John Anderson’s

Writings and Sermons on the Gospel

Edited and Compiled by

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
Of The Rev. John Anderson, D. D.¹

Mr. Anderson was born on the south side of the Tweed, but so near it, that the congregation where his parents attended public worship was on the Scotch side. He was baptized by the venerable James Morrison of Norham, many years stated clerk to the general Associate Synod of Scotland. It is believed that his youth was passed, under the pastoral care of Mr. Morrison. It is certain that he entertained, for that venerable man, the most affectionate regard during the whole course of Mr. Morrison’s long life; and a regular correspondence by letter was maintained between them, until Mr. Morrison’s death. The writer of this sketch, recollects being shown by Dr. Anderson a letter from Mr. Morrison to him, written after he was ninety-one years of age.

Mr. Anderson was born about the year 1748. But little is known of his parents. If his own statements, very incidentally made respecting them, are rightly recollected, his father died before his remembrance, his mother set out with him for America, but died on the passage. He would sometimes allude to practices and remarks of his mother which showed her to be a woman of strong mind and unaffected piety. He was an only child; and never having had any of his own kindred in this country, and his habits of thinking and current of remarks, seldom leading him to speak of himself or his family connections; nothing is particularly known concerning them, more than what has been just related. His education was received in Scotland, but at which of the universities is likewise unknown. Nor indeed is this a matter of much consequence, especially in the case of a man of such extensive and various learning as Dr. Anderson; whose whole life was devoted to the successful pursuit of knowledge; and whose attainments plainly showed, that he had left the usual acquirements of an academic or university course far behind. He studied Theology under the care of the Professor of the Associate Synod, who, it is believed, was at the time of his course, the younger Moncrief.

¹ From, “Biographical Sketches and Sermons, of some of the first Ministers of the Associate Church in America” by James P. Miller, 1839.
After having completed the usual course of study, he was licensed: and having preached for some time as a probationer, it was found that his voice was too feeble, for the audiences which then generally attended the worshipping assemblies of the Associate Church in Scotland. And although it was his ardent desire to serve his divine Master and his generation, in preaching the everlasting gospel, yet on account of his voice, he was obliged to abandon it in Scotland. His accuracy as a scholar, and particularly his very correct taste, in language and every thing connected with composition, were known (for as a linguist and a belles-lettres scholar, he was justly entitled to take the first rank among the scholars of that age) and when he desisted from public speaking, he found ready employment as a corrector of the press, in large book-printing establishments both in Glasgow and Edinburgh. And in this business he occupied himself during several years afterwards, that he remained in Scotland.

During the time that he was thus employed, his mind was still occupied about the concerns of the church. He found leisure to compose and publish a series of Essays on several important religious subjects. These Essays show a deep and thorough acquaintance with revealed truth, and a mind sensitive to its interests. Those who will compare these Essays with his latest writings, published nearly fifty years afterwards, can not but be struck with the undeviating consistency with which he held fast his religious principles. This publication brought him into favorable notice, both as a divine and a scholar.

When the Coalescence between some members of the Presbytery of Pennsylvania and the Reformed Presbytery in this country, in 1782, took place, by which the Associate Presbytery was almost annihilated, and when the Presbytery’s need of aid was known in Scotland; Mr. Anderson was recommended to come immediately to America, and render such aid to the brethren here, as he might be enabled to do. Supposing that the audiences must necessarily be much smaller here, than they generally were in Scotland, it was thought that he might be usefully employed in preaching. Accordingly, he made his arrangements to come as soon as practicable, and arrived in Philadelphia in 1783. The first
sermon he preached after his arrival, was from Psalm xlvi. 5. “God is in
the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her and that
right early.” This was in Mr. Marshall’s meetinghouse in Philadelphia.
In the choosing of his text and in his discourse, he seemed to have a
particular reference to the state of the Associate Church in this country.
Those who heard this discourse, considered it highly seasonable and
reviving to the interests and refreshing to the friends of truth. Mr.
Marshall, knowing what had been his difficulty with regard to preaching
in Scotland, and apprehensive that the same cause might prevent the
edification of his people on that occasion, requested the congregation,
before Mr. Anderson commenced, to draw as near the pulpit as possible.
He was, however, heard with more satisfaction than had been
apprehended. And although his own congregation and those who
became familiar with his manner of speaking, heard him without any
particular inconvenience, yet it was always a complaint with strangers,
through the whole of his ministry, that they heard him with difficulty. It
may be here remarked, that although the difficulty that attended his
speaking might in part be ascribed to the organic structure of the vocal
organs, yet much of it doubtless arose from habits which were the
effects of a strong degree of constitutional diffidence—a feeling often
found in the greatest men. Those who had an opportunity of closely
observing Dr. Anderson’s habits, could readily enough see, that with
this difficulty, he had to contend through his whole life, unless when a
sense of duty, arising from a regard to some truth either in doctrine or
practice, roused all the energies of his mind; then for a time he would
appear wholly to overcome it. Under such circumstances, he has spoken
during the whole of the public exercises of a day, so as not only to be
heard with ease over a large assembly, but in a manner truly eloquent.
Indeed, he seldom preached a whole day, in which he did not in some
part of his discourses, become roused up to speak, for a few minutes, in
the spirit, both as to language and manner, of the most genuine
elocution.

During the first two years after the Union, the operations of the
Presbytery were confined chiefly to the eastern counties of
Pennsylvania. And there in the vacancies under Presbytery’s care, Dr.
Anderson labored with great faithfulness and distinguished success for that period. For the intelligent and the pious always heard him with interest and satisfaction. And such always found delight and refreshment in the clear arrangement of his discourses, and the strain of evangelical doctrine, in which they never failed to abound.

During the summer of 1784, the attention of all the members of Presbytery was much occupied with the preparation of the Testimony; for although the drafting of it was assigned to Mr. Beveridge, there was need of frequent consultations among the members, and frequent meetings of Presbytery: so that although there were applications from several places west of the Alleghany mountains as well as from the State of New York, no assistance could be sent, as the members could not be so far separated, until both the Narrative and Testimony were completed and adopted. This was done, as stated in another part of this volume, viz. the Testimony of the 25th of August, and the Narrative on the 25th of October of that year. It is to be borne in mind that there were then but four members in the Presbytery, viz. Messrs. Marshall, Clarkson, Anderson and Beveridge. Mr. Anderson was at that time stated clerk of Presbytery. As soon as circumstances permitted, Mr. Beveridge was sent to the State of New York, and Dr. Anderson to the western parts of Pennsylvania; and where he was the instrument of planting those congregations in which he was eventually settled.

The legal spirit which prevailed in the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, and which prompted that indicatory in 1720 to condemn the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and the doctrines taught in that book, very early manifested itself in the most numerous branch of the Presbyterian Church in that country. In 1754, the New Castle Presbytery issued a warning against Messrs. Gellatly and Arnot, then newly arrived, in which that Presbytery virtually condemned the Marrow doctrine. This called forth a very able defence of these doctrinal points, and refutation of the warning, by Mr. Gellatly. But still these doctrines were extensively opposed by many ministers in that body. To establish his people in these fundamental gospel truths, Dr. Anderson was led to preach on the nature of Justifying Faith. The continued opposition made
to the doctrines of the Reformation on this subject, at length led him to embody his views on it, in six discourse, in which “The Scripture Doctrine of the Appropriation, which is in the Nature of Saving Faith, is Stated and Illustrated.” This is probably the clearest and most satisfactory treatise on the subject extant in the English language. It was first published in Philadelphia, 1793, and a second edition in Edinburgh, 1797, and a third in Philadelphia, 1823.

While on the subject of Dr. Anderson’s labors as an author, we may here also notice his treatise on Psalmody, “Vindiciae Cantus Dominici.” This work, which will long remain as a standard work on the subject, and will be held in estimation as an able defence of the scriptural purity of divine worship, especially in the ordinance of praise, was occasioned by the very general introduction of a human psalmody, in the worship of God, instead of the songs of inspiration, by the General Assembly Presbyterian Church, in this country. This work was published in Philadelphia, in 1800. This, again, was succeeded in 1806, by his Letters in defence of Hervey and Marshall, against the attacks of Mr. Bellamy of New England, who not only opposed, but misrepresented the views of these eminent British divines. This work is entitled “Precious Truth,” and is a valuable defence and elucidation of the views of the fathers of the Reformation, on the subject of Justification and other collateral doctrines. His last and largest work, is his “Dialogues on Church Communion,” published at Pittsburgh, 1820. The general reason for the appearance of this work, was the prevalence of Latitudinarian sentiments, on the subject of church fellowship; but a special call for such a work, arose out of the publication of the late Dr. Mason of New York, entitled “A Plea for Communion on Catholic Principles;” in which work the popular sentiments and feelings of the day were embodied and presented in a very plausible form. In this work the reader will find Dr. Mason’s arguments stripped of their sophistical and gaudy dress, and the scriptural doctrine of visible church-fellowship, very clearly set forth. And in another part of the work, the principles of the Associate Church, wherein they differ from other denominations, very clearly and candidly stated.
In addition to these writings, which we may safely predict will yet be held, and at no very distant period we trust, in higher estimation than they have ever yet been, by the friends of truth, Dr. Anderson contributed to the defence of truth in his day, by several other publications, though of a more ephemeral character.

As an author, Dr. Anderson contributed largely to promote the cause of truth and piety in this country. And those who knew him intimately, can attest that he did this no less as a pastor and professor of Theology, and by that bright exemplification of all the Christian graces, which shone in his whole character and conversation. It is not proposed in this brief sketch, to do justice to his memory in any of these particulars; but an outline at least should be entered on record, if nothing more be done, that his example may be remembered and imitated by those who would be “followers of them, who through faith and patience, inherit the promises.”

He was settled as pastor over the united congregations of (what was then called) Mill Creek and Harman’s Creek, near the western line of Pennsylvania, which then lay scattered over a great extent of country. As circumstances permitted, new charges were erected within the same bounds; and his was contracted within narrower limits, until his meeting-houses were but eight miles distant from each other; the names of the congregations being changed to Service and King’s Creek.

In the discharge of the various pastoral duties, Dr. Anderson was a remarkable example of diligence and fidelity. Indeed his whole heart was in his work—he lived wholly for his divine Master, and for the spiritual interests of his people. Perhaps no man since the days of the apostles, was more eminently endowed with the true spirit of his station. His pulpit exercises, in their matter, were always solid, judicious and practical; in method, distinct; in arrangement, natural; in style, like his printed compositions, they were models of plainness, simplicity and perspicuity.

As a professor of theology, which office he held from about the year 1792 until 1819, he was no less distinguished for his industry and singular usefulness. His lectures were written and re-written, from time
to time, as his own reflections and various and extensive reading suggested improvements. But perhaps none of his qualifications as a professor, contributed so much to form the character of his students, as his critical acuteness in judging of a discourse. If a discourse was deficient in perspicuity or logical arrangement, his well trained and judicious mind soon detected and convincingly exhibited the fault. And the ear of the adept in music was not more quick to discern a discordant note, than was his to detect a sentiment that accorded not with the oracles of God; or even, an expression that varied from “sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

At the age of seventy-one or two his growing infirmities admonished him to resign the professorship, which he had held about twenty-seven years. He had several times before proposed tendering his resignation, but had still been prevailed upon by the members of Synod to defer it.

His bodily constitution was strong, and until the year before he resigned the professorship, he had never been prevented from preaching a single Sabbath, by sickness or bodily infirmity; when he had an attack of sickness, which greatly impaired his constitution, and from that time he began visibly to decline in health and bodily vigor. But he still continued to discharge the various pastoral duties with a zeal and activity which yielded but slowly and reluctantly to his increasing frailties, until April 6th, 1830, when, in the 82nd year of his age, and 48th of the exercise of his ministry in this country, he was suddenly called to his eternal rest.

The particulars of his death were singular, and are worthy of being recorded. He preached on Sabbath, two days previous to his death, at King’s Creek, the more distant place from his residence. On Monday a meeting of the congregation was held, in order to take measures to procure an assistant to their venerable pastor. He attended at this meeting, and preached a discourse from these words, “Thy name is like ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.” (Song i. 3.) After sermon he rode on towards Buffalo meeting house, which was about twenty miles from King’s Creek, where the Presbytery was to meet next day. He was accompanied by Mr. John Leiper, one of his elders. He
sat in Presbytery all day, until evening, when it adjourned, and took his usual share and interest in the proceedings. After Presbytery adjourned, he and his elder rode about three miles homeward, and lodged at the house of Mr. James Patterson, an elder of the congregation at Buffalo. He complained a little of weariness, and retired to rest about 10 o’clock. Mr. Leiper retired also to the same room in which Dr. A. slept. He awoke, and remarked that he felt some headache, but appeared again immediately to fall asleep. About midnight he arose out of bed, and instantly fell on the floor. Both Mr. Leiper and Mr. Patterson heard the fall and sprang to his assistance; but before a light could be procured his spirit had departed to God who gave it.

Thus was this eminent and faithful servant permitted to continue in the actual service of his Master, in which he delighted, until the last hour of his long and useful life.

Dr. Anderson was capable of bearing an application to study, to which few men could ever attain. Unless when called out on official duties, he seldom spent less than fourteen hours out of the twenty-four in diligent application to study, or in devotional exercises. His body and his mind seemed alike insensible to the weariness of study, and neither seemed to require refreshment by exercise. As an evidence of the soundness of his bodily faculties, his hearing was unimpaired; and he was able to read in a small pocket Bible without glasses to the last.

As to his Christian graces, meekness and humility might be said to predominate. He was also most conscientiously and scrupulously tender of the feelings of all, even to, the very least, with whom he had intercourse.

Dr. Anderson was married, shortly after his settlement, to Elizabeth McCoy, a member of his own congregation, but had no issue. Mrs. Anderson still survives, though laboring under the infirmities of extreme old age.

In closing this short sketch of the life and character of one, who stood to the writer in the interesting and important relation of pastor and theological teacher, the words of the Apostle suggest themselves,
“Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.”
THE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF THE

APPROPRIATION

WHICH IS IN THE NATURE OF

SAVING FAITH

STATED AND ILLUSTRATED IN SEVERAL DISCOURSES.

BY

JOHN ANDERSON, D.D.,

AND MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN SERVICE AND KING'S CREEK,

PENNSYLVANIA, U.S.

“We believe, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.”—Acts xv. 11.

THE FOURTH EDITION,

1843.
THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

Reader,—Our Lord Jesus directs his people to “go forth by the footsteps of the flock;” and the faith we should seek to obtain, is like precious faith with that of all true believers who have gone before us. It is a great encouragement to hold fast the doctrine concerning the appropriation in the nature of saving faith, which is insisted upon in the following Discourses, that there is a remarkable harmony among the Confessions of the Protestant Churches in asserting it. “We believe,” say the Reformed Churches of France, in the 20th article of their Confession of Faith, “that we are made partakers of this righteousness [of Christ] by faith alone; as he hath said, that he suffered for the procuring of our salvation, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish. And this is the case, when the promises of life which are given us in him are appropriated to our use; and they rendered effectual to us, when we receive them, not doubting, being assured by the mouth of God that we shall not be disappointed.” The Confession of the Belgic Churches, as it was revised and approved by the Synod of Dort, says, in the 22nd article, “We believe that the Holy Spirit kindles true faith in our hearts; which faith embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates and makes him its own, nor ever seeks anything without him.” The Augsburg Confession, article 20: “We are to hold, that the remission of sins is given to us, and of unjust we are made just; that is, reconciled, accepted, and sons of God, freely for Christ’s sake; not for the sake of the worthiness of our contrition, or of any other works going before or following. This benefit is to be received by faith; whereby we are to believe, that, for Christ’s sake, remission of sins and justification are freely given to us.”—“The faith we speak of does not only signify historical knowledge, but the belief or confidence of the promise of mercy, which comes for the sake of Christ the Mediator.” The Confession of the Churches of Saxony, which was presented to the Council of Trent in the year 1551, in the article of the Remission of Sins and Justification, we have these words:—“Faith signifies not only historical knowledge, such as is in devils (for they are said to ‘believe, and tremble’); but it signifies the embracing of all the articles of
faith; and particularly of this article,—*I believe the remission of sins*; I believe that this remission is given not only to others, but to me also. This faith is a confidence, acquiescing in the Mediator—beholding and embracing the promises.” The National Covenant of Scotland:—“We detest and refuse his [Antichrist’s] desperate and uncertain repentance, his general and doubt-some faith.” Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, question 73:—“Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God; whereby he not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ, and his righteousness, therein held forth, for the pardon of sins, and the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God, for salvation.” To be satisfied that the Assembly mean the same fiducial application of Christ, and his righteousness, as is meant in the other Confessions of the Protestant Churches, the reader is desired to consider their words in connection with the texts of Scripture which they quote, namely, Philip, iii. 9; Acts xv. 11.

A few sentences may be added from two eminent lights of the Church. Augustine (*Serm. 16, de verb. Apost.)*:—“If we say we have no righteousness, we lie against the gifts of God, nor have we any faith. If we have no faith, we are not Christians.” Again (in Psal. 31):—“We ought to put no works before faith,—I mean, works that can be called good. The works that are said to be before faith, however commendable they may appear to men, are mere vanity. They seem to me to be but great strength exerted in running out of the way. Let no man reckon upon his works done before faith. Where there was no faith, there was no good works.”

Pareus (*Themate Seculari de fugiend. Pap. Rom.)*:—“The saving faith to which we believe unto righteousness, is not only a knowledge of, or assent to, these things which are written in the Word of God; but especially, a confident persuasion of the promise of the Gospel concerning the remission of sins, for the sake of the merit of Christ. To believe that God is God, and that Christ is Christ, without application to thyself, will avail thee no more, than to believe that Venice is a most opulent city, while you have not a house, nor the
least concern in it.”

The faith which is described in the ensuing Sermons, prevailed in the hearts of the patriarchs and prophets, martyrs and confessors, by which they “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises.” It is that faith which leads the soul directly to Christ, as offered in the promises of the Gospel, without waiting for any previous qualifications, and to improve him for sanctification as well as justification, by looking unto him for all the endowments necessary thereunto.

_February, 1793._

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_N.B—_A few of the foot-notes, marked (R), to distinguish them from the Author’s notes, are by the Editor of the second edition, and were reprinted in the third, which was published in Philadelphia, 1823.
THE

SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF

SAVING FAITH.

Discourse I. The ‘Object’ of Saving Faith.
Discourse II. The ‘Act’ of Saving Faith.
Discourse III. The ‘Act’ of Saving Faith.
Discourse IV. The ‘Act’ of Saving Faith.
Discourse V. The ‘Duty’ of Saving Faith.
Discourse VI. The ‘Effects’ of Saving Faith.
DISCOURSE I.

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

Many are forward to make the profession which we have in the 22nd verse of this chapter, “We keep the commandments of God;” who, if they had a right understanding of the following words, “This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,” would be no less astonished and confounded, than a certain young man was, when our Lord Jesus said to him, “Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor.”

The doctrine of believing in the name of Jesus Christ, though declared in Scripture with great plainness, is so very remote from our natural apprehensions, that, while we discourse on the object, the act, the duty, and the effects, of this believing, we have peculiar need to look up to the Father of lights for his pity and direction.

We are, first, to consider the object of faith, or that in which we are to believe, which is, “The name of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”

The name of Jesus Christ is himself, as made known to us by supernatural revelation in the Holy Scriptures, so the name of God is God himself, made known to us in his word and works. Again, the name of Jesus Christ denotes his person; for so the word name is used in Scripture.—Acts i. 15.

But to enter into some particular consideration of this name, we observe,

In the first place, That the object of saving faith is the Son of God: not in the sense wherein saints and angels are called sons of God, but in such a sense as carries in it necessary existence and supreme Deity. He denied not, but allowed the justness of, the inference which the Jews drew from his declaring that God was his Father, namely, that “he made himself equal with God.”—John v. 18, 19. For when they told him so, he “answered and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for
what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.”
Now, it would be blasphemy to say of any one who is not equal with
God, that whatsoever God the Father doeth he doeth likewise. So we
must understand the profession which the Ethiopian eunuch made of
his faith in order to baptism, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of
God;” that is, he is so the Son of God as to be himself the only true
God; “whose name alone is Jehovah, the most high over all the
earth;” who made all things, and without whom was not anything
made that was made; who upholdeth all things by the word of his
power. Indeed, it is manifest, that none can rationally or warrantably
be believed or trusted in for the salvation of our souls, but He who is
God all-sufficient,—who claims the honour of being a Saviour as his
incommunicable prerogative: “I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me
there is no Saviour.”—Isa. xliii. 11. The glorious object which faith
apprehends, is the great God our Saviour, exerting his infinite
perfections in the work of our salvation.

The name of the Son of God implies, that in the absolute unity and
simplicity of the divine Being or Essence, there are more persons than
one; for Son supposes Father. Accordingly, we are assured that there
are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the
Holy Ghost; and these three are one. So that, when we believe in the
Son of God, we believe that in the only true God there are three
distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we also
believe, that the Father sent his only begotten Son in the character of
Mediator; and that the sending of him in that character supposed him
to be the Son of God, but did not make him so, the name Son
denoting his personal relation, not his office. He is the Son of God by
everal and necessary generation; whereas he is Mediator by his
voluntary undertaking. Thus, there can be no believing on the Son of
God, while the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity is rejected. By the
denial or the corruption of this truth, which is the foundation of the
Christian religion, multitudes at this day, are bringing upon
themselves swift destruction.

In the second place, The object of faith is Jesus; a word of Hebrew
original, signifying the Saviour; intimating what we are to believe in
him for, namely, salvation, or deliverance from sin and wrath: “And
she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.”—Matt. i. 21. “His Son Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath which is to come.”—1 Thess. i. 10. The Saviour of the world is the character wherein he is set forth to us in the Gospel: “We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son, the Saviour of the world.”—1 John iv. 14. The salvation of sinners was the errand on which he came: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”—1 Tim. i. 15. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”—Luke xix. 10. By his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, he obtained, not what some call easy terms or conditions of salvation, but salvation itself. He finished the work that the Father gave him to do, having fully satisfied the demands of law and justice, so that nothing remained to be done in the way of procuring; nothing remained but that each of his people should, according to the order settled in the covenant of grace, enter, first, upon the begun possession of salvation in the day of effectual calling; and, afterwards, upon the full and eternal possession of it in the other world.

The supposition that the design of Christ’s obedience unto death was to obtain easy terms of salvation for men, is contrary to the nature of the covenant of grace; according to which the gift of God is eternal life, in the beginning, the progress, and consummation of it, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to the absolute exclusion of creature boasting; particularly of that boasting, to which the creature’s performance of certain prescribed terms or conditions gives occasion. The purport of the everlasting covenant is, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” It leaves no room for the scheme of suspending our salvation upon certain terms or conditions to be performed by us,—since there is nothing that can be considered as a condition of salvation, but what is to be found among the promised blessings of that covenant, being a part of the promised salvation. This is

2 Rom. vi. 23. *The gift of God*, by way of eminence; his gift to poor sinners, who, in themselves, are as worthy of eternal death, as the labourer is worthy of his wages. That which is most worthy of God, as being of all his gifts the freest, the richest, and the most glorifying to all his perfections, is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord; that is, eternal life given us freely for the sake of Him whose name is, the Lord our righteousness.
manifestly the case with respect to faith, repentance, and new obedience: “In his name shall the Gentiles trust. I will give them a new heart; a new spirit will I put within them: I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh: I will put my Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes. They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.” Besides, in the promises which the Father made to Christ, the fulfilment of all righteousness, or Christ’s going through a course of service and suffering in a state of humiliation, is represented as the only condition upon which the salvation of his people, or their attainment of grace and glory, was suspended, and by which it was to be fully and infallibly secured. “When thou shalt make his soul, or, when his soul shall make itself, an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities: Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death.” Now, it is manifest, that the whole salvation of his people, their faith, holiness, and comfort, are included in Christ seeing his seed,—in his seeing the travail of his soul, and being satisfied: and therefore, since Christ, bearing the iniquities of his people in obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, infallibly secured the latter, that is, his seeing his seed, or the travail of his soul; it no less infallibly secured the former, that is, the faith, holiness, and comfort, the whole salvation, of his people.

Thus the object of faith is Jesus the Saviour. Those who regard anything besides Him, as what they are to rest upon, in whole or in part, for salvation, whether it be under the notion of merit, or of a condition, or of a recommending predisposing qualification, are attempting to rob him of the glory of his name. “He is despised and rejected of men of all who do not rely on him for the whole of their salvation. In the name Jesus, faith beholds the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, of our salvation. This name is to all believers as “ointment poured forth;” an unfailing spring of comfort
in all their tribulations. Blessed Jesus! they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: the desire of their souls will be to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.

In the *third* place, The object of faith is called Christ, a word of Greek original, signifying *Anointed*. This name hath respect to his being set up from everlasting as the covenant-head and surety of his people: “I was set up,” or, as some read it, “I was anointed, from everlasting.”—Prov. viii. 23. As also, to the Father’s sending him in his incarnation: “Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?”—John x. 36; and to the public and illustrious manner in which the Father declared his acceptance of the person and righteousness of his beloved Son as our representative and surety, when there came such a voice from the excellent glory, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;” and when he was raised from the dead, and received up into glory; and, lastly, to the superabundant measure in which the Holy Spirit was communicated to his human nature, fitting him for the execution of his mediatorial offices: “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”—John iii. 34. This was signified by the Holy Ghost descending upon him at his baptism in the form of a dove; and had been fully declared in the Old Testament: “And there shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,”—Isa. xi. 1, 2: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek.”—Isa. lxi. 1. The Spirit, which God gave not by measure unto him, rested and abode upon him through the whole course of his humiliation; but was eminently and illustriously upon him as a spirit of gladness, in his state of exaltation: “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—Psal. xlv. 7. As David was thrice anointed to the kingly office,—first, at Bethlehem by Samuel; and next, at Hebron by the men of Judah; and again, at Hebron by the tribes of Israel; so there were three remarkable anointings of our Lord Jesus—the first, at his incarnation; the second, at his baptism, when he was entering upon his public ministry; and the third, which was of
all the most illustrious, in his resurrection and ascension.\(^3\)

He who is the object of our faith is called Christ, or, *the anointed One*, in relation to his prophetical, priestly, and kingly offices, and in allusion to the instances we have in the Old Testament, of persons being anointed when they were invested with these offices. Instances of anointing to the kingly office are common in the Old Testament. Of anointing to the prophetical office, we have an instance in the case of Elisha the son of Shaphan. With respect to the priestly office, the command is express, “Thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister in the priest's office.”—Exod. xxviii. 41.

Faith views its glorious object as our Great High Priest,\(^4\) unspeakably excelling the priests of the order of Aaron. These were but mere men; He is a divine person, the only true, the supreme, and necessarily existent, God. Their offerings were of no value, but as they served to shadow forth the one offering of Christ, and to direct the faith of church members to Him. They were made without an oath; but He with an oath, by Him that said unto him, “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Of his three offices, the priesthood alone is confirmed with an oath; because it is a matter of supernatural revelation, most remote from our natural apprehension; and because it is the foundation of the other offices;\(^5\) for he could not be a prophet or a king of his people, but on condition of his submitting as their great High Priest, to give himself for them, “an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.”

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\(^3\) Witsius in Symbolum, de nomine Christi.

\(^4\) Faith receives Christ as Priest, King, and Prophet: though as Christ, in the order of his offices was first a Priest, undertaking to satisfy for sin; then as a Prophet and King, to rule and guide his people to eternal life; so faith, in order of nature, first looketh on him as a Priest for reconciliation with God; then as a Prophet and King, for illumination and sanctification.—*Troughton's Lutherus Redivivus*, chap. x.

\(^5\) Some have quarrelled this expression, that Christ's priestly office is the foundation of his prophetical and kingly offices. But, whatever may be said about the mode of expression, the sentiment appears exceedingly just. Christ would have had no business among sinning men, more than among fallen angels, as a Divine Teacher, by his Word and Spirit, had he not become their surety, to redeem them from the curse, and procure a special right to dominion over them, and in them, as their Sovereign Lord.—Rom. xiv. 8, 9, &c. So it was *most necessary* that Christ should be a partaker of our nature, in order to serve, surfer, and intercede, as a Priest.—See *Owen on Hebrews*, vol. i. p. 225, of the *Exposition*. (R.)
The priests under the law were said to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. The sacrifice that Christ offered was himself, in respect of his human nature. His divine nature was the altar which sanctified the gift or offering, rendering it of infinite value and virtue. The offering up of himself was begun in his incarnation, carried on through his life, and finished at his death. The effect of it was nothing less than the expiation of all the sins of his people, and their full reconciliation to God. For “by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Hence the Lord represents the efficacy of this offering, by saying, “I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day.”—Zech. iii. 9. In this oblation, faith beholds the sure foundation and full security of our pardon and acceptance with God.

It was part of the office of the High Priest under the law to intercede for the people; but the intercession of our Lord Jesus is infinitely superior; which is not barely the offering up of a desire to God, like the intercession of the saints for one another; but is a glorious representation of that will of Jesus whereby we are sanctified, founded on the dignity of his person, on his infinitely meritorious obedience unto death, and on the everlasting covenant or council of peace, which was between the Father and him from eternity; and therefore, his manner of speaking in his intercessory prayer, is so majestic and peremptory, as would be unbecoming and presumptuous in any other than him who is the Son of God, the Fathers equal, the surety of the better covenant: “Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, to behold my glory,”—I will, not I beg or entreat. Such is the dignity, authority, and efficacy, of his intercession, that it can no more, without blasphemy, be ascribed to any other, than his oblation, on which it is founded, and with which it is inseparably connected. The prevailing intercession of our Lord Jesus proclaims to the whole Church, that “the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake;” and that every believer is “blessed” forever “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;” and that whatsoever we ask in Christ’s name shall be given us,—believing prayer being a sort of echo of Christ’s intercession.

Again, faith views its glorious object as our anointed Prophet. By nature we are utterly blind to the things of the Spirit of God; for the
natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them. For this deplorable case, we have an adequate remedy in our Lord Jesus Christ, as he is set forth in such passages of Scripture as these: “I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes.”—Isa. xlii. 6, 7. “Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way thou shouldest go.”—Isa. xlviii. 17. The prophets under the Old Testament instructed the people, foretold things to come, and confirmed their doctrine by miracles. Our Lord Jesus was, no doubt, greatly superior in what he spoke and did, in the course of his personal ministry among the Jews, to all the prophets that went before him; yet we would have a defective and erroneous notion of his prophetical office, were we to consider it as wholly or even chiefly executed in his personal ministry, while he was in that state of humiliation, the proper and peculiar design of which was the fulfilment of his priestly undertaking. Here we are to distinguish between the general nature of Christ's prophetical office, and the peculiar manner of his executing it in a state of humiliation, as a minister of the circumcision, and in obedience to the law as a covenant of works, which bound him to teaching, as well as other good works. When we consider his teaching with respect to this manner of it, or as what he did in the character of a bond-servant, we justly maintain that it belongs to his surety-righteousness, which was wrought out for, and is imputed to, his people for their justification. But with respect to the general nature of Christ’s prophetical office, which is the revealing of the will of God to his people for their salvation, the execution of it was no way peculiar to the time of his personal ministry in the days of his flesh, but has been going on from the giving of the first promise till now. The external revelation that he gave to the Church under the Old Testament, while there was only a part of the Scriptures in the hands of church members, was more obscure; but the external revelation that he gave to the Church under the New Testament, by completing the canon of Scripture, is far more clear and full. He has now given to his people all the external revelation of the will of God for their salvation, that they have to
expect till the end of time. The Bible, as we have it in our hands, is Christ’s last will and testament, to which nothing is to be added, either by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Christ is even now externally executing his prophetical office amongst us, in his word and ordinances: in these he is “speaking to us from heaven.” Christ teaches inwardly and effectually by his Spirit: he not only gives outward instruction, but an heart to receive it,—he opens our understanding to understand the Scriptures. The supernatural teaching of the Holy Spirit is necessary to our attaining of the saving knowledge and application of what we are taught in Scripture; but adds no new matter to what we are taught there. The teaching of the Spirit attends the teaching of the Word; and we have no ground to expect the former, where the latter is wanting. Christ is bringing in his sheep, by the effectual working of his Spirit, in those places only in which he is teaching by his Word, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Farther, faith beholds its object as that glorious King, whom God hath set upon his holy hill of Zion. Faith views him as the irresistible Conqueror of that enmity which naturally reigns in the hearts of sinners: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power,”—Psal. cx. 3; and as the irresistible Conqueror of Satan, in whose possession the sinner is by nature: “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace,”—Luke xi. 21. Thus our poor souls are by nature Satan’s palace, of which he is represented as having peaceable possession, because there is a willing subjection to him, or, which is in effect the same thing, to the dominion of sin. But it follows in the next verse, “When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour, wherein he trusted, and divideth the spoil.” The stronger one than Satan is our Lord Jesus Christ, who binds Satan; so that he has no more that absolute commanding power over the soul which he had before. Again, “All his armour is taken from him, wherein he trusted,” when the soul is delivered from the law as a covenant, so that Satan can no more exercise his power over the soul, by virtue of that broken law from which the soul is fled to Christ; and when the soul is renewed in
all its faculties; so that, though there be still remainders of corruption, yet these, being effectually opposed by the newly implanted principle of grace, cannot give Satan that absolute dominion which he formerly had. It is added, “He divideth the spoil;” he gives everlasting salvation to the poor soul, and takes all the glory to himself. Again, faith beholds the King of Zion, not only as the almighty Conqueror, but as the faithful Keeper, of the soul. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of mine hand,”—John x. 28. “I know to whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”—2 Tim. i. 12. Faith beholds him, not only as our great High Priest, who hath delivered us from the law as a covenant, but also as our King, giving forth the same pure and perfect law as a rule of life. Though believers are not under the law as in the hand of God absolutely considered, or according to the covenant of works,—that is, either to be justified or condemned by it, they being justified already, and set free from liableness to condemnation, so that they have nothing to do with the law in that respect, it being dead to them, and they to it,—yet the authority by which the law, as a rule of life, is given forth to believers, and is binding upon them, is the authority of God-Creator as well as of God-Redeemer; for it can lose nothing of its authority or obligation by being in the hand of Christ, who “is the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person. All things were made by him, and without him was not made anything made that was made.” The law that believers are under as a rule of life being regarded as in Christ’s hand, is called the law of Christ: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”—Gal. vi. 2. “Being not without the law to God, but under the law to Christ.”—1 Cor. ix. 21. And how persuasive and endearing is the manner in which he gives his commands to his people! He says to each of them, “My son, bind them continually upon thine heart; tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” According to the measure or exercise of faith, it will be the great desire and endeavour of believers to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the
Lord blameless. This is their great encouragement, that he calls his people to no duty without allowing them a sufficiency of grace and strength to carry them through the performance of it; saying to each of them, “My grace is sufficient for thee; and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness. As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Faith likewise beholds a gracious exercise of his kingly authority, in the correction or chastisements of his people; for he will “not suffer sin upon” his people,—he will “in any wise rebuke them.” Both his love to them, and the glory of his infinite holiness, require that he should manifest his displeasure with sin regarded in their heart, or breaking out in their practice. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”—Rev. iii. 19. “Beware of him, and obey his voice: provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions”—(Exod. xxiii. 21); that is, he will not connive at or countenance their transgressions, but will have them brought to a deep and humbling sense of the heinousness and aggravations of them. Surely a gracious heart would tremble to think of the heavy corrections by which the Lord often manifests his displeasure with the sins of his own people. Hence the Psalmist says, “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.” Though a person that has truly believed on the Son of God shall never be cast into hell, yet a sort of hell may, for a time, be cast into him. Such was the case of Job, described in these words:—“The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits.” But faith gets a satisfying view of the heaviest correction, under the management of their merciful and gracious King, as not against their persons, but against their corruptions, and as “light afflictions, which are but for a moment, working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The enemies of our salvation, within and without, are numerous and powerful; but if we have the true faith of that glorious victory over them which our King and Head hath obtained, in his own person, and in our name, we will have a real persuasion, that, through him, we shall be overcomers at last. He may, indeed, for holy and wise ends, suffer believers to fall grievously; but he will raise them up again, as he did Peter, with bitter weeping,—restoring their souls, causing them, with renewed strength, to walk in the paths of righteousness,
for his name’s sake. Faith beholds the warfare in believers against indwelling sin, Satan, and the world, as going on under the hand of Zion’s King, to a complete victory and triumph. Hence the apostle, having uttered that mournful complaint, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” immediately adds, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord;” or, as it may be supplied from 1 Cor. xv. 57, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Faith beholds the power and authority of Zion’s King illustriously displayed in the erection and maintenance of his visible Church in the world; in preserving the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, pure and entire; and in directing all the concernments thereof to a most blessed and glorious issue. Is there one of the truths or institutions of our Lord Jesus Christ which men are peculiarly intent upon having buried in oblivion? Faith beholds, in his kingly office, good security for the resurrection of such a truth or institution, and for its being made to shine forth with distinguished lustre. “His name,” which includes all the truths and ordinances wherein he makes himself known, “shall endure forever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun.” The preservation of such truths and ordinances is the cause of his people; and their “Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause.” By the revival of such truths, in the profession and power thereof, he will carry on the work of building up his Church, which belongs to him, as her King. For, “Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a Priest upon his throne.”

Thus we have given some account, from the Scripture, of that Name which is the object of faith, which is “as ointment poured forth,” and which all believers will dwell on to eternity, with “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” What we have farther to offer, on this part of our subject, shall be in answer to three questions.

The first is, Whether such principles as the being of God, the
immortality of the soul, a future state of rewards and punishments, as
they are known by human reason in its present corrupted state, are to
be considered as objects of faith, or as the foundation on which the
Gospel, or the faith of the Gospel, is built?

Answer. It is absurd to call such truths as those now mentioned,
objects or matters of faith, while they are known and considered no
otherwise than as matters of reason. Faith is a particular way of
apprehending things; and nothing can be said to be the matter or
object of a divine faith, but as it is apprehended to be revealed in the
Word of God—as it is seen in the light of a supernatural testimony, or
in the face of Jesus Christ.6

We allow that there are many truths concerning the being and
perfections of God, and concerning the relation we stand in to him,
which our reason, corrupted as it is, does not fail to suggest. These
truths, not as matters of faith, but as dictates of reason, are supposed
and implied in all the doctrines of revelation; and whoever is an
enemy of the former, must be much more an enemy of the latter. On
the other hand, the knowledge of things by reason, is a different kind
of apprehension from that of faith—as the way of apprehending

6 The doctrine contained in these words of the apostle, “He that cometh to God must believe that
he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. xi. 6), is far more sublime
than anything that can be known by the light of nature. For,—1. To “believe that God is,” is to give
credit to the testimony wherein he hath revealed his name, his perfections, and the riches of his all-
sufficiency; for faith is knowledge founded singly on the testimony of God: and since God hath
revealed himself in his Word as well able to be the Salvation of the sinner, it follows, that a person
does not truly believe that God is, unless he believes the Gospel, as it gives God the praise of his
being well able to “justify the ungodly;” for this is included in the notion of God, as he reveals
himself in his Word.—2. God might be “what he is,” as to his all-sufficiency, though it were not his
will to be the God and Salvation of the sinner. Hence faith does not stop here; for it also believes that
God is actually “the rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” according to his own declaration, “I
said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain.”—Isa. xlv. 19.—3. Another principle of faith
is, that God is to be sought as our chief good, with diligence and deep concern; and that we “must
come to him.” Here it is supposed that God has given us a testimony, wherein he hath shown us the
way wherein poor man, in his present fallen condition, may seek him, and come to him. It is certain,
the sinner cannot “seek God,” unless he seek also the righteousness of God; nor may he look for
salvation, but in such a way as declares and magnifies that righteousness.—Rom. iii. 26. Nor is it fit
that he should “come to God” without such an atoning and interceding High Priest as the apostle says
“became us” (Heb. vii. 26), or otherwise than is included in Him who “engaged his heart to approach
unto God” on our behalf, in our name.—Jer. xxx. 21.

They utterly mistake the apostle’s meaning, who suppose that there is nothing in the words now
considered, but what natural religion teaches; for the knowledge of God, such as it is, which men
attain by the light of nature, is not “faith,” nor is it sufficient to salvation, nor by it can anyone “please
God.”
things by the outward sense is of a different kind from both the former; and though there can be no real contradiction among the truths of God, yet, such is the natural corruption of the human mind, and so great is the distance between the truths that are knowable by human reason and the peculiar doctrines of revelation, that the latter can never be so represented to the understanding of an un-renewed man, as to make him discern that they have a sure and satisfying foundation in the former. Nothing less than this can be meant by the apostle in 1 Cor. ii. 14, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

7 “The natural man,” so called by the apostle (homo animalis), the rational man, who has no other principle of action than his own mind, or natural reason, does not perceive the things of the Spirit of God; they exceed his reasoning powers, and, after all his efforts, he cannot know them, so as to form a right judgment of them. Wherefore? “Because they are spiritually discerned.” They belong to a sublimer sphere, which the axioms or principles of natural reason do not reach.

There is another cause why men cannot discern a foundation for the peculiar doctrines of revelation, in the axioms or principles of reason, beside the sublimity of these doctrines; which is, that the reason of all natural men is now so corrupt, and even blind, especially with respect to the things of God, that they are continually taking gross errors for axioms and principles of reason.

Excellent are the words of Lord Bacon, in his Treatise concerning the Improvement of the Sciences, in the beginning of the ninth book. “The prerogative of God,” says he, “extends to the whole man—to our reason as well as our will; for man must deny himself altogether, in coming to God. Wherefore, as we are bound to obey the divine law, notwithstanding the reluctance of the will; so we are to give credit to the Word of God, notwithstanding the reluctance of reason; for if we believe those things only in the Scripture which are agreeable to our reason, we assent to the reasonableness of the things, but give no credit to the Testifier of them—as we use to deal with witnesses of a suspected character. Moreover, there is something more excellent in believing than in mere knowledge; for in knowledge, the mind is acted upon by sense, which results from material things; but in faith, the soul is acted upon by a soul,” says Lord Bacon: I would rather say, by the Spirit of God, who is a nobler agent.

The hearts and minds of unregenerate men are far from being thus subjected to the authority of the Word of God. Such, however, may have a knowledge of much revealed truth; and with respect to the variety and arrangements of their notions, and suitable utterance, they may, and it is probable often do, excel real Christians. But this is not to be ascribed to the force of the ordinary light of natural reason and conscience, but to the peculiar heightening of that light by the common influences or operations of the Holy Spirit, which persons partake of in the visible Church, for her benefit.

But the light of that knowledge is of a different kind, which, being inseparably accompanied with the love of the truth, and with the sanctification of the inner man, is kindled in the souls of the elect by the Spirit of Christ, which he purchased for them, and which flows from him as the Head, into them as the members of his mystical body. The Holy Spirit endues them with a new spiritual capacity of apprehending spiritual things; a capacity no less peculiarly adapted to the purpose of apprehending spiritual things, in their reality, glory, and suitableness, than the eye is adapted to the purpose of seeing, or the ear to that of hearing. He also gives them the use or exercise of this capacity, by opening and unfolding the Word of God to them; by causing them to behold the infallible truth and excellency of it in its own light, so that their persuasion thereof is no less full and satisfying than their persuasion of the existence of the sun, when he shines upon them in a clear day. See a dissertation of Witsius, which he addresses, Ad amplissimum virum Ulricum Huberum. This is the doctrine of the
The embracing of a divine truth, upon the immediate view that a renewed understanding has of God’s authority shining in some passage of the Holy Scriptures, where that truth is really taught, is a very different thing from our assent to a truth, because it is agreeable to our natural reason. The dictates of natural reason may, indeed, be made use of to show men the inexcusableness of their unbelief, and to excite believers to the more lively exercise of faith, but they may in many cases be sufficient to answer these purposes, and yet be utterly insufficient to be a foundation of faith. Thus our Lord excites the disciples to a cheerful trust in the providence of their heavenly Father, from this consideration, that they were better, or of more importance, than the birds or beasts, of which they saw his providential care so conspicuous. This rational consideration was proposed as a motive to their faith, but not a ground of it; for all that is to be seen, in the ordinary course of providence, is utterly insufficient to be a ground of that special confidence in God’s fatherly love to which they were exhorted,—without that special revelation of his good-will to them in his Word of promise.

Faith embraces the truths revealed in the Word of God, not because it apprehends them to be agreeable to, or founded upon, reason, but because it immediately discerns the Word wherein these truths are revealed to be the Word of God—a Word which bears a manifest, undeniable impression of his authority, majesty, wisdom, power, holiness, righteousness, mercy and truth. So the apostle tells the Thessalonians, that when they received the Word of God, they immediately received it, “not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God.” To receive a truth as the word of man, is to receive it as agreeable to, or founded upon, the principles of natural reason; a way of receiving the truths of religion which here stands opposed to the receiving them as the Word of God—that is, to the receiving of them by faith. Nature affords us some image of faith’s immediate discernment of the voice of God in his Word, particularly in that immediate, indescribable manner in which we distinguish one person from all others, by his countenance, by his voice, and sometimes by

Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. i. art. 6: “We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.”
his manner of expression. It seems to be in allusion to this that faith is represented as our seeing Jesus, and our knowing his voice.

At the same time, this faith does not hinder, but rather promotes, the right use of all the faculties which God hath given us. No mathematical demonstration is more suitable or more satisfying to our rational nature than the light of God’s Word, when let into the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. When reason sets itself above divine revelation, or refuses to submit thereto, it is perverted, and works its own overthrow; whereas, while it acts within its own sphere, and in due subordination to divine revelation, its exercise is ready, uniform, vigorous, and beneficial. What a noble field does revelation open for the due exercise of reason!—in discerning, for example, the propriety and significance of the words employed by the Holy Spirit; in tracing the connection of revealed truths with one another, as so many links of one beautiful chain; and in observing the harmony and agreement between the Word of God and his works of creation and providence.

