

C-11

W3494

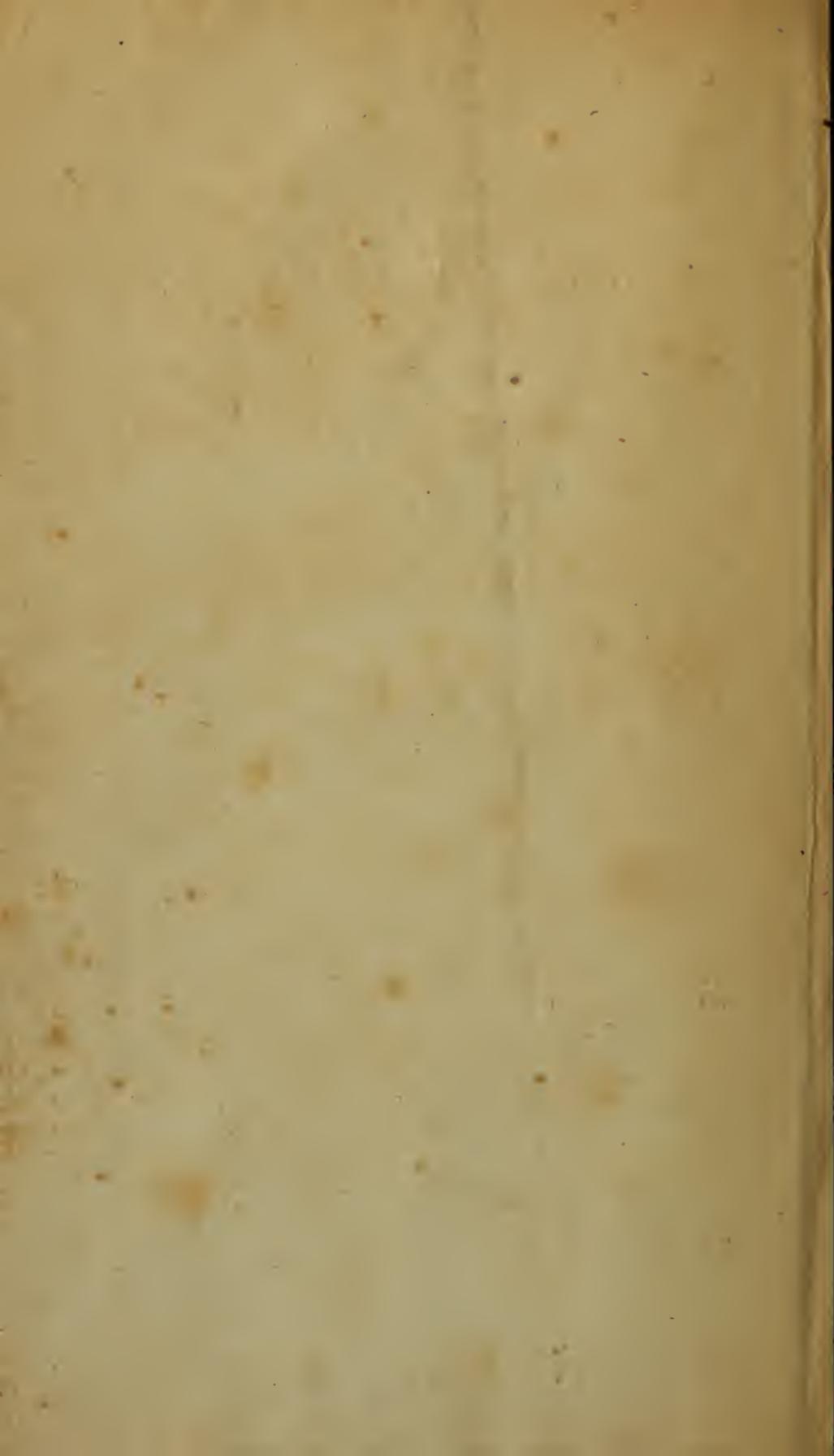
15
3.13.12.

From the Library of
Professor William Miller Parson, D. D., LL. D.
Presented by Mrs. Parson
to the Library of
Princeton Theological Seminary

SCB
11021

Handwritten text, possibly a name or title, in cursive script.





A

RATIONAL DEFENCE

OF THE

GOSPEL.



✓

BY ISAAC WATTS, D. D.

WITH A PREFACE
✓
BY A. ALEXANDER, D. D.



NEW-YORK:
JONATHAN LEAVITT.

BOSTON:
CROCKER & BREWSTER.

.....

• 1831.

Wm. D'Hart, Printer, {
Princeton, N. J. }

PREFACE.

No writer among the English dissenters has acquired more deserved celebrity than Dr. Watts. His works are numerous and on various subjects; but most of them are calculated to be useful. His style is remarkable for its simplicity, perspicuity, and smoothness. It is pure English, and intelligible by the meanest capacity. But that which is the distinguishing excellence of his theological writings is, the vein of evangelical piety which runs through them. It is evident to every impartial and intelligent reader, that Dr. Watts was a sincere lover of truth, and that he had thought profoundly on the subjects discussed by his pen. On some points, it is true, he adopted peculiar opinions, different from the common belief; and in his dissertations on some of the mysterious doctrines of our holy religion, he indulged his fertile mind in speculations which to us appear too bold, and by which his own mind seems to have been

somewhat bewildered. But on all practical subjects, I scarcely know an author who has expressed evangelical truth in a more perspicuous and felicitous manner. And I conceive that it is a real loss to the Christian community that some of the most valuable productions of this author's pen, are now not in circulation, or known only to those who possess copies of his whole works. Some of these were intended especially for the common people, and ought to be again given to the public, in a separate form, and in cheap and convenient editions.

The small work which is here presented to the reader, was, never before, it is believed, printed separately; but when published originally by the author, formed a part of a series of "Discourses on various Subjects," in two volumes, 12mo., and has since been comprised in the collection of his works, of which several valuable editions have been published. These short and pithy discourses, on a very important subject, were no doubt demanded by the state of society when they were first written; but they contain nothing which adapts them more to that

age, than to the one in which our lot is cast. Indeed, there never has been a period, since the reformation, when infidelity assumed a bolder front, or more freely vented her blasphemies against God and his Holy Word, than the present. And such is the menacing appearance of this deadly evil in our most populous cities, that it is a duty incumbent on every friend of Divine Revelation to lend his aid, to check the torrent of error, which will be sure to spread desolation through all its course. Books of very different kinds may be highly useful in this cause. Men who are unconvinced by one sort of arguments, may yield to those of another kind; and often when the elaborate and learned treatise is thrown aside unopened, the brief and popular argument of a few pages will be read with profit. The reader, however, must not expect, in this small volume, a formal, historical view of the evidences of divine revelation;—this was not the object of the author. It was rather intended to furnish an answer to some of the more common and popular objections which sceptics make to revealed religion, and to exhibit the richness and free-

ness of the gospel of the grace of God ; and, moreover, to explain the terms on which sinful men may become partakers of its inestimable blessings. In my opinion, the work is calculated to be eminently useful to those who will seriously and impartially peruse it, not only by removing doubts and objections which relate to the truth of Christianity, but also by unfolding the true nature of the plan of salvation, and by making a salutary impression on the heart. And that it may, by the blessing of God, be useful to many, is our sincere prayer.

If this little volume should be favorably received, so as to indemnify the publisher for his expense and labor, he will immediately put to press "CHRISTIAN MORALITY," by the same author, which, though entirely distinct in its subject, was originally published in the same volume with the DISCOURSES which are now presented to the public.

Before I conclude this preface, I will, for the satisfaction of such as have not attended to the subject, extract the character of Dr. Watts as a writer, from THE LIVES OF THE POETS, by Doctor Johnson.

“Every man, acquainted with the common principles of human action, will look with veneration on the writer who is at one time combating Locke, and at another making a catechism for children in their fourth year. A voluntary descent from the dignity of science is perhaps the hardest lesson that humility can teach.

“As his mind was capacious, his curiosity excursive, and his industry continual, his writings are very numerous, and his subjects various. With his theological works I am only enough acquainted to admire his meekness of opposition, and his mildness of censure. It was not only in his book but in his mind that orthodoxy was united with charity.

“Of his philosophical pieces, his Logic has been received into the universities, and therefore wants no private recommendation: if he owes part of it to Le Clerc, it must be considered that no man who undertakes merely to methodise or illustrate a system, pretends to be its author.

“In his metaphysical disquisitions, it was observed by the late learned Mr. Dyer, that he confounded the idea of space, with that of

empty space, and did not consider, that though space might be without matter, yet matter being extended, could not be without space.

“Few books have been perused by me with greater pleasure than his IMPROVEMENT OF THE MIND, of which the radical principles may indeed be found in Locke’s CONDUCT OF THE UNDERSTANDING, but they are so expanded and ramified by Watts, as to confer upon him the merit of a work in the highest degree useful and pleasing. Whoever has the care of instructing others, may be charged with deficiency in his duty if this book is not recommended.

“I have mentioned his treatises of Theology as distinct from his other productions: but the truth is, that whatever he took in hand was, by his incessant solicitude for souls, converted to theology. As piety predominated in his mind, it is diffused over his works; under his direction it may be truly said, *Theologiæ Philosophia ancillatur*, philosophy is subservient to evangelical instruction; it is difficult to read a page without learning, or at least wishing, to be better. The attention is caught by indirect instruction, and he that sat down only to reason is on a sudden compelled to pray.

“It was therefore with great propriety that, in 1728, he received from Edinburgh and Aberdeen an unsolicited diploma, by which he became a Doctor of divinity. Academical honors would have more value, if they were always bestowed with equal judgment.

“He continued many years to study and to preach, and to do good by his instruction and example; till at last the infirmities of age disabled him from the more laborious part of his ministerial functions, and, being no longer capable of public duty, he offered to remit the salary appendant to it; but his congregation would not accept the resignation.

“By degrees his weakness increased, and at last confined him to his chamber and his bed; where he was worn gradually away without pain, till he expired, Nov. 25, 1748, in the seventy-fifth year of his age.

“Few men have left behind such purity of character, or such monuments of laborious piety. He has provided instruction for all ages, from those who are lisping their first lessons, to the enlightened readers of Malbranche and Locke; he has left neither corporal nor spiritual nature unexamined; he has

taught the art of reasoning, and the science of the stars.

“His character, therefore, must be formed from the multiplicity and diversity of his attainments, rather than from any single performance; for it would not be safe to claim for him the highest rank in any single denomination of literary dignity; yet perhaps there was nothing in which he would not have excelled, if he had not divided his powers to different pursuits.

“As a poet, had he been only a poet, he would probably have stood high among the authors with whom he is now associated. For his judgment was exact, and he noted beauties and faults with very nice discernment; his imagination, as the DACIAN BATTLE proves, was vigorous and active, and the stores of knowledge were large by which his fancy was to be supplied. His ear was well tuned, and his diction was elegant and copious. But his devotional poetry is, like that of others, unsatisfactory. The paucity of its topics enforces perpetual repetition, and the sanctity of the matter rejects the ornaments of figurative diction. It is sufficient for

Watts to have done better than others what no man has done well.”*

Although the name of Dr. Watts has been exposed to no small obloquy, since his death, on account of some of his opinions; yet it has fallen to the lot of few men to be so highly

* This insinuation of Dr. Johnson, that devotional poetry is incapable of high excellence on account of the paucity of its topics, and its rejection of the ornaments of figurative diction, has always appeared to me unjust, and calculated to make a wrong impression. We want no other proof of its incorrectness, than the devotional poetry contained in the Bible. But, is it true, that all devotional poetry in our language is “unsatisfactory?” No one will make the assertion who has a taste for compositions of this kind. To strengthen the opinion here expressed, I will cite a passage from an “Essay” of the amiable and pious poet, James Montgomery, which is prefixed to his “CHRISTIAN PSALMIST.”

“There is an idle prejudice founded upon the misapprehension of a passage in Dr. Johnson’s Life of Waller, and a hint of like nature in his life of Watts, that sacred subjects are unfit for poetry, nay, incapable of being combined with it. That their nature, majesty and grace, cannot be heightened by any art of embellishment, is most freely admitted; but that verse, as well as prose, may be advantageously associated with whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, in religion, we have the evidence of the Scriptures themselves, “in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms,” when they testify concerning Christ and his sufferings, in strains the most exalted that poesy can boast. We have evidence to the same effect, in many of the most exquisite and perfect compositions of uninspired poets, both in our own and in other countries.”—
“We are not without proof, that hymns may be as splendid in poetry, as they are fervent in devotion.”

honored in the church. The praises of a million of Christians are offered to God on every Lord's day, in the words composed by him. His Psalms and Hymns have been instrumental in aiding the devotions of a great multitude of saints, who have already finished their earthly pilgrimage; and will continue to be read and sung with delight, as long as the English language shall be spoken by Christians. And who is there, that has been nurtured in the admonition of the Lord, who does not recollect with pleasure, Dr. WATTS' DIVINE SONGS FOR INFANT MINDS? There is, therefore, less danger of the name of Dr. Watts being forgotten in our churches, than that of any other uninspired man. He may truly be styled the "SWEET SINGER OF OUR ISRAEL," to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude; or rather I should say, we owe many thanks to God for the gifts bestowed on his servant, by which he has been rendered so eminent an instrument in promoting the edification of the church. And we trust, that the thousands who experience, daily, the benefit of his sacred poetry, will not find his prose writings unworthy of their regard.

A. ALEXANDER.

Princeton, N. J. }
March, 28, 1831. }

A RATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL:

OR,

COURAGE IN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

ROM. i. 16.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

PART FIRST.

SHAME is a very discouraging passion of the mind: it sinks the spirits low, it enfeebles all the active powers, and forbids the vigorous execution of any thing whereof we are ashamed. It was necessary therefore, that St. Paul should be endued with sacred courage, and raised above the power of shame, when he was sent to preach the gospel of Christ among the Jews or the heathens, to face an infidel world, and to break through all the reproaches and terrors of it. *I am a debtor*, says he, v. 14. *to the Greeks and to the Barbarians*, that is, to the learned and unlearned nations, to the wise and the unwise: 'I have a commission from

Christ to publish his gospel among all the nations of men, and I esteem myself their debtor until I have delivered my message. And though Rome be the seat of worldly power and policy, the mistress of the nations and sovereign of the earth, where I shall meet with opposition and contempt in abundance, yet I have courage enough to preach this doctrine at Rome also, for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'

My friends, this is an age wherein the gospel of our Redeemer meets with much contempt and opposition. There are many in a baptized nation, and who have been brought up in the christian belief and worship, that begin to be weary of Christ and his religion; they are endeavouring to find blemishes and defects in this sacred gospel, and in that blessed word of God that reveals this grace to us. The divine truths that belong to this gospel meet with mockery and profane reproach from deists and unbelievers. I may call it therefore a day of rebuke and blasphemy. God grant we may never become a land of heathens again!—Those of us that believe this gospel from the heart, have need of courage to maintain our profession of it, especially in some companies and conversations. We should prepare ourselves

to encounter the reasonings of unbelievers, as well as harden our faces against their ridicule. Let us therefore meditate on this sacred text, that each of us may pronounce boldly the words of this great apostle, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Now that our meditations may proceed regularly on the present theme of discourse, let us consider,

I. What the gospel of Christ is, that we may not mistake it.

II. What is included in this expression, I am not ashamed of it.

III. What there is in this gospel that might be supposed any way to expose a man to shame. And I shall take occasion under this head to give particular answers to some of the most important objections that might be made against the gospel, and show that there is no just reason to be ashamed of it.

IV. I shall consider what is that general answer to all objections; that universal guard against sinful shame which is contained in my text, and which will bear out every christian in his faith and profession of the gospel of Christ, viz. that it is *the power of God to the salvation of every one who believes.*

V. I shall draw some proper inferences.

1. What is the gospel of Christ ?

I answer in general, it is a revelation of the grace of God to fallen man through a Mediator. Or, it is a gracious constitution of God for the recovery of sinful and miserable man from that deplorable state into which sin had brought him, by the mediation of Christ; or, in the words of my text, it is the power of God, or his powerful appointment for the salvation of every one who believes.

The word gospel, in the original, *εὐαγγέλιον* signifies good news or glad tidings. And surely, when a sinner, who is exposed to the wrath of God is sensible of his guilt and danger, it must needs be glad tidings to him to hear of a way of salvation and an all-sufficient Saviour.

This constitution of God for our salvation has had various editions, if I may so express it, or gradual discoveries of it, made to mankind, ever since Adam first sinned, and God visited him with the first promise of grace before he turned him out of Paradise.

But the last and most complete revelation of this gospel was made by the personal ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, and more especially, by his apostles, when his own death, resurrection and exaltation, had laid the complete foundation for it.

From the books of the New Testament, therefore, we may derive this larger description of the gospel of Christ.

It is a wise, a holy, and gracious constitution of God for the recovery of sinful man, by sending his own Son Jesus Christ into the flesh, to obey his law which man had broken, to make a proper atonement for sin by his death, and thus to procure the favor of God and eternal happiness for all that believe and repent, and receive the offered salvation; together with a promise of the Holy Spirit to work this faith and repentance in their hearts, to renew their sinful natures unto holiness, to form them on earth fit for this happiness, and to bring them to the full possession of it in heaven.

It might be proved that this is the sense and substance of the gospel of Christ, from many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the ceremonies and figures of the Jewish church, as well as from a variety of citations from the writings of the evangelists and apostles. Yet there have risen some persons (I mean the Socinians and their disciples) in the last age, and in this also, who call themselves christians, but they so curtail and diminish the gospel of Christ, as to make it signify very little more than the dictates and hopes of the light of na-

ture, viz: that if we repent of our sins past, and obey the commands of God as well as we can for the future, Christ, as a great prophet, has made a full declaration that there is pardon for such sinners, and they shall be accepted unto eternal life: and all this without any dependance on his death as a proper sacrifice, and with little regard to the operations of his holy Spirit.

Now I need use no other argument to refute this mistaken notion of the gospel, than what may be derived from the words of my text, viz: that St. Paul expresses it with a sort of emphasis, and as a matter of importance, that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.—Whereas, if this had been all the substance of the gospel, he had no reason to be ashamed of it, either among the Jews, or the heathens.—The Jews had a knowledge of forgiveness upon repentance, and a belief of it long before Christ came: and the heathen philosophers would have readily received it, as a thing very little different from what their natural reason might lead them to hope for, though it could not fully assure them of it, they would never have sought to expose and ridicule the preaching of St. Paul as mere babbling, and called him a setter forth of strange gods.

But on the other hand, if we suppose him publishing the glorious doctrine which I have described, there was something in this so strange to the ears of the heathens as well as of the blinded Jews, that might well be supposed to awaken their opposition and rage; and, therefore, it was a great point gained with him, when he had courage enough to maintain such a gospel, and to say, I am not ashamed of it.

This leads me to the second thing proposed.

II. What is included in these words, I am not ashamed of the gospel? To this I answer under these five heads.

1. I am not ashamed to believe it as a man.

2. I am not ashamed to profess it as a christian.

3. I am not ashamed to preach it to others as a minister.

4. I am not ashamed to defend it and contend for it as a good soldier of Christ.

5. I am not ashamed to suffer and die for it as a martyr.

1. I am not ashamed to believe this gospel as a man. My rational powers give me no secret reproaches. My understanding and judgment do not reprove and check my faith. I feel no inward blush upon the face of my soul, while I

give the fullest assent to all these truths, to this scheme of doctrine, to this heavenly contrivance and system of grace. A rational man, especially one who has been bred up in learning, should be ashamed to believe fables and follies; but I believe all this gospel and am not ashamed. My own reason approves it, and justifies me in the persuasion and belief of such a gospel as this is.'

