preposterous to look for evidences of faith before going at once to the cross of Christ, and resting their all upon it! It is self-evident, that in the order of nature a person must believe the testimony of God before he can be a Christian, and therefore, a persuasion that he is a believer cannot be necessary to his being one, for that would imply a gross contradiction. It would be to suppose, that a person's believing himself to be a Christian is prior in the order of nature to his being such. This notion is allied to the perplexing statement, that the

first thing which a sinner is called to believe is, that the salvation of Christ is already his in particular. How different is this from the call to believe the declaration of God, that the atonement is finished, and is all-sufficient to cleanse from his guilt every son of Adam who puts his confidence in it.

Nothing can be more evident than that whatever God calls us to believe must be already true, and therefore true whether we believe it or not; and that, before we can believe it, evidence of its truth must be given us. But it is not true that a man is a Christian till he believe the divine testimony; and therefore his believing that he is a Christian, or, in other words, that he is a believer, can be no part of the faith of the gospel. The gospel itself is absolutely true; that is, it is true independently of our faith in it, but that a particular individual is a Christian, depends on the reception he has given to the testimony of God. Our persuasion or conviction of the fact that we are Christians, is not properly faith at all—It is rather a knowledge of this fact, arising from our own immediate perception, or consciousness which springs from the nature of the impressions made upon us by the general declaration of the gospel, and not from any thing like a direct testimony from heaven, respecting us in particular. When this conviction is well founded, it is the fruit of faith, and not faith itself.

The term belief, indeed, is sometimes used to denote the conviction which arises from sight, or from the testimony of sense in general, but this is only when our language is accommodated to the subject of conviction *as such*, without regard to its cause. The proper import of it is, faith in a report; and hence it is called, “the confidence of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.” Things

which we know by nature, by unassisted reason, or by experience, are not the proper objects of faith, but simply of knowledge. It is easy to see, then, that our conviction of being believers is not faith, because it is not grounded on the direct testimony of God, but arises from that immediate perception, or consciousness, in our own minds, which springs from the nature of the impression made upon us by the means of the truth believed.

I am far from meaning that a certain time must elapse before a person can be sensible that he is a believer; for all who believe a report must be instantly sensible of it in proportion to the strength of their belief, so that this conviction may be so immediate as to be without any discernible process, even as the sight of an object is attended with the consciousness of seeing it. The impression of surrounding objects on the opened eyes of the blind man made him instantly sensible that he saw, so that he could say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." A man, when under the influence of terror, is conscious of fear, yet his mind is so taken up with the cause of his alarm that he cannot make the passion of fear an object of reflection. Now, the case is similar when any important truth, and particularly the gospel, occupies the heart. We then think of the object of faith, and not of faith itself.

The understanding of the gospel gives an assurance of its truth, and all who believe it must, in their very believing it, have a degree of hope concerning their own salvation, for faith is the confidence of things hoped for. The full assurance of understanding is attained by that progressive acquaintance with the truth, which is gained by obeying what we already know of it, and is connected with the full assurance of faith, that is, a complete and unwav-

ering conviction of the truth of the gospel; and this again, is connected with such effects as produce the full assurance of hope, or, in other words, the firm assurance that we individually shall certainly obtain the whole of the blessings promised in the everlasting covenant. As faith is founded on evidence, it must be proportioned to the degree of that spiritual understanding by which it is discerned. And since there are degrees of spiritual understanding, there must be corresponding degrees of faith, and degrees of faith, suppose corresponding degrees of the assurance of hope, for the measure of the latter keeps pace with that of the former. Were a person to affirm that he was sensible that he was a believer of the gospel, but that, notwithstanding this, he had no hope of salvation; this were certainly to contradict the promise connected with the divine testimony, and in certain respects to contradict himself: But if an unfruitful professor of religion were told, that he must either have received for the gospel something different from it, or have forgotten what he once received, as otherwise he must have been the subject of its salutary influence; and were he so far convinced of this as to be led to doubt whether he indeed believed the truth, this were in nowise to call in question the divine testimony, because God hath no where testified that he in particular is a believer.

Beware, my dear friend, of concluding from these statements that the gospel must be a very uncertain scheme for obtaining peace and hope toward God, since many are at a loss to know if that which they believe is indeed its genuine import. Consider, that if the works of creation manifest that they are the workmanship of God, the gospel in like manner commends itself to the mind by its own light. If we can distinguish the writings of one man from those

of another, is it not to be expected that there shall be such an impress of God upon his word as that all who are open to conviction shall be able to distinguish its import from the false and erroneous systems of men? When we find him saying, "What is the chaff of the wheat?" "Is not my word like as fire and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Is it not evidently taught that there is a light and an energy in the truth of his word, which distinguishes it from the falsehoods of the votaries of error? It exhibits in perfection the character of God: and while it enforces and confirms the voice of his law, it reveals to us a way of access into his presence and family which is altogether worthy of him. The healing remedy which it provides for the wounded spirit fully answers every claim and demand of God in the conscience. The mind, therefore, is not left in perplexity, or if any thing of this kind is felt, it must be owing to the influence of some human system obscuring the glory of the truth. Where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as displayed in the Redeemer, shines in the heart, we see the difference between it and the uncertain guesses of men, and we rest satisfied. We thus obtain a preservative from the errors of the wicked, and experience that rest of mind which follows the cessation of scepticism, and the confidence of faith.

Do you ask, what should be said to a person who fears that he has not believed the gospel, and is anxious for instructions on the subject? I would say in reply, that as the faith of the gospel is to be expected only by an attentive consideration of its nature, import, and evidence, a full statement of these should be given, and the individual referred to the Scriptures. If at all sensible of guilt and of danger, will not the importance of the subject commend to

the mind the necessity of examining the divine record itself? You remember what is said of certain characters in Scripture, "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so: Therefore many of them believed."

Men are accordingly called to hearken and pay attention to the word of God. They are called to stop in their mad career, and to consider their ways—to ponder the nature and issue of their present course—to ask for the old paths and the good way, that is for the way in which, according to the Scriptures, the people of God have always walked, and you know that all of them have lived and died in the faith of Christ: In this way men are required to walk, and in so doing they are promised rest. Jer. vi. 16. The meaning of this address is explained by our Lord, when he says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

In quickening a dead body, God uses no means but his own immediate power, but in quickening the soul, which, though dead in trespasses and sins, possesses an understanding to distinguish between good and evil, a conscience to approve the one and condemn the other, and affections which may be wrought upon by rational motives, he employs means which possess an admirable moral fitness to produce the effect. In the former case means are out of the question, because there could be no suitableness between them and the end; but there is an aptitude in the divine evidence which accompanies, and is contained in the gospel to produce faith in it. When truth of the greatest importance, and accompanied with the highest evidence, is placed before the mind,—even evidence, greater and stronger than that which men proceed upon daily and

hourly in all the concerns of life,—must it not be owing to wilful blindness if the testimony of Heaven is disbelieved? If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. We are not required to believe without evidence, for the most satisfactory evidence of the truth of the gospel is clearly laid before us.

Do any inquire, then, what means are to be used to obtain faith, it may be replied, the testimony of God is to be used, for thus saith the Scriptures: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” “Faith cometh by hearing,” that is, it comes by means of being acquainted with a report. The careful and candid examination of the Scriptures, and the attentive consideration of the import and evidence of the saving truth, are exercises solemnly required. “If any man,” says Christ, “will do his will,” that is, if he is determined at all hazards, to follow the truth wherever it may lead him, “he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”

Subordinate means do not exclude the supreme. If, in bringing us into being, and in preserving our existence, God acts by the instrumentality of means, why should not his influence in regeneration be consistent with this instrumentality? The means which I have mentioned are of divine appointment, and are very unlike the means which are often employed: They present no obstacle—impose no impossible task—fill with no pride, but directly tend to bring the mind to the light of divine truth, to convince of guilt and helplessness, and to persuade the sinner that there is no hope for him except in the atonement of Christ. The call to repent and believe the gospel, and the arguments and motives necessary to produce compliance, come to men at the same time, and are involved in each other. The ex-

hortations to seek the Lord, and to call upon his name, to forsake every evil way, and every unrighteous thought, and to turn unto God, are connected with the revelation of the atonement, and with the promise of mercy and forgiveness. Isaiah lv. 3—8. There is, therefore, the greatest propriety in calling on men instantly to consider at once their guilt, and the way of forgiveness—their danger, and the adequate remedy, so freely provided; and in the faith of receiving the blessings of redemption through Christ, to call upon the name of the Lord. Such are the means which God has appointed: The use of them accompanies the teaching of his Spirit, and is in fact a part of that teaching, whether the effect be immediately or gradually produced.

Does a person say, “I question if I have believed the genuine gospel; and how shall I ascertain the truth on the subject?” Let him ask himself what it was that first gave him any measure of relief from distress. Was it any favorable change in himself, any good desires, fervent wishes, or pious resolutions, or something wrought in him, as he hoped, by divine grace to recommend him to the favor of God? What did he receive for the gospel? Is he fully persuaded in his own mind that God is well pleased in his Son; and that such is the glory and the value of his work, that nothing is necessary to the acceptance of any sinner on earth, but a belief of the testimony concerning the perfection of the atonement? The grand characteristic distinction of a Christian is, that he glories in the work of the Redeemer as the sole ground of his peace. In opposition to the various ways in which unbelievers are seeking to recommend themselves to God, he is persuaded that the only righteousness through which he can be forgiven and accepted is already finished by the Saviour. However much

the many systems of error may differ from each other, they all agree in making the foundation of a man's acceptance with God to be either in whole or in part something in himself; and from all of them Christianity is distinguished by the exhibition of the atonement of Christ, and the promise of salvation to all who believe in it, as a sanctuary for the distressed, and an anchor of hope to the most wretched. We are accordingly told in Jeremiah xxiii. 6. that the name of the Messiah is "the Lord our righteousness," and in chapter xxxiii. 16. that this very name is, as it were, the great motto of the Church of God, whereby it is distinguished from other societies; for, says the prophet, that is the name wherewith she shall be called, "The Lord our Righteousness." The meaning appears to be that "the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Jehovah in human nature, is the fundamental article in its constitution, in the charter of its privileges and hopes; that Jehovah our Righteousness is the song and the boast of all the followers of the Captain of Salvation; the motto on the banners of the Church in her militant state—banners which shall at length be suspended in the temple above, retaining their appropriate inscription, when the warfare of the church shall terminate in everlasting peace." As the mount where a lamb was provided for Abraham was called Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will see or provide; and as the altar which Moses built where Amalek was defeated was called Jehovah-Nissi—the Lord my banner, as memorials of what God had there wrought; so the truth concerning the justification of the Church through the work of Immanuel is inscribed upon her in deep and legible characters; and of this truth she is a memorial to all generations.

I wish, my dear friend, by dwelling on this subject, to

press upon your attention that *great truth*, with the belief of which the blessings of salvation are connected, and which gives importance to all the branches of divine revelation. If the import of what has been stated is perceived by an inquirer in its true light, the question will no longer be, "How am I to believe?" or "How am I to prepare myself for an interest in the Saviour?" No, it will be "What has God testified concerning the character and work of his Son—what is the proclamation of mercy addressed to the world?" That which a sinner is called to believe is the truth of God, and particularly his testimony concerning the perfection and all-sufficiency of the atonement of Christ. It is in believing this testimony, and so becoming the subject of its influence, that we come to the enjoyment of the divine favor, and to know that we are the children of God. The first scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from his conviction that the gospel itself is true. To this truth he comes in the first instance, not as a Christian, but as a sinner; and he looks for acceptance entirely through that atonement of which it testifies. His comfort, therefore, does not, in the first instance, spring from reflecting on the feelings of his own mind towards it, though a sensible change in these is certainly effected. In believing the divine testimony, we are conscious of our doing so; but this consciousness is not itself the source of our comfort; the source of this is in the nature and the promise of the gospel, which declares, that all who believe it are the children of God, and shall ultimately be saved: consciousness is only the medium through which our consolation is enjoyed. It is the thing believed that influences us, and not our reflection on what is passing in our minds.

It sometimes happens that a person will allow that sal-

vation is of grace ; but can take no comfort from this, because faith is necessary to salvation. Now, it is evident that when a man sinks into despondency, and refuses to apply to the gospel, because he has not, as he thinks, obtained faith, he does not really believe that salvation is of free favor ; for he is making the necessity of faith an obstruction to grace. It is true that, till the testimony and promise of the gospel are believed, no relief can be had ; for how can a person apply to himself a promise which he does not believe ? But the necessity of believing good news, before they can give joy, arises from no defect in the joyful import of the *news* : it arises from the very nature of things, just as the necessity of a medicine's being used before it can better the health arises from no deficiency in its virtue, but entirely from the nature of the case. Suppose a person were to say, " The physician tells me that the prescribed medicine is able to cure me, but he also tells me that it cannot cure me unless I use it, and therefore his words give me no comfort, for I do not think that I have used it,"—would it not be evident that he was under a strange misapprehension, so much so as even to think that the application of the medicine was a something that could and must be done separate from the medicine to be applied,—that the application of it must *precede* the application of it,—and that, till this indescribable something was done, and he had thereby become convalescent, he could not apply it ; whereas the very thing to which he was called, and the only thing which could cure him, was the use of what had been prescribed. No doubt it is as using the medicine, or in using it, that a cure is to be expected ; but how, in the nature of things, could it be otherwise, and why then delay the application of it ?

Now, what is the faith of the gospel, but the belief of that truth which testifies that salvation is a matter of pure favor,—being the gift of God through the atonement of Christ to every one who believes, and not the reward of any good thing in us, however denominated: And how can the necessity of believing that a thing is a matter of free grace be an obstruction to the freeness of grace? Is it not evident that the person who views it in this light, means by faith something quite different from a belief of the truth, and a something which he must possess, not merely before the gospel can, in the nature of things, give him relief, but before he can apply to it at all? Is not this to misapprehend the call to believe the gospel as much as the invalid I have been speaking of had misapprehended the direction to apply the necessary medicine? Men indeed do not act thus foolishly in regard to the body; but many, alas! do so in regard to the soul. This is done when faith is considered to be some principle or habit implanted in the heart, independent of the knowledge of the truth of God. Whenever this idea governs the mind, the sinner is led to seek for this mysterious principle, in the first instance, as the main ground of his peace; and is prevented by its misguiding influence from coming to the gospel for relief. Now faith, you know, must, in the very nature of things, relate to some declaration, and cannot so much as be thought of without thinking at the same time of some report to be believed; so that it is absurd to speak of first believing that we are possessed of faith, and then coming to the testimony of God in order to believe it. It must be evident that in this case faith is not considered as the belief of the divine record, but as the performance of some inexplicable work of a very different nature.

It is no answer to this to say, as some mistaken friends of truth have done, that the mode of divine influence is inexplicable; for we ought to beware of confounding the mode in which the Spirit operates with the thing he produces: The former is inexplicable—the latter is not. The apostles have taken the veil from the face of Moses, and have fully declared the gospel with great plainness of speech, and particularly in exhibiting the way of acceptance with God: If their testimony, with its evidence, then, be once clearly discerned, what is there mysterious in giving it credit? It becomes us to believe every fact revealed by Heaven, though the mode of those facts be to us inscrutable; or, in the common sense of the term, mysteries; it is reasonable to do so, for are we not surrounded with such things in the natural world? But it is quite a different thing to receive mysteries of human origin, which are often used as a convenient retreat when all means of scriptural defence have failed. The services of religion are reasonable services, and not the effect of a blind impulse. The judgment is convinced by evidence so powerful, as has sometimes called forth the exclamation, “This is demonstration;” the will is persuasively inclined by appropriate motives; the affections are excited and fixed by suitable objects; and the conscience is impressed by the authority of Heaven,—all being according to the distinctive properties of a rational nature.

These remarks are not unconnected with the subject of this letter, for they relate to things which have kept not a few from discerning the gracious and consolatory nature of the gospel of peace. On this subject I have yet some more observations to make, which I reserve for another letter.—In the mean time, believe me to be yours, &c.

LETTER XXI.

GENERAL REMARKS ON RENOVATION OF CHARACTER.

The renovation of the heart the ultimate object of the Gospel—Dangerous to confine the grace of God to the pardon of sin—Evil of confining the attention to inward feelings—Importance of uniting them with practice—A change of character the great promise of the New Covenant—The divine plan of forgiveness the moral means of sanctification—This change represented as a being called and chosen out of the world.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING considered the doctrine of Scripture relative to that change of state which is the privilege of Christians, permit me now to advert to that change of character which is connected with it: and the necessity of which I have repeatedly mentioned.

We ought never to lose sight of the consideration, that the joyful import of the gospel does not arise merely from the pardon it proclaims, but from its comprehending even higher blessings. These are all inseparably connected with conformity to God, and holy fellowship with him: They form the grand end of the plan of reconciliation, and the doctrine of justification through faith is the moral means by which it is gained. The grace of God appears not in lowering the standard of duty to the level of our depraved wishes, but in raising our nature to the high standard of his immutable law. To suffer us to walk in our own ways were not an act of grace, but an abandonment of us to misery.—On the same principle, were all to which we are raised but an imperfect conformity to the law of God, then our blessedness would be as far below perfection as our obedience.

and, of course, the exceeding riches of divine goodness were not in that case displayed. Here the work is imperfect, but the day is coming when we shall be completely assimilated to God, and so, perfectly happy.

It is a most dangerous notion to confine the display of divine grace to our pardon, and consequent deliverance from the wrath to come. Where it is thus confined, it is abused to the encouragement of sin. The corrupt heart imagines that it may continue in sin, that grace may abound; and that Christian liberty consists in the privilege of sinning with impunity. Sometimes it does not appear, in pleading for liberty, to indulge in gross transgressions, but in pleading against unreserved obedience, and in speaking lightly of what are termed the minor duties of life. Scandalous sins, it will allow, are to be avoided; but minute attention to every precept is not to be expected. A scrupulous exactness in the discharge of every duty is supposed to indicate a self-righteous spirit, and is met with the question, "Do you not expect to be saved by grace?" Often is this unhallowed temper connected with high pretensions to orthodoxy, and to zeal against unsound doctrine. Frequently does it appear in the habitual neglect of relative and family duties, as if religion were confined to particular times, and to public occasions, and snapped asunder the ties of relationship and domestic life.—Characters of this kind will be found boasting that they are the chosen of God, and that therefore they cannot perish. In this way they abuse the doctrine of salvation by grace. That doctrine they evidently do not understand, and do not really believe. What is the great thing in this salvation but holiness of character? What is the end of religious knowledge, but to subdue the corrupt dispositions of the heart, and to cherish and

direct the principles of love to God and our brethren? If this end is not gained, is not the man whose knowledge has puffed him up, pleasing himself with empty speculations. For the truth of God we ought doubtless to be zealous; but, if we really are so, never will that be matter of laughter or supercilious contempt which excited the compassion and commanded the tears of the apostles. It is a fearful thing for professors of religion to count themselves "valiant for the truth," when, in fact, they are gratifying the evil passions of the heart. Such characters, indeed, will often employ the strongest terms, and the most degrading epithets, when speaking of their own hearts and ways, while their self-confidence, censoriousness, and supercilious deportment towards all whose views do not on every subject quadrate with theirs, betray the fact that they have affixed such ideas to sin, when found in themselves, as to divest it of every thing blame-worthy in them. They seem to think that sin is something that works in them without their concurrence, and not a thing criminal, and therefore deeply humbling in the sight of God. By a striking figure, sin is in Scripture compared to an enemy opposed to us, in order to teach us that it tends to our ruin, and to induce us to watch against and oppose it. But if we so dwell on this figure as to forget that it is a principle within ourselves, that it springs from the inclinations of our own hearts, and that the very essence of it consists in the consent of the will, we have admitted a principle which saps the foundation both of the law and of the gospel. It is deplorable when men can use the language of Scripture in direct opposition to its spirit.—There is reason to think that numbers who boast of their orthodoxy, and of the remarkable clearness of their views, while their spirit and deport-

ment are far from corresponding with their profession, have deceived themselves by indulging in notions which lead to this issue. How ready are we to think ourselves rather pitiable than criminal because of our sin! Often do men act upon principles which they would not express in words, and which they themselves do not fully perceive.

Beware, however, my dear friend, of imbibing a prejudice against any part of the truth, because the corruption of man has abused it. Individuals will, indeed, pervert the doctrines of the gospel: but deeply lamentable as this certainly is, I beg you to remember that still more deplorable consequences will follow any mutilated and defective representation of the truth which may be adopted from a wish to guard against abuses which might result from its full exhibition.—Such imperfect exhibitions of the truth afford a handle to the perverters of it, which they know well how to employ in their intercourse with professors of the faith, and thus “by good words and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Some who once took pleasure in stating the genuine gospel of peace, have afterwards become afraid of doing so fully and plainly, because others have perverted it. This may have a show of wisdom; but it betrays a want of confidence in the energy or the truth, a lurking error as to its nature, and a want of that singleness of trust in its Author which is essential to a life of faith in him. It is lamentable when, in consequence of a recent or present controversy, the truths of religion are separated, and one of them set up in opposition to another, to establish a system in which one is prominently exhibited, and the rest are cast into the shade. The opposite of error is not always the truth. There is a point between excess and deficiency—

between inculcating practice without doctrine, and doctrine without practice. In order to avoid one extreme, how ready are we to go to another. This argues not only a narrowness of mind, which takes only a partial view of revelation, but also a want of proper reverence for the truths of the Almighty, which could not be intended to be opposed to each other, but all in their proper place to be received and obeyed.

You will perceive, my dear friend, that while it is the duty of a Christian to hold fast the testimony and the promise of the gospel, and to look to them exclusively for the ground of his acceptance, and his hope as a sinner, he ought to be upon his guard against self-deception. Most carefully ought he to watch over his heart and his ways, that he may ascertain the medicinal effect of the truth upon his character. It becomes him to keep his heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Self-examination is of great importance for the discovery of the evils that lurk within us, the influence of temptation on the mind, and the degree in which we are walking in the truth. When conscience tells us that we have been walking under the influence of a spirit opposed to that of the gospel, though nothing may have been committed of which our fellow men may take cognizance, is it not evident that the truth has slipped out of our hearts? The effect of a proper hold of the truth is the subjection of the conscience to the authority of God in his word. Not only are its consolations imbibed, but its precepts, admonitions, and reproofs, are received with reverence and affliction. The latter no less than the former manifest the kindness and the affectionate care of our heavenly Father.

But it is cause of regret that while some are filled with

presumptuous confidence, there are others who make a righteousness of nursing melancholy. As for that consolation which springs from the truth freely and indiscriminately proclaimed to the world, they care not for it: They are looking for relief not from the word of God, for this they think inadequate to their comfort, but from certain fancied good qualities in themselves. If even the most appropriate passages of Scripture should be adduced to convince them of their error, not only will they deem them inconclusive, but the attempt will excite wonder, and perhaps be treated as a proof of great ignorance of experimental religion. What an evidence of the deceitfulness of the heart! What is religious experience, but that proof or trial which Christians have of the truths of God as they pass through the various vicissitudes of life? The fact is, the characters in question are not properly convinced of sin. The inquiry with them, however it may be disguised, is at bottom this, "What lack I yet in order to procure my acceptance with God?" A question which, though it allows all deficiencies, is quite consistent with a considerable degree of self-complacency on the ground of fancied excellencies, or at least of negative goodness. Under this garb of assumed humility, there reigns the spirit of unsubdued pride.

The change of character effected by the gospel is more than a mere external reformation, and outward attention to religious institutions, or the adoption of one class of opinions in preference to another. It is a renovation of the heart through the belief of the truth. The religion of the subject of this change is a display of the likeness of the divine perfections as revealed in the gospel: It unites in it that humility and contrition of heart which become a sinner, and that holy confidence and happiness which become a

friend and a child of God. His holiness consists in the dispositions which are correspondent with the spirit manifested on Calvary.

I am far from meaning that this change will be equally great in every individual. As it is produced by faith in the gospel, so it must correspond with the degree of its strength. Nor will it be equally apparent even where faith is equally strong; for as there is a great variety in the tempers and dispositions of individuals, the religious principle has more to contend with in some than in others. Take two Christians, in whom the positive principle of piety is equally strong, the one may have to spend his strength in fighting with unamiable peculiarities of character; while the vigor of the other is more employed in such services as will make him appear to be much beyond his neighbor in religion, though, upon the whole, he is not. To know what religion has done for a man, we must consider what he would have been without it.

In considering and examining what influence the gospel has upon us, it is wrong to confine our attention to the thoughts, the feelings, and the desires of the heart. If we are not actively engaged in obedience to the commandments of Christ, as far as we know them, it is in vain to take comfort from what we may deem warm and pious feelings. You will easily see this if you consider that, when our thoughts or feelings are not called forth or exercised by corresponding actions, it is natural for us to judge of ourselves according to the present impression on our minds. Witness the case of Peter, who, feeling warmly attached to his master, said, in the sincerity of his heart, but with great self-confidence, that he should never forsake him nor deny him. It is easy for a man, when engaged

in meditation, and still more when under the excitement of the accompaniments of a public assembly, and a powerful appeal to the heart by the truth, to feel in such a way as to become persuaded that nothing surely can ever damp him or turn him aside from the right path : who yet is no sooner assailed by temptation than he falls. Now, when corresponding deeds or sacrifices are called for, and we do not perform them, it is evident that our hearts have deceived us.

But, on the other hand, as the same works may proceed from very different motives, we ought not to confine our attention to actions. It is the relation of actions to divine truth, and the nature of the principles from which they proceed, that determines them to be good. A man, you know, may give all his goods to feed the poor, and even his body to be burned, and yet be destitute of love. It becomes us then, to examine without reserve, both our actions, and the principles from which they flow. It is quite unscriptural to deery warmth of feeling to the exaltation of internal deeds, for surely the fervor of our feelings ought to correspond with the excellence, grandeur, and importance of the objects with which we are conversant. On the other hand, it is equally unscriptural to deery deeds of obedience to the exaltation of internal emotions and sensations ; for, as it is only in as far as actions are known to proceed from faith in the gospel, that they manifest genuine religion, so it is only in as far as the excitement of our feelings produces Christian practices that they are proved to proceed from the truth. The first Christians were full at once of feeling and of energy ; their minds burned within them ; but it was when the truths of the Scriptures were unfolded to them, and the warmth which was thus enkindled led to constant and laborious activity. They were not afraid to

encourage those inward feelings which necessarily result from the knowledge of the truth, as if they would interfere with active obedience, for they found that the joy of the Lord was their strength; and they united the great principles of the kingdom of God, which are "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

To live by faith is to have the judgment, the affections, and the whole life regulated by a habitual governing regard to the doctrines of the gospel, and to the invisible realities which are revealed to us in Scripture. Unbelief is proved by the want of the emotions or actions which correspond with the objects proposed to our belief. Thus, because Lot's sons-in-law believed him not when he warned them of the impending danger, they felt no fear of it, nor used any means to escape it: And such of the Egyptians as believed not the declarations of Moses respecting the plague of the hail, regarded not the word of the Lord, and left their servants and cattle in the field. Noah, on the other hand, believed the threatening respecting the flood, and feeling, in consequence, the corresponding emotion of fear, he prepared an ark. Gideon was encouraged by the promise of success, for in the confidence of it he attacked and discomfited his enemies. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, believed the promises: and therefore embraced them, and practically confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. In like manner, faith in the gospel will still produce such emotions and feelings in regard to the character of God, the grace and condescension of the Saviour, the character and condition of man, and the comparative importance of the present and the invisible world, as will hallow the affections, will raise above the fear of suffering, and will impart a character of decision

and dignity to the mind. See in the Apostle Paul how the most deep and warm emotions and feelings, were united with patient suffering, constant self-denial, and the most indefatigable exertion.

We are in great danger, however, of deceiving ourselves respecting our religious feelings and emotions in a way similar to that in which the subjects of an ill-regulated sensibility deceive themselves in regard to benevolence. An interesting account of human wretchedness will excite in the latter a kind of pleasurable sympathetic emotions which soothe the heart, and deceive it into a persuasion of its tenderness, but which are very different from genuine and enlightened benevolence. Accordingly, such characters are not the first to enter the abodes of wretchedness, to encounter the painful and offensive concomitants of misery, or to devote time and thought, labor and attention, to the victims of distress.

Now, there is a possibility of living in a world of romance likewise, in relation to religion. Some do nothing but dwell on the varieties of their frames and feelings, to the neglect of those deeds of self-denying labor, and those practical fruits of righteousness, by abounding in which Christians habitually adorn the gospel of Christ. They forget, that if the impressions made upon us do not excite us to that obedience which the Saviour has enjoined, they have not profited our hearts. I need not again say, that warmth of feeling ought not to be decried. He who does not in some measure feel, has not known the truth. What so fitted to impress the heart and to animate the feelings as the doctrines of the cross? The degree of their warmth, and the manner of expressing them, will vary in persons differently constituted, even with the same know-

ledge of the truth : but yet a measure of suitable feeling will in all cases be excited where the glory of the truth is discerned.

But, my dear friend, the feelings I now refer to are not produced by the contemplation of the truth. Often are the subjects of them quite listless when the interesting and sublime, but yet sober and solid doctrines of the Bible, are the topics of discourse. Instead of endeavoring to advance from first principles to perfection, or to a full and comprehensive acquaintance with the truth, they are content with a few common-place ideas. There is a strange vagueness of expression, a want of precision and justness of conception, in all that they say, as if they rested in mere words, without having attached to them any definite ideas. Now, even though the words we employ should in themselves embody the most important truths, if they are not accompanied with definite conceptions in our minds they cannot excite vigorous sensations. If, therefore, notwithstanding this, powerful sensations are produced, it cannot have been by the truth. Obedience to the Saviour, I would remind you, is the test of all right feeling towards him—"Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." In like manner we are told, that "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." We are more ready to be deceived in regard to our affection for an unseen character than for one that is seen ; and hence we are told, that our love to God is to be manifested by love to his people. But as we are likewise apt to be deceived in regard to our love to *them*, because we may love them, not because they are Christians, but for some inferior reason, we are guarded against deception as to this, by being told, "that by this we know that we love the children of God,

when we love God and keep his commandments." You see then, that we are guarded against mistaken views of our internal *emotions* on the one hand, and mistaken views of our *actions* on the other, both as they regard God and our brethren. Some are more apt to be deceived in regard to the former, and others in regard to the latter ; and the same person may at different times err with respect to both. There is, therefore, great wisdom in the cautions of Scripture, by which we are told, "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

I beg you, my dear friend, to remember, that it must be vain to look for the fruits of conversion to God before going as we are to the Saviour ; for it is in believing in his finished work that we become new creatures. You ought likewise to remember, that it is a mistake to look for *great* effects from faith, when it has just commenced. The faith of a Christian may at first be very feeble ; the degree of his light may be but an obscure dawning ; and if his views of the gospel are in many respects indistinct, the result will be small in proportion. But yet this infant faith will produce a corresponding measure of obedience, and will, besides this, be itself increased by obedience. The way to obtain brighter and larger discoveries of the truth is, not to look exclusively at truth as if it were an abstract thing, but to act up to what we already know, for "to him that hath, more shall be given." It is clear, also, from the nature of things, that the way to increase faith and to purify the heart, is not to wait in indolent inactivity, as if, independently of the use of appropriate means, the principle will get more and more vigorous ; for it is a law in nature, that the exercise of a principle tends to strengthen it. Besides, this

were to neglect present duty to the dishonor of God, however we might seek to justify our inactivity, by pleading that we were waiting for great ability for obedience. Never ought it to be forgotten, that the career of that obedience which flows from faith, however weak, cannot be too soon begun. The least degree of faith in the gospel will so far purify the heart, and send forth the streams of a holy deportment. Some seem to bend their whole attention to faith as an abstract thing; and are so occupied, as they think, in increasing it, as to forget that the great value of it arises from its influence in exciting us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, as the means of fitting us for the services and the joys of the heavenly state.