The second question is, Whether the whole Word of God, and whatever is contained in it, be the object of faith?

Answer. The whole Word of God is, indeed, the general object of faith; but, as Calvin observes, “In the Word, which is its general object, it seeks a special object, in which it may find and receive reconciliation with God, and remission of sins.” It may be farther observed, that the Word is to faith what light is to the eye; it is that wherein faith apprehends its only suitable and fully satisfying object, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As to other things contained in the Scripture, they all meet in Christ as their centre. Thus, the law shows us the sinfulness and misery of our natural state, and so our unspeakable need of Christ. The examples of the saints show us what others have received, and what we may expect to receive, out of the fulness of Christ. The threatenings declare to us the infinite hazard that attends our neglect of Christ. The voice of the threatenings, as they stand connected in the Bible, is like that of the angels to Lot, when they brought him out of Sodom,—“Escape for thy life; look not behind thee: escape to Jesus
Christ, the Son of God, lest thou be consumed.” “In Christ are all the promises of God Yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God.” The grand scope or design of all the Scripture is, to testify of Christ; to declare what he is in himself, what he is to us, his doing and dying on earth, and his intercession in heaven, with the manner in which we are brought to the enjoyment of fellowship with him.

Question third. How is God the object of faith?

Answer. Luther had good reason to say, Nolo Deum ahsolutum,—I will have nothing to do with an absolute God, or with God according to the revelation which he makes of himself in the law of works. A person that has “sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (as all mere men have done), has nothing to look for from God, absolutely considered, but “judgment and fiery indignation, that shall devour the adversaries.” Faith cannot see God as the God of our salvation, but in Christ. It is only in Christ that faith terminates, or comes to rest upon God, upon his power, wisdom, mercy, and truth, as working salvation for the Church, and for us in particular. To this purpose it is said, in 1 Pet. i. 20, “Who by him do believe in God that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.” If we see Christ aright, we will see God in him—we will see that we need not go out of Christ to seek any knowledge of God; for in Christ “dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” God’s “name,” nature, all his perfections, are “in him.” He and the Father are one God. Hence he says, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.”

Jesus Christ was the object of faith under the Old Testament dispensation. He was revealed to faith in the first promise concerning the Seed of the woman, and in all the ceremonies and sacrifices of divine appointment. The Old Testament Church is expressly enjoined to believe in Christ: “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way. Beware of him, and obey his voice; for my name is in him.”—Exod. xxiii. 20, 21. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.”—Psal. ii. 11. The name of Christ was faith’s plea under the Old Testament as well as now: “Behold, O God, our Shield, and look upon the face of

8 “Often,” says Luther, “and willingly, do I inculcate this truth. That you should shut your ears, and say, you know no God out of Christ.”
thine Anointed”—Psal. lxxxiv. 9. “Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate, for the Lord’s sake.”—Dan. ix. 17. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, was God as revealed in the promises of the covenant of grace—God in Christ reconciling sinners to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. In a word, the same righteousness of God which is now, under the New Testament, more clearly manifested, was all along “witnessed by the law and the prophets.”
DISCOURSE II.

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

We have considered Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, as the object of saving faith; and surely what the Scriptures teach concerning all his glory, and all his suitableness to our case, should awaken in us an earnest solicitude to have that faith by which he dwells in our hearts.

Let us proceed to another head of inquiry—What it is that, properly and strictly speaking, constitutes the act of believing in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Here some things may be premised, for the better understanding of what we aim at:—

1. The faith under consideration is a saving grace; of which the apostle speaks in Eph. ii. 8, “By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;” in 1 Tim. i. 16, “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should afterwards believe to life everlasting;” and in Heb. x. 39, “We are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe unto the saving of the soul.” It is true, there are counterfeits of faith, as well as of the other graces of the Spirit. Simon Magus, Agrippa, and others, are said to have believed; the stony-ground hearers are said to have received the Word: persons in the apostolic age, destitute of charity, might prophecy and work miracles; and in our own times, a counterfeit faith may be attended with many spiritual gifts, and even with a semblance of love—repentance—devotion—carefulness about good works. But the faith concerning which we now inquire differs not only, as some suppose, in degree, but even in kind or nature, from the counterfeits now mentioned, and from all that can be found in unregenerate men. If the difference between saving faith and mere historical faith, as it is called, were only in degree, then, instead of saying, as the apostles did to the jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” they should have said, “Believe in
such a degree, and then thy faith will be saving;” whereas their way of speaking gave the jailor ground to conclude, that if he believed at all in the sense wherein he was called to believe, he should be saved. True believers are sometimes represented as weak in faith—as of little faith: if the difference between saving and historical faith were only in degree, then Simon Magus might be represented in the same manner. Again, that there must be a difference between saving faith and that which is not so, in some other respect than in degree, is evident from the account that is given of Judas and other apostates: it is not said of them, that they did not believe in a sufficient degree, but that they did not believe at all: “There are some of you that believe not; for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.”—John vi. 64. Several properties of saving faith show that it is of a different nature from whatever semblance of it may be found in natural men. It is “unfeigned faith,” 1 Tim. i. 5; “most holy faith,” Jude 20; “precious faith,” 2 Pet. i. 1; it is a faith of “the operation of God who raised Christ from the dead,” Col. ii. 12. These are properties that belong to the smallest degree of this faith, as well as to a great degree of it. If it be allowed that there are degrees of faith in unregenerate men of the same nature or kind with saving faith, the former must be allowed to be a good preparation for, or rather a progress toward, the latter: and it will follow, that man has some natural ability to prepare himself for saving grace, or to move toward it,—whereby the Scripture doctrine of man’s natural inability to do anything spiritually good, or to prepare himself for it, is overturned, and the old popish doctrine about merit of congruity is introduced. This scheme tends to mislead persons in the weighty and important duty of self-examination; for, in examining ourselves, it should be our first concern to inquire, whether our exercises and attainments are of a saving nature or kind, rather than whether they have been in such a degree. The contrary way of managing this exercise tends to gross delusion: accordingly, many persuade themselves, that they have extraordinary attainments and high degrees of grace, while they have ground to fear, what they give themselves no trouble about, that they are destitute of the reality, or of that which is of a saving nature. It is high time to purge
the leaven of such corrupt doctrine out of the Church of Christ.

2. The subject of our present inquiry is the act of believing in the name of Jesus Christ, abstracting from such things as accompany or follow it. Regeneration, for example, must be considered as, in the order of nature, before believing; faith, or believing, being an act of a soul that is spiritually quickened. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; he cannot see the Son, nor believe on him.” With respect to any law work, as it is called, which may be, in the order of time, before faith, or while there is no believing on the name of Jesus Christ, it is, in its own nature, or as to the exercise of the soul under it, no other than what may be, and actually is, found in reprobates, as in Cain, Judas, and others. Legal terror, unaccompanied with any believing views of Christ as the soul’s only hiding-place, is, in persons under a gospel dispensation, the working of inexcusable ignorance, enmity, and unbelief; and its native tendency is to produce blasphemous thoughts, more and more hardness of heart, and desperate obstinacy in departing from the living God; and therefore, as one justly observes, such terror is rather to be accounted pangs of the second death, than of the new birth. It is certain, however, that God, who knows how to bring good out of evil, makes his people profit by such a law work at last; and as soon as the supernatural principle of faith is implanted in the soul, the experience of these legal terrors will afford many motives which contribute, under the agency of the Holy Spirit, to stir up the soul to the immediate and diligent exercise of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, when a person is in some measure savingly enlightened in the knowledge of the Gospel, the discovery that is made, under legal terrors, of the deceit and desperate wickedness of the heart, will be of use to promote the necessary conviction, that his case would be hopeless, were it not for the sovereign and super-abounding grace of God in Jesus Christ: the experience he had, under these terrors, of the vanity and falsehood of all the refuges to which he used to have recourse is, under the hand of the Spirit of faith, a powerful incitement to adhere stedfastly to the only true remedy: and the sense he had of the dreadful reality of God’s wrath, and of its full execution as near at hand, shuts him up to an immediate and earnest
essay⁹ to “flee for refuge that he may lay hold on the hope set before him.” Indeed, there is a real and thorough conviction of the utter sinfulness, helplessness, and misery, which we are under as the children of the first Adam, necessarily supposed or implied in every act of saving faith. But this conviction, so far as it is of a peculiar nature, and distinguishes the Lord’s people from others, is not before saving faith, nor a previous qualification in order to saving faith, but rather a necessary ingredient in the very act or exercise of it.¹⁰ Accordingly, it is implied in many representations of faith in Scripture, as in “fleeing from the wrath which is to come; in fleeing as doves to their windows; in looking to Christ that we may be saved.” It is not this conviction, however, though it is constantly implied in all that we teach concerning the nature of faith, but faith’s application of the remedy, which we have more particularly in view as the subject of our present inquiry. Again, the act of believing, of which we treat, is to be carefully distinguished from those things which necessarily attend it as concomitants,¹¹ evidences, fruits, or effects; such as love, godly sorrow for sin, new obedience, or desires and purposes of obedience. Considering the act of saving faith as distinct from these things, is by no means a needless affectation of accuracy, but of great necessity and importance; because it is well known that Papists, and many called Protestants, who have lost a relish for the purity of Gospel doctrine, contend that a resolved subjection to, or compliance

⁹ that is, ‘to attempt.’

¹⁰ This is agreeable to that scriptural definition of justifying faith which we have in our Larger Catechism: “Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God; whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.” Excellent, to this purpose, are the words of an eminent divine: “I would not,” says he, “willingly speak of preparations to faith; because it putteth men upon searching something in themselves, upon fashioning their own hearts, and trimming them, to come to Christ; whereas nothing can be acceptable to him but what cometh from him. But, I think, all that men intend, when they speak of preparations, may be gained this way,—by holding out to men the impossibility of coming to Christ till they be emptied of themselves. Not that the one is a thing going before, to be done by us; but because they are all one. It is one motion of the soul, to come out of itself, and into Jesus: it is one thing to distrust ourselves, and to trust in Him: and, by this means, when the true nature of faith itself is holden out, men might, examine themselves rather by it, whether they have it, than by the preparations to it.”—Mr Hugh Binning, on Isa. xxvi. 3.

¹¹ that is, ‘those things which naturally follow or accompany the act of believing.’
with, what they call the precepts of the Gospel, ought to be included in the definition of saving faith. But such a definition is contrary to all these places of Scripture which represent love and obedience as distinct from faith: “Faith worketh,” or manifesteth itself, “by love”—Gal. v. 9. “The We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.”—Gal. ii. 16. Here is a plain reason why faith is to be considered as distinct from love, repentance, good desires, or purposes; because these cannot, like faith, be distinguished from them, and opposed to the works of the law; for love, repentance, good desires, and purposes, cannot justly be considered otherwise than as works of the law, or instances of conformity to the law. It is true, faith is a duty required in the first commandment; and is allowed, in that respect, to be a work of the law. But in the matter of justification, faith is of no consideration as an instance of obedience to the law; it has no place in this matter, but as it is that in or by which we receive the justifying righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is capable of being considered as no work, but merely our receiving a free gift at the hand of a gracious God in Christ. “Therefore,” says the apostle, “it is of faith, that it might be by grace if it had been of love, repentance, good desires and aims, it would have been by works, and the whole design of the Gospel would have been frustrated. The scheme of including love, repentance, or good resolutions, in the notion of faith, renders it quite uncertain what we are to understand by faith; whereas the sacred writers are particularly careful to ascertain what it is, by representing it as no less distinct from other things with which men would confound it, than a cause from its effects; by opposing it, in the matter of justification, to all our own works, or personal conformity to the law; and by the descriptive names that are given to it, such as

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12 Faith, as it respects the kingly office of Christ, is the soul’s resting on him for sanctification, and for deliverance from all evil. The language of it is, The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us. But the absolute surrender of ourselves, or our resolved subjection to his laws, is a native and necessary effect of faith, but is by no means faith itself. Faith is not our resolving, undertaking, or promising to do; but our persuasion of what Christ is, and of what he has undertaken and promised to do. When we say, that faith is not a resolution of subjection to Christ, we do not detract from the necessity of such a resolution; because we maintain that this, and other things, are as necessary in the Christian character as faith itself. Thus the necessity of repentance and holiness is represented in as strong terms as that of faith.—Luke xiii. 3, Heb. xii. 14. Without these, faith would be dead, and unprofitable to salvation.—James ii. 14–17.
persuasion, assurance, trust, confidence, believing or receiving a testimony. Farther, the act of believing under consideration is to be distinguished from any consciousness of, or reflection upon, our own attainments. It is one thing to believe on the Son of God; it is another thing to know that we have believed in a true and saving manner. What we inquire after is, that direct act of faith which neither looks to itself, nor to its effects, but only and immediately to its glorious object, the Lord Jesus Christ; according to the call in Isa. xlv. 21, 22: “There is no Saviour beside me. Look unto me, and be saved.”

3. The subject of our present inquiry is not, what this or that person takes to be his own exercise in believing, but what is that which, in the Scripture account, constitutes believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? or, it is not what a believer’s own faith appears to himself, through a cloud of unbelief, and other prevailing corruptions; but what is that direct act of faith which corresponds with the ground and warrant of it in the Word of God; and the lively exercise of which we should seek, in the use of all appointed means, to attain?

These things being premised, we observe, that a person may justly give the following definition of saving faith: That it is a real or unfeigned persuasion, wrought in my heart by the Holy Spirit, that, in the Gospel record or testimony, God gives his Son Jesus Christ, with his whole salvation, to sinners of mankind indefinitely, and to me a sinner in particular.

Here we propose, first, to take a view of the record of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ; and then to consider the nature of this persuasion.

As to this record of God, the great subject of it is, that which we considered in the preceding discourse, that is, the name of his Son Jesus Christ. We may now consider it somewhat more particularly, according to its formal nature, or as it is the ground of saving faith.

1. It may be observed, that there is no salvation for poor sinners of Adam’s family, but in Jesus Christ, as held forth in this record: “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”—Acts
iv. 12. All the advantages which the things of the world, together with
the help and favour of men, can afford; all the opinions, sincerity,
devoutness, good-meanings, and the most assiduous endeavours to
walk according to the law, being without Christ, are of no avail to our
salvation. So the heathen, being without Christ, are without God and
without hope in the world. And where men are without the record of
God in his Word, they are also without Christ, according to the
apostle’s declaration in Rom. x. 13, 14, 15: “Whosoever shall call on
the name of the Lord shall be saved. How shall they call on Him in
whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of
whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a
preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?”

2. This record of God is an exhibition of the all-sufficiency of his
Son Jesus to accomplish our salvation. “He is able to save them to the
uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make
intercession for them.”—Heb. vii. 25. His obedience unto death, even
the death of the cross, is such an infinitely valuable ransom and
satisfaction to the law and justice of God, that they can demand no
more in order to the justification of the most guilty of the human
race. “As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to
condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift
came upon all men unto justification of life.”—Rom. v. 18. “The blood
of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.”—1 John i. 7. “The
kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.”—Tit. iii.
4. “How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the
children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”—
Psal. xxxvi. 7. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! which killest the prophets,
and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have
gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her chickens
under her wings; and ye would not!”—Luke xiii. 34.

3. In this record of God we have a free gift and grant of Christ
crucified, and of eternal life in him, to sinners of mankind without
distinction. This grant is sometimes expressed in the most formal
manner; as in Isa. xlix. 6: “He said” (the Father said to the Son), “It is
a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes
of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee to
be a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the
ends of the earth;” and xlii. 6: “I will give thee to be a covenant to the
people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring the
prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the
prison-house.” Here it is obvious, that those to whom the Father
gives his beloved Son as a Surety and Saviour, are Gentiles, blind
prisoners; that is, according to the import of these metaphorical
expressions, to mankind sinners indefinitely, who are all, as the
children of fallen Adam, in a state of alienation from God,—in a state
of spiritual blindness and bondage. Another text to this purpose is in
John vi. 32, where Christ is speaking to the promiscuous multitude,
many of whom, it is evident from the context, particularly ver. 36,
were still in their natural state,—unbelievers, and enemies to Christ:
“My Father,” says he, “giveth you the true bread from heaven.” Christ
is here comparing himself to the manna which fell about the tents of
Israel in the wilderness. As the simple raining of the manna around
their camp, even before it was gathered, is in the 31st verse called a
giving; so the revelation or offer of Christ in the word of the Gospel,
even before actual believing, is called a giving of him.13 To the same
purpose, we read in 1 John v. 11: “And this is the record,” by the
disbelieving of which men bring upon themselves the guilt of making
God a liar, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in
his Son.” The giving here meant is not a putting persons in
possession; but such a giving, in the way of grant or tender, to sinners
of mankind, that each of them to whom this record comes is bound to
believe that it is a giving to him in particular; otherwise he makes
God a liar. We have a very remarkable representation of this grant in
John iii. 16: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten
Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have
everlasting life.” This giving of his only begotten Son, is such a giving
as warrants any of the human race, or whosoever will, to believe on
him. But the giving of Christ to some men, as to the elect, in the
decree of election, and in the intention of Christ’s death, or to
believers in actual possession, cannot be a warrant to all men, that
whosoever of them will, may believe on him, or receive him. The

13 See Calvin on the place.
giving of an entertainment to some individuals only of a company, never can be a warrant to the whole company, that whosoever of them will, may come and partake of the entertainment. But the giving here meant, is a giving which is prior to believing, and upon which we are to proceed in believing; which can be no other than the revelation of Christ in the way of grant and offer to sinners of mankind indefinitely, warranting whosoever of them will, to believe on him for everlasting life. This giving of the only-begotten Son of God is illustrated by the simile made use of in verse 14: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting-life.” The brazen serpent was given and lifted up as a common good to all the stung Israelites, that whosoever of them should look on it might be healed. So Christ is given to a lost world in the Word, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life.14 This grant is also expressed in free and absolute promises,—in promises directed to those who are destitute of every good qualification. In a promise, for example, of pardon to the guilty: “Thou hast made me serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake; and will not remember thy sins,”—Isa. xliii. 24, 25; in a promise of purification to the most polluted sinner: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you;” in a promise of the new heart to those who have nothing but the old stony heart: “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh;” in a promise of faith to the unbelieving: “In his name shall the Gentiles trust;” in a promise of repentance to the impenitent: “Ye shall defile also the covering of the graven images of silver, and the ornament of the molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence,”—Isa. xxx. 22; in a promise of the Spirit: “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes;” in a promise of

14 See Answers to Twelve Questions, put to some ministers by the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the year 1721.
Christ himself: “In him,” who according to the flesh is the seed of Abraham, “shall all the families of the earth be blessed;” in a promise of God in Christ: “I will be your God.” Such are the free and unconditional promises (which are a principal part of that Gospel) which the ministers of Christ are commissioned to teach to every creature under heaven; saying to their hearers, “The promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” O sinner of mankind! to whom the Word of God comes, know, that whatever thy case or character be, a promise is left thee of entering into God’s rest. Let it be thy great concern, that thou mayest not come short of it by unbelief. This free and unconditional grant is also declared in the many calls and invitations to an immediate participation of Christ which are directed to sinners of mankind indefinitely. Thus, in Rev. xxii. 17, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” These words can signify nothing less than that God gives “the water of life” to mankind sinners in such a manner, that any individual of them all may freely or immediately take it home to himself, because the divine grant has already made it his, for application, use, and enjoyment. Suppose a number of persons to be in a room where a table is covered with plenty of food: suppose the master of the house coming in, should say to them all, Whosoever will, let him eat and drink of what is on this table, till he be satisfied, it shall cost him nothing; might not each of these persons, esteeming the master of the house to be an honest man, and as speaking these words in earnest, justly consider these provisions as his own, for present or immediate use, no previous terms or conditions being proposed or required? And why should it not be deemed warrantable to make the same conclusion, when the God of truth condescends to use the same language? “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” And again, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.” Those that thirst are men in their natural state, who (as you may see by consulting the passage, Isa. lv. 1, 2) are spending their money for that
which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. Surely no poor sinner of mankind, to whom the Word of God comes, can warrantably reckon himself excepted in such calls as the following: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood, and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”—John vii. 37. “Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; I bring near my righteousness: it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry.”—Isa. xlvi. 12, 13.Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men.”—Prov. viii. 4. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled.”—Prov. ix. 4, 5. These being calls or invitations to an immediate receiving or partaking of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation, and being directed to sinners of mankind indefinitely, necessarily carry in them the notion of that free gift or grant of which we speak. Surely, he who brings a benefit to our hand, and entreats us to accept of it, and make it our own, without money and without price, that is, without requiring any previous compliance with terms or conditions,—entreats us to make it as much our own as we do what we buy for our own use, or what we eat and drink for our own refreshment, may well be said to make a gift and grant of that benefit; and the record in which it is made, being written, sworn, and sealed, may, with the greatest propriety, be called a deed of gift and grant.

It may he asked, Since Christ is thus given or granted to mankind, how can any of them come short of him?

Answer. Because a thing that is presented as a free gift may be despised and rejected; in which case, there can be no possession. That this may be the case with the Gospel-grant of Christ, and of salvation through his name, is the more evident, as it is expressed in gracious invitations, as well as in absolute promises. And that the Lord may give an absolute promise to those who, in the event, never come to the actual enjoyment of the promised blessing, is manifest from the instance of the promise made to the Israelites of the land of Canaan. This promise, as it is recorded in Exod. iii. 17, is free and unconditional: “I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of
Egypt, unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” This promise was given to the children of Israel, as a nation, to be rested on by them as good security for their introduction into and possession of that good land. But the bulk of that generation, despising this security, and persisting in their unbelief, never saw the promised land,—they could not enter in, says the apostle, because of unbelief. This is a type or emblem of the Gospel-promise, wherein Christ, and eternal life in him, are made over to us as a free gift. Such as will not credit the promise, nor accept of the gift, will justly come short of the promised rest. The Lord says to such, as he said to the Israelites, Numb. xiv. 34: “Ye shall know my breach of promise,”—that is, as it is with believers according to their faith, so it shall be with you according to your unbelief. Since ye account my promise unworthy to be trusted in, it is fit that ye should never experience the accomplishment of it; but that there should be, in your case, a seeming breach of it. But we now proceed to observe,

4. That the record of God, which faith receives, is the Gospel, as contradistinguished from the Law. The Law is a perfect rule of righteousness; there is nothing good in man’s nature, dispositions, or actions, but what it requires. All the commands of God, therefore, not excepting those of faith and repentance, belong to the Law. On the other hand, the Gospel, strictly and properly taken, has no commands, no prescriptions of duty in it. Thus the Law and the Gospel differ,—not as one precept of the Law may differ from another, in respect of objects and occasions, in respect of more easiness or difficulty in the performance, but in their nature, as a command differs from an absolutely free grant or promise. It is true, the Law, too, has its promises; but neither promises nor threatenings constitute its formal nature or distinguishing character. The Law might have been without the promise of eternal life; the revealed will of God would have been the rule of obedience to man, as his morally dependent creature, though no such promise had been given. And that the Law may be without the threatening, is manifest from its being a rule of obedience to the confirmed angels and glorified saints; in the case of whom, it must be allowed to have no threatening
annexed to it. Thus, we say, the formal nature of the Law is a revelation of God’s commanding will to men as reasonable creatures. And, even in this respect, it must be carefully distinguished from the Gospel, which, in its formal nature, is purely a revelation of God’s giving and promising will towards poor sinners of mankind, in Jesus Christ. The sum of the Law is, Thou shalt love God, thy Maker and Preserver, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On the other hand, the Gospel was revealed to our first parents in these words, directed to the serpent, “He,” even the Son of God, “shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” The Gospel, as the apostle tells us, was preached to Abraham in these words, “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The Gospel was proclaimed, at the birth of Christ, in these words of the angel to the shepherds, “I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke ii. 10, 11. The Gospel is this faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, “That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;” and this, “That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” The Gospel is good tidings of good to sinners of mankind, through Christ crucified, dead and buried, ascended and interceding. Such is the difference between the formal nature of the Law and that of the Gospel.

But if the Law be considered as a covenant, which all men are under as the children of fallen Adam, promising eternal life as a

15 There is, perhaps, some inaccuracy, or at least ambiguity, of expression, in many valuable authors, about the state of men under the covenant of works. It is certainly true, that all men are under the covenant of works, if this implies, that they are under the curse of it as a broken covenant; and they are also cursed who continue not in all things written in the law, as the rule of their obedience, while they have no interest in the righteousness of the surety. It is also true, that all men are under the command of the covenant of works, if this be understood only as affirming, that all men have contracted, in their representing head, Adam, a debt of obedience, which they can never pay in their own persons; yea, to which, while strangers to Christ, they are continually adding, by the transgression of the law as a rule of duty. Now, believers are honourably delivered from this, by the obedience of Jesus Christ. Sinners are under it, as desperate debtors, who can give no satisfaction to law and justice. But the covenant of works was never renewed with any sinful man, after Adam broke it; either in, what some have called its natural state, as including the whole moral law, which Christ fulfilled, and the curse of which he endured; or, in its positive state, as summed up in abstinence from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It has no promise of life now to any man, either in the Pagan
reward of debt to him who performeth the condition of perfect obedience, and threatening eternal death as the wages of every the least transgression; the Law in this sense, and the Gospel, are not only different, but opposite to one another. The Law, as a covenant, declares, that every sinner is cursed: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;” but the Gospel declares that sinners shall be “blessed in Christ,”—blessed with deliverance, both from sin and from that wrath and curse of God which every sin deserves. The Law says to every sinner, Thou art “condemned already;” the Gospel says to him, “There is no condemnation to thee who art in Christ Jesus.” The Law says, “Thou hast destroyed thyself;” but says the Gospel, Thy sure and all-sufficient help is in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Law-covenant says, That eternal life is the reward of debt to which thy own personal obedience gives thee a title; but the Gospel says, Eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Law-covenant says, Thou hast no right to the promises till thou hast performed the condition of them; the Gospel says, Jesus Christ, thy Surety, hath perfectly fulfilled the condition of all the promises in his obedience unto death; so that in him, or for his sake, thou hast a good right to them; in him they are free and unconditional to thee; in him all the promises are yea, and in him Amen. Hence it appears the essential difference between the promises of the Law-covenant and those of the Gospel is, that the former are conditional to us; whereas the latter are to us free, unconditional, and absolute.

But it is objected, that many promises of the Gospel are conditional, as declaring that they belong to persons of such and such characters. Such, among many, are the following: “He that believeth
shall be saved.” “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.” “He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.” “Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.” “He that overcometh, shall inherit all things.”

We answer, 1. When we say the promises are absolutely free, or unconditional, we are very far from meaning, that any of the promised blessings of the Gospel can be received or enjoyed separately from the rest, or from the great comprehensive blessing of a real vital union to Christ. On the contrary, they are so inseparably connected, that whosoever receives one, shall receive all. There is, for example, such a connection between the overcoming or mortification of sin, and inheriting all things, that they must be miserably deceived who expect the latter without the former.

2. There is a certain order, according to which, and not otherwise, we are to expect the enjoyment of the promised blessings of the covenant of grace. Thus, we are not to expect the attainment of a holy walk, before faith in Christ; nor assurance of sense, or experience of the comforts of the Holy Spirit, before we be brought into the Gospel way of studying holiness. A life of grace here, is before a life of glory hereafter. Thus, when it is said, “that they who mourn shall be comforted,” and “that they who endure to the end shall be saved,” the meaning is, that, according to the order established in the everlasting covenant, there is a mourning before the sensible enjoyment of spiritual comfort,—an enduring to the end, before we can come to the full possession of salvation.

3. The surety-righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only proper condition of all the promises taken together. The redemption which we have through his blood, includes all the blessings of the new covenant. Hence, though we find one of those blessings promised to those who have begun to possess another, we are not to consider the begun possession of the latter as the proper condition of the former; but rather both of them, as alike freely and absolutely promised to us, for the sake of Him whose name is, the Lord our
righteousness. We should consider all the promises as one: “This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life.” Those which have been called conditional promises, are only declarations of the inseparable connection among the various blessings contained in that one promise, and also of the order according to which the Lord is pleased to bestow them; for when we take a view of the whole comprehension of the Gospel promises, we find all these blessings made over to poor sinners in the same free and absolute manner,—the righteousness of Christ being always understood as the only proper condition. Hence, that which has been taken for the condition of a promise in one part of Scripture, is absolutely promised in another. Thus, faith is absolutely promised in Matt, xii. 21; and perseverance in grace unto the end in Jer. xxxii. 40. Hence we see how the apostle came to render one of the texts quoted in the objection as he does, in Rom. xi. 26, “It is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” So that, according to the apostle, the prophet’s saying, that Christ would come to them that turn from ungodliness in Jacob, implied a free, absolute, and unconditional promise, that “he should turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” Thus, when we read this promise, “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings,” we are to understand the absolute promise as implied; as if it had been said, “I will put my fear into your heart, and to you shall the Sun of Righteousness arise.”

4. Sometimes the promised blessing is connected with such characters as infallibly evidence persons to be already partakers of that blessing; as when it is said, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” Now, this godly fear is such as evidenceth a person to be already a partaker in Christ of God’s fatherly pity. In like manner, when it is said, that Christ is “the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him,” only such obedience must be understood as certainly evidenceth the person to be already a partaker of that salvation. Such characters as these may be evidences,

16 Christ is the author or cause of eternal salvation to all who, by hearing, attentively listen to him, which includes faith in his promises and doctrines, with obedience to his commandments, and compliance with his gracious invitations.—Rev. xxii. 14. (R.)
but cannot be any proper conditions of the promised blessings to which they are annexed. Sometimes the promised blessing is represented in propositions of the same form, as belonging to persons in poverty, affliction, temptation, or the like circumstances, which no one will be so absurd as to reckon conditions: “Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires: and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” From these and the like passages it is evident, that a character given in the Word of promise to those who either are or may be partakers of the blessing promised, is a different thing from the prescribing of terms or conditions. The design of the former is no more than to encourage persons to receive freely what is, for Christs sake, freely granted to them in the divine promise as peculiarly suited to the case or character described; whereas the design of the latter, is to show upon what ground a person may warrantably claim the blessing promised.17

5. If the Gospel promise be conditional, then the condition of it either is or is not promised. If our opponents should say that it is not promised at all, they will fall into gross error; for it is evident that faith, repentance, prayer, and whatever has been represented as a condition, are included in the promises of the covenant of grace. To give one example from a multitude, most, if not all, such conditions are comprehended in that promise which we have in Zech. xiii. 9: “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them

17 If it be objected, that in the Gospel there are promises of life upon condition of our obedience, as in Rom. viii. 13: “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live;” we answer, The promises of the Gospel are not made to the work, but to the worker; and to the worker, not for his work, but for Christ’s according to his work. For example, the promise of life is not made to the work of mortification, but to him that mortifies his flesh; and that not for his mortification, but because he is in Christ, and his mortification is the token and evidence thereof.—Perkins on Galatians.

It is a very just observation of Dr Smith of Pequea, in the Second of his Three Sermons on Faith, lately published, to this purpose: That the distressful case is mentioned in Matt. xi. 28, not as a condition either of the person’s right to the blessing, or of his right to come for it, but to point him out, as it were, by name, and invite him to come to Christ for free salvation. He justly represents the sinner as under a fatal mistake, when he attempts to appropriate the promised blessing, not because it is freely offered, but because he has something to offer for it.
as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.” Besides, it is allowed by those that hold the promises to be conditional, that the condition is the gift of God. But every gift that we receive from him is either natural or supernatural. If the condition of a promise be a natural gift of God, then it is no other than what may be found in unregenerate men; and then it will follow, that there are natural attainments, to which God hath secured saving grace by his promise; which is the old exploded error of Pelagius. But if this condition be a supernatural gift, or something given in virtue of the covenant of grace, then it is promised; for there is nothing peculiar given to men by virtue of that covenant, which is not promised in it.

But if they say that the condition is promised, then we ask, Whether it be promised absolutely or conditionally? If they say it is promised absolutely, they yield the matter in question; for what is promised absolutely, cannot, with any propriety, be called a condition required of us. If they say it is promised conditionally, the question recurs, Whether this second condition be promised absolutely or conditionally? If it should be answered, Conditionally, it may be still asked, How the third condition is promised,—and so on without end.

6. It seems absurd to represent faith as a condition necessary to warrant the application of the promises to ourselves, not only because faith is a promised blessing, but also because, properly speaking, it is itself the only application of the promises to ourselves, as yea and amen in Christ. This is undoubtedly the scriptural notion of saving faith; but when people consider faith as a condition of the application of the promises to ourselves, they must either have a quite different notion of faith, or they make faith the condition of itself; the application of the promises, the condition of our application of them; our receiving of a gift, the condition of our receiving it!  

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18 To say that the grant of Christ and all his salvation in the promise is not free and unconditional, because what is thus granted cannot be actually possessed and enjoyed unless it be believed, or, in other words, received, is to say in effect, that there never was, nor can be, any such thing as a free gift or unconditional grant of anything; for no gift can be so free, no grant so absolute, but, in the very
We shall only add, that the new scheme of Gospel conditional promises, no more excludes boasting than the conditional promise of the covenant of works did; because, according to the former as well as the latter, it is our compliance with the terms or conditions that entitles us to the promised blessing,—so that, according to both schemes, the reward is of debt. The common pleas that it is not merit, but the free grace of God, that makes such an act or such a qualification a condition of salvation—that what is required as a condition is easily complied with—that this compliance is not of ourselves, that it is the gift of God—that a humbling sense of our unworthiness, and of our unprofitableness to God, belongs to our performance of the condition,—are of no avail to distinguish their new Gospel covenant from the covenant of works; for it is very obvious, that all these things belonged to the covenant of works, as it was made with upright Adam. For who can deny that it was not merit, but the free grace of God, which made Adam’s abstaining from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil the condition, by the observation of which he was to secure eternal life to himself and all his posterity; that there was no imaginable condition easier to be complied with; and yet, if he had actually complied, he ought to have ascribed his doing so wholly to the upholding grace of God, acknowledging his weakness as a creature, his insignificance before God, who is glorious in holiness, and his unprofitableness to Him who is infinitely blessed in and of himself. So that, so long as persons are standing upon conditions, to be found in themselves, whether supposed to be attained by nature or grace, as giving them a right or claim to Christ or his salvation, all the most humbling acknowledgments and mortifying exercises in the world will not exempt them from the charge, of persisting in the cursed attempt of rebuilding the old Jericho of the broken covenant of works. The evil of this scheme, though it has often been solidly evinced, both in preaching and in writing, is still very little attended to by church members. It is, however, a bitter root; and is at the bottom of that decline of the life and power of godliness, which at this day is matter

nature of the thing, a man must accept, before he can actually enjoy the benefit of it.—Mr Wilson’s Palemon’s Creed Reviewed and Examined, vol. ii. p. 63.
of mourning and lamentation with all the true children of Zion.

Thus the Gospel, properly taken, is to be carefully distinguished from the Law. But it is allowed, that the word Gospel is sometimes to be taken in a large sense, which includes the Law; that is, it is sometimes to be understood as comprehending the whole Gospel dispensation, not only what is properly the doctrine of the Gospel, but all the doctrine of the Law, as being subservient to the Gospel. According to this dispensation, there is a twofold subserviency of the Law.

1. As it is a covenant of works, it sets before us the sinfulness and misery that we are under as the children of the first Adam, in whom we sinned and died. As it reveals the wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and declares us all dead men, it is the great mean by which the Holy Spirit makes use of in awakening us to a true sense of our lost and undone condition. It may be said to shut us up to the Gospel way of relief, as it discovers the vanity of all other ways. It proclaims, with terrible and inflexible severity, its high and extensive demands, and our utter inability to answer them. It proclaims us naked and destitute of any justifying righteousness, and that we must continue so for ever, unless we receive that righteousness which was finished upon Mount Calvary.

2. Our Lord Jesus, having in his flesh perfectly fulfilled the Law as a covenant or condition of life (in which sense, through his fulfilment of it, believers are dead to it), still enjoins it on them as the rule of their thoughts, words, and actions. In this injunction all his authority, as King in Zion, is displayed; and their compliance with it is secured by the promise of the new covenant: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” The Law, in this view, is greatly subservient to the Gospel, as, by setting it before his people in his word and ordinances, and by writing it on their hearts, he makes them partakers of that leading and unspeakably precious benefit of the covenant of grace, sanctification. Therefore, we are to meditate on the law of the Lord night and day, mourning for whatever is opposite to it in our hearts and ways, being deeply concerned that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with us, to conform us more and
more to this pure and perfect rule. Whoever neglects the study of conformity to the law in heart and life, is undoubtedly slighting and despising the Gospel.

Thus the term Gospel is sometimes used, in a large sense, for the Gospel dispensation; including not only the Gospel properly so called, but also, in subserviency thereto, the doctrine of the Law, both as a covenant and as a rule of life. But it is necessary to remember, that we cannot use the Law as we ought, in subserviency to the Gospel, unless we understand and maintain the distinction between them. The confounding and blending of them has been a most fatal source of error and corruption in the Christian Church. The divine truth, with respect to this distinction, shone with peculiar lustre in the morning of the reformation from Popery, and had a principal share in dispersing the deep shades of error and superstition, which had so long overspread the face of the visible Church. It was Luther’s favourite theme; and he was often at a loss for words to express the sense he had of its importance. He reckoned it one of the most necessary qualifications of a minister of the Word, to be able to distinguish rightly between the Law and the Gospel. “It seemeth,” says he, “to be a light matter to mingle the Law and the Gospel, faith and works, together; but it does more mischief than man’s reason can conceive. It not only clouds and darkens the Gospel, but overthroweth it utterly, taking away Christ, with all his benefits.”

We have dwelt the longer upon this part of our subject, in regard that our view of the direct act of faith must be according to our view of the record of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ.

We come now to consider the act of saving faith, or to inquire what sort of a persuasion it is.

First, We observe, that it is a persuasion wrought in our hearts by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. Faith is such a receiving of the things of the Spirit of God as natural men are incapable of (1 Cor. ii. 14); to such the Gospel is hid (2 Cor. iv. 3); to such Christ crucified is a “root springing out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness.”—Isa. liii. 2. Nay, the mind of man, by nature, is full of enmity against the Lord and against his Christ—Rom. viii. 7; 1 Pet. ii.
4. Hence the Scriptures represent, as necessary to the production of saving faith, not only the outward proposal of God’s record concerning his Son Jesus Christ, but also the supernatural teaching and illumination of the mind, together with a display of almighty and irresistible power in drawing us.—Matt. xvi. 17; John vi. 44,45; 2 Thess. i. 11; Eph. i. 19. And faith is represented as our seeing the Son in a special and supernatural manner: “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.”—John vi. 40. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.”—Heb. ii. 9. This faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not a natural gift, as a common benefit, which the ungodly may partake of, but a supernatural gift, which comes to us in virtue of the new covenant, as a proper fruit or effect of Christ’s purchase. “It is given us, in the behalf of Christ, to believe on him.”—Phil. i. 29. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Faith, because the working of faith in our hearts is peculiarly ascribed to him as the applier of the purchased redemption: “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you.”—John xvi. 14. We should be much in this consideration, that however near Christ crucified be brought to us in the outward dispensation of the Word, yet we cannot get the least saving sight of him, till the Lord the Spirit open our eyes. It is proper exercise for a Gospel hearer to be saying, with blind Bartimaeus, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”

Secondly, We observe, that it is a sure persuasion. Grounded on the Word of God, and wrought in us by the Spirit of God, it must carry in it a real assurance. It is our seeing the light of God’s Word in the light of his Spirit. The language of faith is not, we are almost persuaded, as Agrippa said; but we are fully persuaded; or, as the apostles expressed themselves, “We believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God: we believe that, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved.” The doubts of salvation by Christ, which often sadly prevail in believers, are to be ascribed to remaining unbelief, legality, and other corruptions, and are carefully to be distinguished from the nature of faith; for, true and saving faith evidences assurance to be its nature, by wrestling, according to its
measure, against all these doubts, and by its never failing to overcome them at last.

Thirdly, It is an appropriating persuasion; or a belief of the Gospel record, with application to ourselves in particular. It is a persuasion that Christ is ours, for all the purposes of justification and salvation, upon no other ground than the Gospel-grant. None can have this persuasion without being actually put in possession of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation. Thus, no person in believing that Christ is his Saviour in particular, his righteousness and strength, upon the ground of the Gospel-grant, can be deceived or disappointed; because the Lord assures every believer, that it shall be to him according to his faith. Sinners, we call you, or rather Christ himself calls you, to believe that he is yours, his righteousness and salvation yours, by God’s grant thereof in the Gospel.\textsuperscript{19} And herein you are not called to believe a lie: but you are assured, that whosoever of you all, be his case and character what it will, is enabled to make such an appropriation of Christ to himself, singly upon the ground of the Gospel-grant, shall not be ashamed, but shall find that, in believing, he is become an actual partaker of Christ, and of his whole salvation,—whosoever believeth shall not be ashamed.

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\textsuperscript{19} He calleth you: “Go, then, unto him, I beseech you; and if he come and meet you (as his manner is), then do not you unadvisedly say with Peter, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”—Luke v. 8. But say in plain terms, O come unto me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Yea, go on farther, and say, as Luther bids you, Most gracious Jesus and sweet Christ, I am a miserable poor sinner, and therefore do judge myself unworthy of thy grace; but yet I having learned from thy Word, that thy salvation belongeth to such a one, therefore do I come unto thee, to claim that right, which, through thy gracious promise, belongeth unto me.”—\textit{Marrow of Modern Divinity}, chap. ii., sect. iii., § 3.
DISCOURSE III.

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

Many and various are the artifices which Satan employs to darken or obscure the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, and to hinder its light from shining in our hearts. Some he seduces to the embracing of gross heresies; as in the case of those who, with Socinus, reject the divinity and satisfaction of Christ; or with Pelagius and Arminius, deny the effectual and victorious operations of his grace and Spirit upon the souls of men. For those, again, who make a general profession of the truth, in opposition to these abominable errors, he has more subtle schemes and deviations from the truth of the Gospel; which, though they seem, at first, but trivial, and differing little but in explicitness of expression from the doctrine that we have learned, yet secretly tend to enervate and reduce all that serves to distinguish it from the doctrine of Papists and Arminians, to a mere nothing. Thus, many insist on the necessity of coming to and improving him by faith; who will by no means allow, that the Gospel affords every poor sinner of mankind that hears it, an immediate and a sufficient warrant to trust in the promises, grounded upon the law-magnifying righteousness of Christ, for his own everlasting salvation. But their aversion to this manner of expression (while they use many expressions which, according to the true scriptural sense of them, imply the same doctrine) might appear no way dangerous, did it not proceed from an unscriptural notion of saving faith, as not consisting in the sinner’s fiducial and applicatory persuasion of God’s record concerning his Son, but in his compliance with certain terms and conditions prescribed, as they say, in the Gospel.

This doctrine of conditions (of which we have already spoken), as it is commonly understood, namely, as signifying some good and commendable qualifications, exercise, or attainments, the consciousness of which is necessary, in order to warrant a sinner’s appropriation of Christ crucified to himself, is, in truth, the very soul of Arminianism and Popery; or, in other words, of that scheme of
justification by the works of the law, against which the apostle employs so much reasoning in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Hence the manifest importance of that part of our subject to which we now proceed, which is, to show,

That, in the direct act of saving faith, a person appropriates Christ crucified to himself, saying with the heart, I am verily persuaded that Christ is mine, upon no other ground or warrant than that of the free grant, which God is now making of him to me in his word of grace and promise.

Before we come to the argument, it seems necessary to offer a few previous observations, to obviate some common prejudices on this subject.

1. We are far from saying, that every one who professes to hold this doctrine, with respect to faith’s appropriation of Christ crucified, is a true believer. Persons may hold this, as well as other truths, in unrighteousness.

They may have evangelical heads with legal hearts. Such is the amazing deceitfulness of the human heart, that many imagine that they have a persuasion that Christ is theirs, upon a Gospel-foundation, whilst that which they take for such a persuasion is but a selfish notion, grounded upon their own personal righteousness, their knowledge, their outward church privileges, their long standing, reputation, and usefulness in the visible Church; the frames they have been wrought up to, and the resolutions they have taken; their deep convictions, followed by comfortable feelings and enlargements. Nothing can be farther from what is here meant, than to reproach or disparage these things. Would to God, that, being of the right kind, and kept in their proper place, they were more common in the visible Church. But what we condemn, is the vain and impious attempt to invert the order of the Gospel, by building the faith or hope of salvation upon such things. This is the case with those, whatever their opinions or professions may be, who have no self-abasing sense of the blindness of their minds, and the natural enmity of their hearts against the way of salvation revealed in the Gospel, and who do not feel their pressing need of the enlightening and renewed work of the
Holy Spirit to make them discern and take up with the revealed warrant, which they have, in common with others, to say with the whole heart, and with entire confidence, Christ is mine, His whole salvation is mine; “In the Lord have I,” a poor sinner of Adam’s family, “righteousness and strength.” Faith is not a notion, nor a profession of a notion; but a real seeing of the Son, and believing on him.

2. The appropriation of which I speak, is the appropriation of a whole Christ and of his whole salvation to ourselves. A persuasion that Christ is mine for present pardon, and not mine for present sanctification, is not faith, but a mere delusion: Because Christ can be no otherwise received by faith, than as he is given to us in the Gospel. Christ and his benefits are inseparable both in the Gospel report and in the appropriation of faith: which correspond with one another, as the impression on wax with the imprinting seal.