'I believe it with so firm and unshaken a faith, that I venture all my own eternal concerns upon it. I lay all the stress of my hopes of a blessed immortality on it. My soul rests here, and I am not ashamed of my resting place:— I am not ashamed of my Saviour, and the method of his salvation. I am persuaded my hopes shall never disappoint me.'

Surely, if the gospel had been so very irrational a thing as some men pretend it to be, St. Paul being so rational and wise a man, would have been ashamed to believe it. But 'I believe it,' says he, 'and am not ashamed. I do not think it casts any just reflection upon my rational capacities, or my learned education at the feet of Gamaliel, for me to give a full assent to this gospel.'

2. 'I am not ashamed to profess it as a Christian. I am ready to tell the world that I believe

it, and I take all occasions to let the world know it. I am coming to profess this gospel at Rome, and am not ashamed: I have owned it before my own countrymen the Jews, already, where it has been most reproached. I have been telling the Gentiles what the gospel of salvation is, and I long to see you at Rome, that I may tell you what my belief is in the gospel, and may hear how far you have believed, and may be *comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me*: Rom. i. 12. I shall be glad to tell you what doctrines I venture my own soul upon, and shall be willing to hear from you whether you venture your souls upon the same doctrine or no; and shall rejoice to find we are both interested in one salvation.'

3. 'I am not ashamed to preach it to others as a minister; that is, to invite others to believe it. It is a communicable good, and I am sent to diffuse it, nor am I ashamed of my commission. See 2 Tim. 12, 13. Our Lord Jesus Christ has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel, and has appointed me a preacher, and an apostle to the Gentiles: I preach the gospel and am not ashamed, though I have suffered for it. I venture my soul upon it unto the last great day, and I bid thee, Timothy, as a preacher unto others,

to hold fast the same form of sound words which thou has learned of me. I long to teach the whole world this faith and this doctrine, therefore I am a debtor to the Greeks and Barbarians; I would make others partakers of the same hope. *Would to God, that not only thou, Agrippa, but all those that hear me, were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except only these bonds, these sufferings which I endure for Christ's sake:?* Acts xxvi. 29.

4. 'I am not ashamed to contend for it as a good soldier of Christ; to defend it when it is attacked, and to vindicate the cause of my Lord and Master. Where it is assaulted I endeavor to secure it, though with many reproaches from the carnal prejudices of mankind. I oppose them all, for they oppose my Saviour and his cross, and I build my everlasting hopes there. *I am set for the defence of the gospel of Christ:* Phil. i. 17, and I will contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.' And he gave us an instance of it, that when Peter, who was an apostle, seemed to diminish some of the glory and the liberty of the gospel, he *withstood him to the face:* Gal. ii. 11. 'There shall no man silence me, or stop my mouth, when I am preaching a crucified Saviour, and when I express my faith

in the liberty and latitude of the gospel of Christ. For if I durst withstand an apostle under his criminal concealments, and in his diminution of the honor of this doctrine, surely I dare oppose all the world besides.'

5. Lastly, 'I am not ashamed to suffer and die for it as a martyr. Load me with reproaches, ye Jews, my countrymen, and load me with chains, ye magistrates of Rome; of none of these am I ashamed or afraid, but with all boldness I am always ready that Christ should be magnified in my life, or my death: Phil. i. 14, 20. And as for my friends that are full of sorrow lest Paul should be sacrificed for the faith of Christ, Why mourn ye and break my heart? I am not only ready to be bound, but to die for the sake of Christ. I count nothing dear to me, no nor my life precious to myself, that I may finish with joy the course of my ministry of this gospel, that I may testify the grace of my God: Acts xx. 24, and xxi. 13.

I might add also, that St. Paul intends and means more than he expresses by a very usual figure of speech, 'I am not ashamed of it, that is, I glory in it, I make my boast of it; if there be any doctrine worth boasting of, it is the gospel of Christ. If I have any profession to glory in, it is that I am a Christian. Once I was a

Pharisee, and I counted it my gain and my honor:’ Phil. iii. 4, &c. *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. I glory in being a minister of the gospel; it is the highest honor God could have put upon me, who am less than the least of all saints. To me is this grace given to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ: Eph. iii. 8. I glory in it to that degree, that I am dead to all things else. God forbid I should glory in any thing save in the cross of our Lord Jesus, whereby the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. I glory in my sufferings for Christ; and, my friends, if ye understood the value of these things, they are your glory too. If I am offered up a sacrifice for the service of your faith; I joy and rejoice together with you all: O! that you would but rejoice together with me in it.’*

Thus, I have showed you that all these things are implied in St. Paul’s not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and I have proved it to you from other parts of his epistles.

The third general head I proposed to speak to, was this,

III. What is there in this gospel that may be supposed to expose any man to shame ?

And this question is very needful ; for if there were nothing in it that men might take occasion to throw their scandals and reproaches at, it had been no great matter for St. Paul to have cried out, *'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,'*

To this I answer in general, this was a gospel that contradicted the rooted prejudices of the Jews, and was severely reproached by those that professed great knowledge in their law ; it was also a new and strange thing to the Gentiles. A crucified Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greek : 1 Cor. 1. 23. There was something in the faith and practice and worship of the gospel, so contrary to the course of their education in the world, so opposite to their carnal inclinations, and to the customs and fashions of their country, that a man might well be afraid and ashamed to profess it, when they lift their tongues and their hands and their swords against it ; and the chief of them crucified the Lord of glory, and put the preachers of it to death.

Thus, in general. But while I descend to particulars, I shall confine myself only to those occasions of shame, which the same gospel meets with in our day, that so the discourse

may be more useful to the present audience ; and as I mention each objection or supposed occasion of shame, I shall endeavor to take off the force of it, and shew that it is unreasonable.

Now the things that might any ways be supposed to expose this gospel to shame, may be ranked under these two heads.

I. Those which arise from the doctrines of the gospel: and

II. Those which arise from the professors of the gospel.

I. The occasions of shame that arise from the doctrines of the gospel, are these five that follow.

1. 'That there are mysteries in it which are above the powers of our reason to comprehend, and I will never believe a gospel that I cannot comprehend.' This is the language of Socinians, men that pretend so much to reason in our day.

But to relieve this occasion of shame, let us consider, that mysteries are of two sorts.

1. Such as we could never have known, but by divine revelation ; but being once revealed, they may be fairly explained and understood. Such is the doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ, of the resurrection of the dead, of forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ's sufferings, and of

eternal life in a future world. I say, these are all mysteries that were hid from ages, that is, they are such truths which nature or reason could not have found out of itself, but being once revealed to us of God, may be fairly explained and well understood.

Another sort of mysteries, are those, which when revealed unto us, we know merely the existence or reality and certainty of them, but cannot comprehend the mode and manner how they are. And of this kind there are but two that I know of in our religion, which are the chief objects of offence to some men. These are the mystery of the blessed Trinity, and the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. The mystery of Three Persons, who have some glorious communion in one Godhead; and the mystery of two natures united in one Person.

Now, though the way and manner how Three Persons, Father, Son and Spirit, should be one God, and how two natures, human and divine, should be one Person in Christ Jesus; I say, though the way and manner how these things are, is not so easy to be explained and unfolded by us, and above our own present capacity to comprehend and fully explain, yet I could never find these things proved impossible to be. If I must refuse to believe a thing that I know not

the manner and nature of, there are many things in the world of nature and in natural religion that I must disbelieve. Let them explain to me in natural religion what is the eternity of God, what ideas they can have of a Being that never began to be; and then perhaps I may be able to explain to them how Three Persons can be one God, and how two natures can be in one Person. I am well assured, there are some doctrines in natural religion as difficult to be explained, and hard to be understood, and the manner of them is as mysterious, as these doctrines of revealed religion, which are also rendered more offensive by some men's attempts to explain them in an unhappy manner.

But we may go a step lower to meet this objection, and confound it. In the world of nature there are mysteries of this kind, which are as unaccountable, and as hard to be unfolded, as the mysteries of grace. It is the doctrine of *unions*, both in the Trinity and the incarnation, which renders them so mysterious. Now this doctrine of unions in Natural Philosophy hath been hitherto insolvable. We know that spirit and body are united to make a man: but the manner how they are united, remains still a most difficult question. We know that some bodies are hard, and some are soft; but what

it is that ties or unites the hard bodies so closely together, and makes them so difficult to be separated, is a riddle to the best philosophers, which they cannot solve; or, what it is that renders the parts of soft bodies so easily separable. And many other things there are in nature as mysterious as this.

Besides, if it were possible for us to explain all things in nature, and to write a perfect book of Natural Philosophy, with accurate skill, yet it would not follow that we must know God the Creator to perfection. The things of God are infinitely superior to the things of men. The nature of a Creator, in his manner of existence, is infinitely above the nature of creatures in theirs. 'Tis fit there should be something belonging to God, an Infinite Spirit, that is incomprehensible, and above the power of finite spirits to comprehend and fully search out and explain. It ought, therefore, to be no just ground of shame to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it has mysteries in it; that is to say, has some doctrines in it which we could never have found out by the mere light of reason; and some truths the full manner of explication whereof we can never attain to, since there are many things in the world of nature, in the world of bodies and

souls, and many things in natural religion, which we cannot fully explain.

2. Another occasion of reproach, which men fasten upon the gospel, is, that some of the doctrines are so singular and contrary to the common opinions and reasonings of men; such as that the ever blessed God should want a satisfaction, in order to pardon sin with honor; that he should punish the most innocent and obedient man that ever lived, even his own Son, for the sins of wicked and rebellious creatures; that we should be freed from hell, which we had deserved, by the sufferings of another in our stead; that one man should be justified with another's obedience; nay, that ten thousands of men should be pardoned and justified for the sake of the obedience and death of one single man; that all our own repentance is not sufficient of itself to obtain our pardon; that our holiness be it never so great, does not procure us a title to the favor of God and heaven; and that dead bodies, though mouldered in the grave for thousands of years, should be raised again to life and immortality. These are such strange doctrines, so very foreign to the common sentiments of most men, that some of the Athenians cried out, 'what does this babbler mean? A man should be ashamed

of these things ; the very heathen philosophers called it foolishness.'

But now to remove this scandal, let us consider, that many of these things are not so contrary to the reason of men as some think : for as to the satisfaction made for our sins by the sufferings of Christ, did not almost all the heathen world suppose that God would not pardon sin without satisfaction ? What else mean all their bloody sacrifices ? And why did they sometimes proceed so far as to murder men and offer them to God for their sins ? I confess, indeed, that many of the philosophers and learned men amongst them who derided the gospel of Christ, did also despise the sacrifices and religious ceremonies of their own countrymen, believing that God would be merciful to men that were penitent and pious, without any rites of atonement and sacrifice. But it is as evident, also, that the people had a general notion of the necessity of some atonement for sin, and that the more valuable the sacrifice was, the sooner was their god appeased, and the benefit procured would be more extensive, however the philosophers might ridicule it. It is manifest then, that many of the heathens did imagine, that the death and sufferings of one person should procure pardon and immunities for a whole multitude. And,

upon this principle, some of the ancient Romans, now and then, out of nobility of spirit, devoted themselves to death to appease the anger of the Gods for their whole country. Thus it appears, that the business of satisfaction for sin, and the doctrine of expiation and atonement by the blood and death of a surety, was not so utterly unknown in the world.

I add farther, that the notion of one person's making satisfaction for the crime of another, in human and political affairs, has been sometimes practised, and thought to be very intelligible; and why should it be counted so very monstrous and absurd, in things divine? Do we not understand what it is for one man to become a surety for another, or for a criminal to be set free from punishment by the voluntary substitution of another person in his stead? Are we not well acquainted with what it is for one man to pay the debt of another, and the original person that was obliged thereby, to become free? Do we not know what it is for a whole family of children to inherit a possession for many ages, one after another, for some noble acts and services of their father? Therefore, honor, and glory, and happiness, bestowed upon a multitude for the sake of what one man has done, is not so unintelligible a thing as some men would persuade us.

Why should that be esteemed impossible in the affairs of religion, which is evident and plainly practicable in the affairs of this world?

Again, they think it strange that our repentance should not be enough to obtain the pardon of past sins, and our own obedience should not procure heaven for us. But are not traitors, and robbers, and all notorious criminals punished in all governments, notwithstanding their repentance? Can their sorrow for what is past procure a pardon of their prince? Who then would be punished? And is man's government in punishing criminals without a satisfaction just and reasonable? And shall God's government be counted unreasonable? Can future obedience among men obtain no forgiveness for past treason and rebellion? And why then should you think the great God is obliged to accept of it?

As for the resurrection of the dead, though it was counted a strange thing among heathens when it was first preached to them; yet in these latter days, since the knowledge of God and his glorious attributes has been so much increased, and the reason of men has freely exercised itself upon things divine and human, the resurrection is not counted any impossible thing, nor the doctrine of it incredible. And I am verily persuaded, if men whom God has endued with

large capacities and great skill in reasoning, would but employ those talents to write a rational account of most of the doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ, it might be done with much glory and success.

As for those few doctrines of Christianity, which may at first appear less reasonable to men, their abundant attestation from heaven demands our belief.

3. Another occasion of reproach is, that the gospel teaches mortification and self-denial, in a very great degree conflicting with our natural appetites, and fighting against our own flesh and blood : and all that it promises is an unseen heaven, a future reward, a far distant happiness in another country, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard of, nor the heart of man conceived. A mere spiritual pleasure that is to be enjoyed by the mind, and which the body shall not taste of, till perhaps after a thousand years or more. Now, as under the former head, the doctrines of the gospel are a scandal to men of *reason* ; so under this they become a scandal and reproach to those that are literally called men of *sense*, who are carnalized and immersed in sensuality. They think it strange to forego the joys of sense, for the hopes of enjoying a happiness in a world they don't know when or where.

But I need not stand long to answer this calumny ; for even some of the refined philosophers gave sufficient rebuke to this sensual temper. The very heathens could say enough to abash this censure, and to remove this occasion of shame, though the gospel of Christ does it infinitely better.

Christianity does not abridge us of the common comforts of flesh and blood, nor lay an unreasonable restraint upon any natural appetite ; but it teaches us to live like men, and not like brutes ; to regulate and manage our animal nature with its desires and inclinations, so as to enjoy life in the most proper and becoming manner ; to eat and drink and taste the bounties of Providence to the honor of our Creator, and to the best interest of our souls.

But suppose, we were forbid all the indulgence of our appetites and the delights of sense, by the gospel ; surely, those who know what intellectual pleasures are, who can relish the joy that belongs to spirits, will not be much terrified with these objections, nor deride the faith of Christ because it does not propose to them the reward of an earthly paradise. The rewards of the gospel are indeed spiritual till the resurrection, but those spiritual pleasures shall vastly over-balance all that toil, sorrow, and suf-

fering we have passed through on earth, and all that self-denial which we have exercised. But when the body shall be raised again, our refined delights, of all kinds, shall be infinitely satisfying: We shall not say, that God has dealt out happiness to us with a niggardly hand, but that he has exceeded all his promises, when we shall come to taste the things God has prepared for us, which eye has not seen, or ear heard of.

4. Another prejudice against the gospel is this. Some persons charge it with much of enthusiasm; and that the doctrine of the operations of the Spirit, and the expectation of his divine assistance to instruct us in truth, to mortify sin in us, and to enable us to perform holy duties, has too much of a visionary and fanciful turn of mind, and does not become men that profess reason.

But, if such objectors were but better acquainted with themselves, and knew the weakness of their own reason in the search after truth, and the various and plausible errors that attend their inquiries on every side; if they were better acquainted with the strength of temptation, the power of their own sinful appetites, and the weakness of their will to resist sin, and to fulfil the rules of righteousness; surely, they would not think it a thing to lift up

a prayer to the great God to guide them into truth, and to assist them to walk steadily in the paths of religion and virtue. If they had but a deep and lively sense of their own insufficiency for every thing that's good, and of the many dangers and enemies that beset them, they would rather see infinite reason to bless their Creator, that has given them any promise or hope of the aids of his grace.

Nor is it at all fantastical or irrational to suppose, that the great and blessed God, who made these spirits of ours, should kindly act upon them, and influence them by secret and divine methods, to their duty and their happiness; that he should send his own Spirit to help them onward in their proper business, which is to serve him here, and assist them in pursuit of their true blessedness, which is to enjoy him hereafter.

It methinks it is one of the glories of this gospel of Christ, that God has not only sent his Son to purchase heaven for us, but continually sends down his own Spirit to lead every humble Christian in the way thither. When a poor penitent creature, distressed under a sense of the power of sin dwelling in him, who has long and often toiled and labored to bring his heart near to God, and to suppress the irregu-

lar and exorbitant appetites of his nature, addresses himself to the throne of God, and cries earnestly for divine help; it is a glorious provision that is made in the gospel of Christ, that the Spirit of God is promised for our assistance. Nor is at all unworthy of a person of the greatest reason, and the best understanding, humbly to wait and hope for the accomplishment of this promise. Thus the charge of enthusiasm vanishes, and the gospel maintains its honor.

5. The last objection against the doctrines of the gospel of Christ is, that 'they are not sufficiently attested, that there is not ground enough given to credit the divinity of them in our age.'

They are ready to say, 'These things were done (according as ourselves profess) above sixteen hundred years ago, and we have not sufficient credentials to venture our faith upon at this day.'

It would be too long here to repeat over to you half the grounds we have for faith in this gospel. That there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived at such a time at Jerusalem; that he wrought wonderful works in his own country, is not at all disbelieved by those that profess any reasonable faith in human

history. The Jews themselves, who were his greatest enemies, do not deny that he wrought those miracles, which others could not work ; but they pretended that he did it by some magic art, by diabolical charms ; and wrought miracles, not by the power of God, but by virtue derived from spells and evil spirits. So that the miracles he wrought were not disbelieved and denied, but the heavenly spring of them is impiously perverted and turned downward, as though Christ borrowed his power from hell to transact these affairs. But the holiness and the heavenly temper of the gospel of Christ, refutes this accusation. Satan was never known to demolish his own kingdom of ungodliness in such a manner as this. The gospel of Christ, in every part of it, has a most singular and sublime tendency to advance the name, the attributes and the honor of God, whom Satan hates with a perfect hatred. He would never lend his assisting hand to support a scheme of religion so divine and holy.

Never was any body of doctrines and of duties so composed and calculated to promote the glory of God, nor the good of man, as this gospel does. Our peace and happiness would be secured by it on earth, if all men would comply with it, and our felicity after death is

the great and indefeasible proposal and design of it. Now Satan is a restless enemy to men his fellow-creatures, as well as to God his Maker; and he would never exert the remains of his angelic power to encourage and defend such a pious and beneficent religion.

But the most amazing progress and success of the gospel, is another argument that proves it to be divine, even when devils and magicians opposed it as well as princes and philosophers. That the gospel itself, without the force of arms, that a naked gospel, should spread itself throughout the world, in so short a space of time, and that by the preaching of a few despised persons, and several of them fishermen that were utterly unlearned: that this gospel should triumph over all the powers and policies of men and hell: that it should make its way in opposition to the wisdom of philosophers, and the will of princes, and all the temptations and terrors of this world: this is another miracle, which perhaps is as divine and convincing as any of the preceding wonders that attested this gospel, when it was first preached.