This holy character is far from being a merely secondary thing—it is, in fact, the great and ultimate object of the work of Christ. It is not to be put in the back ground, as if, though a very good thing, it occupied only a subordinate place. Some, without intending it, have thus misplaced it. They speak of it chiefly as an evidence of faith in Christ, and of their consequent interest in his work. It does indeed manifest faith in him, but does so because it naturally proceeds from the belief of the truth. It has in itself a value besides the evidence it affords of the reality of our faith, and a value higher than this evidence, just as the health of the body has a value in itself independent of the evidence it affords of the excellence of the food by which it is cherished, and of the goodness of our appetite.

In the new covenant God promises to put his law in the inward parts of his people, and to write it on their hearts; that he will be to them a God, and that they shall be to him a people: and that they shall all know him from the least

to the greatest of them, *for*, says he, I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more. Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. The promise of a change of heart, you see, is mentioned first, because this change is the ultimate though not the only object of the plan of mercy. You will also observe that the last promise exhibits both the ground on which the other promises are made, and the *means* by which they are fulfilled. God does not say, “I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more, for I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,”—but “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: *for* I will *forgive* their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” This last promise is a promise, not merely of forgiveness, but of forgiveness through a propitiation. This is evidently the interpretation given of the passage in Heb. x. 15—18. The remembrance of sin intended is the *judicial* remembrance of it, in order to punishment, or by requiring additional sacrifices of expiation. The promise includes then, the perfect and everlasting removal of guilt through the one offering of Christ, as the ground on which all the other promises are to be fulfilled.* But this promise exhibits also the *means* by which the other promises are fulfilled. We are brought into a new relation to God, as our God, through the mediation of Christ; it is by the manifestation of the divine character in his work, that we come to know God; and it is by the revelation of the glory of God, in the wonderful means of our redemption, that the heart is attracted to him, and becomes the seat of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. Such is the revelation of his union of

* See a Survey of the Old and New Covenants, Chap. ii. Sec. ii.

justice and mercy in his sacrifice, and of the character of God as a righteous judge and a kind parent, that when understood and believed, it produces love to him who has so loved us, and love to mankind for his sake. Now, as the sum of the law is love to God and our neighbor, it follows, that when we are thus influenced by faith in the atonement to the love of God and of man, the divine law is put in our inward parts, and written in our hearts. Thus, in the covenant of God there is provision made, but for a change in our state and a change in our character.

These two blessings correspond with the twofold view given of the sanctification in Scripture, where it is used in a legal or sacrificial sense, and also in a moral sense. In the former it is generally used in the epistle to the Hebrews, where it means, that by the atonement Christ hath expiated the sins of his people, and consecrated them to God, as his peculiar property. Heb. x. 14; and xiii. 12. In this sense it is not progressive. When used in a moral sense, it signifies, to be made holy, by being created after the image of God in holiness and righteousness. Ephesians iv. 23, 24. This work is progressive, and keeps pace with our progress in the knowledge, faith, and obedience of the gospel. 1 Thes. iv. 1.

The blessings of forgiveness, and renovation of heart, though in themselves distinct, invariably go together. In illustration of this, allow me to refer you to the Mosaic Law, which figuratively marked both the connexion and the date of these invaluable benefits. Moses, when speaking of the kindness of God to Israel, in having separated them from the rest of the nations, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself, says, that "the Lord had chosen them to be a people unto himself above all people upon the

face of the earth." Now in these words he obviously refers to that separation which had been effected in time: for he represents it as the fulfilment of the divine oath to Abraham, and as having been begun in their redemption from Egyptian bondage, with a view to its being completed, when as a kingdom of priests, they should dwell in the land of Canaan within the inclosure of his law. As a people separated from the world as to privilege, they were also to be separated as to character, and they were accordingly forbidden to walk as did other nations, and commanded to walk as became a sacred society—"ye shall be holy unto me," says God, "for I the Lord your God am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine."

Now, the separation of Israel was typical of a legal separation as to state, and a moral separation as to character, between the Church of Christ and the world. Christians are accordingly described as distinguished by those blessings and qualities of which the privileges and the services of Israel were figures. They are "a chosen generation," inasmuch as they are a family derived from one stock, being born of God through the incorruptible seed of his word, and thus distinguished from the mass of mankind as his children. They are "a royal priesthood," as the younger brethren of Christ, who "is a priest upon his throne," and because they are consecrated to God by his blood, and by the anointing of his holy Spirit; they are "an holy nation," because separated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus, and because they are sanctified by the implantation of holy principles, tempers, and dispositions of heart: and they are a peculiar people, or a people for a purchase, and therefore a peculiar treasure unto God, because they are redeemed from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin by

the ransom of the blood of Christ, and accordingly they are called "his purchased possession."

These privileges are bestowed, and these holy principles implanted, "that they may show forth the praises," or, by bearing his image, exhibit in their whole spirit and deportment "the perfections of Him who hath thus called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Thus a change of state and a change of character go together:—The former is bestowed chiefly for the sake of the latter, and both are designed to produce that hallowed conduct in Christians by which the truth is embodied, and the image of God is displayed to the world.

In the passage to which I now refer you, the apostle is speaking of relations into which we are brought, of privileges conferred on us, and of a character formed in us, on our believing in Christ. It is only *then* that we are declared to have a particular interest in the blessings of redemption. Accordingly, the apostle represents the whole of these blessings as coeval in their bestowment. And he adds, what corroborates this, "Which in time past were not a people, but are *now* the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but *now* have obtained mercy."

We should beware of confounding the purposes of God with their accomplishment. As his purpose to create the world, and the actual creation of it, were infinitely far from coeval, so his purpose concerning the new and spiritual creation, and its actual existence, ought never to be treated as if they were of equal date. The purpose of God secured the advent of the Saviour, and the accomplishment of his expiatory work secures the bestowment of the blessings of his grace: but till men believe in the atonement they are children of wrath, being declared by the Scriptures

to be heirs of condemnation. Eph. ii. 3. John iii. 18. When sinners believe in the Saviour, they are considered as one with him, and are therefore treated as though they had died when he did, and had been raised and glorified as He was; inasmuch as they obtain the benefit of His death and His glory so far as it can be obtained in the present state. Ephes. ii. 4—9. Rom vi. 8—10. But a man can no more be actually justified while in unbelief, than he can be actually and personally glorified in heaven before he has left this world. The Scriptures, accordingly, when speaking of the justification of such as were to come to the knowledge of the truth, represent it as future. And the Scripture *foreseeing* that God *would justify* the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. “So then, they which be of faith,” that is, those who have believed, are blessed as was Abraham. To make a thing consist in the mere manifestation of it, or in a persuasion of its existence, is utterly inadmissible; for a thing must exist before it can appear, and there can be no warranted belief of a thing unless it be true before our persuasion of it. The inward feelings of an injured ruler towards the criminal, are in themselves neither condemnation, nor forgiveness. The former is his passing sentence, according to the law, and the latter is the reversal of that sentence. And on the same principle, the love of God as existing in his heart, ought not to be confounded with the expression of that love in the actual forgiveness and acceptance of sinners.

The subjects of that change of mind, which is effected by the gospel, are thereby separated from this evil world, and hence it is sometimes expressed by their being said to be called and chosen from the kingdom of the wicked one,

into the kingdom of Christ. Thus our Lord told his disciples, that the reason why they were hated of the world was, that they were not of it, but chosen by Him out of it. Now, that which provoked the hatred of the world must have been a thing which was visible and tangible, as it were, and not something hid among the secrets of God. He must, therefore, refer to their having been by conversion to God called out of the world by a change in their principles and character, which change, as it appeared in its practical result, drew down upon them the hatred of the wicked. It is not any particular sentiments held by Christians in regard to the divine purposes, that, *considered in themselves*, provoke the hostility of the world; for philosophers are allowed to speculate as they may on subjects connected with the different theories which have been held in regard to liberty and necessity without provoking a spirit of the kind. It is the humbling implications of the gospel, its condemnation of the ways of men, its holy and spiritual nature, and its sanctifying effects on believers, which excite the opposition of mankind.

Generally speaking, the world will allow professors of religion to adhere to what doctrinal sentiments they may, provided they conform to their spirit, maxims, and ways. Hold the truth as a matter of mere speculation, and not of practical interest, and reprove not their ways by what resembles God, and reminds them of him, by what condemns their pursuits and disturbs their peace; and though they may at times smile at the fancied dogmas which are retained, they will not greatly oppose. It is the truth as embodied in the holy deportment of Christians,—in their abandonment of the follies, vanities, and sins of this world,—in their practical separation from its pursuits, and in their

conscientious adherence to all that can cherish and manifest the power of godliness, that calls forth the hatred of the ungodly. By these practical means, as well also as by words, do they testify of the works of the world, that they are evil. Nor is it merely the practices of those who make no pretensions to religion that they thus condemn, but the empty form of godliness that is kept by many who seek to unite the service of God with that of mammon. For such things as these are they hated.

The apostle Paul in 2 Thess. ii. 9—13, when speaking of some who, though they had long heard, and even professed faith in the gospel, had never received the love of the truth, that is, had never cordially embraced it, expresses his happiness in the contrast, which was evident in the Christians in Thessalonica, who had from the beginning received it as the word of God. The former held the truth rather as a matter of mere speculation than of practical and eternal interest,—it never sat easily upon them,—its holy nature galled their sinful hearts,—they wished for a system which would reconcile the practice of sin with a profession of piety, and the hope of escaping hell, and getting to heaven at last, and in this state they were prepared to receive any representations of the gospel, however false, that met their desires. In this awful and hardened condition God permitted in righteous judgment the most erroneous doctrines to be taught, and to such delusions they gave themselves up, and so perished in their sins. But the apostle thanked God that his brethren had not thus continued to hear the truth without cordially embracing it, but had, on the contrary, through the grace of God, been chosen or separated from the world, unto the salvation of Christ; which is effected through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. The

Spirit of God had opened their minds to perceive the glory of the gospel, and had changed their hearts; and so separated them from the world, and called them into the holy and blessed kingdom of the Saviour.

Peter addresses his Christian brethren as “elect,” or chosen, and called out of the world, and brought into the fellowship of the kingdom of Christ, by sanctification or regeneration of the Spirit, in order to obedience, and through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, in order to a change of state; according to the foreknowledge of God.

There are two great fellowships, or communities in the world:—At the head of one is Christ, and at the head of the other Satan. All mankind naturally belong to the latter. The members of the former have been called out of the kingdom of the wicked one for the purpose of being conformed to the character of God; and hence are required to be holy, as he who hath called them is holy. As a pardoned people, through the blood of sprinkling, they are separated from the mass of mankind, who are all in a state of condemnation. That truth, through the faith of which they are thus accepted, is accompanied by the influence of the Divine Spirit, causing it to attract the faculties of the mind, and to mould them into his own likeness; so that they are separated, not only as to state, but also in regard to character, from “the kingdom of darkness.” The objects which engage the subjects of the latter kingdom impart to them their own fleeting nature, and imprint on them their own image of death and vanity. And the truth believed by the subjects of Christ dwells within them, and leaves its impressions and resemblance; and thus are the two distinguished.

Indeed, the means and the agency necessary to the com-

mencement of this work, are also necessary to its progress and completion. Look, then, with a devout mind to the Father of light, from whom cometh all that is good, and nothing that is morally evil.—And may you feel the influence of the powerful motives to obedience which are concentrated in the plan of redemption.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NECESSITY OF FAITH, AND OF THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT.

Faith the medium of forgiveness—Connected with salvation, because it brings under the influence of the truth—The word of God the instrument by which the Spirit acts—His influence the fruit of pure Grace—The proper use of the doctrine.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU must often have reflected on the necessity of faith in order to salvation, and on the divine influence by which faith is produced. These are subjects prominently exhibited in Scripture, and worthy of the most serious attention. With a view to aid your meditations, allow me to suggest to you some general reflections, bearing particularly on certain practical mistakes in regard to them.

Man fell through disbelieving the declarations of God, and believing the falsehoods of the tempter; and we are saved through the belief of a truth, confirmed by evidence from Heaven, and comprehending all that is necessary for us in our present situation. There is, therefore, in some

respects a correspondence between the way in which sin was introduced and that in which we are delivered from its influence.

It is worthy, therefore, of particular attention, that though the death of Christ is the ground on which the blessing of forgiveness is bestowed, the faith of the divine testimony regarding it is the medium through which it is communicated. It is easy to see how forgiveness is connected with the death of Christ, because it has magnified and made honorable the law of God, and has made atonement for sin.—But why connect it with faith in it? Had all intended been our forgiveness, there had been no great necessity for connecting it with faith, for as the atonement is perfectly finished without us, faith cannot add to it. There is, however, a fitness of wisdom in the appointment that whosoever by believing in Christ becomes united to Him, and sets his seal as it were to what was done by him, when he expiated the sins of many, shall have his work reckoned to him as though it were his own. But the great object in view is to deliver us from sin itself, and to bring us to love the true character of God, to delight in him, to enjoy what he enjoys, and to place our happiness in the enjoyment of his favor and fellowship; in doing his will, knowing and admiring his excellencies, and in being assimilated to him. Faith, then, is connected with forgiveness, chiefly because our spiritual health can be obtained in no other way. However important and glorious the gospel is in itself, it cannot change our views and principles unless it be believed. We cannot love God in his true character without knowing and believing what he has revealed himself to be. Obedience may, indeed, be yielded

under the impulse of fear, or from a regard to character in the world, but this cannot be acceptable, it must spring from love.

It is not enough that we love a God of our own imagination, which is not to love God, but to love an idol of our own framing. We must be brought to love the character of God, as revealed by himself; and to this we cannot be brought without faith in the revelation he has given in the gospel. We cannot believe in this exhibition of the divine character till we know it,—we cannot know it in its real glory without loving and admiring it,—and we cannot love and admire it without imitating it; and thus it is that we become like to it. There is nothing mystical in this, it is quite analagous to what we see in other things every day. The influence of faith in divine truth is agreeable to the influence of belief in common life. In every case faith is a principle producing some practical effect, and not something abstract, suspending activity. We are diligent because we believe that this is the way to success—we labor for knowledge, because we believe it will yield pleasure or profit—we use medicines when sick because we believe it will remove or alleviate our disorder—we are attached to a friend, because we believe in his excellencies, and that he is attached to us—we esteem a person of worth, because we are persuaded of the excellencies of his character and deportment—we fear when we believe we are in danger; and in like manner we are grateful to God when we believe in his love to us; and we esteem and admire the wondrous and delightful excellencies of his character when the revelation of his kindness and glory, as exhibited in the gospel, is believed.

The principle of true holiness, and its result good works,

are the fruit and the token of faith in the gospel. Its doctrines are in themselves practical, though such as are blind to their true glory may treat them as matters of mere speculation. There were men of old who said they were fraught with the pernicious sentiment, that evil may be done that good may come; but this was opposed most decidedly, and the holy tendency of the truth most clearly evinced. Rom. iii. 9; and vi. 15—22. It is the power of God to salvation from the dominion of sin, because therein is God's method of justification by faith revealed, in order to be believed. Such is its nature, that when believed, a mighty influence is exerted on the heart, by which it triumphs over that rebellious principle which rules in our nature. He who believes it has his eyes opened to its unutterable loveliness: so that while his affections are captivated, corruption receives its death-blow, and sinks beneath the power of the cross.

It is evident from this, that in the very nature of things the blessings of salvation must be limited to such as believe in Christ; for in no other way can the mind be conformed to the character of God, and so fitted for the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The limitation, then, is not an arbitrary one, so far as a change of mind is concerned: And even the connexion between pardon and faith, though in certain respects arbitrary, is not so in all. This connexion being admirably fitted to illustrate the important truth, that salvation is not of works of law, but of pure unmerited favor, Rom. iv. 16, and so to exhibit the nature of the plan of reconciliation, is of course calculated to bring us under the transforming influence of the great object of our belief. We say of a gift, you may have it by asking for it, or by taking it, and the gospel says, God is already

well pleased in Christ, so you may have the benefit of his mercy, by believing this declaration of it; 2 Cor. v. 18—21. Luke xiv. 17: and thus it operates on the heart.

This change of mind is what the Scriptures mean by *re-generation*. In this great work the spirit of God is the agent, and the word of God is the instrument. It is equally unscriptural to affirm, that men may be regenerated without the Spirit, as to say, that they may be so without the truth, for it still remains true, that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord (in the Scripture sense of the words,) but by the Holy Ghost. If any obey the truth, they do so through the Spirit. 1 Cor. xii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 22. On the mode of his operations the Scriptures are silent; but whatever may be the way in which he disposes the mind to receive the truth, in operating directly upon the heart, it is only by the impressions produced in us then that we feel ourselves affected. His influence is employed to make the truth bear upon the mind,—to bring it and the mind into direct contact, as it were; and to fix the mind upon it, and to keep it fixed till its import, nature and excellence are discerned; and till, by our thus perceiving its evidence, the faith of the heart is commanded, and the whole character of the soul is changed. Divine influence is employed in connexion with means, and acts simultaneously with them. Though in itself distinct from the means, and though direct in its operations, it yet so accompanies the means, that its subject is conscious of no change, but through the instrumentality of the truth.

How often does it happen, that on believing the gospel, and finding himself the subject of new views and sensations, the individual does not at the time think of the influence whence they originated, but, on the contrary, is ready

to imagine that any person, if he would but look into the Bible, must see what *he* sees so plainly in it. He is conscious of ideas suggested to him by the word of God, and he thinks that if others but heard what so deeply affects him, they would be equally affected. I am far from saying that such a person is ignorant of the depravity of the heart, or of the necessity of divine influence arising from this, I mean only, that at the time he is so much struck with what he sees, that for the moment he reflects not on the influence accompanying it; and, in the ardor of his heart, he seeks to point every one to it, in the hope of their yielding to it likewise.—Thus felt and acted the amiable coadjutor of Luther; but he says, “I soon found that old Adam was too strong for young Malancthon.” The Christian, though he slackens not his diligence in instructing others, learns to look more to God for his spirit, and to labor with more singleness of dependence upon him. While he rejoices, as he feels from time to time the effect of the truth, he remembers the words of his Lord to Peter, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven.” He is at the same time convinced that nothing but the depravity of his own heart kept him from discerning it sooner. The Spirit, as the Saviour has said, convinces him of having sinned in not believing before. John xiv. 8, 9. He is now astonished at the forbearance and long-suffering which God exercised towards him, and is impressed with the guilt of having so long remained insensible to such a display of love and of excellence. Not that unbelief is the only sin of which the Spirit convinces men, for a conviction of the guilt of unbelief supposes a conviction of the evil of all that led to it. But as our Lord’s object was to state the *ultimate object* of the Spirit’s work,

and that by which it is *distinguished* from the mere effect of the operations of natural conscience, he speaks of it under this comprehensive view.

Now, as the blind man, whose eyes were opened, though he could not explain the nature of light and of vision, nor could tell how it was that Jesus opened his eyes, could yet say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." So when the decisive evidence of the gospel shines into the heart, by the enlightening influence of the Spirit, it produces a sensible conviction of its truth, though the nature of the influence employed we do not understand: We do not see the wind itself, but we see and feel its effects. —"So it is as to every one who is born of the Spirit." The effects of divine influence are seen and felt, but the mode of it is inexplicable.

The recovery of a sinner from the dominion of sin, is what mere human agency never can effect; but he is not out of the reach of the agency of God. We can easily conceive that the Almighty can touch the spring of volition, and without interfering with the laws of mind and of agency, secure a complete change of choice and of conduct. The energy of the Spirit on the mind, combining with truth, gives efficiency to its moral fitness. He thus operates on the heart in a way of holy influence, which, while it effectually secures the obedience of the will, offers not the least violence to its natural freedom of choice, but persuasively inclines it under the influence of an enlightened judgment, in perfect accordance with the properties of a rational being. No new faculties are imparted, which were in fact to destroy the identity of the man. To believe the gospel is perfectly suitable to our natural faculties, for we are by no means under the fatal necessity of making God a liar.

Nothing is taught by the Spirit of God, but what the Scriptures already contain, and what we should see there without his special influence, were we not depraved in heart, and hostile to the pure and humbling doctrines of the cross. Holy creatures instantly receive and act upon whatever God is pleased to reveal to them; and therefore the necessity of the special influences of Heaven in order to the right perception of the gospel, does not arise from any deficiency in its evidence, or from any obscurity in its statements, but entirely from the depravity of the human heart. John iii. 19. The want of a holy inclination cannot excuse unbelief, for in the want of this inclination the radical evil consists. If inclination were the rule of duty, it would follow, that the more a man is disinclined to it the less is his obligation to perform it. This would destroy every idea of sin, for men always perform as much service as they are inclined to; and if no more can be required, they of course have not sinned. Now, if they have not sinned, there can be no necessity for an atonement, and the assistance of the Spirit is unnecessary likewise, since, without his special aid, men will do all that they are inclined to do; and if nothing more be required, why give the Spirit to produce it? Does not this notion, then, sap the foundation both of the law and the gospel? According to this view of the ground of obligation, the less depraved a man is, the more criminal is he; because, upon this principle, in order to constitute a bad action, there must have been some good disposition by which it was performed; and then only those things are criminal which were in some respects inadvertent, or done with reluctance; for if the individual had so hardened himself in wickedness, as to have no compunction remaining, and if the deed were done with

deliberate premeditation, and from malignant design, then, as it proceeded from unmixed depravity, it seems it could not be criminal, because moral power, that is, some good inclination, is necessary to moral obligation! Can any thing be more absurd, or more contradictory to every principle of sound morality than this?

Would any man, in a matter that regarded his worldly interest, say of a person who had defrauded him, that as he had no inclination to be honest, he was not bound to be so; or, of a slothful servant, that as he had an aversion to labor, he was under no obligation to be diligent? It is passing strange, that men should apply rules of judgment to the concerns of religion, which they would blush to adduce in an earthly affair!

This view of the subject is essential to proper impressions of the depravity of man, for there can be no depravity in the insensibility of a piece of inert matter. The opposite view is inconsistent with all feelings of penitence, because it furnishes a plea and an excuse for transgression, for the sinner may say I could not help it. It destroys also every idea of the rich grace of God. It is no great matter to save the merely helpless and impotent, but what a display of grace is afforded in the salvation of such as were the willing and the determined enemies of God and of all that is good!

We should beware, on the one hand, of the error of those who deny an obligation to believe where there is no will to do so, and on the other that of those who maintain that divine influence upon the mind is necessary to render a man accountable for his unbelief.—These extremes, it will be seen, meet in a very remarkable manner, and both charge the guilt of unbelief and sin upon God.

To advert for a moment to the former, it is true, that, in point of fact, no sinner will believe till his heart is changed ; but this does not affect the argument, for the question is not, whether man *will* believe and obey, but whether he *could*, if he were inclined to do so ; and of course, whether his unbelief is criminal or not. It is to no purpose to say, that as man has no inclination to use his natural faculties in this way, it comes to the same thing as if he had no physical power, for there is an essential difference between the character of a servant who would do a piece of service if he *could*, and that of one who could do it if he *would*, but yet does it not. It is the fact, that the latter is the case with mankind, that will strikè unbelievers speechless at the bar of judgment.

With regard to the latter error, it is more specious in appearance, but more inconsistent than the former. It allows that man is depraved, and destitute of all moral power to obey, but affirms that divine grace imparts to him a sufficiency of moral power to render him accountable, and the fit subject of rewards and punishment. But if this grace be the ground of accountability, then without it they cannot be guilty ; and if not guilty, what need have they of the grace of God to save them ? According to this, grace, instead of being favor to the unworthy, is rather an act of equity to the unfortunate. The depravity of man is by this made at once the cause and the effect of the grace of God. This error would be utterly exploded, did men consider the proper grounds of accountability, and the difference between natural and moral power.

It ought never to be forgotten, then, that the disposition produced by the Spirit of God is nothing more than every rational creature ought at all times to possess ; for it must

always be our present duty to love God supremely,—to receive what he declares, and to obey what he commands. Wherever natural faculties are imparted, and means for and freedom in their exercises are enjoyed, there the proper grounds of obligation are laid to the extent of those faculties and means. However much the inclinations of man are opposed to his duty, the latter is not more than commensurate with the faculties and the advantages he enjoys; but to this extent his duty certainly goes, whatever be the state of his mind. The evidence which accompanies, and is contained in the gospel, undoubtedly imposes an obligation on all who hear it, to believe it, without any regard to their inclinations. Accordingly we find, that what is promised by God, as the God of grace, in one part of Scripture, is required by him as a Lawgiver in another. Jer. xxxii. 40. 1 Sam. xii. 24. Ezek. xxxvi. 26. and xviii. 31.

Ought we not, then, my dear friend, to imitate those who, knowing that they were naturally prone to neglect or disobey the will of their God, turned his precepts into prayer, and pleaded that he would, according to his promise, work in them what his law required. Psalm li. 10. and exix. 4, 5. The conviction that the influence of the Holy Spirit is a matter of pure favor, and not the ground of our obligation to conform to the will of God, will preserve us on the one hand from the spirit of self-justification, which would throw the blame of our sins upon God, and on the other, from that spirit of self-sufficiency which would induce us to trust to ourselves, instead of constantly relying on the promises of heavenly aid. The former is calculated to lull the heart into a false feeling of security, while indulging in impenitence and unbelief, but the latter is not less dangerous, for it leads us to act as if independent of the

grace so freely exhibited in the gospel. The true Christian temper will induce us to improve all the doctrines and promises, the precepts and expostulations of Scripture, in the confidence of obtaining in answer to prayer, the aid of the Spirit of God. We shall feel prompted to pray, by the overwhelming thought, that as such is the natural opposition of our heart to the God of all goodness, to his holy law, to his method of redemption through Christ, and to the character which it is his object to produce in us, that nothing short of almighty power could have brought it to embrace the gospel; and such its insensibility to all the melting attractions of the cross of Christ, that nothing less than energy divine could have softened it, so the same influence is still requisite to maintain the work which has thus been begun. This is a thought which, when properly considered, must fill with the deepest contrition. What can render us more unworthy of the divine favor, than such a temper of heart as this? When really convinced that such is our natural character, the necessity of divine influence will no longer be mentioned in order to palliate sin, or to excuse sloth and unbelief, but will be viewed as the ground of deep humiliation and penitence. No more will we speak of our inability, or rather our unwillingness to believe in Christ, with a cold and unimpressed heart, but with shame and self-loathing, while we will bless God for the change effected by his grace.

We shall thus be preserved in our Christian course, from the injurious notion that we ought to feel as if mere passive instruments in the hand of the Spirit—a notion which destroys every motive to self-government and activity. There is a connexion established between means and ends. The operations of the Spirit are not like those physi-

cal operations of nature that do not admit or require any agency on our part, but which go on as well when we are asleep as when we are awake. The Scriptures never lose sight of the free agency of man, or of his obligation conscientiously to exercise the whole of his faculties. 1 Cor. x. 15. Mark viii. 17, 18. They always address us as rational creatures, and in the doctrines of the gospel, they present us with the most powerful stimulus to exertion. 2 Tim. ii. 7—14. When we are first converted to God, the influence of his Spirit is employed to make the truth and motives contained in them to bear upon the mind; and, in like manner, his influence continues to be employed in sanctifying us; for the operation of motives is the only reason of the actions of free agents, and as such we are always treated in the dispensations of Heaven. The Spirit of God deals with us as intelligent creatures, and imperceptibly excites us to consider and receive the declarations of his word, without our being generally able to distinguish between his operations and those of our own faculties. Now, as it is therefore wrong in any man to suppose that it is proper to delay believing in Christ, till divine influence is distinctly felt, as the mariner waits for the flowing of the tide; so it is likewise wrong for a Christian to neglect the duties of his place and circumstances, till he feels, as he thinks, some impulse from heaven, exciting him to obedience. It is easy to start difficulties on a subject like this; but let Christians beware of that vain jangling, which would lead the simple-hearted to perplex themselves with subjects which belong rather to the science of the philosophy of the human mind than to the doctrine of Jesus. If not upon their guard against this, they may be led into a field of speculation which, in consequence of our ignorance, has

no limits. In vain do we seek to lay our hand on those secret springs which, in the first instance, move to spiritual life and activity. What human perspicacity can discern that hidden work which unites the sovereign influence of the aids of grace with the fullest scope for the active faculties of man. It is for us to unite constant watchfulness and fervent prayer, and the utmost activity in duty, with simplicity of dependence on God. The husbandman knows that God gives the increase, but he does not expect to reap where he has not sown. It were foolish to complain of not profiting by the word of God, if we never set ourselves to ponder it, for it does not operate as a charm. Prayer, when unaccompanied by corresponding activity, is a trifling with heaven: and activity without prayer, and a sense of dependence on God, is a practical denial of his character and of his testimony concerning man.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

ON THE CONNEXION BETWEEN FAITH AND RENOVATION OF CHARACTER.

The natural fitness of the truth to renovate the mind—Faith a principle producing action—The truth believed the cure of the soul—The importance of Scriptural sentiments—The sanctifying influences of the doctrines of the Cross.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I suggested some practical reflections on the work of the Spirit; permit me now to call your attention more particularly to the connexion between faith and renovation of character.

The truth of God is the instrument by which the Spirit operates; and it is by producing faith in it that he makes its influence to bear upon us.

It is of great importance to remember that there is a natural fitness in divine truth, to produce the effect designed by it. If we are forgetful of God, and presuming that all is well with us, what so fitted to awaken us from this dream, as the voice of God declaring that all have sinned, and that judgment is at hand. Are we brought to see that we are guilty and helpless creatures, and do we dread the divine vengeance, what can be so fitted to give rest to the conscience, as the cheering declaration of the divine good pleasure in the atonement? Are our affections alienated from God, and set on earthly things? and are we, in the ardor of pursuit, the intoxication of pleasure, or the anxiety of disappointed hopes, carried away from the spring of true happiness? how well calculated are the glorious discoveries of the gospel to stop us in our mad career, to slay the enmity of the heart, and reconcile it to God.