3. There are several misrepresentations with respect to the ground of this appropriation. The first we take notice of, is that which makes particular election or particular redemption the ground of it. It is evident, that the ground of our faith must be something that may be known before, or in order to the act of faith: it must be among the things that are revealed, which belong to us and to our children. But it is utterly unwarrantable to seek the knowledge of our election, or of our actual interest in Christ’s intention to lay down his life for his sheep, before or in order to our believing in his name; because, before the exercise and fruits of faith, our election and interest in Christ’s intention when he laid down his life, are among the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God: a preposterous prying into which, is to be regarded as an abominable temptation of Satan. Faith looks directly or immediately, not at all to what was in God’s secret decree from eternity, but to what is now revealed and presented to us in the Gospel. Again, this faith is grossly misrepresented, when it is said to proceed upon any scheme of universal redemption; which supposes, that Christ made reconciliation by his death for many that are never to be reconciled; or that he laid down his life for others than his sheep, for many to whom he will not give eternal life. The faith of which we speak, makes an application of the death of Christ as that
which, in itself, fully and infallibly secures to us deliverance from wrath, and eternal glory. But this is a faith for which the scheme of universal redemption affords no ground; since it is supposed that Christ died for many that shall never be saved, and that something more than his death is necessary to secure any from the wrath which is to come. The salvation, which universal redemption gives ground for the faith of, is but a conditional and uncertain salvation; whereas that, which saving faith apprehends in the free promise of the Gospel, is unconditional and absolutely sure. Nor can the ground of this appropriating faith be our experience of any saving operation of the Holy Spirit in our souls, or our consciousness of any divine communication of supernatural light or power to believe; for there can be no real experience or consciousness of any communication but in or after believing. Thus, when our Lord commanded the man who had the withered hand to stretch it out, he could have no experience of the strength imparted to him for that purpose, but in or after his act of stretching it out. In believing, we proceed upon the same ground upon which that man proceeded, namely, the call of the Lord Jesus. In short, the ground of this appropriation is utterly misrepresented, when it is said to be any good or commendable qualifications in our souls, or, indeed, anything peculiar or not to be found in other sinners; for we are to come to Christ, or, in other words, to make a believing application of him and all his benefits to ourselves, as miserable sinners, having nothing in ourselves to distinguish or give us a better claim to him and his salvation than other sinners of the human race.

4. The appropriating persuasion or assurance, which we hold to be in the nature of saving faith, is carefully to be distinguished from the knowledge of our being believers, and already in a state of grace. For, though the mind must ever be conscious of its own act; yet whether that act be such as has the particular nature and properties of saving faith, cannot be known but by reflection. That knowledge is to be ascribed to the shining of the Holy Spirit upon his own blessed work in the soul, whereby he causeth us to see that it bears the marks given in the Word of that which is saving. This knowledge is usually attained in the diligent use of means, particularly of self-
examination. They seem to speak with the greatest accuracy, who call it, the assurance of sense. The assurance of faith arises from the single view of what is contained in the Word of God; the assurance of sense from the joint view of his Word without us, and of his work within us. The language of faith is, Thus he hath spoken; the language of sense, Thus he hath done.

Having premised these things, we proceed to state the scriptural evidence of this truth, That there is an appropriation of Christ crucified to ourselves in the nature of saving or justifying faith.

What we propose in this discourse is to show, that, as saving faith is that which corresponds with God's record concerning his Son; so the only faith which corresponds with that record, is that which includes in it a person's appropriation of Christ, and his whole salvation, to himself in particular.

The former part of this proposition, we hope, will not be disputed. At least it must be sufficient to refer to that definition of a believer which we have in John iii. 33, “He that receiveth his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true.”

As to the latter part of the proposition, we shall now proceed to show, that the faith which corresponds with the Gospel record in each of the views in which we considered it in the former discourse, must be such an appropriating persuasion as saving faith has been asserted to be.

1. This record is a declaration that there is no salvation in any other than Christ crucified. Now, the faith that corresponds with this declaration must carry in it, that the person has no hope or confidence of salvation but what he has in Christ crucified; and therefore if he may have this faith, without any persuasion of his own salvation by Christ crucified, he, may have it without any hope or confidence of salvation at all; he may have it, and yet sink in despair; which is absurd. When the people of God renounce their idols, such as chariots and horses, riches, beauty, strength, self-righteousness, they transfer whatever confidence they placed in these vanities to a God in Christ. Now, it is evident, that their confidence in these vanities included in it an appropriating persuasion, however ill-grounded, of
their safety and happiness as thereby secured: “If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence: if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much.”—Job xxxi. 24, 25. “Asshur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods.”—Hosea xiv. 3. “He spake this parable to certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous ”—Luke xviii. 9. Now, what must be the language of this regard that had been blasphemously given to idols, when transferred from them to the Lord Christ, to whom alone it belongs? It must be to this purpose, A God in Christ is my God, my confidence, in whom alone I will rejoice. I trust in Christ, that I am righteous through his righteousness imputed to me. Hence we find the people of God in Scripture, still accompanying their renunciation of creature confidences with professions of their confidence in the Lord as their God: “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? We have no might against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee.”—2 Chron. xx. 12. “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.”—Jer. iii. 23. “We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies.”—Dan. ix. 18. “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”—Phil. iii. 9.

2. The Gospel record is an exhibition of Christ crucified to every sinner of mankind, as an all-sufficient Saviour. If a traveller, ready to faint with hunger, comes into a house, and the head of the family, being acquainted with his condition, causes proper food to be set before him; if the traveller, knowing the head of the family to be an honest man, and of a generous hospitable disposition, has also heard him declare, that the food set on the table was for the use of hungry travellers, who might have nothing wherewith to purchase a meal; surely the traveller, having a due esteem for that person’s character and word, and of the provision set before him, will be fully persuaded that he has a right to the immediate use of the food for his present refreshment. In like manner, while the sinner sees himself to be an
outcast, ready to perish, he may say, I am persuaded Christ Jesus is
set forth to me, as having assumed the human nature into personal
union with his divine person, and as having, therefore, become the
elder brother and kinsman-redeemer of mankind sinners: I am
persuaded, that the satisfaction or surety-righteousness of Christ is
set forth, as, in its intrinsic nature, full payment of my debt to the law
and justice of God: I am persuaded that the offices of Christ, as set
forth in the Gospel, afford all that deliverance from ignorance, guilt,
and spiritual bondage, which I infinitely need: I am persuaded, that
the persons whose Saviour Christ is, for whom he suffered and died,
are described in terms that are as applicable to me as to any other of
mankind; he being called the Saviour of the world; he having suffered
the just for the unjust; having died for the ungodly, for enemies: I am
convinced that the Lord hath put the Bible into my hands, and that
his ministers are called and sent according to the rule of his Word, on
purpose to set before me this all-sufficient and suitable Saviour: I
remember, too, that he who makes such an exhibition of Jesus Christ,
his only begotten Son, to me a poor sinner, is a God who delighteth in
mercy; this exhibition of Christ, being particularly for the praise of
the glory of his grace, which provides all that is here exhibited, freely.
Upon these grounds I am persuaded, That Christ is my Saviour; nor
can I, without casting reproach upon the wisdom, faithfulness, and
mercy of God in setting him forth, entertain any doubts about my
justification and salvation through his name. We have many
examples in Scripture of such an appropriating faith being grounded
upon the all-sufficiency of the name, of the power, of the mercy, of
the loving-kindness of God in Christ: “They that know thy name will
put their trust in thee.”—Psal. ix. 10. “Our God whom we serve is able
to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out
of thine hands, O king.”—Dan. iii. 17. “Abraham was strong in faith,
giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised
he was able to perform.”—Rom. iv. 20, 21. “How excellent is thy
loving-kindness, O God! therefore do the children of men put their
trust under the shadow of thy wings.”—Psal. xxxvi. 7. It is a sweet
name that was revealed to Abraham, “I am God Almighty;” or, as it
might be read, “All-sufficient.” His all-sufficiency for the salvation of
sinner, could not be seen in all the law, nor in all the works of the old creation: It could nowhere be seen but in Christ; in Him whose name is the lord our righteousness. Whoever gets a spiritual discernment of this all-sufficiency in Christ, will see ground to say unto God, in the language of an appropriating faith, “Thou art my shield and exceeding great reward.”

3. In this record of God concerning his Son, there is a free gift and grant of Christ crucified, and of eternal life in him, to sinners of mankind. We may endeavour to represent the manner of the grant in a simile. Suppose that a great and generous prince had made a grant to a certain class of persons, therein described, of large estates, including all things suitable to their condition; and had publicly declared, that whosoever of the persons so described would believe such an estate, in virtue of the grant now mentioned, to be his own, should not be disappointed, but should immediately enter upon the possession of the granted estate, according to the order specified in the grant: suppose, too, that the royal donor had given the grant in writing, and had added his seal, and his oath, and his gracious invitation, and his most earnest entreaty, and his authoritative command, to induce the person, described in the grant, to accept of it: it is evident, that any one of these persons, having had access to read or hear the grant, must either be verily persuaded that the granted estate is his own, or be chargeable with an attempt to bring dishonour upon the goodness, the veracity, the power, and authority, of the donor; on account of which attempt he is liable not only to be debarred forever from the granted estate, but to suffer a most exemplary and tremendous punishment.

We have shown already, that God hath made a free and unconditional grant of Christ and his whole salvation. Indeed, what is the preaching of Christ as crucified, dead, risen, ascended, and interceding within the veil, but a proclamation of this grant? For the preaching of Christ is by no means (what some have supposed) one’s giving a recital of certain facts, but rather his endeavouring to show how all the great and precious promises are in Christ Yea, and in him

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20 See Mr Wilson’s Palemon’s Creed Reviewed and Examined, vol. i.
Amen, to the glory of God by us. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, do not constitute the Gospel, or glad tidings of great joy to sinners of Adam's family, as naked historical facts, but as connected with the promise of pardon and everlasting salvation: according to the example of the Apostle's preaching: “As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”—Acts xiii. 34. “He whom God raised from the dead saw no corruption: Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”—Acts v. 37, 38. “Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the forgiveness of sins.”—Acts v. 31. Thus, to preach the three offices of Christ, is to show how, in these offices, the promises are all yea and amen to us: how we have the procuring of all the promised blessings in his priestly office; the saving knowledge of these blessings in his prophetical, and the actual communication of them in his kingly.

Now, what is the direct act of faith which corresponds with the free unconditional grant of Christ and his salvation, which is made to sinners of mankind in great and precious promises? Surely the language of such a faith must be to this purpose: Faithful is he who hath promised; he will do as he hath said; God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. We are not to wait for any recommending or predisposing qualifications, but are immediately to apply to ourselves the benefit of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, made over in the absolutely free promise to such as belong to the world of mankind sinners, who are described as unjust, lost, rebellious, stout-hearted, and far from righteousness.  

21 This is agreeable to the definition of faith, given in the first part of the Marrow of Modern Divinity, ch. ii., sect. iii., § 2. “As Paul and Silas said to the jailer, so say I unto you, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; that is, Be verily persuaded in your heart, that Jesus Christ is yours; that you shall have life and salvation by him; and that whatsoever he did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for you.” This treatise, when men come to relish the genuine Gospel of Christ, the storms of Neonomian and Baxterian rage being over, will be found to be a concise but judicious declaration, of those articles of Bible-doctrine, which Luther, Calvin, and others of our first Reformers, used chiefly to insist on; and the preaching of which they found most effectual for promoting that blessed work of reformation they were engaged in.
seen and do testify, thou the Father sent the Son in the character of
the Saviour of the world. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all
acceptation, That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.
The Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost. He
suffered for sins, the just One for the unjust, that he might bring us to
God. He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, he received gifts
for men, yea, even for the rebellious. Hearken unto me, ye
stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; I bring near my
righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not
tarry.” Each of us should be setting to our seal that God is true;
saying, These are faithful words, worthy of all acceptation, and of my
acceptation in particular. Here I see, that they, to whom the promises
are directed, are sinners, unjust, rebellious, stout-hearted, and far
from righteousness; and therefore I, being such in myself, am hereby
fully warranted to consider them as directed to me: therefore it shall
henceforth, through grace, be my concern to doubt no longer, but to
rest on these promises as in Christ Yea, that is, belonging to me, and
Amen, that is, sure to be performed. I acknowledge, that the promise
as in Christ meets with no other reception from my depraved nature,
than that of being disbelieved and rejected. But there is hope in Israel
concerning this thing, in regard that faith itself, or security against
the dominion of unbelief and doubting, is in the promise: “In his
name shall the Gentiles trust. Thou shalt call me Ishi, that is, my
husband. I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my
God.”

As the grant is peculiarly opposite to our corrupted nature, and
particularly to the legal bias of the heart, and to what we are naturally
prone to consider as the only rational way of attaining any good thing
at the hand of God,—that is, not by believing, but by doing; a great
variety of means are employed to bring us to this appropriating
persuasion, and to render our unbelief more inexcusable. The Lord
urges us, with much importunity, to accept of the free grant of eternal
life in his Son Jesus Christ. He invites, entreats, commands us to
receive it, He confirms it with his oath, and puts his seal to it in the
sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper. He declares that
nothing is more pleasing or glorifying to him, than our belief of this
grant. On the other hand, when the disbelief of it prevails in his own people, it is peculiarly grieving to his Holy Spirit, as being directly opposite to his saving work, of which it is a principal part to convince them of this blessed grant. As to others, their rejection of it will not only exclude them from the blessings it conveys, but will make their damnation far more intolerable than that of the heathens, who never heard of it.

This grant was formally made to the children of Israel, and is now made to us, in the preface of the Ten Commandments: “I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” In order to the right understanding of this declaration, we observe, that it is the same revelation of the covenant of grace which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is what the apostle calls “The Gospel, which was preached to Abraham,”—and which is now preached to us Gentiles. This declaration was made to the whole people of Israel, and is still made to all the members of the visible Church, in such a manner as to afford each of them as full a revealed warrant to believe it, with application to himself, as the patriarch Abraham himself had. In this preface the Lord is saying unto us, “Be it known unto you, members of my visible Church, whose deliverance from Pagan, Mahometan, or Popish darkness, is no less wonderful than that of Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, that I am now making the same gift and grant of myself to each of you,—to thee, man, to thee, woman,—which I made to my servant Abraham; I said to him, and I say to thee, I am thy God, I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward. Whosoever believeth shall not be ashamed.”

This is not a conditional, but an absolutely free grant. It is as if he had said, “I am not now making a proposal of becoming thy God upon condition of some moral good to be found in thee, or done by thee; but I, Jehovah, am pleased, in the sovereignty of my grace, to make a gift and grant of myself to be thy God; without the faith of this grant it is impossible to please me, or to yield acceptable obedience to any of my commands. According to the covenant of works, doing, or perfect obedience, was to go before, in order that man might have a covenant-right or claim to God, as his God or everlasting portion; but
according to the covenant of grace, our covenant-right or claim to God as our God, or everlasting portion, apprehended by an appropriating faith, goes before all acceptable doing or obedience to his commands. An evangelical performance of duty is not at all in order to, but necessarily presupposes, his being our God in Christ.

This preface, with the following commandments, being addressed to the same person or persons (as is evident from the connection), affords every member of the visible Church the same ground to make an application of both to himself: and indeed there is no genuine or single regard to the authority or glory of God in any of his commandments, without that appropriating persuasion which corresponds with this preface,—without a real persuasion that God is our God and Redeemer in Christ. Teaching men to attempt obedience to any of the commands, without directing them to know and believe what is contained in the preface, tends to the subversion of all true holiness.

It would remove a great prejudice against the appropriating persuasion of which we speak, if every Gospel hearer would consider that the Lord Christ speaks as particularly to him as if he spoke to him alone; whether it be in the Law, for his conviction, as when it is said, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?” or in the Gospel, for discovering the way of relief, saying, “In me is thy help; I am the Lord thy God; I am the Lord that healeth thee; I that speak unto thee am he.”

If the whole word of the Gospel consisted of general propositions, like this, “He that believeth shall be saved,” though, even in that case, there would not be a solid ground, yet there might be some plausible pretence for the opinion, that saving faith is only a general persuasion of the mercy of God, and of Christ’s ability and willingness to save those that come to him; but when the Lord speaks to us in the form of a free, indefinite grant and promise, addressed to each of us in particular, with the continual use of the personal pronouns, Thou, Thee, Thine, it seems strange that it can admit a doubt with any, that,

22 Because “this general testimony was given out, just for every one’s faith to make it particular to himself.”
in our belief of this grant, there is an appropriation, which is expressed by the corresponding pronouns, *I, Me, Mine.*

4. The record of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ, considered as the ground of saving faith, is the Gospel as contradistinguished from the Law. Saving faith, though it set to its seal that God is true in all that he speaks, can never rest till it come to the Gospel strictly taken. Here is the beginning of our confidence; here is firm footing for eternity; here nothing is commanded; here is no new law, requiring of us faith, repentance, or any other previous condition or qualification. There is nothing here but the infinite love and mercy of God abounding to sinners of mankind through the blood and righteousness of his beloved Son, and revealed to us in free and absolute promises. Here all things are of God, who is in Christ reconciling us to himself, not imputing our trespasses to us. In the Gospel, thus understood, every one who is enabled to believe to the saving of his soul, beholds a sufficient, a present, an immediate warrant, to make a fiducial application of this salvation to himself in particular.

It may tend to make the matter more plain, to give a specimen of the answers which the Gospel, as contradistinguished from the Law, affords to the objections which a person under concern about his everlasting salvation is apt to offer against this fiducial application. If he say, “My sins are uncommonly heinous and aggravated, therefore I doubt whether God will pardon them:” we answer, If thou meanest God absolutely considered, or as he reveals himself in the Law, thou hast no ground to believe that he will pardon the least of thy sins; but if thou speakest of God as he reveals himself in the Gospel, a promising God in Christ, thou canst not doubt of the forgiveness of any of them, however great, without giving the lie to such words, directed to thee, as these: “The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin,”—1 John i. 7; “Come and let us reason

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23 “The declarations and promises of the Gospel are made to men with relative words, or terms suited for appropriation; such as, *You, Your, Thou, Thee, Thy,* and when these enter the ear of faith, they immediately point out or specify the person, as all holding true of him in particular. Whenever the person is spiritually quickened, and thus brought to the hearing of faith, immediately the word of grace strikes the ear of faith, as spoken to him; and he credits it with terms of appropriation,—*Me, My, Mine.*” This and the preceding note are taken from the *Present Truth,* vol. ii. pp. 179, 173.
together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,”—Isa. i. 18; “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins,”—Isa. xliii. 25. According to the order of blessings in the Gospel promise, thou art to believe the pardon of thy sins, as fundamental to thy enjoyment of other saving blessings, such as the writing of the Law in thy heart, and the increasing knowledge of the Lord. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel” (that is, the visible Church, including all those to whom the Word of God comes), “After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least even to the greatest. For” (the causal particle here is diligently to be observed) “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”—Heb. viii. 10–12. If the person say, “I must find something promising like in my case, some good desires and resolutions at least, before I may venture to apply so comfortable a promise to myself:” we answer, That the Gospel, strictly taken, requireth nothing as a condition, but is a free grant of Christ and his whole salvation to sinners of mankind. None of thy desires or resolutions will be truly good, while thou believest not the Gospel. Beware of going to the Law for a condition to warrant thy application of the Gospel; rather let thy immediate application of the Gospel be thy preparation for essaying obedience to the Law as a rule of life. Thou canst not take a right step in the path of duty, till thy feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.—If the person say, “I do not find that God speaks particularly to me in the Gospel promise:” we answer, That this is to deny that the Gospel is preached to thee; though the Lord commissions his ministers to preach it to every creature,—to every man, to every woman, in every part of the world to which Providence brings them. Thou art one of the members of the visible Church, to whom pertain the promises. The Lord speaks as particularly to thee as ever he did to any, before their actual believing.—If he say, “I may
perish, notwithstanding this direction of the promises to me:” we answer, If thou still obstinately persist in looking into thyself, into thy exercises or attainments, as necessary to give thee a right to Christ as thy Saviour, and in refusing to give credit to God’s promise and record concerning his Son, then the Law-covenant, which, in that case, retains its full dominion over thee, and the threatenings of which cannot fail to be executed at last, condemns thee to everlasting destruction; but the promise, believed with application to thyself in particular, cannot fail to be verified in thy experience,—for whosoever believeth shall not be ashamed.—If he say, “I have not, as yet, that light which is necessary to the act of believing:” we answer, Dost thou not know that the Gospel is preached to thee? Dost not thou understand that the Gospel is an absolutely free grant of Christ and his whole salvation to sinners of mankind, and to thee in particular? If thou dost, thou hast light for the immediate exercise of faith; if thou dost not, thou hast just cause to fear that thou art shutting thine eyes upon the clear light shining unto thee in the word of the Gospel, and that thou art hating the Lord’s instruction, and casting his words behind thy back. It is true, the people of God have all a humbling sense of their spiritual blindness; but this they desire to improve, as rather an incitement to the immediate exercise of faith in Christ Jesus, as given to be a light to the Gentiles, and to open the blind eyes, than as any excuse for the delay of it.—If he say, “I have no strength to believe:” we answer, Dost thou mean that thou canst not help looking upon the Gospel record concerning Christ, and the promise of eternal life in him, as a cunningly devised fable, affording no real security for what it promises? Or is it not rather thy case, that, though thou art troubled with no doubts of the truth of the Gospel, thou art entertaining a false notion of the Gospel, agreeable to the legal bias of the heart, that it is a new Law, requiring faith and repentance as terms or conditions, the performance of which is necessary to give thee a right to lay claim to the good of the promise. Thus, when thou complainest that thou canst not believe, thy meaning is, not that thou canst not believe the Gospel grant to be true, but that thou canst not do or acquire something which thou conceivest necessary to entitle thee to what is therein granted; not
considering that this grant is free and unconditional, and that believing, as it is the mean of our possession of promised blessings, is always opposed to doing, and to every appearance of it: which is what the apostle teacheth, when he opposes our seeking righteousness by faith, to our seeking it, as it were, by the works of the Law.—Rom. ix. 32. But a real, humbling sense of our utter inability to believe, and of such a prevalence of darkness and enmity in the heart, as nothing less than almighty power can overcome, is so far from being inconsistent with true faith, that it is inseparable from it. As under a sense of extreme guiltiness, faith is a persuasion that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have righteousness; so under a sense of absolute weakness, it is a persuasion that in him we have strength. The language of faith is: “O Lord, our strength, we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; but our eyes are to thee.” Allow not thyself in thinking that thou hast any ability or any faith to bring to the promise; but rather look that virtue may proceed from the promise itself (that is, from a promising God in Christ), effectually determining thee to believe it; and to this thou art the more encouraged, in regard that whatsoever is necessary to the exercise of faith is expressly contained in the promise: “When the poor and needy seek water” (seek light or strength to believe), “and find none” (in themselves), “and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, and I the God of Jacob will not forsake them.” “He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” “The outcasts, and they that are ready to perish, shall come.” This shall come will be inexpressibly sweet to thee, who hast a suitable, humbling sense of thy unbelief, and utter inability to withstand the power of those corruptions that oppose thy believing application of the promise,—such as spiritual blindness, enmity, legalism, carnality.—If he say, “How can I believe, till I experience the saving work of the Holy Spirit?” we answer, There would be much force in this objection, if the consciousness of some previous recommending qualifications were necessary to warrant the application of the promise in Christ to thyself; because all such qualifications must be included in the saving work of the Spirit. But the Gospel, as contradistinguished from the Law, being an absolutely
free grant of Christ and his salvation to sinners of Adam’s family, as such, it is plain that thou art to believe the free promise with application to thyself, not as having already attained the experience of a saving work of the Spirit, but rather as wanting it: and this is the more evident, in regard that that saving work is amongst the things specified in the promise, and for which thou art to take it as good security; and in regard that the pretended experience, which is supposed to be before believing, is but delusory,—all genuine experience of a saving work being in or after believing.

But against what has been said concerning the foundation of this appropriating persuasion in the record of God concerning his Son, the following objection, in the words of a late publication, may be considered:—

“The Scriptures nowhere call upon the sinner to believe that Christ died for him in particular, or that the blessings of salvation are his. As soon shall a person, whose understanding is deranged, and who, in the extravagance of his folly, imagines himself a king, be advanced, by virtue of this persuasion, to the throne, and to all the ensigns and prerogatives of royalty, as a person shall become an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ, who founds his claim to these blessings upon this presumptuous, confident persuasion. The constant, uniform tenor of Sacred Writ, is, that Christ died for sinners, and that there is pardon, life, and salvation by the mercy of God, through him, for all who will break off their sins by repentance, accept of him as their Saviour, and of the offered mercy through him.”

*Answer.*—1. It is true the Scriptures nowhere call upon a sinner to believe that Christ died for him, in this sense, as if he were, in the first instance, to consider himself as among those for whom Christ intended to lay down his life. We have already seen, that neither election nor the intention of Christ in laying down his life could be the ground of saving faith; but surely the Scriptures call upon the sinner to believe that the Gospel is preached to him,—that therein Christ crucified is now freely given to him in particular,—that the blessings of salvation are his, by virtue of the promise directed to

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24 Mr M‘Knight’s Six Sermons on Faith, p. 88.
him; even while he has no sensible or sufficient evidence that they are his in respect of actual possession. The actual possession of them, however, is also sure to him that believeth. Christ saith to him, “According to thy faith so be it unto thee.” Hence these expressions, “Christ crucified is mine, his whole salvation is mine,” and the like, are always true in the mouth of faith; that is, to him who believeth upon the footing of the Gospel grant or promise alone. But they are most false in the mouth of unbelief; that is, to him that rejects the Gospel grant, as judging it to be no sufficient ground of such confidence.

2. It is, undoubtedly, an essential part of the character of a believer, that he is a person who breaks off his sins by repentance; yet his doing so is neither faith nor the previous condition of faith, or of a sinner’s believing application of the promise to himself; for the promise which the person applies to himself by faith, is a promise of repentance,—and how absurd is it to make repentance the condition of our application of the promise of repentance! Hereby the great Promiser is represented as saying, “I will give thee the new, the penitent heart; but thou mayest not make any application of this promise to thyself till thou hast got that new and penitent heart;—or, thou mayest give no credit to the promise till thou art in actual possession of what is promised; that is, thou mayest give no credit to it at all.”

3. The phrase, taking or accepting of Christ, is ambiguous. There is an accepting of Christ by way of trusting or believing in him for all the good of the promise; and there is an accepting of him by way of resolution or engagement to submit to his authority and government. Both are essential to the Christian; but the former is only faith, and is, in the order of nature, before the latter. In the former sense, the following proposition is entirely agreeable to the doctrine we have stated concerning the appropriation which is in the nature of saving faith: that there is pardon, life, and salvation, by the mercy of God through Christ, for all who accept of Christ as their

25 Justifying faith (as the author of Lutherus Redivivus, p. 129, intimates) is not our taking Christ in all his offices, by way of promise or covenant of obedience, or subjection to him; but our taking him,—that is, our believing or trusting him, for the benefits of every office.
Saviour; or rather, all such are partakers of these blessings.

4. The madman alluded to in the exception never uttered anything more extravagant or farther from common sense, than a representation of the old Protestant doctrine as founding its claim to spiritual blessings upon some presumptuous, confident persuasion; since according to that, which is, indeed, the doctrine of the Bible, faith’s claim and its persuasion are one and the same thing; since that claim has no other foundation than the Gospel promise; and since this faith, as such, regards nothing but the object of it, our Lord Jesus, —and the ground of it, the record of God concerning him,—exclusive of reflection upon, or consciousness of, its own act.

Upon the whole, saving faith is not a speculative notion of Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension; nor an abstract philosophic view of the moral excellence therein displayed; but it is a spiritual discernment of such an exhibition of these mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, in the Gospel grant and promise, as affords a solid ground for an application of Christ, and his whole salvation, to ourselves in particular. We do not rightly believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, unless we believe that we shall have life through his name. There is no right or warrantable meditation on the death, resurrection, or ascension of Christ, but that which includes in it this believing application; or which is to this effect: “He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification. He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. God the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The forerunner is for us entered within the vail.”
DISCOURSE IV.

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

Having endeavoured to show that there is an appropriation in the nature of saving faith, from its correspondence with the record of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ; we now proceed to state the evidence of this truth arising from other considerations.

1. To understand faith or believing in Christ as including appropriation, is most agreeable to the sense in which the word is used in Scripture. To believe is to give credit to a testimony. The different acceptations of the word arise from the different lights in which the testimony is considered. Thus, when the matter of the testimony is, or at least is accounted to be, something wherein the person believing is nothing concerned, the word must be understood of what has been called Historical Faith, or an assent to some general truth. But when the matter of the testimony is some good thing to be done or given by the Testifier to the person believing,—faith or believing, in that case, always includes trust or confidence; and, in Scripture, is commonly expressed by believing in the Testifier. So when Abraham believed the promise that God had given him of a son, he is said to have “believed in the Lord.” Hence it is manifest, that to believe in Christ is to trust in him, or to be verily persuaded, that he will give us the promised salvation; and is parallel to the expression used in Ephes. i. 12, “Who trusted in Christ.” Since the matter, therefore, of the Gospel testimony, is everlasting salvation, to be bestowed on us by the Testifier, surely when we consider the faith of that testimony, as including confidence or a real persuasion that salvation will be bestowed on us in particular, we adhere to the usual acceptation of the word in Scripture; whereas it will be hard to produce a single passage wherein it is necessary to understand the term faith, or believing, of complying with proposals, terms, or conditions, of coming under engagements, or of submitting to rule or government.

2. There are several express descriptions and representations of
saving faith in Scripture, which are necessary to be attended to. Remarkable is that in Heb. xi. 1, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” In the first place, it appears from this text, that, in believing, the sinner apprehends the good presented to him in the Gospel as his own good, his own salvation; for we do not hope for salvation otherwise than as our own. “Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for.” In the next place, we learn from these words, that there is, in the nature of faith, a confidence or assurance of salvation, quite different indeed from the assurance of sense. The original word here translated substance, is the same which, in chap. iii. 14 of this book, is translated confidence. This confidence necessarily arises from a spiritual and satisfying view of good things to come, as already present in the promise; of things not seen, that are not yet matter of sense or experience, as the greatest realities. So that the soul can reckon upon them, as if they were already in its possession, saying with the Psalmist, “God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice: I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.”

There are several passages in which saving faith, or believing, having been first mentioned, is exemplified by expressions of this appropriating persuasion; such as the following: “I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God.”—Psal. xxxi. 14. “Now, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him: but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”—Rom. iv. 23, 24, 25. In these words the apostle teacheth us what it is to believe in a true and saving manner. It is to believe in God, as having delivered his own Son for our offences, and as having raised him again for our justification, and as having thus declared himself fully reconciled to us in Christ: “He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”—1 John v. 10, 11. It is evident, that, in the 11th verse, we have the language of faith in opposition to that unbelief which makes God a liar; and therefore all true and saving faith, whether weak or strong, as being
opposite to unbelief, must have this persuasion in it, That God hath given to us eternal life; in which words, the apostle speaks the language which is common to himself, with all believers: “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”—Gal. ii. 20. In the last clause of this verse, the apostle represents what sort of faith it was by which he lived in the flesh, by which he was crucified with Christ, by which Christ lived in him, and by which, being dead to the law, he lived unto God. The assurance of sense is, indeed, a most blessed attainment: there is a great deal of the comfortable enjoyment of the spiritual life, a great deal of heaven begun, in it; but still it is a different thing from the faith by which a Christian lives. The great appointed mean of Christ living in us, is that faith which appropriates him as having loved us and given himself for us,—a faith which proceeds upon no other ground than the free grant and offer of him in the Gospel.

We may farther observe, that when the Lord promises faith, he continually represents it as an appropriating persuasion: “But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shalt not turn away from me.”—Jer. iii. 19 “Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.”—Isa. xlv. 24. “And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi,” that is, my husband:—Hosea ii. 16, and ver. 23, “I will say to them who were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.”

3. This appropriating persuasion makes faith differ specifically, or in kind, from whatever else bears that name.26 In the times of the apostles, some, who were destitute of saving grace, had the faith of miracles. There was, indeed, in this faith, an application of a promise, or rather prediction of some extraordinary work of God, in which the

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26 “The distinction between justifying faith and special application is absurd, wholly subverting the nature of true faith. A general faith is not justifying, unless we would say, that devils and hypocrites who tremble, are justified before God, because they are endued with such a faith. When God enjoins faith in the Gospel, he does not only require that we believe in general that remission of sins is given to all the faithful, but that every one should believe that it is given to him in particular, in order that he may receive it to his salvation.”—Rom. iv. 24, 25; viii. 35, 38; and xv. 4. Gal. ii. 16, 20. 1 Tim. i. 15.—Henricus Altingius on the Heidelberg Catechism.
person was to be instrumental. So Jehu appears to have believed the threatening against Ahab’s family with application to himself. So Cyrus and Alexander, though ignorant of the true religion, might have a belief of the Scripture prophecies concerning their respective conquests. But this was only a carnal view of some temporal event, which was quite different from that spiritual and appropriating view which a believer has, in the promise of a present and everlasting salvation. In other cases, wherein unregenerate persons are said to believe, there is manifestly either no application of the Gospel salvation, or, if there seem to be any, it is upon some other ground than the divine grant in the Gospel. Thus, persons may be said to believe, when they only allow the truth of certain doctrines, or facts recorded in Scripture. In this sense we may understand the apostle, when he says, in Acts xxvi. 27, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.” Again, they may be said to believe, who apply the promise of life to themselves on account of some good frames, dispositions, or affections which they find to be or to have been in themselves, or on account of, what they reckon, their unblameable practice, or on account of the favourable outward aspect of providence. In this sense the stony ground hearers are said to have received the word with joy. But they had no root in themselves; they were destitute of regenerating grace, from which springs another sort of faith, even that which rests upon the Gospel grant of Christ and his salvation to sinners of mankind, as the single and sufficient ground of its claim to Christ and his salvation. Thus, if it be asked, How saving faith, in its own act, is distinguished from that belief of the truth concerning Christ, which may be found in wicked men or even in devils? it may justly be answered, By appropriation, or the application of Christ to ourselves in particular. Again, if it be asked, How saving faith is distinguished from that presumptuous confidence which is often found in those who endure but for a while? it may still be answered, By the appropriation of Christ crucified to ourselves, upon no other ground than the Gospel grant. Saving faith is distinguished from whatever else is called faith, by the effectual relief which it affords the soul from the reigning fear of Law condemnation and wrath. But, in order to this relief, it is necessary that the application
of the Gospel in believing, be as particular as the application of the
Law in conviction. When the Law says, Pay me what thou owest; the
soul is relieved when it can say, Christ is my Surety, Substitute, and
Saviour, and his righteousness is a full answer to all the demands that
law and justice have upon me. When the Law says, Thou art a child of
wrath: True, says Faith, I am such by nature; but Christ is my peace.
Thy case is hopeless, says the Law: It would be so, says Faith, if I had
no hope but what creatures afford; but Christ is my hope. Faith is
farther distinguished from whatever else bears that name, by its
hearty approbation of, and acquiescence in, the whole device of
salvation through Christ crucified, as well-ordered in all things and
sure. But there is so much of the manifold wisdom and grace of God
manifested in that part of this device, which makes a public and free
grant of Christ and his salvation to sinners of mankind, as such, that,
in rejecting or approving that grant, we reject or approve the whole.
And indeed that part of this device by which Christ crucified is
exhibited as a free gift to sinners of mankind, who have nothing to
distinguish them from other sinners, is peculiarly a stumbling-stone
to natural men; as it is so directly opposite to the legal pride which
possesses their heart, and which the almighty power of divine grace is
necessary to subdue. No person has a just or spiritual view of the
grace and mercy of God in Christ, exhibited in the Gospel, who does
not see it extending even to him in particular, though amongst the
chief of sinners; a covering not too narrow, but abundantly large for
him to wrap himself in; a covering not at a distance, but brought to
his hand: “The righteousness of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not
in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ
down from above.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy
mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach.”—
Rom. x. 6, 7, 8. Faith’s view of the glory of God in the face of Jesus
Christ, is an applicatory view of it; a view of Christ Jesus as made of
God unto us (to me in particular, says faith), wisdom, righteousness,
sanctification, and redemption; a view of God in Christ as our God,
and of all his infinite perfections, as exercised and glorified in our
salvation. It is another distinguishing property of true faith, that it is
effectual to animate us to the cheerful performance of duty. But it is
the lively appropriating persuasion of the love of Christ, as
manifested in his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross,
and not the abstract philosophical contemplation of moral beauty
and excellence, that will constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to
Him who died for us and rose again. We are to consider ourselves as
not our own, but bought with a price, that we may glorify God in our
bodies and spirits, which are his: We never walk right, unless we walk
in Christ, that is, under a persuasion, grounded singly upon the
Gospel grant, that he gives himself to us to be our quickening head,
and his Holy Spirit to be our ever actuating guide. They only have
heart or hand for setting about the blessed exercise of mortifying
their corruptions, who know and believe that their old man is
crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed, that
henceforth they may not serve sin and who “reckon themselves to be
dead indeed unto sin, and alive to God through Jesus Christ our
Lord.” They who have a real persuasion that Christ is such a merciful
and faithful High Priest, that he will not fail to confess them before
his Father who is in heaven, and that they have unsearchable riches
in him, are the only persons who will, honestly, and with singleness
of heart, confess him before men, and forego all they have in the
world, even their natural life, for his sake. The preface of the Lord’s
Prayer, and the preface of the Ten Commandments, are both
expressed in such terms, that we can neither heartily say the one, nor
fully assent to the other, without this appropriating persuasion, to
teach us that, without it, there is no such thing as acceptable prayer,
or suitable respect to any of the commandments. Were we to enter
into a particular consideration of the various exercises of the
Christian life, we would see this appropriating persuasion running
through and animating them all.

4. This appropriating persuasion is implied in the metaphorical
representations which we have, in Scripture, of saving faith. Faith is
called a “receiving.” “To as many as received him, to them gave he
power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his
name.”—John i. 12. Faith being called a receiving, implies that there
is a giving on God’s part, in the external dispensation of his word,
previous to our believing; for “no man can receive anything, except it
be given him from heaven.” We receive Christ when we believe, as in 1 John v. 11, that God “hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.” Faith is called a receiving, from the nature of the testimony believed, or because it is a testimony discovering Christ as a free gift, of which, in the act of believing, we become real partakers. Faith is called a receiving, because its proper and specific act lies, not at all in the persons offering or bringing anything to God, but in his taking home to himself, as a poor sinner of Adam’s family, a whole Christ and his whole salvation, upon no other footing than the Gospel grant.27 We have another metaphorical representation of saving faith, in Isa. lv. 1: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “He that hath no money,” that is, no good qualifications, no performance of conditions; he in whom nothing is to be found but sin and misery, is called to “buy wine and milk,” that is, to take home to himself, Christ and his benefits, unto actual possession and enjoyment; just as a person takes home to himself, for his own use, what he hath lawfully bought in the market. But here it is repeated, as a thing chiefly to be attended to, that no price is to be brought, no condition to be complied with, in order to our appropriation of Christ and his salvation; for these are presented to us as a free gift, in such a manner as to warrant our immediate appropriation of them to our own use and enjoyment,—without money and without price; for though it is a buying on our part in respect of appropriation, yet there is no selling on God’s part; no requiring of money, no prescribing of previous terms or conditions. Faith is often represented as “resting, leaning, or relying on the Lord Jesus Christ.” These metaphors import a persuasion, that, in his name, in the grant and promise of him in the Gospel, we have sufficient, we have infallible security for pardon, peace with God, deliverance from every evil work, and preservation unto his heavenly kingdom; and this persuasion, so far as it takes place, excludes all doubting, uncertainty, and perturbation of mind.

27 Faith, which properly signifies an assent or persuasion, is called a receiving of Christ, because it is, in its own nature, an appropriating persuasion; as unbelief, which properly signifies the disbelieving of a testimony, is a rejecting of Christ.—Palaemon’s Creed Reviewed and Examined.
When the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw the invading army of the Assyrians at the walls of their city, it is said, “They rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah.” They had such a persuasion of the truth of his words, as was effectual to set their minds, which had before been greatly disquieted with fear, at ease and rest with respect to the issue of their present distress. So establishing to the heart is a real persuasion, founded on the Gospel promise, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved. Faith is represented as our trusting in the Lord. You know, that when we trust an honest man, it implies that he hath given us a promise, and that we are persuaded he will not fail to make it good. Surely there cannot be less than this in a real trusting in the Lord. The language of it is, that, on account of the faithfulness of his word, and the liberality of his heart, I reckon upon what he hath promised as my own. Again, faith is represented as “a coming, or fleeing to Christ,” for refuge; which implies that a person, as soon as he believes the Gospel report, has no more confidence in outward worldly advantages, in his own wisdom, righteousness, or strength, or any lying vanity whatever, but immediately, or without any delay, places his whole confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ as his righteousness and salvation. Faith is represented as “putting on Christ,” as “eating his flesh, and drinking his blood,” to signify, that as, in putting on our clothes, we take them to ourselves for covering or for ornament; as, in eating or drinking what is set before us, we take it to ourselves for our bodily nourishment; so, in believing, we make an application of Christ Jesus to ourselves in particular, for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Saving faith, in each, even the very first of its actings, is (according to our Lord’s discourse in the sixth of John) our eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God; and therefore, in its very nature, it must include an appropriation of Christ to ourselves in particular. We can have no saving benefit by Christ without this application of him to ourselves, as we cannot be nourished by our food without eating it. Faith is likewise represented as a “looking to Christ.” As the stung Israelites could not look to the brazen serpent, in compliance with the divine command, without a persuasion that they would be healed by it; so we cannot look to Christ, that is,
believe on him, without a similar persuasion, that, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of his death, we shall be healed. So uniformly is this appropriating persuasion held forth by the metaphorical representations of faith in Scripture.

5. That this appropriating persuasion is of the nature of saving faith, is manifest from those things which are represented as opposite to it. For, that staggering at the promise, or doubting, which is opposed to faith, Rom. iv. 20, Matt. xxi. 21, James i. 6, is not a staggering at, or doubting of, a general speculative truth, such as, That the promise of eternal life will be accomplished to the elect, or to them that truly believe; but it is a person’s staggering at, or doubting of, his warrant to apply the promise to himself, or to believe the accomplishment of it in his own case. Thus, when it is said, that Abraham did not stagger at the promise, the meaning is, that he did not doubt that it was God’s faithful word to him, and that it would be performed. This is the more evident, in regard that this doubting is sometimes expressed by the fear and perplexity that accompany it, as in Mark v. 36, and John xiv. 1. Now, if the opposite of faith be a staggering at the warrant which the Gospel affords us to apply the promise to ourselves, or to believe the accomplishment of it in our own case, then faith itself must be an application of the promise to ourselves upon the footing of that warrant, and a persuasion of the accomplishment of it in due time, such a persuasion, namely, as, according to the measure of it, frees the mind from fear or trouble with respect to our attainment of what is contained in the promise. To the same purpose is the Scripture account of unbelief, as a putting away the word of the Gospel, which is the free promise of eternal life, from ourselves.—Acts xiii. 46. Now, if unbelief be the putting away of the promise from ourselves, then faith must be the application of it to ourselves. Men are condemned as unbelievers, not merely because they disbelieve this general proposition, that God will give eternal life to them that believe; for that is a truth of which the most desperate unbelievers, and even devils themselves, may be convinced; but the proper ground of their condemnation is, that they do not believe the record of God concerning his Son, with application to themselves; they do not truly believe that the righteousness, salvation, and
kingdom of God, are brought to them in particular in the Gospel grant. This account of unbelief we have in 1 John v. 10, 11: “He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son: and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Therefore, we are always unbelievers, till we be brought to a real persuasion, that God hath given to us eternal life; that he hath given it to us in his Son.