I add also the testimony of prophecy to that of miracles. The wondrous and exact accomplishment of many prophecies, since our Lord

Jesus Christ dwelt on earth in the days of his flesh, confirm his gospel. The prophecies that he himself gave forth from God is another testimony to this gospel, which is uncontrollable. The destruction of Jerusalem, the time and methods of its destruction, and the terrors of it, may be read in Matthew, xxiv. And if you read the history of Josephus, a Jew, you find so many parallels, that you must say Christ did foretel it indeed.

I might here subjoin the predictions of the apostles, particularly that of St. Paul and St. John, concerning the rise and spirit of Antichrist, wherein the church of Rome so clearly answers the language of the visions and prophecies.

But the brightest and most uncontrollable witness of prophecy to the truth of the gospel, is the most exact and punctual accomplishments of all the predictions of the Old Testament, in the life and death, the resurrection and glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. From the first promise given to Adam in the garden, down to the words of Malachi, the last of the prophets, you find every thing that was said of him, fulfilled in his history. And thus the books of the Jews, wherein they placed all their hopes, confirm the gospel of Christ,

and refute and confound their own infidelity : so that if ever I had been a Jew, and did believe Moses and the prophets, I think I am constrained to be a Christian, and believe in Jesus Christ.

Thus I have endeavored to answer those objections against the gospel, which are pretended to arise from the truths or doctrines of it : and before I proceed to answer those cavils which are raised against it because of the professors of it, I must finish the present discourse with a word or two of improvement.

USE 1. If this be a gospel not to be ashamed of, then study it well : learn the truths and doctrines of it thoroughly : truths and doctrines which St. Paul, so wise and so great a man, did not blush to profess, and preach, and die for. Value it as he valued it : the more you know it, the more you will esteem it ; and the better you are acquainted with all the glorious articles of it, the less you will be ashamed of it : the divine harmony of the whole will cast a beauty and lustre on every part.

USE 2. Furnish yourselves with arguments for it daily, that you may profess it without

shame, and defend it without blushing. This is a day of temptation, and you know not what conversation you may be called into by divine Providence; you know not what cavils you may meet with to assault your faith, and attack Christianity. Be ready, therefore, to give reasons of the hope that is in you, and to make a just and pertinent reply to gainsayers, and to convince those, if possible, that are led away captive by the wiles of the devil, to forsake Christ and his gospel. Let not every turn of wit or sleight of argument and sophistry, make you waver in your faith. It is a gospel that will bear the trial of reasonings and reproaches. It has something in itself that is divine, and therefore it is able to support the professors of it against an army of cavillers.

USE 3. Submit to all the institutions of it. Profess the whole of this gospel; not only the doctrines, but the ordinances of this gospel, are divine and glorious; they have something in them that show they come from God, and they have something in them that evidently leads to God. They have all something in their sense and signification that discovers divinity. Wait upon God, therefore, in all his ordinances in the assemblies of Christians, that you may see his

power and his glory, in his own sanctuary ; and that you may, from your own experience, be able to say, that the gospel is too great, too glorious, too divine a thing in its doctrine and worship, and in all its institutions, for you ever to be ashamed of. It has now, for sixteen ages endured the test of the wit and the rage of earth and hell, and it shall stand in power and glory, till the heavens be no more.

AMEN.

A RATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL:

OR,

COURAGE IN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

ROM. i. 16.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

PART SECOND.

THERE are many in the world who call themselves Christians, and boast in the name; yet if you ask them what the gospel of Christ is, they are either struck into confusion and silence, or they give such an awkward and impertinent answer, as sufficiently discovers they know little of the religion of Christ, or of the sacred name into which they were baptized. Now, that we may act and speak as becomes persons indued with reason, I thought it necessary at first, to give some account what this gospel is, that you might know and understand the religion which you profess; and if ye will glory in the

name of Christian, ye may be able to tell what it is you mean by Christianity.

By reading the books of the New Testament wherein the gospel is contained, you will find this to be the sum and substance of it, viz: 'That it is a wise, a holy, and a gracious constitution of God, for the recovery of sinful man, by sending his own Son Jesus Christ into the flesh, to obey his law which man had broken, to make a proper atonement for sin by his death, and thus to procure the favor of God and eternal happiness, for all that believe and repent, and receive this offered salvation; together with a promise of the Holy Spirit, to work this faith and repentance in their hearts, to renew their sinful natures unto holiness, to form them on earth fit for this happiness, and to bring them to the full possession of it in heaven.'

I have shewn, in the next place, what St. Paul meant, when he told the Romans, he 'was not ashamed of this gospel:' he was neither ashamed to believe it as a man, nor to profess it as a Christian, nor to preach it to others as a minister, nor to defend it as a good soldier of Christ, nor to suffer and die for it as a martyr.

The third thing, which I proposed, was to make it appear, that 'all the occasions of

shame, which men of infidelity pretend to raise from this gospel, may be answered upon the fair and just principles of reason and argument.' The first sort of reproaches are those which are cast upon the doctrines of the gospel, and I hope I have rolled them away.

I repeat no more of these things, but proceed to the next sort of occasions of shame, and these are such as are supposed to arise from the professors of this Gospel; and I shall endeavor to shew you also how they may be answered. They are chiefly these four.

I. Some will say, 'The professors of this gospel, in the beginning, were the weak and foolish and mean things of this world; but it was despised by the wise, it was scorned by the great and honorable, and persecuted by the mighty. Why should a Paul, a Pharisee, a Doctor of the Law, become the follower of a carpenter's son, and associate with a parcel of fishermen? This is a scandal, and foolish indeed. *Who among the Pharisees or the rulers, have believed on him?* John vii. 48.' This was the stumbling block of the gospel in that age, and it is the stumbling block at which many persons take offence in our age, too. 'It is the unthinking multitude,' say they, 'the mere mob of mankind, that are led away with the noise of

strange things and the gospel. And it is only those who have no relish of good sense, that can dispense with mysteries. The poorer and weaker sort of men and women flock after your powerful preachers of the gospel, but wise men despise it.'

I am very glad, my friends, if in your conversation you meet with no such persons that ridicule the gospel at this rate. But there are many in our age and nation, arrived at this height of pride and contempt of the gospel.

This objection may have more answers than one given to it; as first, It is a matter of unjust reproach, and it is false in fact; for all the professors of this gospel are not weak and unlearned. There have been in the very beginning of Christianity some wise, some great persons, that have given testimony to this gospel, by their believing it. St. Paul was a man of no weak reason, no mean understanding, no small learning, and yet he believes this gospel, and professes he is not ashamed of it.

And there have been in most ages of the church, some instances of the power and success of this gospel, in converting philosophers, and senators, and princes. The learned the ingenious, and the noble amongst mankind, have sometimes given up their names to

Christ, have yielded their assent to his doctrines, and conformed their hearts and lives to the rules of his gospel. Men of wit and reason have been converted to the faith, and then have exerted their peculiar talents in the defence of Christianity, and they have convinced the world that they had neither left their reason nor their wit behind them, when they became Christians. Men of grandeur and power have sometimes also supported it with honor.

But the number of these has not been exceeding great. God has ordained that there should be some, to show that it is no foolish and unreasonable doctrine; that it is not a religion unworthy of kings, nor unbecoming the wisest and the greatest of characters. But if there have been but few great and wise who have embraced it, it is evident that its success and glory is not owing to the wisdom and power of men, but to the divinity of its doctrines, and the power of God.

Besides, I might tell you secondly, that riches, and grandeur, and elevated degrees of wit and learning, become a sore temptation to pride of mind and self-sufficiency. Now the faith of the gospel is founded in humility, and self-diffidence, and poverty of spirit; and this is

one plain reason why it was received by so few of the rich, and the learned, and the mighty among men, though it was contrived and invented by God himself.

I answer, in the third place, that it is one of the designed characters of the true gospel of Christ, and it is foretold by the ancient prophets, that when it should come to be preached upon the earth, the poor should receive it. Its reception by the poor and weak among men, is one evidence that it comes from God; Matth. xi. 5. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to our Saviour, to know whether he was the Messiah, or must they expect another? *Go tell John, the blind receive sight, the deaf hear, and the lame walk, and to the poor the gospel is preached; blessed is he that is not offended in me, &c.* Go and give John this very account I now relate to you, and tell him these are my credentials, these are the testimonials I bring. John will infer that I am the Messiah, and this is the true gospel that I preach; for the great and rich, and the pretenders to wisdom among the Jews, account it a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, and only a few of the poor receive it, as it was foretold by the prophets.

Each of us may say, therefore, if only the wise, or the great, or the rich believed it, it

must have been such a gospel as I could never have believed; for it wanted one character which is necessarily adjoined to it, that is, that the poor receive the gospel. *Father, I thank thee, says our Lord, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, but thou hast revealed them unto babes; Math. xi. 25.* It pleased God, when the world by wisdom knew not God, to darken all their wisdom, and turn it into folly; and to call those that were esteemed fools, and make them wise in believing the gospel of Christ. It has pleased God to choose the *mean and weak and contemptible things of this world, to confound the wise and mighty. It has pleased him to choose the things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh might glory in his presence; 1 Cor. i. 27, &c.*

II. It is another occasion of stumbling or shame in the gospel of Christ, that some of the professors of it are vicious in their lives. 'Will you believe such a gospel,' says an infidel, 'that does not restrain the professors of it from the worst of sins.'

This, I confess, gives it great dishonor among the men of the world, and is sometimes ready to shake the faith of younger Christians; they know not how to go on farther in Christianity,

for such and such that made great profession, you see how they are fallen. This is a common temptation of the devil; it is a frequent snare, and there hath been many a pious soul that hath been in danger of being caught thereby. The vices of some professors were great, even in St. Paul's days: there were some among the Phillippians, Phil. iii. 18, *of whom I have told you often, and now even weeping, that they walk as enemies to the cross of Christ, and 'cast scandal and shame upon it. It makes my eyes flow with tears, and my soul bleed within me, to hear of it: the gospel of Christ is so much dishonored by these means.'*

But if we take a nearer view, we shall see that no doctrine ought to fare the worse, because some wicked men are professors of it. It was not counted a discredit to philosophy, that some of the professors of it, who hated the Gospel, were vicious in their lives. I would ask the deist now, is there any ground to disbelieve natural religion, because there are some that make profession of it, are fallen into great sins? The gospel itself *teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and does not indulge one of them. And they are said to be *enemies to the cross of Christ, when their con-*

versation is all earthly, when their God is their belly, and their glory is their shame. This is no fault of the gospel, for they felt not the power of it. Nor is there any religion or profession in the world, that would have had any followers at all, if men must have entirely cashiered that religion, because there have been some persons vicious that have been professors of it.— There is no sect, no religion in the world, though the institution and the rules of it have been ever so pious, but what has produced some persons that have been vicious in their lives.

But this cavil is still carried on, and urged with much vehemence. ‘If the gospel of Christ were a religion so heavenly, and so divine in its original, as you pretend, surely the nations that profess it, would eminently exceed all other nations in piety, in justice and goodness; whereas, the nations that now-a-days embrace Christianity, are not at all superior to the Mahometans, nor to some of the heathens, either in duty that relates to God or man: and if we may give credit to ancient history, the virtues of the old Romans, long before the days of Julius Cæsar, shone much brighter than any of the virtues of the baptized nations: there was more truth and honesty, more devotion to the

heavenly powers, more of a public spirit and zeal for their country's good, than we can find in any Christian kingdoms or states now-a-days. To this I would give these three answers.'

1st, The account which we have of the shining virtues of these best ages of heathenism, is given us only by their own posterity who lived in succeeding ages. Now it is the well known temper and custom of mankind, to magnify the virtue of their ancestors, and to say, that the former times were better than these; but you have scarce any heathen writers who do not describe their own age as vicious enough, if they have occasion to talk upon that subject. And, therefore, there is just reason to suspect the strict truth of these encomiums of their forefathers.

2dly, Although some social virtues in a heathen country might really flourish more for an age or two springing from the principles of ambition, and honor, and love to their own country; yet there were such vices also practised among many of the Gentile nations, which are seldom heard or known among Christians: the apostle describes them in Rom. i. 26, and that in such a manner, as leads us to believe that they were practised by those who professed wisdom among them.

It must be acknowledged, also, that these nations were gross idolaters, and worshipped many gods, and that even in the times when their social virtues were most conspicuous. Now, this is most highly criminal in the sight of the great and Sovereign God, the Creator of all things: and the warmer and the more zealous were their devotions, which they paid to these idols, with the neglect or contempt of the true God, the greater was their guilt and abomination.

But 3dly, The chief answer I give is this, that when whole kingdoms are made Christians merely by birth, education and custom, it is not to be supposed that a twentieth part of them believe the gospel upon any just and reasonable principles of knowledge and choice. When whole cities and nations are worshippers of Christ, no otherwise than the Ephesians were worshippers of Diana, or the Turks of Mahomet, it is not reasonable to expect that there should be much difference in the virtues of such a national sort of Christians, Mahometans, or heathens; for the principle from which all their religion springs is the same, namely, their education, custom and fashion of their country; and therefore, their vices are much the same as they would be according to the present reign-

ing humour, disposition, or political temper of the nation, whatsoever were their form of religion and their established worship.

The true way, therefore, to put those things to the test, is to consider those Christians only who believe and profess the gospel from knowledge, and choice, and inward conviction, and who make their religion a matter of solemnity and importance, and not of mere form and custom. Now, if you separate these from the rest of mankind, I am well assured, that as bad as the Christian world is, you will find all the human and divine virtues more gloriously practised among such Christians as these, than among an equal number of the professors of any other religion under the sun: for inward Christianity, and the faith of the gospel, when it is built upon just foundations, will necessarily draw along with it such a train of virtues and graces as shall adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; and by such a comparison as this, men would be constrained to confess that God is among us of a truth.

III. The various and divided opinions, the sects and parties that are found in the Christian world, have been another occasion of scandal and offence to the infidels. 'How can we ever come,' say they, 'to any certainty what your

religion is, since you do not agree about it among yourselves ?

‘ All Europe pretends to be Christian, and to believe the gospel ; yet France, and Spain, and Italy, and Poland, and a good part of Germany, tells us that true Christianity is found only amongst them. But in the countries of Denmark and Sweden, and the northern parts of Germany, and in the British Islands, there is another religion professed, of a very different kind, and they call theirs the pure gospel and reformed Christianity. The Protestant and the Papist divide these western parts of the world, and they are ready to tear one another to pieces upon the account of their different opinions and practices. Now if the books that contain the religion of Christ be of so very uncertain sense and signification, truly we are ashamed of such a doubtful religion ; it is even as well for us to content ourselves with the religion that the light of nature teaches us, and the dictates of our own common reason, which we think has more certainty in it.’

To this, I answer, that it is a great mistake to imagine that the light of nature and reason, if left entirely to itself in this corrupt and fallen state, has more certainty in its determinations than Scripture hath. How many wild opinions

hath the corrupt mind of man produced among the inhabitants of the heathen world, and this same light of nature has not corrected them? What infinite diversity of vain and monstrous fancies hath past for religion and devotion among them? And the light of nature has been supposed to dictate some of them, for they did not always pretend revelation for them. There have been wide and irreconcilable differences among the philosophers, as well as among the priests and the people of different nations. The light of nature and reason is a poor dark bewildered thing, if it hath no commerce, nor communication with persons who have been favoured with Divine Revelation. It is only the scripture that has established and ascertained the doctrines of natural religion: and it is to the scripture that the deists of our age are obliged for their greater acquaintance with natural religion than ever their forefathers, the heathen philosophers, arrived at, though they are too proud to acknowledge it. If they agree better, and are more uniform in their principles now than the old Epicureans, the Stoicks, and the Platonists were, it is all owing to a more intimate acquaintance with the writings of Moses and the prophets, the evangelists and the apostles; so that it is with a very ill grace

that our present infidels can object to Christians their difference of opinions, and pretend that this is a ground of shame to the gospel of Christ, and a reason why they do not believe or profess it.

But I come now to give some account of the true reasons of such divisions of sect and party, among Christians. There are two great causes of these divisions, and the charge is not to be laid upon the gospel of Christ, nor upon the books that contain it.

1. The first cause is, that the Papist does not pretend to derive his religion merely from the Bible; but he brings in the Jewish Apocryphal writers of ancient ages, and lays them also for a foundation of his faith; and he makes the traditions of the Christian Church, which he pretends to have been delivered down from age to age, of almost the same authority as the scripture itself: and some of their authors have raised these traditions to equal dignity with the scripture, as being built upon the same foundation, viz. the authority of the church. As they have many things in their religion which they cannot find in the word of God, so they think it is sufficient if they can support them by these pretended traditions of the church. Whereas, the Protestant takes nothing for the ground of

his faith, but the books of the Old and New Testament; and what he cannot find written there, nor derived thence by most obvious and evident consequences, he does not profess it as any necessary part of his Christianity. The religion of the Protestant, therefore, is abundantly more conformable to the gospel of Christ, both in the doctrines and the worship of it, because it derives the whole from the word of God: but it is no wonder at all that there should be such a difference between them and the Papists, when they lay such different foundations for their faith and practice.

2. Another reason why the Protestant and Papist differ so much, is, because the Papist pretends that there is an infallible judge among them to determine all controversies; and that their popes and their councils, which they call the church, have authority to appoint what shall be esteemed the true articles of faith, and to bring in rites and ceremonies into their worship, according to their own invention and pleasure. And that all the people are bound to believe as the church bids them believe, and to practise in matters of worship, whatsoever the church bids them practise: and upon this account they forbid the Scripture to be read by the common people, that they may not learn

the truth of the gospel, but may take all for gospel which they teach them, and be content with it. Whereas, the Protestant has nothing else but his Bible to have recourse to for the conclusion of all controversies; and he encourages every man to use his Bible, and to judge for himself concerning the sense and meaning of it, using the best helps that he can obtain for this end: the Protestant ministers teach him not only what they know of the gospel, but they put the Bible into his hand, and bid him search and see whether things are so or no, that thence he may learn what are those doctrines and those duties which Christ has required him to believe and practise. Thence it comes to pass, that there are almost a thousand things in Popery, which the Protestants utterly disown, because they disown the power of the pope, or church, to stamp new articles of faith or invent new forms of worship.

Object. But it may be said still, there are so many different sects and parties among the Protestants themselves, as encourages the deist to maintain his charge and accusation. 'Why do you,' saith he, 'who profess to derive all your religion from the Scripture, differ so much among yourselves, both in doctrine, in worship, and in the order of your churches, if

the gospel of Christ be so excellent a religion, and if the books that contain it can give you so plain and certain a knowledge of it?

I answer, that almost all those things wherein Protestants differ, are but of smaller importance in religion, in comparison of those many and great things wherein they agree. The chief and most important points of Christianity are written with so much plainness and evidence in the word of God, as would lead all humble, honest, sincere and diligent enquirers into a belief of them, and consent in them. Now it is not necessary that the lesser matters of Christianity should be written down so expressly in scripture: for the all-wise God thought it proper to leave many of these articles of less importance more dubious and obscure, both to awaken the diligence of men to study his word and to leave amongst them some occasions for the exercise of their mutual charity and forbearance. Our Blessed Lord has thought it proper to put the universal love which he requires amongst his followers to this test or trial to see whether they will cultivate peace and charity to one another amidst their various and divided opinions in things of less concernment.