Many things, indeed, we believe, which leave the mind as it was; but there are reports which cannot be believed without affecting us. The former are things, the truth or falsehood of which we conceive to be of no moment to us; the latter, such as possess particular interest, as for example, the death or recovery of a beloved relative. Still, in the former, as well as in the latter case, there is a correspondence between the thing believed and the result. Now, what is the intrinsic worth, or the interest, which we can possibly have in any earthly thing when compared with the unutterable importance of things divine and eternal? And must not the belief of their nature and reality powerfully impress us? I say their *nature*, for, as I formerly

stated, faith is a belief of the qualities as well as the reality of its object. The reason why divine truths do not impress us, must be, that their glory and their importance to ourselves are not believed. But when the power of God is so combined with his word as to enable the mind duly to regard spiritual objects, the heart becomes imbued with holy principles and affections. Though a sword will not cut unless some one wield it, yet it possesses a natural fitness to cut when it is wielded. The Scriptures, accordingly, frequently appeal to living witnesses of their sanctifying energy. 1 Cor. vi. 11. 2 Cor. iii. 3. 1 Thess. i. 6—10.

It is very injurious, and fosters prejudices in certain quarters, to speak in a vague manner of the efficacy of faith. What good can a person receive by being told, that faith can effect this or the other great thing, while he is not told those truths, from the belief of which all Christian obedience, patience, and comfort arise?—When we are informed in Scripture of what the ancient worthies did and suffered by faith, we are also referred to the testimony, promises, or threatenings, the belief of which influenced them according to their nature, and in this way effected what was intended. These examples are designed to encourage us in the constant exercise of faith, in order to our sanctification.

The purification of the heart, and of the life by its means, is of the utmost moment. When Christ died the work of atonement was finished *for* us, but there was much also to finish *in* us. He is our sanctification as well as our righteousness or justification. 1 Cor. i. 30. Isaiah xlv. 24, 25. I need not tell you that he cannot be the former, by allowing us to live in sin, any more than he can be said to be made unto us wisdom, if he leave us to our own folly.

It is not by being a substitute for our sanctification, but by actually sanctifying us, that he is to us the source of this blessing. The grand object of the gospel is to assimilate the heart to God, by assimilating us to its own holy character; and hence true religion is called "walking in the truth." Like a mould which gives its form to a melted substance when cast into it, the gospel so transforms the believer, that the principles of his heart accord with the revelation of God in the Scriptures. When you look to the book, it endears to you the man, and when you look to the man he endears to you the book. Religion, then, is not a mere matter of opinion—it is a practical change of the mind, or a principle growing out of fixed governing sentiment.—Hence the following expressive address of Paul to the Ephesians,—“In whom also after that ye believed,” or rather, in whom also believing, “ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” That is, in believing the gospel, which was accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit of God, they received the full impression of the truth, just as the melted wax receives the impressions of the seal, when applied to it with sufficient power.

Such is the view given in the gospel of the union of mercy and justice, in the plan of redemption through Christ, that the character of God appears at once amiable and venerable. We there see his abhorrence of sin in the very means of our forgiveness; and his mercy to be infinitely removed from weakness and partiality, while full of warmth and of tenderness. Indeed, were it not for the atonement, our redemption would not clearly appear to be the fruit of mere favor; for had not the divine abhorrence of sin been displayed in the very plan of mercy, it might have been alleged, that God had no great aversion to it, or

that it did not deserve any particular mark of his reprobation. But the cross of Christ, by exhibiting the guilt of our rebellion, illustrates the nature and glory of divine goodness. Here the transgressor enters into the views, and imbibes the principles of the wondrous sufferer; and thus, identifying himself with his Lord, he becomes assimilated to his character. When he takes his station there, the arguments and demonstrations of the truth effectually convince the judgment,—the evil nature, and tremendous desert of sin, deeply impress the heart,—while the sublime, interesting, and animating views exhibited in the character of the Redeemer, captivate the affections.—Yes, it is here that the melting attractions of the unsearchable riches of divine grace are most powerfully felt,—that the influence of the strong and interesting motives of the gospel is found an irresistible stimulus to perseverance in well-doing, and patience under suffering; and that we approach the nearest to the spirit of the heavenly worshippers, who incessantly contemplate and adore the Lamb which was slain. In a word, it is the discoveries made here which produce and cherish that holy self-denied and subdued spirit which adorned the Saviour: which in us is connected with deep self-condemnation, and heartfelt contrition; and which makes meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, while it even here affords an earnest of the heavenly blessedness.

The truth of God, then, is that mighty instrument by which the divine Spirit transforms the soul into the image of God. It is the model of true religion in the mind. By this standard, and not by our own pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable, ought we to be guided. By this means we shall be preserved from trusting to the fan-

ciated rationality of our views on the one hand, and from losing ourselves among the extravagancies of a wild enthusiasm on the other. To both of these the work of the spirit is opposed. We ought then to unite a deep sense of the importance of clear and distinct apprehensions of the great truths of the gospel, with an equally deep sense of our dependence on the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, thereby to purify our souls, and to meeten us for the heavenly inheritance.

The change of mind which is effected by his agency, is in its commencement called regeneration, and in its subsequent stages it is called sanctification. The latter, therefore, is just our progressive recovery from the disease of sin, and our growth in conformity, in principle, and deportment, to the character of God.

The same means by which this change is begun, are employed in perfecting it. There is a wonderful fitness in the gospel to produce in us this holy renovating effect. The Christian can give proper reasons for what he feels, and a rational account of the influence of the truth. He is attached to the Saviour, because he sees in his cross the most free and generous affection for himself when in guilt and in ruin. Such is the discovery given of the character of God, as to excite the most delightful and satisfying complacency in all and each of the divine perfections. While we live by faith in the Son of God, and hold fast the saving truth, we are struck with the manifestation of the divine glory, the beauty and the excellence of Jehovah, as at once the just God and the saviour, and as the source and the pattern of all perfection and blessedness. It is thus that the heart is drawn to him, and captivated by his glory in the transporting character of the God and Father

of Christ, and our God and Father through him. Here all that is great, and all that is good meet, and produce in our hearts the corresponding principles of fear and of love, which mutually influence, chasten, and temper each other. Thus are we made to advance in conformity to that which is the ground of our hope, and the source of our happiness. As the soul feeds upon its thoughts and desires, its hopes and affections, and its joys and its sorrows, so when God and the glories of his salvation engross our hearts, they become the moulds which give their form and character to the mind. The stronger the attachment, the greater is the effect, for affection is remarkably assimilating; like fire, it reduces every thing it fixes on into its own nature. We naturally take the likeness of the glories we contemplate, and are attracted to the perfections we adore. What then is this but our sanctification? And hence Christians are so often, and so urgently exhorted to continue in the faith, to hold fast the truth, and to beware of forgetting it.

It is thus that the gospel heals the diseases of the soul, and nourishes spiritual health. The same effects, you know, are ascribed to faith, and to the truth. This is done on the same principle on which we may either say, that we are cured by a medicine, or by taking it;—either that we are nourished by food, or by eating it. All the virtue is in the medicine, but unless it be taken it can be of no use—all the nourishment is in the food, but unless it be eaten it can be of no service. This shows the place which is occupied by faith in the matter of salvation: It is with the gospel as with a cure for a disease.—As we are called to take medicine for the sake of health, and not for the mere sake of taking it, so we are called to believe the gospel, that it may effect the cure of our spiritual disorders.

In vain should a physician recommend to his patients to be in health without giving medicine, and equally vain must it be to call upon sinners to be holy without declaring to them the medicinal doctrines of the gospel.

What man was ever delivered from the government of his sinful propensities but by the influence of these doctrines? Exhortations to love and obey God will never produce a salutary effect, unless accompanied by a display of the divine character, as exhibited in Christ, and of the wondrous discoveries afforded in the gospel. You will, accordingly, find, on perusing the Scriptures, that it is always in connexion with the motives furnished by the plan of redemption that the Scriptures exhort to watchfulness, diligence, and exertion. Phil. ii. 5—13. 1 Cor. xv. 58. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Rom. xii. 1.

I cannot but remark here, that, when we think of the many and arduous duties which we have to perform, and the course of difficulty which we have to pursue, we must feel a deep conviction of the necessity of having the mind directed to adequate motives and inducements. It will not do to dwell only in a general way on the importance of religion, and the vanity of worldly pursuits. We need to be brought under the influence of the sweet and the powerful motives furnished by the doctrines that regard the atonement and intercession of Christ—the nature and permanence of his love—the evil, and dismal issue of sin, as displayed in his cross, and the blessed privilege of the aid of his Spirit to enlighten our minds, hallow our affections, and strengthen our hearts. If we dwell on the holy, circumspect, and self-denying nature of Christian obedience, without adverting to the highly interesting motives, which alone can form the basis of genuine religious practice, the

result will necessarily be a gloomy and imperfect appearance of piety. An outward decency of life, and an external compliance with the duties of religion, may follow; but how different these from the surrender of the heart to God!

I am here led to make a remark or two on the importance of holding the sentiments of divine revelation. When we look into the natural world, we see, that every seed has a certain specific quality; and that such is the constitution of nature, that every seed bringeth forth fruit after its kind. Now, there is a similar connexion between the principles and the actions of men, and hence the saying of our Lord, "by their fruits ye shall know them." You must be aware that, if we act in a rational manner, we are influenced by our views of things in all our determinations and pursuits, and that, therefore, if we see things through false mediums, we shall certainly err in our practice. If, then, professors of religion embrace, and act upon erroneous principles, they cannot fail to transgress the law of their God. Why were divine truths revealed to us at all if they are not fitted to rectify our principles and conduct? They cannot have been revealed to furnish us with certain speculative notions, to afford matter for idle discussion, or to gratify the silly pride of unprofitable knowledge.

Will not the persuasion, that it is of no moment whether we hold one religious sentiment or another, check the progress of inquiry, since, if truth and error are equally safe, it must be useless to spend time or talent in endeavoring to distinguish them?—Does it not lead to condemn the light which has followed the reformation, and to view with unconcern the darkness and the errors of the middle ages, and of those countries where all kinds of superstition and error abound? Does it not give the lie to the Scriptures,

which assure us, that error is fearfully pernicious, and that truth is pregnant with all that is salutary, and which invariably trace all holy practice to truth as its source? 2 Tim. ii. 16—18. 1 Tim. iv. 16. Psalm xix. 7, 8. If truth and error existed in the mind as mere matters of speculation, their influence were small; but when they exist in us as principles of action, the case is very different. When we read that we shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body, we must not suppose, that actions apart from their principles are meant; for, apart from their principles, they are neither good nor evil. It is, therefore, as connected with their principles that we shall be judged according to them. Both Scripture and experience teach us, that doctrines, when believed, model the character. Accordingly, all the Churches which depart from the truth, as for example the Corinthians and Galatians, are represented as declining also in holy obedience.

Habits of education, and such like things, may produce external propriety of deportment, but the gospel alone can effect a radical and permanent change: By cleansing the fountain it purifies the streams. The apostle could look all human systems in the face, and ask with holy triumph, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” Is it so, that Jesus, who was a man of sorrows, who lived in poverty and shame, and who at last died the accursed death of the cross, is indeed the beloved Son of God! Is it so, that as the Father’s heir, he is now glorified at his right hand as Lord of all things? Is it so, that he who suffered at the hand of the world is the object of the ineffable complacency of Heaven? And shall I again, after this discovery, pursue the world as my portion? No, “God forbid that I

should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."

What do we behold in the world but the lust of the flesh, or the love of sensual pleasures,—the lust of the eyes, or the love of wealth—and the pride of life, or the desire of pre-eminence? Where such principles prevail, there is certain misery. But the gospel is the power of God to salvation from every disordered passion of the heart,—it leads us to that exercise of the passions which is suited to their different objects. The Almighty views every thing as it is, and estimates it according to its nature and design; and what is religion but being of one mind with Him?—Now, faith in his word furnishes us with just sentiments, because when we credit his testimony we enter into his views, and imbibe the principles of his character. When we dwell on the dismal consequences of our love of earthly and sinful pleasures, as exhibited in the bitterness of the Saviour's sufferings; when, in the light of divine truth, we see their empty, low, and unsatisfactory nature; and when we taste of the pure, spiritual and substantial blessings of the gospel, we walk in the Spirit, and so cease to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. When we contemplate the unwearied compassion and unutterable love of God, in providing for the interests of the soul, the mind is set at rest in regard to the body. When we look to him, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that he might enrich us with true substance, we are taught the unutterable importance of eternity, and have the heart turned to things heavenly and divine. When we turn to the cross of Christ, and listen to the judgment which God pronounced upon us, when he condemned his own Son, as our representative,—

when we mark the striking contrast which it exhibits between the dealings of God towards us, and our ungrateful returns to him,—when we ponder the deep humiliation of the Saviour,—and when we rise to the true glory to which it elevates us, the pride of our hearts is subdued, and genuine humility implanted. Rom. viii. 3. Isaiah liii. 6. Phil. ii. 5—8.

The gospel of Christ thus reasons with us on the evil of sin, and the glory of holiness. It likewise addresses the passions; for it appeals to our fears, our hopes, and our love, by the striking exhibition of all that is fitted to excite them. If it does not profit men, it is because it is not mixed with faith in them that hear it. If food cannot nourish the body unless it be eaten and digested, neither will the gospel benefit the soul unless it becomes incorporated with it. We are influenced by the force of motives, which, on being apprehended by the mind, affect the passions, and govern the will. When the truth dwells within us, as the object of our faith, our thoughts are purified; and holy thoughts, you know, excite holy affections, and holy affections issue in rectitude of conduct. How admirably fitted are the discoveries of the gospel to induce us to seek our happiness, not in the creature, but in God; to seek, not the perishing trifles of time, but the important realities of a blessed eternity; and to seek, in the day of affliction, not the cold consolations of the world, but the animating joys which arise from the character, the glory, and the promises of the Saviour.—“He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” In his life we see the nature of that character to which we are destined to be conformed, and in which are contained the elements of all true happiness:—In his glory we see these principles producing in

perfection their natural fruits. The doctrines of his cross thus tend to implant and cherish that piety which consists in the choice of God, as the portion of our inheritance,—desire after fellowship with him in the closet, in the family, and in his public institutions,—supreme regard to his authority,—a sacred and constant regard to his glory, zeal for his cause—and humble and cheerful submission to his will. John ii. 17, and xviii. 11.

They are likewise admirably calculated to produce the love of our neighbor, by the display which they afford of the interest which our common Father has taken in our welfare, in the plan of our redemption, from the evil in which all of us are involved. Titus iii. 3. 2 Cor. v. 14. We feel that in our fallen state there is a sad companionship of woe; but in the gospel we see an animating communion of hope. The grace of God excites in us a particular interest in those who are fellow-heirs with us of the heavenly inheritance; but it also produces regard for even blasphemers and persecutors, by the consideration that they may yet be changed by the same mercy which we have experienced. When we remember that some, even of the worst of characters, may go before us, and others of them follow us into the heavenly temple, we learn to pity them, to pray for them, and to treat them with kindness.

You know that friendship formed by fellow-sufferers, and by the subjects of a common deliverance from a calamity which threatened to engulf them all, are among the very strongest on earth. No friendships equal those which are cemented by tears of sorrow and of joy. When such a common deliverance has been effected by a particular character, distinguished by generous and brotherly kindness, he becomes a bond of union and corresponding

affection, of the most close and endearing nature. And will not the consideration of our common ruin, as sinners, and our common deliverance by the Redeemer, unite us to his truth, and to one another for his sake? It is on this principle that we are exhorted to walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor. What a force there is in these words—"Thy brother for whom Christ died." Is he dear to the heart which was pierced for our sins, and is he graven on the hands of him who achieved our redemption, and shall we not love him?

Nothing in the gospel tends to cherish selfishness. The joy of the Christian loves to see itself multiplied and reflected. Our inheritance admits of participation without being diminished. It resembles truth, which suffers no change or diminution how many soever know it. When the mind is placed at ease in regard to eternity, it must extend abroad a tenderness of feeling—must experience an expansion of heart, an outflow of affection, which assimilates it to the God of all love.

Now, since "love is the fulfilling of the law," we are conformed to it when brought to love God and our neighbor. Our love to the Father of glory is implanted and cherished by the manifestations of his unutterable and free love in the gospel. In our helpless guilty condition, a vivid view of the divine majesty and holiness must overwhelm us with terror and dismay: but the mercy revealed in Christ commands our confidence. The fear which hath torment is banished; but there succeeds to it a sacred reverence for the character of God, and a holy fear of offending him. That same cross which exhibits him as the God of love, exhibits him as also light without darkness; and while it

exalts his mercy, it shows him to be a consuming fire. When we contemplate the history of Emmanuel, and trace his progress from heaven to the cross, and back from the cross to heaven, that he might redeem us from the curse, and elevate us to glory, what must be the effect but overwhelming admiration, the warmest gratitude, and humble prostration of Spirit before our Benefactor!—The fear of which I speak, so far from being opposed to love, is in fact proportioned to it; for in the same degree as a child loves his father, he will fear his frown. Neither is it incompatible with happiness; for even in heaven, where there is fulness of joy, the inhabitants exclaim, “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy!”

The gospel detects all those unscriptural notions which derogate from the majesty and grandeur of Jehovah, and which are utterly inconsistent with holy and devout reverence; and it gives us such a consistent and stupendous manifestation of his peerless glory, that the mind can no longer raise itself against him, but drops all its high thoughts and proud imaginations. To bring us back to our original principle, the love of God and of every creature *in* him and *for* him, is the grand object of the Saviour. In this consists the spiritual health of our nature, and the new heart which is promised in the covenant of peace. It is the very element of our life and of our joy. Springing, as it does, from just apprehensions of the character of God, and from a sense of his mercies, it cherishes the most honorable sentiments regarding his law. Services the most unwearied are cheerfully performed; sacrifices of the most painful nature are willingly made, and sufferings the most distressing are patiently endured, when this principle rules in the heart. What hath not faith working by love effected! What

a triumph have the doctrines of the cross gained over all the unhallowed passions of the heart!

These doctrines are the power of God to salvation. Rom. i. 16. They are that sound or healing instruction, of which so much is said in the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus, 2 Tim. i. 13; iv. 3. Titus ii. i. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 3. Psal. xix. 8; and they are to be stated clearly and constantly, that men may be brought under their salutary influence, and that such as are Christians may be excited by their powerful energy to be careful to abound in good works. It is true, that if stated as a mere theory, without being applied, they cannot produce the desired effect; but if taught in union with the other parts of revelation, they must, by the divine blessing, prove truly salutary. Agreeably to this, the Scriptures identify the new creature with the principle and the purifying influence of faith.—“Faith, which worketh by love,” is represented as the root of holy dispositions and behavior, Gal. v. 6, and of course the gospel believed is the effectual cure of the depraved heart of man; and from this practical and healing tendency, the Scriptures infer its utility and its importance. 1. Tim. iv. 16. and vi. 3. 2 Tim. iii. 16. It is not by transient impressions, or incidental visitations of Providence, but by a permanent principle, that the heart is drawn out to obedience, dissolved in gratitude, or blessed with happiness. He who is born of God overcometh the world, and the principle which is thus declared to be of divine origin, and to be the means of our victory, is faith. 1 John v. 4. In a word, by the truth of God, and the agency of his Spirit, we are regenerated at first, John i. 11, 12, and by it thus written upon the heart, we are also progressively sanctified; John xvii. 17; and when in heaven the change shall be perfected,

although there we shall not stand in need of Bibles, yet even there it will be by the full revelation to us of that character now unfolded to us in the Scriptures, that we shall become completely like to God ; for the word of the Lord, and the relation into which it brings us, and the character which it forms in us, shall endure forever. 1 Pet. i. 23. The nature of the agency which will then disclose to us this transforming light, it were vain to inquire after.—

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

THOUGHTS ON THE REASONING OF JAMES, ON THE JUSTIFICATION OF ABRAHAM.

Justification used to denote two things in Scripture—Is used by James to express the means of the renovation of the character, and the approbation which follows it—The trial of Abraham's faith exercised and strengthened it—His holy character was formed by it, and obtained the Divine approbation—The same doctrine taught by Paul—The forgiveness of Abraham, the pattern of that of believers—His character, the pattern of that of believers—The reasoning of James respecting Faith—The happiness of having the Divine approbation—The duty of imitating the father of the faithful.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE dwelt for some time on the ground of forgiveness, and the means of a change of character. The latter is connected with every part of the truth ; for the whole of Divine revelation is designed for practical purposes. He who has been pardoned by the grace of God, will lament

his contrariety to the character and will of his Benefactor, and will be anxious to become like Him, and to obtain his approbation. These desires are met in the gospel, and provision is made to gratify them: Allow me, in illustration of this subject, to call your attention to what I formerly stated respecting the meaning of the term *justification*, as it bears on the reasoning of the apostle James, in regard to Abraham.

When this term is applied to the acceptance of a sinner, it signifies his discharge from the condemnatory sentence of the law, and his being treated as though he were righteous, and, so far as the former is concerned, it differs not from forgiveness, except in this, that the latter may be the deed of a private as well as of a public character, and may respect private as well as public offences, whereas the former is the deed of a ruler in his public capacity, and regards the offences from which the offender is justified, as committed against the government, of the laws of which the ruler is the guardian. Considered in this view, the term *justification* relates to the honorable medium through which the blessing of forgiveness is bestowed, and signifies that it is communicated in a way which supports the claims of the violated law, while it also signifies the acceptance of the sinner as righteous for the sake of the righteousness of Christ.

But though this be its meaning, when it is used to express the acceptance of a sinner, it properly signifies the approbation of a man's principles and character as *actually* righteous. Elihu accordingly expresses his desire of being able to approve of the spirit of Job, by saying, "speak, for I desire to justify thee." And when Job expressed his disapprobation of his friends, he said, "God forbid that I

should justify you." David, in confessing his guilt to the Almighty, said, "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest." The lawyer, willing to justify himself, said, "Who is my neighbor?" In this sense, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." The Saviour says, "By thy words, (or by thy account, for it is the word rendered account in the preceding verse), thou shalt be justified," that is, approved, "and by thy account thou shalt be condemned." I need not say that in these and similar passages, the term *justify* by no means signifies pardon, but, on the contrary, approbation grounded upon excellence of character, as made manifest by appropriate actions.

Now, excellence which calls forth praise, cannot require forgiveness. The meaning of the term in such cases, must be the same as when it is said, "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." And, "Study to show thyself approved unto God." I cannot help thinking, that it is rather to be regretted, that the term *justify* has been employed to denote the pardon and acceptance of guilty creatures. It had been better, perhaps, if, in translating the phrase expressive of a change in the legal standing of a sinner, a mode of expression had been used, different from that which in our language so fitly expresses the Divine approbation of the fruits of that new character which results from a change in the principles of his mind.

It is in this last sense that the term *justify* is used by the apostle James, when he says that Abraham our father was justified by works. He is not speaking of the pardon of Abraham, or of his legal acceptance as righteous, but of his actual character as the object of the Divine approbation and complacency. His pardon was of pure favor; and

of this the apostle Paul treats, in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and in the third of that to the Galatians.—But James is speaking of his being approved of as a righteous character, and of the means by which the righteousness of his character was formed. Both these apostles adduce the case of Abraham in illustration of their reasoning ; but it ought to be observed that they refer to different periods and circumstances in his history. When first called of God, he believed in the Lord ; and was in consequence of his faith in the promised Messiah, treated as though he had been righteous, by being forgiven and accepted, for the sake of the Saviour in whom his faith terminated, and it is of this that Paul treats. But the design of God was not merely to pardon him and receive him into his family ; his object was, to train him up for “glory, honor, and immortality.” Now, this could only be attained by the trial and consequent exercise of his faith, in a course of patient continuance in well-doing. And it is of the latter that James treats. Paul, then, refers to the acceptance of a sinner,—James to the approbation of a saint.

Faith wrought with his works, or was exercised in and by means of his work of obedience to the commandments of his God, and by means of works proceeding from and exercising faith, was faith “made perfect:” that is, it was gradually invigorated till it was matured. It is a law in nature, that the exercise of a principle strengthens it ; and this is explanatory of the whole matter. Though faith must precede good works, since without it no acceptable service can be performed, yet, where faith exists, the exercise of it in acts of obedience, will not only manifest its existence and degree, but will also strengthen it. If faith,

then, is thus strengthened by obedience, it is easy to see how the assurance of hope is connected with it, without in the least infringing on the blessed truth, that the gospel, as soon as it is believed, imparts peace and joy in proportion to the measure of faith in it. For if the assurance of hope keeps pace with the degree of our faith, does it not follow that whatever strengthens the latter, confirms the former? If, then, obedience, by exercising faith adds to its strength, must not this increased faith add to the assurance of hope? Can we fail, therefore, to see with what propriety Christians are called on to make their "calling and election sure," by adding to their faith all holy dispositions, and by abounding in the fruits of righteousness? 2 Peter i. 5—11. In believing the gospel, we embrace not a speculative system, but a system of motives which daily increase in power by their habitual operation, both on the understanding and the will.—This operation converts every event, and every performed duty, whether of doing or of suffering, into an accession of strength, into a mean of advancing towards perfect conformity to the will of God. It is with this as with capital and gain in trade. The greater a merchant's capital is, the greater, other things being equal, will be his profits; and the greater the latter are, the more will his capital become, and this increase of capital will produce still greater profits. These two act and re-act on each other. The faith of Abraham was tried by a variety of commands which were given him by God; and it was strengthened by every act of self-renunciation and of obedience to the will of his Father. The maturity of his faith, then, was produced by habitual action.

His faith was particularly tried by the commandment to offer up that son in whom the nations were to be blessed.

But the trial of his faith in the promise, led him to think the more on its nature,—on the power, faithfulness, and love of Him who had made it,—on all that tended to confirm the certainty of its being accomplished, and on the relation which it bore to the spiritual and eternal world. By being thus led to ponder the promise more closely, he became the better acquainted with its nature, importance, and glory; his faith in it was the more confirmed, and was indeed so matured, that he lifted up his hand to slay that very son in whom it was to be accomplished, in the firm confidence that though he was reduced to ashes, God was able and ready to raise him from the dead, and to fulfil every word which he had spoken. His faith was thus wondrously exercised in corresponding works, and by this habit of action was brought to maturity, and by its influence upon him formed that character of which God expressed his high and delighted approbation. Now, it is to the formation of this character, and the approbation of it expressed by the Lord from heaven, that the apostle refers, when he says, that the Patriarch “was justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar.” James ii. 21. What was that justification? Not the forgiveness of his sins, and his legal acceptance as righteous, and a consequent change of state. It was the approbation of his deeds of faith and of piety, as the means at once of perfecting and of manifesting that character in which God delighteth. “Now I know,” said Jehovah from heaven, “that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” To express still farther his approbation of the principles and work of the Patriarch, he renewed to him the promises formerly made to him, and confirmed them by his solemn oath.

His faith is introduced by James, then, as the means of producing and maturing those principles of piety by which he became the object of divine complacency. This explains his meaning in these words—"Ye see then how that by work a man is justified, and not by faith only." He is not speaking of that change of state which takes place on a sinner's believing in Christ, but of the divine approbation of the principles and fruits of that character which is formed, not by a single instance of faith merely, nor by the single act of contemplating abstract truth, but by the continued practical exercise of faith in that gospel, the belief of which, while it changes the sinner's state, changes also his mind. He accordingly says, that the Scripture declaration, that Abraham believed God, and was in consequence treated as though he were righteous, was "fulfilled," or verified, by his ready obedience to the commandment of Heaven. The means of a sinner's pardon and acceptance are the moral means of his sanctification. While a sense of unpardoned guilt remains in the conscience, the enmity of the heart is thereby fostered: but a sense of the pardoning mercy of Jehovah reconciles the sinner to his God, and excites to obedience. When, therefore, sanctification is effected, it is a proof, as James here teaches, that the individual has indeed believed the truth, and has experienced the happy and purifying effects of that temper of mind which must result from the blessedness of a state of forgiveness.

Pardon, you know, is connected with faith only, and not with works of law; but the approbation of God must of necessity be grounded on *character*, as formed and manifested by good works. Now, this character is in this life gradually formed. It is not the result of *one* exercise of

faith only, but of the continual and persevering exercise of it, in doing and suffering the will of God. The faith of a man when he first receives the truth, is very imperfect, and it requires to be strengthened by exercise. As it is imperfect, the change upon his character must be so likewise, so that there can be little in him to call forth the divine approbation. One instance of the exercise of faith brings a sinner into a state of acceptance with God. On believing in the work of the Mediator, God in the character of the Judge and the Lawgiver, pardons his sins, and receives him into the kingdom of his Son. But if he were to live in the world without exercising his faith, and so by this means having it strengthened, he could not make progress in holiness, and of course could not be approved of God as a righteous character. If a child, on coming into the world, did not breathe, we should pronounce it dead. Though it had once been alive, yet without breathing, life could not continue; for the body without breathing is dead. If faith, in like manner, is not exercised, not only will it not grow, but it will decline and die: and the character, instead of becoming more holy, must be marked by the prevalence of sin, and will incur condemnation.

When a Christian, from love to the Saviour, performs acts of kindness to his brethren, his mind is by this very means kept in contact with the truth, and he grows in the faith of it. It follows, then, as the Apostle reasons, that by works, as the fruit of faith, and also as the means of exercising and strengthening it, is a man sanctified, and made to attain that excellence of character which calls forth the approbation of Heaven. The Scriptures, accordingly, distinguish real faith by the nature and permanence of its fruit. It is not then, by one exercise of faith merely, that

a man is justified, in the sense of which I now speak, that is, attains that rectitude of character, on the ground of which he is approved of as a holy person,—it is by continuing a life of holy obedience—in the performance of works of faith and labors of love. Heb. vi. 10—12.

The notion, that but one exercise of faith secures either a man's safety, or his meetness for heaven, independently of his perseverance to the end, is clearly in direct opposition to the doctrine of Paul. He never calls faith an inert principle.