6. This doctrine concerning the appropriation of faith is most consonant to other articles of Scripture truth. It accords with the doctrine of man’s natural inability for any act or exercise that is spiritually good; for, in setting about the performance of any duty, we must either see strength for the performance of it in ourselves or in the promise. But to see it in ourselves is contrary to the Scripture doctrine of our spiritual impotence. On the other hand, to see it in the promise as our furniture for the practice of duty, is to have the appropriating persuasion of which we speak. Such an appropriating faith accords with the doctrine of justification by free grace through the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; for that righteousness, according to this doctrine, is imputed to men as having no inherent righteousness, and therefore as sinners, as ungodly. Hence, when men believe in a God in Christ, they “believe in Him who justifieth the ungodly;” they make an application of the righteousness of Christ to themselves under the same character under which they are considered in God’s imputation of it. Surely the hearers of the Word may, without presumption or delusion, apply the justice-satisfying and law-magnifying righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ to themselves as poor sinners, or as persons who have no righteousness of their own; since that is the character under which God is pleased to grant it to them in the Gospel, and under which he imputes it to them, for their complete justification, in the moment of believing! Again, this view of saving faith, as including in its nature an application of Christ to ourselves in particular, is most agreeable to the light in which faith ought to be considered in the matter of justification, that is, not at all as a work or instance of obedience to the law, but purely as a mean or instrument whereby we receive the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ into actual possession! Thus,
the alms that are offered to a beggar, come into his possession by his act of stretching out his hand to receive them. Now, there may be something commendable, something agreeable to the giver, and becoming the condition of the beggar, in his act of stretching out his hand to receive; but it is not the commendableness of the act, nor its agreeableness to the giver, nor its suitableness to the condition of the beggar, that puts him in possession of the alms. There might be many other acts equal or superior to it in all these respects; but the only thing in this act, that puts the beggar in possession, is this, that it is a receiving of the alms. In like manner, faith is itself an eminent instance of obedience, and disposes a person to every other instance of it. But, in these respects, it is of as little effect in the affair of our justification, as any other work of the law; under these considerations, it is entirely excluded from that affair; for it does not justify, or put us in possession of the justifying righteousness, as it is an instance of obedience, or as disposing to it, but merely as it is our “receiving the gift of that righteousness,” or our application of it to ourselves. Farther, this appropriation is implied in another Scripture doctrine, namely, that we never can set about the practice of duty in an acceptable manner, unless we do so in the persuasion of the Lord’s acceptance of our persons. This is evident from all those scriptures that teach us to yield obedience, not as slaves, but as children, as bought with a price. Indeed, for persons to attempt any duty in order to the acceptance of their persons, or, which is in effect the same thing, without essaying to believe in Christ for the acceptance of them, is to go about to establish their own righteousness, refusing to submit to the righteousness of God; it is an attempt to act in their own strength, and even while they must consider themselves as under the burden of God’s everlasting wrath and curse; for, there is no middle state between being accepted with God, and being under the curse. Now, there is no persuasion of the acceptance of our persons, but what is either in the way of appropriating Christ as the Lord our righteousness, upon the footing of the Gospel, or in the way of the assurance of sense. But it is absurd, and contrary both to Scripture and to the experience of the Lord’s people, to suppose, that they are not accepted in their essays to discharge what is present duty, even
while they walk in darkness, and have not the light of sensible assurance. But the acceptable way of setting about present duty, which is always competent to believers, whatever case or situation they may be in, is that of a present application of Christ to themselves as the lord their righteousness, in whom their persons and services are ever accepted. This appropriating persuasion, is implied in the Scripture doctrine of Gospel holiness. This holiness is represented as our living, not to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and rose again. We are to study it as knowing that our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we may not serve sin. This appropriating persuasion of the crucifixion of our old man with Christ, is represented as essential to the very beginning of the study of holiness; and, consequently, it is different from that assurance of sense, which is founded on marks and evidences, and which supposes some actual progress in holiness; it is indeed that application of Christ crucified to ourselves, which is, either more or less explicitly, in the first and in every following act of true faith. That there is such an appropriating persuasion as we speak of in the nature of faith, is most agreeable to the Scripture doctrine of the covenant of grace; for the condition of that covenant having been perfectly fulfilled by our Lord’s obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, it is to us a covenant of absolutely free promise; and therefore our taking hold of this covenant must be in the way of the application of the promise to ourselves in particular. When we read, that God will make this everlasting covenant with us, the meaning is (as Isaiah lv. 3 is explained in Acts xiii. 34), that he is well pleased for Christ’s sake, to give us poor sinners the mercies promised in that covenant; and faith is our taking to ourselves freely what is freely given. The last words of David may well be considered as the language of faith in taking hold of this covenant: “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire.” This appropriating persuasion is agreeable to the nature and design of the sacramental seals of that everlasting covenant. In these ordinances the Lord deals with the receiver, as a person would do if he should take a quantity of earth and stone, and say to another, This is such a valuable estate, which I
give or convey to thee; take it, and doubt not of the validity of the conveyance. Thus, in baptism, the Lord says to the soul, This washing with water signifies and seals my promise of washing thee from the guilt and pollution of sin; a promise which is as sure to faith as this washing or sprinkling with water is to the outward senses. In like manner, in the Lord’s supper, he says to the soul, This bread is “my body, broken for thee:” This cup is “the New Testament in my blood, shed for thee, for the remission of thy sins.” Now, it must be remembered, that baptism and the Lord’s supper are designed for the weakest as well as for the strongest believer; and also, that the least measure of true faith is answerable to what our Lord says to it in these ordinances, as well as the strongest. As the appropriation of which we speak is according to the analogy of faith, so it is opposite to manifold and pernicious errors: particularly to Legalism; as this appropriation is just the soul’s going out of itself; its going away from all its own qualifications, exercises, and attainments, to take up its only rest upon the free grant and promise of Christ, and of eternal life in him, as set forth in the Gospel to sinners of mankind indiscriminately: to Antinomianism, as it is an appropriation of Christ for sanctification as well as justification; and as it holds our reception of the privileges and comforts of the Gospel to be both necessary, and, according to the measure of it, always effectual to the production of a holy practice: to Enthusiasm, in regard that the whole matter and ground of this faith are contained in the written word; and the revealed warrant for this appropriation is the same to the believer and the unbeliever, in opposition to the extravagance of enthusiasts, who found their high pretensions upon the peculiar clearness of their imaginary ideas of Christ’s human nature, and of its appearance in suffering or in glory; upon their dreams, visions, and new revelations; upon the peculiar liveliness of their frames and feelings; upon extraordinary impressions of the divine wrath or of the divine love; upon some sudden change of mind, which they call their conversion; while they are strangers to any suitable concern about the only saving conversion, which is a turning from that unbelief “which makes God a liar,” to a cordial receiving of and resting upon his record or testimony concerning his beloved Son.
7. We might show that there is an appropriation in the nature of saving faith, from examples of the exercises of it. Several of these examples have been already taken notice of. To this purpose we might transcribe almost all the professions of faith made by the saints recorded in Scripture. Here it may suffice to produce the two following: “I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust.”—Psal. xci. 2. Hence, it appears, that when a person, in a scriptural sense, trusteth in the Lord, he has a real persuasion that Jehovah, a promising and promise-performing God, is his God. “And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.”—John xx. 28, 29. Though Thomas was now favoured with a very clear and sensible manifestation, we cannot allow that these words were merely the language of sense, and not of saving faith; because a sensible manifestation may, and always ought to be improved as an occasion of, and an encouragement to, the lively exercise of faith; and because our Lord’s answer undoubtedly refers to these words, and calls, what is expressed by them, believing.

But it has been said, that such instances represent rather a high degree of the exercise of faith, than what belongs to the essence of it.

We answer, by observing, That the appropriation of which we speak, arises, as was shown in the former discourse, from the matter believed, or from the nature of the record that God hath given us concerning his Son; and not from the degree of strength or distinctness in the act of believing; whether faith be weak or strong, in a higher or lower degree, the matter believed is still the same, namely, “the record of God concerning his Son.”—1 John v. 11. If we had scriptural views of a strong faith, we would find it to be that in which what belongs to the nature or essence of faith most distinctly appears; whereas, what we call weak faith, is that which is obscured and almost buried out of sight under a multitude of opposite corruptions. The weakest faith, were it disentangled, would be what we allow a strong faith to be. Strong faith, according to Scripture, is that which proceeds most singly upon the ground of God’s word of promise, whilst everything, in experience and sensible appearances, are against it. “Abraham against hope believed in hope; and being not
weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, nor yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.”—Rom. iv. 18–20. The truth is, the language of faith in all the Lord’s people, whether weak or strong, is the same; only it is spoken more distinctly and explicitly, and with less faltering, by some of them than by others.

Here it may be observed, that we need not wonder to find Christians backward to express themselves in the proper language of this appropriating persuasion; because their doing so implies a distinct and comfortable sense of their having believed, which is a different thing from believing itself. This appropriating persuasion is a very deep-laid and frequently hidden act of the soul. The comfortable sense of it arises partly from the strength and distinctness of it, and partly from the peculiar fruits and effects of it.

When we are speaking of the example of the Lord’s people, it deserves particular notice, that we find expressions of this appropriating persuasion mingling with their complaints of desertion and prevailing corruption. “But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.”—Isa. xlix. 14. “Iniquities prevail against me: but as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.”—Psal. lxv. 3. Heman begins his mournful song with these words, “O Lord God of my salvation.” Faith still holds the same language in its hardest conflicts with prevailing unbelief. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”—Psal. xliii. 5.

How often has a poor distressed soul, that could find no satisfaction as to his gracious state in the way of reflecting upon past exercises or present attainments, found sweet peace, composure, and satisfaction in essaying the direct act of this appropriating faith, and resting upon the free promise of a God in Christ, as addressed to sinners of mankind, even the chief. In which case that word has been verified in Isa. xxx. 15, “Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and in
confidence shall be your strength.”

We may add, that ministers dwelling upon the nature and grounds of this appropriating faith in their public administrations, have been a blessed mean in the Lord’s hand, of reviving a work of reformation, of converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort. On the other hand, when this is neglected, and even opposed, by many who are called Protestants and ministers of the Gospel, it is a sign of grievous departure from the faith, which had been so fully declared in most of the confessions and other forms of sound words publicly authorised in the reformed churches. It is also a dismal sign, that whatever Gospel truth on other heads is taught among us, we reap little spiritual profit from it, by reason of ignorance or corrupt notions of that faith which is the organ whereby the Word is received into the heart.

Upon the whole, this proposition, That saving faith is a fiducial appropriating persuasion of our salvation through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, founded on the free grant and promise of the Gospel, manifestly accords with the ordinary acceptation of the word; with the various representations in the Scripture, of the nature and exercise of faith; with other articles of Gospel doctrine; and, finally, with the uniform experience of the Lord’s people.

Here it may be proper to take notice of some things which have been urged against this doctrine.

*Objection 1st.* According to this notion, the thing to be believed is, That Christ died for me, that I am justified and shall be saved through him; and yet the persuasion is supposed to be the very thing which gives me an interest in the Saviour, and in the blessings of salvation through him; for, let this be what it will, nothing is more certain from Scripture, than that he who believeth shall be saved, but he who doth not, shall be damned. Must I not, then, be interested in the Saviour, before I can know or believe that I am so? How, then, can this persuasion be the mean of giving me this interest? Is not this to make the effect to exist before the cause? Is it not to give existence to that which had no existence before, by confidently believing that it doth
already exist.28

Answer. If, by a belief that Christ died for me, that I am justified, and shall be saved through him, the objector means a persuasion that I am one of those for whom Christ intended to lay down his life, or, which is the same thing, one of the elect, or that I am already in actual possession of justification and salvation; then, as was shown in the preliminary observations, what is objected is nothing to the purpose. We utterly deny that such a persuasion can be saving faith; because it cannot be founded in the Word of God alone, and because it is a persuasion of what God hath decreed from eternity, or of some good which the person supposes himself to be already possessed of; whereas, the faith of which we speak, is a persuasion neither of what was God’s decree from eternity, nor yet of any good which we are already possessed of, but merely of this truth, that God is now in the Gospel dispensation, giving us Christ crucified and his whole salvation.

The inconsistency supposed in the objection vanishes, when we consider that the death of Christ, justification, and salvation, may, at the same time, be ours in one respect, and not ours in another. They are ours in the grant and promise of the Gospel; but they are not ours in actual possession, till we believe that grant and promise. In believing, we become actual partakers of them; because this believing is our receiving of them; and, therefore, faith is represented as receiving Christ, receiving the gift of righteousness, receiving the atonement.

Agreeably to what is now observed, we do hold, that, in saving faith, there is a real persuasion that Christ and his salvation are presently and infallibly ours, as existing in the promise; ours, so that we cannot fall short of them; before and in order to our consciousness and experience of their being ours, as existing in our actual

28 Mr M’Knight’s Six Sermons on Faith, pp. 92, 93. Similar to this is the reasoning of Bellarmine. “Fides specialis misericordiae,” says he, “sequitur justificationem. Igitur fides specialis misericordiae non est fides justificans. Fiducia qua quis confidet remissa esse peccata pendet a bona conscientia, ac proinde praeexigit justificationem, non illam efficit;”—i.e., The faith of special mercy follows justification. Therefore the faith of special mercy is not justifying faith. The confidence with which a person trusts that his sins are forgiven, depends on a good conscience, and therefore presupposes justification does not bring it about.
possession. This is what all we have said goes to prove; and so we understand our Lord, when he says, “Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them,” that they are presently and infallibly yours, as existing in the promise, “and ye shall have them,” ye shall have the consciousness and experience of their being yours, as existing in your actual possession. Again- he says, “According to thy faith, so shall it be unto thee.” When a person believes that Christ and his whole salvation are his, as existing in the promise,—his, so as he cannot fall short of them; he believes what none but a true believer, or one who hath heard and learned of the Father, does or can believe.

Here a continual outcry of obscurity or absurdity is raised. But the ground of it is no more than this, that the way of coming to the possession of a benefit, by believing merely, is without any exact parallel in human affairs; or, in other words, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are discerned spiritually,” and not by reducing them to the measure and standard of carnal things.

Objection 2nd. It is unreasonable to call reprobates to believe what neither is nor ever will be true in their case.

Answer. Though it appears from Scripture that the greater part of the human race are included in the decree of reprobation; yet no man can warrantably think or say of himself, or any other person, who is in the present life, and hath not sinned the sin unto death (which is the sin against the Holy Ghost) that he is a reprobate; this being one of the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. But the Gospel offers and promises are things that are revealed to us—things that we have to do with; and they are directed to mankind sinners indefinitely, in such a manner as warrants every person to whom the Word of God comes, to make application of them to himself: The elect are brought, through the supernatural illumination and effectual persuasion of the Holy Spirit, to make this application; each of them, in his time, is brought to say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. As to those who, in the issue, will prove reprobates, they
have the same warrant in the Word of grace, and promise to believe in Christ as their own Saviour, that any ever had before they believed. But they refuse to be persuaded. The proper cause of this unpersuadableness is not predestination, but their spiritual blindness and enmity against the Lord Christ, their obstinate attachment to self-righteousness and other idols. The promise of eternal life is indeed left to them, but since, instead of embracing it by faith, they put it away from them, despise and reject it, making God a liar, who but must see and acknowledge, that they justly come short of the promised blessing?

**Objection 3rd.** This appropriating persuasion is presumptuous.

**Answer.** It is indeed an awful truth that security and presumption are the ruin of multitudes in the visible Church: we never can be too much cautioned against it.

But presumption, in every view, is far from the appropriating persuasion of which we speak. Presumption is always grounded upon some supposed privilege or qualification by which the person supposes himself to be distinguished from others;—“I am not as other men are, or even as this publican. We have Abraham to our father;”—whereas the appropriating persuasion of which we speak, is grounded upon the free grant which is made of the Saviour to all people, even to the vilest of the vile. The presumptuous conclude, upon imaginary or insufficient grounds, that they are already believers, and in a state of grace; but, in the persuasion of which we speak, a man regards himself no otherwise than as a poor sinner of mankind, to whom that word comes, in which God is making to him in particular a gift and grant of his Son, Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. The ground upon which the presumptuous apply the promises, is always something that they see in themselves, in their experiences or attainments; but this persuasion appropriates the good of the promise as ours, for Christ’s sake alone, and because the promise is directed to all sinners of mankind to whom the Word of God comes. Presumption is a groundless expectation of deliverance from wrath, without holiness or deliverance from sin; but this is a persuasion of salvation from sin, as well as from wrath,—a persuasion that we have sanctification as
well as justification in our Lord Jesus Christ. Presumption puffeth up, and renders men secure in sin; but the more distinct and prevalent this persuasion is in any person, he will be the more humble, self-denied, watchful, and diligent in the study of universal obedience.

**Objection 4th.** If faith consisted in this confident persuasion, then all a person would have to do, would be, by every possible means, to work himself up to, and confirm himself in it, whatever evidence he might have of the contrary. This is a faith which may do well enough for fools and madmen, but which no wise man can be satisfied with.  

**Answer.** What we speak of is a persuasion of this, that in the Gospel offer and promise, God is now giving us Jesus Christ, the true bread from heaven; and we have the same evidence of this, that we have of the Gospel being preached to us. And surely what is opposite to this is the most abominable of all falsehoods, as it contradicts the best news that were ever heard in heaven or on earth. Persons may, no doubt, come to some sort of persuasion of all being well with them, by attempting a compliance with terms and conditions, and by a conceit of their own qualifications as undoubted evidences of their state of grace and favour with God. But the appropriating persuasion is of a quite different kind; we are so far from working ourselves up to it, that we naturally hate it, and do all we can to fortify ourselves against it; this continues to be the case in reality, whatever outward professions we make to the contrary, till the Lord, the Spirit, work this persuasion in us, by enlightening the eyes of our understandings to apprehend the free grant of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation, as what God is presently making over to us poor sinners of mankind, to each of us in particular. The opinion of many, that they

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29 Mr M’Knight’s Sermons on Faith, p. 88. To the same purpose, “Omnino temere,” says Bellarmine, “tanquam ex verbo, possunt homines credere, sibi remissa esse peccata;” i.e.,—“Men cannot believe, as if warranted by the Word, that their sins are forgiven them, without the utmost rashness.” The reason is, That, in the Word of God, salvation is nowhere promised to this or the other individual, this being peculiar to a few who are expressly named.

30 “As for hoping to be saved by faith only, as an humble relying upon the promise in Christ, it is against the natural inclination of man, till sanctified and subdued to Christ, his mind being ignorant of the righteousness of faith, and his heart too proud to submit to it, and his guilty conscience fearful to trust to it, without some works of his own. As for the high-flown pretences of the Antinomians and the Familists, to faith without works subsequent, and works being prejudicial, they are the irrational transport of an opinion, not the natural inclination of the heart, or that which the conscience doth naturally acquiesce in.”—*Lutherus Redivivus*, p. 161.
can easily work themselves up to this appropriating persuasion, betrays their gross ignorance, not only of the nature of that persuasion, but also of the spiritual blindness, enmity, and legal bias of the heart.  

When the objector says, All a person would have to do would be to work himself up to this confident persuasion: if he speaks of what unites us to Christ, we own, that we are united to him, not by doing, but by believing: but if he speaks of all that belongs to the Christian life, and to the evidence of our union to Christ, then there is a great deal more indispensably necessary: love, repentance, the diligent study of universal obedience, are fully as much so as faith. If they be accounted fools who rest upon the Gospel grant of Christ, and of eternal life in him, and are persuaded that, in doing so, they shall not be disappointed, we desire to be such fools more and more.

Objection 5th. There are various marks and characters laid down in the Word of God for us to examine and prove ourselves by. But to what purpose are those marks and characters, if our satisfaction or assurance respecting our gracious state were a mere confident persuasion, and not the result of a rational and scriptural inquiry?

Answer. There is an assurance, a full assurance, in the direct act of faith; but this is different from what is properly called our satisfaction or assurance respecting our gracious state, or an assurance that we have believed in a right manner; or that we are already in actual possession of Christ and his salvation; for the assurance of faith is neither an assurance of what we have done, nor of what we already possess, but only of what God is presently giving us in his word of grace and promise.

The Lord hath enjoined us to endeavour after satisfaction as to our

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31 “There is nothing about Christ Jesus, or about the whole mystery of the Gospel, but is incredible to a natural man, and to a natural reason.—Do not run away easily with an imagination, that it is a common and ordinary thing to believe the truth of Gospel doctrine. People will say, it is very easy to believe;—it is a hard matter to believe, they may say, their own salvation; and that one is a great deal easier than the other. If there be a firm assent begotten by the Spirit of God upon the heart, as to the foundation-truth of the Gospel, the particular application of that to thy soul for thy salvation, will be found an easy thing.”—Traill's Third Sermon on the steadfast Adherence to the Profession of our Faith.

32 Mr M’Knight’s Six Sermons, p. 92.
gracious state, or the assurance of sense. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”—2 Peter i. 10. Self-examination is a principal mean of obtaining this satisfaction. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”—2 Cor. xiii. 5. In order to a true knowledge of our state, it is necessary to examine, not only whether we have done what is materially right, but whether it has flowed from a pure heart; whether our purity of heart has flowed from a good conscience; whether our good conscience has flowed from faith unfeigned, or that faith which makes an application of Christ to ourselves in particular, upon no other footing than that of the word of grace and promise. This order is pointed out by the apostle in 1 Tim. i. 5:—“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

Supposing our spiritual condition to be peculiarly dangerous, self-examination is the appointed mean of our coming to such a true knowledge of it, as will put us upon an immediate believing application of Christ for our spiritual healing; that our experience may be like that of the woman who had the bloody issue, when she touched the hem of his garment.

On the other hand, supposing that, in the exercise of self-examination, the Lord has been pleased to grant us some distinct view of his own work in our souls as corresponding with the marks and characters of it in his word; in that case, instead of doting on our attainment, which is peculiarly dangerous, we should improve it as an encouragement to the immediate renewed acting of this appropriating faith; that our faith, like that of the Thessalonians, may grow exceedingly.

Objection 6th. Such a representation of faith is discouraging to the weak and doubting, who may be a true Christian.

Answer. This doctrine must discourage the vain confidence that men have in themselves, that they are righteous, and that they have good qualifications; it must discourage their attempts to work out or find something in themselves which may give them a right to lay claim to Christ and his salvation as their own. But to those who know the plague of their own heart, and who can see nothing in themselves
but sinfulness and misery, these good news from a far country must
be as cold water to a thirsty soul; namely, that they, not as believers,
not as persons so and so qualified, but as poor sinners of mankind,
are called to look to Christ as the Lord their righteousness, and to
look to the promises as “in him Yea,” that is, directed to them, and
“in him Amen,” that is, sure to be performed, “to the glory of God by
them.”

The doubts that professing Christians labour under, are either such
as respect their own attainments; as, whether they have truly
believed; or such as respect their warrant in the Gospel to make a
present, an immediate, application of Christ to themselves in
particular. There may be too much ground for doubts of the former
sort; for men are naturally prone to think themselves to be
something, while they are nothing, and so to deceive themselves. But
with respect to doubts of the latter sort, they are the workings of that
unbelief which makes God a liar; and therefore the principle of true
faith, even in the weakest believer, will maintain a conflict with them
as belonging to the flesh or depraved nature: “For the flesh lusteth
against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.” Now of two
schemes of doctrine, which is the more favourable and helpful to the
Christian in this warfare? whether is it that which palliates and
excuses these doubts, which are some of his worst enemies; or that
which sets the evil and malignity of them in the strongest light?
Surely the latter; for he will make head against these doubts, only in
proportion as he is enabled to see, in the glass of the Lord’s Word, the
vanity and vileness of them. We have many examples to this purpose
in Scripture, particularly in the Psalms: “Why art thou cast down, O
my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall
yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.
Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is
his mercy clean gone for ever? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?
Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, This is my
infirmity.” Thus the Psalmist struggled against his doubts of
salvation in the promise; as seeing them to be quite groundless, as
seeing that they rose from the sinful haste and infirmity of his
depraved nature.
Attempting to comfort persons under perplexing doubts of their salvation, by insisting upon some favourable things in their character and exercise as proofs of their being already true believers, is frequently very dangerous, and, in some cases, proves a healing of the wound of the soul slightly; a crying "peace, peace, while there is no peace;" but it never can be improper or unseasonable to set before the person the free grant of an all-sufficient Saviour, in the Gospel offer and promise; for, supposing the worst as to the person’s real case, this Gospel declaration is consistent with the most plain, particular, and faithful dealing with him concerning the heinousness and aggravations of his sins; nay, it is absolutely necessary to any dealing with him at all about, that which is chiefly the ruin of souls in the visible Church, the sin of unbelief. This was still the method of the Apostles. “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which was spoken by the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.” It was the method of the Master himself: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” On the other hand, supposing the best in the doubting persons case, nothing can be more proper than such a Gospel declaration; for, if he have grace in the root or habit, this is the appointed mean of calling it forth to lively and vigorous exercise, if he have the marks and characters of one who is not almost, but altogether a Christian, a present believing application of this word of life is the way to have them brightened and corroborated.
DISCOURSE V.

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

We may sum up what has been delivered in the preceding discourses concerning the object and the act of saving faith.

With respect to the object of faith, we observe, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the immediate object of it. By faith we behold him as “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world,” as our sacrificing and interceding High Priest, who deals with God on our behalf; and as our Prophet and King, who deals with us on God’s behalf.

God is the ultimate object of faith. In believing on Christ, we believe on God:—“Who by him do believe in God who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.”—1 Pet. i. 21. Hence, when the Philippian jailer believed in Christ, he is said to have “believed in God.” Christ is our way to God:—“No man cometh to the Father but by me.”—John xiv. 6. He is “the door” of our access to God.

The Word of God, particularly the Gospel promise, is the matter believed. It is, no doubt, the property of faith to believe whatever God reveals; but it could not be saving faith, if it were not a belief of the free promise of salvation by Jesus Christ. “This is the rest and the refreshing.”

With respect to the act of saving faith, it is a real and unfeigned persuasion. Many say, they have faith, who have it not. The Apostle James deals with such in the second chapter of his epistle.

It is a sure persuasion. The most probable notion or opinion about the infinitely important affair of our everlasting salvation, would afford nothing but perplexity and heart-wavering. Faith could not establish the heart, if there were no assurance in its nature.

It is a supernatural persuasion, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. He enlightens the eyes of our understanding to know Christ as the only
Saviour, and our Saviour.

It is an appropriating persuasion: it is a persuasion that Christ crucified is ours, upon no other ground than the free grant and promise, which God is now making in the Gospel to sinners of mankind indefinitely. In this respect faith is just an echo to the joyful sound of the Gospel. The Gospel says of Christ, He is the Saviour of sinners,—the Saviour of the world. He is my Saviour, says Faith, for I belong to the world of sinners, of whom he bears the character of the Saviour. The Gospel says, “This is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.” He is the Lord my righteousness, says Faith. His voice in the Gospel is, “I am the Lord thy God.” Faith returns, Thou art my Lord and my God.

We come now to inquire into the import of faith being God’s commandment.

Here two points are to be considered; namely, That believing on the name of Jesus Christ is one of God’s commandments; and, That it is his commandment by way of eminence.

Since believing on the name of Jesus Christ is one of God’s commandments, it must be our duty. This, however, is perfectly consistent with its being God’s work of grace. A great part of that which, in the covenant of grace, he promises to work in us, is our duty. Thus he promises to “put his fear into our hearts, and to circumcise our hearts to love him; to put his laws into our minds, and to write them in our hearts.” Again, Faith is that whereby we are made actual partakers of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation. In this respect, faith is not considered as our work or duty, but merely as a mean or instrument of God’s appointing and giving, whereby we receive Christ and his benefits into actual possession. In this sense the apostle says, “It is of faith that it might be of grace.” This, however, does not hinder faith from being justly considered as our duty in another respect, namely, as it is required in the first commandment of the moral law.

We may here point out some things evidently included in the duty of believing.

1. Endeavouring to attain the knowledge of what is taught in the
Word concerning Christ. They who are neglecting to seek the true knowledge of what the Scriptures testify of Christ, are neglecting to believe in him. Knowledge is so necessary to faith, that the former is often put for the latter: “By his knowledge,” that is, by the faith of him, “shall my righteous servant justify many.”—Isa. liii. 11. Let such as would believe in the name of Christ, use diligence to know what the Scripture teaches concerning their unspeakable need of him, concerning his person and offices, concerning the making, the proper condition, the promises, and the administration of the covenant of grace, concerning their sinful and miserable condition under the broken covenant of works, and the way and manner of their happy instatement in the covenant of grace. Let not the precious moments, in which they have an opportunity of attaining a competent knowledge of the things which belong to their eternal peace, be criminally squandered away in the vain pursuits and amusements of this world. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for persons in the visible Church that live and die without the saving knowledge of Christ. God says concerning such, “They are a people of no understanding; and therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.”

2. Endeavouring to have a deep impression of, and subjection of heart unto, the authority of God speaking in his Word. We do not truly receive the testimony of God concerning his Son, unless we receive it on account of the authority of the Testifier. People may seem to have an esteem of many articles of Gospel truth, because they can somehow contrive to reconcile them to their natural understanding, or because they appear agreeable to their natural desire of happiness. But surely true faith is a different thing: it is a receiving what God says, for the best of all reasons, namely, because it is God that says it. Such was the reception which the Gospel met with among the Thessalonians. “For this cause,” says the apostle to them, “thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God.” Hence faith is not so much our saying anything, as our silent acquiescence in what God
says.

3. Another thing, included in this duty of believing is, that we should be exercised in applying and taking home the word of the Gospel to ourselves, as a word directed to us in particular. As the word of the Law can be of no use for reproof or conviction, without application to ourselves; neither can the word of the Gospel afford us any relief without as particular an application. When the Lord says, “The word of salvation is sent to you, The promise is to you,” each of us ought to be saying, To me, to me. Wherefore is Christ lifted up, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness?” Each of us should be saying, That I, a poor sinner of Adam’s family, may look to him as my Saviour. Whom is he calling and inviting so tenderly, so importunately, to “take the water of life freely?” Each of us should still be saying, Me. Whom does he command to trust in him for everlasting salvation? Me, hell-deserving me.  

4. Another thing that belongs to the duty of believing, is, that we should essay to avow or profess to God, to our own souls, and also, as there is occasion, to men, that we do believe, and that we desire to be delivered from our unbelief. Though this avowal may not be necessary to the existence, it is so to the distinctness, of the exercise of faith. We should especially make this avowal or profession unto God; as the Psalmist frequently does: “But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God.”—Psal. xxxi. 14. “I cried unto thee, O Lord, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.”—Psal. cxlii. 5; and as the father of the child, in Mark ix. 24, did; who “cried out, and said with tears, Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Indeed our Lord enjoins us to make this avowal in our prayers, when he directs us to say to God, “Our Father;” and that we shall be brought to this avowal, is matter of promise, “Thou shalt call me, My Father: Thou shalt call me Ishi, my husband.” We should also make the same profession of faith to our own souls, as a mean of.

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33 Considering our natural aversion to the believing application of Christ to ourselves as sinners, upon no other footing than the free grant of him in the Gospel, there is great propriety in the following exhortation of Luther, in his commentary on these words, in Gal. ii. 20, “He loved me, and gave himself for me.” “Who is this me?” says he, “Even I, a wretched and damnable sinner, was so dearly beloved of the Son of God, that he gave himself for me. O print this word ME in your heart, and apply it to your own self, not doubting but that you are one of those to whom this me belongeth.”
stirring them up to the more lively exercise of faith. We have examples of this in the Psalms: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” Again, “My soul wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock, and my salvation.” We are also, as there is occasion, to make this profession before men; for, we are not to be ashamed of Christ, “who is our hope,” before men; lest he be ashamed of us, “when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.”

5. Another thing included in this duty of believing in the name of Jesus Christ is, that we should be careful to continue in this faith. For this end it is necessary that we learn to distinguish between truth and error in doctrine; that we may be established in the former, and that we may give no sort of countenance to the latter; for the Holy Spirit saith, “Cease from the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge.” And again, “Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.” To abide in the faith, is to abide in the truth which faith receives, and on which it relies. We are also to struggle against the remaining unbelief of the heart, which is always working to make us give up our confidence in the promise; sometimes representing other seeming supports, such as, worldly riches, wisdom, strength, or self-righteousness, as better than it; sometimes taking occasion, from a distressing sense of the guilt and power of sin, or from the discouraging aspect of providence, to suggest that the promise does not belong to us, and that we shall never see it verified. In this case, we are called to hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end. Our Lord is saying to us, as he said to Jairus, Fear not, only believe. The more that Satan, the world, and unbelief, vilify this way of making the Lord’s promise in Christ the single and sufficient ground of our confidence, we should study to commend and magnify it the more; and to be the more resolute in saying with the Church, He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and he will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” Such is the conflict by which faith is tried and proved to be genuine.
6. Another thing included in our obedience to this commandment is, that we should study to grow in faith. True believers are far from resting in what faith they have already attained; but are still pressing towards a greater measure of it; they are keeping up the cry of the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith.” They see that they cannot have more stedfastness in the way of duty, more success in work or warfare, more spiritual strength or comfort, but in the way of their having more faith.

7. The diligent use of means is also included in the duty of believing in the name of Jesus Christ. They that hear the voice of wisdom, or believe the word of Christ, are “watching daily at his gates, waiting at the posts of his doors.” The commandment of God to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, bindeth us to acquaint ourselves with those things contained in the Scriptures; because they were written for this very end, “that we may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, believing, we may have life through his name.”

The Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is both what we are to believe, and the mean of bringing us to believe; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Let them, therefore, that would have saving faith, be diligently engaged in reading and hearing the word of faith, in laying it up in their memories, and in meditating upon it. Let them never suffer it to depart from their minds, but let them have it dwelling in them in all wisdom. Another mean, the use of which is especially required by this commandment, is prayer. ‘Natural men are utterly averse from, and incapacitated for, prayer, as it is a real offering up of their desires to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ. They have no desire of what is truly and spiritually good; no faith by which to make use of Christ’s name. Yet, while they have been attempting this duty, from no better principle than self-love, the Lord, who will countenance and honour his own ordinance, has given them faith, and enabled them to pray in deed and in truth. In this case, that word is verified, “Before they call, I will answer.” While they remained in unbelief, whatever name themselves or others might give to their exercise, there was no calling, not a syllable of prayer, in God’s account; yet, in a way of sovereignty, he gives them faith. Thus, he
answers the cry of their need; he answers the design of his own ordinance; he answers the petition, which, upon obtaining the grace of faith, they immediately offer up; for faith, as soon as it is bestowed, discovers itself, by an ardent and unextinguishable desire of faith. In prayer, we are to make much use of such promises as this, “In his name shall the Gentiles trust,” saying, “Do as thou hast said.” We should think highly of the season of our attendance on Gospel ordinances, as a blessed opportunity of hearing Christ’s voice; as the day of his power, wherein he “makes his people willingnesses,” or free will offerings; as the happy “hour which cometh and now is, in which the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” Thus, we are diligently to use the word, sacraments, and prayer, as means of our establishment and growth in faith.

8. It is included in obedience to this commandment, that we should ascribe the work of faith, in the beginning, the continuance, the increase, and the finishing of it, to the almighty agency of the Holy Spirit. Faith is not of ourselves; nay, we are naturally full of aversion to it. What Christ said to the Jews, he says to all men in their natural state: “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” The habit or disposition to believe is created in us by the power of the Holy Spirit enlightening us to discern spiritually what God is giving us in the Gospel, and determining us to make application thereof to ourselves. With respect to Christ and his salvation, brought nigh to us in the Word, we are naturally in the same case that Hagar was in with respect to the well of water: she could not see it, till the Lord opened her eyes. Whatever believing views we get, or desire to get, of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation, or of the great and precious promises in him, they are wholly to be ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Hence he is called “The Spirit of faith.” It is no less necessary to regard the Holy Spirit as the worker of faith in us, than it is to regard Christ as the purchaser of it for us. Hence the promise of the Holy Spirit should be unspeakably precious to us,—his indwelling, and all his saving and effectual operations, should be unspeakably precious. We should be habitually longing and looking for more and more experience of these operations, saying, with the spouse,—“Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the
spices thereof may flow out."

Here, however, it is necessary to remember, that our experience of the work of the Holy Spirit is in no respect, in no degree, the rule of duty, or our warrant for setting about the performance of it. The whole saving work of the Holy Spirit lies in conforming us to the Word,—in making us know what is revealed in the Word,—in making us yield a ready compliance with the calls and commands of the Word. The perfection of the Holy Spirit's work within us lies in its exact correspondence with the absolutely perfect plan of it in his own Word without us. The Gospel that came to the Thessalonians in the Holy Ghost, was no other than that which came to them in the Word. The wonders which the Psalmist desired to see by the Lord's opening his eyes, were no other than what are declared in his Law. The conduct of the Spirit which the Psalmist desired, was the ordering of his steps in his Word. Thus we say, the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the only rule of duty, and our only warrant for setting about the performance of it. Hence, while we depend wholly upon the Holy Spirit for his enabling us to believe in Christ, we are to look to his Word alone, and not at all to our own experience of the Spirit's work, as our warrant to believe: we are now to essay the exercise of faith, because the Word is now calling us to it. Surely it is one of the vilest suggestions of the corrupt heart, to allege the want of experience of the Spirit's work as an excuse for refusing the present call which he himself is giving us in his Word.

We shall only add, that the great aim of our obedience to this commandment is, to give God the praise of the glory of his grace. The mouth of faith is filled with the praises of grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life: faith ascribes the whole of our salvation to free and sovereign grace. That which ascribes any part, be it ever so small, of our salvation to the free will, sufficiency, or exertions of the creature, is not the faith in Jesus Christ of which we speak, but is directly contrary to it.

We now proceed to the consideration of the other point which is here to be considered, namely, that this commandment, that we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ, is the commandment of
God, by way of eminence,—it is his great commandment.

1. It is so, because our obedience to this commandment lays the foundation of our obedience to all the other commandments. Believing in Jesus Christ the Son of God is the first and immediate duty of every Gospel hearer. In believing, the person puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so is furnished and prepared unto every good word and work. By faith we abide in Christ. “But,” saith Christ, “he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for, without me, that is, while you are not abiding in me, ye can do nothing.” In a word, faith in Christ is the first instance of genuine obedience to God’s commandments that is ever found in any of fallen mankind; and the diligent study of acceptable obedience to all his commandments necessarily follows, as the effect follow’s its cause.

2. It is so, because our obedience to it in so peculiar and signal a manner gives glory to God. The glory that faith gives to God, is that of the highest manifestation of his name and perfections that was ever made to his creatures, namely, the manifestation thereof in the obedience and death of his eternal Son. Saving faith is the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God,” not in the works of the old creation, but “in the face of Jesus Christ.” Again, faith in a peculiar manner gives glory to God, by its stedfast adherence to his revealed truths, that are foolishness to natural men; and by its firm persuasion and hearty embracing of those promises which, to the eye of sense, appear most unlikely, or even impossible, to be fulfilled. “Abraham, not considering his body now dead, nor yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb, staggered not at the promise, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Faith is remarkable, as it is, of all the graces of the Spirit, the most self-emptying; its constant and invariable language is, that it has nothing in itself, or in the creature; but all in Him whom it looks to and apprehends. Some would have it to be a term or condition, giving us a claim or title to Christ and his salvation. But faith itself abhors the arrogant pretension. Like the natural eye, it regards not itself,—it regards nothing but its glorious object. “Talk they,” says Faith, “of the performance of terms or conditions? God forbid that I should glory, save in the fulfilment of the condition of the covenant of grace by Him who said, when he was dying on the
cross, ‘It is finished.’ This is that finished work by which God was so eminently glorified on earth, and from which I alone expect pardon and peace with God, grace and glory, and every good thing.” Thus faith falls in with the great design of the Gospel, which is, “that the loftiness of men may be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men made low; and that the Lord alone may be exalted.”

We may now add some short improvement of the subject:—

1. From what has been said, we may learn how precious and necessary faith is, as it is our obedience to God’s great commandment. By it we are made partakers of precious Christ, and of the precious promises. Hence the apostle calls it “precious faith.” “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained” (or, to them who receive by inheritance) “like precious faith, through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—2 Pet. i. 1. You need not wonder, then, that the ministers of the Gospel insist so much upon the duty of believing on the Son of God,—upon the absolute necessity of it,—upon the nature, the grounds, and warrants of it. We only desire you to judge by the following text in what degree this subject ought to engage your attention: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”—John iii. 36.

2. Hence we see what is our great business under a Gospel dispensation,—it is, to believe on the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God,—it is, to accept of the free grant of eternal life in him. You are this moment either believing, or despising and rejecting it. If you now believe, you will be studious of those things which we have considered as included in the duty of believing. Ye will be endeavouring to know what is taught in the Word concerning Christ and his salvation; to have your hearts subjected to the authority of God speaking in his Word; to make a believing application of Christ to yourselves in particular; to make a profession of your faith to God, to your own souls, and before the world; to have your faith established and increased; to be diligent in the use of means; and yet to ascribe the beginning, the continuance, and the increase, of your faith,
entirely to the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit,—acknowledging
that the praise of all belongs to rich, free, and sovereign grace. To you
that believe Christ is precious: ye are like the merchant “seeking
goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went
and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Ye are counting all things but
“loss and dung, that ye may win Christ, and be found in him, not
having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is
through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by
faith.” But we have too much cause to apprehend that, to the bulk of
persons under the outward dispensation of the Word, Christ is “a
stone of stumbling and rock of offence.” This has been the case in
former ages; and surely we have reason to fear that it is very much so
at present, when there is such a manifest declension from the Word
of Christ, both in profession and practice. Wherefore there is too
much ground to address ourselves to unbelievers, as being the greater
part of our hearers. Well, Sirs, since you persist in despising and
rejecting the Son of God, we must deal faithfully and plainly with you,
—we must tell you that we have heavy tidings to you: you are
“condemned already; the wrath of God abideth on you.” Because ye
“set at nought all his counsel, and will have none of his reproof,” he
is threatening that he will “laugh at your calamity, and mock when
your fear cometh.” But you will say, “Wherein have we despised
Christ?” Some of you are not ashamed to proclaim that you do so, by
your open profanity, by your horrid oaths, your Sabbath-breaking,
drunkenness, and the like. “But,” say you, “we have none of these
things to reproach ourselves with,—we are sober, honest people.” But
if ye can habitually behold such transgressors, without feeling either
compassion for their souls or concern for the flagrant dishonour they
do to God, alas! what are ye better than they? Are not many of you in
your hearts mere worldlings, who, provided you can get such worldly
things as your hearts are set upon, care nothing for the Word and
ordinances of Christ? You are called honest; but you are not truly so,
unless you are studying to give God his due as well as your neighbour.
“If I be a Father,” says God, “where is mine honour? and if I be
Master, where is my fear?” Do not many of you neglect secret prayer;
that is, retiring to a secret place, and employing some time in prayer
every evening and every morning? Do not many of you, who are heads of families, neglect family worship? But, say you, “We perform these duties, and are regular Church members. Outward Church membership is no certain evidence of true faith; and many go the round of duties outwardly, whose hearts are otherwise engaged. “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.”—Isa. xxix. 13. But say you, “We have had great convictions and concern about our guilt and danger.” So had Cain, Judas, and many others who are now in hell. But you add, that your heart is wonderfully changed. You may get another heart, like Saul, and yet never get the new heart. The stony-ground hearers, no doubt, thought they had undergone a wonderful change, when they received the Word with joy, and endured for a while; but they were strangers to a saving change. But you insist, that you cannot help thinking, that since you have so many good things about you, it is hard that you should not be allowed to be true believers. Take heed lest what you call your good things be not, like the young man’s great possessions, the fatal occasion of an eternal parting between Christ and you. You have been brought not only to civility and sobriety, but to the practice of religious duties, to conviction, and to some delight in hearing the Word. All this is well in itself; yet you lack one thing,—you have not been brought to quit and forsake all, in point of trust or dependence, and to come away stript of all your duties, convictions, frames, and good qualifications, as poor sinners, to take up your rest in the name of Christ, as the Lord your Righteousness. You allow that you ought to renounce the sins you are conscious of; but you cannot think of renouncing your own righteousness as “filthy rags.” You have been troubled about several sins, but not about unbelief, or your not believing the record of God concerning his Son, whereby ye have made God a liar.\textsuperscript{34} You are

\textsuperscript{34} “Unbelief refuseth the only remedy, and therefore must needs cause destruction. ‘He that hath not the Son, hath not life.’—1 John v. 12. Besides, unbelief is a sin against the moral law,—not believing the veracity nor trusting in the promise of God. He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. It is contrary to love and thankfulness, despising the riches of the grace of God. It is contrary to repentance; nay, implieth the greatest love of, and obstinacy in, sin. It carrieth the greatest contempt of God, his Son, and spiritual things; and sheweth that men choose their lusts and creatures rather than God, though with the loss of their souls. It therefore greatly aggravates man’s other sins, and hastens his condemnation: so that
entertaining a conceit of your own abilities to believe at any time; and hence you delay the work of believing from day to day; yet, after all your obstinacy in rebellion, the voice of the Son of God is to you,—the Gospel grant of himself and his whole salvation is to you,—“to you is the word of this salvation sent.” Christ is saying to you, “My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven, that each of you may eat thereof, and not die. Hearken to me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; I bring near my righteousness, and my salvation shall not tarry. Behold me as the propitiation for your sins,—behold me as the lord your righteousness. I am stretching forth my hand all the day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people: I am still saying to you, Behold me! Behold me! I would gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. Come, then, to trust under my wings. Whether you have been more gross sinners, such as those Corinthians had been, mentioned in 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, or more specious, as Paul had been before his conversion,—whatever you are or have been, being sinners of Adam’s family, that now hear this call, you are welcome to me. Believe that I will not cast you out. Believe that I am and will be that to you which I am declared to be in the word of the Gospel: that I am and will be to you a Priest, to bear all your iniquity, that you may never have to bear it,—that in me ye may have peace: that I am and will be to you a Prophet, to make you wise unto salvation: that I am and will be to you a King, to slay the enmity of your hearts,—to make you my willing people, to make you free indeed. Unless ye believe that I am and will be to you what I am declared to be in the Word, ye shall die in your sins, ye shall perish eternally. Hear, and your souls shall live.”

Thus you see Christ is very hearty in making a free offer and grant of himself and all salvation to you, as sinners: and it is the great commandment of his Father, which was proclaimed by a voice from the excellent glory, that ye should hear him. A voice out of the cloud, on the Mount of Transfiguration, said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.” “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus

unbelief doth not condemn as being disobedience to a new command, but as it is a breach of the moral law, as it binds on all other sins, and as it refuseth pardon.”—See Lutherus Redivivus, p. 125.
Christ.” The Holy Spirit also sayeth, “Today, if ye will hear his voice.” “And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” It is true, a day of supernatural, almighty power, is necessary to believe in a saving manner. But we are to distinguish between the real putting forth of that power in our case, and the distinct or comfortable sense or feeling of it. O sinner! if thou art at length verily persuaded, that God, in this word of faith which we preach, which is in thy mouth and in thy heart, is at this moment giving thee his well-beloved Son and all his salvation; and if thou art now taking up thy eternal rest upon this blessed gift and grant; know assuredly, that there is a real putting forth of that supernatural power towards thee; there is a cord cast forth from the heart of everlasting love for drawing thee to itself, whether it be sensibly felt or not. But hold on in essaying the exercise of this faith, looking up to Him who alone is the strength of thy life; and by the fruits thou shalt know, that it is the true grace of God wherein thou standest.
DISCOURSE VI.

“This is his commandment. That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”—1 John iii. 23.

The doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus, has often been objected to as relaxing our obligation to good works. Some have thought the most proper way of obviating this objection was, to represent faith itself as being, in its formal nature, a cordial subjection to the laws and government of Christ, and as a compound of holy tempers and qualifications. But this is only pretending to obviate an objection by a gross misrepresentation. For, if the Holy Spirit had meant such a subjection, or such a compound, he would have used some other word or phrase, such as, love, repentance, the fear of the Lord, any of which are much better adapted to such a meaning than the word faith, or believing; and then, according to such a representation, faith could never be opposed, as it is, to all our works of obedience. “By grace are ye saved, through faith,—not of works.” The Scripture takes a quite different way of answering the objection under consideration; which is, not by representing faith as, in its formal nature, a subjection or obedience to the laws of Christ, but by showing that faith, while it is itself one instance of obedience, is sufficient, by virtue of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which it apprehends, to bring us to every other instance of obedience; and that the several branches of holiness are fruits of faith,—fruits which, in their place, are no less necessary to our seeing the Lord than faith itself. The Apostle James, in the second chapter of his Epistle, teacheth us the necessity of good works, not by representing them as constituting faith, or included in it, but by showing that they are inseparable fruits and evidences of it. “I will,” says he, “show thee my faith by my works.” It is not more necessary that faith should be at all, than that it should be productive of the fruits of new obedience. You may as well suppose that, according to the established course of nature, the sun may rise upon our hemisphere without diffusing light, as suppose that true faith can be in any soul without being accompanied with such fruits or effects as we are now going to
enumerate.

1. Wherever this faith is, it produceth peace, hope, and joy. There is no genuine or lasting peace to the soul of man, but what is attained by the faith of Christ. Persons may seem for a time to have peace of mind, arising from some conceit, or vain opinion of their own righteousness; but since this pretended righteousness of theirs is, in reality, no righteousness, but a want of conformity to the law, particularly in the principle from which it proceeds, and in the end to which it is directed; since their supposed peace is grounded on a false notion that God will account that righteousness which his law does not account such, and that he will adjudge them to life whom his holy and righteous law adjudges to death; since they think that God is altogether such a one as themselves; they will find in a little, when conscience shall be awakened, and they will no longer be able to shut out the truth concerning the holiness and inflexible justice of God from their minds, that what they called their peace was but a delusive and fatal security, under which they flattered themselves in their iniquity, and “treasured up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” But the righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, affords true and everlasting peace with God, and peace of conscience; for well may that give us peace of conscience which gives full satisfaction to the demands of law and justice, which removes all the grounds of difference between God and us, and with which God has, by the most glorious demonstrations, declared himself well pleased. The righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, affords also the hope of “eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began.” Faith says concerning Christ, “He is our peace,—our hope.” While faith sees the promise, and is persuaded of it, and embraces it; hope waits and looks for its accomplishment. While faith regards eternal life as already ours in the promise; hope regards it as what will be ours in the accomplishment of the promise. Faith and hope, according to their measure, cause joy to spring up in the heart. “Now, the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing.”—Rom. xv. 13. “In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—1 Pet. i. 8. There is a joy
resulting immediately from faith’s views of eternal life as ours in the promise, as well as from the sensible experience of the begun accomplishment of the promise. Faith, appropriating faith, being ever productive of peace and joy, is opposed to all trouble and perturbation of mind. Hence the disciples, under perplexity, are directed to this faith: “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.”—John xiv. 1. By this faith the Psalmist struggled against all his disquieting thoughts: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him: he is the health of my countenance, and my God”—Psal. xlii. 11.

2. Wherever this faith is, it produceth true holiness in heart and life: we are “sanctified by the faith that is in Christ.” Faith in the blood of Christ, by purging the conscience from dead works, and making it good, purifies the heart unto the unfeigned love of God and man. “Now, the end of the commandment is charity” (or love), “out of a pure heart; and of a good conscience; and of faith unfeigned.”—1 Tim. i. 5. Faith, by the view that it gives us of the Law as in Christ reconciled to us, reconciles us to the Law, and makes us take it for our companion, our guide, and our familiar friend. Again, faith unites us to Christ, and opens a communication between the inexhaustible fulness of grace in him and our emptiness, which is to be continued till our souls be entirely conformed to the image of Christ. Faith is the mean of continuing as well as of beginning this communication; for Christ dwells in the hearts of his people by faith; and by the exercise of faith they attain more and more experience of this supernatural and heavenly communication, enabling them to say, according to their various measures, “Out of His fulness have all we received, even grace for grace;” that is, grace in us answerable in nature or kind to that grace of which there is an unmeasurable fulness in Him; as we have by nature corruptions in us answerable to all that corruption which appeared in the first Adam’s breach of the covenant of works.

But, to be more explicit, we may take a view of some parts of that disposition and practice which necessarily belong to true holiness, and which never can be attained but by faith on the Son of God.
1. Love to Christ is the immediate effect of this faith; because faith is such an apprehension of the love of Christ to us poor sinners as cannot fail, according to the measure of it, to make us love him who first loved us,—so the poor woman's believing apprehension of much being forgiven her, caused her to love much; and because the believer sees him in his beauty and loveliness, and has also got a new capacity, a new heart to relish that loveliness and beauty: "Whom having not seen," otherwise than by faith, "ye love."—1 Pet. i. 8. This love is exercised in a superlative esteem of him: "To you who believe he is precious,"—1 Pet. ii. 7; and in our desire being towards him, towards more and more acquaintance with him, towards more and more manifestations of his love, towards more and more conformity to his image: "The desire of our souls is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."—Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. This love is exercised in spiritual-mindedness. Love to Christ, as an object apprehended by faith only, is quite a different thing from that love which persons may pretend to have for him, resulting from imaginary ideas or representations in the mind of his human nature, whether in a state of suffering or of exaltation; resulting from the agreeable sensations that are excited by music or pictures, any way employed in devotional exercises; or resulting from the presumptuous and blasphemous notion, that through Christ it is become safe or without danger to continue in any sin; or resulting from a carnal prospect of worldly profit, ease, pleasure, or preferment, under the profession of his name. Pretended love to Christ under any of these notions is, in reality, nothing but the carnal mind’s attachment to its own idol. But they that truly love Christ are spiritually minded. They love Christ according to the whole of his blessed name,—according to the whole representation that he gives of himself in his own Word; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened by his Spirit, to apprehend that representation in a spiritual manner. They love him as Immanuel,—God in their nature; they love him as made of God to them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. The soul that loves him is seeking his face; no worldly enjoyments, no duties, means, or
outward privileges, will content that soul,—nothing but Christ himself.

2. Another inseparable attendant of true faith in Christ, is our love to one another. Hence they are joined together in the text: “This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” The person who has truly believed the truth of the Gospel, has got such a view of it, in its nature, beauty, and lustre, as has effectually captivated his heart; so that now he cleaves to the truth in love, and to the brethren “for the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in them.”—2 John 4. This love is exercised in delighting in any conformity to Christ that we observe in others, on the believing consideration of their relation to Christ; in taking delight to show them kindness on that account; and in our sympathy with them in their trials and temptations.

3. Another inseparable attendant of true faith is repentance, or the soul’s turning from sin unto God. Christ is set forth in the Gospel as a Saviour from sin as well as from wrath; and the promise, which is in him “Yea, and in him Amen,” is a promise of deliverance from sin; and therefore, by the appropriating faith of Christ as our Saviour, and of the promise in him, the soul truly departs from sin. Faith’s views of the reconciled face of God in Christ fill the soul with shame and self-abhorrence on account of sin: “That thou mayst remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God,”—Ezek. xvi. 63; and xxxvi. 31: “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations;”—and also with godly sorrow for sin: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for a firstborn”—Zech. xii. 10. According to our faith in the death of Christ for us, as meritoriously and virtually the crucifixion of our old man, and the death of sin in us, so will we be diligent and successful in the exercise of mortifying sin. The fight of the Lords people against sin is “the good fight of
faith;” their enemies are lusts that “war against the soul,” aided and stirred up by Satan and the world. Believers are in themselves without strength, and an easy prey to the least of these enemies; but, by faith in Him who is the Captain of their salvation, they are made strong out of weakness, wax valiant in the fight, and turn to flight the armies of their spiritual enemies. Thus faith makes the soul turn from sin, treat it as its worst enemy, and employ the grace and strength of Christ for putting it to death, or for its utter destruction.

4. Patience under the cross is also the fruit of this appropriating faith. By that faith which rests on the promise, and embraces the good things of it as the greatest realities; which makes distant things near, and future things present; the soul waits with composure and tranquillity under sensible discouragements and delays of the answer of prayer. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” Under affliction, it is by the faith of the promise in Christ that the Lord gives his people more and more of that patience wherein they possess their souls; with Moses, “they choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;” wherein they choose rather to be “of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud,”—rather to have their spirit brought down to their lot, than to have their lot brought up to their spirit. There is no true patience but what is the fruit of this appropriating faith; and we can have no more of the former than we have of the latter. Hence we find them frequently joined together: “Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,”—Heb. vi. 12; “Here is the patience and faith of the saints.”—Rev. xiii. 10.

5. Another fruit of true faith is a due esteem of the Word, as indeed the Word of God: “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”—Job xxiii. 12. The Word is more necessary to faith, than outward food is to the subsistence of our natural life or health. This esteem of it is evidenced by commending and magnifying the Word above all other things in the world, because there is more of God to be seen in the Word than in all other things,—by seeking to have ourselves and others brought to a willing subjection to its authority,—by desiring and endeavouring to attain more and more
knowledge of it, and conformity to it,—by our using it as the only rule to direct us how to glorify and enjoy God, as affording the only medicine for the healing of our souls, the only armour for our defence against our spiritual enemies, and the only effectual comfort in our affliction.

6. Another fruit of true faith is prayer. As soon as a person believes on the Son of God, it may be said of him, as it was said of Paul at his conversion, “Behold he prayeth.” Before he believed, his praying was but a lifeless form; but now he prays indeed,—he now comes to God as his Father in Christ. Faith’s view of the mercies of the new covenant, as suitable to his case, as sure, and as his own mercies in Christ, makes him continue to wrestle with God for the actual enjoyment of them. Faith kindles a desire that will never be satisfied with anything short of the King’s immediate presence.

7. Another fruit of true faith is a single regard to God’s declarative glory. While a man is an unbeliever, all he does proceeds from natural self, as its principle; and, as the stream cannot rise higher than the fountain, it returns to self, as its end. But, being united to Christ by faith, he begins to act from a supernatural principle, and to a supernatural end,—even to the glory of God. So far as he is a believer, he is delivered into the mould of the exhortation in 1 Cor. vi. 20: “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” They who live by Christ will live to him. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.”—2 Cor. v. 14. And here we may observe, that an honest desire and endeavour to glorify Christ, by a suitable confession of his name, of his truths and ordinances, especially of those that are peculiarly disregarded and trampled on by the generation among whom we live, are also the effect of this appropriating faith. As soon as a man believeth with the heart unto righteousness, he maketh confession with the mouth unto salvation. As soon as the thief on the cross became a believer, he became a confessor of Christ. David’s faith made him one too: “Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; my God, I will exalt thee.”—Psal.
cxviii. 28.

But who can recount the noble acts of this precious faith? We have an illustrious group of them in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which you may peruse in this view at your leisure. There never was, nor is, nor shall be, in any of the fallen posterity of Adam, in all their generations, the least spark of genuine love to God, or to man for his sake, or any saving grace, or act of new obedience, but what is to be regarded as proceeding from this heavenly and supernatural principle.

Here we may add a word in answer to the question, When does faith bring forth these fruits?

1. It begins to bring forth fruit as soon as it exists in the soul. It is ever attended with all the other graces of the Spirit, such as love, humility, the fear of the Lord, godly sorrow for sin, patience. Each of these is in the believing soul, if not in actual and sensible exercise, yet in the habit and disposition towards that exercise; and that habit or disposition, as soon as implanted, will (except perhaps in the case of infants) be carried forth into some acts, more or less. Hence the apostle says to the Colossians, “The gospel bringeth forth fruit in you from the day that ye heard, and knew the grace of God in truth.” When a person is brought to a real faith in Jesus Christ, he no longer delays repentance, and the study of close walking with God. He makes haste, and delays not to keep God’s commandments.

2. It perseveres in bearing these fruits unto the end. As the being of true faith, wherever it is, can never fail, by reason of our Lord’s preservation of it, and intercession for it, John vi. 40, Luke xxii. 31; so it shall never altogether cease to bear fruit. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”—Jer. xvii. 7, 8. It brings forth fruit in prosperity, as it did in Jehoshaphat, when his heart was lifted up in the righteous ways of the Lord; in adversity, Hab. iii. 17, 18; in desertion, Isa. viii. 17; under a sense of the power and prevalency of indwelling sin, Rom. vii.
23-25; under the assaults of Satan’s temptations, Ephes. vi. 16; under the enjoyment of public ordinances, Ezek. xx. 40; Heb. x. 25; under the want of them, Psal. lxxxiv. 1–3; in living, Gal. ii. 20; and in dying, Heb. xi. 13.

From what has been said, we may learn, that the only genuine faith is that which brings forth good fruit. O Christian! though you may not understand how to answer all the objections of an artful disputer of this world, yet you may certainly know that your faith is unfeigned, and of the right sort, if it be the case, that, according to the measure of your faith, you love Christ, and delight in his Word, and in his people for his sake; you are resolute in striving against sin, and patient under affliction; you are eyeing self less, and God’s declarative glory more. “He that abideth in me,” says Christ, “and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.”

We have also seen that true peace of conscience is attained by faith in the blood of Christ, and inseparably accompanied with the fruits of holiness. Let us remember that true peace of conscience is not attained by our duties, by resolutions, or endeavours to do better. This is only attempting to get the wound of our souls healed by the law. Whatever closing of the wound may seem to be attained in this way, we may be sure it will break out again in a more terrible and desperate manner than ever. All that is ever attained in this way, is but a healing of the wound slightly,—a saying Peace, peace, while there is no peace; nor can it be otherwise, since the pretended righteousness on which it is attempted to be built, is no righteousness. “Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law. Going about to establish our own righteousness” is justly to be accounted the most heinous of all provocations, as it is a saying, That Christ is dead in vain; God’s curse is upon all the peace, or rather presumptuous security, which men attain in this legal way. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. But we say, true peace of conscience is attained by faith in the blood of Christ, or by resting in this Gospel declaration, That Christ is our peace, who hath made peace by the blood of his cross. And this peace cannot take
effect on the conscience, without bringing us to the study of universal obedience to God’s commandments. For the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God, purgeth our conscience from dead works to serve the living God: from dead works, that is, from the charge which the law brings against us of works deserving eternal death. Nothing is to be accounted the purgation of the conscience by the blood of Christ alone, which does not lead to the diligent and delightful service of the living God. Let us be on our guard against a false peace; it is the ruin of multitudes in the visible Church; and never in any period of the Church was it a more epidemical plague than in our day. The high-minded carriage of professors, and their contempt of the means of reformation, proclaim this to be the case. Their obstinacy in backsliding courses declares that they hold fast deceit.

From what has been said we may learn, that we are to account that only to be true holiness which is a fruit of faith in Christ, and which is received by faith out of His fulness. A believer does not account himself to have already attained; he can see nothing in his attempts to perform duties, but deficiency and defilement; while legalists are ostentatiously displaying their seeming attainments,—their knowledge, their frames, their experiences, the rectitude of their conduct, and the benevolence of their hearts. When they hear a person bewailing the bitter experience he has of the deep-rooted and prevailing enmity against God and his ways that is still in his heart, they are ready to bless themselves, thinking that it is not so bad with them. But, believer, let not this tempt thee to return to them; that is, to go back to the law of works. So far as you are seeking holiness in the way of believing in Jesus Christ for it, or trusting that, he will give it to you freely for his name’s sake, you are in the only way in which God will ever bless any of the children of fallen Adam with true holiness. Stumble not at the proud boasting of legalists; for, when they talk of holiness, they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Thy groans on account of indwelling corruption, thy eager looks to the promise in Christ as all thy hope, thy feeblest (being honest) endeavours to strive against sin, and to adhere to all the truths and ways of God without exception, are assuredly accepted
in the Beloved, while the most splendid and celebrated virtues of the self-righteous are an abomination to the Lord.

From what has been said, we may learn the indispensable necessity of holiness, or good works, in Church-members. God is looking for holiness, or a regard to all his ordinances and commandments, as the fruit of all that he does for them, and works in them. Gospel hearers!—take heed lest he have nothing to say of you at last, but that, when he looked that you should have brought forth grapes, he found that you had brought forth wild grapes. Remember that the Husbandman is taking away such as, being in Christ by profession only, bear no fruit. Let the case of the barren branches, which are to be cast into the fire and burned, stir you up to seek union and fellowship with the Son of God, “that ye may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.”

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FINIS.
PRECIOUS TRUTH;

OR

SOME POINTS IN GOSPEL DOCTRINE,

VINDICATED
IN A SERIES OF LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO
CHRISTIANS OF EVERY DENOMINATION;

Shewing The Falsehood Of The Charges
Brought Against The Writings Of
Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey, And Others.
By Mr. Bellamy,
In His Dialogues And Letters.

By The Rev. JOHN ANDERSON,
MINISTER OF THE ASSOCIATE CONGREGATIONS OF
SERVICE AND KING’S CREEK.

Buy the truth and tell it not.—Prov. xxiii. 23.
Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints.—Jude

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TO WHICH IS ADDED,
THE STONE ROLLED AWAY,
A SERMON.

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1806.
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LETTER I.

On the opposition to the purity of Gospel-doctrine.

Christian Brethren,

There is hardly any revealed truth which has not been openly contradicted or secretly undermined by one or other of the numerous errors which have troubled the church of God. But of all the parts of our holy religion none has been opposed under more plausible pretences, or with more uniform and unabated malignity, than the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the law. This opposition was as early as the murderous envy of Cain. The apostle tells us, that by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Abel’s faith, no doubt, respected the promise which had been given to our first parents concerning salvation by the seed of the woman. Hence it appears that Cain, whose offering was rejected for his want of that faith, was an enemy to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. That the opinion of self-righteousness prevailed amongst the Israelites in the days of Moses, is evident from his caveat against it in the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy. Not for thy righteousness, says he to Israel, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess the land. A legal temper was the ruin of the Jews in the time of Christ and his apostles. Israel, who followed after righteousness, did not attain to the
law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith; but, as it were, by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling stone. They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. The New Testament church, as soon as it was erected, began to be troubled with legal doctrine. To set forth the danger of that leaven is the principal design of Paul's epistles to the Romans and Galatians. He shows, in these epistles, that the righteousness, for which alone we are justified, is not to be procured by our performance of any work or by our attainment of any good qualification as the condition of our interest in it; but to be received as the free gift of divine grace through faith. Hence it is called the righteousness which is of faith; and which God imputes to us without works.

After the times of the Apostles, the opposition to the doctrine of free grace continued and increased; but did not come to a remarkable height, till the beginning of the fifth century, when Pelagius rose. He openly denied the doctrine of the victorious work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling; with which doctrine that of justification by free grace through the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ is closely connected. Though his errors were well refuted, particularly by Augustine, and also condemned by several councils; yet they were never eradicated; but, in one form or another, were still maintained and propagated by many. When the Papal Antichrist attained his height, the doctrine of justification by man's works or inherent righteousness was the principal of his abominations: it was the head and heart of Popery. Still, however, even in the darkest periods, there were witnesses against this error: Some of them, such as Bernard and Anselm, in the communion of the church of Rome; and others, who departed from that most impure communion, such, as, the Waldenses, Wickliffe, Hus. But in

35 Deut ix. 5. Rom ix. 30, 31, 32. x. 3.
36 Rom. ix. 30. iv. 6.
the sixteenth century, the scripture-doctrine of justification through the righteousness of our Lord Jesus imputed to us and received by faith alone, began to shine forth with such a peculiar splendor, as had never been known before from the times of the Apostles. In the preface to the Syntagma Confessionum, or Collection of the Confessions of the Reformed churches, it is observed, that all these Confessions teach the same doctrine concerning the justification of a sinner before God; a doctrine, which is the very life and soul of the Christian religion; and which our first reformers, such as Luther, Calvin, Beza, delivered, just as they found it in the holy scriptures. It would have been happy for the Protestant churches, if their public teachers had satisfied themselves with that simplicity, and had not attempted in various ways to corrupt this article, in order to render it more palatable to a carnal, self-conceited generation of professors. There are, in general, three ways in which the doctrine of the reformation has been deserted. First, instead of teaching, with our old reformers, that the righteousness of Christ is our only justifying righteousness; some have taught, that God, for Christ’s sake, will accept our own sincere, though imperfect obedience, as our justifying righteousness. Secondly, there are some, who, though they allow the righteousness of Christ to be our justifying righteousness, yet maintain that our actual justification by it is not received by faith alone, but procured by our performance of the conditions of faith, repentance and sincere obedience. Thirdly, however much these legal preachers differ otherwise among themselves in their accounts of the manner in which we obtain justification before God, they all agree in disapproving the definition of saving faith delivered by our reformers, as a fiducial reliance on Christ crucified, or on the free promise of the gospel in him, for our own everlasting salvation, and in representing true faith as our willingness to comply with certain terms or conditions upon which, according to them, salvation is offered.
These pretended improvements, but real corruptions, of the doctrine of the reformation were zealously opposed by Messrs. Marshall, Boston, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, Hervey, Gelatly and others, who were convinced that the old Protestant doctrine concerning justification by faith alone, the free access of sinners to Christ, and the nature of saving faith, was the same which had been taught by the Prophets and Apostles. No human writings are absolutely faultless; but it may be safely asserted that there are few equally intitled, with the writings of the Divines now mentioned, to the commendation of having represented the doctrines of the Bible in their native simplicity, free from the mixture of preconceived opinions. Nor is the testimony, which these writings have obtained, of their spiritual savour and usefulness to the souls of the Lord’s people, to be overlooked. *My sheep, says Christ,* know my voice: a stranger will they not follow; but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.

Such are the writings attacked by Mr. Bellamy in his Dialogues and Letters. Considering how much his performance, reprinted of late, and highly recommended by many teachers in our Israel, tends to perplex and unsettle the minds of church-members with regard to several precious truths of the gospel, the writer of the following letters was led to believe, that an essay to illustrate these truths, and to vindicate them from the misrepresentations of Mr. Bellamy and others, would be seasonable, and, through the Divine blessing, useful.

In a Postscript to Mr. Bellamy’s Advertisement, we have the following words: “It will be an abuse upon the publisher of this piece to suppose it in his intention, to detract from the character of such worthy men as Mr. Hervey and Mr. Marshal, or to hinder the perusal of their writings.” One can hardly forbear remarking upon these words, that this pretended abuse seems unavoidable by a reader of Mr. Bellamy’s work. For the errors, with which he charges
Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, are not only some unguarded expressions or inadvertent mistakes; but a variety of doctrines, connected with one another, which manifestly run through their writings in general, and which it is the professed design of a great part of them to establish. Nor, according to Mr. Bellamy, are they trivial errors, but most pernicious. He represents the faith inculcated by these writers, as “the first-born of delusion;” a faith, which, “having no support from scripture, sense, or reason, is founded wholly in a heated imagination.” He tells us, that their doctrine teaches men to “hate the Divine law;” that it is “Antinomian delusion, leading to infidelity and atheism.”

If these charges be well founded, it must be a good work indeed to hinder the perusal of the writings of Messrs. Marshal and Hervey. On the other hand, if they be false, such horrid blasphemy ought to be rebuked; injured truth vindicated; and a just commendation given to those communications of the faithful servants of Jesus Christ which are good to the use of edifying, and which have often, through the Divine blessing, ministered grace to the readers and hearers.
LETTER II.

*On the appropriation which is in the nature of saving-faith.*

Christian Brethren,

Mr. Bellamy inveighs with great severity against Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey and others, for teaching, that the language of the direct act of faith is to this purpose, I believe, upon the footing of the gospel-promise, “that the Lord Christ is my saviour, and that I shall have life through his name: that the Lord is my God in Christ, my light and my salvation.” Persons, according to him, cannot use such expressions, without presumption, till they have found by self-examination the sincerity of their faith and repentance. Such, he allows, was the language of assurance commonly used by the saints recorded in scripture. But then, says he, “they had sufficient evidence of their good state by their sanctification. This was their evidence: they knew no other.”

Mr. Bellamy's opinion, then, on supposition that it is contradictory to that of Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, (and to say that it is not so, is to charge Mr. Bellamy with gross calumny) must be, that no person, without reflection on his good qualifications or inherent righteousness, can have any well grounded belief, that Jesus Christ is his own saviour.

In order to form a right judgment of this matter, we must attend carefully to the representation which the holy scripture gives of saving faith, as distinguished from the other graces of the spirit. In the first place, it may be observed, that the words by which *faith* is expressed in the languages, wherein the scripture was first written, are such as certainly imply *persuasion*. Mr. Bellamy ought to have taken notice of what is urged to this purpose by the authors whose doctrine he undertakes to confute. “This notion,” says one of these
authors, “of assurance or persuasion in faith is so agreeable to the nature of the thing called believing, and to the style of the holy scriptures, that sometimes when the original text reads faith or believing, we read in our translation assurance, according to the genuine sense of the original phrase; Acts xvii. 31. Whereof he hath given assurance to all men that he hath raised him from the dead; in the original faith, as is noted in the margin of our Bibles. Deut. xxviii. 66. Thou shall have none assurance of thy life; in the original, Thou shall not believe in thy life. This observation shows, that to believe, in the style of the holy scriptures, as well as in the common usage of mankind in all other matters, is to be assured or persuaded, namely, according to the measure of such believing.”

“Budaeus and Stephens,” says Mr. Hervey, “derive the Greek word rendered faith from another word in that language, which signifies, He is persuaded: and I think they do so very properly; for, whatever we believe, of that we have a real persuasion. The interpretation which Stephens, one of the most accurate critics in the Greek language, gives of the word in the New Testament, rendered faith, is, that it is a persuasion, which the holy spirit works in us, of salvation promised in Christ, which a person applies to himself in believing.”

George Pasor, in his Lexicon for the New Testament, observes, concerning the word rendered to believe, “That in profane authors, it is used for trusting, depending, placing confidence in a person or thing. He who believes in Jesus Christ, holds him not only to be the saviour of the elect, but his own saviour, placing all his hope and confidence in him. Whosoever does not adhere to Jesus Christ by faith and to God in him, remains in the kingdom of Satan, and is spiritually dead.”

In the second place, it may be observed, that a real persuasion of our warrant to rest on Jesus Christ as our own saviour, not only belongs to the nature of saving faith, but serves to distinguish it

37 Mr Boston’s notes on the Marrow of Modern Divinity, Chap. ii. Sect. 3.
from the other graces of the spirit. Mr. Bellamy himself allows, “that there is in saving faith an entire dependance for acceptance with God on the free grace of God through Jesus Christ, as exhibited in the written word.”\(^{38}\) It is true, he, at the same time, sets this dependance in opposition to the confidence which Mr. Marshal and others put in their definition of saving faith. But Mr. Bellamy had no warrant from the holy Scriptures to represent these expressions as opposite to one another. On the contrary, believing and trusting, faith and confidence, are used indifferently for one another. Thus, confiding or trusting, in Ps. ii. 12. is parallel to believing in Mark xvi. 16. What we are exhorted to in Prov. iii. 5. Confide or trust in the Lord with all thine heart; is parallel to that which is affirmed in Rom. x. 10. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. In Ps. lxxviii. 2. believing in God is explained by trusting in his salvation. Believing is expressed in other places by relying, staying, leaning on the Lord, 2 Chron. xiii. 18. and xvi. 7. Isai. i. 10. Song viii. 5. As fear and doubting are opposed to confidence, so they are to believing, Mark v. 36 Be not afraid, only believe.

\(38\) Dialogue. ii. page 80.

\(39\) The design of these letters is not to treat of everything supposed or implied in saving faith, but chiefly to explain and vindicate the truth on this head so far as appears necessary to obviate Mr. Bellamy’s objections. It may, however, be of use to observe, that, besides a deep and abiding conviction of our sinfulness, misery and inability to help ourselves, there is a spiritual illumination necessary to our believing in Christ, according to these remarkable words of the Lord Jesus, in John vi. 42. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life. The evidence, on which saving faith proceeds, is called our seeing the Son, because it is most certain and infallible. The knowledge of Christ, which is supposed and implied in saving faith, is not the knowledge of an uncertain report; but of the testimony of God, who cannot lie. Nor is it an imaginary idea of Christ as man. To regard such an idea as a representation of the object of our faith is to take up with an idol instead of the true Christ; and it is not the holy spirit of God, but Satan, that leads any to allow themselves or countenance others in such idolatry. A gross error in this respect is most judiciously confuted in a treatise on mental images, or faith no fancy, by Mr. Ralph Erskine. Nor is it a merely rational knowledge or conviction of Christ’s being the true Messiah founded on the historical evidence of the miraculous facts recorded in the New Testament; but a supernatural knowledge, which the Holy Spirit gives us by enlightening the eyes of our understanding to apprehend the authority and faithfulness of God, shining in the light of his own word, particularly in the testimony which he hath given concerning his Son Jesus Christ. He gives us an understanding to know him that is true; to know that he, whom we contemplate, is indeed the Christ,
requires, therefore, something else to constitute the faith of God’s elect. Some judicious divines have said, that a cordial approbation of God’s way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, to the praise of the glory of his grace, is the true spiritual notion of justifying faith. And it is certain, that such an approbation is always included in the exercise of saving faith: yet it may be questioned, whether our approbation of God’s way of saving sinners, exclusive of an application of his salvation to ourselves, will sufficiently characterize true faith or distinguish it from every other gracious or spiritual exercise; since it is obvious, that the notion of believing or trusting in a person or thing is different from that of approving that person or thing. Besides, it is evident, that any holy rational creature, such as an angel, must approve of God’s way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ; though his case neither requires nor admits the same faith or dependance on that salvation with the case of sinners. Nor is faith, formally considered, our turning from sin to God; which, under the name of repentance, is properly distinguished from faith, in our Shorter Catechism. The saving graces, which the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of true Christians, are inseparable; yet he teacheth us to distinguish them from one another. He teacheth us particularly to distinguish saving faith from all the other graces by the peculiar designations he gives it and by the peculiar office he assigns to it. He calls it our receiving

the Son of the living God. See this point well illustrated and established by Mr. Halliburton in his essay concerning the nature of faith; annexed to his Rational Inquiry into the principles of the Deists. The knowledge which believers have of Christ is certain; though it be, as yet, in a small measure. They see through a glass darkly; yet they know that the object seen is the Lord Christ and no other. Though the light of the sun, which is let in through the narrow window of a prison, be small; yet the discovery that it gives of objects is real, and no deception. So the view that believers obtain by spiritual illumination of the reconciled face of God in Christ is a just view; and none, that are favored with it, shall ever find themselves deceived. It is true, they often doubt, whether the view which they have of Christ, be of a spiritual and saving nature, and are sensible of nothing but darkness and inability to discern the object according to their desire. But their view of Christ is abiding; it becomes clearer by degrees; till it overcomes the remaining darkness. By this view, Christ is spiritually discerned in his glory and suitableness to their case; as their righteousness and salvation; as the glory of their strength; as the true bread which God the Father giveth them from heaven. We may farther observe, that although the seeing of the Son be, in the order of nature, before believing on him; yet the former cannot be separated from the latter. Nay, they are not to be considered as different acts; but as included in one and the same act of saving faith. Hence that act is expressed in some places of scripture by seeing or beholding Christ, or by looking to him. Heb, ii. 9. John i. 23. Isai. xlv. 22.
the testimony of God concerning his Son, our coming to Christ, our leaning on him. He assigns to faith, and not to love, repentance or any other grace, the office of receiving the righteousness of Christ for our justification. The simple account, which our old Reformers used to give, of the formal nature of saving faith, however much despised by their Popish adversaries or by degenerate Protestants, was scriptural, and served well to distinguish faith from every other gracious act or habit. The formal nature of saving faith, according to them, is a sure trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, or a fiducial dependance on him for all our salvation; a trust, that he is and will be our atoning and interceding high priest, our teaching prophet, our sin-subduing king. The Psalmist speaks the language of this faith, when he says, The Lord is my high tower and my deliverer, my shield, and he in whom I trust; that is, as Mr. Hervey justly observes, “Of this I am persuaded; and therefore I trust in him! or thus I believe, and, in so doing, I trust in him.”

Thus, when the writers, whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, spoke of our having a real persuasion “that Christ is ours,” they meant no more than a fiducial dependance on the Lord Jesus Christ for all our salvation. Indeed, such a persuasion cannot well be denied to be the native, import of this dependance. When we trust in a person, or depend on him for doing us a favour, we are persuaded that he will do it. Nor have we any more dependance on him, than we have of this persuasion.

Mr. Marshal proves, that by saving faith we appropriate Christ to ourselves as our own saviour for such reasons as the following.

First, an argument for this truth arises from the evils to which true faith is opposed; among which are staggering, Rom. iv. 20. wavering, Heb. x. 23. doubting, Matth. xiv. 31. fear, Mark v. 36. These contraries serve greatly to illustrate the nature of faith, and to show, that believing must have some confidence in it; otherwise it would have doubting and fear in its very nature. For what man,
that understandeth the preciousness of his immortal soul, and his
danger of losing it, can ever avoid fear, doubting and trouble of
heart by any believing, whereby he doth not at all assure himself of
salvation?

In the next place, the right manner of trusting and hoping in the
Lord, after the examples recorded in scripture, is by assuring
ourselves against all fears and doubtings, that the Lord is our God,
and that he is become our salvation, Psal. xxxi. 14. \textit{I trusted in thee,}
\textit{O Lord; I said, Thou art my God.} Psal. xviii. 2. \textit{The Lord is my rock
and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will
trust.} Isai. xii. 2. \textit{Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be
afraid.} Psal. lxii. 11. \textit{O my soul, hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise
him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.}

Farther, that the direct act of faith, by which we are justified and
saved, assures us of salvation, appears from the titles and
attributes given to it in scripture. It is the \textit{substance of things hoped
for, and the evidence of things not seen,} Heb. xi. 1. It sets the great
things of our salvation hoped for evidently before the eyes of our
mind, as if they were already present in their substance, though
not, as yet, visible to our bodily eyes. That faith, whereby we are
partakers of Christ and become his house, must be worthy to be
called confidence, and must be accompanied with the rejoicing of
hope, Heb. iii. 6, 14. In Heb. x. 22. we are exhorted to \textit{draw near to
God with a true heart in full assurance of faith.} Many apply this text to
that which they call the reflex act of faith; because they imagine,
that all assurance must needs be by reflection. But the words of the
text clearly teach us to understand it of that act of faith, whereby
we draw near to God, that is, the direct act; and it is that very faith
by which the just liveth. This assurance must be full in the true and
proper nature of it in opposition to mere doubtfulness; though we
are yet farther to labour for that which is full in the highest degree
of perfection. In James i. 6, 7, we are expressly required to ask good
things of God in faith nothing doubting; which manifestly includeth assurance; and he tells us plainly, that without it a man ought not to thinks that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. Therefore we may firmly conclude, that without it we shall not receive the salvation of Christ. And that which the apostle James requireth us not to doubt of, is the obtaining; of the things which we ask; as we may learn from an instruction to the same purpose given by Christ himself, Mark xi. 24. Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Again, if we be altogether in a state of suspense and doubting, whether God will be pleased to give Christ to us or not, it is evident, that our souls are quite loose from Christ, and have no holdfast or enjoyment of him as our only salvation and happiness. We do not, in that case, so much as pretend to any actual receiving or laying hold of him; but are rather still to seek whether we have any good ground or right to lay hold of him. Can a woman honestly receive any one as her husband, while she is not assured, that he is fully willing to be her husband?

The same thing may be said concerning the several parts of Christ’s salvation, which are to be received by faith. For example, we do not actually receive into our hearts our reconciliation with God and adoption of children, and the title to an everlasting inheritance, until we can assure ourselves, that God is graciously pleased to be our God and Father, and to take us to be his children and heirs. If we do not assuredly believe, that we are dead to sin and alive to God through Christ; that we are risen with Christ; that we are not under the law, but under grace; that we are members of Christ’s body, temples of the Holy Ghost, and the dear children of God; it would be hypocrisy to affect to serve God on account of such privileges, as if we reckoned ourselves partakers of them. And is it not a miserable, worthless kind of faith, which cannot fit a believer to practise in a gospel manner, upon the most pure and
powerful principles of grace, but rather leaves him to work upon legal principles; such as, the justice and wrath of God against sinners, and his mercy towards those who perform the condition of sincere obedience? A faith, we may add, which faileth in the very matter of some great duties which are of such a nature, that they include assurance of God’s love in the right performance of them; such as, the great duties of peace with God, rejoiceing in the Lord always, hope that maketh not ashamed; owning the Lord as our God and Saviour; praying to him as our Father in heaven; offering up body and soul as an acceptable sacrifice to him; casting all our cares of body and soul upon him; contentment and hearty thanksgiving in every condition; making our boast in the Lord; triumphing in his praise; rejoicing in tribulation; putting on Christ in our baptism; receiving Christ’s body as broken for us and his blood as shed for us in the Lord’s supper; committing our souls willingly to God as our Redeemer, when he shall be pleased to call for us; loving Christ’s second appearance and looking for it as that blessed hope.

A reader who expects to find these and other arguments offered by Mr. Marshal on this subject, fairly stated and answered in Mr. Bellamy’s work, will be utterly disappointed. He takes notice indeed of one or two of the texts from which Mr. Marshal reasons. On Heb xi. 1. he observes that, “If the word of God gives a sinner out of Christ no absolute unconditional right to the blessings of the gospel; faith cannot see what is not, nor believe without evidence.” Here he only denies Mr. Marshal’s doctrine about the freeness of a sinner’s right of access to Christ, (which doctrine we propose to consider afterwards;) but says nothing against Mr. Marshal’s remark, that the apostle’s expressions in this text, carry in them an appropriation of the good things not seen. It is plain that a person, who has the faith described in this text, views the things which that faith apprehends as things for which he hopes: and the certainty of his expectation of them is expressed by emphatical words,
substance or confidence, (as the same word is rendered in chap. iii. 6. of this book) and evidence which produces full conviction.

With regard to James i. 6. Mr. Bellamy says; “To ask in faith: In the faith of what? Of the truths revealed in the gospel concerning the way of access to God in the name of Christ as our great High Priest, and God’s readiness to hear and answer all requests agreeable to his will, put up to him in his name. These truths ought to be—these truths must be firmly believed.” But Mr. Bellamy could not deny, that when a person has the faith of these truths wrought in his heart by the Holy Spirit, and, in the exercise of, that faith, asks such things as God hath promised to give to poor sinners for Christ’s sake; such a person will believe, that he shall certainly receive these things of the Lord. This being the faith in which the apostle directs us to ask, it is plain, that the contrary doubting, against which he cautions us, must be, as Mr. Marshal observes, a doubting whether we shall obtain the things that we ask. This is all that Mr. Marshal’s argument requires; and there is nothing against it in Mr. Bellamy’s observation.

On Mark xi. 24. Mr. Bellamy puts the following gloss: “Whensoever the disciples of Christ were called to perform any miraculous works and were looking up to God to do them, they must firmly believe that he would do the thing.” This observation is nothing against, but rather serves to strengthen Mr. Marshal’s argument: for, though the faith of miracles differed from saving faith in respect of its aim or end; that of the one being the accomplishment of an external miraculous work, that of the other being the salvation of the soul; yet they agreed in two respects: for both proceeded upon a word of promise; and both were means of obtaining the thing promised. Hence, as Mr. Marshal justly observes, “the faith of miracles gives us some light as to the nature of saving faith. Christ assured them on whom they were wrought, and who had the commission for working them, that the miracles
should be wrought, if they believed without doubting of the event. There is a reason for this resemblance; because the end of working miracles was to confirm the doctrine of the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ’s name, as the scriptures clearly show: and indeed the salvation of a sinner is itself a very great miracle.” But the truth is, Mr. Bellamy had no sufficient reason to limit the faith spoken of in v. 24th to the faith of miracles. Our Lord, indeed, speaks of the faith of miracles in the foregoing verse: but in this verse he goes on to speak of that faith which is common to all his people. It is usual with our Lord to take occasion from things of a more peculiar nature to discourse of the common duty of Christians. Thus, for example, from the case of one doing a miracle in his name he takes occasion to speak of the ordinary duty of doing offices of kindness to Christians for his sake, Mark ix. 39, 40, 41. That, in this 24th verse, he speaks of that believing which is common to all true Christians, appears from the expression, when ye pray. Wherever praying is mentioned absolutely, as here, it is to be understood of the common duty of prayer. This is still more evident from the following verse, which shows that the prayer here meant, is that in which we are to exercise the duty of forgiving others their trespasses against us. Now, if the praying, in which this faith is exercised, be the common duty of Christians; then the faith itself is so, too. It is plainly the import of our Lord’s words, that the former ought never to be without the latter. This place of scripture, says Mr. Calvin, serves excellently to set “forth the nature and efficacy of faith, showing that it is an assured resting upon the goodness of God, which admits not of doubting. They only believe, in Christ’s account, who view God as propitious or reconciled to them; and who doubt not but that he will give them what they ask. Hence we see what a diabolical delusion or fascination the papists are under, who contend for a doubting faith and charge us with presumption, if we dare come into his presence, in the persuasion of his paternal favour towards us. Paul represents it as a principal benefit which
we have by Christ, that in him we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.”

Before we conclude this letter, it may be proper to take notice of Mr. Bellamy’s remarks on some passages of the XVI. Dialogue of Mr. Hervey’s Theron and Aspasio.

Mr. Hervey observes, that “this appropriating persuasion is comprehended in all the figurative descriptions of faith which occur in Holy Writ. Faith, is styled a looking unto Jesus. But if we do not look unto Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, what comfort or what benefit can we derive from the sight? When the Israelites looked unto the brazen serpent, they certainly regarded it as a remedy, each particular person for himself. Faith is styled a resting upon Christ, or a receiving of him. But when I rest upon an object, I use it as my support. When I receive a gift, I take it as my own property. Faith is a casting ourselves upon Christ. This may receive some elucidation from an incident recorded in the Acts. When those who sailed with Paul saw their vessel shattered; saw the waves prevailing; saw no hope of safety from continuing in the ship, they cast themselves upon the floating planks. They cast themselves upon the planks without any scruple; not questioning their right to make use of them; and they clave to these supporters with a cheerful confidence; not doubting but, according to the apostle’s promise, they should escape safe to land. So we are to cast ourselves upon the Lord Jesus Christ, without indulging a doubt concerning our right to make use of him, or the impossibility of his failing us. Faith is characterized by eating the bread of life. And can this be done without a personal application? Faith is expressed by putting on Christ as a commodious and beautiful garment. And can any idea or any expression more strongly denote an actual appropriation?”

The unprejudiced will allow these observations to be much to Mr. Hervey’s purpose; that is, they clearly prove that there is, in the
nature of saving faith an application of Christ to ourselves in particular.

And what does Mr. Bellamy reply? Why, says he, “Christ is to be acknowledged, received and honoured, according to his character, as the promised Messiah.—Is he compared to the brazen serpent? We are not to believe that we are healed; but to look to him for healing. Is he compared to a city of refuge? We are not to believe ourselves safe; but to fly to him for safety. Is he compared to bread and water? We are not to believe, that our hunger and thirst are assuaged; but to eat the living bread, and to drink the living water that they may be so.”

In this reply we observe, first, that Mr. Bellamy misrepresents the sentiments of his opponents. For they are so far from saying, that faith is a belief, that we are healed; or that we are already in a safe state, or that our hunger and thirst are assuaged; that they will not allow, that faith, properly speaking, believes any thing concerning the state we are already in, excepting that we are miserable sinners of Adam’s family to whom the gospel is preached. And while they tell sinners, that the gospel is directed to them, in such a manner as to warrant their immediate reception of Christ as therein exhibited; they at the same time, declare, that the gospel, without that reception of Christ, will be unprofitable to them. In the next place, it is to be observed, that, in Mr. Bellamy’s remark, there is no notice taken of Mr. Hervey’s argument; the force of which lies in two things. One is, that it is only true and saving faith which is meant by these metaphorical expressions. The other thing is, that each of them includes the notion of a person’s application of something to his own use or for the benefit of himself in particular. If these two things hold true, (and Mr. Bellamy says nothing against either of them,) it will necessarily follow, that there is such an application of Christ to ourselves in the nature of saving faith.
Another argument which Mr. Hervey offers in support of this doctrine, is, that our Saviour calls the act of Thomas which he expressed by saying, *My Lord and my God*, believing, John xx. 28, 29. To this Mr. Bellamy answers in the following words, “The thing, that Thomas was so faithless about, was not his particular interest in Christ; nor was this the thing he believed, that Christ died for him in particular. But the resurrection of Christ was the thing, the only thing in question with him. Overjoyed to see him, feel him, hear him, know him; in the language of fervent love, he cries out, *My Lord and my God*. Thus then stands the argument—because Thomas believed, that Christ was risen from the dead on the clearest evidence; therefore justifying faith consists in believing, that pardon is mine, grace is mine, Christ and all his spiritual blessings are mine without any evidence at all from scripture, sense or reason.”

Here it is necessary to observe, as before, that the force of Mr. Hervey’s argument lies in two things. The first is, that what Thomas expressed on this occasion was true and saving faith. That it was so, is evident from our Lord’s declaration of the blessedness of those who should, believe, as Thomas had done, without having the opportunity, which he had, of seeing Christ with the bodily eye. The other thing on which Mr. Hervey’s argument stands is, that what our Lord calls Thomas’s faith or believing included the appropriating persuasion, that Jesus Christ was his own Lord and God. This, indeed, Mr. Bellamy seems to deny, because, says he, the resurrection of Christ was the thing, the only thing in question with him; and therefore the only thing that our Lord represented Thomas as believing on this occasion. But when Mr. Bellamy supposes that Thomas might have doubted of Christ’s resurrection without doubting of his being his Lord and his God; he supposes a gross absurdity, namely, that Christ might have been Thomas’s Lord and God, though he had continued in the state of the dead. Surely, as the apostle declares, 1 Corinth, xv. 17, if Christ be not
raised, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins. Besides, the believing, which our Lord here ascribes to Thomas, cannot be limited to the historical fact, that Christ rose from the dead: because our Lord pronounces them all blessed who attain such believing. But they are not all blessed who believe that historical fact. For wicked men may believe it, and devils believe it, and tremble. After all, can anything be plainer, than this, that our Lord, when he says to Thomas, Thou hast believed, refers to the declaration which Thomas had made, immediately before of his faith in these words, My Lord and my God; or that the faith declared in these words is an appropriating faith?—We may add a judicious observation of Dr. Guise on this passage: “Though the seeing and the handling of the risen body of our Lord,” says that expositor, “were strong inducements or motives to this divine appropriating faith; yet it was the word of Christ set home upon his heart with power, which begat it in him; for it was immediately upon Christ’s saying, Be not faithless but believing, that he cried out, My Lord and my God.”