I confess there are some differences among Protestants in the great doctrines of the Trinity,

and the satisfaction of Christ, which must be acknowledged to be articles of very high moment and importance in Christianity. But if we compare those few who profess dangerous opinions in these points, with the millions that agree in the same general profession of faith, it will be found that their number is but very small. If we consider the great ignorance of God which is found in all men, by nature, and take a survey of the unhappy influences that education, fancy, passion, pride, friendship, aversion, precipitance and laziness, have upon mankind in forming their judgments and opinions, we shall not wonder to find some persons here and there falling into strange sentiments, contrary to the plain and sufficient evidence of scripture. We believe in general, that whoever puts off all prejudices, and is piously sincere in his search of the word of God, shall certainly find, through divine assistance, all needful truth. If, therefore, a disbeliever come with a serious, humble, and pious mind, and apply himself with diligence and fervent prayer to read the scripture, I am well assured he will become a Christian, and find out so much of the doctrines and duties of the gospel, as are necessary to his eternal happiness.

But there will be heresies arising sometimes

in the church. Tares will grow up sometimes in the field that is ever so well cultivated and sown with corn: and what unknown reasons there may be in the counsels and providence of God in permitting heresies to arise for the farther trial of his own people, is too high and hard a point for us to determine. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. xi. 19; *There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.* If such a thing as this is, shall be abused by men of corrupt minds, to turn them quite away from the gospel of Christ, and to support their own infidelity, they must answer for it at the great day to Christ their Judge.

Thus I have done with the third charge or accusation brought against the gospel, and removed the scandal and shame that some men have thrown upon it, because there are such sects, and parties, and divided opinions among the professors of it.

IV. Another occasion of scandal which infidels charge upon the gospel of Christ, is this, 'That some who have long professed it have forsaken it; and one should be ashamed to embrace such a faith as this is, for it has been tried and found to be vain and groundless, even by those who have known it long and searched it

through and through, and therefore at last they have abandoned and cast it off.'

But in answer to this, give me leave to say, first, that the chief and most common reason why persons who have professed Christianity cast it off, is not because they found any just reason of blame either in its principles or rules; but because they think it too strict for them, and it curbs their vicious appetites more than they like.

I will allow, that perhaps there may be some persons who have abandoned the Christian religion from a wantonness of fancy, from a licentiousness of thought, from a pride of reasoning, and who make it their glory to have thrown off the bonds of their education, and to have obtained the honor of free-thinkers, or from a presuming conceit that they must comprehend every thing in their religion, and will believe nothing that hath mysteries in it. Such vain principles as these may have influenced some minds, and given them up to apostacy: but far the greatest part of those who forsake the gospel have been tempted to it by the power of their lusts, which the gospel would restrain; and some of these persons upon their death-beds have confessed it too.

This is also sufficiently visible in the world,

that when men have long professed this gospel and forsaken it, they seldom grow more pious, more sober, more honest or good than before ; but, on the contrary, they generally have indulged vicious excesses and neglected all piety, and this is rather a ground of glory to the gospel than a just reason of shame.

If these persons had generally grown more holy ; if they had feared God more afterwards than ever they did before ; if they had more aimed at the glory of God, and loved him better, when they forsook Christ and his gospel ; then we might have some reason to suspect this gospel was false, and a mere mistake or imposture. But when these persons grow more unjust than before, love their neighbours less, are become more sensual, more selfish, disregard God more than they did before ; I repeat it again, this is rather a ground of glory to the gospel of Christ, than of shame. Demas hath forsaken us, saith Paul, because he loved this present world ; 2 Tim. iv. 10. A covetous Demas is no good argument why St. Paul should forsake Christ, or be ashamed of the gospel. And the apostle has shewn that those who have made shipwreck of their faith, have parted with a good conscience too, and lost their virtue ; 1 Tim. i. 19, 20.

But there is another answer which the apostle John gives to this objection in his first epistle, chap. ii. ver. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* They might make a profession of the gospel, and perhaps give a real assent to the truths and doctrines of it by the convincing influence of miracles and human reason, or perhaps they became Christians merely by the force of education, because they were taught this religion from their childhood, and professed it without thought; but they never had such a powerful belief of this gospel of Christ, as to change their hearts, to renew their natures, to form their souls after the image of Christ into real holiness; and, therefore, like the hearers that are compared to stony ground, the seed did not sink deep into their hearts, though they might receive the word at first with joy; but having not root in themselves, they endure but for a while, and when any temptation arises, they are offended, and depart from the faith which they once professed; Math. xiii. 20, 21. Thus it appears, that the gospel of Christ is never the worse in itself, nor does it deserve the less esteem in the world, notwith-

standing such apostates as these, no more than seed-corn, should be pronounced naught, because it does not bring forth a harvest in every soil.

I have now finished the third general head of discourse which I proposed, and have shown, whatsoever occasions of shame might be supposed to arise, either from the doctrines of the gospel, or the professors of it, are unjustly charged as blemishes on the gospel; and I have given particular answers to both sorts of cavils, and defeated the accusations.

One word of advice to Christians shall conclude the present discourse; and that is this.

A word of advice.

Since the gospel of Christ gives no just occasions of shame, you, that are professors of it, should take heed that you do nothing to cast shame on this gospel. Do not mingle the Christian faith with doubtful notions of your own. Do not defile your Christian conversation with sinful practices. Do not make the lesser circumstances and appendages of your religion, the matter of loud contest, and a party strife; for all these things expose the gospel to shame, and may justly put its professors to the blush, in the face of the world, when they are guilty of these practices.

Let me insist a little upon each of these.

1. Do not mingle the Christian faith with doubtful notions and fancies of your own. The articles of our Christianity, and the necessary truths of the gospel, are divine and glorious : take heed you do not bring in your peculiar sentiments and favorite opinions, which have no sufficient evidence from the word of God, and join them in the same rank of dignity with the articles of your faith ; and much less should you dare to impose them upon the consciences of your fellow-christians. The gospel itself will suffer by it, and sink in the esteem of the world, when the divine doctrines of it are mingled with our weaknesses, and debased by the addition of our doubtful sentiments.

2. Defile not your Christian conversation with sinful practices. Indulge not a conformity to this present evil world in any of the corrupt and unlawful customs and courses of it. Mingle not your practice of the lovely duties which this gospel enjoins, with lying, and slandering, and railing ; do not interline your lives with religion and sin, with devotion and shameful lusts. It is a gospel that forbids all iniquity ; it requires that you mortify sin, and cleanse yourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and that you go on to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord ;

2 Cor. vii. 1. The very design and end of it in God's eternal counsels and contrivance, is, that you might be holy and without blame before him in love, Ephes. i. 4. If you pursue this advice, then shall others, who behold you, confess that there is something divine in Christianity, when you thus adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour. Thus you give the gospel its due honor, by believing all it reveals, by worshipping according to the methods of its appointment, and by that purity of conversation which it enjoins.

3. Make not the lesser circumstances and appendages of your religion the matter of loud contest, and a party-strife. We are called to contend earnestly for the great and necessary doctrines of faith, which were once delivered to the Saints: but we are commanded also to receive those that are weak in the faith, without involving them in doubtful disputations about matters of less moment. Give no occasion to the infidel to blaspheme the gospel by your factions and quarrels, and the rage of a bitter and unsanctified zeal. Oh, that the time were come, when the wolf and the lamb shall lie down together, and there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy in all the Holy Mountain! But surely, it is very hard if the lambs themselves, who belong to the flock of Christ, cannot live with-

out hurting and destroying one another ; that Christians cannot live without exposing their divine and heavenly religion to the blasphemies of sinful men. Happy were the Christian world, if we could all behave ourselves so as never to give occasion to the adversary to reproach the professors of the Christian faith, nor throw shame and dishonour upon the gospel of Christ ! May the blessed spirit of God teach us this lesson effectually, and let it be copied out in our lives daily, till we arrive at the regions of perfect holiness and love ! AMEN.

A RATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL:

OR,

COURAGE IN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

ROM. i. 16.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

PART THIRD.

Though the passion of shame has something in it that sinks our nature, and enfeebles our spirits, yet it is a very becoming passion, where sin is the object of it; and indeed, it was wisely ordained by our Creator, to be a guardian to those small remains of natural virtue that abide in us since the fall. We find the first young sinners clothed with shame, in the garden of Eden, at the presence of God. But the growing corruption of our natures, the subtilty of Satan, and the temptations of this world, have joined together to take this piece of artillery out of the hands of virtue, and make use of it in their attacks upon religion and goodness.

We ought to be ashamed indeed of nothing but our sin, our folly, and our wretchedness ; but we have been too ready to be ashamed, even of the grace of God, and the methods of our recovery from folly, wretchedness and sin. The gospel itself—the glorious gospel—has been made a matter of reproach among men, and its professors have been sometimes tempted to be ashamed of it.

The blessed apostle, in my text, had gained a victory over this temptation, for he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Whatsoever there might be contained in the doctrines of this gospel, or whatsoever might be found among the professors of it, from which infidels or unbelievers might take occasion to throw shame and scandal upon it ; yet I have shown in the two foregoing discourses, that all this is unjustly charged on the gospel, and have given particular answers to both sorts of cavils.

I go on now to the last proposal, which is to explain the force of the apostle's argument against shame in professing and preaching this gospel, and to make it appear, that the words of my text contain a general and most extensive guard, or defence, against all possible occasions of shame, in the profession of Christianity ; and that is, that the gospel of Christ is the

power of God for the salvation of all that believe.

Now this is an argument which you, who believe in Christ, may all assume to yourselves as well as the apostle. You cannot preach this gospel so well as he, nor explain the reasons of your faith to others, and establish it upon so solid and unshaken foundations of argument, as Paul could do; but every Christian that has embraced the faith, and felt the power of this gospel for his own salvation, may give this reason for his profession of it, and may support his courage in opposition to all the sharpest temptations of mockery and reproach.

When the apostle says, 'it is the power of God,' we must suppose him to understand, it is a most powerful means, or effectual instrument that God uses, to save souls; and it is attended with divine power for that end.

It is more powerful than the light of nature; for we have no just reason to believe, that the mere light of nature, without some helps of divine revelation, or some unwritten traditions of it, ever saved any souls at all; and if there have been any of the sinners of the heathen nations made partakers of grace, I think it is otherwise to be accounted for, than merely by the poor remains of the light of nature.

It is more powerful than any religion that men or angels could invent, and more powerful too, than any religion that God himself ever invented, or revealed, and proposed to men before the gospel of Christ. His revelations to the Patriarchs were but few ; they were made here and there to a house or two, or to a family ; they were particular favors that he bestowed upon persons called out of idolatry ; nor had they a very long, nor spreading, nor lasting influence, except in the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, where they were frequently renewed.

It is more powerful than all the revelations of grace, which God made by Moses to the children of Israel, and intermingled with the Jewish law ; for these discoveries reached, but to one single nation, and wrought but feebly toward the conversion of sinful souls to God and holiness, in comparison of what the gospel of Christ has done.

Besides, let it be considered that all the power which all the former discoveries of grace to the Patriarchs, or to the Jews, had to save souls, was derived from the gospel of Christ, which is contained in them, in lower measures, and in a more obscure manner. Therefore, since the gospel of Christ now stands forth in open light,

and in full glory, it is most eminently powerful to convert sinners, to bring this apostate world back again to God, and to save millions of souls.

I. It is the most powerful means of salvation considered in itself, and in its own nature and influence.

II. It is the most powerful means, as it is accompanied with the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The first of these may be called a moral or persuasive influence ; the last is supernatural and sovereign. Let us meditate on each of these distinctly.

I. It is the most powerful means, if we consider the gospel in itself, and its own nature. Not that the mere word of the gospel, reaching the ears of men, is sufficient to change the heart, and to save the soul, without divine influences : for it is said to be the power of God to salvation ; i. e. it is that doctrine whereby God exerts his Divine Power to save sinful man. But still it must be granted, that the doctrine itself, in its own nature, has a very great and evident tendency to this glorious end, as it is the noblest, the richest, and the brightest discovery of grace that ever was made to man.

If we consider it in its own nature, it has the greatest moral power, or persuasive influence, toward the salvation of perishing sinners. This

is easily proved by explaining what this salvation means.

Salvation includes in it a freedom from the guilt and punishment of sin, together with a right and title to heaven; it implies also a freedom from the power of sin, and thereby a preparation for heaven, and a final possession of it. Under each of these considerations it will appear with great evidence, that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the power of God to salvation.

1st, It is the most powerful means to set sinners free from the guilt and punishment of sin, and to relieve a distressed conscience under the sense of divine anger: it gives the most effectual security to a believer against the terrors of hell and eternal death; for it not only declares that there is forgiveness with God, but it shows us the foundation upon which this forgiveness stands; namely, the satisfaction made to the offended justice of God by the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his Son. Suppose it were possible for a philosopher or wise man, to prove that God would forgive the sins of the penitent, yet there is nothing but the gospel that can set the conscience at such joyful ease from the terror of guilt, and release the soul from the chains wherewith it was held: 'For now,' says the believer, 'I not only hear it proved by di-

vine testimony, that there is pardon of sin to be obtained from God, but I see how God may do it with honor. I behold the atonement that is made by Christ Jesus, his own Son: the atonement is equal to the offence. He can justify me, though I am a sinner, upon the account of this perfect righteousness, and he can do it with glory to all his terrible perfections; therefore, I may venture my assent to this doctrine, and I may rest my soul upon it.'

2dly, The gospel is a powerful means, also, to raise undeserving sinners to a hope of heaven and eternal life. It shows us what heaven is, by the discoveries of one that has been there, even the Son of God himself. Life and immortality are brought to light by this gospel, which lay hid under much darkness before; 2 Tim. i. 10. It teaches us also how the happiness of heaven is procured for us, even by the obedience and blood of the Son of God; and therefore, some think, heaven is called the purchased possession in Ephes. i. 14. It assures us, that this blessed state of the enjoyment of God, in unchangeable peace, and in the company of blessed spirits, waits for every believer, when he is dislodged from this flesh, and when the habitation of the body is no longer fit to retain the spirit: and it reveals also the final hea-

ven of the saints, when the body shall be raised into immortality. 'Without this gospel,' says the soul, 'I could have no just ground to hope for heaven; for all my best righteousnesses are imperfect—my fairest acts of holiness have many defects in them; but I behold the perfect righteousness of my Saviour that has procured it. A life of holiness without defect, and a most submissive obedience to a painful and shameful death, has been the price and purchase of it.'

3dly, This gospel is a most powerful means to subdue sin in the soul, to mortify corrupt nature, to inspire us with virtue, to wean our hearts from vice, sensuality and trifles, and from all the insufficient pretences to blessedness that the world can flatter us with.

The gospel of Christ, both in his own personal ministry of it, and in the writings of his apostles, sets before us the most divine scheme of morality, piety and virtue, that ever the world knew. The sacred dictates of probity and goodness toward men, as well as the venerable rules of piety toward God, which are scattered up and down in an imperfect and obscure manner among the philosophers, and shine like a star here and there in the midnight darkness of heathenism—these are

all collected and refined in the gospel of Christ, and fill the Christian world with a pure and universal light, like the sun unclouded in a meridian sky. We know our duty infinitely better from the instructions of Christ and St. Paul, than all the Plato's and the Plutarch's, all the Zeno's and the Antonines of Greece or Rome, could ever teach us.

The most divine rules of the gospel are attended also with the noblest motives to love virtue, and to hate all vice; for never was the evil of sin so displayed to the eyes and senses of man, as by the cross and gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: never did sin appear so hateful, so abominable, so justly the object of divine and human hatred, as when it appeared pressing the soul of the Holy One of God into agonies and sharp anguish. A believer who has seen the evil of sin, as revealed in this gospel, will hate it, and will be led powerfully to a conquest over it.

Besides, the terrors of hell are revealed to us among the doctrines of Christianity, as the just punishment of sin, and that in such a manner as no other religion pretends to: for, as the doors of heaven are opened by our Lord Jesus Christ, both by his ministry on earth, and by his ascent into heaven, and by the farther dis-

coveries which his apostles have made of the future unseen happy world, so the doors of hell are opened too. Our Lord Jesus himself preached hell and terror to sinners with a sacred vehemence, and set everlasting fire in a clearer and more dreadful light than ever had been done by all the philosophers in the world. The soul of every saint has been in some measure a witness of this truth, when it lay under the work of divine conviction.

And not only the horrid nature and evil of sin, and the dreanful consequences of it, are powerful motives to make us stand afar off, and fear it; but 'the sweet and constraining influence of the love of Christ does most effectually incline me,' saith the believer, 'to hate every sin, and to follow after universal holiness: shall I build up again the things which my Saviour died to destroy? This would be to make him suffer agonies in vain, and run counter to all the designs of his bleeding love, and the voluntary sacrifice of his soul.

'I have also the glorious and perfect example of my blessed Lord. Never did virtue and religion shine so bright, and look so amiable as in his life, and he has set it before me as my pattern: I feel the attractive and divine power

of it. Where my Lord leads, I must follow ; for I would fain be like him.

‘He draws me by his example, and he draws me too by his heavenly promises. He spreads the glories and the joys of heaven before me, to allure my hope—I see those sacred glories—I long after the possession of these unfading joys, and I must and will keep the path that leads to paradise, that where my Lord is, I may be also.

‘The rules and precepts of holiness, which my Lord has taught me, are more pure, more clean, more perfect, more divine and godlike, than ever any other scheme of rules and duties was ; and the joyful and dreadful motives given me to press after this holiness, are infinitely beyond all the motives that any doctrine or religion has proposed. Blessed be God that I ever learnt these holy rules, that I ever felt the power of these divine motives, and am become a lover of holiness.’

4thly, Thus the gospel prepares the saint for heaven, and fits every power of his soul for the business and belssedness of those happy regions. ‘Once,’ says he, ‘I had no delight in spiritual things ; I had no relish of spiritual pleasures ; but now I taste them with delight, and I rejoice in the hopes of a sweeter and more complete taste of them on high. Once

I had no love to God—it is true, I feared him as some unknown and extraordinary terror—but I had no delight in him, no desire after him. Now he is the object of my warmest love, and of my sweetest meditations. Heaven itself, as it is described in the word of God, was not pleasant to me. What! The everlasting continuance of a Sabbath? Perpetual employments of worships and service to be done for God everlastingly? These are things that were not agreeable to carnal nature; but by the influence of this gospel of Christ, my heart is new moulded, and I delight in the forethoughts of such a heaven as the gospel describes. Such instances as these of the sweet efficacy of the gospel upon the soul of man, turning it into a divine temper, and fitting it for the enjoyment of God, are so many proofs of the power of this gospel unto salvation, and so many grounds and reasons why the believer cannot be ashamed of it.

But I must add in the 5th place, it is the gospel of Christ that brings believers to the final possession of heaven. Then, and not till then, is the salvation perfect. It is the gospel that has given us an unchangeable promise of heaven, when our state of trial is ended here on earth, and Christ is bound to fulfil it.

The gospel assures us, that when we are absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord. When we see the heavens open at the death of Stephen the first martyr, and Jesus Christ standing there to receive his departing spirit, we believe that the same Jesus will fulfil the same kind office to us also, and receive our spirits, if we have been found faithful to the death.