It is wrong, therefore, to represent Paul and James as at variance, for the latter is not treating at all of the pardon of sin, and of the way in which this blessing is obtained. He states, however, in verse 10, of this very chapter, a position which establishes the doctrine of forgiveness through faith, and not by the works of the law, when he says, that if we have kept the whole law, and have offended in one point only, we are guilty of all. He has thus declared, that to the man who has sinned but once, acceptance by law is impossible. Paul, again, though he has largely treated the subject of a sinner's acceptance with God, through faith, without works of law, has also largely treated the subject of which James is now speaking. He accordingly says to the Corinthians, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea I judge not mine own self: For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." He means, that though his conscience did not charge him with unfaithfulness, yet the testimony of his conscience would be of no avail, unless sanctioned by the approving sentence of his final Judge. There can be no doubt regarding the sense in which he uses the term

justified in the 4th verse, for in the one following he expresses his meaning by saying, that in the day of the Lord every faithful servant shall have *praise* of God. When speaking on this subject, he exhorts believers to walk so as to please God. 1 Thess. iv. 1. He reminds them of the testimony borne of Enoch, that he pleased God. Heb. xi. 5. He excites to liberality and deeds of kindness, by this consideration, that with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Heb. xiii. 16. He says, that the circumcised in heart have praise of God. Rom. ii. 29. He says, that he who serveth Christ as a subject of that kingdom which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is accepted or approved of God. Rom. xiv. 17, 18. He declares that he labored, that, whether present or absent, he might be accepted or approved of Christ. 2 Cor. v. 9. In the prospect of martyrdom he exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. He dwells with as great zeal on the practical influence of the faith of Christ as does James. Who can read the sixth, eighth, and twelfth chapters of his epistle to the Romans; the sixth, tenth, and thirteenth of his first epistle to the Corinthians; the latter part of his epistles to the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, as well as those to Timothy and Titus, without being fully convinced that the practical influence of the gospel was kept steadily in his view, and was in the most solemn and energetic manner pressed on the conscience of every one who professed the faith? Is not the necessity of continuing to abound in the practical ex-

ercise of faith most strikingly enforced in the third, fourth, sixth, and tenth chapters of the epistle to the Hebrews? Never let one sacred writer be put in the least opposition to another; for if we think that there is any difference between the doctrines of one and those of another, the reason must be, that at least one of them is misunderstood by us.

The justification or approbation of which James speaks, is of the same nature with that which shall be pronounced by the Redeemer, as the ruler of his mediatorial kingdom; and it is illustrated by the language of Christ to those who have improved their endowments,—“Well done,” says he, “thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”—“Well done, thou good servant, because thou has been faithful over a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.” He will at the last address his benevolent people in these terms,—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” Now, even in the present life, the faithful servants of Christ are approved of, as is evident from his language to some of the Asiatic churches; so that the blessing enjoyed by Abraham on earth is enjoyed by them likewise.

Time would fail me were I to go over the many passages of Scripture which refer to the present approbation of the faithful, and to that applauding sentence which will be pronounced by the Judge when he surveys his faithful

disciples from the throne of his glory. We need not be surprised then, at the zeal manifested by James, (but not by him only) against all who, under a profession of faith in the gospel, indulged in the practice of sin. The depravity of man will abuse the most holy doctrines of Scripture; but while we oppose this abuse, let us beware of obscuring the glory of those doctrines.

An objecting Jew in the days of James might well say to such a perverter of the grace of God, "Thou hast faith and I have works, show me thy faith by *thy* works, (this is the reading of some copies, as you will see in the margin) and I will show thee my faith by *my* works." "Let our respective creeds be tried by their fruits,"—a proposal certainly quite unobjectionable. Vain is the reply which some suppose made to this,—"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well;" (as if to say, 'this is a great matter truly,')—"the very devils believe this and they tremble;" to them no gospel is preached, and what they believe can yield them no joy; but I am a Christian, I do not merely believe that there is one God, as do the unbelieving Jews; (for by their belief in the unity of the Godhead, the Jews were distinguished from the idolatrous Gentiles,) I believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and in the gospel preached by him." To such a man it might well be said, as is done by the apostle, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead,"—or it is not faith at all. Could we even conceive of faith having begun to exist in a man, and never to have been called into exercise by appropriate works, his faith could not survive, it must necessarily die. In such a man faith, being inert, could not exist. A profession of faith, therefore, where no works follow, be it found in whom it may, is a profes-

sion of it without the reality. The fact is, whatever may be said of his faith, *that* which he believes is not the gospel, but a thing of such a nature that it can have no salutary effect.

I need not say that the use made by James of what is said of Abraham's believing in God, and so being pardoned, as verified by his after conduct, is a striking proof, that though a change of state and a change of character are distinct, they are yet closely connected, and both connected with faith. The importance attached to the case of Abraham arises from this, that, on his being justified by faith, he was constituted the father, in a spiritual sense, of all among mankind, who, to the end of time, should be justified in the same way. It is common in the Scriptures to call persons distinguished by any quality or acquisition, the children of those by whom it was first and pre-eminently possessed. Thus, we read that Jabal was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle; and that Jabal was the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ. In like manner, they who resemble Abraham in his faith, are justified as he was, and are called his children. "Against hope, he believed in hope;" that is, he believed and hoped that the promised seed would be given, though every thing in nature and experience was against such an expectation. He believed in God as the quickener of the dead—the creator of life. In like manner, when a sinner believes unto justification, he sees nothing in himself, on account of which the blessing should be given him; but he believes in the grace of God, who, through the perfect work of his Son, can honorably justify the ungodly.

These two things illustrate each other; and hence the apostle reasons from the faith of Abraham in regard to the

promised Son, to throw light on that through which forgiveness is obtained. If conformity to the law had been necessary to the latter, then Abraham could not have obtained it, and the nations could not have been blessed in him.— But he obtained it by faith in Him, of whom Isaac was a pledge and a type; and all who believe as he did, enjoy the same blessing with him, and hence are denominated his children. Not that Abraham was the first believer in the Messiah, and the first who was justified through faith in him,—for Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many others, were partakers of the righteousness which is by faith. But when, after the flood, the knowledge of God was a second time in a great measure lost, the Lord, instead of again sweeping at once the ungodly from the earth, by a deluge, was pleased to separate from the midst of them a people for himself. To accomplish this gracious purpose, he called Abraham out from among idolaters, and made of his posterity a nation, among whom he placed his name, in order to preserve, by a regular and peculiar system of typical institutions, the knowledge of his character, and of the plan of redemption, till the Messiah should come,—to hold up a figurative representation of the kingdom of Christ; and to prepare for the more full manifestation of the divine glory, in the extension and establishment of this kingdom among all the nations of the earth.

To Abraham, as the founder or father of this spiritual family, were the promises of mercy through Christ more fully unfolded than they had been before: and hence his faith was fitly exhibited as the pattern of that faith through which sinners should in every age be justified. The manner in which he was justified was designed to illustrate the only way in which the guilty can obtain the blessing of

acceptance with God ; and hence the care taken, both in the Old Testament and the New, to show what was his original character as a sinner, and the way in which he, ungodly as he was, obtained that blessing.

There is an evident fitness in the selection of Abraham to be the pattern of the faith and the blessedness of the Church of God, because he was the first person in the world, to whom the promise of being the progenitor of the Messiah was made ; while that event, according to the order of nature, did not necessarily follow. It was, according to the order of nature, necessary that he should descend from our first parents ; and, on the same principle, it was necessary, after the flood, that he should descend from Noah ; but there was no natural necessity that he should descend from Abraham rather than from any other of the multitudes then upon the earth.

Since, then, he was the first to whom this special favor was granted, it was meet that his faith should be so distinctly exhibited in connexion with its great object, the promised Deliverer, as to be the pattern of faith to the family of God ; and that his character and blessedness should be the pattern of the character and blessedness of all the redeemed. His justification, by faith in the Messiah, is recorded and attested, not for his own sake alone, but for an example and assurance to all generations. All are accordingly assured, that they shall in like manner be justified if they believe on him who raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead, —who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

But allow me, dear friend, to advert again to the character produced by the faith of Abraham. There is an evident fitness in making him, whose faith and justification

are the pattern of the faith and acceptance of the people of God in all ages of the world, a high example likewise of the *sanctifying* influence of the faith of the gospel. Imperfections and evils do indeed appear in his character: but considering the comparatively dark dispensation under which he was placed, it nevertheless exhibits a very striking display of the power of the truth. One great end for which the commandment to offer up Isaac was given him, was, that by this means, there might be a discovery of his confidence in God—his love to his name; and, in a word, of that constellation of graces which were thus brought into full and powerful operation. We are not to suppose, that the benefit of this trial was intended for the good of Abraham alone, but we must consider it as of standing use to the church in all ages of the world. Those of the Jews who openly rejected the gospel of Jesus, boasted that Abraham was their father: and from the reasoning of James it appears, that some who professed to receive the truth, were inclined to do the same, though in a different way. The example of the forgiveness of Abraham through faith in the Messiah, appears to have been wrested by them to their own destruction. They gloried in the correctness of their creed, spoke highly of salvation by grace, and confided in the safety of their state; while their tongues were unbridled, their tempers ungoverned, and the practical fruits of righteousness were quite disregarded. The national pride, which in no small degree led one class of the Jews avowedly to oppose the gospel, had in this latter class given place to, or had become mixed with, spiritual pride, arising from a supposed connexion established between them, as Christians, and Abraham, as their father in that character.—That their errors arose from a perversion of what had

been taught by Paul, in relation to the forgiveness of Abraham through faith, without works of law, is evident, from this consideration, that the very language and passage of Scripture which he had employed in illustrating the subject of the forgiveness of that patriarch are referred to by James, and are rescued by him from the wilful perversions of these nominal Christians.

He employs, in the 15th and 16th verses, an illustration in regard to love, which shows, that he considered the faith of these licentious professors of religion as a non-entity,—an empty false profession. What should we say of the love of that man, who, when asked to relieve a brother or a sister in distress, would in words express for him or for her the greatest affection and the warmest wishes, but yet would refuse to afford even the smallest assistance? Would we allow him to be possessed of love because he *said* he was so? Would we not rather consider his conduct a compound of hypocrisy, meanness, and cruelty? On the same principle, if a man say he has faith, but does not manifest it by corresponding works, must we not conclude, that he is making a false profession, or, in other words, that he is utterly a stranger to faith in the gospel? Works are as much connected with faith as *breathing* is with life, which seems to be the meaning of *spirit* in verse 26th.

Now, there is not in this reasoning of James the least degree of opposition to the doctrine of Paul. Surely, when the latter speaks of faith, he speaks of what is really such, and not of an empty profession of it, which is no more faith than a counterfeit piece of money is money, or than a dead body is a man. No one can for a moment dream, that in order to establish the doctrine of free forgiveness through faith, it is necessary to assert, that an *empty* and *false* pro-

fession of it will interest in the blessing. I need not again say, that this were not faith, but hypocrisy; and, therefore, to suppose that a man could in this way be forgiven, were to teach, not the doctrine of acceptance through *faith*, but the absurd notion of acceptance through *hypocrisy*.

The great reason why men are pardoned through faith in the gospel, is, that as the ultimate object of their pardon is their sanctification, and as this cannot be effected by the truth, unless it is believed, it is necessary that the gospel be believed, in order that the object of redemption may be gained. It follows, then, that as nothing short of a real belief of the truth can bring a sinner under its hallowing influence, the confession of the mouth, which is connected with salvation, must flow from the belief of the heart. With great propriety, therefore, did James refute the error of these Jewish professors, by a reference to the history of their father Abraham.

Addressing the avowed unbelievers among the Jews, Christ said, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." And the reasoning of James with professed believers is the same. The justification of the patriarch was an act of free grace and of pure compassion; and great would be his peace and his joy when called from a state of condemnation to a state of acceptance. But his blessedness must have advanced as he grew in acquaintance with the promises and character of God. What a view is given us of his happiness in these words,— "and he was called the friend of God." It was in that confidential intercourse with God—that cultivation of fellowship with him—that imitation of him—that ready obedience to him—that union with him, in judgment, affection, and aim—and that entire trust in him which so highly dis-

tinguished his character, that his blessedness was continued and advanced. His happiness was still farther heightened by the delightful sense of the approbation and complacency with which Jehovah regarded him; and by the many tokens he received of the unceasing care and kindness of his God. In the day of the Lord all his sins will be declared forgiven; but, in as far as his character was righteous, forgiveness will not be called for. The approbation which he received when on earth, will then be ratified by his just and applauding Judge.

This view of the subject gives an edge to those parts of Scripture which call upon Christians to seek that they may be found at last of the Judge, "in peace, and without spot, and blameless;" and which exhibit even to them, the solemn nature of his judgment. 2 Peter iii. 14. 1 John ii. 28. Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10.—Never let any sentiment be admitted which would blunt the admonitions of Scripture, and reduce to unmeaning sounds the solemn warnings of Heaven. On the other hand, ever give the proper place to the doctrines of the cross, and the gracious promises of the covenant.

When the Christian, dear friend, thinks of the sins that stain even his religious services, and of the imperfections that at best mingle with them, he may well wonder that any of them should be acknowledged by his Lord. Even when the redeemed are at the seat of judgment declared the approved servants of Christ, they are represented as expressing their surprise that they should be thus applauded. Matt. xxv. 37, 38, 39.—But the Saviour can separate from what is sinful all that proceeded from love, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Many were the errors and the infirmities of his first disci-

ples ; but in his intercessory prayer on the night in which he was betrayed, he does not mention one of them. All that was good in their behaviour, he separates from what was evil ; the latter had been forgiven, and the former he approves. To his Father he says of them, " They have kept thy word." " I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me ; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." " They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." See in this a disposition to commend rather than condemn, and learn to trust in him as one who will not forget our work of faith, and our labor of love. Job, notwithstanding his occasional failures, was upon the whole a submissive sufferer ; and hence God, exhibiting him as an example, says to us, " Ye have heard of the patience of Job." What a kind Master do we serve ! Ought we not to be ambitious of high degrees of his approbation ? On the resurrection morn, when on coming forth from the grave, and on viewing all the grandeur and importance of eternity, our first thoughts and words will turn upon the atonement of him through whom we have obtained the victory,—when we shall count it an unutterable blessing to " find mercy of the Lord in that day," how transporting to find, that not only are all our sins declared completely forgiven, but that He who " washed us in his blood," will kindly and openly declare his complacency in our poor services in his cause on earth. Will not this at once humble and elevate the heart ? Will it not make the whole soul to thrill with ecstatic delight ?—Will it not be joy unutterable and full of glory ?

Let us seek, then, to manifest the tried faith and approved obedience of the father of the faithful. He is held

up as an eminent example of the supporting and sanctifying influence of faith in the atonement. Let us give glory to God as he did, by implicit confidence in his word, and unreserved and persevering submission to his will. The love of God towards us has been manifested in the merciful forgiveness of our sins ; but his great object in thus displaying his compassion, is to effect our deliverance from sin, and to advance us to that exalted blessedness which results from a holy resemblance to him, from union of heart with him, and from the enjoyment of his complacent satisfaction in our character and services. May it be justly said of us, that our spirit and conduct like that of Abraham, make it manifest that, like him, we “have been treated as though we were righteous,” for the sake of the Redeemer. What a happiness thus to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour ! Like the patriarch, let us cultivate the spirit of pilgrims, and look for the heavenly country ; let us, like him, be decided in the service of God, contented with our lot on earth, the friends of peace, kind to all men, particularly attached to the family of God, and distinguished by the patient self-denial and perseverance of a life of faith. And may it be our happiness, as it was his, to die in the peace and hope of the faith of Christ, and to be gathered to the assembly above.—I remain, &c.

LETTER XXV.

ON THE MAINTENANCE OF CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE.

The doctrine of the gospel, the medicine of the soul—The necessity of constancy in the faith—The danger of trusting to past attainments—Mistaken views of faith in some—The proper manner of treating the dejected—The connexion between consolation and holiness—The influence of disease on the mind—Importance of uniting jealousy of ourselves, with confidence in God—The ground of access to God ever the same. Remarks on 1 John iii. 21—The necessity of uniting the use of means, with simplicity of dependence upon God.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU will remember the conversations that we have had on some of the difficulties which are met with in the Christian course, and particularly on the means of maintaining Christian confidence. Allow me, with a particular view to the latter subject, to recall to your remembrance the principal observations which were suggested on these occasions.

You have often mentioned the medicinal power of the gospel in first restoring health to the benumbed and perverted powers of the soul, and then nourishing and supporting it. Now, this spiritual health is not the ground of a Christian's hope, under a view of guilt. The foundation of our peace is the same from first to last ; it is the atonement of Christ. Not only is our cure at best imperfect, but though it were perfect, it could not expiate sin. The only scriptural confidence which the new character of a Christian can give, is similar to that of a man who, finding his health improving by the use of a particular medicine or regimen, is sat-

isfied of the advantage of the system, and perseveres in its use. His health, he knows from experience, improves or declines, according as he follows or neglects the prescribed remedy, and his growing confidence in its efficacy excites to the unremitting use of it.

In like manner must we seek deliverance from the disease of sin, by continuing in the firm faith of the medicinal truth of the gospel. If faith be the conviction of things we do not see, the conviction must be ever maintained; for if not upon the mind at the moment, we cannot be said to have it. Forgetfulness then, is, in many respects the same thing with an opposite conviction. The belief of yesterday, if confined to it, will not benefit us to-day. He who believes, feels the power of the truth, not he who merely *has* believed.

When the divine righteousness, in the full and free redemption of the guilty, through the blood of Christ, was first beheld by us, the love of God was kindled in our hearts. Our happiness arose from that truth which answered the painful question, "How can a sinner be justified before God?" We maintained a holy jealousy of every thing that threatened to deprive us of our only hope. Faith wrought by love, and love produced cheerful and self-denied obedience. A deep sense of guilt and unworthiness endeared to us the love of God, which had met us in all our wretchedness, and had kindly and freely saved us. But, alas! our mutable and fluctuating heart deceived us! Though, like Israel, we had sung the praises of God at the Red Sea, we "soon forgot his mighty works." We gradually lost a proper sense of our sinfulness, pollution, and danger, and of the love and mercy of our God. Our love to him naturally declined; and though the truth was not

denied, it came to be held as a matter of speculation. The works which formerly flowed from love to Him who loved us, and gave himself for us, now proceeded from some self-righteous principle. Our sufferings came to be considered as in some sense meritorious, and did not as before spring from love to the Man of Sorrows, and from the hope of sharing in his glory. Now, if any thing like this has taken place, have we not reason to be alarmed? Ought we not to examine into the root of the evil? If we do so, we shall find, that it is a ceasing to live constantly by the faith of the Son of God.

The sacrifice of Christ ought ever to be the food of our souls. If we withdraw from it, and trust to the degree of spiritual health which we think we have attained, we act as a man would do, who, because he is in health and vigor, should dream of supporting his existence by the stock of life he already enjoys. The very essence of our spiritual life is our love to God; the enjoyment of his favor as our chief joy; happiness in that in which he delights, and satisfaction in the privilege of fellowship with him, and conformity to him. Now this cannot be maintained if we feed not upon the gospel of Christ. When we leave it, we exclude ourselves from the fellowship of Him who is our life. We cease to be influenced by the only motives which can keep in the way of holiness and of peace. Sin, of course, gains the ascendancy, and the power of temptation is augmented. From this state of declension we cannot be recovered, but by returning to the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and abiding in the faith of the healing doctrine of the cross.

It is unhappily supposed by many, that a declension from their first love is just what is to be expected in Christians; and that, being a thing of course, it therefore need not

cause fear. That Christians are naturally prone to decline from God is too true; but that they ought to be comforted in such circumstances is false. Many, indeed, leave their first love; but is it therefore right to affirm that it merits little regard? Some, again, have appeared to be Christians who never were so in reality, and the fall of such need not surprise us. Mistakes on this subject have arisen from not considering, that the lively exercise of the affections, when newly excited, and accompanied with poignant sensations, is a different thing from the exercise of the same affections when settled into a habit, and operating as a principle at once powerful and tranquil. The effect of the first impressions of the truth may be such, that physical, as well as moral causes, will not allow it to be permanent. The individual may be so affected, as for a time to be incapable of attending to the ordinary concerns of life: and this, I need not say, is a state which is far from being adapted to our situation in the world, and therefore it cannot be essential to piety. There is often too, in such circumstances, more that is superficial than there is of solid principle. There is frequently, for example, great ignorance of the heart, and of the deceitfulness of sin, and very defective views of the gospel of peace. When the knowledge of these, and of kindred subjects, continues to advance, the principle of sacred love strikes its roots the deeper, and its fruits become more mature. There is more simplicity of confidence in God—more of a filial disposition towards him; and of a conscientious regard to his will, accompanied with genuine contrition, and great self-jealousy.—There is less of a censorious and inconsiderate temper,—less of an obtrusive and talkative humor, and more of a candid, humble, and cautious spirit. Love has not declined, but it “abounds in all

knowledge, and in all judgment." Now, this state ought not to be confounded with religious declension, as, through an error of judgment, has been sometimes the case.

This is quite a different thing from saying, that what is really a declension from our first love, is a mere matter of course. The Ephesians were greatly blamed by our Lord for having declined in their fervor. Rev. ii. 4, 5. Shall we then sanction lukewarmness on principle, and flatter those who ought to be awakened from their false dreams of security? Far be it.

No fancied increase of knowledge, or correctness of views, will supply the place of genuine love; and care ought to be taken that we mistake not *true* and acceptable fervor for irregular warmth. There are errors on this side as well as on the other. It becomes us, when at any time we have fallen, "to remember from whence we have done so." We ought, like Israel, to remember our original state of guilt and unworthiness, that we may be humbled. This Paul never forgot, and the remembrance of it he pressed upon his brethren. Titus iii. 3. 1 Cor. xii. 2. Ephes. ii. 11, 12. We ought to remember the blessedness we tasted when first relieved by the atonement,—the mingled emotions of joy and of sorrow which were excited in us when we looked on him whom our sins had pierced: and how our hearts were melted when, from a sense of much forgiveness, we loved much. Gal. iv. 13—16. Heb. x. 32—34. Such reflections will lead us to remember the temptations, snares, and deceits which called forth and cherished a spirit of self-dependence, which darkened our views of the grace of the gospel, and which sunk us into a state of coldness, or lukewarmness towards God, and things unseen and eternal. Feeling the instability and deceitfulness of

our hearts, we shall be the more eager to keep firm hold of the divine testimony. In a word, we shall feel that we must be coming daily to the Saviour. This, it is true, is humbling, but the more suited it is to our state and character. We are apt to think, that in the course of our progress, a time shall come, when we shall not be under the necessity of doing so; but this is an error.—Through life we shall have to come to the cross as at first. The necessity is far from being incompatible with enjoyment. The fear of death would keep Noah from leaving the ark, and plunging into the waters, but would not in the least mar his happiness while in the place of safety. In the same way, the fear of perishing keeps a Christian from departing from Christ, but does not mar his peace or his joy while he continues in the faith of Him.

The primitive Christians dwelt upon the great truths of the gospel as the very meat and drink of their souls. When the attention is turned to ourselves, and to our feelings, exclusive of the things in the truth, which should *make us feel*, and which alone can produce proper sensations, we act very differently from them. Their devotion was not like that which has a hold of the imagination, or of the feelings alone,—it was founded on the conviction of the understanding, and the sanctification of the affections. They speak of their sensations, but not apart from the revelation of God, which is the seed of all the true piety, and was the constant delight of their hearts. Accordingly in the most animated descriptions of the feelings of the apostles, we have distinctly set before us the truths which made them feel. It becomes us to act in spiritual things as we do in the concerns of this life. We never dream of being nourished by ruminating on the sensations of hunger and thirst,

or by conversing about them, but have recourse to such food and drink as are suited to our wants. Neither do we expect the cure of our bodily maladies by merely brooding over them, or conversing about them, without having recourse to the appropriate medicines. On similar principles, it is by a constant attachment to the great truths of the gospel, as the bread and the water of life, and the remedy of our souls, that we shall be invigorated and enlivened. If, through the power of temptation—the influence of a self-righteous spirit—the prevalence of sin—the harassing effect of sorrow and affliction,—in a word, through whatever cause we have lost the enjoyment of comfort, it can never be recovered but by the renewed exercise of faith in the atonement. Many in such circumstances err greatly, in spending that time in reflecting on past sensations, which had better be spent in looking afresh to that truth which is the spring of genuine purity and happiness. Our inability to decide upon the nature of what is past is no reason why we should not now go to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

The recollections of past sensations and deeds will generally be but indistinct, and of course, incapable of yielding the solid satisfaction which arises from the present active and constant exercise of the principles of genuine religion. Besides, were they of the most vivid description; and were we satisfied that past sensations were the fruit of divine grace, our reflections on them would only profit us in proportion as they led us at present to look anew from ourselves to the gospel of peace; for nothing can supply the want of a present persuasion of the truth of the gospel, and present dependence on its blessed import.

I am far from meaning, that we ought not to look back at all to our past courses.—There is a wide difference be-

tween reflecting on past sensations, as an inducement to "repent, and do our first works:" and that we may be encouraged to confide in that blessed sacrifice which formerly gave us rest, and doing so, to calm a sense of guilt, and to strengthen a hope founded on such sensations.—The former is salutary, but the latter is deeply injurious.

If we endeavor, by reflecting on what is past, to maintain a persuasion that we are the children of God even when we are lukewarm, or quite cold in his service, his Spirit confirms not this confidence by his word. The prevalence of worldly lusts and indifference towards spiritual things cannot dwell in the same heart with the Spirit of God. If sin prevail—if carnality and the love of the world are predominant in the heart, we must greatly dishonor Him by a fearless assurance that all is safe. If the word of God is not now abiding in our minds we cannot have any well-grounded confidence that we are saved by it; for we are made partakers of Christ only if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Heb. iii. 14. There is nothing in this calculated to induce us to distrust God; but there is every thing fitted to lead us to distrust ourselves. The gospel is not obscure, however beclouded it may have been to us.—It is still open for our relief and free for our use.—The merciful language of God is, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Lord will preserve believers to eternal life, but he does it "through faith." When he restores their souls, it is not merely their consolation that he renews,—it is their spiritual health. When he heals their backslidings, he makes them fruitful in the works of right-

eousness, for he is as the dew to their souls, at once refreshing and fructifying the heart. Hosca xiv. 4—6.

I beg you to take notice, that there is nothing in these statements at all like to the notion, that when our minds are lively, and our affections warm, we need not faith, because we then live by sense; but that when our hearts are cold and lifeless, then is the time to live by faith, as if Christian feeling and faith were opposed to each other; as if the latter were a persuasion that we are the children of God. To say, that however bad the state of our minds may be, we ought instantly to believe in the atonement of Christ, and to come to him in the confidence of obtaining mercy, is quite different from saying, that when we have no reason to conclude that we are Christians, we ought then to maintain the confidence that our state is safe. The latter is not to believe God, for he has testified no such thing. Unbelief is not calling our piety in question; it is calling in question the truth of the divine testimony. If the Galatians, when Paul stood in doubt of them, had maintained the confidence that all was well with them, would they not have resembled the Jews, who boasted of their assurance that they were the children of God at the very time that they were opposing his truth, and rebelling against his authority? Gal. iv. 20. John viii. 54. This was not faith, but unfounded presumption. It is true, that our questioning if we are indeed the children of God, may be *traced* to unbelief, because, if our faith in the gospel were steady and active, it would put an end to hesitation on the subject; but it is not on this account unbelief itself, any more than penitence, is sin, because it cannot be exercised but in consequence of sin.

It is much to be regretted, that an opposition between

faith and sense, or, in other words, between faith and Christian feeling, should ever have been so stated as to lead any into the dangerous mistake of supposing that the latter is unconnected with the former, and even supersedes the necessity of it. Occasion has thus unhappily been given for reproaching Christian devotion and enjoyment as irrational and wild enthusiasm. Nothing can be more unfounded than such reproaches. The joy of a Christian is doubtless felt and sensible; but it is not a mere sensation, it is rational joy. So far from being separated from, or unconnected with faith, it springs from it, and is proportioned to its vigor and steadiness. He who enjoys it, can give a reason for the hope that is in him. His joy is "the joy of faith," for every thing in genuine piety is characteristic of "the spirit of a sound mind." His love to God is not an unaccountable sensation, but a principle; implanted indeed by a heavenly influence, but by suitable means. The faith from which all his comfort springs, is not like the vain daring of the Egyptians, who, without any divine declaration to rest on, ventured into the Red Sea. It is like the confidence of the Israelites, who, in passing through the waters, rested on the explicit declaration and promise of God. It is proper, however, to state that the expression sensible comfort, is often used to signify that enjoyment which a Christian has in a consciousness of the healing influence of the gospel, as distinguished from that which a man has when viewing himself as a stranger to this healing influence; he goes as a sinner to the Saviour, on the ground of the infinite merit of his sacrifice, and of the unfettered invitations he has addressed to all indiscriminately to come to him for rest. It is also used to denote that flow of the spirits, which in certain constitutions and

circumstances accompanies the influence of the gospel. But there may be a settled peace and joy possessed, where, owing to constitutional causes or other things, there is little of this kind of excitement. These things then are quite distinct, and ought not to be confounded.

You ask, my dear friend, how a person should be treated, who fears, that in his profession of religion he has been deceiving himself with delusive hopes? When a professor of religion, who had concluded that he was a believer of the gospel, comes to question if he has indeed believed it, his case demands particular attention. In vain do his friends endeavor to console him, by reminding him of what they think good about him, of past instances of religious services and enjoyments, or of the length some have gone astray who were yet the people of God; as if these could form a pillow for repose. Any peace got in this way, will be like the momentary ease derived from opium, which leaves the disease as it was. Let it never be forgotten, that the indulgence of sin, and departure from the truth, must deprive of scriptural comfort. An example of the effect of the latter we have in the Galatians, who, when they departed from the gospel, preached to them by Paul, lost their former blessedness. And as to the former, distress must follow the predominance of sin, the conscientious workings of the love of the world, and the prevalence of carnality of heart. He would only aggravate his sin, and dishonor God still more, by a fearless confidence that he is living by faith notwithstanding. It were extremely dangerous to heal his wound slightly, by saying peace, when there is no peace. Let him be probed to the quick, by being seriously called on to consider wherein he has departed from the truth, and how far he is living in

the neglect of some known but disagreeable duty, or in the practice of some known sin. If the truth is not retained in the mind, or if some error respecting it be embraced, distress of spirit must as necessarily follow, as darkness does the setting of the sun, unless the heart be very hardened indeed. Sin again darkens the understanding, and alienates the affections from things holy and spiritual, sears the conscience as with a hot iron, and renders the transgressor utterly incapable of enjoying the consolations of the Comforter. Safety, indeed, may be earnestly desired, but holy intercourse with God, and spiritual enjoyments, are not. In such circumstances, let the disorder be fully exposed, and every false hope shaken to the foundation. The fear that the divine word will fail, is a very different thing from the dread of being deceived by our own hearts. The more that we distrust our deceitful hearts, the more shall we trust in the divine testimony.

When the cause of distress is, that the truth has been forsaken, it is of the first importance to direct the distressed to the only balm for his wound, and to the immediate exercise of faith in the atonement. Though no particular known transgression has been indulged in, the faith of the gospel has been declining. The hopes of the mind cannot be solid, unless they are built on the work of the Saviour. They are often however too easily raised or sunk, according to the pleasant and agreeable nature of our feelings on the one hand, and their dull and unpleasant nature on the other. The reason is, that we look more to our feelings as such, and apart from the truth, than to the great cause of all proper feeling, and the foundation of all true confidence. The immutability of the divine faithfulness and love, as manifested in the gospel, and the absolute perfec-

tion of the work of Christ, are not sufficiently perceived. Error is mixed with truth in our minds, so that the real glory of the gospel is but partially seen, and of course it has not that influence upon us which it would otherwise have. Finding, or at least fearing that we have been deceiving ourselves, we act as if there were no hope. Because we see nothing good in ourselves; and so are stripped of all hope from *that* quarter, we feel as if there were no means of relief in another, and our spirits sink into despondency, and all comfort is refused. Often in such cases the mind is filled with the most tormenting anguish, and the darkest gloom, because a blow has been struck at its self-righteous confidence, while the true ground of acceptance has not been perceived. In such circumstances, our immediate duty is to look to the blessed gospel of Christ, and contemplate the Saviour as he is there exhibited.