We conclude this letter with a caution, which may be of use to remove a common prejudice against our doctrine concerning the nature of saving faith. When we say, that a real persuasion, that Christ is mine, and that I shall have eternal salvation through his name, belongs to the essence of faith, it is not meant, that a person never acts faith, but when he is sensible of such a persuasion. There are various degrees of faith; and its language is sometimes more, sometimes less distinct and explicit. The confidence of faith is, in many, like a grain of mustard seed; or like a spark of heavenly fire amidst the troubled sea of all manner of corruptions and temptations; which, were not this faith secretly supported by the power of God according to his promise, would soon extinguish it. Hence this real persuasion may be rooted in many a heart; in which for a time it cannot be distinctly discerned; yet it in some measure discovers itself by secret wrestling against unbelief, slavish fear and
all other corruptions.
LETTER III.

Of the grounds of that appropriation which is in the nature of saving faith.

Christian Brethren,

Mr. Marshal and others, whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, teach, that the evil of unbelief does not lie merely in a person’s disbelief of such speculative propositions as these; That Christ is the son of God; that he died; rose again and ascended to heaven; or that every true believer shall be saved;—but rather in a person’s practical disbelief of this truth, that there is in the gospel-dispensation such a grant and promise of Christ, directed to sinners of mankind, as affords each of them, and particularly the person himself, a sufficient ground to rely on Christ, immediately upon hearing the gospel, for his own salvation. When we say, that soul-ruining unbelief lies in a practical disbelief of this truth, we mean, that it does not lie merely in the want of an assent to this doctrinal proposition (for some sort of assent to it may be given by such as continue under the dominion of sin)—but in the want of such a cordial reception of this truth, as carries in it the actual exercise of that fiducial reliance; by which the person takes Christ and eternal life in him to himself in particular. That every sinner of mankind; to whom the gospel of the grace of God is preached, has a sufficient ground for such an immediate reliance on Jesus Christ for his own salvation, is the doctrine of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents and of the Bible. To lay before you, Christian Brethren, the grounds of this appropriating faith, as we find them in the Bible, is the design of the present letter.

First, the promise of Christ and his salvation, directed to all the hearers of the word, is a sufficient ground for this appropriating faith. What was the first gospel heard by fallen man? It was a promise of Christ as the seed of the woman who was to bruise the
head of the serpent. How did Peter preach the gospel to his hearers? He said to them, *The promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off and to as many as the Lord our God shall call.*\(^{40}\) That is, as if he had said, “The promise is so directed to you and to your children, that each of you has a sufficient warrant for an immediate dependence upon it, as a promise to him in particular; and, on the profession of this faith, he and his children are entitled to baptism; just as when Abraham received the promise, he and his family were to be circumcised. Nor is the sense of your extreme guiltiness to hinder you from receiving the promise as directed to you; for this promise is no other than that gospel, which we, the apostles and succeeding ministers of Christ, are commissioned to preach to every creature, even to the profligate Gentiles; to as many as God is pleased to favour with the gospel-call.” The promise here meant was undoubtedly the promise of the remission of sins and of all other spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. The apostle exhorts his hearers to be *baptised for the remission of sins*; and he adds this reason, *For the promise is to you.* But this promise could not have been a good reason for their receiving baptism as signifying and sealing the remission of sins, unless it was a promise of that comprehensive blessing. Paul, in like manner, represents the gospel, which was preached to sinners both under the Old and New Testament as consisting in a free promise, Gal. iii. 8. *The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham.* And what was that gospel? It was just this promise; *In thee shall all the nations be blessed.* Heb. iv. 1, 2. *Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them.* Some understand the expression, a promise being left, as signifying the *promise being forsaken by us.* Even thus understood, the words

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\(^{40}\) Acts ii. 39.
imply that the promise is so addressed to us, that we are warranted to apprehend it; otherwise how could we be said to forsake it? But the sense in which the words are taken by our translators, seems preferable. The word *left* is used in this sense in 1 Pet. ii. 21. *Leaving us an example.* John xiv. 27. *Peace I leave with you.* And that it should be so taken here, is most agreeable to the connection; for the apostle had been showing in the latter part of the preceding chapter, that God had given the Israelites a promise of a temporal rest in the land of Canaan; but that they were excluded from it through unbelief. Well, adds the apostle, Let us fear, lest as our case is like theirs in having a promise left us; so it should also be like theirs in our coming short of it. Here it is plainly supposed, that the gospel preached to us is *a promise left us* to be believed or trusted in; as the promise of the land of Canaan was given to the Israelites for that purpose.

This promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ admits of two considerations. First, considered as it was made to Christ from eternity in the covenant of grace and to all the elect, as his spiritual seed in him, it is, in this view, no other than God’s unchangeable decree concerning their salvation. But, secondly, considered as it is proposed and directed to mankind sinners indefinitely in the gospel dispensation, it is the means which God is pleased to make use of for the execution of that unchangeable decree. In the former respect, the accomplishment of the promise to every one, to whom it was made, is infallibly sure: in the latter respect, the promise is proposed and directed to many, who shall in the event come short of it: because the accomplishment of it is not to be attained, but by means of true faith. They who have not faith, are not, as yet, in the actual possession of any other saving or spiritual blessing. This appears to be what some orthodox divines meant, when they called faith the condition of our interest in such blessings. This is all that the expression, “requiring faith as the condition to interest sinners in Christ,”—as it is used in our Larger Catechism, can mean;
consistently with the general tenor of the evangelical doctrine taught in that form of sound words, and particularly with what there taught concerning the covenant of grace being made with Christ as the second Adam representing all the elect as his seed. This, however, is not the proper meaning of the word condition, when we speak of the condition of a covenant or promise. For, as a judicious writer on moral philosophy observes, “Although the acceptance of a promise be necessary to render the obligation of a promise complete; yet it is not what usually comes under the name of a condition; for a condition is something in the promise itself upon which, even after the promise has been accepted, the performance of it is suspended. Hence it appears, that the same notion is not affixed to this word by civilians in treating of contracts and promises, as by metaphysical writers in speaking of what they call a conditio sine qua non, that is, something without which some other thing cannot take place.” Hence it appears, that when faith is said to be the condition of the covenant of grace, the assertion suggests the notion not of one of the promised blessings of that covenant, but rather of something which is the proper ground of our title or claim to these blessings; just as man’s perfect obedience was, according to the covenant of works, to have been the proper ground of his claim to eternal life. Arminians and Neonomians, by this use of the word condition, have subverted the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, though we allow, that we receive justification and other blessings promised in the gospel by means of faith, we maintain, that faith itself, considered as a work of the law, is excluded as well as all our other works, from being, in any proper sense, a federal cause or condition of the gospel-promise, Rom. iii. 20. iv. 4, 16. xi. 6. and we hold the gospel-

41 Vide Observations Gersch. Carmichael in opus Puffendorf de officio hominis et civis.
42 “Some worthy divines,” says Mr. Ralph Erskine, “make faith the condition of the covenant of grace; but their sound explication of what they mean shows, that they dare not make it the proper condition. If any that pretend to soundness do so, they but expose their darkness and discover their mistake concerning the covenant of grace, which is a free promise in Christ Jesus; wherein faith itself and all the blessings that attend it, are freely and absolutely promised. Indeed conditions on our part, properly so called, would destroy the nature of
promise, (which is a promise of faith as well as of pardon or any other blessing,) as that promise is exhibited to sinners in the word, to be free and unconditional. Nor is it less so, that sinners cannot be actual partakers of Christ and his benefits therein exhibited, unless it be received by faith; since the most free and unconditional gift cannot be possessed or enjoyed without being accepted. The freest gift or promise may be rejected. Many scripture-examples show, that faith may be necessary as the means of obtaining the benefit of an absolute promise. It cannot be shown, that Abraham would have obtained his Isaac, that Gideon would have saved Israel from the oppressions of the Midianites, or that David would have been raised to the throne of Israel, otherwise than by faith in the promise; and yet the promise made to each of these persons was free and unconditional. Since, then, the gospel-promise is so absolutely free, and since a person by the direct act of faith believes this promise as addressed to him, saying, God hath spoken and he will make it good, it follows, that there must be in that act a real trust in the word of God, implying an assurance

the gospel, and turn the free covenant of grace into a conditional covenant of works. It would destroy the peace of the poor humbled sinner, to think that there is such and such a condition to be fulfilled by him, before he meddle with the promise. Then he stands back, he dares not believe, because he supposes he wants this and that condition and qualification. This legal dream hardens his heart against the gospel, and fosters his unbelief to the dishonor of God and to his own ruin. But if he could see the promise free and absolute, and that there is no condition in this covenant but Christ’s obedience unto death, which is performed to God’s satisfaction; then a door is opened to him to plead for all upon this ground, saying, give me faith, repentance, all grace for Christ’s sake. If faith itself were a condition, the grand objection is Oh! but I cannot believe. Why, if faith were not absolutely promised, there would be no relief in that strait, the gospel could not be a joyful sound to sinners that are humbled to see their want of faith.—Though the use of means be required both of sinners and saints, and though we be under a command and obligation to faith, repentance, and all other duties and graces; yet the covenant of grace is a free absolute and unconditional promise. There is indeed a condition of order and connection between one promised blessing and another, they being like so many links of a chain. Hence in the dispensation of the gospel many promises are expressed in a conditional way. But there is not a conditional promise in the Bible, but what is reductively absolute.—The promise, in Malachi iv. 2. of the Sun of righteousness arising with healing under his wings, is said to be a conditional promise; as being to them that fear his name. But I will tell you, there is no conditional form put upon any promise in the Bible, to keep back a soul from applying and taking hold of that promise; but rather to draw it embrace the promise in the way of taking Christ for the condition, or running to an absolute promise, where that condition is promised. For instance, are you apprehensive, that you are destitute of that fear of God? Do not on that account stand back; but rather come forward to embrace the promise just now mentioned in the way of looking to another promise where the fear of the Lord is absolutely promised, Jerem. xxxii. 40. I will put my fear into your hearts, that you shall not depart from me. Thus you are to do with all the promise’s that seem to run in a conditional form. Run to the absolute promise, where the condition itself is promised: run to Christ himself in whom all fulness is, and in which all the promises are yea and amen: having him, you will have the condition of all the promises.” See some sermons; entitled, The Pregnant Promise.
of salvation, previous to the person’s reflexion upon his own exercise in believing. The Lord says, *I will remember thy sins no more, I will give thee a new heart*: Supposing that a person is brought to depend on these promises as directed to him through Christ, he must, in the very act of dependence and according to the measure of it, be persuaded that God will give him pardon and a new heart. It is therefore a dangerous error to assert, “That it is presumption for a person to be assured of his pardon, otherwise than as being conscious of his faith and sincerity.” Hereby we are forbidden to have any dependence on the gospel-promise, till we know that we have attained the conditions of it; and that promise is made as properly conditional as the promise of the covenant of works.

In the second place, the gospel is such a *free grant* of Jesus Christ to sinners of mankind, as makes it their immediate duty, upon the hearing of the word, to take him to themselves as their own Saviour, and to trust in him for their deliverance both from sin and wrath: We take this grant to be the import of the whole gospel, as it is preached to sinners. The following are some of the passages, in which that *grant* is formally expressed. The first we take notice of is in John vi. 32. where Christ, speaking to such as appear, from the 25, 41 and 42 verses, to have been unbelievers, and making a comparison between himself and the manna, which fell about the tents of Israel in the wilderness, says, *My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven*. As the simple raining of the manna about the camp of Israel is called a giving of it, in Verse 31, before it was tasted or fed upon; so “the very revelation or offer of Christ,” says the judicious Calvin upon this place, “is called a giving of him, before he be received and believed on.” Mr. Bellamy, in his remark upon this text, neither denies, that Christ is there speaking to people who were still persisting in their unbelief, nor that the faith, which is answerable to this blessed grant, must include appropriation. Thus he leaves the argument of his opponents from this passage untouched. He even expresses their doctrine, when he
declares, “that all mankind are as welcome to receive Christ, as the whole congregation were to take the manna and eat.” For surely the right which the Israelites had to the manna, was a right to take every one for himself, as soon as it was presented to his view; not looking for his warrant to intermeddle with it to something within himself, to his feelings or good dispositions, but only to the Divine grant and the present exhibition of the manna about his tent. Had Mr. Bellamy adhered to this way of thinking and speaking about the warrant of faith in the gospel-offer, he would never have employed his pen on this subject against Mr. Marshal or Mr. Hervey.

Another passage wherein this grant is plainly expressed is that which we have in 1 John v. 11. And this is the record or testimony, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. That they who are bound to believe this testimony of God concerning his Son, are not only such as know themselves to be true believers or among the elect; but all men to whom the word of the gospel comes, is evident from the preceding verse, which represents the great sin of unbelief, the damning sin of gospel-hearers, as lying in their not believing this testimony. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the testimony which God gave of his Son. And this is his testimony, that he hath given to us eternal life.

“True,” says Mr. Bellamy; “but this life is in his Son. Therefore, he that is united to Christ, hath eternal life: For he that hath the Son, hath life. But those who are out of Christ have no interest in him. For he that hath not the Son hath not life.”

Answer. All this is granted: but how does it affect the reasoning of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents? Does Mr. Bellamy mean to say, that God’s offer of eternal life is conditional; because, according to that offer, eternal life cannot be received and enjoyed without union to Christ? This would be as unreasonable, as it would be, for a poor woman, to whom some great and generous prince had offered
himself with a large inheritance, requiring nothing in order to her actual possession, but that she should immediately accept his offer, to complain that the offer of the inheritance was not free, but only conditional; because the prince had offered it to be received and enjoyed in the way of a marriage-union to himself. The grant that we speak of is a grant of Christ himself, John vi. 32. that is, of union and communion with him; and thus it is a grant of eternal life in him, according to the text now under consideration.

Another remarkable text to the same purpose is in John iii. 16. God so loved the worlds that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. While God passed over the fallen angels, he set his love upon a certain number of fallen men; whose recovery he purposed from all eternity to accomplish: The giving of his own Son was to be the foundation, not of this love-design itself, but of the execution of it. Accordingly, he not only delivered up his only begotten Son to the death as the surety and substitute of the chosen company; but, as the means of gathering to himself all that belong to that company, he made a public grant of him to sinners of mankind; warranting any one of them, upon the intimation of this grant, to trust in it as a grant made to him in particular, and as infallible security for his own salvation both from sin and wrath: and whosoever thus believeth, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. It is observable, that after the words, He gave his only begotten Son, there is an ellipsis,—the particular persons, to whom the Son is given, not being named. This may be considered as a blank to be filled with the names of individuals, as they come to believe in Christ: such persons being brought to say, To us, to us the Son is given. To me, says the poor sinner, whom the Holy Spirit brings to a single dependance on this Divine grant for his everlasting salvation.

Thus it appears, that the gospel is such a free grant of Christ Jesus to sinners of mankind, as warrants them, upon hearing it, to
claim and receive him as their own Saviour.

Mr. Bellamy attempts to ridicule this doctrine in the following words: “If this grant only makes a common interest mine; then I ought to believe a common interest only to be mine. If the grant makes a saving interest mine, then I ought to believe a saving interest mine. And what is mine by grant, if the grant be absolute, is mine before I believe it, and whether I believe it or not.”

Answer. Mr. Bellamy here proceeds upon the supposition, that his opponents make no distinction between the Divine grant in the gospel, and the declaration of what is, has been, or shall be matter of fact, as in history or prophecy. If God declares any thing to be ours in the last way, it is, no doubt, ours or will be ours according to his declaration, whether we believe, or not. But the grant in the gospel is of a different nature: for it is such a testimony of God concerning Christ and his salvation in the way of a free offer or promise, as cannot be believed without receiving, nor disbelieved, without rejecting, what is therein exhibited to us. And will any reasonable person say, that our interest in a thing presented to us, though in the most absolutely free promise, or under the notion of the freest gift, is the same, when the thing is utterly despised and rejected, as when it is cordially received and actually possessed by us? The gospel is the testimony of God exhibiting Christ as his free gift; a gift, which we are actually to receive by believing that testimony. Two things are, therefore, carefully to be attended to in this matter: One is, the nature of the testimony to be believed; it being a grant or promise of Christ and his salvation. The other thing is, the supernatural appointment of the unfeigned faith of that testimony to be the only mean of our coming to the possession of what is therein exhibited; that is, of Christ and of eternal life in him.43

43 “Question. If God hath given a promise to me, will it not be accomplished, whether I believe or not?”—“Answer. If he give you grace to believe, and so give you it in possession, then it infers an obligation on God to accomplish it to you; because, to the believer who receives the promise, it is given definitively and
The difference between the common interest of all the hearers of the word in the gospel-promise and the special interest of believers in it is a point which the writers, whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, have, in some measure, illustrated by similes taken from the transactions of common life. “The promise in the external dispensation of it,” says one of these evangelical divines, “is like a blank bond or an indefinite obligation to blank persons: sinners in general are named; no person’s name is peculiarly inserted therein. But if you by faith fill up your name, then the bond gives a right to you in particular: and that which was yours only generally before, becomes yours actually and particularly, upon your receiving it with particular application to yourself.” “A king’s promise of pardon,” says another of them, “directed to a company of rebels, cannot profit any of them but such as accept of it. A legacy, left by the last will of a wealthy friend to a certain family, without specifying one individual of the family, can only profit that person or those branches of the family, who claim a right to the legacy upon their friend’s testament; but to the rest it is unprofitable; because, through pride or ignorance or sloth, they forsake their own mercy. Suppose a letter should come directed to me containing a bank-note of 50, 100, or 1000 pounds sterling, or more, if you will. The direction of the letter to me gives me a right to carry the letter to the bank, and ask payment. But if, through pride and conceit that I am rich and increased with goods, I decline receiving the letter and asking payment of the sum; in that case, I come short of my own privilege, and it becomes unprofitable to me. Particularly. But when it is given only in the gospel offer and external dispensation, as it is to all the hearers of the gospel, this infers no obligation on God to make good the promise to every or any particular man:—If you offer a man your bond for a sum of money, and he reject it; then you are under no obligation by that bond to give him the contents of it. If he accept the bond, then you are thereby obliged; but if he reject, then you are free, and cannot be accused of unfaithfulness to your promise or bond. So here, if you truly and believingly take God at his word, then he is bound by his own promise to make out all; for then, believing, you have everlasting life. But if you will not take God’s bond, nor receive his record, but reject it by unbelief, saying, in effect, that it is not good enough security for your salvation; then you make him a liar, and his promise an untruth. If you live and die in this case, he is so far from being bound to give you the blessing contained in that charter, that he is bound on the contrary to execute his threatening upon you, He that believeth not, shall be damned.”—The Pregnant Promise.
I own,” adds the judicious writer, “that in every one of these similitudes there is a disparity. The only use I make of them is to show how near Christ and his salvation are brought to us in the word of promise, that we may be encouraged to draw near by the blood of Jesus, with full assurance of faith; since he is faithful, who hath promised.”

In the third place, the preaching of Christ to sinners is for this very end, that in him, as thus exhibited, they may have a sufficient ground to rest on for their own salvation. The scripture represents the preaching of Christ crucified as the preaching of the forgiveness of sins, Acts xiii. 36. Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that, through this man, is preached to you the forgiveness of sins: and as the preaching of peace, Ephes. ii. 17. Being come, he hath preached peace to you that were far off, and to them that were nigh. In Acts iii. 20. Peter gives a summary of that gospel which he and the other apostles preached, and which every hearer is bound to believe with application to himself in particular: God, says he, having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; according to the ancient promise made to Abraham, In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. The preaching of Christ’s resurrection is represented as the preaching of that sweet promise, I will give you the sure mercies of David, Acts xiii. 34. The truth is, the doctrine concerning the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, if it no way included or implied a promise of everlasting salvation directed to sinners of mankind, would be no more glad tidings to them, than to the fallen angels. But when persons hear Christ preached to them, as a Saviour, who came into the world, died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven for sinners of mankind, unjust, children of wrath, dead in sin: in a word, when they hear Christ preached as having done all these things for persons of

44 I Tim. i, 15. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Rom. v. 6, 8, 10.
Adam’s ruined family, bearing the same characters, which, they are conscious, belong to themselves; if the Holy Spirit, at the same time, open their understandings to apprehend the true import of what is preached to them; they cannot fail to discern therein a sure foundation to rest upon for their everlasting salvation: For, in that case, the hearers are brought to a spiritual apprehension of Christ in his person, as Immanuel, their kinsman Redeemer; and in his offices, as their enlightening Prophet, their atoning and interceding High Priest, and their sin-subduing King.\(^45\)

Suppose, that a man of known integrity has ordered his servants to set provisions before a number of people ready to perish with hunger; and that the provisions are accordingly presented to them with high commendations of their value and suitableness. Should one of the servants, at the same time, say to the starving company: “You have no right to take any of these provisions, or to use them for allaying your hunger, as if they were already your own:” would not every considerate person allow his remark to be absurd, as well as a cruel sporting with human misery. No better is the doctrine of one who pretends to preach the gospel of Christ to sinners; and yet denies, that they have any present or immediate warrant in that gospel to take him to themselves for their own Saviour.

It may be useful to observe here, that this common relation of the person and offices of Christ, of his death, resurrection, ascension and intercession, to sinners of mankind, as offered to them and suitable to their case, is carefully to be distinguished from the peculiar relation thereof to the elect whose redemption Christ undertook to accomplish in the council of peace from eternity. The former common relation is that, which faith proceeds upon, and not the latter. For no person can know that Christ undertook for him, or, in other words, that he is one of God’s elect, before he believe in Christ: And whilst any matter is unknown, it

\(^45\) Matth. i. 23. 1 Corinth, i. 30.
It has been asserted, that the immediate duty of the hearer of the gospel is to believe, in the first place, his personal election to eternal life. It is indeed a precious article of gospel-truth, that God, of his mere good pleasure, hath elected a certain number of mankind to everlasting life; and that none but those, who are thus chosen from eternity, become believers and saints in time, Ephes. i. 4, Acts xiii. 48. xv. 18.

As it is of his good pleasure, that he actually gives his saving grace to some and not to others, Matth. ix. 25, 26. So it is of the same good pleasure that he purposed to do so, Ephes. i. 5. This doctrine concerning God’s choosing of some of fallen mankind, not because they were foreseen to be better than others, but only because it pleased God to choose them, ought, no doubt, to be believed by every hearer of the gospel. Nor has the belief of it, in itself, any tendency to discourage persons from the diligent use of the means of their salvation, or from essaying to come to Christ. On the contrary, the sovereign grace of God, which this doctrine represents as pitching upon some of the chief of sinners, and the connection, which it establishes between the right use of the means of salvation and the attainment of salvation, should rather encourage the hope of that attainment by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; even in those who have the most distressing sense of guilt and depravity. But this belief of the doctrine of election is quite different from a person’s knowledge or belief, that he is himself one of the elect: just as it is one thing for a person to know, that government has made a draught of some men out of the regiment of militia to which he belongs, to go upon a certain expedition: and another thing for him to know, that he himself is one of that draught. The scripture teaches, that God hath chosen some particular persons to be believers in Christ; but by no means, that a hearer of the word may know himself to be one of these persons, otherwise than by his actual believing and the fruits of it. We are to know first our calling, and then our election. There are only two ways, by which a person can know what God hath decreed concerning his eternal state, or indeed concerning any other thing: namely, by his word and by his work. But in none of these ways can a person know, that he is one of the elect before his actual believing in Christ. It has been said, That our faith should begin, where God begins. But it is evident, that our faith must begin with the things that God hath revealed to us: for with secret things, or things not revealed, it has nothing to do. A person cannot begin to believe, that God hath elected him in particular to eternal life, till God reveal it to him. It has been said, that, in the appropriating faith of the gospel, a person believes his own election, as well as his salvation by Jesus Christ. But there is a manifest difference in various respects. 1. We have an offer or promise of salvation directed to all the hearers of the gospel. Acts ii. 39. xiii. 26. But there neither is, nor can be, in the nature of the thing, an offer or promise of election as such, because election, being an eternal immanent act of God, cannot be said, without the grossest absurdity to be either offered or received. 2. Salvation is justly considered as an end attainable by the use of appointed means. But nothing can be more absurd, than it would be to represent election, which is the original or first cause of our salvation, as something to be attained by the use of means. 3. The salvation, offered to sinners in the gospel, is apprehended by faith as a present salvation: whereas election is necessarily considered as something past, to which we are to look back. “Saving faith at first,” as some divines have justly observed, “has no back look to Divine purposes and intentions: it takes no consideration of what may have been formerly true about the person, in any counsels of the Father and the Son concerning him; it makes no enquiry, whether any particular eye was had to the person, in the former appointment and offering up of Christ’s sacrifice. But it looks straight out to Christ as revealed in the word, to his blood and righteousness as there set forth: and on the ground of the free exhibition, it applies all to the person’s self.” Display of the Secession Testimony, p. 176. 4. It may be farther observed, that saving faith, if it were, in the first instance, a person’s belief of his own election; would infer the present interest of the person in the salvation of Christ exhibited in the gospel from his eternal election. But the order in which faith proceeds is quite the reverse: it first apprehends the person’s interest in the salvation of Christ as presently exhibited in the gospel; and, from the person’s interest, thus apprehended, infers his eternal election. For, as the same divines have observed, “Jesus Christ is evidently set forth to sinners, before their eyes crucified among them. Gal. iii. 1. A present revelation and offer is made of him as crucified or dead,—for them to rest upon in the way of receiving him by faith: and faith receives him with appropriation,—saying, Christ is mine, his satisfaction and righteousness are mine,—Upon the ground of that present offer which faith accepts. And when it thus appropriates its object, it has a glorious privilege, under the Holy Spirit’s influence,—of going farther out upon its object in the word: so that it looks backward and forward through the wide, field of grace, in ascending the hill of God. It rises up to a view of election, in the Lord’s everlasting love; to a view of Christ’s amazing love, in laying down his life for the person; and to a view of the soul’s portion in the land afar off, which makes to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. But still it is a present interest in Christ by a present receiving of him, that sinners have immediately ado with. And as it is the duty of all who hear the gospel to take out or verify this saving interest to themselves,—by the appropriation of faith; so these other blessed interests (here spoken of) will always be found inseparably connected there with in the chain of free grace.” Ibid. p. 179, 180.
In the fourth place, there is a solid ground for the appropriation of saving faith in this declaration which God makes of his name to every member of the visible church, *I am the Lord thy God.* By this declaration in a multitude of places of scripture, and particularly in the preface to ten commandments, God lays all who read or hear his word under an obligation to know and acknowledge him as the Lord their God. Nay, the manifest connection of this declaration with each of the ten commandments shows, that none of them will be observed in an acceptable manner, without a spiritual, believing view of the Lord, as our God in Christ; Such, is the faith which the Lord promises to work in his people, Zechar. xiii. 9. *I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lard is my God.* Jerem. iii. 4, 22. *Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the Guide of my youth? Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God.* Hosea ii. 16. *And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi, that is, my Husband.* Jerem. xxiii. 6. *This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.*

“If these passages,” says Mr. Bellamy, “prove any thing to your purpose, they prove, that all the Christless sinners in Christendom, how wicked soever, if they be baptized are, all of them, married to Christ, children of God and heirs of heaven.”

But Mr. Bellamy’s consequence is justly denied. For though we maintain, that these and the like passages, rightly understood, afforded church-members, under the Old Testament dispensation, and still afford them, under the New, a sufficient warrant to trust in Christ Jesus as their only justifying righteousness, and in God as their God and Father in Christ; assuring them likewise, that, in thus believing, they would be justified and received into the number of the children of God;—yet it will not follow, that persons are partakers, of these privileges, who, instead of trusting in these declarations, despise them, continuing under the reigning power of unbelief. All that such persons, according to the doctrine of Mr.
Marshal, can justly infer from their outward privileges in being under the gospel-dispensation, in being baptized and so forth, is, that a spiritual marriage to Christ, and adoption into the family of God, and the heavenly inheritance, are exhibited and offered to them in the gospel-promise, to be received by faith in Christ; but, by no means, that they have a saving interest in these benefits before they believe.

Mr. Bellamy adds, “As to these texts their true sense may be easily seen, if we consider God’s covenant with Abraham, in which he promised to be a God to him and to his seed; and God’s covenant at Mount Sinai in which he took the whole nation to be his peculiar people:—from which be calls himself the Lord their God:—and on account of which he is called their God: and on account of which he is called their husband, and they are said to be married to him, and are charged with whoredom and adultery for going after other gods; and are invited to return to him as a wife to her husband, and to call him their God and Father. Not that they had any title to pardon, grace and glory, while uncircumcised in heart.”

We answer by observing, in the first place, that, in these words, “Not that they had any title to pardon, grace and glory,” Mr. Bellamy either means to deny, what his opponents really hold, that, when the Lord says, I am the Lord thy God, he makes an external grant or free offer of himself, as a God in Christ, to unregenerate men; or to insinuate that the doctrine of his opponents flatters unregenerate men, continuing such; as if they were already actually intitled to the blessings of pardon, grace and glory. In the former sense, Mr. Bellamy only denies what he had undertaken to confute; in the latter, he is chargeable with calumny. In the next place, it is observable, that, when. Mr. Bellamy admits, that the covenant, into which God took the whole nation of Israel,

as his peculiar people, was that covenant, which he made with Abraham, and in which he promised to be a God to him and to his seed,—he establishes the argument of his opponents: for it cannot be denied, that when God said to Abraham, *I will be a God to thee*, the patriarch was warranted, immediately upon the footing of that declaration, to believe in God as his own God and everlasting portion; and therefore the Israelites, by the same declaration made to each of them, had a sufficient warrant for the same belief. This declaration was, indeed, of no saving advantage to those who continued in unbelief. But to them who understood and believed it in truth, it was an infallible conveyance of a saving interest in God as their God in Christ. Hence this declaration is proposed as the ground upon which they were to return to the Lord, Ps. Ixxxii. 9, 10, 11. *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel if thou wilt hearken unto me. There shall no strange God be in thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange God. I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* The object, which is thus proposed to faith, as every way sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul, cannot be merely the external relation of God to the visible church; it can be nothing less than the grant or offer of God to be our Redeemer, Sanctifier and everlasting Portion. The faith of this declaration is represented as influencing a thorough return to him, Jerem. iii. 22. *Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God.* But we need not dispute long here; since our Saviour has condescended to assure us, that a happy and glorious resurrection, and consequently all the blessings of eternal life, are contained in the import of this declaration, as it was made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. *As touching the Resurrection of the dead,* said Christ to the Sadducees, *have ye not read, that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* Mr. Bellamy seems to grant, that the same covenant of promise, of which this declaration was a
principal part, was made with Abraham and afterwards with Israel; and indeed it cannot be denied, since the promise runs in the same terms to him and to his seed. Hence we infer, that, as this declaration, when made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, afforded a sufficient ground for the faith of eternal life; so it did, as made to Israel; and so it does still, as made to the visible church.

The truth is, the effect of this declaration made to a people and publicly assented to by them in their united capacity, is, that they, as a visible church, are brought to stand in an external covenant-relation to the Lord. But the effect of the same declaration received into the heart of an individual by faith, is an actual or special interest in God its his own God in Christ. As the spiritual whoredom, with which God charged Israel, was not merely the outward worship of idols; but the heart-attachment of individuals to them; so the exercise, to which the Lord promised to bring them, was not only that they should acknowledge their external relation to God, as his visible church; but also that multitudes of individuals amongst them, should be brought to say, every one for himself, by a faith of God’s operation, Ishi, my husband, the Lord is my God.

In the fifth place, we have a solid ground for the appropriating persuasion which belongs to the nature of saving faith in such calls and invitations of the gospel, as the following: Prov. viii. 4. Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of Adam. Isai. lv. 1, 2. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. Revel. xxii. 17. The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.48 Matth. xi. 28. Come unto

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48 Answer. It is granted; that none actually receive the water of life but such as are made willing to do so. But it does not follow, that the call or invitation and the promise implied in it are exhibited and directed to no other. Nay, they are exhibited and directed to all the hearers of the word; in order that those, who are ordained to
me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. In these and other passages of the same import, three things are particularly to be observed. The first is, Who are the persons invited. They are men, the sons of Adam, who have no money,—who spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not,—who are ready to sink under the burden of the guilt and power of sin. Are not these characters applicable to any poor sinner that hears the gospel? The second thing to be considered is, what these persons are invited to receive; Christ and his benefits, set forth under the names of wine and milk, of that which is good, of rest to the soul, of the water of life. The third thing is, how persons of the description just now mentioned, are invited to receive Christ and his saving benefits according to these invitations; namely, by faith, or by believing the free promise supposed or implied in each of these invitations. It is evidently the property of this faith, that by it persons take to themselves the good which is presented to them in these invitations as a free gift; and that they do so immediately, no previous recommending qualifications being required of them; and no qualification pleasing to God being attainable by them otherwise than in and by receiving what is presented to them in these invitations.

The infinite Majesty of Heaven condescends not only to invite, but to beseech or intreat poor sinners to receive the reconciliation. 2 Corinth, v. 20. We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled unto God. "In these words," says Mr. Bellamy, "you are invited to be reconciled to God, and not to believe, that God is reconciled to eternal life, may believe; and in order that the obstinate unbelief of others may be manifestly inexcusable. Nor does human language afford words more expressive of such an unlimited grant than the words of the text. If there were a company of people to whom a generous person should present something as a free gift, making every one of them all welcome to it immediately or without requiring any previous condition, what words could he make use of more proper to express his design, than these words of the Holy Spirit, Whosoever will, let him take freely. The Lord hereby calls, every one to be willing to take freely; for he that seriously calls whosoever will to take any thing freely, calls them, whom he addresses, to be willing to do so, willingness being essentially included in the act of taking.
you.” But If we are not to believe that God is reconciled to us, how are we to believe the revelation which God makes of himself, according to the preceding and following verses? In these verses he reveals himself as in Christ reconciling a guilty world to himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; as having made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The reconciliation to God, to which we are pressed with so much earnestness, proceeds upon a view of God as in Christ; that is as having received a sufficient satisfaction to his incensed justice, and as therefore affording us a sufficient ground to trust in him for the pardon or non-imputation of our sins.

It is necessary to add with regard to these invitations, that being proclaimed in the name of the Most High God, they carry in them all the authority of his command: which is formally expressed in many places of scripture, particularly in 1 John iii. 23. This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ: A command, which, as Mr. Hervey well observes, is “the most important that ever issued from the throne of glory. If this be neglected no other can be kept; if this be observed, all others will be easy.”

Objection. “The gospel is a feast freely provided, and sinners of mankind are freely invited to partake of it. There is no mention of any gift or grant distinct from this; but this itself is a ground sufficient. Those, who were persuaded to embrace the invitations, are not described as coming to make a claim of it as their property; but as gratefully accepting of it.”

Answer. This objection allows, that sinners of mankind are invited to partake of the gospel feast, which is Jesus Christ and all spiritual blessings in him. But it is plain, that every invitation of this kind implies a grant or promise, which gives the persons invited a right to use the provisions of the feast for all the purposes

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49 Dialogue ii. p. 64.
specified in the invitation; and to claim them as their property for these purposes. The grant or promise thus implied in the invitation is either free or suspended upon some condition. If it be suspended upon some condition then the persons invited cannot make their claim to the provisions, till that condition be fulfilled. But if it be free and unconditional, they have a sufficient warrant to make their claim immediately. Here then is the difference between those who contend, that an appropriation of Christ, grounded singly upon the gospel-offer, belongs to the nature of saving faith, and their opponents. The former hold, that the grant or promise implied in the invitations of the gospel, is free; or, in other words, that it is such as warrants any perishing sinner of mankind, immediately upon hearing it, to rest upon it for his own everlasting salvation. Whereas the latter deny, that he has any warrant to do so till he find that he has come up to the terms or conditions required. The ground of the sinner’s trust in Christ for salvation, according to the former scheme, is the promise alone. But the ground of his trust, according to the latter scheme, is partly the promise, and partly something that he feels or does, considered as the condition of the promise. Faith, according to the one doctrine, proceeds only upon what is without us; but, according to the other, it necessarily proceeds in some measure, upon something within us.

The act of receiving Christ and his benefits cannot be separated from the persuasion, that they are ours by virtue of the grant in the gospel promise; because though there may be a giving, where there is no receiving, as we have seen; yet there can be no receiving of Christ without a previous giving of him, John iii. 27. A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. Any pretended receiving of Christ, which proceeds not upon a view of the divine grant of him in the gospel, is nothing but hypocrisy and presumption. A person may take a commodity as a thief or a robber; but not as an honest man, till he, can claim it as his own by
donation, by purchase, or upon some other lawful ground.

The assertion, “that there is no mention in the scripture of any gift or grant of Christ distinct from the gospel invitation,” is true, if it mean, that the free grant which God makes of Christ to sinners, is implied in every gospel invitation; But it is a gross falsehood, if it mean, either that there is no such grant, or that it is not distinctly expressed in various places of scripture.

Objection. “In what sense may a gospel-hearer call salvation by Jesus Christ his own? He is freely invited to partake of it: that is all. It is not so his own, but that he may ultimately be debarred from possessing it. But in whatsoever sense it is his own, that is the only sense in which he is warranted to believe it to be so.”

Answer. We have already observed, that a free invitation to a feast implies a free promise, which gives the persons invited a sufficient ground to call the feast their own, according to the import of that promise; as much their own, as if they had procured the entertainment with their own money. A persuasion that it is theirs in this sense is implied in their compliance with the invitation, in their coming to and partaking of the feast. Such is the sense in which the gospel promise affords every sinner of mankind, who hears it, a ground to believe that salvation by Jesus Christ is his. In both cases, it is not the right of persons, as only exhibited in the invitation, that makes them actual partakers of the provision; because to such as disbelieve and reject this right, it is as if it had no existence. But when their right is actually believed and improved, then they cannot fail to be actual partakers, unless the inviter be deficient in faithfulness or ability. This deficiency is supposable in the case of men who invite their neighbours to an earthly feast; but not in the case of the great God who calls us to Christ in the gospel. Hence when this right is duly apprehended, under the influence of the spirit of faith, it secures the person so apprehending it from all danger of being debarred from the
possession of the promised salvation. In the case of an earthly feast, it is indeed one thing for persons to believe or trust in the promise of the inviter, and another thing to exert bodily strength in coming to such a place, in eating and drinking. But with regard to the spiritual feast to which we are invited in the gospel, our trust in the promise of God in Christ as directed to us, and our coming to partake of Christ as the food of our souls, are but different views of one and the same thing.

There are few religious controversies in which a greater want of candour appears, than in the opposition which has been made to the doctrine of Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston and others, concerning the nature of that faith in Jesus Christ to which the hearers of the gospel are called. According to this doctrine, says one, “the unregenerate are called to conclude themselves interested in the righteousness of Jesus, while adhering to their own righteousness as the ground of acceptance with God:” just as if calling sinners, as Mr. Marshal and Mr. Boston do, to believe the righteousness of Christ to be so presented to them in the grant and promise of the gospel, as to warrant each of them to trust in it assuredly for his own justification before God; were the same thing with calling them to conclude themselves savingly interested in the righteousness of Christ, or already in a justified state; and as if the believing claim which sinners are directed by these divines to make to the righteousness of Christ, as their only justifying righteousness, were not as inconsistent with any dependence on their own righteousness for their acceptance with God; as it would be for the same person to go towards the north and south poles at the same time.

“This faith,” says Mr. Bellamy, meaning that which is taught by Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey and others, “is founded wholly in a heated imagination.” To this we may reply in the words of Dr. Owen. “We know,” says he, “that if a man promise us any thing seriously and
solemnly, which is absolutely in his power, we trust to his word or believe him, considering his wisdom, honesty and ability. This we know is not a mere fixing of the imagination, but is a real and useful confidence or trust. And whereas God hath given us great and precious promises, and that under several confirmations, especially that of his oath and covenant, if we do really believe their accomplishment; and that it shall be to us according to his word, upon the account of his veracity, power, righteousness and holiness; why shall this be accounted a fanatical fixing of the imagination. If it be so, it was so in Abraham, our example, Rom. iv. 19, 20, 21. But this blasphemous figment is designed for the overthrow of the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ. God gives us great and precious promises, that, by them, we might be made partakers of a Divine nature. These promises he requireth us to receive and to mix them with faith; that is, trusting to and resting on his Divine power and veracity, ascribing unto him thereby the glory of them; to believe that the things promised unto us shall be accomplished, which is the mean of God's appointment, whereby we shall be made partakers of them. Such was the faith of Abraham so highly celebrated by the apostle; such was all the true and saving faith that ever was in the world from the foundation of it."
LETTER IV.

On some Queries proposed by Mr. Bellamy.

When a writer or speaker pretends to determine a controverted point by proposing queries, it is often the design of such queries to insinuate some prejudice, and to make us overlook the considerations which are most necessary to a right judgment of the matter in question. Hence, though Mr. Bellamy’s queries be materially answered in the two preceding letters, yet it may be instructive to consider them particularly, as an example of the artifices, that are made use of, to preclude the most salutary truths from any candid hearing or impartial examination.

Query I. “Did God ever require any of the sons of Adam to believe any proposition to be true; unless it was in fact true before he believed. We are required to believe, that there is a God,—that Christ is the Son of God,—that he died for sinners,—that he that believeth shall be saved,—that he that believeth not shall be damned,—that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. We are required to believe all the truths taught in the Bible. But they are all true, before we believe them, and whether we believe them or not.”

Answer. The occasion of this query is the following words in the explication of the tenth direction in Mr. Marshal’s Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification. “The reason,” says he, “why we are to assure ourselves in our faith, that God freely giveth Christ and salvation to us particularly, is not, because it is a truth before we believe it, but because it becometh a certain truth when we believe it, and because it will never be true, except we do, in some measure, persuade and assure ourselves that it is so.” In opposition to this passage Mr. Bellamy asserts, “that God never requires us to believe any thing but what is true, before we believe it, and whether we
believe it or not.” And it is granted to Mr. Bellamy, that God never requires us to believe any speculative proposition, such as those recited in the query; or any absolute prediction or historical fact, but what is true, whether we believe it, or not. But saving faith, as it is distinguished from other sorts of faith, is not merely a belief of such speculative truths: because there is no such truth but what may be known and assented to by wicked men and devils. When the apostle James says, *Even the devils believe and tremble*, he undoubtedly admits, that they may assent to all the truths or propositions contained in the scriptures. In this sense, it has been justly said, *That true justifying faith is not simply the believing of any sentence that is written or can be thought upon.* So the persuasion, *that Christ is mine*, which we consider as belonging to the nature of saving faith, is not properly speaking, a belief of this proposition, *That Christ is mine*, as if it were formally, or, in so many words, contained in scripture; but it is the necessary import of that receiving or taking of Christ to myself, which is answerable to and warranted by the free grant of him in the gospel, directed to sinners of mankind indefinitely. In this believing, however, *that Christ is my own Saviour*, I am no more chargeable with believing a lie; than I am in believing, that, when a friend gives me a book or any other valuable article, I have a right by virtue of his gift, to consider it, to take and use it, as my own; though it be certain, that, if I finally despise and reject his gift, it neither is, nor ever will be mine. Farther, if the gospel be considered as a free promise of Christ and, his benefits; then this persuasion, *that Christ is mine*, is undoubtedly the import of my faith or belief of that promise as directed to me. And yet, though this promise be directed to all the hearers of the word, none of them, in the event, will find Christ to be theirs, excepting those that believe: because faith is the only way or mean by which God hath appointed them to attain a saving interest in, or the actual possession of, what he hath promised in the gospel. Hence the apostle warns those to whom this promise is
left, of the danger of coming short of it, Heb. iv. 1. It may be useful to add the words of some ministers of the gospel on this subject. “There is a full warrant,” say they, “to believe, or general right of access to Christ by faith, which all the hearers of the gospel have before they believe, and whether ever they believe or not; and, in this respect, the provision of the New Covenant is their own mercy: which warrant or right, faith believes and improves. Yet faith is not a mere believing of an interest which the person had before;—but it is also a believing of a new interest in Christ and his blood; or a persuasion, by which a person appropriates to himself what lies in common upon the field of the gospel. All the privileges and blessings of the New Covenant are generally and indefinitely set forth by the gospel, upon this very design,—That each person who hears it may take all to himself, in the way of believing; as there cannot otherwise be any proper entertainment given to the gospel. An indefinite declaration is made of God’s name as the Lord our God, and of Christ’s name as the Lord our Righteousness, and all covenant blessings are presented to us in absolute promises; all which is certainly for being believed. But every person is to believe for himself, not for another. It is a mock faith, if a person believes only that some others have a saving interest in God and Christ and the promises; as he hath no business about making this particular application to others. So that he is still a rejecter of the whole, if he do not believe with an appropriation of the whole to himself; whilst the revelation of grace is made to him for this purpose, or for none at all.”

“Such is the wonderful power and privilege which God bestows on true faith,—that he makes all to be personally and savingly a man’s own: just as the man is taking all to himself, and making all his own, by an appropriating persuasion of faith.”

Query II. Are not all these truths contained in the scriptures of

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the Old and New Testament, which it is necessary for us to know and believe in order to our salvation?—But are they not all true, before we believe them, and whether we believe them or not?