The same gospel also gives us a more distant hope and glorious assurance of the resurrection of our bodies from the prison of the grave. When we behold the body of our Blessed Saviour rising from the tomb, and ascending to glory, and when we are told that his resurrection is a pledge and pattern of ours; then with a joyful expectation we wait for the same blessedness. The gospel lays an obligation upon Christ himself to raise his saints from the dead; for he himself tells us, that it is the will of his Father, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day; John vi. 40.

Hence it comes to pass, that the believer triumphs over death under the influence of these hopes. 'Now,' saith the saint, 'I can venture to die; for my spirit shall be received

to dwell with my Saviour among the spirits of the just that are made perfect. These feeble and withering limbs of mine, I can cheerfully commit them to dust and the grave; for the great trumpet must sound, the dead must arise, my Redeemer will call my flesh from its dark prison; I shall arise to meet the Lord in the air, and dwell with him for ever in unknown worlds of blessedness.'

Thus I have shewn you the first thing I proposed, viz. how the gospel, in its own nature, has a very proper and powerful tendency in a moral or persuasive way towards the salvation of the soul, as it insures pardoning grace and final blessedness to believers.

II. I come now to show how the gospel is made powerful to the salvation of sinners by the accompanying influence of the Spirit of God, and this is supernatural and sovereign. If I should run over all the particulars I have just before mentioned, I might make it appear in each of them, how the Spirit of God, by the word of his gospel, works this salvation.

It is this Blessed Spirit that awakens the stupid and thoughtless sinner to a sense of his guilt and danger. It is He that shows him the evil of sin, and makes him groan after deliverance, and cry out, what shall I do to be saved?

And it is the Spirit that reveals and discovers Christ Jesus to him as the only and all-sufficient Saviour: it is He who shows the convinced sinner that there is righteousness and grace to be found in Christ to answer all his present complaints and necessities. The word of the gospel says these things indeed, but it is like a dead letter, until the living Spirit speaks them over again, and, as it were, constrains us to hear the voice of encouragement and hope. It is He that represents the death and sufferings of the Son of God, as an effectual atonement for sin, and makes the soul believe it, and teaches us how to lay hold on this hope, to fly to this refuge, to receive this atonement: it is the Spirit of God that softens the hardest heart, and melts it into godly sorrow: it is He who makes us willing to accept of Jesus as a Prince and a Saviour, to renew our sinful natures, to refine our hearts, and thereby to reform our lives; it is he that takes the blood of Christ, and applies it to a distressed conscience under the guilt of sin, and thus gives the disquieted soul rest and peace: He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us in all their glory and sufficiency, for our salvation, and thereby justly obtains the name of the paraclete, that is, an advocate for Christ, and a

comforter to us; John xiv. 26, and xv. 26, and xvi. 14, 15. He composes the ruffles of the disturbed mind, and speaks all the waves of the soul into a calm: he makes all within us peaceful and easy, under the apprehension of divine forgiveness through the merit of Christ.

It is only the Spirit of God that can make the discoveries of heaven in the gospel effectual, to awaken our hope and to raise our joy: he shows us how it is purchased by the blood of Christ, and that it is made sure to all those that believe: he stamps his own Holy Image upon us, and seals us up for the inheritance of heaven; Ephes. i. 13. When ye heard the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—and believed it, ye were then sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance. The spirit is sent into our hearts as a spirit of adoption, whereby we call God Father; Gal. iv. 6. And he changes us from children of wrath into the sons and daughters of the living God; and he himself dwelling in us is a pledge and earnest of that inheritance, which is reserved for us among the saints in light.

It is the same Blessed Spirit that makes the gospel of Christ powerful, to mortify sin in us; for though the words of the gospel forbid

all iniquity, and require us to renounce the lusts of the flesh and the vanities of the world, if we belong to Christ: yet it is by the Spirit of God alone that we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the body, that we may obtain eternal life: it is he that makes the commands of Christ come with divine power and authority upon the soul, and gives the motives of the gospel power to persuade us: it is he that renews our affections, makes us hate sin, and love God superemely, and causes us to delight in the spiritual pleasures of a future, unseen world, which before, we treated with contempt, or disregard. It is by the sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth, that we are prepared for the heavenly glory whereunto we are called by the gospel; 2 Thess. ii. 13. And since the Spirit of God is promised to dwell in us for ever, John xiv. 16, 17, we have good reason to believe he will be our eternal sanctifier in heaven, and our eternal comforter.

There is such a thing as the influence of the Spirit of God attending the gospel of Christ. The apostle argues thus with the Galatian Christians, *received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* Gal. iii. 2. And it is the great promise of the gospel, or the new covenant, that God would send

his Spirit to make it powerful for the blessed ends for which he has designed it; Ezech. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. Joel ii. 28. Zach. xli. 10. Esa. xliv. 3.

In the primitive days of Christianity, and the age of miracles, the Holy Spirit attended the preaching of the gospel with his extraordinary gifts of tongues, of healing, of prophecy, as well as with the graces of conviction and sanctification and comfort: and the suddenness and the glory of the change that was wrought on sinners, carried with it an illustrious and uncontested proof of the presence and power of God and his Spirit. Nor have some fainter resemblances of such glorious grace been altogether wanting in later ages. There have been some most remarkable instances of great sinners converted at once by the gospel of Christ, and the demonstration of the Spirit.

But in his more usual and ordinary communications of grace, He works so gently upon our natures, and in so sweet and connatural a way, as not to distinguish his agency in a sensible manner from the motions of our own souls; for he never disturbs our rational powers, nor puts any violence upon the natural faculties; yet when we are changed, when we are renewed, when sin is mortified, the

scripture tells us, that it is the Spirit of God that has done it: when our souls are prepared for heaven, and our corrupted natures sanctified and suited to the things that are prepared in heaven for us, we are assured by the word of God that the Holy Spirit has been the great operator, and has wrought this change in us.

Thus I have made it appear at large, how the gospel of Christ is the power of God, to salvation. I apply myself immediately to raise a few inferences from the subject I have been treating of.

I N F E R E N C E S .

I. INF. How unreasonable are all the reproaches that are cast upon this gospel! A gospel that saves mankind from misery, and from sin, and eternal death! A gospel that teaches men how to appear before a holy and terrible God with comfort, though their sins are many, and their righteousness imperfect! A gospel that gives the hope of pardon to criminals and rebels, and the hope of heaven to undeserving creatures! And all this upon such solid grounds and foundations, as justifies its highest promises and proposals to the reason of men! It is a gospel that changes our sinful natures into holiness, and reforms our hearts as

well as lives ! A gospel, that aided by divine power, creates souls anew, and raises dead sinners to life ! It is a gospel that turns wolves into lambs, and makes ravenous vultures meek as doves ! A gospel that so disturbs the kingdom of Satan, as to take thousands of slaves and captives out of his dominions, to transfer them into the glorious kingdom of Christ, and make them cheerful and willing subjects ! A gospel that fulfils gloriously the first promise, and makes it appear, that the seed of the woman hath broke the serpent's head, and destroyed the works of the devil. You have never seen, you have never known, you have never learned this gospel aright, if you have not felt it to be the power of God unto salvation. Those that can speak evil of this gospel, it may be universally said concerning them, they speak evil of the things they know not ; for if they had known this gospel as they ought to know it, they would have seen it all over glorious and divine ; they would have felt it to be attended with divine power to their salvation, and then they would never speak evil of it.

The heathen world may be ashamed of their doctrines and their religion ; the heathen worshipperers may be ashamed of their sacrifices, their superstitions, and their forms of devotion ;

for they have no power to save their souls : and many of them were indeed brutish and shameful. Mahomet, the founder of the Turkish religion, may be ashamed of his Alcoran, a volume of fables and incredible lies ; all his followers may be ashamed of their prophet, and of the sensual paradise that he promises them. The Jews under the eye of Christ, and the sun-beams of the gospel, may be ashamed of the vain traditions of their Rabbins, which were never divine ; and even of the old rites and ceremonies which Moses gave them ; for all these are now but weak and beggarly elements ; the Spirit of God calls them so ; Gal. iv. 9. They have now no power to save souls, since God hath abolished them ; nor indeed had they ever any power but what they borrowed from this gospel of Christ, which lay concealed in them : but let none of us that believe and profess the gospel of Christ be ever ashamed of any of the doctrines, or precepts, or promises of it ; for they are all holy, they are all heavenly ; all of them have divine power accompanying them to lead souls to salvation.

II. INF. Learn hence the true method of obtaining Christian courage ; courage to profess the gospel of Christ against all opposition ; it is by getting it wrought into your hearts, and lives

by Christian experience, and not by learning a mere form of words in a road of education and catechism. You must feel it as the power of God to your salvation, or you will never suffer much for it. Let it be an ingrafted word able to save your souls, Jam. i. 21. and then it will harden your faces against all blaspheming adversaries, and the terrors of a persecuting world; then you will be able to render a most powerful reason why you are bold to profess this gospel, and to answer every one that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you: you will be able to oppose those that set themselves against the gospel of Christ, when you feel this divine spring of courage within you.

I have encouraged you before, to acquaint yourselves with reasons and arguments that may defend your religion, and support your faith: but hours of temptation may come, when all the knowledge and learned furniture of your head, all the arguments that are treasured up in your memory, and all the reasonings that your invention can supply you with, will hardly be able to keep your faith and hope firm and steadfast; for Satan goes before you in skill and rational argument; and though your arguments are strong and solid, yet he may baffle you by his hellish sophistry, and thus cheat you of your

faith, and your hope, and your heaven, if you have not got this gospel wrought into your hearts with power, if you have not felt it to be the power of God unto salvation.

Hence it comes to pass, that in times of great temptation and persecution, there are many who fall away, as the leaves of a tree in the blast of autumn, when but here and there one stands and endures the shock : it is because there are so few of the professors of the gospel who have felt it to be the power of God to the conversion of their souls, and turning their hearts to God and heaven.

And hence it comes to pass also, that several unlearned Christians in all ages, that could not argue much for the faith in a rational way, yet could dare to die for it, because they had this argument wrought in their own souls : they had felt a divine power going along with it to change their natures, to make them new creatures, to give them the hope of heaven, and a preparation for it.

III. INF. From what you have heard of this subject, learn the wide extent of this argument for the defence of the gospel of Christ, and the invaluable worth of it to every Christian, viz : that the gospel is the power of God to your salvation.

It is an argument of wide extent ; for it belongs to every Christian, to the wise and to the unwise, to the weak and the strong ; there is no sincere Christian, no true believer in Christ, but hath got the foundation of this argument wrought within him : he knows this gospel is divine, and he should not be ashamed to believe and profess it ; for he hath felt it support his soul under a sense of guilt, and give him solid hope of pardoning grace : He hath found it change his sinful nature, soften his heart into repentance, and turn him from a sinner into a saint ; it hath laid the foundation of eternal life within him.

And as it is an argument that belongs to every true Christian, so it answers every objection that an infidel can bring against the gospel, either from the doctrines, or from the professors of it : and methinks, I would fain have you all furnished with this glorious argument, and learn to manage it for the defence of your faith.

Do they tell you that the doctrines of the gospel contain mysteries in them, and things that are unsearchable ? Do they endeavor to put you out of countenance by ridiculing the truths of Christianity, as being contrary to the common opinions and reasonings of men ? Do they reproach them as foolish and unreasonable, and

do they endeavor to persuade you that they are not sufficiently attested, and there is not ground enough to give credit to them? Though there have been particular answers given to each of these cavils in the first discourse; yet you may give this general and short reply to all of them, and say, 'I am sure they are not contrary to reason; for they are divine. They are not incredible, nor do they want sufficient evidence; for God himself, by his own Spirit, has borne witness to them in my heart; He has wrought an almighty work there by the means of this gospel: He has created me anew unto faith, and hope, and holiness: He has turned my heart from earth to heaven, and subdued the sinful inclinations of my nature by the precepts, by the promises, by the glorious discoveries of this gospel: He has made use of it to save my soul; and I carry about me an uncontrollable proof that it came from heaven.' Now, though this sort of argument may have but little force in it sometimes for the conviction of the infidel, yet it is of sufficient force to establish the believer.

But I proceed. Do they fill your ears with the mean and contemptible character of the professors of this gospel? Do they charge many of them with vicious practices? Do they tell you of their different opinions, their contests

and their quarrels? And do they discourage you by pointing to the apostates that have forsaken the faith? You may defend yourself and your profession against all these objections by the same general argument, thus; 'Are the professors of it some of the mean and base things of this world? But they are saints, and this gospel has made them so; they are the sons and daughters of the Most High God by faith in this gospel; and I will not be ashamed to reckon myself of their society, and to number myself amongst them. Are there many that are called Christians, whose lives are vicious? Surely, they never knew this gospel in truth; they are but false professors of it.— There are thousands that can bear this witness to the gospel, that it has changed their hearts; it has renewed their natures; it has made them hate every vice, and their lives shine amongst men glorious in holiness, and resembling God himself. Are the sentiments of some of them different from others? It is chiefly in points of lesser importance; but the substantial truths of it, which are the power of God to salvation, are professed and acknowledged by us all. And though a thousand should forsake this gospel, and become apostates, yet I can never part

with it, while I feel the blessed effects of it abiding upon my heart, and I trust through the grace of God, they shall abide forever.'

This leads me to the last Inference.

IV. INF. What strong engagements is every true Christian under to maintain the profession of this gospel? Not only is he laid under many obligations from the commands of God, and the bonds of duty, and gratitude, and love, but he has a constant pressing obligation within him. 'How can I be ashamed of my hope, my portion, my everlasting all? Shall I be ashamed of that gospel, upon which my salvation is founded, and my best and highest interest, even my expectations of endless felicity? If I let go this faith, if I loose my hold of this gospel, I let go my hold of Christ, of God, and his love; I let go my hold of heaven and all my happiness: my sins all return upon me with their unsufferable loads of guilt and anguish of conscience, if I loose my faith in this gospel; for all my hope of pardon is built on this foundation: heaven with all the joys of it vanish from my soul, if I part with this glorious gospel of Christ; and death and hell face me with all their terrors.'

There is an awful and solemn motive derived from the great judgment day to maintain the

profession of this glorious gospel; for our Lord himself has pronounced this threatening, and he will fulfil it, 'whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words amongst a sinful generation of men, I will also be ashamed of him before my Father and his holy angels.' But this text shall be the subject of some future discourses.

A RATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL:

OR,

COURAGE IN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

RÔM. i. 16.

The gospel of Christ,—it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

SALVATION is a frequent and familiar word in the mouth of all who call themselves Christians. It is a sort of asseveration or oath among the looser and meaner part of mankind; as I hope to be saved. But little do they know what salvation means. All the notion they have of it is this, that they would be saved from going down to hell, a place of fire and torment, and that they would go up to heaven when they die, to some fine unknown shining places above the skies, where they shall be free from all pain and uneasiness. This is the utmost point to which their idea reaches, and I think I have hit their sense exactly in this description. Alas! Poor

ignorant creatures! They have no thought of being saved from sin, of having their hearts made holy, their sinful inclinations rectified, their passions subdued or refined, their love turned toward God and things spiritual, and their desire and delight fixed upon things divine and holy, instead of their sensual entertainments of flesh and blood. They have no concern about the pardon of the guilt of sin, and restoration to the favor or image of God, and not so much as a wish for the joys that arise from his love, or from the blessed presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world to come.

I have shewn you therefore, in the foregoing discourse, what this salvation is, and made it appear that the gospel is the power of God to salvation; that is, it is a powerful means in the hand of the Spirit of God to save us from the guilt of sin, and to give us a right to heaven; to save us from the power of sin, to fit us for the business and the joys of heaven, and ensure to us the actual possession of it.

There are two things yet remain to be considered in discoursing on this subject.

I. The place or influence that faith, or believing, hath in this salvation; for the gospel provides this blessing only for believers. It is

called the power of God to salvation to every one who believes.

II. The wide extent of this glorious benefit : it belongs to every one that believes, whether Greek, or Jew.

I shall treat of each of these particularly.

First, Since the gospel is the power of God to the salvation of them that believe, let us inquire, what place or influence has our faith in this sacred concernment !

To answer this, we may consider faith in its various acts or degrees of exercise, as it begins in this assent, as it proceeds to affiance, and as it is completed in assurance ; and shew what influence each of them hath in the work of salvation.

1. An assent to the truths of the gospel must begin the work of salvation in us : there must be a belief and inward conviction of our sinful and dangerous state, which is more clearly revealed under the gospel, and that there is an atonement made for sin by the blood of Christ : we must believe, that there is forgiveness to be found with God for the sake of this atonement ; and that there is grace enough in our Lord Jesus Christ, to renew our sinful natures, and to fit us for heaven. This usually begets in the sinner who is truly awakened some desire toward

this salvation, and some distant hope of obtaining it. When the poor perishing creature believes and beholds the glorious influence of the death and righteousness of Christ to justify a sinner in the sight of God; when he surveys the love, the wisdom, the grace and the power of Christ, answerable to all his wants, he then comes to determine thus with himself, 'This salvation is glorious and desirable; the methods proposed even for my own attainment of it, are practicable and sufficient, and why should not I apply myself to this Saviour, and seek this unspeakable happiness?'

2. Affiance or trust in Jesus Christ the Saviour, is the next degree of faith. When we are willing to be delivered from the condemning guilt of sin, and from the defiling power of it, and have seen an all-sufficiency of atonement, grace and power in Christ, then we commit our souls into the hands of Jesus the Mediator, for this blessed purpose, and make a solemn surrender of our whole selves unto his charge and care, that we may be pardoned for the sake of his death, that we may be accepted of God through his righteousness, that we may be sanctified and made holy by his grace and spirit, and that we may be fitted for and preserved to his heavenly kingdom. We reflect upon our past

iniquities, and mourn to think that we have been rebels so long; we are ashamed and grieved for our rebellions, and we now most earnestly desire to be made willing subjects to his holy government; and therefore we entrust our souls with him, and beg that he would take us under his care for this end, and bring us into the Father's presence with comfort and joy. This is the soul's coming to God by Jesus Christ.

Now such an act of faith, as this is, has some sensible tendency to promote the peace of a distressed conscience, the sanctification of a sinful nature, the solid hope of heaven, and a preparation for it. But still it must be acknowledged, that its original and chief influence arises from divine appointment. The gospel is the power of God to salvation, and it is by divine promise and power that faith saves the soul. Such a faith, or trust in Christ, has all the promises of gospel blessings belonging to it. God has appointed in his word, and it is the standing rule of the gospel, he that believes shall be saved; Mark xvi. 15, 16.

All the parts of salvation come by faith: justification, and favor in the sight of God; Rom. v. 1. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.* Adoption comes also by faith; Gal. iii. 26. *Ye are the children of God by faith*

in Christ Jesus. Sanctification is ascribed to the same principle; Act. xv. 19. The Gentiles had their hearts purified from sin by faith. *Joy and hope come in this way also*; Rom. xv. 13. *The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.* And you may read several of these benefits of the gospel, these divine ingredients of our salvation put together, and all attributed to faith; Act. xxvi. 18. *‘I send thee now to the Gentiles,’ saith the Lord Jesus to St. Paul, ‘to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sinse and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.’*

Faith, or affiance in Jesus Christ, is an acceptance of this salvation, it is a trust in the offered grace, it is a dependance on the promises of the gospel, confirmed by Christ, it is the surrender of a sinful soul to Jesus the Saviour, to perform his whole work of grace for him and to him; and thereby the believing sinner, according to the appointment of God in his gospel, partakes of all the benefits that are treasured up in Christ.