The ground of acceptance revealed in the gospel, takes it for granted, that he who builds upon it has a deep conviction, that he needs the full extent of the redemption of Christ, and that his confidence in it needs not thereby be shaken. It is easy to maintain that hope which arises from slight views of sin, but it requires a conflict to preserve at once a just sense of our guilt, and full confidence in the Saviour. We are prone to seek a false peace, and naturally averse to the humbling means by which the gospel imparts consolation. The solidity of our comfort, and the progress of our sanctification, depend, however, on the simplicity of our dependence on the cross. This makes the soul not only to allow its guilt, but to shudder at sin; to wonder that ever it could have been guilty of it, while, at the same time, it is happy in a sense of pardon, and in the hope of eternal life.

When distress of mind arises from the indulgence of sinful habits, the subjects of it ought to be affectionately told, that the indulgence of evil tempers, worldly cares, and sinful practices and neglects, grieve and quench, and in fact resist, the spirit of God. Eph. iv. 30, 31. 1 Thess. v. 19. Acts vii. 51—53. David felt this when he said, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." Psalm li. 11. It will not do to speak of darkness of mind and insensibility of heart, in relation to divine things, as mere infirmities, and of cold affections, and slothful and inefficient desires, as mere matters of course. There is too often a secret feeling, as if, though it is becoming to complain of such things, there is no very urgent necessity to endeavor to remedy them. Christians are called to a life of watchfulness, circumspection, and diligence, and are warned of the necessity of pressing forward as through a crowd of opposition, of striving as in a close combat, and of laboring to enter into the rest of God. Now if professors of religion shall substitute for these exercises of self-denial, verbal complaints of their insufficiency and inability, and call such lamentations exercises of piety, is it surprising that they should be strangers to the comfort which the Lord hath connected with righteousness? if the man who was once serious, watchful, and diffident, has become the prey of levity, sloth, and presumptuous confidence, though he may for a time obtain a delusive peace, he will ultimately find, that true joy is connected only with holy and humble fellowship with God, and is utterly incompatible with a life of sin. It is necessary to sound in such a man's ears the awakening alarm of the divine threatenings against backsliders, and to call upon him to "repent and do his first works."

If these admonitions are blessed to his soul, care ought to be taken that his unbelief do not lead him to distrust God as to future circumstances, by indulging a distrustful dread that temptation may arise which will deprive him of his valued mercies, and plunge him in perdition. It is true, that the temptations and changes of this ensnaring world ought to make us jealous of our own hearts, but they should always be viewed in connexion with the delightful declaration of the Saviour, that "his grace is sufficient for us." We are called, then, in relation to spiritual as well as temporal things, to mind only the things of the present day, and to leave the concerns of to-morrow to the wise and the gracious disposal of our Lord. The heart will thus rest upon a firm foundation, and will enjoy rest, while, at the same time, it will be stimulated to the greatest activity.

I speak, you will observe, of a Christian who, although he is conscious of daily failures in obedience, is upon the whole, walking in the light, and so has fellowship with God. While from day to day, he confesses sin and implores forgiveness through the heavenly Advocate, he does so with fervor and contrition of spirit, and the renewed mercy of his God binds him the more to him, and inspires him with a growing aversion to whatever would offend him.

It is a sad abuse of the merciful constitution of the gospel, when the prayers and confessions of a professing Christian become matters of form; when, on being convicted of sin, he says, in cold blood, and with complete indifference, "There is forgiveness with God," and "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." Is this the lesson taught by the condemnation of the angels that sinned, the

destruction of the old world, and the cities of the plain, the fall of the Israelites in the wilderness, and, above all, by the death of the Redeemer? To all of these are Christians pointed in Scripture, that they may learn *their* God is a consuming fire. 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. Jude i. 5. Heb. xii. 29. They are thus solemnly told, that God will not trifle with sin, even in his own people, and that the more fully they understand the gospel, and the more that they live by faith in the atonement, the more will they see the danger of sin, and the more holy and circumspect will be their deportment. Well, indeed, may we be warned against departing from the living God, through an evil heart of unbelief.

When the spirit of God takes the things of Christ, and discovers their reality and glory to the mind, the faith of the heart is commanded. We can no more doubt the truth of the gospel, than we can doubt the existence of the sun when it shines before us, and our eyes are dazzled with its beams. The evidence of the truth strikes the mind with overpowering effect; and there is a glory and an excellency seen in it, which transforms the soul into its likeness. When the mind is thus absorbed in the contemplation of the Redeemer, the blessed effect is growing and satisfying gladness. When the heart is thus enlarged, we go to our heavenly Father with the utmost confidence, and pour out our hearts before him whom our souls love. Prayer is felt to be a privilege, and we delight in it as a means of fellowship with him. Such, however, is the deceitfulness of the heart, that when thus happy we are in danger of being too much engrossed with our sensations themselves, and of forgetting their entire dependence on the gracious truths of the gospel, and the gracious influence

of the Spirit. Pride is thus excited and cherished. There is nothing in the communications of divine grace, that is, of *itself*, calculated to fill us with pride. On the contrary, all of them are fitted to promote humility. But when the mind dwells only on the gift and on the circumstance that to *us* the blessing has been imparted, a spirit of pride may be engendered. There was nothing in what Paul saw in the third heavens, that of *itself* could foster pride, but when he began to dwell on the mere circumstance, that to *him* and *not* to others this favor had been granted, his mind would be turned from the objects he had seen, and so might be lifted up above measure. David said in his prosperity, "I shall never be moved." He not only expected that he should always enjoy the same temporal prosperity, but he preferred the gift to the Giver, the streams to the fountain. He speaks as if past and present communications from God would be sufficient to his happiness, without any constant or fresh supply; as if he could now stand without additional aid from above. Now, when a Christian is wholly occupied with his joyful feelings, and dwells only on the circumstances, that now he sees the truth clearly, or feels its convincing and animating power strongly, and ceases to keep his eye on the great object of faith, and to retain a firm hold of the truth itself, he falls into an error of the same kind. The consequence is, that he declines in faith, and in true joy, for though a kind of warmth and comfort be felt, they are not genuine. He has ceased to draw from the fountain, and the stream is, of course, dried up. It becomes him to ponder on the cause of his declension, to be sensible of his sin, and to seek again his departed joys.

God has promised his people consolation; but, as was

necessary from the very nature of the thing, he has connected it with our continuing in the faith and obedience of the gospel. The indulgence of any evil temper grieves the Spirit of God, and causes him to withdraw. As men express their displeasure by looking away from one who has offended them, so the withdrawal of former displays of kindness because of sin, is signified by the hiding of the face of God. When the Saviour became answerable for guilt, even from Him did God hide his face. It is true that the Church, under persecution for *righteousness* sake, says to him, "Wherefore hidest thou thy face?" But this expresses not what was really, but what was *apparently* the case, for we find that Paul when he applies this passage to himself and his brethren, is exulting in the thought, that nothing whatsoever could separate them from the actual benefit of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Rom. viii. 35—39. This chastisement then is an instance of salutary severity used for the recovery of such as have wandered from God.

If professing Christians habitually neglect what they ought to observe, if they cleave to what they ought to abandon, or do what they ought to shun, what can they expect but to be void of that comfort to which other things are preferred? If their regard to the blessings of divine grace is not strong enough to reconcile them to that holy, humble, and self-denied course with which the enjoyment of them is connected, they may rest assured that they are far from valuing them as they ought. There is, in such cases, an evident reluctance to make the sacrifices which are indispensibly necessary to the enjoyment of Christian comfort, which shows, that much as the want of it is in words lamented, the heart is too much set upon the world. The

fact is, that the great thing desired by such characters, is to be able to entertain the assured hope of at last reaching heaven, without parting unreservedly with every idol. How different their spirit from that of those who find enough in the favor and fellowship of Christ to occupy the whole heart, and who, from a sense of happiness in his service, abandon all that is incompatible with the much valued blessing! In the very nature of things, we can have no fellowship with the God of light, if we walk in darkness.

I would here remind you, my dear friend, that the want of enjoyment is sometimes owing to a constitutional tendency to melancholy and to bodily disease. There are disorders which produce great dejection and lowness of spirits, and which affect the hopes and the fears both respecting time and eternity. In such circumstances, is it not enough that the *truth* is stated; means must be used to better the health. A proper attention to all the means necessary to restore vigor to the bodily frame, is an important part of Christian duty. The mind gets enfeebled by disease, and the sufferer becomes incapable of fixing his attention on the object of faith with any degree of distinctness or composure: he cannot engage with his wanted fervor in the exercise of devotion, for however animating in themselves, in his circumstances they are very exhausting; and his wavering mind being disturbed by images, perhaps of the most gloomy description, he is disposed to indulge in dismal apprehensions; and, in particular, to conclude that his situation is the result of grievous declension from God, and that he is left to reap the fruit of his transgressions. Now, all the while nothing has happened to him, "but what is common to man." The most eminent servants of

God are not promised exemption from any of the afflictions to which flesh is heir, for "one event is to the righteous and to the wicked." If we connect this consideration with the promises which ensure comfort in the way of obedience, we shall perceive the consistency between such afflictions and the faithfulness of God. The gospel could never be designed to remove physical disorders; and the promises of consolation while we walk in it, must be understood in a sense agreeable to its nature and object. It is true, that as "a merry heart doth good like a little medicine," so the joy of the truth may in a measure influence the health. But as there are maladies which deprive of ordinary mirth, by incapacitating the mind for performing its proper functions, so there are disorders which impede the exercise of Christian principles. Though the judgment of the afflicted allows the truth of all that an enlightened Christian states from the Scriptures, the heart fails to receive the comfort of the message. So long as the mind of Job was unimpaired, he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly; but when, through the effect of circumstances and disease, his spirit was broken, and when, both while asleep and awake, his wavering mind was disturbed by dismal and gloomy images, he indulged in the most melancholy thoughts, and spake unadvisedly with his lips. His infirmities, though not in themselves sinful, became an inlet to evil; for, though he was not the character which his friends supposed him to be, he certainly in some measure erred, as otherwise the Almighty would not have reprov'd him. It is matter of great consolation, that He who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, distinguishes between what is the fruit of infirmity, and what is the fruit

of sin ; as we see in his address to his three friends, of whom God says, that they had not spoken of Him the thing that was right, as his servant Jacob had. Job xlii. 7.

It is possible, indeed, dear friend, that the state of the mind may be attributed to a bodily cause, when it is not really owing to it; but what is there about which errors may not be committed? And, therefore, though this is a strong reason for caution, it is none for discarding a fact, and refusing to learn from it what it is fitted to teach. If the mind is quite susceptible of impressions from *worldly* things, corresponding with their nature, and not so in regard to spiritual objects, then certainly the cause is not an infirmity, but a morally evil principle. This, therefore, requires particular attention. I beg you to remember, in connexion with this, that though, as we advance in life, Christian principle may become more vigorous, it may not always produce the same warmth or tenderness of feeling. A change in the constitution, or the decay of animal nature, sufficiently accounts for this. A similar effect is produced in regard to worldly objects; for even when we are deeply engaged with them, there is not in advanced life the same degree of liveliness in our feelings, as was in our early days. The same principle is applicable to different kinds of natural temperament. Particular circumstances, when joined with certain constitutional tendencies, will sometimes cause one part of the truth to impress the mind more than other parts of it; and at such times there may, for example, be such a view had of the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of God, as will lead to bow submissively to his will, while there is not that view of his whole character which fills with unutterable joy.

The reality and the vigor of our piety are not to be

judged of, therefore, by the ebbs and flows of our animal spirits. Love to the truth may operate at one time with more tender and affectionate feelings than at another ; but in the latter case, it may be as apparent in the solidity of our attachment, in the cheerfulness and activity of our obedience, and in our patience under suffering. It were very wrong to confound the latter state of mind with religious declension, for it manifests genuine love no less than the former. In this way is the life of religion often maintained to old age, and thus “ while the outward man decays, the inward man is renewed day by day.” Frames and feelings pass away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. The soul may have good hope through grace, and may be able calmly and peacefully to step into eternity, though nothing like rapture is enjoyed.

Allow me now to say a few words in regard to the discouragement which arises from the failure of our many efforts against sin. Sin gains no advantage over us so long as we keep depending on the Saviour, but the moment we commence a warfare distinct from him, it prevails, and all our efforts against it are baffled. Feeling this, we bemoan our case, and get discouraged. But the fact is, that instead of acting under the influence of love, from a sense of great forgiveness, we are at bottom engaged in laboring to make our peace with God. Now, this is not the spirit of a child, and never can we cleanse ourselves from our filthiness, but by the influence of the grace and promises of Heaven. We are very apt to imagine, that we are fighting against sin, on the principles of the gospel, when in reality we are struggling to establish some kind of claim on God for its blessings.

Instead of depending on the Saviour, we wish to add to

the strength of the foundation of hope, by some additional security. We dread lest we be deceived in trusting solely to the declaration of God in his word. In addition to these, we may secretly wish for a voice from heaven, or some direct revelation to assure us of our safety ; or, which comes to the same thing, we are busy in endeavoring to work ourselves up to a particular state of feeling, or to work out some good thing in ourselves, before going to the cross for deliverance. Like Peter, who, though he had the word of his Master to rely on, instead of looking to his Lord, and simply crediting his word, fixed his eyes exclusively on the waves, and forgot the encouraging call that had been given him, we fix our attention exclusively on our guilt and our danger, and so lose sight of the all-sufficiency of that remedy revealed in the gospel, and busy ourselves in seeking relief from some other quarter. The dread which seized he apostle, arose from his forgetting that his Master's call to him to venture on the water, implied that it would be safe for him to do so, since the waves obeyed the word of the Saviour. In like manner, if, while we do not in words deny the truth of the gospel, we are afraid to trust it without something of a more direct and tangible nature added to it, our fear will tend to sink, rather than to save us.

In such a case, when feeling the works of unbelieving fear, and our consequent insecurity, let us, as Peter did, cry to the Lord. Let us do so, not only for pardon, but also for deliverance from an evil heart of unbelief. When we read that the blood of the Son of God cleanseth from all sin, let us believe it, and be encouraged to keep his way, and this will at once calm and purify the heart. We shall thus be freed from all self-righteous labor, and from all the disappointments arising from this misgiving foundation. Do

we read of the number, power, malice, and wiles of our enemies,—we also read of the love and of the grace of God, and believing the promises of defence, guidance, and support, we shall meet our foes, and, relying on the Lord, we shall overcome them.

The promises are sometimes so clearly seen, that they cannot but be believed; and we are ready to think, that our faith shall be always equally strong, forgetting the necessity of constant watchfulness, and we are thus laid open to temptation. One cause of this error, my dear friend, is, that we are apt to make a distinction between what we were when we first believed, and what we are, now that we are Christians, in regard to the ground of peace under a consciousness of guilt, and to the way of access to God. Now these are the same to a Christian, as to a man who has hitherto been a stranger to piety. This was taught of old, by the commandment which required that every new approach unto God should be made with blood. The perfection of Christ's sacrifice has rendered it unnecessary to offer another, but we ought not to draw near to God, or expect pardon but by again pleading the worth, and relying on the virtue of his accepted offering. No doubt a Christian has advantages which another has not. The fellowship he has with God, the experience he has had of the power of his grace, and the progress he has made in the life of religion, must all be felt an encouragement to go to the throne of his Father, and may be the means of enlivening his devotion, and of establishing and strengthening his faith. But these are abused if they are made the ground of his access to God, or the foundation of his acceptance with him. Never ought the blessings of his family to be put in the place of the work of his Son, on account of which alone

he communicates of his goodness. To do so is not to hold fast the beginning of our confidence which was nothing but the atonement. No sooner do we thus err, than the sanctifying power of the truth ceases to be felt, for its true glory is thereby eclipsed. We feel the difference, and are perhaps struck with it, but the cause is in ourselves, and our own backslidings in this way reprove us.

When I speak of the ground of forgiveness, and the medium of access to God, as the same in every case, I am far from meaning that the advancing Christian has no comfort but what arises from that peace which is preached to all, and which springs from nothing but the blood of Christ. Besides the blessing of peace of conscience, under a sense of guilt, the Christian, while he walks with God, enjoys comfort in his obedience, and tastes an earnest of the blessedness of heaven itself. These enjoyments doubtless arise from resting on the proper foundation of confidence; but this is very different from their being the ground of that confidence. When the apostle says, that we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren, his meaning cannot be that our love to the brethren is the *cause* of our having passed from death to life; it is only the fruit and evidence of a change of mind. In like manner, when he says, if our heart condemn us not as insincere in our profession of faith, then have we confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 14—21, he is not speaking of the *foundation* of our access to God, nor representing our consciousness of integrity in our profession of faith as the ground of our confidence before Him, but is affirming, that in this state of mind we approach God with a good conscience, as opposed to the distrust which must fill the mind of the man whose own heart condemns him for hypocrisy

in his profession and worship. If we are really living by faith in the atonement, and so have our conscience purged by it, we can draw near to God with confidence. Of this state of mind, obedience is a fruit and token; and hence it is said, that we shall obtain what we ask, because we keep his commandments; that is, since in this state of mind, our desires are in union with the will of God, they shall therefore be gratified. John xv. 7.

It is not necessary, surely, that a Christian should be conscious of hypocrisy in his profession of the faith, in order to his being humble before God, and to his really placing his confidence in the atonement. Peter, in the integrity of his heart, said, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Was this the language of pride? Was it not the language of a humbled and a penitent character; of one who had been restored, and who was now called to strengthen his brethren. When a Christian has the deepest views of his guilt and unworthiness, and is most deeply humbled before God, he may be able to say, in the integrity of his heart, that all his hope as a sinner is on the atonement, that he loves the gospel of peace, and that having much forgiven he loves much. What is he conscious of but that he loves that truth which condemns him before God, strips him of all his fancied righteousness, and shuts him up to the cross as his only refuge, by convincing him that between him and the pit of perdition there is nothing but the finished work of the Redeemer? These are not the feelings of a man who is engaged in reflecting on the warmth and the constancy of his love, and is pleasing himself with the thought that he has done well, and that therefore he is safe. Far from the Christian's mind are ideas such as these, and yet he cannot condemn him-

self as destitute of love. Such may be the abundant sense of the love of God, as revealed in the atonement, that his soul may be filled with the most ardent affection, and that he may come before God without the least of that fear which hath torment, while he worships at the throne of grace with humble and reverential awe.

If, on the other hand, a man's conscience condemns him, by testifying that he does not believe in the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to purge from all sin, it is impossible that he can enjoy peace with God, or have any comfort in approaching him. If our heart testifies that we are insincere in our confession of sin, and that we are resolved not to forsake it, we cannot in such circumstances enjoy a sense of forgiveness, for wherever there is a scriptural sense of pardon, there is genuine contrition, which is followed by forsaking the ways of iniquity. The testimony of a Christian's conscience, that he loves the truth and the character of God, is connected with a deep and a humbling sense of his sinfulness and imperfections, which leads him to the atonement as the sole ground of his hope, and to the throne of grace for mercy to pardon and grace to help him in time of need.

Forget not, my dear friend, that a deep sense of unworthiness, and of the weakness of our love to the Saviour, when compared with the glory of his character, and the greatness of his love to us, is much fitted to cause us to question if we indeed love him at all, while yet he really has our hearts. Remember also that genuine affection appears not only in burning ardor and rapturous delight, but in a settled complacency, in a readiness to suffer and to act for our Lord, and in humble and abasing views of ourselves, when we dwell on his character. The immense

interest which we have at stake is also fitted to stagger our confidence. The man who has no interest in a vessel that is at sea, can easily be persuaded of its safety, but he whose all is on board, feels many anxieties. Is it matter of wonder, then, that creatures such as we are should at times feel perplexed when the unutterable importance of eternity is vividly before us? What is it, however, that can settle the mind, but growth in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ?

It becomes us, then, to hear the voice which says, "Abide in me, and I will abide in you." We ought to live by faith, for holiness as well as pardon. "I live," says Paul, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And when he spake of his labors he said, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." This language is not meant by him to discourage the use of means to mortify sin; *far from it*, but to warn against confidence in the means considered *in themselves*, and to lead to a life of prayer to the Lord, and of simple and constant trust in him. Ever are we dependent on him; and it is a blessed thing to be in the constant habit of uniting complete reliance on him with unabating activity. In this case we labor not from any high opinion of our powers, but because we trust in God, who has graciously promised us his Spirit in answer to our prayers.

We are naturally unwilling to be kept in constant dependence on the communication of aid from above. Too often do we ask assistance, not only for the present necessity, but that we may have a kind of stock in ourselves, that we may not need to be daily coming unto God, as poor and helpless sinners. Our spirit is like to that of the Israelites, who were averse to the humbling manner in

which they were fed with the manna, when every day they were obliged to go and gather of it for their support, instead of being allowed to lay it up in store. They would not live by faith, but would have a visible God, and visible means of support and security; and is not a life of faith contrary to our natural bias? How unwilling are we to look afresh every day for our spiritual provision, and to trust in God without some visible means of supply? At one time they refused to go against the Canaanites, though God had promised to be with them; and at another, they would go against them though they had no promise of his presence. In the former instance, they would not use the means of conquest in the faith of the promise, and in the latter they would use them without expecting their success from the divine blessing, but from their employment of them. Now true piety unites faith in God with the use of means. The assurance of success always leads to activity, while the dread of a defeat enervates the heart. Of course the promises of aid and of victory, instead of relaxing diligence, stimulate to it. If we have in any case failed, they will lead us to blame ourselves, and, at the same time to say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall I shall arise." It was God's revealing to David that he would build him an house, which made him find in his heart to pray so earnestly for the establishment of it. And in like manner, when we look to the promise of the everlasting covenant, in which the Lord says, he will write his laws on our hearts, we become the more earnest in watching and praying, and laboring in the use of appointed means, that the work may be accomplished.

To neglect duty because we do not feel a particular degree of warmth in our affections, proceeds either from

the notion that our disposition for duty is the result of something which we must effect in ourselves, or from an idea that the aid of the Holy Spirit is given in an immediate manner. Satan is thus transformed into an angel of light. While there is an appearance of humility in depressing, with a sense of emptiness, the mind is turned from the fulness that is in Christ, and to which we have constant access. The Christian it is true is taught to feel his insufficiency for any duty, but never to induce him to neglect what he is called to, but rather to make him the more careful to go to his Lord for all that he needs. A great part of spiritual wisdom consists in maintaining at once a deep conviction of our own weakness, and a firm persuasion that we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us, in uniting simplicity of dependence on divine grace with constant activity in the work of God. We ought, in humility, to act rather than dispute; and thus to unite in our practice the two doctrines, relative to the duty of man and the free grace of Jehovah. If the Lord had barely revealed his goodness in pardoning sin, and had merely said that he would sanctify us, without telling us how, or prescribing to us any regimen, or directing us to any medicine to cure our spiritual maladies, this had been saying to us, "Stand still and see the salvation of our God." With regard, indeed, to the work of atonement and the victory of the Saviour, and also our final deliverance from the consequences of sin, this language is strictly appropriate. But with regard to our sanctification, commands and exhortations have been given along with manifestations of the grace of God, and promises of his aid; and we are called to quit ourselves like men, and to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It is on this

principle that the apostle calls on Christians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Phil. ii. 12, 13. He is addressing believers, and not unbelievers of the gospel; and is calling on them not to work out their justification, for they were already justified by faith without works of law, but to endeavor to be progressively delivered from the dominion of sinful principles, the influence of temptation, and the practice of iniquity, by the sanctifying energy of the unutterable and free love of God, which had already been manifested towards them in their redemption through the death of his Son.

The rest which the Lord had promised his people, is not that which arises from the persuasion that no enemy shall ever attack us,—it is that which arises from confidence in the power, faithfulness, and love of the Captain of Salvation, by whom we have been called to the conflict, and who hath said that we shall be more than conquerors. We are prone to seek such a certification of our safety as would supersede, not merely the fear which hath torment, but that godly and cautious fear by which we are preserved. We wish to be assured of our safety in a way which would render it unnecessary to be daily and constantly coming to the Saviour, and maintaining that watchfulness and holy circumspection which the gospel requires. Now such a kind of safety is quite different from that which is the privilege of Christians, and it is the unbelief and carnality of the heart which desires it. Confidence in God is to be united with the diligent and constant exercise of every Christian principle, in the conscientious discharge of every commanded duty. It is the union of these things, then—reliance on God, and activity in the use of means,—that distinguishes a Christian.

Make the word of God, then, your counsellor, and look

to him for guidance and assistance, and expect not too much from creatures. It has been well observed that truth is the daughter of calmness, of unbroken meditations, and of thoughts often revised and corrected. I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

The Lord's Supper a commemorative ordinance—A profession of faith in the atonement—A communion feast—A profession of confidence in the Divine promises—A profession of faith in the second coming of Christ—General remarks—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL NOW, agreeably to your request, write you a few thoughts on the Lord's Supper. The nature, design, and subject of this ordinance, may easily be learned from the words of its institution, and from the direct references to it in the apostolic writings. We are there taught, that it is a *commemorative* appointment. "Do this in remembrance of me," is the language of our Lord,—language which refers to the natural depravity, weakness, and instability of our hearts, through which we are prone to forget him, and which teaches us that this institution is appointed for the purpose of counteracting these evils, and keeping him in our constant, grateful, and affectionate remembrance. Here our faith and love are assisted by our senses, for in various respects it is an emblematical ordinance, in subserviency to its commemorative design.

The bread is an emblem of the body of Christ, and the wine is a sign of his blood. The breaking of the bread is a significant action, being emblematical of the body of our Lord as crucified, and so a representation of his sufferings when his body was bruised and broken for us. "This is my body broken for you," was the pathetic declaration of the Saviour, in which he exhibited himself as the substitute for sinners, his death as a sacrifice for sin, and the benevolent design of his undertaking, which was to redeem his people from guilt and from ruin. The wine, as a figure of the blood of Christ, is a sign of that in the sacrifice which made the atonement. This, the Israelites were taught, was the blood of the victim; for, said God, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul." Lev. xvii. 11. The blood of the Redeemer was his life, which he gave up in sacrifice as a ransom for the souls of men. Hence he is said to have poured out his soul unto death, and to have made his soul an offering for sin. In allusion to this, he says, that the wine in the cup represents his blood as *shed*, or poured out—of which the pouring out of the blood of the ancient sacrifices was a figure. This typical rite in the services of the Levitical sanctuary was no doubt in his eye, and he here represents himself as the great antitype of the figures of the law. He appears also to have had in view the drink-offerings which accompanied the Mosaic sacrifices, and which were poured out unto God; Num. xxviii. 7. as when he speaks of his body as broken, he seems to refer to certain of the meat-offerings, Lev. ii. 5, 6, 14, which were offered on expiatory occasions. The latter, when connected with blood-offerings, were typical of

his oblation, and in an extreme case, even when offered without them. Lev. v. 11, 13.

The distinction which he makes between his body and his blood is not to lead us to separate the two, but to present to us the same grand subject of the atonement in different lights,—the breaking of his body being designed to signify his *whole* sufferings in our nature, and the pouring out of his blood being meant to denote their tremendous issue in his death, their propitiatory nature, and their blissful result; even the “remission of the sins of many.” For him a body was prepared, Heb. x. 5, or, in other words, he became a partaker of our whole nature, including flesh and blood, strictly so called, and a rational soul. By his obedience to the will of God, which called him to give himself in sacrifice for sin, we are said to be separated to God, namely, “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Here, of course, more is meant than his body literally, even the whole offering of himself. Accordingly, the propitiatory nature of his sufferings, and their happy effect in taking away sin, are elsewhere distinctly set before us in reference to his blood as shed for the remission of sins, and for the same purpose presented in the heavenly sanctuary. Heb. ix. 14, 15, 22, 23, and x. 19.

Such, then, is the emblematical nature of this institution, which, as I have said, is in subserviency to its commemorative design. Our faith and our affection are aided by our senses as we contemplate these external symbols,—our weakness is kindly met and provided against. This is one of the many instances of the divine condescension with which we are graciously favored, and is a striking proof of the care and affection of our High Priest.

In celebrating this ordinance, we ought, then, to keep up

a constant remembrance of the Saviour. We ought to remember the dignity of his person as God in our nature, what he hath done for us in coming from heaven to earth, in veiling his glory, becoming, though rich, poor for our sakes, and cheerfully stooping to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We ought to dwell particularly on the rich, the generous, and the amazing love which moved him for us to become obedient unto death, and to encounter and sustain all the horrors of the curse. We ought to remember the blissful issues and consequences of his propitiatory sacrifices; his present and constant ministrations for us in the heavenly temple; the perpetuity of his attachment, and the sweet tenderness of his regards; now that he is alive in the world of light, and there invested with universal government. With deep interest we ought to keep in memory the many and valuable blessings which he hath freely procured for us. The language of our hearts ought ever to be,

“O thou, my soul, forget no more
The Friend who all thy misery bore.”

This institution is appointed to keep up the remembrance in particular of the *death* of Christ. It is so, because of the unutterable importance of this event. It was the death of the Prince of Life, the Son of God, the Lord of Glory. It was most voluntary on the part of the wondrous sufferer, while it was at the same time the effect of the most excruciating anguish. Never was there an act of worship like to it. Here love and devotedness to God were displayed in their highest glory; here his claims were manifested and answered to the full, and here there was the brightest exhibition of the perfections of his character. The most important consequences have followed in securing the honors

of the divine law : vindicating the rights of the divine government, and "opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers." Here a perfect expiation is found, and here was finished that wondrous work which is ever pleaded by the Saviour, and is most prevalently intercessory. This is the centre of the ineffable delight of God ; it is the source of peace, and hope, and joy ; it leads back to God with the sweetest and most attractive power ; it forms our character upon his ; and it will be the subject of universal love, admiration, and song, in the heavenly and eternal world. Into this the "angels desire to look." Long had they contemplated the progress of events leading to it, and when it took place it was like a flood of light bursting forth upon them, and heaven was filled with joy.

If the mere spectators of this feel thus, how ought we to feel who are indebted to it for redemption from all evil and the enjoyment of all good ? Where shall the affections be engaged if not at the cross of Christ ? What can fire the soul if this is contemplated with coldness ? Ought not our hearts to be animated and engaged according to the worth and glory of the object, and the importance of the subject which attracts them, and the degree of our interest in it ? And if so, must they not here be elevated indeed ? Surely, then, the importance of the Saviour's death is a proper reason why it has been appointed to be thus devoutly remembered.