Answer. Mr. Bellamy here insinuates, that Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey and others, when they call sinners to believe the grant and promise of Christ in the gospel with application to themselves, require them to believe something which is not contained in the scriptures. Now, that something must be either the sinner’s application of the gospel-promise to himself, or his warrant to make that application. As to the former, that is, the sinner’s application of the gospel-promise to himself; it is as absurd to speak of its being contained or not contained in the scriptures, as it would be to speak of his praying, of his reading or hearing the word, or any other of his transient actions being contained, or not contained therein. As to the latter, namely, the sinner’s warrant to make an application of the gospel-promise to himself immediately, or before he find in himself certain evidences of his vital union to Christ; Mr. Bellamy should not have taken it for granted, that there is no such warrant in scripture, after so many passages of scripture expressing that warrant had been produced and urged by his opponents. This warrant is, indeed, as clearly contained in the Scripture, as if the sinner’s name and surname had been mentioned. God says, The promise is to you; the word of salvation is sent to you. The characters of those, to whom the promises and invitations of the gospel are directed, belong to you: for they are addressed to the sons of Adam, Prov. viii. 4. to those that are stout-hearted and far from righteousness, Is. xlvi. 12. to those who labour in vain, Is. Iv. 1, 2, 3. to every comer, John vi. 37. We hope this warrant is shown satisfactorily in the preceding letter.

Query III. “Is it safe to venture our souls on the truth of a proposition no where contained in the Bible, namely, Theron, Christ died for thee. Is this proposition contained in the Bible? Is it
taught in Scripture? If it had been, would it not have been true before it was believed, and whether it was believed or not? If Theron venture his soul upon the truth of this proposition, and find himself at last deceived, can he blame the Bible? Was it contained in that book? Did he learn it thence? Nay, he owns he did not. But then he thinks, God has required him to work up himself to such a belief, and promised, that according to his faith, so shall it be unto him. And yet owns, he has no evidence of the thing from scripture, sense or reason.”

Answer. The solemn manner in which Mr. Bellamy speaks here and in other places, of the unspeakable danger of deceiving our own souls, is, in itself, scriptural and highly becoming a minister of Christ: but how awfully is it abused, when it is connected with an attempt to corrupt the truth of the gospel! in such a case, it can only serve as an example of those good words and fair speeches which deceive the hearts of the simple, Rom. xvi. 18. It seems unnecessary to add to what has been already observed concerning the absurdity of what Mr. Bellamy repeats so often, namely, that the gospel-promise is not to be believed, (or, which is the same thing, depended upon) unless it would be true to us whether we believe it or not; and that our act of applying that promise to ourselves is not contained in the Bible. But Mr. Bellamy’s followers might be asked, Whether it be the safer course to believe in God giving us the true bread from heaven, and to receive it thankfully in his appointed way, that is, by embracing the promise as directed to us; or to stand disputing against the propriety of God’s way of dealing with us in this matter; and alleging, that, if Christ be given to us in the promise, the exercise of faith is unnecessary and superfluous; for then the promise must be true to us, whether we believe or disbelieve it? The manifest arrogance and presumption of the latter course may well make a thinking person tremble.

Mr. Marshal, in the explication of the tenth direction in his
Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, has the following words: “We have an absolute promise or declaration in scripture, that God certainly will or doth give Christ and his salvation to any one of us in particular, neither do we know it to be true already by scripture or sense or reason, before we assure ourselves absolutely of it. Yea we are without Christ at present (or before we believe) in a state of sin and misery.” Hence Mr. Bellamy infers, that Mr. Marshal teaches us to believe without evidence from scripture, sense and reason. Mr. Marshal indeed teaches us, that, in believing, we attain a saving interest in, and the begun possession of, Christ; but that, before we believe in him, we have no evidence from scripture, sense or reason, of either our present or future possession of him. Just as a person, in receiving a free gift presented to him, may warrantably believe it to be his own in possession; though, while he rejecteth the gift, he could not know either by scripture, sense or reason, that ever he would attain the possession of it. In order to make Mr. Marshal appear ridiculous, Mr. Bellamy represents him as owning, that the faith, to which he directs his readers, is totally unsupported by scripture, sense and reason. But, with the candid and judicious, the ridicule must fall upon Mr. Bellamy’s grossly mistaking the sense of the author. Mr. Marshal is so far from making such an absurd concession, that it is the design of that part, of his treatise, from which the above quotation is taken, to show that there is not only one, but many sufficient grounds in the scripture for this appropriating faith. Accordingly he evinces, with abundance of scriptural evidence, that there are sufficient grounds for this faith in the promises, calls and commands of God in his word; that it is only an appropriating faith that corresponds with the scriptural account of saving and justifying faith; that it is the faith exemplified by the professors of true godliness through the scriptures of the Old and New Testament; that it is the only faith by which we receive Christ and his salvation into our hearts, and live to him in the practice of all holy duties; and, in fine, that any
pretended faith, which excludes this appropriation, shows itself to be not the faith of God’s elect by the evil fruits which it produceth.

Mr. Bellamy observes that the proposition, that Christ died for Theron, is not contained in scripture: and that therefore Theron had no ground to say, in the direct act of faith, The blessed Jesus died for me. And it is granted, that if the knowledge or belief, thus expressed, mean a person’s knowledge or belief, that he was one of those whom Christ intended to redeem by his death; that knowledge, however attainable it is, yet, being the same with the person’s knowledge of his election, is by no means that which constitutes justifying faith. But when we believe or trust in Christ for all our salvation, it is evident, that we have a real apprehension of his death, nay, of all that he did and suffered, as for us; not meaning any immediate view of God’s decree or of Christ’s intention in laying down his life; but an immediate view of his death as presently exhibited to us in such a manner, as to warrant our entire dependence upon it as the meritorious and procuring cause of all our salvation. When a traveller goes into a house and eats the food set before him; he may justly say, This food is for me, both as being suitable to my present need, and as being now freely given to me, without any regard to what particular persons the people of the house might have had in view, when they prepared that food.  

Query IV. “Did God ever require any one of the sons of Adam to

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51 In Dr. Preston’s treatise of faith we have the following paraphrase of our Lord’s commission to his apostles and with them to the ordinary ministers of the word. Go and preach the gospel to every creature, Mark xvi. 14. “Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him, Christ is dead for him; and, if he will take him and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him.” On this passage, quoted in the Marrow of Modern Divinity, Mr. Boston remarks, that the design of it is not to determine concerning the extent of Christ’s death; but to discover the warrant sinners have to believe in Christ. Therefore Dr. Preston saith not, Tell every man, that Christ died for him; but, Tell every man that Christ is dead for him; that is, for him to come to and believe on; even as if one had said of old, Tell every man who hath slain a person unawares, that the city of refuge is for him, namely, to flee to, that he may be safe: and every one bitten by a fiery serpent, that the brazen serpent set upon a pole is for him, namely, to look to that he may be healed. Both of these were eminent types of Christ; and upon the latter the Scripture is full and clear to this very point. Numb. xxi. 8. And the Lord said unto Moses, make thee a brazen serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. John iii. 15, 16.
believe any thing to be true, without sufficient previous evidence, that it was true? Look through the Bible. Where shall we find one instance? Not in the Old Testament—nor in the New Testament—no, not even in one of these particulars, these writers usually refer to, to illustrate and confirm this strange kind of assurance.”

Answer. With regard to the charge, which Mr. Bellamy brings against his opponents, of calling men to believe without sufficient previous evidence, enough has been said already. The sneering way in which he repeats an expression which had been used by Mr. Marshal in a grave and serious manner, is very unbecoming. What Mr. Marshal meant by that expression was, that the assurance of faith, “like other things of the Spirit of God, is a strange thing to natural men: and, by reason of men’s natural bias towards the old covenant way of obtaining life, they reject the way of receiving spiritual blessings by believing the free promise of God in Christ, as absurd. Hence we need not wonder, that many reckon, that we bring strange things to their ears, when we say, that it is the immediate duty of sinners to believe the gospel-premise as directed to themselves; and yet allow, that, while they do not believe it, there is no manner of evidence, that it will ever be actually fulfilled in their case. Several instances, however, are given by Mr. Marshal and others, as, in this respect, parallel or very similar to that of this faith in the gospel-promise; Abraham’s believing the promise that God gave him about a son in his old age; the faith which the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt ought to have had in the promise of the land of Canaan; David’s faith in the promise of his advancement to the kingdom of Israel; the faith of miracles; and, particularly, that which Peter exercised in walking upon the water. Let us see how Mr. Bellamy deals with these instances in order to show that they are no way to the purpose of his opponents.

With regard to Abraham’s faith, he observes, that “he had
sufficient evidence for the thing he believed, even the known, the plain, the express promise of the God of truth.” This assertion of Mr. Bellamy is unquestionably true; and, in order to show the example to be quite pertinent to the purpose of his opponents, it is only necessary to add, That there is no evidence, that ever the promise would have been verified to Abraham, or that he would have attained the promised blessing, if, instead of believing, he had despised and rejected the promise. The promise made to Abraham is precisely parallel to the gospel-promise in this respect, that it was to be verified to him by means of his faith in it. The promise given to David of his advancement to the kingdom of Israel is an example of the same kind.

With regard to the promise which the Lord gave the generation of the Israelites, who came out of Egypt, the following objection is offered to Mr. Marshal’s view of it. “It is true, God absolutely promised to plant them as a nation in the good land; and this he performed. But he did not absolutely promise, that every individual, who left Egypt, would be amongst them. So far as it respected individuals, (unless in reference to Caleb and Joshua,) the promise was not absolute.”

To this objection we answer according to what was observed in the preceding letter concerning absolute promises. The promise made to Israel was absolute in the same sense in which we hold the gospel-promise to be so. The promise of eternal life, as it was made to Christ in behalf of his seed, could not fail of being accomplished. This, however, as we formerly observed, does not hinder the same promise from being proposed in the outward dispensation of the gospel, as a free promise, to many who, in the event, shall come short of it and finally perish. In like manner, the promise, as it was made to Abraham and embraced by his faith, was sure to be performed to his seed sooner or later. But, as it was proposed to that body of Israelites who were numbered at their departure out of
Egypt, it afforded them a sufficient ground for their trusting, that they would be brought into the good land: This appears from the terms, in which the promise was proposed to them, Exod. iii. 8, 17. *I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey,*—from God’s saying to them, *Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein,* save Caleb and Joshua, Numb. xiv. 30.—from the apostle’s representation of unbelief as the cause of their exclusion, Heb. iii. 19. This unbelief is not to be understood of their not believing, that the promise would be accomplished in the bringing of some future generation of the Israelites into the land of Canaan; but of their not believing, that it would be accomplished to themselves, who were numbered by Moses at their departure from Egypt. For Moses still spoke of the land of Canaan as promised to them who came out of Egypt, Numb. x. 29. *We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.* Deuteron. i. 20. *I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the Lord our God doth give unto us. Behold the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up, possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee.* And their disbelief of this promise is represented in v. 32. *In this thing, ye did not believe the Lord your God.* The following observations of the judicious author of a most valuable work entitled, *Palemon’s Creed examined,* are solid. “The unbelieving Israelites, to whom the Lord gave the promise of entering into his rest, not only disbelieved the promise, but despised the gift, Psal. cvi. 24. The Hebrew word there rendered *despised,* is, in other places, justly rendered *refused* or rejected, Jerem. vi. 30. Isai. liv. 6. Hence it is manifest, that the promise or gift of the land of Canaan was made even to those who were not permitted to enter into it because of their unbelief; for men cannot be said to refuse a gift which was never offered to them. Hence, too, it is evident, that God could not be charged with any unfaithfulness for not bringing them to the possession of it, however freely promised before. Yet it is observable, that the not
permitting them to enter into it had some show or appearance of a breach of promise. And therefore when the Lord had threatened, that their carcases should fall in the wilderness, he added these remarkable words, *Ye shall know my breach of promise.* Numb, xiv. 34.” With regard to individuals of Israel, if we consider that the land of Canaan, made over to them in the promise, was a type and figure of heaven, and that the apostle intimates, that the gospel was preached to them, when this promise was given to them, Heb. iv. 2. It cannot well be denied, that every individual was bound to believe, or trust in the promise, as what would be fulfilled to him in bringing him to the possession of the earthly Canaan, unless God should see meet to translate him beforehand to the possession of the heavenly Canaan, of which the earthly was but a faint shadow. These things considered, we agree with Mr. Bellamy, that the Israelites “had sufficient evidence, that God was able and willing to do all that he had engaged to do; and that if they would trust his wisdom, power, goodness and faithfulness, and follow him wholly, they might safely enter and easily conquer the country;” that is, just what his opponents maintain, that the promise of the good land would have been verified to that generation of Israel, if they had believed it; but that they could not enter in because of their unbelief.

Mr. Bellamy allows, “that the Jews in Babylon had a good warrant to trust in the Lord, who was able, and who had expressly and absolutely promised at the end of seventy years to bring them back.”

Concerning this assurance which the Lord gave his people of their return from the Babylonish captivity, we observe, that it may be considered both as a prediction of a future event, and also as a promise given for the support and comfort of his people. It is in the latter point of view, not in the former, that this assurance is to be considered as parallel or similar to the gospel-promise. As a
prediction, it might be believed by the devils themselves. But, as a promise, it was to be received by faith and pleaded in prayer. So much is intimated in that promise, as it is expressed in Jerem. xxix. 10, 12, 13. Accordingly towards the end of the seventy years, it was the mind of the Lord’s people, particularly of Daniel, that faith and prayer were necessary means of obtaining the promised deliverance, Dan. ix. 2, 3.

Mr. Bellamy observes, “that those who had the faith of miracles, and could say to this mountain, Be thou removed and cast into the sea,—had sufficient evidence to believe that it would be done, resulting from Christ’s express promise in the case.” But this observation does not at all affect Mr. Marshal’s argument, while it does not appear that that promise would have been verified in the working of miracles by any of the apostles as moral instruments, if they had not believed it, Matth. xxi. 21. Jesus said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, If ye have faith and doubt not,—ye shall say to this mountain, &c. From other passages we learn, that, even in those upon whom miracles were to be wrought, faith in the promise was required in order to their having the benefit of the miracle, Matth. ix. 28, 29. Christ said to the blind men, Believe ye, that I am able to do this? According to your faith, be it unto you. Mark v. 36. Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, who had applied to him on behalf of his daughter, Be not afraid, only believe. Acts xiv. 9. Paul, observing the impotent man at Lystra, perceived, that he had faith to be healed.

It may be observed with regard to the command which Christ gave Peter to come to him on the water, that it implied, as Mr. Bellamy grants, Christ’s promise of keeping Peter from sinking. But would Peter have experienced the accomplishment of this promise, if he had disbelieved it? That he would not, we are led to think from his beginning to sink, as he began to doubt, and from our Lord’s reproof, which intimated that his sinking was occasioned by his doubting.
On the whole, these are undeniable instances of a Divine promise given to be believed or relied on for some benefit; which, however, was not to be attained without the belief of the promise.

What Mr. Bellamy adds about the absurdity of teaching (what he most unjustly supposes to be taught by Mr. Marshal) that “God suspends the salvation of all mankind upon their believing a thing to be true, of the truth of which they have no evidence from scripture, sense or reason; and that he sentences men to eternal damnation for not believing what they would be glad to believe with all their hearts is only remarkable as an instance of extravagant abuse.

With regard to his insinuating, that men in their natural state would be glad to believe with all their hearts what Mr. Marshal calls them to believe, we may transcribe a few words of one who preached the same doctrine on this head with Mr. Marshal: “To take the word of God for your security,” says Mr. Ralph Erskine to his hearers; “to quit the law-way of salvation and flee to the gospel-promise; to trust the faithfulness of God pledged in his promise, for your salvation from sin and corruption as well as from hell and damnation; to set to your seal that God is true, and to receive his record with particular application to yourself; if you do this, never fear, that you are doing it by your own strength; for it is not natural, but supernatural power by which you are so acting. If you get a heart to embrace the promise, you may be sure the promise is embracing you: for it is only virtue coming out of it that enables you to embrace it. None are willing to take the good of the promise till God make them so. One of the great things that makes believing so difficult, is, because we cannot admit it into our thoughts, that salvation is to be had at so easy a rate; the old conditional covenant of works being so much ingrained in our
nature."^52

Query V. “Is not this the difference between faith and presumption, as the words are commonly understood among mankind, viz. that, in the one, we believe because we have sufficient evidence; in the other, without any evidence at all? And is it not the constant character of all self-deceived hypocrites, that they have a real persuasion in their heart of the love of God to their souls and confident expectation of eternal life without any real evidence, Matth. vii. 27. Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27. xviii. 9, 11.”

Answer. Enough has been said about Mr. Bellamy’s charge (against Mr. Marshal and others who teach the same doctrine,) of calling men to believe without evidence. But it may be of use to take notice of some differences between the doctrine, of which we speak, and presumption. Presumption rests on outward church-privileges, such as, the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments, as if they were in themselves sufficient evidences of God’s special love: Hence the language of self-deceivers is, _We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets._ But faith seeks and finds its rest in Him who is exhibited in word and sacraments, even in Jesus Christ, as our righteousness and salvation. A person’s opinion of his own righteousness or inherent good qualifications is the support of presumption. The language of it is, _God, I thank thee; I am not as other men. I fast, I pray, I do such and such good works._ But this is building upon the sand. When the Jews sought salvation, _as it were, by the works of the law;_ they sought it not by faith: for faith builds

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^52 The sense, which Luther had, of the difficulty of attaining faith’s appropriation of Christ, appears from the following passage taken from his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians. Discoursing on these words in Gal i. 4. Who gave himself for our sins, he says: “Weigh diligently every word of Paul, and especially mark well this pronoun, our. For the effect consisteth altogether in the right application of the pronouns; in which, as they are used in scripture, there is often a peculiar force. Thou wilt easily say and believe, that Christ, the son of God, was given for the sins of Peter, of Paul, and of other saints, whom we account to have been worthy of this grace. But it is a very hard thing, that thou, who judgest thyself unworthy of this grace, shouldst from thy heart say and believe, that Christ was given for thy invincible, infinite and horrible sins,—Although our weak nature read or hear this sentence. Who gave himself for our sins, yet she applies not this pronoun our unto herself, but out unto others, who are worthy and holy. As for herself, she will tarry, till she be made worthy with her own works.”
upon no other foundation than that which God hath laid in Zion, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, as exhibited in the gospel.

The claim of presumption to the promise is grounded upon something which a person supposes to be wrought in him or done by him: but faith mentions nothing, as the ground of its claim to the good of the promise, but the righteousness of Christ, the only proper, entitling, procuring condition of all the promises of the New Covenant. Presumption would take the promise without Christ: whereas faith comes to Christ in the free promise, and finds every promise to be yea and amen in him. Farther, it may be observed, that the gospel reveals a certain order in the execution and application of Christ’s Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly offices. Taught by him as a Prophet, a true believer first comes to him as a Priest, for that justice-satisfying and law-magnifying righteousness, which alone is sufficient for the justification of the guilty; and then submits to him as a king, being sweetly constrained by his love to have respect to all his commandments. But this order is inverted by presumption; which pretends first to submit unfeignedly to Christ as a King and Lawgiver; and then, upon the ground of this submission, claims the benefit of his Priestly office: thus, it may be, with much seeming devotion, seeking a justifying righteousness, as it were, by the works of the law. How much of this presumption is in Mr. Bellamy’s scheme, which directs persons to regard the reconciliation of their heart to the law, and their consciousness of good dispositions, as the ground of their claim to Christ and his salvation, may easily be discerned. Presumption, according to the degree of it, increases pride and self-conceit, Revel. iii. 17. Gal. vi. 3. But saving faith, according to the measure of it, promotes humility and self-abasement. In fine, true faith worketh by love to the person of Christ and purifies the heart, Gal. v. 6. Acts xv. 9. whereas presumption, however it may pretend to take the benefits of Christ, has no love to his person, nor
regard to the glory of his name.

Query VI. “Is not this faith analogous to that which the devil tempted our Saviour to exercise, Luke iv. 8. Psal. xci. 11. Here was a promise, a precious promise out of God’s own word. The devil urged our Saviour to appropriate and take it home to himself in particular; and be verily persuaded in his heart, that he would be safe, although he cast himself down. However, on a critical examination of the text the devil recited, there could be no evidence from that of safety to Christ, if he had cast himself down. So therefore he must believe really without any evidence from scripture, sense or reason; and the devil would have had him think, that according to his faith, so should it be to him.”

Answer. It is hard to see what pretence Mr. Bellamy had for the abuse implied in this query. Is the doctrine of his opponents, like the temptations of satan, designed to countenance or encourage immoral practices? Did they ever allow any faith to be genuine, but that which brings men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world? By no means. Mr. Marshall treatise demonstrates, that true holiness in heart and life is not to be otherwise attained by fallen men than by that very faith, which he describes out of the holy scriptures. Again, was it the practice of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents to handle the word of God deceitfully, and like satan, to mutilate texts in order to make them appear favourable to their own schemes? Mr. Bellamy’s admirers may be safely challenged to produce any human writers who stand clearer of such a charge. Farther, it may be asked, how Mr. Bellamy came to represent our Saviour’s appropriation of the promise in Ps. xci. 11. to himself, as any part of Satan’s temptation? The devil, no doubt, horribly perverted that promise by mutilating it and attempting to make it patronize a most abominable crime; but not by intimating, that Christ might consider it as a promise made to him in particular. “The devil Was
right,” says Mr. Henry, “in applying it to Christ; for to him all the promises of the protection of the saints primarily and eminently belong, and to them in and through him.” It belongs, indeed, to the craft of the old serpent to make his falsehood pass by mixing it with a good deal of truth.

Query VII. “If the devil attempted thus to delude our blessed Saviour himself by misapplying a precious promise, has he not courage? has he not power? has he not will? to attempt to delude poor sinners in a like manner; that thereby, devil as he is, he may accomplish their eternal ruin. For that satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

Answer. How justly may all this be retorted upon Mr. Bellamy’s scheme! It is an observation of some judicious divines, that as before the fall, it was satan’s great plot to tempt man to disbelieve the threatening of the covenant of works; so it is now his great plot to tempt men to disbelieve the gospel-promise. The apostle assures us, that the god of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them. Now though Mr. Bellamy makes many professions of deep concern for men’s salvation and for the danger of delusion; though he appears zealous for experimental religion; yet when all these things (which are in themselves commendable) are made subservient to a scheme, which debars poor sinners of mankind from any application of Christ or of the promise to themselves, till they certainly know they have the marks of regeneration; we may well be apprehensive, that, in this case, Satan is transforming himself into an angel of light; while he is taking the most effectual way to prevent persons who enjoy the gospel-dispensation from having any saving benefit by it. The plot is the deeper, that it is carried on under a plausible pretext of ardent zeal against diabolical delusion.

The divines, whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, were far from
neglecting to warn men against that misapplication of the promises to which they are tempted by satan. When you flatter yourselves, they would often say to their hearers, that you have such good qualifications as entitle you to the righteousness of Christ and to the promise; when you are induced to apply the promise to yourselves, rather by an imagination of something in it suitable to your depraved inclinations or to the exaltation of corrupt self, than by any spiritual view of the glorious authority, power, righteousness, mercy and faithfulness of God shining in it; or when you apply a promise to yourselves without any regard to the true meaning of it; or when your application of it tends to make you more secure in a sinful course; in such cases, you are chargeable with a misapplication and presumptuous abuse of the promise; an abuse which satan will not fail to promote by his delusive suggestions. “Satan’s design,” as Mr. Ralph Erskine observes in one of his sermons, “in bringing a promise to our mind is, to fill the soul with spiritual pride or false peace; to make it rest in itself; and to drive it away from its true resting-place.” No human writings abound more with salutary cautions of this sort, than those of Mr. Boston and the two Erskines.

Query VIII. “Did ever Christ or his apostles define faith to be a real persuasion, that Christ died for me in particular; and that pardon, grace and glory are mine? They call it coming to Christ, receiving Christ, trusting in Christ, believing in Christ, believing on Christ, &c. but never call it believing that Christ is mine, and that my sins are forgiven. It is true, the saints in the Old Testament and in the New, usually speak the language of assurance. And it is as true, that they had sufficient evidence of their good estate from their sanctification. All who pretended to belong to Christ without this, are branded as liars, 1 John ii. 4. But where do we ever read of their endeavoring to work up themselves to an assurance professedly without evidence?”
Answer. In what sense the expression, “Christ died for me” may be admitted to be the language of justifying faith, was shown in the answer to the 3rd query. Mr Bellamy’s charge against his opponents, of calling men to believe without evidence, must appear, from what has been said, to be a gross misrepresentation. We have seen that the phrases which are used to denote the exercise of faith, such as, coming to Christ, receiving Christ, believing in or on him; trusting in him, include the notion of appropriation. It cannot be shown satisfactorily, that a person has or may have such a sure trust in Jesus Christ for his own everlasting salvation as is answerable to the gospel promise, without some real persuasion, that Christ is his own Saviour in particular. That such a persuasion belongs to the nature of saving faith has been evinced from the necessary import of the Hebrew and Greek words rendered faith and believing: from the terms of the gospel-record or promise; and from what the scripture calls believing or trusting in the Lord. In the xxxi. Psalm, David says, I trusted in thee, O Lord: and then he adds, I said, Thou art my God: where the latter expression is an explication of the former. The apostle, in the iv. chapter of the epistle to the Romans, teacheth us, that to believe on God, in a saving manner, is to believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. And in another place, having said, I delivered unto you first of all, how that Christ died for our sins; the apostle adds, So we preach, and so ye believe. Where shall we find passages of scripture that show more clearly, than these and other texts cited in the second of the preceding letters, what it is that a person believes, when he believes to the saving of the soul? We have seen, that the exercise of the faith of God’s people, in scripture, is still expressed in the language of appropriation. But, says Mr. Bellamy, “They spake the language of assurance, because they had sufficient

53 1 Corinth. xv. 3, 11.
evidence of their good estate from their sanctification.” But it may be asked, whether the gospel-promise be not a promise of sanctification? And, if it be so, whether we are not warranted to trust in the promise for this blessing, till we are conscious, that we have already attained it? And whether we can trust in Christ and in the promise for any blessing; without a real persuasion, that Christ is our Saviour, and that the promises are yea and amen to us in him? When Moses taught the Israelites at their coming out of Egypt, to sing, *The Lord is my strength and my salvation; he is my God;* shall we suppose, that he intended, that none should sing these words, but such as were conscious of their sanctification? This supposition must appear very unreasonable to one who considers the corrupt and degenerate state of that people, when they came out of Egypt. Even in the most thriving state of the visible church, we cannot suppose, that the generality of church-members will be so certain of the truth and sincerity of their gracious attainments as to be able, upon the ground thereof, to assert their interest in the Lord as their God. Hence it appears, that when the Lord promises to bring church-members in general to join in the exercise of calling God their God, their Husband, it is implied that they were to do so upon some other ground, than the consciousness of their own attainments; that is, upon the ground of his own free grant and promise, Hosea ii. 16, 23. Zechar. xiii. 9. The apostle Paul, in writing to the churches in his time, speaks of them as consisting of members, who called God their Father in Christ; who Considered themselves as members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. Shall we suppose, that the apostle means, that church-members in general were then so conscious of their sanctification, that they could always found their claim to these privileges upon it? Or is it not rather evident, that he speaks of these privileges as what they received by faith in Christ, and even by the very first act of it? Hence he directs the members in general of these churches, to which he wrote, to consider
themselves as partakers of these privileges and to walk according to them. He teaches them to seek the attainment of peace and joy in the very act of believing, and not merely by reflection upon that act or its effects.\footnote{Rom. xv. 13.} Besides, if our sanctification be the only ground of the warrantable application of Christ to ourselves, then our sanctification must be the only ground of our hope. But the legalism of Mr. Bellamy’s scheme may be considered more particularly afterward: and also his calumnious insinuation, that the doctrine of his opponents allows persons to conclude themselves to be in a gracious state, without any solid evidence of a work of sanctification begun in their souls.

Query IX. “Is there one in all St. Paul’s catalogue of believers in Heb. xi. whose faith consisted in believing without any evidence?”

Answer. Their believing was undoubtedly agreeable to Mr. Marshal’s doctrine; for, when it is said, that by faith they obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, out of weakness were made strong; it is plainly implied, both that these things were promised; (for the promise was the ground of their faith;) and also, that there was no evidence, that they would ever have obtained these things without faith; for that is what the apostle continually repeats through this whole chapter, that, by means of faith and not otherwise, such and such benefits were obtained.

Query X. “Were any awakened sinners invited and urged to believe by Christ or his apostles; and told, at the same time, that the thing they were to believe was not true as yet? Nor had they any evidence from scripture, sense or reason, it would ever be true; but however most solemnly assured by the promise and oath of God, if they would venture to believe, without any evidence at all in the case, it would be according to their faith.—Was this the thing the apostles dwelt upon in all their preaching? Was this the thing
they urged awakened sinners to, with all their might? No: they never heard of it—neither came it into their hearts, to think that this was justifying faith.”

Answer. It seems unnecessary to add to what has been advanced on the subject of this query. Only it may be observed, that, if, instead of saying, “The thing they were to believe was not true, as yet;” it had been said, The promise they were called to believe, was not verified to them, as yet; nor was there any evidence from scripture, sense or reason, that it ever would be verified; while they continued to disbelieve it;—the futility of this and indeed of most of these queries would have been obvious to many readers; who are confounded with the continual repetition of the grossly misapplied expression, believing without evidence. With regard to the way in which Christ and his apostles dealt with awakened sinners, it is easy to show, that sinners in such a case were still directed to the grant and promise of Christ Immediately, Matth. xi. 28. John vi. 32. Acts ii. 39. That what is now expressed was, in effect, what Mr. Marshal intended by the words harped upon so much by Mr. Bellamy, will never be denied by such as comply with Mr. Hervey’s reasonable request in his recommendatory letter concerning that excellent treatise, The Gospel-mystery of Sanctification. “Only,” says he, “let candour, not rigour, fill the chair, and interpret an unguarded expression or a seemingly inconsistent sentence by the general tenor of the discourse.” The expression, however, of which we now speak, can hardly be called unguarded; as it appears to have been intended by the judicious author to set forth the mystery of saving faith in the very peculiar manner wherein it takes possession of the good of the promise by an act of believing. But it is insisted upon as what cannot be refused without the greatest injustice to Mr. Marshal, that this expression be interpreted according to the general tenor and design of his discourse.

Query XI. “Is not the thing believed a lie? It was not true before
it was believed, as is granted. But believing an untruth to be true cannot make it true. It cannot according to reason: it cannot according to scripture: it cannot according to experience. It was never known, since the world began to produce this effect in any one instance, unless in this case. And we have no evidence from scripture, sense or reason that it ever did in this.”

Answer. What is it that Mr. Bellamy calls a lie? Is it a lie, that a promise of eternal life is exhibited and directed to sinners of mankind indefinitely, to be either believed or disbelieved? Is it a lie, that this promise shall be verified in the experience of such as believe and cordially receive it; but not in the experience of those who disbelieve and reject it? Were some honest, wealthy and generous man to say to his indigent neighbour, “I sincerely make you a grant of a certain valuable estate. It is as much your own as my deed of gift can make it. All that remains in order to your actual possession of it, is, that you accept of it;” and were that neighbour to make this reply; “Sir, that estate is not mine: I despise your grant, and there is no evidence that the estate either is or ever will be mine. Therefore you bid me believe a lie;” every reasonable person would be shocked at the stupidity and baseness of such an insulting answer. And is not the same affront offered to the infinite Majesty of Heaven, to the God of all grace, when the call he gives poor sinners to believe the gospel-promise with application to themselves, is represented as a call to believe a lie? This is, indeed, the sin of unbelief, which makes God a liar, 1 John v. 10, 11.

It may be added here, that such is the high import of this call, (though it be a most glorious display of the Divine condescension) that our falling in with it necessarily implies a supernatural work of the Holy Ghost, bringing us to renounce all carnal and legal confidences; to discern the wisdom, holiness, mercy and faithfulness of God in the gospel-promise exhibiting Christ and his benefits; to discern, also, our right of applying that promise to
ourselves without any hazard of vicious intromission; and to embrace and take it home to ourselves as both true and good; as the everlasting rest of our souls. To represent persons who are truly brought to this holy and spiritual exercise as only flattering themselves with a gross lie, is turning the glory of God’s people into shame with a witness.

Query XII. “Is it not astonishing and one of the most unaccountable things in the world, that a rational creature, with the Bible in his hands, should ever be able to work up himself to believe what he knows is not yet true; and what he knows he has no evidence, that it ever will be true. No wonder these men are so much troubled with doubts. No wonder they are afraid, they believe a lie. No wonder, they are obliged to strive and struggle against this unbelief, a kind of unbelief we no where read of in the Bible: a kind of conflict no saint ever had, that stands on record; as themselves are obliged to own. To struggle daily to believe without any evidence from scripture, sense and reason! As nothing can be plainer than that we ought never to believe any thing with more confidence, than in exact proportion to our evidence; to do otherwise is the most presumptuous thing in the world; and to think, by being thus strong in the faith, we shall give glory to God, is the very first born of delusion, that even Satan himself ever begot in the heart of a fallen creature.”

Answer. While the charge, against Mr. Marshal and others, of teaching men to believe without any evidence, is founded, as we have seen, in the most gross misrepresentation, the passionate aggravations of that charge serve only to expose the folly of the accuser. It seems unnecessary to add to what has been already advanced on the subject of this query. A remark, however, in opposition to the reproach cast upon the doctrine of Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey and others, may not be improper. It may be observed, that, were we to believe the gospel-promise, according to the
degree of evidence attending it, that is, according to the ground we have to believe it, our persuasion of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ would exclude all fear and doubting. It is true, there is often much doubting in the believer; but that is to be imputed not to any defect in the evidence attending the grant or promise of Christ in the external dispensation of the gospel, but only to remaining unbelief and other corruptions, according to such passages of scripture as the following, Psa 1. Ixxvii. 9, 10. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? I said, This is mine infirmity.* Matth. xiv. 31. *Jesus said unto Peter, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* Hence the believer is represented as wrestling against perplexing doubts and fears, Psal. xlii. 11. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Hence it is nothing against the faith inculcated by Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, that those, who have it, are sensible of remaining doubts, are humbled for them, and wrestle against them, often crying out with the father of the child, in Mark ix. 24. *Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief.*
LETTER V.

Of Mr. Bellamy’s account of Saving Faith.

Christian Brethren,

Having considered Mr. Bellamy’s objections against the doctrine of Mr. Hervey, Mr. Marshal and others, who hold that there is an appropriation of Christ to ourselves in the nature of saving faith, we are now to enquire into Mr. Bellamy’s own opinion concerning the nature of saving faith. From the unrelenting severity with which he condemns the labours of others on this subject, we are led to expect a satisfactory determination from himself. But his greatest admirers will hardly say, that there is any thing on this subject in all his letters, dialogues and essays, answerable to such an expectation. He says many things concerning true faith, such as, that it is an holy act; that it is wholly founded in that revelation which is made in the written word; that it is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit; that it is always attended with love to God arising from a sense of the amiableness of his infinite perfections; that the believer is thereby united to Jesus Christ, as the branch to the vine; that men’s backwardness to the exercise of true faith arises from a worldly and self-righteous spirit. These words, taken by themselves, are sound words that cannot be condemned; and had he proved any one of these unquestionable properties of saving faith to be inconsistent with the doctrine of his opponents, he would have justified his opposition to them. But with candid and judicious readers the bare assertion of that inconsistency, without proof, will pass for nothing but calumny.

In the second of Mr. Bellamy’s Dialogues we meet with the following passage.55 “Let me tell you the inspired apostles,” (he might have added, Mr. Hervey, Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston, and

55 Page 71.
others,) “verily believed, that, in the written word, we have, not only full evidence of the truth of the gospel itself, John xx. 31. but also, the truth of the gospel being seen, sufficient encouragement to come unto God through Christ, in full assurance of being accepted through him, Heb. x. 19, 22.” Now these words, in the most natural construction of them, import nothing less than a real persuasion, that God is reconciled to us through Christ; for, unless we have this persuasion, we cannot have a full assurance of being accepted: and this persuasion is here represented as proceeding immediately upon “the truth of the gospel being seen.” One should think, this expression plainly supposes, that any sinner of mankind has a sufficient warrant to believe or trust in the Lord Jesus for his present acceptance with God; and to do so immediately upon “the truth of the gospel being seen;” that is, upon no other ground than what the gospel offer or promise affords. This is exactly Mr. Marshal’s doctrine.

But that Mr. Bellamy was far from resting in this simplicity, appears from his explanation of the encouragement which the gospel affords us to come to God through Christ, in the three following particulars: “1. That God, of his own mere motion, has given his Son to die for such an ill-deserving world as this. 2. That God can consistently with the honour of himself, his law and government, pardon those, who are infinitely ill-deserving, through Jesus Christ his Son. 3. That it is the revealed will of God, that even the vilest and the worst should repent and be converted; should return home to God through Jesus Christ. A clear view and firm belief of these plain gospel truths, gives him the fullest assurance, that he may return home to God; that it is God’s will, he should; and that God stands ready to accept him through Jesus Christ, if he does.”

With regard to the propositions here stated by Mr. Bellamy, it may be observed; that the first two are allowed to be

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56 Dial. 2nd. page 71, 72.
precious truths; but they are only such as many Arminians have admitted, who take the gospel offer to be a new covenant of works, proposing such terms or conditions of life, as they suppose to be more accommodated, than those of the old covenant, to the present weakness of human nature. As to the third, when it is stated as the ground of our faith of salvation through Jesus Christ, it appears to be highly exceptionable. For, in the first place, it is not properly and strictly speaking gospel at all: but only a proposal of a duty of the law. Secondly, it inverts the gospel order: for according to that order, pardon and acceptance with God, through the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone, are the means of our return to God: but, according to Mr. Bellamy’s proposition; our return to God is the means of obtaining acceptance with him.

But some will say, the return to God, of which Mr. Bellamy speaks, is not a legal, but an evangelical work: return home to God by Jesus Christ. We answer, that whatever Mr. Bellamy meant by this expression, he could not mean, that we are to believe our acceptance with God through Jesus Christ, in order to our return to God; for, according to him, our return is the previous condition, upon which God’s acceptance of us is suspended. “God,” says he, “stands ready to accept a sinner, if he return.” But all our works, legal and evangelical, are, by the word of God, excluded from being conditions of our justification or acceptance with God. God imputeth righteousness without works. Thirdly, all the faith, which is warranted by the last of Mr. Bellamy’s propositions just now recited, (being only a belief, that returning to God, through Jesus Christ, is a duty of God’s law; and that whosoever performs this duty rightly, shall be accepted with God through Jesus Christ) is nothing57 which requires the special and saving operation of the Holy Spirit to the production of it. There is no exercise, here, of a

57 In merely believing, that this proposition is true.
poor sinner, who finds himself naked and exposed to God’s everlasting wrath, betaking himself to the law-magnifying and justice-satisfying righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground of pardon and acceptance with God; no exercise of a person, sensible of his utter inability to return unto God, looking to the Lord Jesus for heart-turning grace. The truth is, the account, which is here given by Mr. Bellamy of saving faith, is so lame, that it requires the addition of love, repentance or something else, to give it the appearance of a grace of the Holy Spirit. For nothing is more certain, than that the belief of such propositions as these three of Mr. Bellamy, is nothing more than what may be found in wicked men and even devils. Hence, in disputing against the faith taught by Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, he often introduces something about love to God on account of his infinite amiableness; as if he found fault with these authors for not mentioning the love of God in their definition of faith; or as if he agreed with the Papists in supposing that love, or a disposition to good works, is the form (as they used to speak) of faith, or that which makes it a living faith. But this leads to the erroneous opinion, that a living faith differs not, in its own nature, from a dead faith; but only as it is accompanied with love or repentance. While we firmly maintain that it is by no means true faith, which is not accompanied with a supreme love to God for his infinitely glorious excellencies, and with sincere love to men for his sake; and also with gospel repentance; yet we hold that love and repentance are graces of the Spirit, which, in their formal nature, are distinct from faith; They are enumerated as distinct things, 1 Corinth, xiii. 13. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, love. Acts xx. 21. Testifying—repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Love and repentance are represented as fruits of faith, 1 Timothy i. 5. The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. Zech. xii. 10. They shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall
mourn for him. We are said to receive Christ, and to be justified before God by faith, but not by love or by repentance. In a word, we hold, that saving faith, is, in itself and abstracting from all its concomitant and effects, what none can attain without the special supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling.

What is farther proposed in this letter, is to show more particularly, that we have too much reason to reject Mr. Bellamys doctrine concerning saving faith, on three accounts; because it misrepresents the gospel; because it contradicts the scriptural notion of faith as a receiving, grace; and because it fosters one of the most dangerous evils of our depraved nature.

First, with regard to the gospel, it is made up, according to Mr. Bellamy, of two things: One is, the revelation of certain abstract truths; such as, that God, of his own mere motion, gave his Son to die for those that are infinitely ill-deserving; and that he can consistently with the honour of his law save such through Jesus Christ his Son. The other thing is a declaration, that God is ready to be reconciled to the sinner, upon condition of the sinner’s return to him. There are no promises of the gospel, according to this author, but what are suspended upon the condition of some moral good wrought in us or done by us; and consequently none which a sinner, unconscious of such goodness in himself, has any immediate access to believe or embrace, as directed to him.

But this is, by no means, a just representation of the gospel of our salvation. For, in the first place, the gospel is not merely a proposal of some abstract or historical truths to be believed. For when such truths concerning the person and office of Jesus Christ are declared as good news to sinners, there is always implied and often expressed, as was shown before in the third letter, a free promise of salvation through his name. Thus, when the apostles taught, that Jesus is the true Messiah, they declared, at the same time, that he is the promised seed, in whom all the families or
kindreds of the earth were to be blessed, Acts iii. 25. When they bore testimony that he died and rose again, they likewise preached through his death and resurrection the forgiveness of sins. Nor, in the second place, are the promises of God in Christ exhibited and offered to us in the gospel dispensation to be considered as conditional; but rather as absolutely free to us, the proper condition of them all having been fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ in his obedience unto death: a position which was vindicated in the third letter, and which appears to be sufficiently confirmed by this one consideration; That whatever morally good qualifications have been represented as conditions of the promises, are secured in the promises themselves. Thus, faith is a promised blessing, In his name shall the Gentiles trust. They shall say, the Lord is my God. Repentance, They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn: Love, The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart to love the Lord thy God. Acceptable obedience to God's law, I will put my Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments and do them. The fear of the Lord and perseverance in a holy practice unto the end. I will put my fear into thy heart that thou mayest never depart from me.

We allow, that the word gospel is often taken, in a large sense for the gospel dispensation, including all the commands and threatenings of the law, as these are subservient to the design of the exhibition of the gospel-promise. But when we speak of the gospel, as contradistinguished from the law and as the formal ground of saving faith; then it is no other than a revelation of Jesus Christ, including a free promise of everlasting salvation through his name. The confounding of these two senses seems to be what the papists intended, when they taught, that faith justifies as well by believing the threatenings, the commands and histories of the word, as by believing the promises. This opinion was resolutely opposed by our reformers. For, said they, the life which faith seeks
in God is not to be found in the commands of the word or in the threatenings of punishment, but only in an absolutely free promise; for a conditional promise offers life to those only, who see or feel that they have it in themselves already.\textsuperscript{58} If we would have a firm and unshaken faith, we must build upon those promises of God in which he regards not our worth but our misery; upon his mercy, as revealed in the free message of reconciliation; That \textit{God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them}. A person is not to be called a true believer, because he believes, that the commands of God are just, and his threatenings true; but rather because he apprehends Christ as exhibited in the free promise. Such were the principles upon which our reformers opposed the papists on this head.

Unless the gospel, strictly taken, were such as we have now described it; that is, unless it were a free unconditional promise of salvation through Jesus Christ; it would be no gospel, no glad tidings, to fallen man; who, being dead in trespasses and sins, has no disposition or ability to will or do what is spiritually good. To tell persons in such a case, that they must acquire some good qualifications or perform some conditions, before they have a warrant to look for any benefit from Christ as their Saviour, is as impertinent, as it would be to tell a paralytick, unable to move a hand or a foot, that he might be cured, if he would walk several miles to a certain skilful physician. But some will be ready to say, Is not your own doctrine attended with the same absurdity; since men, in their natural state, are incapable even of that apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, and of that believing application of the free promise, which you allow to be necessary. Answer. The gospel, strictly taken, is adapted to the case of impotent sinners, in regard that it has no commands: for here God hath promised to give us all things belonging to our salvation, not excepting faith

\textsuperscript{58} Promissio conditionalis, says Calvin, \textit{qua ad opera nostra remittimur, non aliter vitam promittit, quam si perspiciamus esse in nobis sitam. Vide Institut. lib. iii. cap. 2d. sect. 29.}
itself, freely for the sake of his beloved Son. And though the law, in subservience to the gospel, enjoins us to believe in Christ as our Saviour; yet there is a great difference between the soul’s compliance with this command, and that performance of previous conditions, which our opponents insist upon. These conditions, according to them, must be performed by sinners before or in order to their having any ground to consider Christ as their own Saviour; and consequently whilst they have no ground to consider him as their righteousness for acceptance or as their strength for performance. But this is by no means the case even in the very first act of that faith which our doctrine inculcates as the immediate duty of every sinner upon hearing the gospel; for in that act Christ is considered as now given to us to be our righteousness and strength. In a word, the difference between the new law requiring certain good qualifications or conditions to give us a right to claim Christ as our own Saviour, and the call which God gives us to receive him as such without money and without price,—is, that the former bids us discharge a duty without Christ; whereas the latter directs us to discharge it in and by him as our only strength.