Faith in the gospel relieves the distressed

soul under a sense of the guilt of sin, and the humble weary sinner finds mercy to forgive, and strength to subdue it. Faith appropriates and applies the blood of Christ, that sovereign medicine, to the wounds of a guilty conscience, and the conscience finds ease and refreshment. It applies the grace of Christ, that powerful antidote, to expel the venom of in-dwelling sin, and the soul is healed in some measure, and the poison is expelled. It lays hold on the power of Christ to assist in the performance of every duty, and it obtains divine assistance. Every true believer has experienced something of these benefits, by a sincere surrender of himself to Christ in such a way of trust and holy dependance.

Can the thirsty soul taste of the running water, and not find refreshment, since God, who created water, has ordained it to refresh the thirsty? Can weary limbs lie down on a bed, and not find ease, since a bed is made to give ease and rest to the weary? Can a fainting creature drink a divine cordial appointed to give life, and yet feel no revival? No more can a guilty, distressed, and penitent sinner believe the truths of the gospel, and trust in Jesus the Saviour, and yet find no relief: for this is the will and settled law of the God of

heaven, that peace and holiness shall be obtained this way.

3. When faith grows up to assurance, it approaches toward complete salvation. Then the Christian can say, *'I know I have believed on the Son of God, I know I enjoy his favor.'* Then the holiness and the joy increase, for the salvation enters into the soul in fuller measures: the nearer faith arises to assurance of our own interest in the grace of Christ, the more it supports the soul, the more it comforts, the more it sanctifies, and the more evidently doth the gospel appear to be divinely powerful to save us from sin and hell.

'Can I believe God has pardoned me, so vile a rebel, and forgiven me so many and aggravated offences, and yet is it possible I should not love him, and rejoice? Can I be assured he loves me, and not make him a return of my highest and warmest love? Can I believe that Christ the Son of God died for me, and shall I not consecrate myself and all the powers of my nature to him, that I may live devoted to his service? He has bought me with a price, a dear and valuable price, that of his own blood, and I must glorify him with my body, and with my soul, which are his; 1 Cor. vi. 20. Can I believe that I am redeemed from hell and de-

struction, and shall I dare to walk in the road that leads to it? and not rather run with patience and joy the race that is set before me, until I arrive at the gates of heaven? Am I not assured that Jesus the beloved of God, suffered death for my sins, and shall not I hate sin, which caused his suffering? Sin, which was the occasion of his agonies, and the very sting of his sorrows! I am crucified and dead to sin and to this world by my union with a crucified Saviour; yet I live, saith the divine apostle, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who hath loved me, and gave himself for me; Gal. ii. 20. How is it possible that I should hope to be made like Christ in glory, with a full assurance of arriving thither, and not purify myself as he is pure? 1 John iii. 2, 3. While I believe and am persuaded that the promise of the joys of heaven shall be fulfilled to me, I would awaken myself hourly to the joyful prospect, and be ever preparing for the possession of that blessedness.'

Thus when faith rises to a sublime and eminent degree in this world, the believer may be said to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and to receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul; 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

Before I pass to the second head, I desire leave to make these few remarks.

REMARK I. Though the first degree of faith or assent to the gospel be necessary to salvation, yet it is not of itself sufficient; and though the last degree of faith or assurance be gloriously useful in this work, yet it is not absolutely necessary.

A mere assent to the truths of the gospel is not sufficient to save; for there are many who by the force of education, or by the force of argument, yield their assent to the doctrine, and believe it to be true; yet it is a cold, feeble, languid assent; it begins and ends in the head, and never reaches the heart; it does not awaken them thoroughly, nor make them long after the pardon and the grace promised: they seem to sit still, contented with the forms of their catechism, and a general belief of the Christian religion, so far as they know it; but are under no painful solicitude, or concern of soul, about the forgiveness of their sins, the sanctification of their natures, their interest in the favor of God and eternal happiness; and therefore they proceed no farther; they never heartily apply themselves to Jesus Christ the only Saviour, and they fall short of the blessing. The devils

believe as much as they do, but are in a state of damnation still.

Again, consider that a full assurance of our own interest in the favor of God through Jesus Christ, is the highest degree of attainment on earth; but it is not necessary to the being of Christianity, nor doth it belong to every Christian. It is true indeed, that every one ought to seek after it by the frequent exercise of faith and love, and every grace, thus brighten the evidences of his saving interest in the blessings of the gospel daily; and where assurance is obtained upon solid grounds, holiness and joy will rise by swift degrees, and the soul will make glorious advances towards the heavenly state and complete salvation: but some Christians scarce ever arrive at this attainment all their days.

Since therefore a mere assent to the gospel in general is not sufficient for salvation, and a full assurance of our own interest is not necessary, it follows, that an affianced or trust in Christ as a Saviour, is the most essential and important act of faith. This is that sacred and appointed duty of a convinced soul, whereby it is made partaker of the blessings of salvation according to the gospel, if it be practised in the way which I have just before described.

REMARK II. Take notice here of the difference between the law and the gospel, between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The one gives us life upon our working, the other saves us from death, and gives us a right to heaven upon our believing. Therefore one is called the law of works, and the other the law of faith; Rom. iii. 27.

It is proper here to observe, that the scripture sometimes speaks of two covenants; the old and the new: and means chiefly the œconomy or dispensation of the Jews under Moses, and the œconomy of Christ, or the dispensation of the gospel since the Messiah came. But by the two covenants I now speak of, I would be understood to mean the law or constitution of innocency, and the constitution of grace.

By the constitution, or law of innocency, man was to have obtained eternal life before his fall; and as this law or covenant was given to Adam as the head and representative of all mankind, so every son and daughter of Adam continues under it, until they accept of the covenant of grace, or the offers of the gospel, either in the darker or brighter discoveries of it: and therefore all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are laid under condemnation by it in the writings of St. Paul, in the second and third chapters to the Romans.

By this law of works every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is become guilty before God; Rom. iii. 19. Though the nations of the Jews and Christians, and perhaps the greatest part of the heathen world have had some revelations of the gospel or covenant of grace, and have been under the outward offers of it; yet Jews, Heathens, and National Christians, are all under the sentence of the covenant or law of works, until they enter into the covenant of grace by repentance and faith in the mercy of God.

But the covenant of grace, or the gospel, is a new constitution, which God hath ordained for the relief of poor, fallen, miserable man, condemned and perishing under the curse of the law of works. It is a constitution of grace, whereby alone fallen sinners can obtain salvation.

The law of works demands universal obedience to all the commands of God, obedience perfect and persevering: for this is the language of it; the man that doth them, shall live in them; Rom. x. 5. and it curses every sinner without hope or remedy; *cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them; Gal. iii. 10, 12.* But the voice of the gospel, the righteous-

ness of faith, or the way of justification by Christ, speaketh on this wise; *with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; for the just shall live by faith; Rom. x. 10. Gal. iii. 11.* The one proclaims eternal life to all that perfectly obey, the other publishes salvation to all that believe, though their obedience be very imperfect.

I grant indeed, that the apostle cites these descriptions of the law of works out of the books of Moses, and therefore some persons would suppose him only to mean the particular law given to the Jews at Mount Sinai, and not the general covenant of works made with Adam and with all mankind in him.

But to this I give these two answers.

1. Answ. The law of works, which the apostle speaks of in the epistle to the Romans, particularly in the second and third chapters, cannot signify merely the Jewish law; for it is such a law as includes all the heathen world, as appears plain; Rom. ii. 14, 15. and by which the heathens as well as the Jews were condemned, and could never be justified; Rom. iii. 20. *By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin; therefore this must be a law that extended to all*

mankind, since it stops every mouth, and proclaims the whole world guilty before God.

2. *Answ.* The law given to the Jews, or the covenant of Sinai, so far as it is purely political, was indeed a covenant of works; and their continuance in, or rejection out of the land of Canaan, depended upon their own works, their obedience or disobedience to this law, as is often expressed in the writings of Moses: and upon this account it is used sometimes by the apostle as a very proper emblem or representative of the covenant of works made with our first father Adam, who was to have enjoyed or forfeited some earthly or heavenly paradise, according to his obedience or disodedience. It is plain then, that though St. Paul may cite the law of Moses to show the nature of a law of works in general, yet it does not follow that he means only the law or covenant of Sinai; and it is as plain, by his including the Gentiles under it, that he does not mean the law of Sinai, but the original law or covenant of works made with all mankind in Adam, their father and their head, and of which the law of Sinai was a proper emblem or figure.

All laws of works therefore are insufficient for the salvation of sinful man, and his resortation to God's favor and image, and eternal life. The

law of Sinai was a law of works, promising an earthly Canaan to the obedient Jews. The law of innocency in Eden was a law of works, promising life and immortality to obedient mankind. But they have been both wretchedly broken; man was turned out of Paradise, and the Jews out of Canaan, because of disobedience. But now the gospel, whereby the Jews or Gentiles are to be saved, or to obtain eternal life, requires faith in the mercy and promises of God in and through Jesus Christ; and by this means it saves us, though our obedience be far short of perfection. This was the way whereby the Jews themselves were saved under the Old Testament; for the gospel was preached to them as well as unto us; Heb. iv. 2; though it was in darker hints and types, and figures. And in this way were Abraham and David justified, as the apostle teaches; Rom. iv. 3, 4, 5, 6.

Though the Jews enjoyment of the land of Canaan depended on their good works and obedience to the Law of Moses, yet their hope and enjoyment of heaven depended on their faith or trust in the mercy of God, which was to be farther revealed in the days of the Messiah. And it is the same gospel by which we are to obtain salvation, since Christ is come in the flesh; but with this difference, that we are now

more expressly required to make Jesus Christ the object of our faith, and we have a thousand clearer discoveries of his righteousness and grace than ever the Jews were favored with.

Happy mankind! though fallen and ruined in Adam, yet recovered and raised to righteousness, grace and glory by Jesus Christ. How dreadful is that law which pronounces a curse and death upon every transgressor! *Tribulation and wrath, indignation and anguish, upon every soul than doth evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; Rom. ii. 9.* But how sweet and reviving is the grace of that gospel, which becomes the power of God to the salvation of every one that believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek!

The great and blessed God saw the frailty of his creature man, how ready he was to ruin himself under a law of works; therefore he has appointed his recovery by a law of faith. And what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the infirmity of our flesh, that he has sent his own Son Jesus Christ in the likeness of sinful flesh, to do for us, to fulfil all the demands of the law both in the penalty and the precept, to finish transgression, to make an end of sin by his own sufferings, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness, that whosoever believes on

and condescending are thy ways to the children of men! how full of compassion to rebels, who had destroyed themselves! how gentle are the methods of thy recovering mercy! if we will but confess our sins, mourn over our own follies, return to the Lord our God, by humble repentance, and put our trust in an Almighty Saviour, there is peace and pardon, there is grace, and life, and glory provided for us, and laid up in the hands of Jesus Christ our Lord.

REMARK III. Though the gospel offers us salvation by faith and not by works, yet it effectually secures the practice of holiness, since holiness is a part of that salvation. We are saved from sin as well as from hell, by this gospel; and we must have our souls prepared for heaven, as well as brought to the possession of it. He that pretends to trust in Christ for a deliverance from hell, and has no desire to be made holy, he has no desire after such a salvation as Christ proposes in his gospel, nor is he like to attain it.

We must be sensible then of the corruption of our natures, the perverseness of our wills, the vanity of our minds, the earthliness of our affections, our inability to do that which is good
→ him should be saved. Blessed God! how kind

for time to come, as well as our guilt, condemnation and misery, because of our transgressions past: we must desire that a thorough work of repentance may be wrought in our hearts, that the power and reign of sin may be broken there, and that we may become new creatures as well as desire to escape the wrath of God, and hell, and eternal death, if ever we would be partakers of that salvation which the gospel proposes. Christ will not divide one part of his salvation from the other: and in vain do we presume to trust in him for happiness, if we are not willing to be made holy too.

How false and unreasonable are all the reproaches that are cast upon the doctrine of salvation by faith, as though it tended to promote looseness of life, and to indulge iniquity; when that very salvation includes in it a freedom from the power of sin, and a delight in all that is holy? This is the very character of Christ our Saviour, and the reason of his name Jesus, that he shall save his people from their sins; Matth. i. 21. If we are delivered by Christ, it is from this present wicked world; Gal. i. 4. If we are redeemed, it is from all iniquity, that we might be a peculiar people, purified to himself, zealous of good works; Tit. ii. 14.

REMARK IV. Though the gospel is such a

glorious doctrine of grace, that there is no reason to be ashamed of it, yet since it saves us by faith, and not by works, there is no reason for us to boast when we are saved. We may glory indeed in the Cross of Christ, and make our boast in the Redeemer all the day long; but the gospel for ever cuts off all ground of boasting in ourselves. Here the justice and mercy of God shine forth gloriously; here the righteousness of God is declared, sinners find remission or pardon, God is just and a justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith; Rom. iii. 25, 26, 27. By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; Eph. ii. 8, 9.

The gospel concurs with the law in this respect, that it shows us our own guilt and vileness our ruin and our impotence to restore ourselves, and therefore it has put all our help upon another. *God has laid our help upon one that is mighty to save*; Psal. lxxxix. 19; and he has ordained that the way whereby we should derive this salvation, is by renouncing all dependence upon self, and trusting in Christ and grace for all that we enjoy and hope for. This

is the business of faith; this is the very nature of that Christian virtue, to disclaim all self-sufficiency, and receive all from mere mercy; and therefore it is appointed to be the means of our justification under the gospel; therefore it is said so often in scripture, that we are justified by faith, that divine grace may have all the glory; Rom. iv. 16. *Therefore it is of faith that it might be of grace.* We are ignorant and foolish, and must derive wisdom from Christ: we are guilty, and must receive righteousness from him; we are unholy, he is the spring of our sanctification; we are captives and slaves to sin and Satan, and we must have redemption from him: *He is made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, that no flesh might glory in his presence; but he that glories, must glory in the Lord;* 1 Cor. i. 29, 30.

Man, innocent man, had power and righteousness, and life put into his own hands; but the first Adam grew vain in his self-sufficiency, and he foolishly sinned and lost it all: therefore God, in order to our recovery, would put power and righteousness, and life into the hands of another, even his own Son, the second Adam, that we might go out of ourselves, and seek it all from another hand. Now faith, or trust, is the proper

act of the soul, to express our own emptiness, and our dependence on another for all.

This is the language of faith, 'Lord I am a sinful and guilty creature ; I have no righteousness, no merit to recommend me to thy favor ; I have no power to change my unholy nature, and rectify the criminal disorders of my soul ; I am unable to subdue the sins that dwell in me, or to practice the required duties of holiness ; I deserve condemnation and death, and I am by nature walking in the way to hell : helpless and hopeless forever in myself, but in thy rich grace is all my hope : I rejoice in the discoveries of thy mercy ; I come at the call of thy gospel, upon the bending knees of my soul I accept of the proposals of thy grace ; I give up myself to thy power and mercy, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, thy Son, that I may be saved from sin and hell. To me belongs nothing but shame and confusion of face : I renounce forever all self-sufficiency, and if ever I am saved, thy grace shall have all the glory.' Now when a poor humbled sinner is brought thus far, and receives the salvation of God in this lowly posture of soul, the great God has obtained a good part of his designs in the gospel upon him ; self is humbled, grace is glorified, and the sinner is saved by faith.

REMARK V. Heaven is made up of believers. The whole number of the saved were once sinners, and obtained salvation by faith.

The holy angels indeed never sinned, and yet whether their confirmed state of holiness and glory is not secured to them by trust, or dependance on Christ, may be a reasonable inquiry; for all things in heaven and earth are said to be gathered together, and reconciled in him; Ephes. i. 10. Col. i. 20. But this we are sure of, that not one of all the race of Adam hath been restored to the love of God, or raised to heaven, by their own works, but all by faith. It is sovereign and glorious grace that has saved them all, and that by the gospel too, in the various editions of it, from the promise in Eden until the full discovery of grace at the days of Pentecost after the ascension of Christ.

O it is a pleasing entertainment of soul to send our thoughts forward to the last great day, or to send them upward to the courts of heaven and glory, and to hear how the millions of redeemed sinners shout and sing to the honor of divine grace! How all that happy world of believers assist the melody, and dwell upon the delightful sound. 'Not unto us, O God our Father, not unto us, but to thine own name, and to thy mercy be all our honors paid through

the ages of eternity. We were a race of guilty and perishing rebels, who had sinned against thy majesty, and ruined our own souls: we lay upon the borders of death and hell without help and without hope: we could do nothing to procure thy love, nor merit any thing by the best of our works: but thou hast called us to believe thy gospel, to trust in thy grace, to lay down the arms of our rebellion, and to receive the blessings of salvation by faith: we have nothing to boast of, for we are mere receivers: thou hast put forth thine almighty arm, and hast made thy gospel the instrument of thy power to save us; and while we feel and taste the complete salvation, thy power and thy mercy shall have all the praise.

‘Not unto us, O Lord Jesus our Saviour, not unto us, is any honor due; but to thy condescending love; to thy compassion and death shall our honors be paid, and our acknowledgments made for ever. We saw ourselves helpless, and were directed to thee for help: we trusted in thee, and thou hast saved us; it is thy sufferings that have procured our pardon; it is by faith in thy blood we find an atonement; it is through thy righteousness that we are justified and accepted of God, and made partakers of these heavenly glories that shine all

around us. All our sacred comforts, our excellencies, and our joys are thine. Pride is hidden from our eyes for ever, and boasting is banished from all our tongues: it is thou hast fulfilled the law; it is thou hast suffered the curse; it is thou hast purchased, and promised, and bestowed the blessing. We believed thy word, we received thy grace, and behold, we dying sinners are raised to life, and advanced to glory. There is not a soul of us but delights to join in those sublime anthems of worship; worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing: blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever. AMEN.

A RATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL:

OR,

COURAGE IN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

RÔM. i. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ :
for it is the power of God unto salvation, to
every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and
also to the Greek.*

WE have seen the gospel of Christ vindicated in the former discourses on this text, and the glorious doctrines of it guarded against the various reproaches of an unbelieving world : we have heard what a powerful instrument it is in the hand of God for the salvation of perishing sinners : we have been taught the way to partake of this salvation, and that is by believing ; and we have learnt what influence our faith has in this sacred concernment. I proceed now to the last thing which I proposed, and that is to show the wide extent of this blessing of the gospel ; for it brings salvation to every one that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Where the word Greek is used in opposition to the Barbarian, as it is in the fourteenth verse before my text, it signifies the learned part of mankind, as distinguished from those that are unlearned; the Greeks being the most famous among the nations for wisdom, knowledge, or learning in that day: but when this same word stands in opposition to the Jew, as it does here in my text, then it includes all the heathen world; so that when the apostle says, the gospel brings salvation both to the Jew and the Greek, he shows the extent of this benefit to all mankind that hear and receive it.

It may be worth our while to spend a few hints upon the order in which the apostle represents the communication of this blessing, viz: to the Jew first, and then to the Greek or Gentile.