But the commandment to commemorate the death of the Redeemer springs also from love to *us*. It is not issued as a mere test of obedience, or merely as a display of authority—it is the counsel of a friend—of a brother—of Him who loved us, and is desirous of our hearts in return, because this spirit is essential to our happiness. It was fol-

lowed by the declaration, that he would not drink the fruit of the vine till he drank it new with them in his Father's kingdom. He meant this as a promise, that he would not forget his friends when in his kingdom, but would impart to them of its new joys. He entered into joy when he rose and was glorified: and he made them to taste of it when he gave them the consolations of his Spirit, who took of his things and showed them unto them, and particularly as they did eat and drink at his table. He appointed his supper as a memorial of his love, and as an outward token that he would not drink the new wine of the kingdom alone, but would cause them to drink of it along with himself. He thus promises that they shall sup with him, and he with them. It is an ordinance, then, designed for our comfort, and purity, and joy. He well knows, that when the soul is conscious of guilt, and filled with the dread of judgment, if we remember his sufferings and atonement, we shall obtain rest. When we feel that our hearts are cold and insensible, he is aware, that if we look to him whom our sins have pierced, we shall be melted into tenderness.—The hard heart will be softened, and we shall cleave to him with mingled sorrow and joy—sorrow, when we reflect on what our sins cost him—and joy, when we think of his love, of his salvation, and of the blessedness of his fellowship. He knows, that in the path of obedience we shall find, in remembering him, the most powerful motives and encouragements to fidelity in duty. He is aware, that amidst all our sufferings and trials, our perplexities and sorrows, our weaknesses and distresses, if we but remember him aright, we shall be encouraged and strengthened—filled with hope, and with gladness, and enabled to triumph in the view even of death and eternity. His honor and our profit are thus

kindly and naturally united. Surely, then, every consideration of duty and of interest should induce us to listen to his last wish, and to obey his last injunction.

But in the observance of this rite we also profess our faith in the work of Christ, as the sole ground of our acceptance with God. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, *do ye show* the Lord's death." In obedience to this, we, in celebrating this appointment, publicly confess Christ crucified as our only Saviour—we exhibit his death, as the only foundation of our hope towards God, and we openly glory in our connexion with him who suffered, and died, amidst ignominy and contempt, and who is in his true character still despised of the world. We therefore not only declare that the work of Christ is all our salvation, and all our desire, but we also proclaim to every one around us, that the redemption of the cross is as free to them as to us, and we virtually call upon them, not indeed to unite with us in the observance of this rite, while yet in their sins, but certainly to embrace the truth and the salvation of Jesus. Thus the institution not only edifies believers, it may also be blessed to all who witness its observance. It is of course a public and not a private service. In Scripture it is invariably represented as an open profession of faith and discipleship, and as always observed with an assembly of Christians. The injunction to show, or exhibit the death of Christ, is a proof that the observance of the institution was viewed as a very striking manner of proclaiming the gospel to spectators; and from being such none were excluded. It formed, accordingly, a part of the stated services of the Churches for a long period, as is evident from Scripture, and from historic testimony of undoubted credit. Acts ii. 42; xx. 7. 1 Cor. xi.

26. This exhibits an interesting harmony between the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The latter is commemorated by hallowing that day on which he arose; and as we cannot think of that delightful event without thinking of his death, it is edifying to observe, at the same time, that institution, the object of which is to assist in this very exercise. It accords also with the principle of love to the Saviour, for as we profess to be the friends of Christ, will not love lead us to ask, how often we may enjoy this delighted privilege? and the more frequently we can, the more love will rejoice.

But while none were excluded from witnessing it, it is self-evident, that none could thus confess their faith in the one sacrifice of Christ as the only ground of acceptance with God, who did not believe the gospel. The confession made in the observance of this institution, necessarily implies, that we perceive the complete sufficiency of the atonement of Jesus to take away sin, and to reconcile us to God. It implies, that we see here an answer to every perplexing question, as to the way of acceptance, and the source of peace to a guilty conscience—because here God appears at once, just and merciful in perfection—just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Without this the confession in question cannot be made in sincerity and truth. It is the belief of the gospel alone that implants that love to Christ, and excites that supreme desire to be found in him, by which Christians are distinguished, and under the influence of which they gratefully, and affectionately, commemorate his death. An indiscriminate admission to this ordinance were therefore in utter opposition to its nature and design, dishonorable to the Saviour, and of the most ruinous tendency to the partakers themselves. On the

other hand, how delightful and edifying it is to confess with the understanding and the heart the important and precious truth in which is displayed the glory of the divine character, and the harmony of the divine perfections.

Christians are called to separate themselves from the irreligious of every class, and to unite in religious society to partake of this and other institutions. The church of Christ is as distinct from the world as ever; and it ought visibly to appear so. Not that the design of that union, which ought to exist among Christians is merely that they may obtain access to the table of the Lord, but that, connected therewith, they may edify one another by walking in love, as Christ also loved them, and that by exhibiting the sanctifying, the benevolent, and the gladdening influence of the gospel, they may recommend it to the world. When a Church of Christ thus adorns the doctrine of God their Saviour, they ought also to recommend it to such as may come into their assembly, "by showing forth our Lord's death till he come." This is quite a different thing from indiscriminate fellowship with them.

I am here led to remark, that this ordinance is also a *communion feast*. It is called a feast, in allusion to the Passover, in 1 Cor. v. 8; and in chapter x. 15—21, it is illustrated by the feasts which were connected with sacrifices, both among the Jews and the Gentiles. It is a *representation* of a feast upon a sacrifice, and of our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with one another, in that blessedness which springs from the divine glory as manifested in the one offering of the Redeemer.

In the passages just referred to, the apostle sets the body and blood of Christ in opposition to the sacrifices of the

Gentiles, and makes a reference to those sacrifices of the Israelites of which the priests and the people were in certain circumstances allowed to eat. In eating of the peace-offerings, there was a representation of that peace and consequent mutual fellowship which subsisted among all who jointly partook of them. Part of the sacrifice was consumed upon the altar, and was considered as received by the God of the altar, and of course was his part—part was eaten by the priest, and part by the people. Lev. vii. 6, 15. Thus God, the priest, and the people, partook of the same sacrifice. They all sat, as it were, at one table, participated in the same enjoyment, and so had fellowship. The Lord's Supper, then, represents joint fellowship in partaking of the sacrifice of Christ. The bread and wine are not by any means offered in sacrifice—they are but *outward signs* of that by which a sacrifice *has* been made by the Saviour. Of course, our eating and drinking of them is not that in which we have fellowship with God and with his Son, for of these they do *not* partake with us; but our eating bread and drinking wine is a *sign*, or visible *representation* of our spiritually partaking with them in the enjoyment which springs from the glories of the cross as an adequate exhibition of the divine character. Since the happiness of God arises from his own character, and since the work of the Redeemer gives the fullest and brightest display of it, here of course his soul dwells—here the fullness of his delight rests, and from his glorious character, as here manifested, his blessedness springs. Isaiah xlii. 1. 21. Matth. xvii. 5. Eph. v. 2. Now we have fellowship with the Father when we perceive and relish this display of his glory; when our hearts are captivated with his excellencies; when from this we derive our peace, and

hope, and joy; when we imbibe his spirit, enter into his views, and become one with him in principle, affection, aim, and pursuit. Then that which delights his soul, not only calms and delights our guilty and troubled heart, but fills it with holy and exalted gladness. That which he contemplates and enjoys we study and delight in. We in particular judge of the Saviour as he does; we bless him for delivering our surety from death, and for crowning him with glory and honor. In a word, we participate of his feelings, and we drink at the fountain head of all true bliss, and the happiness of Jehovah becomes our happiness through that transformation into his likeness which is effected by beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.

This institution also represents our fellowship with the *Saviour*, who, as Emmanuel and as our High Priest, is now blessed in contemplating and enjoying the divine glory and character as displayed in his work. In allusion to the privilege granted the Israelites of eating of the peace-offerings, it is said, that "the meek shall eat" of his sacrifice and be satisfied. Psalm xxii. 26. This is that altar of which, as Christians, we partake, Heb. xiii. 10, and this is the meaning of the law which allowed the ancient priests to partake along with them. The Redeemer, in his priestly character, is blessed in beholding the divine character as manifested and glorified in his wondrous sacrifice. When speaking of himself as the bread of life, and, as such, the antitype of the ancient manna, he refers to his sacrifice, declaring that he would give his flesh for the life of the world, and that whosoever did eat of his flesh, and drink of his blood, had eternal life begun, and should have it in full perfection at the last day. John vi. 51—56. He who believes in the divine testimony concerning his sacri-

fice, is said to eat of it, because he continues to contemplate it, to trust his salvation upon it, to derive from it his peace, hope, and happiness, to imbibe the spirit it displays, and to imitate the character it exhibits. Our Lord is not there speaking of the ordinance of his supper, for many who have no access to it, and never observed it, are blessed with his salvation; but still he is speaking of the great thing *represented* in this institution. To be a thing, however, and to be but a sign or *representation* of it, are very different, and ought not to be confounded. To apply the striking metaphors by which the Saviour taught the necessity of faith in his atonement, to the rite which is only symbolical of the spiritual exercise, is to substitute the letter for the spirit. To such as are living by faith in the sacrifice of Christ, the outward sign will be of use, and such ought to improve the privilege when in their power, and when not in their power, the Saviour can supply the lack. But those who are strangers to this faith, and of course to the life connected with it, can derive no benefit from their eating of the Lord's Supper, but, on the contrary, must be injured by it.

The life of which the Saviour speaks is not merely existence, but blessedness; so that when he speaks of "the living Father," he refers not merely to his being, but also to his happiness; and when he says that he "lives by the Father," he refers to his life and blessedness as Mediator, the full glory of which is possessed by him as the Great High Priest of the house of God in the enjoyment of the manifestation of his Father's glory in his own person, and character, his work and his kingdom. When, therefore, he says, that whosoever eateth of his sacrifice "shall live by him as he lives by the Father," he refers to that fellow-

ship with him in blessedness, which arises from contemplating the divine character as displayed in his work. Of this, then, our eating and drinking of the symbols of his sacrifice is an expressive representation. It is an outward sign that we drink with him of that new wine, or that exalted joy of which he partakes in his Father's kingdom; that kingdom which is founded on his finished work, which he received on his entrance into glory.

But there is here also a representation of our fellowship with *each other*. It is not intended for an individual as such, but is a social ordinance, as is evident from 1 Cor. x. 15, where it is said, "The cup of blessing, for which we bless, or give thanks, is it not the communion (or joint participation) of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion (or the joint participation) of the body of Christ?" The proper reading of the 17th verse is, "Because the bread is one, we the many are one body, for we all partake of one bread." Now, it is evidently the design of the apostle to show, that the institution is a social one, and that it is a visible representation of the close fellowship of those who partake of it. It could not on any other principle be called a "communion." It is, of course, intended to exhibit the unity of the church which observes it as one body, united in the faith of the same gospel, in the hope of deliverance from the evils common to them all, in the expectation of glory, founded on the common foundation of the cross, in the enjoyment of the same blessings and privileges, and in the same fellowship of their exalted Lord, as their common Head, Deliverer, and Ruler. Eph. iv. 4—6. 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. They meet as brethren, and unite in celebrating, by one service, that wondrous event in which they are all equally

interested; and thus is the spirit of love, and tenderness, and liberality, cherished and strengthened. Every particular church is thus a visible representation of the fellowship of the general assembly and church of the first-born, with their Father, their Elder Brother, the Saviour, and with each other. Hence the Corinthians were blamed for separating into parties, and eating the Lord's supper apart from each other, and were required to tarry one for another when it was to be observed. 1 Cor. xi. 21—33. It was only when the disciples "came together" in the assembly that this ordinance was to be administered. I need not say, then, that since an individual, as such, cannot represent the joint fellowship of a body, it follows undeniably, that the social observance of the right is essential to it, as otherwise it is converted into a thing quite different, and its true nature is lost sight of.

The apostle, in 1 Corinthians x. 16, shows that the very external form of the ordinance manifests, that it is the joint act, not of an assembly indiscriminately collected, but of a *select* society. He proves this from their joint participation in the breaking and eating of the same bread, and in drinking of the same cup; and from their jointly blessing, or praising God by thanksgiving, for the many blessings which, as Christians, they had actually received through the atonement, and for that love of which it is the fruit and token. Acts ii. 47, and v. 13, 14. We are called then to consider, not only ourselves, but our fellow-worshippers, as the first Christians most evidently did. The primitive churches were societies of (Ephes. i. 1. Article 19th of the church of England) "faithful men;" that is, of such as *appeared* to be believers in Christ; and when any of their number acted unsuitably to their profession, prompt and appropriate

means were used to bring him to repentance ; and, if the means failed, separation from their fellowship followed. Matt. xviii. 15—17. 1 Tim. v. 20. 1 Cor. v. 7—11, 13. 1 Tim. iii. 1—5. Luke xvii. 3, 4. Gal. vi. 1. 2 Cor. ii. 6—8. Their fellowship was just the constant exercise of the principle of love. And surely the most genuine exercise of this principle is to guard others, as far as we can, against being deceived in the important concerns of eternity ; and great must be the violation of it, when, by our conduct towards them, we contribute to their deception. Lev. xix. 17. Gen. iv. 9. To whom but to the friends of Christ can these moving words be addressed, “ This do in remembrance of me.” Can any one either expect or desire to be remembered by such as continue his enemies ? And can the enemies of Christ be expected gratefully to remember him, or cheerfully to obey him ? For whom then is this ordinance intended, but for those who, conscious of guilt and unworthiness, have fled for refuge to his cross, and who, as abased and self-condemned sinners, are earnestly desirous of expressing their gratitude to him, who loved them and gave himself for them. It is intended for such as can say, “ We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy great and manifold mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.” And whose hearts say, Lord Jesus I would remember thee ; and though my gratitude and love are low and languid, yet my soul desires to be quickened and excited by the recollection of thy constant and unspeakable love.

But in this ordinance there is not only a *joint* act of fellowship, but a representation of a *mutual* act of communion in giving and receiving. God is exhibited as giving us his

Son, and the Redeemer as giving himself for us; while we ought with the most grateful and delightful emotions, to receive with humility and joy the unutterably precious blessings of salvation. As meat and drink are the necessary ingredients in the sustenance of man, so the symbols of his broken body and shed blood are signs of that full provision which is made for our redemption and happiness; "for his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed." As bread and wine nourish our bodies, so do the communications of the divine goodness, through the atonement of Christ, nourish our souls. The atonement, and all connected with it, become the objects of our thoughts, and our affections, and the mind takes the character of its food. Thus is there exhibited a visible representation of the family of God, receiving all blessings from the Father through the mediation of their Elder Brother, and in fellowship with one another, expressing their gratitude and joy.

In the observance of this institution, we profess our confidence in the promises of the everlasting *covenant*, and our hope of all the blessings they exhibit. "This is my blood," said the Saviour, "of the new covenant." By the covenant of God, is meant his promise of salvation and all necessary blessings, confirmed by sacrifice. Thus were the promises to Abraham confirmed, Gen. xv. 9, 10, 18; and hence were they called a covenant. Thus were the promises of the old covenant, Exod. xxiv. 5—8, and also those of the new and everlasting covenant confirmed, Heb. ix. 15—20; xiii. 20. In Gal. iii. 15—18, the apostle reasons on the principle, that a promise, or promises, and a covenant, are one and the same thing, it being understood that a sacrifice has been slain for the purpose of confirmation. Indeed, the word in the Old Testament used

to signify a covenant, signifies a purifier, or purifying sacrifice; and the phrase, for making a covenant, signifies to cut a purifier, or to cut a purifying victim. The reason of this is, that when God made the promise of salvation and eternal life to the guilty and the unworthy children of men, he confirmed it by sacrifice, in order to show how it was to be accomplished through an atonement, and that the atonement typified should insure its fulfilment. I need not enlarge on the necessity of confirming promises made to *sinners* by such means as shall effect reconciliation and purification. It was in consequence of this that promises were ratified by slaying a victim, cutting it asunder, and passing between the parts of it. It is not then a promise *simply* that is a covenant, but a promise to sinners confirmed by a sacrifice which is illustrative of the way in which the bestowing of the blessing promised becomes consistent with the divine character and law. To this there is a reference in Psalm 1. 5, where it is said, "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made (or cut off, or solemnized) my covenant by sacrifice."

Men soon came to confirm *their* promises by a sacrifice; and as their engagements were generally mutual, the word came to be used to denote a mutual compact. But, when the term refers to the covenant of God, it denotes nothing of this kind, but his own free and gracious promises to the guilty, and the unworthy, ratified by a sacrifice: or else an institution, or system of institutions, founded upon, and illustrative of, his promises. Thus the Sabbath was in this last sense called his covenant, because it was a sign of the rest promised to his people; and the whole system of the Mosaic institutions is called His covenant, because they were founded on his promises, and were signs of the

blessings promised. Exod. xxxi. 16. His language accordingly is, not that of a proposal to enter into a mutual agreement with any individual whatever, but it is, "with thee will I establish *my* covenant;" and corresponding language is employed when a body is in question. A covenant among men, you know, is a mutual stipulation between two or more parties, for their mutual benefit. But as God can receive no addition to his blessedness from his creatures, it is evident that when he establishes a covenant with them it must be solely for their advantage. The covenant of peace, then, is just his promises of salvation and eternal life, as ratified by the death of Christ. When God is viewed as the king of Israel, and the people as his subjects in that character, the term covenant may be used with greater latitude; but this, like the exception to a general rule, confirms, rather than invalidates what has been stated.

When his people offered the appointed sacrifices, they were simply celebrating the instituted representation of *His* covenant, in the faith of the fulfilment of its promises, with gratitude to him for his goodness, and an earnest desire of obtaining the blessings he had graciously promised them. In like manner, in the Lord's Supper, we drink of that cup, which is a representation of the blood of Christ, which hath confirmed all the promises of the new covenant; for in him they are all yea and amen. 2 Cor. i. 20. By his blood, every obstacle in the way of their accomplishment is removed. Great, numerous and precious as are the blessings they contain, they shall all be bestowed through this sacrifice. It is thus that our hope in the promises is confirmed by the death of Christ, and this we express in commemorating it according to his will. Such is the value of his sacrifice, that God hath declared that he

never will again remember sin, by requiring any more offering for it; and on this he rests the accomplishment of all the promises of the new and everlasting covenant, Jer. xxxi. 31—34; Heb. viii. 10—12; x. 17, 18.

It follows, therefore, that there is nothing required like entering into a covenant, in the common sense of the term. The covenant of God, it is evident from the passages I have just referred to, consists of free promises, ratified by the work of the Redeemer. In this ordinance we are called to commemorate that glorious work with devout and thankful hearts, and in the sure and certain hope that not one good word of all that the Lord hath spoken shall fail to be fulfilled. Not the most distant hint of any thing like a vow or oath being of the nature of this observance, is given in the word of God. It is true that our religious services include the solemn dedication of ourselves, and of all that we have, to God, and in the observance of the Lord's Supper there is much that is fitted to cherish this spirit, but this is not the same thing as is meant by a vow in its common acceptation. In every act of worship, Christians express their resolution or purpose to be the devoted subjects of the Saviour, and not merely at the Lord's table. Here, no doubt, they ought, in a particular manner, to feel the power of those motives which urge believers to cleave with firm purpose of heart to the Lord; but different ways of expressing their fixed resolution in the strength of divine grace, to abide by him, are adapted to different persons, which, setting aside every other consideration, forbids us to insist on any one as particularly enjoined.

No doubt, too, the public confession of the truth which is there made, must aggravate our guilt, if we afterwards deny it, or cease to be influenced by it, so that it may be

said to lay us under great obligations. But so, in a measure, does our observance of every other divine appointment, all of which are connected with the death of Christ. There is much evidence to prove, that the confining a sense of obligation so much to one institution, has the effect of inducing comparative, and often great indifference as to others. The gospel of Christ, and, in particular, his death, furnishes the most powerful motives to obedience, and in vain do we think of adding to them. It is not by formal engagements at the table of the Lord, that we can increase the importance of any duty, nor ought such things ever to give us peace under a sense of guilt, or cause confidence in our steadfastness. If they do, we shall find, to our cost, that they are a false foundation.

One view of Christ, in his transcendently glorious character, as the dear Redeemer of lost souls, hath more power and efficacy to break the bonds of sin, and urge to obedience, than all the vows, promises, and resolutions, wherewith we can bind our souls. (Haweis on the Lord's Supper, chap. vi.) "Think not," says a well known writer, "to bring yourself to good by vows and promises, as if the strength of your own law could do it when the strength of God's law doth it not. The devil will urge you to vow, and then to break, that he may perplex your conscience the more." (Marshall on Sanctification, Direct. xiii. p. 244.)

Instead of ensnaring and entangling ourselves with oaths or formal vows, let us contemplate the cross and character of Christ. Here there is all that is moving in love, affecting in condescension, and engaging in mercy,—united with all that can impress us with a sense of the baseness and desert of sin: and in contemplating and celebrating the love of God in the gift of his Son, the unutterable conde-

scension of the Saviour, we shall be powerfully constrained by the innumerable mercies of the everlasting covenant to present ourselves unto God as a living sacrifice, and to live to Him who for us groaned, and bled, and died. Never let us suppose that the remembering of the death of Christ can be of little use, or change the design of his Supper, and turn it into an oath of fidelity ; as if the duties of obedience were more likely to be discharged from a sense of the obligation of vows, than from the remembrance of the unutterable glories of the cross. Such ideas will tend to darken our views of the covenant of peace ; and they invest the institution with a kind of mystery which perplexes the conscientious, and not seldom excites unfounded confidence in the ignorant and presumptuous. Very different is the scriptural view of it from this complicated service. Indeed, even in the services of prayer and praise, in the name of Christ, and the rehearsal of the gospel, there is a remembrance of his word. The difference in the Lord's Supper lies in the advantage of outward signs, and a more striking display of fellowship. Connected with the air of mystery which has been thrown around it, is the fear which many have of frequently observing it. But is it not delightful frequently to express our love to the Redeemer, and to meet often with our best and our tried friend ? We are indeed prone to be formal in this, as in other parts of worship, but it is not the way to cure this propensity to *abstain* from the service of devotion. Is the man who prays but a few times in the year more devout than he who prays daily ? The more frequently, indeed, that unbelievers observe the Lord's Supper, the more indifferent they will be about it ; and the more seldom they do so, the more superstitious terror will they feel regarding it ; but it never was

intended for such at all, and therefore we are not left to choose between the evil of constant formality and coldness, and that of a periodical self-righteous and superstitious seriousness, which is as far removed from genuine piety as the other.*

Once more, my dear friend, we, in the observance of this institution, profess our faith in the second coming of Christ, and our hope of that event,—“Show ye the Lord's death *till he come.*” These words show the permanence of this ordinance, and call upon the Churches in all ages to celebrate it. But they also teach us to look to the first and the second coming of Christ, in connexion with each other. He appeared as a sin-offering when on earth—he is now absent in heaven; but this institution is the pledge of his coming again. In looking to our own death, we think of His,

* Dr. Erskine, speaking on this subject, expresses himself to the following effect.

Does not the Bible speak strongly on the solemnity of prayer, and the danger of rashness in speaking unto God? And does it not tell us that the word, when heard in an unworthy manner, is a savour of death unto death? Shall we then pray and hear the word seldom, that we may do it with the greater solemnity? Would not this way of reasoning be fallacious, if applied to prayer and hearing the word? And is it not equally so when applied to the Lord's Supper? Christians will not quit their reverence at the Lord's Supper upon any the greatest frequency, as appears by their uniting frequency and reverence in other institutions. And the show of reverence which the ungodly bring to it is not worth the preserving.—Dissertations, p. 319.

The same sentiments are expressed by Mr. Brown of Haddington, in his Apology for the more frequent administration of the Lord's Supper; by Mr. Randal of Stirling, in his letter on the same subject; and by Mr. Willison, in the Preface to his Catechism on this institution. See also *Thoughts on the Present Revival of Religion*, by President Edwards, p. 214.

—in anticipating his coming to judgment, we contemplate Calvary; and in thus connecting events so interesting to us, and so adapted to our circumstances, we are at once comforted and purified. This delivers from the fear of death, dissipates the gloom of the grave, and inspires us with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. We need this ordinance while here; but when we see him as he is, no such means will be necessary to keep the Lamb that was slain in our constant and delightful remembrance.

It must be evident from this view of the subject, that there is nothing like a charm in the influence and effect of the celebration of this ordinance. There is nothing mystical, in the common sense of the term, in it. We are, in other instances, taught the truth of God, by reading or hearing his word, and here we are taught it by external signs. It is, in each case, the truth that is brought to view; but, in the former instances, we are taught it by words, and in the latter instance, we are taught it by an appeal to the senses. The benefits arising from the observance of the institution, must then be in proportion to the degree in which we are brought to understand and feel the power of the great truth which it exhibits. As a symbolical representation it has many advantages,—it appeals to several of our senses at the same time—the truth is presented to the mind by several inlets—and, by the divine blessing, it makes a deep and powerful impression, and excites a lively interest in its glory.

God has indeed promised to bless, in a particular manner, the institutions of his grace, but he does so by means of the truths which they teach. Now, as the Lord's Supper is a commemorative ordinance, it can only be of special service in so far as it is made the means of bringing and

keeping before the mind the objects to be remembered. Gal. iii. 1. 1 Cor. xv. 2, 3, 4. 2 Pet. i. 12. Accordingly we find, that the commemorative appointments of the law were designed to profit the worshippers, by reminding them of the divine interpositions in their behalf, and of the mercies that were yet in store for them. Exod. xii. 26, 27. Deut. xvi. 3, 12. Heb. x. 1.

Too often do people expect at the Lord's Supper something of a mysterious and unaccountable nature, quite different from the effect of the influence of truth upon the mind. When their expectations have, as they suppose, been realized, they have been delighted, while the whole has resulted from a heated imagination, and a strong excitement of their feelings, without any discovery of the glory and excellence of the gospel of Christ. If they have *not* obtained what they expected, they are in danger of sinking into despondency. In both cases, the mind is led away from the truth, and the great design and the true nature of the ordinance are quite out of view. By fellowship with God, in such cases, is meant some immediate manifestation of the love of God, quite different from the knowledge and sense of his love which arises from feeding on the doctrines of the cross, and realizing the glories of the divine character as there illustriously displayed. These things ought not so to be among Christians. Genuine enjoyment is that of the disciples, whose hearts burned within them, as Christ, in his conversation, kindly opened to them the Scriptures.

Connected with this is the mistake of confining fellowship with God, to some period of peculiar enjoyment, in the observance of this or other ordinances. But the appointments to be observed by Christians, are designed to cherish

that state of mind which fits for the right discharge of every duty, in the various situations and relations in which we are placed. Religion is not to be confined to public institutions, the Lord's day, or formal acts of devotion, but is to be carried into all the business and affairs of other days, and of common life. The man who has, on the Lord's day, had his mind directed aright to the things of God, will be devout throughout the whole week. He will eat and drink, and transact his affairs in the world, under the influence of the truths of the gospel, and will breathe the spirit of a pilgrim and a stranger, whose home is in heaven. But, as the mind is apt to lose sight of the truth, and to decline from God, he needs the benefits of the institutions of Christ; and the return of the Lord's day, and its services, revive the tone of the spirit: And, when he afterwards again goes to his lawful engagements in the world, he does so in a proper state. Thus the institutions of Heaven are but means to an end; and if the end, which is the spiritual health of the soul, is not gained by their observance, they have not profited us, and cannot have honored God. How different this spirit from that of those who observe them chiefly in compliance with custom, or from mere habit, or who imagine that the penance they have endured in performing the services connected with the ordinance of the Supper will atone for their usual carelessness and neglect of God.

It is not merely the warmth which may be felt at the Lord's table, but the practical and daily exercise of true religion, that manifests the proper remembrance of the death of Christ. Warmly, indeed, ought we to feel there, but not there only. The affections have a high place in genuine piety; and deeply, *very deeply*, must a Christian feel, when he meditates on the wonders of the cross, and

the glories of that character which there meets his eye ; but this ought not to be a transient and occasional thing, but a habit. The recurrence of public observances will indeed be of essential service in reviving it, and at such seasons it will often be stronger than at other times ; but still the benefit of this is to be found in our habitual spirituality, and our practical subjection to the Saviour, in the exercise of every Christian principle, and of obedience to every command of his.

Self-examination is a daily duty, and ought not to be neglected when we are about to partake of the Lord's Supper. It becomes us to judge of our faith by its fruits,—to examine the state of our minds, and the reasons which induce us to observe this institution. Having, however, in the former letters, considered the subject of self-examination, I shall not dwell on it now. Suffice it to say, that we ought to examine what are our views of the gospel—do they indeed accord with the testimony of God? We ought to examine our state of mind, for we may have fallen into a very improper state. Not, however, to find an excuse for absenting ourselves, but that, by means of the import of the institution, our sin may be mortified. We should examine our motives for this observance, and seek that, with a proper spirit and with proper views, we may engage in this act of worship. We should examine our views of the institution, and form them on the word of God.

Allow me to mention, that the preparation necessary to the acceptable observance of this ordinance, is just that preparation which the Lord bestows when he called sinners by his grace to the blood of atonement, and when he enables them to continue to live by faith in the cross, from a deep sense of their own guilt and helplessness, and of the

mercy and love of the Saviour. In the 11th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle is speaking to Christians who had erred in their manner of observing the institution, and not of personal worthiness or unworthiness, in order to partaking or declining to partake of it. They had observed it in an unworthy manner, and he exhorts them to do it in a worthy, or a proper manner. The word rendered damnation, in verse 29, means judgment, as you will see in the margin, and refers to those temporal afflictions which are mentioned in verse 30, and not to eternal woe. The solemn warning here given arose from the abuses into which many had fallen as to the observance of this institution, in consequence of connecting it with a common meal, and observing it apart from their brethren. Not that they were guilty of excess, for the word rendered drunken often means well refreshed, as in John ii. 10; and we cannot conceive of persons being addressed as Christians who could indulge in such intemperance. They had mistaken the design of the ordinance, and were no doubt greatly to blame, but they were chastened of the Lord, that they might not be condemned with the world, verse 32, so that their afflictions were intended to awaken them to a sense of their sin, that they might be saved; and we learn in the next epistle that the end was gained.

No doubt a transgression in regard to this institution, like every other sin, exposes to the displeasure of God; but there is no warrant for that spirit of terror and bondage, in relation to it, in which many Christians have been held. The Lord invites his people to a privilege, and there is nothing to hinder a Christian from partaking of this feast, prepared for him on his way to the celestial city. The man who thinks that the character necessary to the acceptable

observance of this rite may be dispensed with on other occasions, is grossly deluding himself; for what is it but that very state of mind which results from a life of faith in the Son of God, and from that habitual keeping of the heart with all diligence which is essential to the growth of genuine religion, and which is necessary to acceptance at the tribunal of judgment?

Never ought it to be forgotten, however, that while an ignorant and superstitious terror ought not to be indulged, yet God is to be had in reverence in the assembly of his saints. Special care should be taken that, while free from the former, we do not decline in the latter. A careless irreverence, and a rude familiarity, are quite different from warranted Christian confidence. The former is deeply offensive to God and injurious to ourselves, and that man has nothing to rejoice in who can look down on his superstitious neighbors, and bless himself that he can, without fear of any kind, eat and drink at the table of the Lord. The fear which hath torment is expelled in proportion as the gospel is believed, but in the same proportion is there a holy reverence and a filial fear produced in the heart. It becomes Christians to be watchful against coldness and indifference, and to be fervent in prayer and in holy meditation before engaging in the public services of religion, in order that they may maintain the spirit of sacred devotion in the worship of God. It is a matter of deep regret, when even the external behavior indicates the want of suitable feelings.

It is deplorable, however, when men act in regard to preparation for this ordinance, as if they meant to qualify themselves for the favor of God, or at least for an interest in the work of the Saviour. How different this spirit from that which distinguishes Christians? Such characters are

as far from the truth as are those who regard this ordinance as a fountain in which to wash away sin. How prone are men to abuse the appointments of God, and the most salutary exercises!

It is a matter of deep regret too, that the observance of this institution is often urged chiefly as a thing proper and becoming, on coming to a certain age, without considering, that unless possessed of genuine piety, none can acceptably partake of it. The great duty of parents and others is, in the first instance, to urge upon young people the necessity of a change of mind through the faith of the gospel. If they give evidence of faith in Christ, by all means earnestly exhort them to obey the whole appointments of the Saviour, in relation to Christian fellowship: but till they give evidence of this, their admission to the peculiar ordinances of the Churches of Christ will only serve to ensnare and deceive them. The effects of this profanation are truly deplorable.

I conclude with reminding you, my dear friend, that we ought to remember the death of Christ with ardent love and profound reverence—with heartfelt contrition and animated joy. Since in this ordinance there is an appeal to the senses, let us be careful that the frequency of such appeals does not weaken their effect: and, to prevent this, let us with devout attention dwell upon the great things signified. In a word, let us have recourse to the remedies against formality and declension, which the Scriptures point out, among which we do not find infrequency in observance of the Lord's Supper so much as once named. The Spirit of God has prescribed watchfulness, brotherly admonition, and counsel; steadfastness in the profession of the faith; the maintenance of a holy and heavenly temper of

heart, and constancy in the public as well as other duties of fellowship. Heb. iii. 12, 13; x. 19—25, 35—39; xii. 12—29; xiii. 5, 6, 9. We shall thus be preserved from superstitious dread on the one hand, and from careless irreverence on the other. While in holy fellowship we confess our faith in the atonement—in the promises of the everlasting covenant—and in the second coming of the Saviour, we ought ever to view the exercise as designed to assimilate us to the heavenly worshippers, who, while they continually ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb, are also continually employed in active services of obedience. Somewhat, yea much, of their spirit we may attain even here. Let this be sought for in fervent and importunate prayer.—

I am, &c.

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LETTER XXVII.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE.

Heaven a seat of worship—Was represented by the figures of the law—Exhibited in visions to the prophets—Christians have access to it—The life of Christ a life of office—Importance of Scriptural views of heavenly worship—Christ the great object of attraction—The view given to the subject in the epistle to the Hebrews—The benefit of the frequent consideration of it—The priestly care and sympathy of the Saviour.—Connexion between his relative and personal glory.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE repeatedly reminded you of the duty and the privilege of approaching the throne of grace with filial confidence and freedom of speech: Allow me now to call your

attention to the worship of the heavenly temple, where his throne is seated. Heaven is not merely the seat of royal power and grandeur; it is a temple, and as such is the seat of exalted and sacred worship. The Redeemer appears there not only in state displaying his dignity and greatness, but ministering in his official character. His life there, no less than his death on earth, is necessary to our salvation. Rom. v. 10. He does not possess mere personal glory, but likewise relative glory, as our head and representative. There, in a peculiar manner, dwells the God and Father of Christ,—and there all his family are around him, participating in the blissful effects of his goodness—offering up the purest adoration of his excellencies—and uttering the warmest effusions of gratitude for the manifold riches of his grace. There the Saviour officiates as the great mediator in behalf of all in heaven and in earth who are the children of God, and for the purpose of adding to the family, by translating sinners from the kingdom of darkness into his own spiritual and holy fellowship.

Under the ancient dispensation, many representations were given of this glory and worship, which are often referred to in the New Testament, and are of much use still in illustrating this subject. Both the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and the temple of Jerusalem, exhibited “a pattern of things in the heavens.” The holy place, and particularly the holiest of all, with the ark, the mercy seat, and the cherubim—the high priest in his sacerdotal robes—his solemn services in the sanctuary, connected with the offering of sacrifice, the sprinkling of blood, and the burning of incense; in a word, the whole of the Temple, in its ministers, furniture, and worship, formed a visible repre-

sentation of the offices, work, and salvation of Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews contains much interesting instruction on this important and delightful subject.

Not only was there given in the sanctuary a constant representation of heavenly things—the prophets had besides this occasional visions and revelations, illustrative of the celestial temple and its sacred services. Isaiah had a vision of God as seated on his throne, above the ark, in the most holy place, where the glory appeared above the cherubim. This vision, we are told by John, related to the kingdom and glory of Christ; and was designed to exhibit the exalted and hallowed nature of that sanctuary which is open to believers of all nations, and in which the earthly holy place has its end. The prophet Ezekiel had several visions, in which he saw the grandeur of our Lord in the heavenly sanctuary, who there unites the priestly censer with the regal sceptre; and likewise beheld the cloud of glory leave the earthly temple, and from Mount Olivet ascend to heaven, as an expressive representation of the termination of the Levitical economy—of the ascension of Christ, the substance of this emblem of the presence from that very mount—and of the commencement of his mediatorial glory in the heavenly temple, where he dwells as the antitype of the Shechinah on the ancient mercy-seat.

The ancient sanctuary had no light from without. The holy place was illuminated by the sacred candlestick: but the most holy place had not even this light—it was illuminated by the cloud of glory on the mercy-seat. In allusion to this, Isaiah says, “The sun shall no more be thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.” The ancient tem-

ple was but a small enclosure in Jerusalem; but the whole of the heavenly city shall be "a temple for God and the Lamb," where the glory of Jehovah shall for ever shine in full effulgence in the face of the Redeemer, illuminating the whole of the celestial Jerusalem, and transforming every worshipper into his image.

These representations should be connected with the view given of the camp of Israel in the book of Numbers. There stood the tabernacle where God dwelt, and whose presence made the whole camp holy. The great body of the Israelites were kept at a considerable distance from the sanctuary, and the Levites were allowed to pitch their tents around it; but none except consecrated priests were permitted to enter it to minister before the Lord, and even they were not allowed to enter every part of it; for the most holy place could be entered by none but the high priest, and that only on the annual day of atonement. These appointments served to impress the minds of the people with a deep sense of the Divine holiness and greatness; while they served also to show the glory of the priestly character of Christ, and the dignity and blessedness of that station to which Christians are advanced through him. They are all kings and priests unto God; and, as such, they all have access into the holiest of all. We are treated as the domestics of the Most High, and are allowed the most unrestrained and intimate converse with him. We enjoy privileges which assimilate our station, not merely to that of the people surrounding the sanctuary, and praying without in the court; but to that of the priests who worshipped in the house itself, yea even to that of the high priest, who exclusively worshipped in the holiest of all. He who dwelleth between the cherubim hath shone

forth, and invites us even to his seat. We are admitted to the very throne of God, and are free from that servile fear which the state of things among the Israelites naturally cherished. We have access at all times, which even the high priest had not, and may expect a kind and gracious audience in all possible circumstances. And how precious is a place in the sanctuary of God to the man who, knowing that his spirit shall survive the wreck of nature and the crash of worlds, can be happy in nothing but that which will exercise, invigorate, and completely fill his renovated and continually enlarging mind! In proportion to the clearness of our views of these privileges, as exhibited in the gospel, and to the degree of our faith, our hope, and our love, will be our freedom from the spirit of slavish dread, and the measure of our filial, joyful, and yet humble confidence in God. Such confidence is the delight of our heavenly Father—it is at once honorable to him, and profitable to us.

The great object of attraction in the heavenly temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has entered it as our friend and representative. He has our names upon his breast, and in his heart—he presents our spiritual sacrifices, and obtains their acceptance on the ground of his one perfect offering. He speaks by his blood, and his blood speaks by its worth. Solemn indeed must be the act of his continued representation of his sacrifice as the ground of his intercession, and the sole foundation of our full redemption and blessedness. When conscious that our best services are stained with guilt, how precious the thought that his offering purges away all our sins! When sensible that our best services are weak and imperfect, blessed is the recollection of the ample efficacy of his intercession. When bowed down

with a sense of our unworthiness, encouraging indeed must be the remembrance of his dignity, and the merit of his work. These considerations sweetly incline us to come to him with freedom, and to cast on him all our cares. They tend also to cherish the most reverential awe, by the display which they afford of the holy character of God, and of the necessity of such a mediator. The self-abasement which they produce is tempered, however, by the joy of hope and confidence of love.

Our high priest lives a public as well as a glorious life. He is, accordingly, denominated the minister of the sanctuary, Heb. viii. 2, and in his character he will officiate there, till the consummation of the plan of mercy. The term minister, indeed, has not in this case the same meaning as when applied to the character he sustained on earth, but it certainly implies official ministrations. When kings are termed the shepherds of their people, this appellation by no means derogates from their dignity, it only marks its official nature, and intimates that their powers are exercised in behalf of their subjects, and not merely for personal purposes. There is a difference, doubtless, between them and our Lord; and therefore it is only to a certain extent that their character can illustrate his.

On the constant ministrations of the Saviour in the heavenly sanctuary depends our safety, amidst all the snares, the temptations, and the perils of this scene of conflict. Hence the Scriptures represent him as dwelling and sitting in the temple of his Father and his God. This view of his character and his station is fitted to keep and gladden the heart—to dissipate all gloom and despondency—and to stimulate to active exertion and patient suffering. In this exalted glory he exercises the warmest and most

engaging love, pity, and tenderness, towards his people in all their difficulties and trials. He is ever attentive to their returning wants, and liberally supplies them according to their varied and ever-changing circumstances.—The persuasion of this relieves and supports the mind, as it dwells on him who left the world in the act of blessing his disciples, and whose affection towards his people is the same now as in the days of his flesh. In his public and official ministrations in heaven, he manifests to his brethren in the great congregation the wondrous character of God. He leads them to the unveiled glory of Jehovah—enriches their understanding with inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge—stamps the image of his excellencies on all their faculties, dispositions, and affections—and imparts to them bliss and satisfaction, the purest and most exalted. The worship of the sanctuary is a constant and a fervent adoration of the many and inestimable glories of the divine character; and as the redeemed advance in the knowledge of the transcendent excellencies of the God and Father of the Saviour, their admiration is enlarged, and their devotion becomes more profound; while knowing that they never can fully comprehend their boundless extent, they anticipate enjoyment inexhaustible, and prepare for yet higher strains of animated and heavenly worship. In that happy land there is necessarily a constant tendency towards an increase of all that is holy and blissful. The heavenly temple is the seat of light, order, and love, where every worshipper and every object has an appropriate place, and where all add to the general harmony.

In this world we can know but little of the refreshing and exhilarating pleasure which abounds at the right hand of God, and of the enjoyment which must result from the

blissful communications of the Saviour to his people. Little do we know of the increasing delight with which a mind, freed from all spiritual disorders, and elevated to the steadfast contemplation of all that is holy and excellent, pursues the investigation of heavenly and sacred things. Feeble must be our conceptions of that ardor of affection, and that immutable cleaving of the heart, with which it must dwell on the attractive beauties of the Saviour's character. It is but faintly that we can enter into that holy triumph and elevation of spirit with which the redeemed rise above all that is here, and glory in the wondrous issue of that grace through which they have become more than conquerors. It is our duty, however, to make these subjects familiar to us, and to advance in the knowledge of them. The nearest approach which we can make on earth to the spirit of the celestial temple, is in the contemplation of the nature, the exercise, and the happiness of the general assembly and church of the first-born; in entering into their views, and uniting with them in the hallowed service of ascribing glory to God and the Lamb. There must be happiness unspeakable in endeavoring to imitate them in their holy and spiritual affection, and in seeking to participate in their estimate of this vain and dying world, and of that glory with which the evils of time are not worthy to be compared. It is in thus entering within the veil, and imbibing the spirit which there reigns, that we from principle condemn the boasted glories of time, and rise superior to their fascinating power. As long as our views of the heavenly glory are weak and imperfect, our services and our character must be far beneath what they might be, and temptations must have an influence of the most perilous kind.

Scriptural views of the heavenly holy place, its high exercises, and its sacred joys, are at the foundation of all spiritual worship, and all excellence of character. When set beside the glory of the Redeemer, and that of his people in the world of light, the glory of this passing scene is completely eclipsed, and the strange spell and bewitching enchantment which bound us to this poor unsatisfying portion, lose their hold of our hearts. The thought of the safety and the blessedness of our brethren above, of the means by which they overcame the difficulties and trials of life, of the connexion which even now subsists between us and them, as children of the same family, and heirs of the same inheritance; of our interest in that same grace through which they have weathered the storm, and of the day when we shall be with them in person, must have a soothing, animating, and sanctifying effect. Heaven is thus viewed as the seat of our family, and our final home. *There* dwells our Father, who is not ashamed to be called our God, since he hath prepared for us such an inheritance. There resides our Friend and our Redeemer, who is not ashamed to call us his brethren. There are the departed spirits of the just, some of whom were near and dear to us on earth, and whose memory we cherish still with the fondest affection, and thither we expect soon to go ourselves. Our citizenship, then, is in heaven, and as denizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, we are as pilgrims and strangers here, looking for the Saviour from heaven, who hath kindly said, that he will come and receive us to himself, that where he is, there may we be also.

Surely, then, it becomes us to value our home above all other places. Is it not at once our duty and our interest to get acquainted with its nature and its blessings? Ought

we not to get familiar with its enjoyments—to long for it—to hold such intercourse with it, as the present state will admit,—to manifest its spirit, and to seek increasing meetness for its pure and spiritual glory? In this way we have fellowship with the heavenly worshippers;—we enter within the veil, and have blissful intercourse with God; we anticipate the work of heaven, and we taste of its joys; we feel ourselves in the presence of our Lord, and we become assimilated to his glory. This is the very life of genuine religion, and of spiritual devotion. The most exalted view which we can form of the blessedness of heaven, and of its sacred services, is that of dwelling on the glory of God, as exhibited in the Redeemer, and of progressively advancing in likeness to his character. We err most egregiously if we do not habituate ourselves to the contemplation of the true sanctuary, and employ not our thoughts and our cares, our heart and affections, on the heavenly seat of worship and of bliss.

I have mentioned to you, that the great object of attraction in the heavenly sanctuary, is the Redeemer himself. He is ever beheld officiating in our behalf, offering up the services of his people, and procuring for them the blessings of redemption. There he watches over the least and the feeblest of his brethren, and the sight of his kindness produces the sweetest satisfaction and complacency. No one can touch the members on earth, but He, the Head, feels it in heaven. When called to scenes of trying duty, severe affliction, or fearful alarm, we shall find relief and encouragement in him. A view of him at the right hand of God gladdened the mind of the martyr Stephen, and enabled him calmly and joyfully to commend to him his spirit. And in that solemn hour, when life is hastening to extinc-

tion,—when human aid is felt to be powerless ; when the memory of the past is fading away, and the present ceases to interest,—in a word, when eternity in all its magnitude is about to burst upon our view, even then, when all is at stake, the faith of the character and the glory of Christ can enable us to rejoice in the thought that all is perfectly safe, and that all before us is inconceivably glorious and delightful.

The contemplation of this glory should be, not an occasional, but a stated employment. In this delightful exercise we are aided by the scriptural representation of the sanctuary. Were nothing unfolded respecting its nature, and had we only general declarations respecting the love and the care of our Lord, we should be greatly at a loss. But the particular account given us of the character and work of our High Priest, of the nature and the services of the heavenly temple, and of the way in which we have access to God, and in which he communicates of his goodness to us, is admirably calculated to enlighten, sanctify, and gladden the heart. He who knows our frame, hath in this way adapted all to our nature and character. The description of the Levitical sanctuary is of great service still in illustrating the glory of the heavenly holy place. To the former there is a constant reference in describing the latter. It must, then, be of great moment to understand well the typical economy, for our faith is by this means assisted by our senses, and the truth takes the firmer hold of the heart.

Jesus, when on earth, gave or offered himself to be slain as a sacrifice; and his death, as such, finished the whole of those positive sufferings which are included in the curse of the law; but as, under the ancient economy, an impor-

tant service remained to be performed after slaying the victim, namely, that of the priest's taking of its blood into the sanctuary of God, and sprinkling it before Him ; so Christ, as the apostle has told us, Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24, had to enter with his own blood into the celestial temple, and, after presenting it to God, to take his seat "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The service of the Jewish high priest, on the annual day of atonement, was the most solemn and particular of all the Levitical services, and must, therefore, have something particularly corresponding to it in the priestly ministry of the antitype.

Permit me to call your attention, for a little, to the interest attached to this subject in the epistle to the Hebrews. The apostle reproves them for their declension in knowledge and in piety. He says, that they needed to be taught again what were the first principles of the oracles of God, and had become such as have need of milk, and could not digest strong meat. He proposes, however, to lead them forward from first principles to the higher branches of the Christian faith, though he had great difficulties in doing so, in consequence of the slothful state of their minds. Now, in what does he endeavor to lead them forward? An answer to this will be found in the following part of the epistle, particularly in chaps. vii. viii. ix. x. and xii. We are there directed to the complete consecration of the Saviour—to his mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary—to his investiture with office in his glorified state—to his entrance, as the immortal Son of God raised from the dead, into the celestial temple—to the presentation of his offering there in the midst of departed spirits and of holy angels—the Divine acceptance of his sacrifice, and the Divine complacency in it—to his session at the right hand of

power, as a priest upon his throne, accompanied with the oath of Jehovah, declaring him a priest after the order of Melchizedec—to his intercession—his government of the sanctuary and of the Church of God—his lordship over all worlds in behalf of his spiritual kingdom,—and to his high ministrations as thus elevated in heaven.

Our attention is particularly directed to the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary. Having completed the atonement, by appearing in the celestial world with his sacrifice, and there presenting it unto God, the Saviour thereby consecrated heaven for a dwelling place and a sanctuary to his people. The Levitical tabernacle being defiled by the sins of the Israelites, had to be purified annually by the sprinkling of blood. Lev. xvi. 15—17. And even before it became the seat of their worship, the earthly sanctuary and all its furniture were by this means purified, and so set apart for the use of the people, in order to show that the access of the worshippers to God, and their acceptance in his sight, were solely through the blood of atonement. In like manner, the appearance of our Lord with his sacrifice in heaven was necessary, in order that it might be set apart for the use, and opened for the admission of sinners, Heb. ix. 21—24. Heaven must have been defiled by their admission, if an atonement had not been made for their sins.

While the high priest was purifying the earthly sanctuary, there was no man allowed to be within it but himself. On other occasions, the priests, Levites, and people, were in it in their different places, but on this solemn occasion the whole assembled tribes of Israel were excluded. They were thus most impressively taught, that sinners can have no access to God, except through a mediator, the awful consequences of sin as excluding from the favor and family

of God, and that the work of redemption devolves exclusively on the Saviour. In consequence of sin, all men are, according to their desert, under a sentence of exclusion from the house and favorable presence of God. But as, after the propitiatory services of the high priest were performed, the sanctuary was open to all, so now that Christ hath finished the work of atonement, the very holiest of all is laid open to every individual of mankind, who chooses to enter it in his name. The sentence of exclusion is in this sense reversed. If a man does not believe this, he will refuse or neglect to enter, but the way remains clear, so that he has himself to blame if he enjoys not the benefit. But the faith of the gospel has its immediate issue in coming to him who is within the veil, and taking of the water of life freely. When the sanctuary was purified, the people had access to it for the following year, at the end of which it was again shut, and had again to be cleansed. But Christ having consecrated the heavenly temple, it never can be defiled, and from it we shall never be excluded. The heavenly things which are said to be purified cannot mean the church and its worship, for we are expressly told in the verse which immediately follows, that that which answers to the purification of the earthly sanctuary is Christ's entering into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.—Had the guilty been admitted into heaven without any regard to an atonement for their sins, then heaven had been defiled, even (supposing it to be possible) although they had at the time of their entrance been perfect in holiness. The subject in question is not their meetness for heaven, but the ground on which they are received into it, which of course relates to what was their original character. By the atonement of Christ then, the purity of the celestial

sanctuary is preserved, while the guilty have access to it.

This, however, is not all that is included in the purification in question. Let it be considered, that the sacrifices were generally not only expiatory, in the strict sense of the expression, they were designed to be propitiatory ; that is, they not only cancelled guilt and so freed from punishment, they obtained for the guilty an interest in the special blessings of the covenant of God. The death of the victim denoted the former, and the sprinkling of the blood before God solemnly signified the latter. These two things were considered by the law as but different parts of the same sacrificial service ; and accordingly, when the Scriptures speak of the one offering of Christ, they oppose it to the numerous sacrifices of the Levitical economy, and not to the different services which were required in regard to the same sacrifice. By his death he cancelled guilt, and so obtained “ eternal redemption ” from the curse, by bearing the desert of our sins “ in his own body on the tree,” because he then finished the whole of those positive sufferings which are comprehended in the curse of the law, as is proved by his resurrection and glory. But to show that he had not only ransomed his people from death, or merely restored them to what they had lost through sin, but had also by his propitiation laid the foundation of their access to God as his God and Father,—of their admission into that hallowed community of which he himself is head—and of their entrance into that celestial inheritance which is the reward of his work, he entered into heaven as our representative and forerunner ; and, as it were, sprinkled the mercy-seat with his blood, as a solemn demonstration that all that *superabundance* of blessing which shall there be enjoyed is communicated to sinners through the infinite

merit of his sacrifice. Thus heaven is said to be purified in the sense of being set apart for the use of the redeemed in a way which reflects the highest honor on the character and government of God. By the appearance of Christ, then, with his blood in the sanctuary, we are taught to ascribe the enjoyment of heaven as well as deliverance from wrath to his previous atonement. Our participation in the blessings of the former, was signified by the sprinkling of the blood upon the people ; and our participation in the latter was denoted by the sprinkling of the book of the covenant, of the sanctuary, of the altar, and of all the vessels employed in the divine service. (Familiar survey of the Old and New Covenant, Chap. iii. sec. v.)

Our attention, dear friend, is also turned to the general assembly and church of the first born,—to the legal and blissful perfection of the departed spirits of the just,—to the union of all saints in heaven and on earth into one body,—to the union of redeemed sinners and holy angels into one glorious community under Christ as their common head ; and in a particular manner to his high character as a priest, not of an earthly, but of a spiritual and heavenly sanctuary,—not of one people only, but of all in every place who come to God by him,—not subject to infirmity and death, but as the conqueror of the grave, and as possessed of an everlasting life in an immortal, vigorous, spiritual, and glorious body,—not holding his office for a time only, but forever ; and as invested with it, not by descent, but by immediate appointment of God. We are also directed forward to the time when he shall come again ; not, as at first, to be a sacrifice for sin, but as the great high-priest, to bless his people with complete and eternal salvation, and with all the mercies of the everlasting cove-

nant. As when the Jewish high priest was in the sanctuary, the people stood without, waiting his return to bless them, so, in regard to actual *personal* presence, we are without, while in this world, waiting for the second coming of our Lord. Then he shall appear as the blessed bond of connexion among the various parts of the community gathered into one, the medium of fellowship between God and his people, and the substance of the dignities and joys of the glorified creation. Col. ii. 4. 1 John iii. 2. Rev. vii. 14—17.

We are taught farther, that already we are come to this blessed assembly, which is cemented by likeness of disposition and character—sameness of privileges and blessing, and by corresponding exercises and enjoyments,—that already we have access by faith into the seat of their bliss : and that a measure of their joys may even now be possessed. In this way we are led to consider all that preceded as leading to the establishment of the Church of Christ,—to view his kingdom as the commencement of heaven,—to consider the services of Christians on earth as the means of fellowship with the celestial worshippers ; and to remember, that this present state of things is a preparation for the final glory of his name and his people. We thus acquire a tone of sublimity which elevates us above all low pursuits and worldly affections. The power of temptation is thus neutralized, and we attain that singleness of heart which consists in having but one object, desire, and pursuit ; namely, the glory and the enjoyment of God.

The place given to this subject by the apostles merits your regard. When they preached to the world, they dwelt on first principles ; such as the guilt and wretchedness of men—their inability to deliver themselves—the

love of God, in giving his Son—the love of Christ, in becoming obedient unto death—the resurrection and glory of the Redeemer, as the great proof of the sufficiency and acceptance of his atonement, and on the way in which sinners obtain the benefit of it through faith. On the subject of the glory of Christ, they, in such circumstances, spoke in general terms only, and chiefly for the purpose of proving the perfection of the atonement, the certainty of salvation to all who believed, and the certain condemnation of the impenitent. But when their object was to edify believers, and to lead them forward to the higher branches of the Gospel, they dwelt upon it in the most particular manner, and exhibited it in its many and various bearings and connexions. They connected it all in particular with his cross and sacrifice, and showed how his humiliation and his heavenly elevation mutually illustrated each other.

Permit me, then, to recommend to you the frequent consideration of this subject. You will find it consoling, gladdening, and purifying. It is but little of it that can be known here, but much more might be known than is, did we enter into it as we ought. The full light of it we could not bear, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But when we drop this body, we shall see the Divine glory as it shines in the Saviour, and seeing him as he is, we shall be like to him. Then, like the priests of old, we shall feed on the provision of the house of God, and shall be satisfied in the enjoyment of the blessed fruits of the sacrifice of Christ. Then shall our happiness be uninterrupted and unmingled. In the full enjoyment of bliss, and an immortality of glory, nothing shall disturb our repose—no shade of grief shall ever be known—no moment

of uneasiness shall ever pass over us. Our God himself shall be our light, and he who freed us from guilt and ruin will with his own hands give us our inheritance: And will it not add to our joy in the reception and enjoyment of the crown, that it is bestowed by Him who once shared our sorrows? In drinking of the fountain of the water of life, we shall think of his groans and his sorrows when for us he drank of the bitter cup of tribulation.

Delightful it will be, directly to witness, in the celestial sanctuary, the workings of that love which, in the height of his glory, burns as warmly as ever. Sweet to the soul is the thought, that in the face of the Man of Sorrows, "whose visage was once marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men," the divine glory shall for ever illustriously shine. Most consoling is the hope of entering into that joy, the prospect of which animated his soul amidst the horrors of the curse. To see justice done to his character—to see his worth acknowledged and applauded by his God—to witness the reward of his varied and manifold excellencies; and to mark the benevolent and pious exultation of his heart, as he surveys the glory and the blessedness of the new creation, will surely fully gratify his redeemed, and swell their songs of triumph and of joy. John xvii. 24. Rev. v. 8—14.

Even now there is much of this enjoyed when the mind turns to his glory, and remembers that his grandeur lessens not his love, but is valued by him as the means of blessing us. Though Christ be in the highest heavens, he is there as a priest. Now, it is necessary that, in that character, he should be full of compassion. He, of course, can be no longer qualified for the place he holds than he continues to be of a gracious and merciful disposition; and he can no

longer act in it than he shows all kindness and sympathy towards those who come to him for refuge, and seek for happiness in his heavenly and holy temple. Heb. v. 2. In the cause of sinners he suffered and he died on earth, and never can he forget that for which he endured so much. Isa. xlix. 15, 16.

Every thing that rends our heart has rent His ;—and every stroke we bear has been borne by Him. He knows our trials and wants, not merely because being God he knows all things, but because he has had actual experience in our nature of all the difficulties and afflictions to which flesh is heir. Such is our nature, that this interests us more than the divine omniscience, simply considered. On this ground the apostle builds his reasoning respecting the fitness of our Lord for the tender and affectionate discharge of the whole of that sympathetic official work which is necessary in a priest. Heb. iv. 15. He not only says, that so God appointed it, but that the lot of Christ was most suited to the close and endearing relation which subsists between him and his people, as well as most suited to the great object which he had in view, namely, to conform them to that glorious character exhibited in his cross. Heb. ii. 10—12. 17, 18.

What is he doing in heaven, but reaping what he sowed below? His reaping this in the celestial temple, is the very life of his mediatorial bliss, so that our interests are bound up with the joys of his abundant harvest. The more that we cheerfully suffer and do for another, the more ardent does our love for him become. We see this in parents towards their children, and particularly towards such of them as have been most weakly and sickly. These last have most occupied the thoughts and feelings of

the heart, by which means the principle of affection has been greatly strengthened. On this principle the peculiarly warm affection of a mother is accounted for. Let this be applied to the love of Christ. His affection for us has been increased and invigorated in the furnace of tribulation, the most afflicting and severe. In this way we have been written upon his heart, and never can the writing be effaced.

Not only is he independently happy as Emmanuel, he has also a capacity for happiness as the head of his body, the church. Personally considered, he is complete in himself, but as the head of his body, he has an additional relative fulness springing from the blessedness and the glory of his members. Ephes. i. 22, 23. Now, as happiness is in a high degree the companion and the result of activity in behalf of our friends, so this is enjoyed by the Saviour in the constant ministration of the sanctuary, and in the unceasing exercise of his grace, and his mercy towards his people. He is blessed himself in imparting to them the blessings of redemption. In seeing them pardoned and comforted, sanctified and preserved, his soul is delighted. The more that they are filled with the goodness and the salvation of God, the more happy is he. He sees in this the first fruit of his labor, and the effect of his grace; he sees his word and his character glorified, the honor of his father promoted, examples of excellence exhibited for the present and future benefit of others, and his soul is gratified in the prospect of such being one day with him to behold his glory and to participate in his joys. His love to God, his benevolence towards men, and his respect for all that is excellent, are thus strikingly displayed. These views of his blessedness are included in the saying of the prophet, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

Between us and the heavenly Canaan, the seat of the celestial temple, there runs the river of death; but as when the Israelites passed over Jordan, the ark and the priests went before them, and remained in the midst of the river till all the people had clean passed over, so the Saviour, of whom the ark and the priests who accompanied it are types, will be with us to secure to us both safety and victory. As the Captain of salvation, he will give them the victory, and will cause his purchased people all to pass over—he will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of his inheritance, and in the place which he has made for his own abode, even the sanctuary which his own hands have established. Ex. xv. 16, 17.