When he describes in the second chapter of this epistle the terms or conditions of the covenant of works, he sets mankind in the same order; he pronounces indignation and wrath upon every soul that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. So when he declares the blessings of the covenant of grace or the gospel, he brings the salvation first upon the Jews, and then upon the Gentile nations: and

one reason of it may be this, that the Jews having been favored with an earlier and more express discovery of the nature and will of God than the heathens, they seem to stand fairest for the participation of divine blessing ; and that, even by the law of works, if life and righteousness could have been obtained by it, as well as by the covenant of grace, or law of faith. But if they abuse their knowledge; and their sacred advantages, to the neglect of God and godliness, faith and works, they justly fall under a more severe condemnation every way, because their guilt is greater.

But there may be some special reasons given, why God thought it proper in the course of his providence to send the notice of this salvation by Jesus Christ among the Jews, before he sent it to the Gentile world.

I. The Jews were the chosen people of God, the sons and daughters of Abraham, his friend, the first favorites of heaven considered as a family and a nation ; and as he first preached to them the purity and perfections of his law, whence they might discover their own sin and misery, so he published his gospel of grace by Jesus Christ first among them, and sent his son with the messages of peace and forgiveness first to their nation. The great God thought it

becoming his equity to publish his abounding mercy first toward them, amongst whom he first published his law, to show them their guilt and misery through the abounding of sin. By the law is the knowledge of sin; and where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Rom. 3. and 5.

II. The Jews had this same gospel preached to them many ages before in types and emblems, in sacred ceremonies and dark prophecies. Now it was fit, that the types and prophecies should be explained, and the grace contained therein revealed first to them; for hereby the gospel obtained a great confirmation, and established its own truth, when it appeared in all the parts of it so exactly answerable to the ancient figures, and to the predictions of many hundred years. It was fit that the Messiah should appear among them first, where his character and picture had been drawn for many ages before, that so he might be known and distinguished whensoever he should visit the world. It was fit that his doctrine should be first published in plain language, where it had been long written and spoken in metaphors. Thus the gospel went forth first from Jerusalem, that it might be preached and proclaimed with more glorious evidence among the rest of the nations.

III. Jesus Christ, who is the subject and substance of the gospel, was himself a Jew, of the seed of Abraham, of the nation of Israel. He was born, he lived, he died amongst them. All the great affairs of his birth, his life, his ministry, his death and resurrection, were transacted in their country, and in the midst of them. It was fit the benefit thereof should be first offered to them.

If this gospel of Christ had been first preached to the Gentiles, while it was kept silent and secret amongst the Jews, there might have been reason to suspect that there was some fraud or falsehood at the bottom, and that this doctrine would not bear the light in the country where these things were done, and that it would not stand the test of examination in the land of Judea, and therefore the story was told first among strangers: and thus the Gentiles might have found some difficulty to receive it, and been prejudiced against the belief of it. But now, when it is published through all the land of Israel, and the apostles appeal to their own countrymen for the truth of these transactions; when it has stood the test of public examination there, where the things were transacted, it goes forth to the rest of the nations with brighter evidence and glory.

IV. I might add, in the last place, That it was fit it should be first published to the Jews, who seemd to have the first claim to it; that since they refused it, it might be offered to the poor Gentile nations with greater justice and equity, even the Jews themselves being judges. Such are the frequent hints given by St. Paul; Acts xiii. 46. *It was necessary that the word of God should have been first spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. Be it known, therefore, unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it;* Acts xxviii. 28.

When we think of that poor unhappy nation, the Jews, scattered abroad among all the kingdoms of the earth, banished from their own promised land for their rejection of Christ, and yet hardened in their unbelief, methinks we should send out a groan of pity for them; for they are the sons and daughters of Abraham, the first favorites of our God. Jesus our Saviour was their Messiah, their kinsman, and their rightful King. We should send up a kind wish to heaven upon their account, "How long, O Lord, how long shall Israel be cast off? How long wilt thou be angry with the children of Abraham, thy friend? When shall the day come for the opening of their

eyes, that they may look on Jesus whom they pierced, and believe and mourn? When shall the veil be taken off from their hearts, that they may read the name of Christ in the books of Moses, and trust in Jesus of Nazareth, whom their fathers crucified?"

When we see one and another of the Jewish nation in this great city, and think of their blindness and their zeal for the idle traditions of their teachers, and observe their ignorant rage against our blessed Saviour; when we behold the vain superstitions of their worship, the thick darkness that hangs upon them under the brightest beams of gospel-light, and their wide distance from salvation, we should let our eyes affect our hearts, and drop a tear of compassion upon their souls. "These were they to whom the promises of salvation did first belong, and to whom the first news was brought that Jesus the Saviour is born. These are they to whom the gospel was first preached. God himself dwelt in the midst of them, and the Son of God was their brother, their flesh and their blood. Though they are for a season cast off for their infidelity, yet God has told us, that he has a secret love for that nation still, for their father Abraham's sake, Rom. xi. 28. and this love shall break forth in its full glory one day. Make

haste, O deliverer, who didst come out of Zion, make haste to fulfil thy promises, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Let the fulness of the Gentiles be brought in, and let all Israel be saved. Bring them back from all the lands whither thine anger hath scattered them. Release thy ancient people from their long captivity to Satan, and their bands of thick darkness. Be thou, O Jesus, who art the light of the Gentiles, be thou also the glory of thy people Israel.

But I would endeavor to make a larger improvement of this general head of discourse.

Does the gospel bring salvation to every one that believes without exception; to all ranks and characters, and degrees, and orders of men? then let this grace be spread far abroad: and let not the more polite and nicer hearers grow tired, or drowsy, or disdainful, while I amplify a little and diffuse my thoughts into various particulars, pointing out the variety of the subjects of this grace; for I would (as it were) mention every sinner by name, that they may not be left only to unaffecting general notions, but being specially addressed to, they may all come and partake of this salvation by believing this gospel.

A glorious and extensive gospel indeed, and a wide-spreading salvation! To every one who believes! None excluded from this blessing.

1. It is not confined to one nation, or one family, not to one tribe or kindred of mankind, as the law of Moses was. *Go preach the gospel*, says our Lord, *to every creature*; Mark xvi. 16. Preach repentance and remission of sins in my name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; Luk. xxiv. 47. To the Jew first, but let not this grace be confined to them: publish this blessed doctrine also to the sinners among the Greeks and Gentiles. You that are afar off from God, even in the ends of the earth, ye are called to look unto Christ, and be saved; Isa. xlv. 22. It is no matter, oh sinner! what thy father was, or what thy kindred are! if thou art but a believer in Christ, thy soul is happy, thy sins are pardoned, the gospel is the power of God to thy salvation.

2. It is not confined to one sex only, or to one age. The children are called as well as the fathers, and men and woman are invited to partake of this blessing together in Christ. There is neither male nor female, neither young nor old, neither Greek nor Jew, that have any distinction put upon them, to exclude them from this grace; they are all one in Christ Jesus; Gal. iii. 28. Children, have you seen the evil of your sins, and the danger of hell? Do you long for pardoning and saving grace, and are

you willing that Christ should make your peace with God, that he should enable you to serve him on earth, and prepare you for heaven? Come then, trust in this gospel, give up yourselves to Jesus Christ the Saviour, in the manner I have spoken, and the salvation is yours. Nor let old sinners thrust away this mercy from them, under a pretence that they have long abused it. You are now under the joyful sound of the gospel; you sit now under the language of inviting love; are you willing to be made new creatures before you die, and to accept of a deliverance from hell, though you are upon the very borders of it? Behold power enough in this gospel to deliver you: the blood of Christ can wash out stains of the longest continuance; the spirit of Christ can change the skin of an old Ethiopian, and create an old inveterate transgressor into holiness. This gospel could save the thief upon the cross, and ensure paradise to him. It can rescue a dying rebel from eternal death, for it gives life and salvation to every one that believes.

3. It is not limited to one rank or condition of men in the civil life, but reaches to persons of every circumstance. The rich and the poor, the master and the servant, the prince and the peasant, must partake of salvation by the same

faith in the Son of God. The Barbarian and the Scythian, who seem to be born for slaves, and the Romans who are lords of the earth, the bond and the free, have all an equal call to receive this salvation ; Col. iii. xi. Ye are all rich enough to obtain it : there is no purchase of these blessings by any other price but that of the blood of Jesus. Silver and gold, and the treasure of kings are all contemptible offers in so sacred a concernment as this is. The benefit is too valuable to be bought at any meaner rate : Christ who paid for it, will bestow it freely on all. If the rich will receive it, they must come without money, and without price, and accept of the free gift of God, as humble petitioners at his footstool ; and the poor that have no money, come ye and buy ; Isa. iv. 1, 2. Let the vilest, meanest creature come to this treasury of grace, and with thankfulness receive the salvation, for it is bought already. You are called only to trust in this gospel, to surrender yourselves to this Saviour, and the salvation shall be yours. Ye that are mean and low and base in this world, there are many of your brethren already joined in the fellowship of this gospel : come, enter yourselves into the blessed fraternity. To the poor the gospel is preached, and the poor receive it. But there are some noble, there are some

great, there are some rich, that have felt the power of it too : there is Philemon the master, and his servant Onesimus, joined in the same faith, and partakers of the same salvation ; Philem. 16.

Again, 4thly, it is not confined to the persons whose intellectual excellencies are superior to their neighbors, or who exceed others in understanding and the acquirements of the mind. St. Paul was debtor both to the wise and the unwise ; to the learned Greek, and to the ignorant and unpolished Barbarian ; Rom. i. 14. He preached the gospel to all of them, for Christ had a chosen number amongst them all. If the witty, and the wise and learned, will lay down their pride, and submit to the doctrine of Christ crucified, and not call it foolishness : if they all humble their understandings to receive the sacred mysteries of our religion, God, manifest in the flesh, and put to death for the sins of men, and will place the concerns of their eternal welfare into the hands of him who hung bleeding upon the cross : if they are willing to be converted, and become as little children, there is a door for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And as for you, whose understandings are weak and unpolished with human learning, this is a doctrine and a gospel exactly fitted for your character : it is

no business of great sagacity, no ingenious matter to become a Christian. Believe the truths that are plainly revealed concerning your own sin and misery, and the power of Jesus Christ to save you, bewail your own wretchedness and guilt, and intrust yourselves in the arms of his grace, that ye be made holy and happy, and ye also shall become possessors of the same kingdom. Father, I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, that though these things may be hidden from the wise and the prudent yet thou hast revealed them to babes ; Matt. xi. 25, 26.

But I pursue the distributions of this grace yet farther.

5. No particular tempers or constitutions of men, no different qualities of soul or body, can exclude those that believe, from the grace or blessings of this gospel. Let not the strong man glory in his strength, nor the comely figures of human nature boast themselves in their beauty. Let not the weak be overwhelmed with despair, nor the deformed or uncomely stand afar off and abandon their hopes ; the same Saviour proposes the riches of his grace to all. Learn therefore to look upon all your natural advantages, and all your natural discouragements, with a negligent eye in the matter of your salvation. If you would be strong to win heaven, you must

borrow all your strength from Christ and the gospel. If you would appear comely and honorable before the face of God, you must be clothed in the robe of righteousness and the garments of Salvation, which he has prepared ; Isa. lxi. 10.

Nor can any difference in the natural qualities of the soul forbid any person who believes in Christ to hope for this Salvation. Those who are by nature proud or peevish, sullen or passionate, angry and revengeful, have been made partakers of this grace, as well as those who by the complexion of their animal frame, and the original temper of their minds, have had more of the natural virtues belonging to them ; such as gentleness, meekness of spirit, good humor and kindness. Those who have something in their very frame that is sly and crafty, or covetous, wanton and intemperate, have felt the power of this gospel, as well as those that have been generous and sincere, modest, chaste and abstemious ; for the grace of the gospel, which was typified by the ark of Noah, takes in all manner of animals, clean and unclean, and saves them from the deluge of divine wrath that shall come upon an ungodly world. But there is this blessed difference, that the brutes went out of the ark with the same nature they brought in ; but

those who come under the protection and power of this gospel by faith, they are in some measure changed, they are refined, they are sanctified: the wolf that came in is turning into a lamb, and the raven by degrees becomes a dove; surely, the gospel has begun to make them so, for it has begun their salvation.

I will grant indeed, that the perverse temper of blood and spirits, and the very make of the man as to his natural vicious qualities, is seldom, entirely altered by the grace of God here on earth. There will be some sallies of animal nature, some out breakings of the irregular fire that is pent up in the constitution; and these will too often mix themselves with our conduct, and interline our acts of virtue and duty. But the holy soul, who believes in Christ, will be humble, will mourn, will accuse and chide itself before God in secret, and will be importunate and restless in prayer for the victory. The Christian will not suffer himself to be carried away willingly by the stream of vicious inclination; for he that is born of God sinneth not; 1 John v. 18. and it is in vain to talk of the gospel and salvation, of faith and grace, if we give up the reins to vicious nature, and bid a careless farewell to any one virtue.

But to proceed yet farther in reckoning up the

various characters of men, whom the gospel makes Christians by the grace of faith.

6. As no persons are excluded because of their national constitution, so neither are any forbid the blessing of salvation because of their former ill characters in the moral life. Not the greatest of sinners are shut out from this blessing, if they repent and believe the gospel. Not the Jews, who crucified the Lord of glory: not the Gentiles or Greeks, who were slaves to superstition and idolatry, and drenched in most infamous and abominable practices; the Greeks, who gave themselves up to work uncleanness with greediness, without God, and without hope in the world. One gospel has saved them all. No former follies or faults, no, not the greatest of sins against man, or against God himself, ought to shut up a humble soul under despair; for this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came to save the chief of sinners; 1 Tim. i. 15. And that is a word of most extensive grace which our Saviour speaks; Matth. xii. 31. All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.

You who have enjoyed a happy education, and had pious parents to boast of, as the Jews boasted of Abraham; you who have many shining works of sobriety and righteousness, you are called to

come and trust in this gospel : but you must renounce all your pretended merit, and accept of pardoning grace, or you can never be saved. And you that have nothing that looks like a good work to glory in, sinners as bad as the worst of Gentiles, come and believe this gospel, and surrender yourselves to Jesus the Prince and the Saviour ; his blood is all-sufficient for the pardon of your sins, his righteousness is all-sufficient for your justification ; and his spirit can purify your sinful natures. Where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded ; Rom. v. 20. It is to the everlasting honor of the gospel of Christ, that it has appeared to be the power of God to the salvation of multitudes of such as you : such were some of you, saith the apostle to the Corinthians, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God ; 1 Cor. vi. 11.

And surely, if great degrees of sin cannot exclude the penitent soul from the benefit of the gospel, then 7thly, neither shall any person be excluded because of the weak degrees of his faith: him that is weak in the faith receive ye, for Christ has received him : Rom. xiv. i. 3. Read that kind condescending promise, and believe it ; Matth. xii. 20. He will not break the

buised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor suppress nor despise the least, the lowest desire of grace. He will encourage the youngest and feeblest acts of sincere repentance and true faith though struggling under much sin and darkness, until it break out into evident and active flame. The little tender seed of grace under his heavenly influences shall bud and blossom, and spring up into full glory. How large and glorious is the salvation that attends faith in this gospel! How extensive is the grace of God our Saviour! How unsearchable are the riches of his mercy! O the heights and the depths, the lengths and breadths of the love of Christ, that pass all knowledge! None of the sons or daughters of Adam, the sinner, are excluded from this salvation, where the gospel is preached, but those who exclude themselves by stubbornness and unbelief. Persons of every kind, every character, condition and quality, amongst men, have found this gospel become the power of God to their salvation, when they fled to the refuge and believed in this Saviour.

What improvement now shall I make of the last part of this discourse, this wide extent of salvation bestowed on all who believe? Has every single believer this salvation in some measure conferred on him, and wrought in him?

Then here is a plain and evident test, whereby to try our faith, or a certain sign whereby we may judge, whether we are true believers, or no.

The gospel is the manifestation of the power of God for the salvation of every one that believes. What have you found of this salvation begun in you? What have you felt of your own guilt and wretchedness by reason of sin, and of your danger of eternal death? Have you seen the death of Christ as an effectual atonement to procure the forgiveness of an offended God? Have you beheld the power and grace of Christ sufficient to renew your sinful natures, and to form them after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness? Have you found your conscience resting upon the sacrifice of Christ, and your souls humbly expecting pardon and peace there? Are your hearts turned away from every sin? Is the temper of your mind made divine and havenly, and suited to the business and blessedness of the upper world? This is the salvation of Christ which the gospel proposes, and bestows upon all that believe.

Upon such solemn inquiries as these, I am persuaded there is many a soul must take up this heavy complaint, "Alas! I fear I am no believer: I have sat long under the sound of the gospel, and I have heard the doctrine of Christ

crucified many years to no purpose ; for I have never found this gospel attended with any such powerful impressions as to begin salvation in me. I have been too thoughtless about the guilt of my sins, and about the forgiveness of them in the court of heaven. Nor have I found my sinful nature changed, nor “my affections sanctified. I have very little of these spiritual desires and delights which have been before described as part of my salvation. I feel the inward workings of my soul vain and carnal still ; I am not prepared for the heavenly world, and surely then I have never truly believed in Christ, nor received his gospel.”

To such complaints as these, I would propose these three several answers.

Answer I. It may be so indeed. All this complaint may be just and true ; and perhaps thou art an unbeliever still, dead in trespasses and sins, and exposed every moment to the stroke of death, and to everlasting misery. This is the case of many a thousand beside thyself: even the greatest part of those who are called Christians, are afar off from God and from salvation, and have no just ground to suppose that they are believers in Christ. But it is of infinite concern for thee, O sinner, to busy thyself about this inquiry. There is not any one act in thy

life, in which thou canst be engaged, that is of greater and more awful importance than this, for thy heaven or thy hell depends upon it.

Some sit all their days under the gospel, and hear nothing but the outward sound, always unmoved, unawakened and unaffected; slumbering and nodding upon the borders of eternal fire; while others hear the voice of the Son of God, arise from the dead, and receive a new, a divine life. Some in the same family, perhaps of thy own kindred, thy flesh and blood, or some that are upon the same seat in the public assembly, are convinced and converted, believe in Christ, and are saved; while thou remainest a hard and impenitent sinner under the voice of the same grace, and the preaching of the same salvation.

And if this be thy case, it is a dreadful one indeed. Consider, how will thy condemnation be aggravated, that thou hast heard the gospel published with so much glorious evidence, in such a land, and such an age of light as this is, and yet thou abidest in the state of impenitence, and unbelief, and death. Thou hast had the blessings of heaven offered at thy door, and hast hitherto refused to receive them. Thou hast sat, as it were, on the banks of the river of life, and never desired to taste the living water. Thou hast dwelt near the shadow of the tree of life, but art an utter stranger to the fruit. O!

with what a stupid and a careless ear hast thou heard the things of thy everlasting peace? Think of it therefore, and be horribly afraid: if the gospel be not powerful for the salvation of thy soul, it will become, through thy own impenitence, a powerful means to increase thy damnation, to make thy hell hotter, and thy eternal sorrows more intolerable. Wo to thee, Capernaum; wo to thee, Bethsaida; wo unto you, O sinners of Great Britain, ye have been exalted to heaven in divine favors, and ye shall be thrust down to hell if ye continue in unbelief. *It shall be more tolerable in the day of Judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for you;* Matth. xi. 21.

But art thou indeed yet an unbeliever? Yet sleeping the sleep of death? It may be this is thy awakening time: it may be this is the hour when thou shalt begin to hear the voice of God in order to life. O, cherish such important thoughts as these. Let them arise with thee in the morning, let them lie down at night with thee, and give thyself no rest, nor give rest to the God of heaven, nor to Jesus Christ the Saviour, till he has received thy soul into the arms of his love, forgiven thy sins, and made thee a new creature, that the gospel may not be to thy soul the savor of eternal death.

Ans. II. But perhaps the person who makes

this complaint, may be some humble melancholy Christian, some sincere believer in Christ, and yet under dark and timorous apprehensions concerning his own state. It may be, poor trembling soul, that thou hast found the preaching of the gospel to be the power of God to thy salvation, though thou art not able rightly to evidence it to thy own conscience.

Thou hast not the joy of pardon indeed, but hast thou not some glimmering hopes? Surely thou dost not abandon thyself to utter despair. Thou hast not assurance that Christ has accepted of thee; but art thou not sincerely willing to surrender thyself to him, to receive his complete salvation in the holiness as well as the happiness of it? Dost thou not long to be pardoned and accepted of God, for the sake of his death and obedience? And art thou not heartily desirous to give him all the honor of thy salvation? Thou hast not much power against sin, but dost thou not hate it with immortal hatred, and esteem it thy constant enemy? Does it not often cause thee to mourn before the Lord because of thy captive state, and the working of indwelling iniquities? Perhaps thou dost not yet feel thyself to be manifestly saved from sin, but art thou not saved from the love of sin? It dwells in thy flesh, it may be, and raises tumults there, but not in thy

desire and thy delight. Canst thou not say with the apostle ; Rom. vii. 23, 24. There is a law in my members warring against the law of my mind? But it is a daily torment to me, O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me? Thou dost not love God, it may be, according to thy wish and desire ; but is there any thing which thou valuest more than God and his love ? Art thou not truly willing to love him above all things, to be renewed and sanctified in all the powers of thy nature, to be fitted for the business of heaven, and suited to the blessedness ?

If thy heart can echo to this sort of language, and the grace of God has prevailed thus far in thee, then thy salvation is begun ; the gospel has shown its divine power upon thee, and thou art indeed to be numbered among the believers.

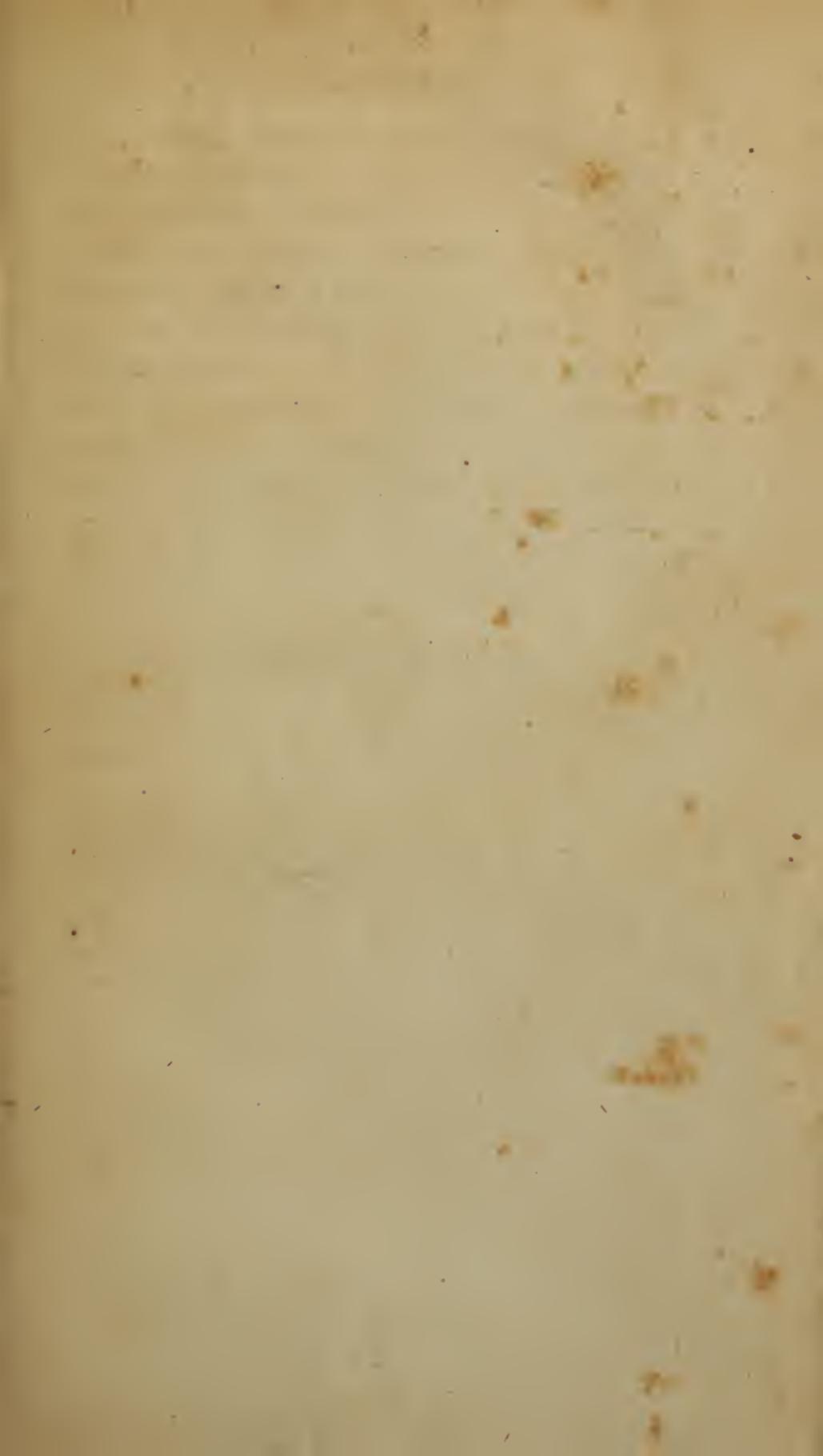
Answ. III. But I would conclude my discourse with a word that may have equal respect to saints or sinners. If you are concerned sincerely about your eternal welfare, but can see no comfortable evidences in yourselves of the work of faith or the beginnings of salvation, if all within you appear to be guilt and sin, and there is much of hell and darkness in the soul, yet do not cast away all hope : arise and come to Jesus the Saviour, behold he calleth you. This is the season of the grace of the gospel, this is the

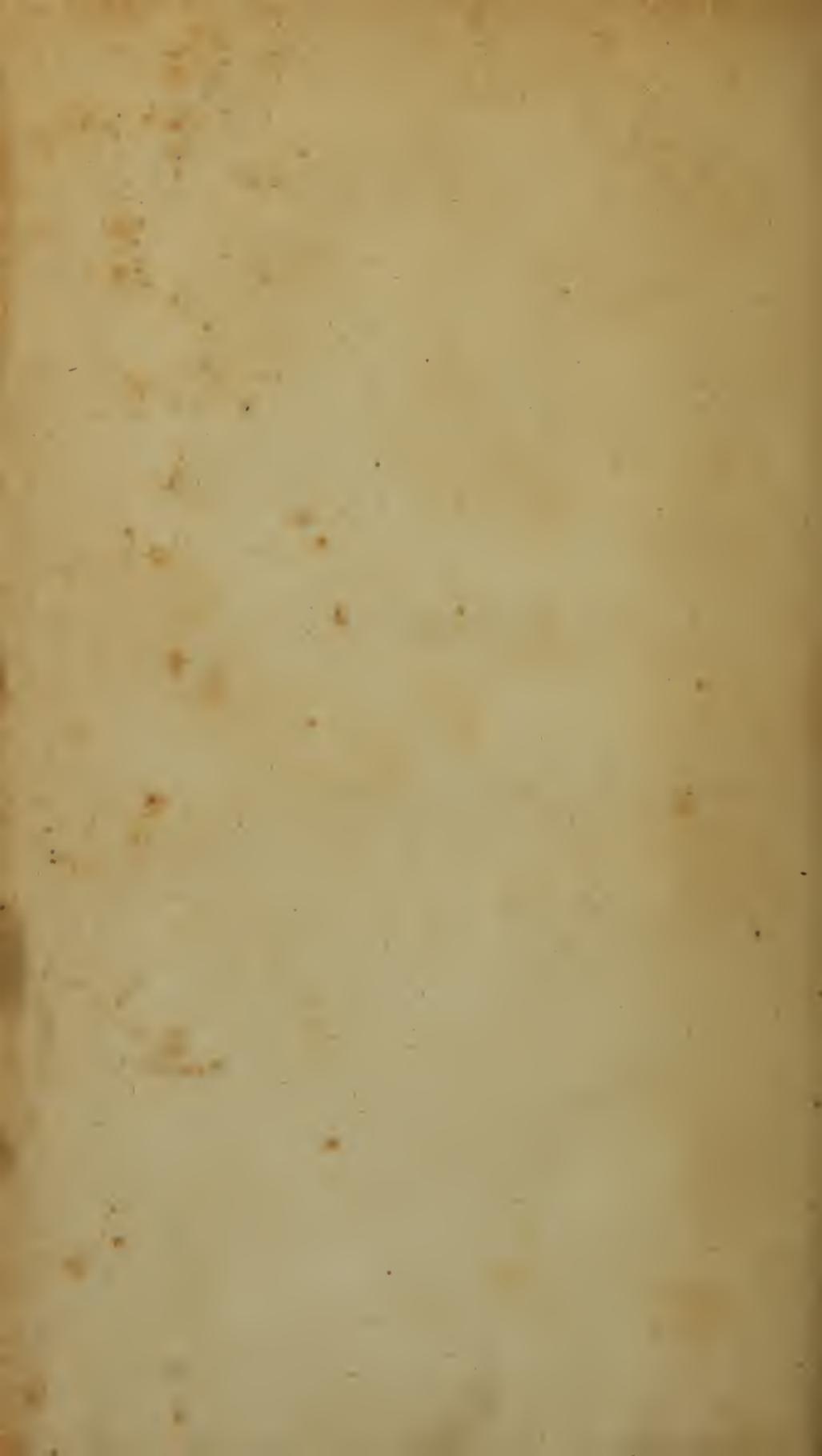
accepted time, this is the day of salvation. Make haste now to the city of refuge, fly now to the hope that is set before you.

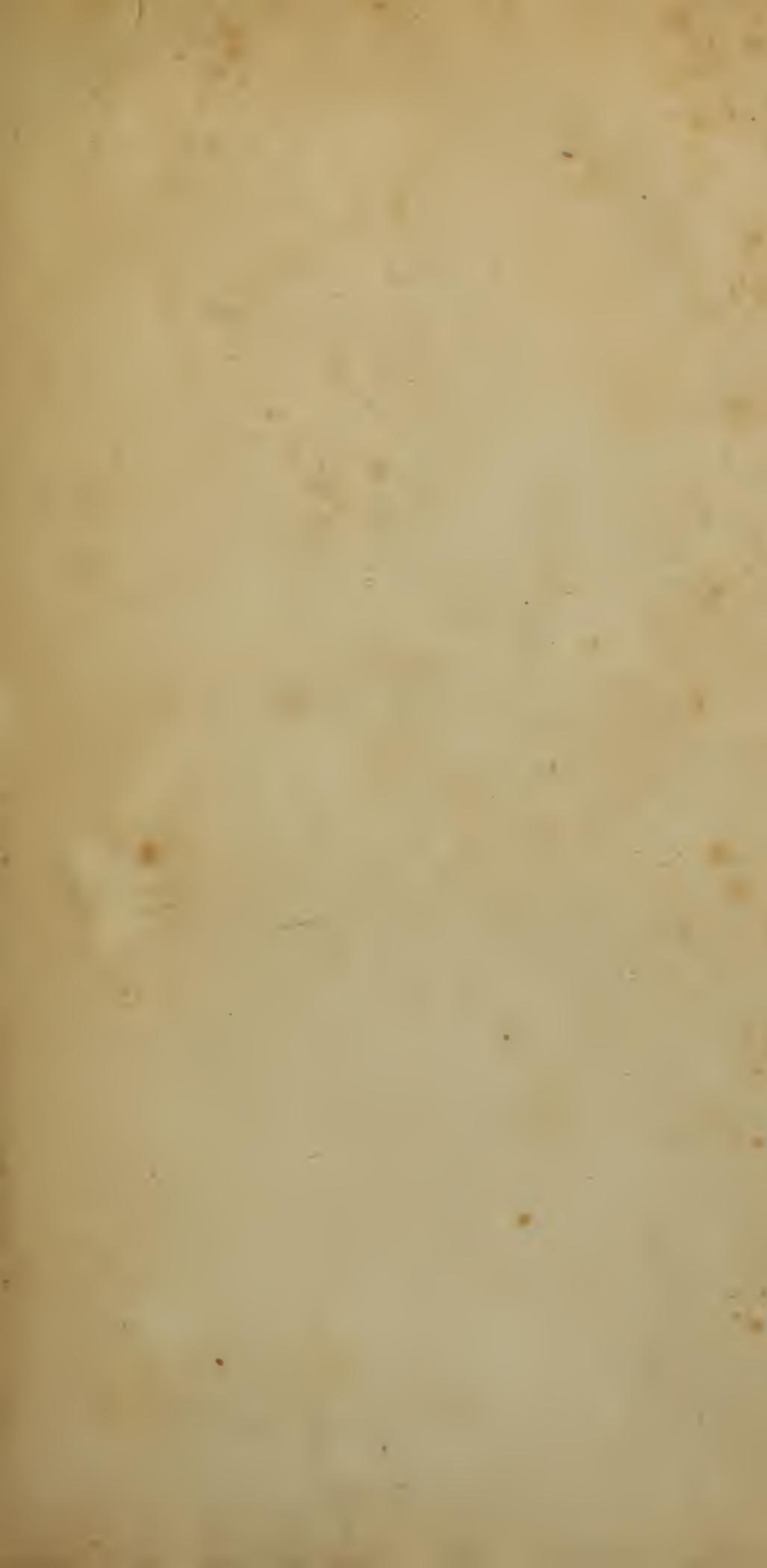
The promises are held open to thee, O soul! whosoever thou art, even the promises of light and life, of grace and eternal glory. Christ Jesus invites thee by the messengers of his gospel: if there be some darkness upon thy spirit, do not spend all thy time in laborious and fruitless inquiries whether thou hast heretofore believed in Christ, or no; but come now with an humble sense of thy guilty and sinful circumstances, and surrender thyself to his charge and care by a new act of faith, or trust or dependance. Plead with him to accept a vile criminal overloaded with guilt and misery, and to make thee accepted with God by a righteousness which was not thy own. Beseech him to look with pity on thy unholy soul, to sanctify and renew it, to take thy hard heart into his hand, and soften it into repentance. Plead with him, and say, Lord, art not thou exalted to give repentance as well as remission? Intreat of him to subdue thy sins, to new-mould and create all the powers of thy nature in the beauties of holiness, and to prepare thee for the heavenly state. Go and complain humbly at his mercy-seat, how long thou hast sat under the ministry of his own

gospel, and felt no divine power attending it. Intrust thy soul now to his care, and place thyself by faith under his divine influences. He that comes in this manner, shall in no wise be cast out, for the Lord has promised to receive him; John vi. 37. Wait on him with daily importunity, follow all the means of grace which he hath appointed, and the gospel of Christ shall appear in due time to be the power of God, even thy God to thy salvation. AMEN.

THE END.

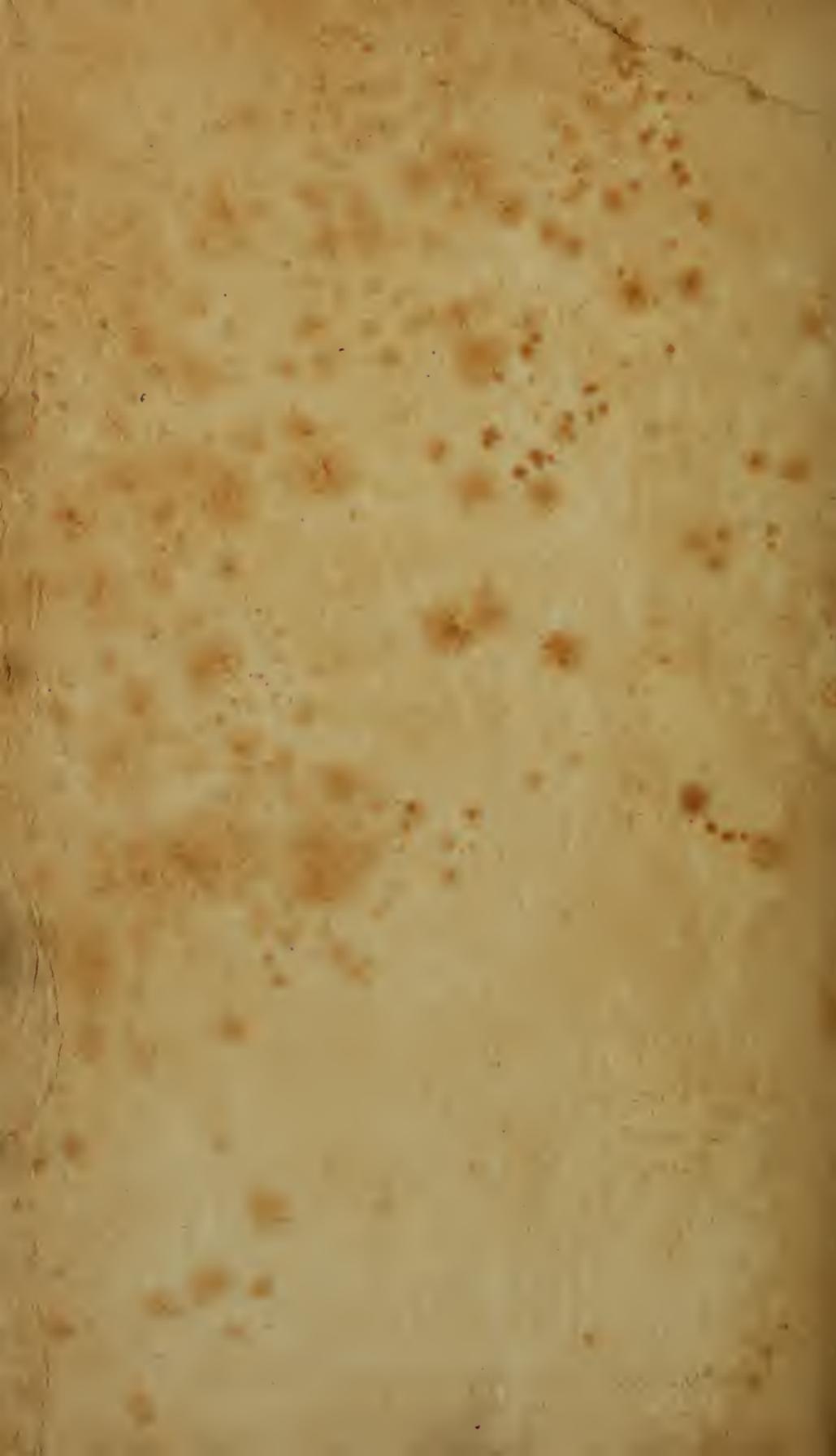






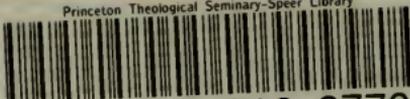








Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01012 2770