We see, then, how closely the relative glory and blessedness of the Saviour are connected with the true interest and happiness of his people, and how unnecessary are perplexing cares and anxieties as to the strength and durability of his love. There is much in this to lead you with filial boldness to “the throne of the heavenly grace,” and to render fellowship with the Father and with the Son your chief joy. What are the ways of Providence, but the doings of a Friend whose kindness is ever awake and active, and always most so when we are most in want of it. We may often be at a loss to see the wisdom or the goodness of God in our trials, but when we take our station at the cross, and contemplate the unutterable tenderness and love, and the depths of wisdom which are there displayed, we rest satisfied that he who first loved us can never injure us, and can never cease to care for us. You will find, that the hope of this glory cherishes a humble and holy confidence in God, and “that peace which keeps the heart and the mind.” Nothing but the religion of the cross can quiet the conscience, without stupifying it, or gladden the heart with-

out degrading or defiling it. The debasing influence of mere earthly pleasures shows at once the folly and the guilt of pursuing them. But here the most elevated desires of the spirit are gratified, and the most distressing agitations of the mind are calmed. In view of this, poor indeed are the trifles of time, and few and light are the trials of life, even when it is most crowded with cares, and fears, and sorrows.

Let us, then, fix our hope within the veil, and our hearts will be kept by it calm and unmoved, like the peaceful sanctuary of heaven; or if we are not altogether free from agitations, it will at least keep us from being lost in the storm.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

ON THE HEAVENLY SABBATH.

Heaven often compared to the keeping of a Sabbath—Design of this institution—The kingdom of Christ a new creation—Like the old, it is a gradual work—The happiness of the Saviour in his heavenly rest—The Lord's Day, appointed in remembrance of his resurrection—What is implied in keeping it—The superiority of the heavenly Sabbath—The nature of heavenly bliss—the suitability of the character of Christ—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

To assist your meditations on the celestial world, I propose, in this letter, to take a view of the bliss of heaven as the keeping of a Sabbath. Future happiness is frequently described in language borrowed from the garden of Eden. Heaven is called Paradise; and, in allusion to the tree of life, and to the river of Eden, we are told that a pure river of water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and that, in the midst, and on either side of the river, is the

tree of life. Luke xxiii. 43. 2 Cor. xii. 4. Rev. ii. 7. Rev. xxii. 1. 2. On the same principle the Sabbath instituted in Paradise is in Heb. iv. 9. used as an emblem of the eternal rest which awaits the people of God. The word there rendered *rest*, signifies the keeping of a Sabbath, and is employed for the purpose of showing the nature of that rest which God hath provided for his children.

When God, after employing six days in the work of creation, is said to have rested on the seventh, the meaning cannot be, that being fatigued he needed repose, but that he ceased from the work of creating. It denotes also, in a particular manner, his satisfaction and enjoyment in contemplating the works of his hands, as illustrative of certain parts of his character. Accordingly, he declared all his works to be good, and is said to have been refreshed in beholding them, Gen. i. 31, compared with Exod. xxxi. 17. He was happy, that is, in contemplating them, because they were a manifestation of his power, wisdom, and goodness.

He blessed the seventh day, or exalted it above other days; and he sanctified it, or set it apart for holy purposes,—by appointing it to be devoted in a particular manner to religious services. It was designed for the use of man, as a representation of, and a means of his entering into a participation of that rest, or enjoyment, which God had in his works; for the happiness of rational creatures must ever arise from fellowship with God in his blessedness. Rest from labor was enjoined on man, then, not merely that he might repose himself, though this, it is true, was one reason of the appointment; but chiefly that, being set free from his daily exertions, he might bend his undivided attention to the contemplation and enjoyment of God, and might have a certain portion of time to spend in direct devotion and intercourse with him. Of course, therefore, it was in certain respects

but a means to an end. While in innocence he would ever be spiritually-minded ; but it does not follow from this that it was unnecessary to set apart a particular time for devotion. If this was necessary in a state of innocence, it must be much more so to us, whose minds are distracted by sin, and in danger of forgetting the truth, and losing a devotional spirit, amidst the cares of the world. Hence the observance of one day in seven as sacred to God, is required now, as well as in former periods, and it is found to be a sweet and profitable retreat even to those who most fully unite business with devotion.

The importance of special seasons for devotion, was taught by the law, which required that the sacrifices should be doubled on the Sabbath day. Num. xxviii. 3, 9. Though Christians, whether they eat or drink, are to do all to the glory of God, they are edified by appointments in the observance of which their intercourse with God is more immediate, and their worship is more like that of the celestial sanctuary.

With an eye to the old creation, the erection of the kingdom of Christ is called the creation of "new heavens and a new earth," Isaiah lxxv. 17. The Saviour finished the work of atonement ; he laid the foundation of the church in his perfect sacrifice ; and he entered into his rest when he rose from the dead and ascended into glory. The work of redemption, or the new and spiritual creation to which the first had been subservient, is that in which the divine character is fully unfolded. It is in a striking sense the work of Christ, and the rest into which he hath entered is no less strikingly his own. He so rests from his works as to rest *in* them, Heb. iv. 10. God rested or enjoyed the manifestation of his character given in the work of the old creation ; and Christ hath entered into bliss

unutterable in the contemplation and enjoyment of the divine character, as manifested in the works of the new creation. The happiness of God arises from the contemplation and enjoyment of those principles or perfections which constitute his character; and hence he delighted when in the works of creation he saw certain of them visibly displayed. But his character is best displayed in the work of his Son, and hence he had expressed his highest delight, and his ineffable satisfaction in that work.

As the pale emanations of the moon walking in her brightness, are absorbed and lost in the effulgence of the sun, so the first creation, though certainly glorious, fades away before the surpassing splendor of the new. Think of the many moral obstructions which opposed the righteous and honorable exercise of mercy to sinners, and see how fully they have all been removed by the Saviour. Contemplate the polluted, depraved, and miserable condition of mankind, and see an innumerable multitude of them bearing an image of God, and restored to heavenly knowledge, holiness, and love. Consider the power displayed in the complete command of their minds, in preserving them through all the temptations of the world, in reviving them when languishing, recovering them when fallen, and beautifying them with salvation, till they are presented before God without spot or blemish. In this moral creation, there are more grand and decisive displays of the divine wisdom and power, than in the original production of the universe; and in this manifestation of all his moral perfections, the Father rests with ineffable delight, as the brightest effulgence of his glory. Jesus, likewise, as Mediator, is blessed in enjoying the light of his Father's countenance, and beholding his character as displayed in his own work. In the heavenly temple his happiness arises from that in

which Jehovah delights. In like manner do *we* enter into the rest of God, because our happiness as Christians arises from fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This high privilege we have, when our enjoyment springs from the knowledge of the divine character as exhibited in the gospel. "It is life eternal to know God, and him whom he hath sent;" or, in other words, to have a just sense of the divine character, as revealed in the work of the Mediator, and in the glory that hath followed, 1 John i. 3. John xvii. 3.

When the Redeemer, by his obedience unto death, had purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of God, there to enjoy that blessed rest which hath followed, and results from his wondrous sufferings and work. This rest is not merely a cessation from labor, or repose after tribulation, it is perfect complacency in the divine character, glory, and excellency, as displayed in the building of mercy which is established on his precious atonement; it is the complete enjoyment of blessedness in the favor of his God and Father; and it is the delightful gratification of his pious and benevolent wishes in the redemption of sinners to the family, the love, and the services of Jehovah. His life is not a life of state merely, but a life of office. Hence heaven is called a temple; and his blessedness is represented as arising from what he did when in his representative or public character he entered it as a sanctuary, with the blood of the everlasting covenant, and from what he is still doing there. The new creation, like the old, is a gradual work. The foundation of it was laid in the atonement of Christ, and considering its nature, this was the grandest and most important part of it, and hence he is represented as having then entered into his rest. But, as at the end of each successive day, the Lord said of his works,

that they were good, and rested in them, as a partial display of his character, so the Saviour has satisfaction in witnessing the successive stages of this spiritual creation; and as on the seventh day, when the *whole* was finished, God in a particular manner rested and was refreshed; so at the final consummation of the plan of mercy, the Redeemer, on surveying the glories of the new creation, will in the *fullest* sense "rest and be satisfied." How interesting to him, then, must it be, to contemplate the progress of this moral renovation, as it advances from dispensation to dispensation, unfolding one part of the divine glory after another, removing evil after evil, and brightening more and more until, in its most perfect lustre, it shall exhibit the meridian sunshine of the divine character and perfections.

The Levitical priests entered the earthly holy place with the blood of others, but Jesus entered heaven with his own blood. When they had performed the appointed services they retired, but the Saviour remains in the heavenly holy place. There he continues to declare the name, or character of God, in the continued representation of his sacrifice, which is made by his appearing as a Lamb that has been slain; by his continual intercession on the ground of this atonement; by the communication of all blessings through it, by the government of all the affairs of Providence, in subserviency to his church, and by appointing and guiding all the worship of the sanctuary of God, in connexion with his own perfect offering.

The whole affairs of this lower world are connected with the advancement of his kingdom to his ultimate perfection. When these heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and this world, and all its works shall be burned up, the new creation shall remain. The holy and spiritual principles of the humbled and purified heart, in which all

that assimilates to God will be found to dwell, are destined to survive the wreck of nature, and to shine forth in their highest glory in the light of heaven. For what is this world but a piece of scaffolding, erected for the sake of the spiritual temple, and to be removed when the building is completed? Then shall the heavenly structure be revealed in all its beauty, grandeur, and glory. This new creation, like the old, though it consists of a great variety of parts, is but one work; and hence the sacred writers make the most rapid and apparently abrupt transitions from one part of it to another; as, for instance, from the first to the second coming of Christ, and from some particular stage of his administration backwards to its commencement, and forward to its close. In all this great work, the heart of the Redeemer exults. It is the delight of his heart to unfold the manifold wisdom, the immaculate purity, the perfect holiness, justice, and faithfulness of God, in union with the love, mercy, and grace which distinguish his character. In looking to the consummation of the plan of redemption, and to the salvation and blessedness of the general assembly and church of the first born, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied. This is the rest into which he hath entered. The nature of it is most honorable to him, and most interesting and delightful to us.

Fellowship with him in this bliss is the rest set before us in the gospel, and in fellowship with him is refreshing and satisfying joy. In this we participate when we unite with our great high priest in blessing in his official character "his Father, and our Father, his God and our God," for his deliverance from the grave, and from all the effects of the curse, and for the bestowment of all the blessings of his kingdom. Not that the Saviour is considered as merely a member of the heavenly community; far, very far from

it, He is the glorious head of his body the church, and it is as such that he communicates life and every blessing to his members, and also guides them in acts of devotion. To allude to the language of an eminent writer, the Son, as the *Head* of the redeemed, leads the worshippers of the higher house in their expressions of reverence, love, and subjection, as a part of his mediatorial glory. (Dr. Erskine's discourses, vol. i. p. 495.) In this worship there is heard one universal acclamation of praise, on every side there is seen the constant overflow of gratitude, and in every heart there is ever felt the most sacred and transporting bliss.

In commemoration of the resurrection and glory of Christ, the day of rest has been changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, which is hence termed "the Lord's day." Rev. i. 10. The mind is thus turned to that great work, for the sake of which the world was created; so that the two creations are here, so to say, united. The day on which he rose, and that on which he ascended, were the same day of the week, and both events are commemorated together. Indeed it was not till his ascension into heaven, that he fully took possession of the throne, as the conqueror of death; and hence the high glory into which the Redeemer then entered is celebrated, as distinguishing the day on which it was received, Psalm cxviii. 22 compared with verse 24, and Acts iv. 11. On that day the first Christians met for the observance of all the stated institutions of Christ; and he himself honored it while on earth by different appearances among his disciples, who even then assembled on it, Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 20, compared with chap. xvi. 1, 2. John xx. 19—26. On that day they met, in particular, for the observance of the Lord's supper, in which his death is commemorated; the observance of this rite on the very day sacred to the memory of his resurrec-

tion, beautifully connected the memorial of the one with that of the other. The contemplation of the resurrection of Christ necessarily leads to the contemplation of his death, and indeed cannot be separated from it, and how delightful then to unite their respective memorials!—In meditating on the rest into which he hath entered, it is edifying to observe, at the same time, that institution which directly leads us to the solemn scenes of Gathsemane and Calvary. When at last we come to the seat of his heavenly rest, we shall dwell with deep and heartfelt interest on those affecting scenes; and how blessed now to anticipate the enjoyments of heaven!

In commemorating on the Lord's day his resurrection from the dead, we commemorate an event in which we have the fullest confirmation of the accomplishment of his work, and a satisfactory assurance of our own resurrection. We profess our faith in the perfection of his atonement, and declare that all our hope arises from that work from which he rests,—we express our joy in contemplating the divine delight in it, as manifested by his life from the dead, and thus have fellowship with God in his blessedness,—we declare that, viewing ourselves as but pilgrims and strangers on earth, we look to his temple as our home; and that our highest desire is to resemble Him in character, and to partake with him in his rest,—we express our love to his name, and to his people with whom we unite in the observance of the day; and we view it as an emblem of the heavenly state, as a state of rest, devotion and enjoyment, in which we shall exult at once in the death and the resurrection of the Saviour, blessing for ever the Lamb who was slain, and glorying in Him as the resurrection and the life. This is the spirit which makes such a day a foretaste of glory.—This is the feast of solemn and

delightful feeling—the very sabbath of the mind, and the commencement of heaven.

Heaven is a state of *rest*.—There we shall rest from all labor and employments connected with the body. Many are the cares connected with our bodies at present, and it is our duty to attend to what they require; for we are not warranted to neglect them. But though in the necessary cares and business of life, we serve God, still to an immortal spirit there is much in them that is tedious and unpleasant; and it is not inconsistent with the spirit of piety to long for a state of higher religious service. Much time is consumed in what is in itself but irksome to a rational being, and the attention is often diverted from things of higher importance, and occupied exclusively by perishing trifles. This latter circumstance is especially painful. The former sensation had not been so powerfully felt had man never known any higher state than that allotted him on earth; but the stupendous revelation of the divine glory, which is afforded us in the gospel, has the effect of attracting the mind to the celestial world, and elevating us to the contemplation of those exalted enjoyments which are in the immediate presence of God. Still, the recollection that God hath placed us here—that it is he who appoints our lot,—and that he is glorified, when, in the ordinary business of life, as well as in direct acts of worship, we keep his designs and his glory in view, reconciles the mind to the will of Providence, and even cheers the heart amidst the cares of this world. But in the heavenly state there will be no farther occasion to inquire after supplies for bodily wants. All the distresses arising from these vile bodies, shall in like manner terminate. We shall have a spiritual body, not subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, or disease. Not only will the soul be no longer engaged in the earthly and

ensnaring concerns that relate to the body, but neither will it toil, as at present, in the laborious pursuit of knowledge, which is often a weariness to the flesh, but will acquire information by a kind of intuition. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

We shall have rest also from the assaults of enemies. In this present state we are ever in danger from our spiritual foes. Many are the attacks made upon us by the objects of sense—the smiles and the frowns of the world—the errors and lies of Satan and his emissaries,—and the sinful passions and affections of the corrupt principle which dwells in us. Sometimes our spirits languish, and our strength fails. Frequent and daily struggles, with inward evils, and outward temptations, sink our hearts; especially when we have been foiled, or an advantage has been gained against us. But in the heavenly world no enemy can appear,—there no error will disturb us,—there we shall be freed from the entanglements of this earthly scene—our warfare shall terminate, and we shall enjoy complete and undisturbed tranquillity. Isaiah lvii. 2. Rev. xiv. 13. Let the hope of this animate us while yet in the field of conflict.

We shall have rest from all the sorrows and troubles of the present state. Here we are ever exposed to vexation and anxiety—to fear and to sorrow. From all these, and from every thing else which can assail our peace, we shall rest. Nothing from without, and nothing from within will disturb us. No desire will be ungratified.—Our enjoyments will have no sting, and our joy will never disorder us.

But heaven is not only a place of rest from what is distressing.—It is a state of the most exalted devotion, and of the highest spiritual enjoyment. Christians are said to enter into rest in heaven, not only because they there rest from their labors, but because being set free from the necessary cares and incumbrances of the present life, they are wholly

employed in contemplating, serving, and enjoying God. The heavenly rest, then, is not a state of inactivity ; for action is essential to our happiness. Rest, in this case, is opposed to fatigue and disquietude, and not active service. It is but one of the many figures employed to illustrate future bliss, from each of which, some of its diversified glories may be learned. This rest, then, is entering into the *rest of God* ; it is to participate in his bliss : and this arises from conformity to his character, as manifested in Christ. Now positive likemindedness to him is connected with the exercise of our principles and faculties in his service. It is so here, and it will be so there. The enjoyments of heaven are not so much different in kind, as in degree, from those bestowed on earth. The Sabbath above is not a mere ceasing from sin, but the exercise of all those holy principles which form the Christian character. There we shall for ever contemplate, and progressively advance in the knowledge of God. We shall observe, and study the excellencies of his works and character. This will excite the most ardent love to him, and will cause the most exalted delight in his favor. There no dulness of apprehension will ever be felt—no perplexed reasonings or false conclusions will ever mislead. There the perceptions of the Divine glory will produce the most sublime devotion. How delightful to turn from this world of vanity to the paradise above, where every natural and moral imperfection, and every evil shall be excluded ; where all our faculties shall be enlarged ; where every object fitted to satisfy them shall abound, and where, existing in immortal vigor, we shall rise higher and higher in the scale of excellence and blessedness, while the living God shall exist.

Lord's days below are days of solemn convocation, Lev. xxviii. 3, and in the heavenly temple the general assembly

and church of the first-born will meet to celebrate for ever the most sacred worship. Jesus is the centre of their union, and in this great assembly he acts as their leader, though not only in this character. He imparts, for instance, all those principles and dispositions which fit for the service of the sanctuary,—he directs in the hallowed songs of adoration and thanksgiving which are there incessantly sung,—he, in particular, “takes the cup of salvation;” and directs the redeemed family in the delightful exercise of blessing his Father for all his goodness to him and to them. He has sat down on the right hand of God in a glorious eternal rest, not only *from*, but *in*, his finished work, as an adequate display of the divine glory, and as a proper foundation for eternal and exalted worship. In this rest all the redeemed partake with him, rejoicing and glorifying in God with him, and entering into all his devotional feelings and sacred views.—Through him Christians, even whilst on earth, partake, in a measure, of this rest, when they assemble together for the observance of the institutions of the Gospel, in the remembrance that they have access into the holiest of all, and when they so enter into the views of the redeemed on high, as to have communion in the heavenly worship. In the heavenly temple the Saviour is the object of universal and supreme adoration and praise; but this is as compatible with his directing, as Lord of the sanctuary, its various services in a way corresponding with their nature, as is his intercession. The services of heaven are not exactly of one description, and this, together with the official character of Christ, accounts for the different capacities in which he there acts and appears.

But in many respects the heavenly Sabbath exceeds the most delightful of such days on earth.—Here, even on such days, the necessary cares of life interrupt us,—both mind

and body require rest ; and sometimes we cannot enjoy the public institutions of Christ. But in heaven this mortal shall be clothed with immortality, and the body will no longer be a clog to the soul. The body of the first Adam was suited to the old creation, and the body of the second Adam is suited to the new ; and as we have borne the image of the former, so shall we bear the image of the latter. Flesh and blood, in their present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; corruption cannot inherit incorruption ; so that these bodies of ours, before we can fully enter into the sacred joys of the upper sanctuary, must be changed, and made like the glorified body of the Saviour.

The hope of the resurrection is not the mere expectation, that our bodies shall again be linked to a piece of matter,—which were no dignified anticipation ; but that, as the present body is of essential use to the mind, being the medium through which it holds communication with sensible objects, so the resurrection body shall be possessed of organs and of senses adapted to the heavenly world, which will make it a handmaid to the soul—the means of increasing its knowledge, and, consequently, its devotion and blessedness. This is a prospect worthy of a rational being, and suited to a heart set upon spiritual things.

There will be nothing, then, to distract our attention, either in ourselves or in surrounding objects. Our faculties here are weak and imperfect,—we comprehend but little of God and divine things,—we soon tire in the contemplation of the most interesting objects, our minds wander, and often are they crowded by vain thoughts. But in heaven we shall no more have a dead, a cold, or a wandering heart ; for the glories thrown open to view will animate the attention, give a glow to the sentiments of the mind, and vigor to the spirit. The mind will be purified

from every sinful disposition, and invigorated in every sacred principle; and having an incorruptible body, as well as a pure and holy spirit, we shall feel no hindrance to our hallowed pursuits. There the senses will not, as in this world, ensnare the affections, nor will the imagination pollute the heart. There all shall see God, and our fellowship with him shall be close and complete.

There will be nothing in those about us, any more than in ourselves, to mar our exercises or our enjoyments; for there every one will be active, spiritual, and holy. In this pure and tranquil assembly we shall be holy and happy; and in looking to a society perfect in holiness, we shall be animated and active; for such is the human mind, that it assimilates itself to surrounding objects, and catches the spirit of what is familiar to it. In heaven there will not be one jarring string. The redeemed from all nations, peoples and tongues, shall constitute one grand assembly—shall assist and animate the devotion of each other, and increase each other's triumph and joy.

This sabbatism will be *eternal*.—Here our sweetest days soon come to a close; many of them we have seen pass away, the remembrance of which is still pleasing, though, because of our sins, it is in some respects painful. But in heaven the redeemed will meet never to part;—there is no night there;—our sun shall never go down;—we shall be pillars in the temple of God, and shall no more go out. Because Christ liveth for ever we also shall live, and ever be with him to behold his glory. We shall be like him in body and in mind, in character and condition, and in glory and blessedness. In this blessed society love will be perfected. Here there will be no clashing of interests, no opposition of sentiments, or dispositions and temper. In this hallowed abode Jesus sits as head; and

far asunder and scattered as his people once were, they shall all of them be brought to the heavenly and the eternal temple, where they shall celebrate a jubilee of unutterable, yea, inconceivable joy.

This hope should excite our gratitude. We lost happiness by leaving the only fountain of it, God himself; we can only recover and preserve it by returning and cleaving to him. He hath opened a way for our return to him, and hath exhibited to us the most pure and exalted enjoyments as his gift through Christ. We are not left, then, to weary ourselves seeking rest, and finding none—we have it clearly set before us. Let us then think of our great leader, who hath gone before us, and let us labor, “to enter into his rest.” Let us rejoice in the prospect of being with him, where we shall behold the wondrous character of God, and shall be the subjects of its transforming power. Heaven is the presence of Christ and his people, perfect deliverance from sin, and positive likeness to God. Is it not the cause of much poignant sorrow to us that sin still cleaves to us, that it mingles with our most solemn services, and mars our most sacred joys? Is not heaven endeared to us by this, that we shall be holy as God is holy, and so be the objects of the divine complacency? We rejoice in the hope of glory, not merely because we shall be freed from all trials, calamities, and sorrows, and shall be perfectly happy, but chiefly because there we shall be purified from all that is base and impure—shall behold the divine glory in the Redeemer, and shall be perpetually delighted with new accessions of knowledge, holiness, and spiritual bliss. It is to this that our highest hopes are turned, and it is this that hallows and delights our spirits in the prospect of futurity. The Saviour will present his church holy and unblamable in the sight of Jehovah, and

will thus gratify the desires of his people, and consummate their joys. How sweet the thought that we shall lie down at the close of our day below—fall asleep in Christ, and open our eyes on a Sabbath in which the glories of the new creation shall be fully displayed, our souls satisfied with the likeness of God, and our hearts animated with the spirit of the heavenly family! It is our duty, and likewise our high privilege, to enter by faith into this wonderful assembly, and to join the innumerable multitude of the redeemed in giving praise to him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. The very anticipation of bliss so exalted, feeble as is our highest conception of it, is fitted to fill with joy inexpressible; and what then must it be to enjoy it in all its grandeur and spiritual glory! Here, even in our highest joys, we see only as in a glass darkly; but in the life to come we shall see God face to face. In the heavenly rest we shall remember all the way in which we have been led through the wilderness, and there shall “we be glad according to the days wherein we have been afflicted, and the years wherein we have seen evil.”

This sabbatism will be very different from that enjoyed in the earthly paradise. Not only have we life, but life “more abundantly,” through Christ, who hath not merely restored what was lost, but hath raised to bliss inconceivably higher. In the garden of Eden, Adam contemplated the divine wisdom, power, and goodness, as manifested in creation and providence; but the display was but partial, and the effect on him corresponded to that partial display. Inadequate as it was, it was the only mould on which his character could be formed in that state of things. Though there was no contrariety in his mind to the character of God, there was not that degree of positive resemblance which may now be attained, and of course his happiness

could not be equal to that of the redeemed. The view which he had of creative beneficial kindness, and unstained purity, was a very scanty exhibition of him who inhabiteth eternity. The power, wisdom, and goodness of God, are much more displayed in the gospel of peace, and there we see also the divine mercy and grace, of which Adam knew nothing, in connexion with the holiness and justice of heaven. It is the glory of the gospel that it makes manifest how the God of holiness and righteousness,—who from the perfection of his very goodness, must hold sin in utter abhorrence, and must, as the Ruler of all things, decidedly condemn it,—can not only grant forgiveness to sinners, but elevate them to a state of such grandeur as the earthly paradise can but very faintly illustrate, and with which it can hardly be compared. The plan of redemption is expressly intended to be a comprehensive and adequate exhibition of the character of God. Here he is seen, not merely as he appears in the works of nature, even in their highest glory, in which little can be known of him; but in a light which is calculated to satisfy the most enlarged desires, and the most important cravings of the heart. The views given of him in the earthly paradise were suited to the state of Adam, but the exhibition of his character in the gospel is connected with the glory and blessedness of the Lord from heaven. The full blaze of his glory will not be seen by us till we enter the invisible world. We have yet to learn what is the fulness of the divine character, but the hope of seeing it fills with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

There is an unspeakable pleasure in contemplating the glory of God, as manifested in making the entrance of sin and misery into the world, the occasion of a full display of his character. His wisdom and goodness have educed from the fall a more stable and perfect order of things,

both in relation to his own glory and to the spiritual perfection and happiness of man, than that which existed before. From the entrance of sin there arose a series of actions which, in the scheme of redemption, exhibit the divine character in a much more definite and endearing light than it otherwise could have been.

In his first estate, man, as an upright creature, expressed the majesty of God, by obedience to his will; but as there was no distress to invigorate and display the excellence of piety, so there was no room for a manifestation of the divine delight in excellence thus tried and displayed. Had our Lord, supposing it to be possible, been in possession of the same power to save us which he now has, but without having had previous trial of our infirmities and sufferings, neither our present consolations, nor our future blessedness, could have been what they are. This, however, could not have been the character of our Redeemer, not only because in that case our guilt had not been expiated, but also because the character of God had not been fully manifested. We should have wanted that bright display, and pattern of every possible excellence, which is seen in his humiliation and sufferings, and we could not have been conformed to it, and thus assimilated to the whole of the divine character. In such circumstances, heaven had not been what it now is, even had it been possible for us to have been admitted to it.

If we always enjoyed ease and worldly prosperity, one important and great mark of resemblance to the Saviour would unavoidably be wanting in us, as we should be in a condition which must of necessity preclude us from imitating the transcendent qualities which adorned his character as the afflicted one. But when we are called to partake of the afflictions of the body of Christ, and to fill up that

portion of them which falls to our share among all his genuine disciples, Col. i. 24, ; we are put in a condition to resemble him more completely than otherwise we could have done. The meaning of the apostle in the passage I have just referred to, cannot be, that the sufferings and atoning work of Christ were imperfect, or that any thing could be added to his righteousness ; but, as the Saviour is the head of his body the Church, so he uses the appellation *Christ*, to include the members as well as the head. 1 Cor. xii. 12. Now, as the members are destined to be conformed to him in glory, it is necessary, in order to this, that they be previously so in sufferings ; and as when the members were persecuted, the head complained from heaven, Acts ix. 4. so here the afflictions of the people of Christ are called his afflictions, because they are borne by his members, with whom, as their head, he tenderly sympathises, and also because many of them are endured in the profession of his truth. Of these afflictions, a certain measure is allotted to every Christian, and his enduring of them is necessary to *fill up* his proportion of what is appointed to the whole ; and as each member is designed to promote the general good, his share is borne for the sake of the body of Christ, which is the church.

This conformity to him as a meek and cheerful sufferer, invigorates the great principles of genuine religion, and capacitates us for more enlarged enjoyment. It is consequently fitted to increase the strength of our hope in this world of trial, Rom. v. 4, 5, and the measure of our bliss in the world to come. 2 Cor. iv. 17. Though here we shall have tribulation, yet in him we have peace ; and amidst all our troubles we have reason to rejoice, since he hath overcome the world, and hath done so to ensure us the victory at last. John xvi. 33. This is the blessed

inference to be drawn from his victory over all the evils that we have to encounter below. Indeed the mere fact that he overcame the world and all our enemies when they attacked him, could not of itself comfort and encourage us. So far from this, the recollection of his dignity and power, and of our insignificance and weakness, if we dwell not on his public character, may damp our spirits in the prospect of the conflict. But the recollection that he fought as our leader, that in this character he was attacked, that it was in our cause he combated and conquered, that our enemies are thus enfeebled, that he lives and reigns that he may be the Captain of our salvation, and that he hath promised to give us the victory, must animate and embolden us in our warfare. Surely he who hath thus conquered may well ask us to confide in him, and to engage every foe, in the firm persuasion that, through him that loved us, we shall be more than conquerors. Since all that happens in the present state leaves a permanent impression on our eternity, and constitutes it happiness or misery, how precious the privilege of the guidance of him who is head over all things for the sake of his church, and who is making all the occurrences of this fleeting scene work together for our good. At first by his creating power he stamped beauty upon that which before was all confusion and darkness; but he gives a more striking display of his character, when in the new creation he makes disorder and deformity give place to moral and spiritual harmony and glory.

What a grandeur then, is there in the hope of beholding the innumerable multitude of the saved united in one holy and eternal kingdom unto God, and every one of them an archetype of the splendid glories which shine in the heavenly Adam! Is it not most refreshing to mark the gradual

progress of this new creation since the day that the first promise was made, and to dwell on the glory of that sacrifice, which is the foundation and security of the whole. When the long progressive work shall be finished, then shall the Godhead shine forth in all the plenitude of beauty, grandeur, and glory. A new heaven and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem, shall rise to our view as a fit habitation for God, and the everlasting abode of righteousness. Then shall the glorious author of the whole pronounce all to be good. Every individual of the redeemed shall reflect the glory of his image. The whole erection will exhibit the very perfection of moral and spiritual beauty. Contemplating his likeness in multitudes conformed into the very image of his own excellence, Jehovah will rest in them with high complacency. He will survey with deep and delightful interest the character of the head of this hallowed community, and will hear with the most exalted pleasure, the songs of admiration and of praise which shall rise to the Redeemer from every side, as expressions of regard to worth, and of gratitude for the blessings of mercy, so freely and richly bestowed through his precious atonement. The whole multitude of the heavenly host, both angels and redeemed sinners, shall rest in Jehovah as manifested in the new creation, as the fountain of ineffable blessedness and joy, ages without end.

Such shall be the glorious issue of the plan of redemption. Who, on looking to it, can fail to say, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee O people, saved by the Lord." "The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord."

I am, &c.

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