In the second place, we observe, that Mr. Bellamy’s opinion of saving faith, as it stands opposed to the doctrine of Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, represents faith rather as a giving, than as a receiving grace. Faith, according to Mr. Bellamy, far from taking Christ to itself upon the footing of a free grant, makes no claim to him but what is founded upon its reconciliation of heart to the law of God; upon its love to God on account of his infinite amiableness; upon its disposition to return home to God. But it is the distinguishing character of true faith in Jesus Christ, that it is a receiving, self-emptying grace. It is nothing in or of itself: its all is in and from its glorious object. The language of it is; O our God, we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee. In the Lord Jesus Christ, not in myself, have I righteousness and strength. By
faith a person, considering himself no otherwise than as a child of fallen Adam, ignorant, guilty, unholy and subject to innumerable miseries, receives Christ Jesus as made of God to him, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. When the person takes Christ and all these blessings to himself by true faith, the ground he proceeds upon in doing so, is not his consciousness of any good wrought in him or done by him, but only the grant, the free and unconditional grant, which a gracious God in Christ makes, of all in the word of the gospel. In this way, the believer begins to be a partaker of Christ and of spiritual blessings in him. All the graces of the Spirit are among these blessings. Hence it is more proper to say, that the other graces suppose faith, than to say, that faith supposes them. Faith goes to God in Christ for love, pleading such a promise, as that in Deuteron. xxx. 6. The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart to love the Lord thy God.—For repentance, pleading such a promise as that in Zechar. xii. 10. They shall mourn for him:—for new obedience, pleading such a promise as that in Zechar, x. 12. I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord. Thus, Faith may be considered as receiver general for all the other graces. By this property faith is distinguished from all the other graces of the Spirit. For, while they bring some offering to God; love, for example, brings gracious desires; repentance, a broken and contrite heart; zeal, a holy courage to wrestle against all our spiritual enemies; faith comes empty-handed to receive out of the fulness of Christ what is necessary for the preservation, exercise and increase of itself and of all the other graces.

In the third place, Mr. Bellamy’s doctrine in opposition to that of Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey in relation to the ground of saving faith, is favourable to the legal bias of man’s heart. For though a person be brought to some acknowledgment of the insufficiency of his own righteousness and of the necessity of the righteousness of Christ for the purpose of justification before God; yet, under the
influence of this corrupt principle, that the person’s inherent righteousness or good qualifications are his only warrant for any application of Christ’s righteousness to his own case, the legal pride of the heart will continue in its full strength: because his own righteousness is hereby still allowed to be the ground of his hope of acceptance with God through the righteousness of Christ; and he is still departing from the gospel plan of justification by free grace through faith; a plan, which will not allow us to consider our personal holiness otherwise than as an effect of justification.

Mr. Bellamy’s opinion about saving faith has led him to give the following representation of legalism. “The chief difficulty,” says he, “in the way of true faith, is for the sinner, distressed with the fears of eternal damnation, to yield the point, not only that the law does in fact require sinless perfection on pain of eternal damnation, and that he is under the curse of the law; but that this law is holy, just and good, and so he is justly condemned; and, in fact, in the hands and at the disposal of a sovereign God. This—this—a proud self-righteous spirit is diametrically opposite unto.” Mr. Bellamy’s opinion about saving faith has led him to give the following representation of legalism. “The chief difficulty,” says he, “in the way of true faith, is for the sinner, distressed with the fears of eternal damnation, to yield the point, not only that the law does in fact require sinless perfection on pain of eternal damnation, and that he is under the curse of the law; but that this law is holy, just and good, and so he is justly condemned; and, in fact, in the hands and at the disposal of a sovereign God. This—this—a proud self-righteous spirit is diametrically opposite unto.”

He has a great deal to the same purpose in the ninth section of his essay. And it is undoubtedly true, that whilst persons are under the reigning power of a legal or self-righteous spirit, they will by no means be reconciled to the purity and spirituality of the precepts or to the inflexible justice of the threatenings of the law, especially as applied to their own case; and that they will set themselves to excuse and extenuate their sins. Legalism, we allow, is attended, with the evil which Mr. Bellamy here describes, but is not formally constituted by it. Legalism is men’s natural disposition to depend on their inherent righteousness or personal conformity to the law, as the ground of their justification before God; or to seek life in the way of the covenant of works. This disposition was not culpable in man, whilst he continued upright; because it was then the revealed

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59 Dialogue 2d. page 77.
will of God, that man should live by doing or his personal obedience. But, in fallen men, this disposition argues ignorance both of God and of themselves; and, in those who enjoy the gospel-dispensation, it implies unbelief and contempt of Christ and his righteousness. In scripture, legalism is represented as men’s desire to be under the law, as the bent of their heart to establish their own righteousness, as their seeking righteousness by the works of the law, in opposition to their seeking it by faith.

How great is the malignity of this corruption! It is the principal cause of men’s enmity against the gospel plan of salvation. For so ignorant are they of God’s holy nature and perfect law; so insensible of their guilt and spiritual impotence; and so elated with an opinion of the moral goodness which, they think, they either have attained or are capable of attaining, that nothing is more offensive to them, than the doctrine which directs them to come to Christ as miserable sinners. Nor can a greater affront be offered to them than to tell them, that, with regard to the right of access to Christ, or the ground of dependance on him for salvation, they must account all their duties and good qualifications but loss and dung, and allow themselves to be on a level with the greatest criminals. Legalism attempts to frustrate the Lord’s design both in the giving of the law and in the preaching of the gospel. The law was given to humble the sinner and to destroy the conceit of his own righteousness. But legalism abuses the law to the fostering of that proud conceit. The gospel is preached, that the free grace of God in Christ may reign in our justification and in every other part of our salvation, to the utter exclusion of creature-boasting. But legalism makes the death of Christ a footstool for the advancement of self-righteousness. Christ died, says legalism, that our virtuous endeavours and devout exercises may be accepted with God, either

60 Gal. iv. 21.
61 Rom. x. 3.
62 Rom. ix. 32.
as constituting our justifying righteousness or as entitling us to it.

What renders this evil so peculiarly fatal is the subtilty of it, and the plausible appearances which it assumes. It is indeed a dictate of man’s reason and conscience, that God will deal with him according to his works. But the delusion lies in supposing that this principle is sufficient to direct us, in our present sinful and miserable condition, to the attainment of the Divine favour. Men are led by the legal bias of their hearts to think, that there is no sufficient motive to a holy practice, without the consideration of it as the ground or condition of their justification before God: and they are often confirmed in this notion by the fair appearances of regular deportment and sometimes of devout exercises, that seem to be attained under the influence of legal principles: though no such attainments can exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, Matth. v. 20.

But the subtlety of this evil appears, especially in the dominion that it retains over many who, under an evangelical profession of an entire dependance on the righteousness of Christ, are living upon their duties, their convictions, their frames and feelings, as the ground of their hope, of their peace and comfort. Indeed, those who have never had any humbling sense of this legal disposition to rely on something which they feel or do, instead of relying singly on him whose name is the Lord our righteousness; and who have not found themselves under the necessity of applying to the throne of grace for deliverance from it; have, reason to consider themselves as still under its accursed dominion. All that secure generation who are settled upon their lees, having never been emptied from vessel to vessel, and who appear at this day to make up the bulk of the visible church, are of this class. In fine, the subtlety and strength of this evil appears in the case of believers themselves, who, though they are no more under its dominion as to

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63 That is, the sediment of wine in the barrel; dregs.
their state, yet, in their exercise, often find it stealing upon them, and disposing them to build upon something in themselves, instead of building only upon Christ exhibited in the gospel. Hence they are apt todote on lively frames and sensible manifestations, while they are continued, and to be unduly cast down, when they are withheld.
LETTER VI.

Remarks upon a passage in a late publication. The doctrine of Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey concerning the nature of true Faith the same with that of our Old Reformers.

Christian Brethren,

It may be useful to observe how ill the ablest opposers of the doctrine of an appropriating faith have succeeded in their attempts to give such a definition of saving faith as would exclude the notion of appropriation. Some have called it a consent of the heart to be saved by Christ and to submit to his government. But this definition, understood as excluding appropriation, was found to be totally unauthorized by the scriptural acceptation of the word; and to confound faith with love and other graces. We have been told, that Mr. Baxter had given some such definition of faith; but that, in one of his later publications, he says, “I formerly believed the formal nature of faith to lie in consent: but now I recant it: I believe it lies in trust.” Some have defined faith to be no more than an assent to some speculative propositions; such as, that Christ is the Son of God; that he suffered for the sins of the elect; that he makes intercession for them. But such a faith may be found in devils and in many reprobates, and is manifestly inadequate to many of the phrases, by which saving faith is expressed in scripture; such as, receiving Christ himself, trusting in him, coming to him. When some of these writers have admitted the notion of trust into their definition of faith, they could not oppose the appropriation taught by Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston and others, without inconsistency. The following passages of a late
publication\textsuperscript{64} may serve to exemplify this remark.

“The belief of the truth revealed in the scriptures,” says the author of that publication, “is saving faith: for saving faith is represented as a real belief of the word of the gospel, a persuasion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, or that God hath raised him from the dead, on the ground of what is written of him in the scriptures, Mark xvi. 16. John xx. 31. Luke viii. 12. Matth. xvi. 17. Rom. x. 9.”

Answer. It is granted, that saving faith is a belief of the truth revealed in the scriptures concerning Christ Jesus; but it does not follow, that it is \textit{not} a belief of the promise of salvation through him as directed to us; because this promise is a great and essential part of that truth; Acts ii. 39. Rom. iv. 14. Gal. iii. 18, 21. Heb. iv. 1,2. When a belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that he rose from the dead, is spoken of as saving faith, it must be understood, not as excluding, but rather as including the belief of the gospel-promise.\textsuperscript{65} Thus, \textit{“the name of Christ”} as Calvin observes on John xx. 31. and on 1 John v. 1. “comprehends all the offices which the prophets ascribe to him; and to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to hope for all the good things which are promised as resulting from those offices. Jesus cannot be received as the Christ without looking for salvation from him; since for this end he was sent by the Father and is now offered to us.” “And,” says another of our reformers in Marlorate’s collection, “Christ is proposed as the object of faith; for in him it finds righteousness, life and every desirable blessing, even the whole Godhead.” Farther, says the same writer on Rom. x. 9. “when we believe, that Christ was raised

\textsuperscript{64} The Gospel worthy of all acceptation by Mr. Fuller. It is with no small regret, that the writer of these letters finds himself under the necessity of opposing an author who has done excellent service to the cause of truth by his letters on the Moral tendency of the Calvinistick and Socinian Systems.

\textsuperscript{65} The terms, which the Scripture uses in speaking of saving faith, are sometimes such as signify knowledge, Isai. liii. 11. or assent, John, vii. 24. Sometimes such as signify confidence, Heb. iii. 6. According to the Hebrew idiom, words signifying knowledge are often to be taken as comprehending in their signification the affections of the heart; and therefore when faith is termed knowledge or assent, we are to consider confidence as included; as, on the other hand, when it is termed confidence, we are to understand knowledge and assent as included. Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Disput. xxxi. Sect. 17.
from the dead, we believe that he made satisfaction for our sins; and that he reigns in heaven in order that he may form us to his own image.”

“In Heb. xi. 6.” says the author of the above mentioned publication, “there are three different exercises of the mind: first believing, that God is; secondly, believing, that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; thirdly, coming to him; and the last is represented as an effect of the former two. The same may be applied to Christ. He that cometh to Christ must believe the gospel-testimony, that he is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners; he must also believe the gospel-promise, that he will bestow eternal salvation on all them that obey him; and under the influence of this persuasion, he comes to him, commits himself to him, or trusts the salvation of his soul in his hands.”

Answer. As to the truths mentioned in the first and second steps of this process, we allow that the belief of them is necessarily implied or included in every act of saving faith; but for any to hold, that the belief of them constitutes that faith, while they are considered merely as speculative truths and as having no more relation to the person believing than what they have to any other intelligent being, would be a pernicious error. For such a belief is neither answerable to the gospel, as including a free grant of the good which it reveals, nor to the scripture representations of saving faith, as a receiving of Christ, as a confiding in him for all our salvation. As to the last particular of the process, this writer seems to consider it rather as “the immediate effect of faith, than as faith itself.” So that according to him, there is nothing in the faith itself of true Christians, abstracting from its immediate effect, that is sufficient to distinguish it from the faith of wicked men or devils. It cannot be allowed, that this notion of saving faith receives any countenance from the text in Heb. xi. 6. The apostle there declares, that it was by means of faith, that Enoch attained such a singular
testimony of the Divine acceptance of his person and service: adding that he must have obtained it by means of faith and not otherwise; because there never was nor could be any coming unto God or acceptable worship given to him, without a belief of his being and goodness answerable to the revelation that he makes of himself. The faith of this truth, that God is, as it is matter of a special revelation made by God himself, is to be carefully distinguished from the knowledge of the same truth by the light of nature. The latter is a remainder of the impression of God, which man received in his creation: the former is a supernatural belief or apprehension of God as a reconciled God in Christ; and it is in consequence of this belief, that any of fallen mankind, either diligently seek him, or have any well-grounded expectation of a reward of grace from him. In like manner our belief answerable to the gospel-revelation of Christ, is our belief in him as our own Saviour, our Prophet, Priest and King.

This writer seems, however, to waver in his opinion: “Let it be granted,” says he, “that a real belief of the gospel is not merely a matter presupposed in saving faith, but that it enters into the essence of it, and he will be far from contending for the exclusion of trust or dependance.” Does this writer mean by these words that he is far from excluding trust or dependance from the essence of saving faith? If he does so, he retracts what he had said before. To say, that trust belongs to the essence of saving faith is a very different thing from saying, that trust belongs to it, as an immediate effect belongs to its cause. He needs not ask those, who hold the same doctrine on this head with Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey, to grant, that a real belief of the gospel enters into the essence of saving faith; since they admit nothing into their definition of saving faith, but what is necessarily included in the belief of the gospel; for as, according to them, a free promise directed to sinners of mankind, is essential to the gospel? so it is absolutely impossible for that promise to be really believed by the
persons to whom it is directed, without trust or dependance.

This writer enquires, “what it is for which a sinner is warranted to trust in Christ?” His answer is, “For the obtaining of mercy incase he applies for it.” And how is he to apply for it? To answer by trusting in Christ, would be to commit a ridiculous circle; as if our trust in Christ for the obtaining of, mercy were the ground of our trust in him: and to answer, by our desire of him or by any other good act or feeling, would still make that desire, that act of feeling, and not the gospel revelation of the mercy of God in Christ, the immediate ground of our trust. This evil of making faith build upon itself or upon some other supposed good acts or feelings in ourselves, as the supposed condition of salvation by Jesus Christ, poisons all the definitions and descriptions of saving faith, from which a direct and immediate application of Christ, and of the mercy of God in him upon the ground of the gospel-promise, is excluded.

In vain will any attempt to retort this absurdity, upon the scriptural account of saving faith given by our first reformers, and, after them, by Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston and others. Because the faith of a free unconditional promise, suitable to the perishing condition of the sinner, finds even previous to all reflexion upon its own act, an immediate and complete rest in the promise itself and in the glorious object therein exhibited.

“Let it be considered,” says this writer, “what it was for which a sinner was warranted or obliged to trust? Was it that Christ would save him, whether he believed in him or not?” To this we answer, that, though Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston and others caution us against building upon our act of believing, as the proper condition of our salvation; yet nothing was farther from the design of their discourses and writings, than to lead men to think “that Christ would save them, whether they believed in him or not.” They constantly taught, that it is one of the first parts of that salvation,
that we partake of by Christ, to be delivered from unbelief and to be enabled to believe in him; that we are to trust in him for this faith, as well as for the other graces of the Spirit; and that it is by means of this faith, and not otherwise, that we are to attain the possession and enjoyment of all the other parts of our salvation.

We need not be surprised, if we meet with severe censures on account of our adherence to the doctrine of an appropriating faith. This is no new or strange thing. The sarcasm of Julian, the Roman emperor, is well known. “The jargon of believing” said that apostate, “is all the science to be learned in the Christian school.” The papists used to call our first reformers Solifidianis, and the appropriating faith taught by them, figmentum Lutheri, Luther’s fiction; and amentissima insania, the height of madness.66

The doctrine concerning the nature of faith maintained in the preceding letters, has been called Marrow-doctrine; a term sometimes used by way of reproach, as if this doctrine had been first broached about the middle of the seventeenth century by the author of a book, entitled, The Marrow of Modern Divinity. But this imputation of novelty is sufficiently confuted by that book itself, it being nothing else but an honest representation of the evangelical doctrine of our reformers, such as, Luther, Calvin, Musculus, Beza, Tindal, Fox and others; a judicious collection of testimonies being also added in Mr. Boston’s notes.67 To the same purpose it may not be improper to add here a quotation from Altingius’s explication of the Heidelberg Catechism; a book which was written a considerable time before the Marrow of Modern Divinity; and which expresses

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66 See Arrowsmith’s Tactica Sacra, lib. ii. cap. 7.
67 Luther, in his commentary on the epistle to the Galatians, often expresses the deep sense he had of the necessity and importance of this doctrine. On chap. i. 4. he says: “Except thou be found in the number of those that say, Our sins; who have this doctrine; and teach, hear, learn, love and believe the same, there is no salvation for thee.” On chap. ii. 20. “Read,” says he, “with great vehemence these words, me and for me; and so inwardly practise with thyself, that, with a sure faith, thou mayst conceive and print this word me in thy heart, and apply it unto thyself.” This appropriation is strongly expressed in Calvin’s definition of faith: “It is,” says he, “a firm and certain knowledge of the Divine good will towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the free promise in Christ, is both revealed in our mind and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” Institut. lib. ii. chap. 2d. sect. 7.
the doctrine taught by our reformers in general on this head.

“True faith,” says that valuable writer, “is distinguished by a sure trust or fiducial apprehension of Christ and all his benefits as exhibited in the promise of the gospel. That there is such a trust or confidence in true faith is proved.”

“1. From all those places of scripture, in which faith or believing is put for confiding or trusting, John xiv. 1. *Ye believe in God, believe also in me.* And ix. 36. *Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?* Acts xxvii. 25. *Be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me,* Rom. x. 10. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.* In all these places to believe signifies to confide or trust. In other places where the word faith is used, it plainly means confidence or trust. Matth. ix. 22. *Thy faith hath saved thee,* meaning the faith of the woman who had the bloody issue; the faith by which she said within herself, *If I shall only touch his garment, I shall be healed.* Matth. xv. 28. *O woman, great is thy faith.* Acts xiv. 9. *Paul perceived, that the impotent man had faith to be healed.* Rom. i. 17; *He that is just by his faith, shall live.”

“2. From the appellations which are given to true faith, declarative of its nature: such as, *a full persuasion,* Rom. iv. 21. *boldness or freedom of speech,* Heb. iv. 16. *being of good comfort;* Matth. ix. 2. *rejoicing or glorying,* Rom. v. 2. Heb. iii. 6.”

“3. From the most remarkable descriptions of it which occur in scripture, Heb. xi. 1. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* The Greek word here translated substance, is rendered confidence in the same epistle, chap. iii. 6, 14. and in 2 Corinth, ix. 4. xi. 17. Faith is said in Rom. iv. 20, 21. to be that by which a person does not doubt of God’s promise through unbelief, but gives glory to God by a firm persuasion, that he who hath promised is able also to perform.”

“4. From those things which are in scripture opposed to true faith, as its contraries: such as, distrust, doubting, fear. Matth. xiv.

“5. The formal nature of true and saving faith lies in that by which it is distinguished from all other sorts of faith: But by a sure trust in or fiducial apprehension of Christ true and saving faith is so distinguished; particularly, from historical faith which produces fear and despair, James ii. 19.—from temporary faith, which has no root, does not receive and retain the word of the gospel in an honest and good heart, Luke viii. 13, 15.—from the faith of miracles which does not make any partakers of Christ, Matth. vii. 22, 23.”

“For these reasons we conclude, that the formal nature of faith lies in a sure trust in or fiducial apprehension of Christ, as exhibited to us in the gospel-promise.”

It may be of use to add here from the same author the substance of his answers to two questions.

The first question is, Whether there are not true believers who have little confidence, and who labour under many doubts and fears?

Answer. “When we describe faith as a firm assent and a sure trust, we describe what it ought to be according to the rule of God’s word; that we may be brought to a humbling sense of the weakness and defects of our faith as our sin, and to aspire after an increase of this grace. God grants a certain measure of faith to every believer, Rom. xii.3. and the Spirit distributes his gifts to every one severally as he will, 1 Corinth, xii. 11. Hence the great faith of some is commended, Mat. viii. 10. xv. 18. The little faith of others is reproved, Mat. viii. 28. xiv. 31. There are none in the militant church whose faith is free from defect or infirmity, Rom. xi. 20. 1 Corinth, xiii. 12. Now we see through a glass darkly:—we know but in part. Meanwhile, a weak or little faith may be true faith; just as a weak and sickly man is truly a man. Such a faith is justifying; for faith justifies, not because it is strong; but because it apprehends
Christ as the Lord our righteousness, in the word of promise. The struggle, which is experienced, in essaying to maintain this fiducial apprehension of Christ, is a sign, that, though there is much remaining unbelief, it does not reign; and that there is in the soul a lively and efficacious principle of faith captivating the understanding and the will to a subjection to the authority of God in his word. This doctrine is confirmed by many sweet promises, Isai. xlii. 3. Mat. v. 6. John vi. 35, 37. and by many comfortable declarations, Philip, iii. 12. Gal. iv. 9. and also by this rational consideration; that the variations of any thing, in respect of degrees, do not alter its nature: so the nature of faith is the same amidst its various degrees of strength or weakness, of increase or decrease.”

The second question is, How could the apostle distinguish trust or confidence from faith, Ephes. iii. 12. if the formal nature of faith lies in trust.

Answer. “Trust or confidence is not always in scripture taken in the same sense. First, it is sometimes put for the object of confidence or the thing trusted in, Job xviii. 14. His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle: that is, his children or wealth. Secondly, it is put for fiducial assent or persuasion, as in 2 Corinth, i. 15. In this confidence, that is, being persuaded. Heb. xiii. 18. We trust we have a good conscience, that is, we, are persuaded. Thirdly, sometimes it is put for the comfortable sense of security or freedom from danger, which is the effect of persuasion. Job xi. 18. Thou shalt be secure. The original word signifies, Thou shalt trust, or, as the Geneva translation has it, Thou shalt be full of confidence. Confidence belongs to the essence of faith in the second sense, or, as signifying a persuasion, that God makes us a grant of Christ and of eternal life in him. In the third sense, the word confidence seems to be used in Ephes. iii. 12. as signifying that composed rest and establishment of mind, which is the immediate effect of faith,
according to its measure; and which is manifested by what is there called \textit{boldness}, or \textit{liberty of speech}, in drawing near to God. But if it be considered, that this security is the effect, not only of our reflection upon the direct act of faith, but of that act itself; (\textit{we have boldness and confidence}, it is not said by the knowledge or consciousness of our faith, but \textit{by our faith} itself;) we will find here a convincing proof, that faith discerns Christ, not only as a Mediator in general, but as a Mediator for us in particular, procuring for us peace with God and introduction into his gracious presence; for no other faith can produce this boldness and confidence.”
LETTER VII.

On the Gospel-revelation of God as reconciled in Christ.

Christian Brethren,

Arminius and his followers, whose peculiar tenets were justly condemned in the celebrated synod which met at Doit in the year 1618, represented this as the whole immediate effect of the death of Christ, that, justice being satisfied, God might, consistently with his honour, grant pardon and reconciliation on such terms, as he should see fit; and that it might be possible for God, either to detain the captives or to set them at liberty. By the death of Christ, said they, God is reconcileable to all men, but reconcile to none.68

68 Morte Christi, ait Arminius, factum est, ut Deus jam possit, justitia non obstante, hominibus peccatoribus peccata remittere, et Spiritum gratiae largiri. Interea jus suum integrum manet, illa bona, illis quibus visum, et istis conditionibus quas praescribere volet, impartiri.

It is pity to see some, who profess adherence to the evangelical doctrine of the Reformation, warping so much to the Arminian scheme on this head. Some have taught, that God might, in strict justice, withhold grace and glory from those for whom Christ died. How can this opinion consist with what the scripture teaches about Christ’s giving himself a ransom for many, and laying down his life for the sheep, as their Surety? Matth. xi. 28 John x. 11, 15. Heb. vii. 22. When an adequate satisfaction is once given by the Surety, the persons, on whose behalf it is given, are, in strict justice acquitted: grace and glory are theirs, in strict justice, as merited by that satisfaction: because he and they are one, in the eye of the law.

Would it be a sufficient declaration of the truth in this matter, to say, that the satisfaction or righteousness of Jesus Christ opens the way for the exercise of mercy in such methods as the wisdom of God sees fit to adopt? By no means. Were the righteousness of Christ no more than a satisfaction to the penalty of the broken law, there might be some pretence for saying, that it only opened the way for exercise of mercy by the removal of the curse. But his righteousness is also a complete fulfilment of the precept, considered as the condition of eternal life, in the stead of his people. In this view, it is called, his obedience; and gives them legal security for all the blessings of that life, Rom. v. 19.

This is more evident by considering, that, in point of merit, the obedience of Christ is infinitely superior to that of man before the fall. The merit of the first Adam was only improper merit; as, if He had continued upright, his title to eternal life would have risen, not from the worth of his obedience, but from the promise of the covenant of works. Whereas the merit of the second Adam’s obedience is most proper, its intrinsic value being such as entitles to eternal life, according to strict justice. Hence his blood is called precious blood; the blood and righteousness of God; that is, a righteousness wrought out in our nature by him who is the true God, whose name alone is Jehovah, 1 Pet i. 19. Acts xx. 28. Rom. iii. 22. And will any Christian deny that grace and glory are due, in strict justice, to this astonishing righteousness?

It seems improper to speak of the righteousness of Christ as opening the way for some other methods which God may adopt of exercising his mercy; a mode, of expression borrowed from the Arminians, implying that we have ground to expect that God will adopt some other methods of exercising mercy as additional to that of exercising it through the blood of Christ; or rather that this is only an introduction to those other methods. Mercy is exercised through the blood of Christ in the pardon of sin, Ephes. i. 7. in adopting of poor sinners into the family of God, Gal. iv. 5. in their sanctification, 1 Pet. ii. 24. in bringing them at last to the full enjoyment of eternal life, Rom. v. 21. The Bible knows no other method, nor gives us ground to expect that any other will ever be adopted. The Arminian method for which, they say, the blood of Christ opened the way, is a new law or covenant of works, directly opposite to God’s method of exercising mercy, Rom. iii. 27, 28. iv. 5. xi. 6.
In a similar manner, Mr. Bellamy speaks of God’s willingness to be reconciled upon their return to him. “The gospel,” according to him, “is glad tiding, that, through Christ, God is ready to be reconciled to the returning penitent.”69 “God” says he in another place, “to testify his approbation and infinite delight in the

But it is said, that the salvation of sinners is not a commercial transaction; that sin is not a debt, but a crime. Sin is called in scripture a debt and sinners debtors; designations, which may be of much use in directing us to right apprehensions of Christ’s suretyship and satisfaction. To say that Christ paid our debt, when he bore our griefs and carried our sorrow’s, is sound speech, that cannot be condemned. Nor is it any way inconsistent with our doctrine on this head, that some things may be said of a private debt, that would not correspond with what we believe concerning the punishment of sin. A creditor may dispense with the payment of such a debt. But the holiness and justice of God, and the honour of his moral government of the world, render the punishment of sin indispensably necessary. For he cannot deny himself. But this only tends to the fuller establishment of our doctrine; as it shows, that no other righteousness could be accepted of God, as the ground of our justification, but such as, in strict justice, would entitle us to that and all the other blessings of grace and glory. Our salvation, through such a righteousness, is not only in some way consistent with the justice of God, but, as the apostle says, Rom. iii. 25. declares it, glorifies and sets it in the most conspicuous and illustrious point of view.

But how is this righteousness of Christ peculiar to the elect, since it is as sufficient for others as for them; and as suitable to the case of other sinners as to theirs?
The sufficiency and the suitableness of this righteousness, together with the free offer or grant of it to sinners of mankind indefinitely, are the grounds upon which the hearers of the gospel are called to believe in it for their salvation. But this setting forth of Christ and his righteousness to these hearers, whilst it is not embraced by faith, is no evidence of their belonging to the number of those for whom Christ died: for they only are of that number, who are in him as their federal head; an in-being in him, which is an impenetrable secret; till it be manifested by the Holy Spirit working faith in their hearts, and thereby vitally uniting them to him in their effectual calling.

But it is said, that in this case there will be no room for free remission with respect to the Father.
Here we may observe a difference between pecuniary debts and the debt of punishment. In the former case, the payment of a debt by a surety, or one that gives bail, is agreeable to, the letter of the law, as well as the payment of it by the debtor himself; it being all one to the creditor. But as to punishment, the law in its rigor, says, the same person that sinned should suffer. Here then the grace of the Father is manifested, in his not insisting upon the terms of the law, that sinners should suffer, the punishment of their own sin; but admitting it to be transferred to the person of Christ, or condescending to consider Christ and the elect as one, and to regard them as suffering and satisfying offended justice in him. Thus the grace of the Father appears in admitting, and also in providing a Surety for poor sinners. But the Surety being once admitted, and his satisfaction being adequate, he having suffered the whole punishment due to the sins of his people, the remission of sin, is, with regard to him, a matter of strict justice; whilst it is to be altogether of free grace. These two are still represented as harmonizing in the forgiveness of our sins through the satisfaction of Christ, 1 John i. 8. Rom. iii. 26. Besides, all the grace manifested by the Son in the remission of sin, is also the grace of the Father; for he and the Father are one.
The covenant of grace having been made from eternity among the persons of the Godhead, and the Son having, according to his undertaking, perfectly fulfilled the condition of that covenant, the accomplishment of all the promises, is due to him, in strict justice, according to that blessed council of peace.
Nothing is added or given to the perfection of the Divine Being by the righteousness of Christ: nor is any change ascribed to God by what is now said concerning the effect of that righteousness; the change is only in the relation of the creature to God.

But if grace and glory be due, in strict justice, to Christ, on account of his law-magnifying righteousness, and to his people in him, how is their faith still necessary?
We answer, faith is an eminent fruit of this righteousness; and the mean of our possessing it to our actual justification, terminating on the conscience: it is also an eminent accomplishment of the promise, and the mean by which we embrace all the promises as yea and amen in Christ. It is the spiritual organ by which Christ and the good of the promise in him are received and enjoyed, while we are in the present imperfect state. Without faith and the fruits of it, we have no evidence of our being among those for whom Christ died and rose again.

69 Dialogue p. 110.
obedience and sacrifice of his Son, becomes, ready to be reconciled to any how vile soever, who repent and return.” On the contrary, the Divines whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, teach, that God is revealed in the gospel as reconciled in Christ. By this expression it is not meant, that any change takes place in the nature or will of God, but only that the infinite justice; which necessarily belongs to him as the judge of all the earth, having been abundantly glorified by the satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ, his good-will towards man has obtained a full and honourable vent; and that all the spiritual blessings, proceeding from his special love to a certain number of mankind-sinners, are infallibly secured to them by that satisfaction, without any other procuring cause.

That Mr. Bellamy’s expression just now mentioned is injurious to the truth of the gospel appears from such considerations as the following.

1. The immediate effect of the death of Christ is not a possibility of reconciliation, but reconciliation itself. The reconciliation, effected by the death of Christ, includes both the appeasing of God’s wrath against us and the procuring of the removal or slaying of our enmity against God. The former of these two things appears to be meant by this expression of the apostle: *For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*, Rom. v. 10. which words are not to be understood of our conversion; for that is intended by the following words, *We shall saved by his life; conversion being more immediately the effect of Christ’s life than of his death; and being here as plainly distinguished from our reconciliation by his death, as the effect from the cause. Hence in the Syriac, which is the most ancient translation extant of the New Testament, the first clause of this verse is rendered, *God is reconciled to us by the death of his Son*. It is usual in Scripture to say, the offender is reconciled, even when the thing most directly

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70 Essay on the nature, &c.
meant is that the offended party is appeased. Thus in Matth. v. 24. our Lord directs a person, who remembers, that his brother, hath ought against him, to go and be reconciled to his brother, that is, to endeavour, by offering satisfaction, to turn away or appease his brother’s anger. In the same sense, the wife, that had deserted her husband, is enjoined to be reconciled to him, I Corinth, vii. 11. When God is said to be a God of peace, and to be in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; nothing less can be meant, than that he is reconciled in Christ.

Objection. God is not reconciled to all men. Those that believe not are condemned already; the wrath of God abideth on them: God is angry with them every day.

Answer. There are two ways wherein God reveals himself to fallen men. One of these ways is that of the covenant of works. Here he reveals himself as condemning every sinner, that is, all mankind considered as in their natural state. Every child of Adam, as such, is a child of wrath. By this covenant, in itself, we cannot know that God is either reconcilable or reconciled. Nothing is revealed here but the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Hence we need not wonder, that the scripture so often declares all, that are under this broken covenant, all unbelievers or persons out of Christ, to be under the wrath and curse of God. The other way, in which God reveals himself to fallen men, is, that of the covenant of grace: wherein he regards men no otherwise than as they are in his beloved Son, in whom he is ever well pleased or entirely reconciled.

If it be said, that in the calls of the gospel, God proclaims that he is willing to be reconciled to those that, persisting in their unbelief, are still under the covenant of works.

We answer, that the word of God represents him as irreconcilable to men, according to the tenor of the broken covenant of works; but as entirely reconciled to them, when they
are found betaking themselves to the covenant of grace. The willingness of God revealed in the calls given to unbelievers, is not a willingness to be appeased or reconciled, as if something remained to be done by way of expiation or satisfaction for sin; but a willingness, that they should renounce the covenant of works, and betake themselves to the covenant of grace; a willingness, that they should know and acknowledge God according to the gospel revelation of him, as a reconciled God in Christ.71

2. The view that saving faith obtains of God in the glass of the gospel, is a view of him, not as reconcilable, but as actually reconciled. Faith apprehends God as in Christ reconciling us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us. The language of faith is not, that God is, on his part, willing to be reconciled; and that I must do something, on mine to reconcile him; but that he is already manifesting himself as a God of peace through Jesus Christ, who made peace by the blood of his cross As soon as we have the least grain of true faith, the face of God begins to appear mild, serene and propitious to us. As we make progress in the exercise of faith, our views of his amiable countenance become more clear and distinct. Though believers during the present state, labour under much ignorance of God in Christ; yet so certain and so efficacious is the sight, which in believing, they obtain, of the glory of the Lord, that they are, more and more, changed into the same image.72

3. This view of the gospel of Christ, as if it represented God as only reconcilable, not reconciled, flatters men’s legal pride, and derogates from the perfection of the satisfaction of Christ. Is God, as yet, only reconcilable to us? Is he not reconciled by the death of his Son? By what other means is he to be at last, reconciled? Why,

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71 The substance of what is here advanced is expressed by Dr. Owen in the following words of His Theologoumena: Omnis Dei revelatio ad faedus aliquod pertinet. Duo autem sunt faedora Deum inter et homines; operum unum, gratiae alterum. Ex prioris faederis tenore Deus placabilis non est. Revelatio ad posterius pertinens, non Deum placabilis, sed placatum, reconciliatum et mundum sibi reconciliatam, praedicari debet.

72 2 Corinth. iii. 18. Calvin’s Institutions, chap. ii. sect. 19.
says Mr. Bellamy, by our repenting and returning home to him. Thus, it would seem, that, by Christ’s obedience unto death, God is only ready to be reconciled: but by our own good exercises the work is accomplished: God is actually reconciled. A very subordinate part is thus ascribed to what Christ hath done and suffered; while the glory of turning away the wrath of God from us is ascribed to our inherent righteousness.

4. If the gospel represented God as only reconcilable, not reconciled, it would afford us no ground at all for the hope of salvation. The doctrine, which makes any works of righteousness done by us the federal or proper condition of our reconciliation to God, is destitute of any foundation in the word of God. But supposing that God should offer to be reconciled to us upon condition of our thinking one thought truly and spiritually good; our case would still be hopeless. For as we have no natural ability to think such a thought, so we have no ground to expect that an unreconciled God will give us the least crumb of saving grace, by which we might be enabled to think it. In fine, this truth, that God is reconciled in Christ, is at the bottom of every communication of his grace to us, and of every good motion of our souls towards him.
LETTER VIII.

Of Marks or Evidences of a state of Grace.

Christian Brethren,

Mr. Marshal and the other divines, whom Mr Bellamy opposes, are very careful to distinguish between the assurance of salvation which is in the direct act of faith, and assurance, that we are already in a gracious state. “Observe diligently” says Mr Marshal, “that the assurance directed unto is not an assurance that we have already received Christ and his salvation, or that we have been already brought into a state of grace; but only that God is pleased graciously to give Christ and his salvation unto us, and to bring us into a state of grace; though we have been altogether in a state of sin and death, until the present time. So that this doctrine doth not at all tend to breed presumption in wicked and unregenerate men, that their state is good already; but only encourageth to come to Christ confidently for a good state.” “Mark well,” says the same author in another place, “the difference between these two questions: Whether God will graciously accept and save me, though a vile sinner, through Christ? and whether I am already brought into a state of salvation? The former of these questions is to be resolved affirmatively by a confident faith in Christ, but the latter is to be enquired into by self-examination.”

It seems very plain, that it is one thing to believe or trust in Christ, for our own salvation; and another thing to know that we have believed, and that our faith is of a saving nature. The ground of the former is only the word of the gospel; but the ground of the latter is our having the marks and evidences of a gracious state laid down in scripture. Such marks and evidences will distinguish the true believer from the hypocritical professor, even when they shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. “Though the weight,”
says Mr. Boston, “of our acceptance with God lies not in our good works; yet the weight of our evidence does. If you set not yourselves to do all the parts of Christ’s will without reserve, ye do nothing. Sound believers fail in the degrees, but not in the parts of obedience.” Such is the doctrine uniformly taught in the writings and ministrations of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents. Hence it must astonish a candid reader to find Mr. Bellamy insinuating,\(^73\) that his opponents “do not really and verily believe, that none will at last he admitted into heaven, but such as have the characters essential to Christians, that is, such as are humble, meek, penitent, breathing after holiness, merciful, pure in heart, peace-makers, willing to part with all for Christ and to go through the greatest sufferings in his cause.” Did ever his opponents say or insinuate that persons, destitute of these qualities, would at last, be admitted into heaven? Far from it. Let us observe, for instance, how one of them, the judicious Mr. Boston, speaks to his hearers. “Sirs, according to the state of your souls now, so will it be with you through eternity. Examine, yourselves, therefore, now, whether ye be yet in the black state of nature, uncircumcised spiritually; or whether ye be in the state, of grace and of the true circumcision. Ye have heard the characters, let conscience make the application; and judge yourselves, that ye may not be judged and condemned with the world.” How strange is it, that Mr. Bellamy could represent ministers who preach and write in this strain, as having given up the way of looking for marks and evidences of grace?\(^74\)

What he chiefly grounds this charge upon is their teaching that there is an assurance of salvation in the direct act of faith; as, in that act, a person, without reflection upon any previous acts or exercises, rests immediately upon the grant or promise of the gospel, for his own everlasting salvation. This, according to the distinction just now taken notice of, is quite a different thing from

\(^73\) Dial. iii. p. 87.
\(^74\) Page 91.
the person’s knowledge, of his being already in the faith or in a state of grace. When Mr. Bellamy argues, that assurance of faith, as explained by the authors in question, makes men careless about the assurance of sense; it is just as unreasonable, as it would be for one to say, An honest man has given me a promise of a little money, of which I stand in the most absolute need: and therefore it is no matter of concern to me, whether I actually get it to answer my need, or not. Would not common sense, on the contrary, lead one to say, I have a promise of money from such an honest man; and therefore I will not fail to seek, that I may have the use of it? This concern will be the greater, on the supposition, that the promise, like the gospel of Christ, secures to the accepter a variety of benefits to be obtained one after another, in such manner and order, that each previous benefit is a sure sign or pledge of more glorious benefits to follow. The apostle plainly intimates, that the appropriating belief of the promise of entering into God’s rest, instead of leading us to carelessness and security, excites fear and solicitude with regard to our actual attainment of that rest, Heb. iv. 1.—not a slavish fear that makes a person let go the promise, as being doubtful either of the truth of it, or of his warrant to rely on it; but such a fear as makes him both embrace the promise with redoubled ardour, and look with earnest expectation for the begun accomplishment of it.

Here it may be proper to quote some passages in the writings of Mr. Hervey and Mr. Marshal, and to consider the censures passed upon them by Mr. Bellamy.

The first passage we adduce is from the sixteenth Dialogue of Theron and Aspasio. “Our good qualifications,” says Aspasio, “are sometimes like the stars at noon day, not easily, if at all, discernible; or, they are like a glow worm in the night, glimmering rather than shining. Instead therefore of poring on our own hearts, to discover by inherent qualities our interest in Christ, I should
rather renew my application to the free and faithful promise of the Lord.”

In this passage we may observe two things: first, a case supposed; and secondly, a particular course recommended as the most proper in that case.

With regard to the case supposed, wherein a believer cannot discern his good qualifications to be sufficient evidences of a state of grace, Mr. Bellamy says, that, “since it is the character of the saints to bring forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty, it seems difficult to reconcile it with scripture, that a true saint (there being no extraordinary disease, as the hypochondria, &c. nor other extraordinary circumstances that may account for it,) should live in the dark, full of doubts and fears about his state from year to year; I say more difficult to reconcile this with scripture, than it is to prove, that they may live so as to make their calling and election sure.”

In answer to what Mr. Bellamy here insinuates, it may be observed, that, though this exhortation of the apostle Peter implies, that the assurance of sense is attainable, yet it also implies, that there are believers who have not yet attained it, and that it is their duty to be engaged in the sincere pursuit of it. It is true, that all the saints bring forth fruit; but it is also true, that the evidences arising from that fruit, from grace received, from good dispositions or exercises, may, for a time, (how long seems not precisely determined in scripture) be found much out of sight. Where were Heman’s evidences, when he complained, that he was a man of no strength, no spiritual life or grace; free among the dead, Psal. lxxxviii, 4, 5? Where were Jeremiah’s evidences, when he cursed the day of his birth? or Peter’s, when he said to Christ, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord? or the Church’s, when she said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me: Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, and we are cut off for our
part? We know, that those who have true grace or holiness are liable to spiritual decays; owing to no other hypochondria or extraordinary circumstance, than some remarkable prevalence of indwelling sin, or negligence as to the discharge of some seasonable duty. Even the wise virgins may slumber and sleep. “We know,” says Beza, “that it is a most false conclusion of satan, that we have no true faith, because the effects of it do not appear for a time. A person might as well say, that wherever there is no flame, there is no fire; or that, because the trees, in winter, have neither leaves nor fruit, they have therefore no vegetable life.”75 Those who fear the Lord, and who obey the voice of his servant, may, for a time, walk in darkness, and have no light of sensible comfort. “God,” says Dr. Owen, “who in infinite wisdom, manageth the new creature or the whole life of grace by his Spirit, doth so turn the streams, and so renew and change the special kinds of its operations, as that we cannot easily trace his paths therein; and therefore we may often be at a loss about it, as not knowing well what he is doing with us. For instance, it may be, the work of grace, and holiness hath greatly put forth and evidenced itself in the affections which are renewed by it; causing persons to experience readiness unto, delight and cheerfulness in holy duties, especially those of immediate intercourse with God. But, after a while, it may seem good to the Sovereign Disposer of this affair so to order his dispensations towards them by afflictions, temptations, occasions of life in the world, that they shall have new work to do, and all the grace they have shall be turned into a new exercise. Hereon, it may be they find not that sensible vigour in their spiritual affections, nor that delight in spiritual duties, which they have done formerly. This makes them sometimes ready to conclude, that grace is decayed in them, and the springs of holiness dried up: So that they know neither where nor what they are. And it may be the real work

75 Confession, chap. iv. art. 20.
of sanctification is still thriving and effectually carried on in them.”⁷⁶ And says the same excellent writer on the cxxxth Psalm, “A man may have grace acting in him; and yet not know, nor be sensible, that he hath acting grace.” Such as duly consider these things will not find Mr. Hervey erroneous for saying, that the good qualifications of believers are sometimes not easily, if at all, discernible. The truth on this head seems to be well expressed in our Larger Catechism, in the answer to question 81: “Assurance of grace and salvation” (that is, assurance of sense) not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they attain it; and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, temptations and desertions. Yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God, as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.”

With regard to the course which ought to be taken by persons in the case now supposed, Mr. Hervey expresses his judgment both negatively and positively. He would not have persons in that case pore on their hearts to discover, by inherent qualities, their interest in Christ. His meaning is, that they should not do so without or in order to their essaying the direct act of faith; as if they were, to seek some ground for it in their inherent qualifications. That such a, poring on their own hearts as, meant as, would be a hindrance to that act of faith, appears from the beautiful simile, which is used in the same place, taken from the practice of the industrious fisherman, who does not spend his time in idle triumphs on account of his success; who does not stand to measure the dimensions of the fish or, to compute the value of the prize. In short, the poring on our own heart, against which Aspasio cautions us, is just the evil of seeking a ground of confidence or the restoration of our evidences in and from ourselves, in opposition to

the course which, he positively recommends; namely, that of renewing our application to the free and faithful promise of the Lord; that of seeking afresh to the inexhaustible fulness of our Saviour for renewed communications. This is no other doctrine, than what is ordinarily taught by protestant divines. “It were good for you,” says a pious writer, “who doubt of your faith, to set yourselves for actual present believing. Some people, who are apt to be weary of long debates in their minds, whether they have believed or not, and tempted to give it over, are, by the blessing of God upon this mean, relieved of their fears and cleared of their doubts. Addressing themselves to the Lord with all the reverence and seriousness they can attain, and, in the sense of their sin and need of a Saviour, they set themselves to receive and embrace Christ as their Redeemer and Lord.”

“I suppose” says another, “that you do not know, that you are regenerate or born of God; should this hinder or discourage you from believing forgiveness, from closing with the promises? Not at all. First, to take up merely pardon and forgiveness absolutely on the account of Christ; and then to yield all obedience in the strength and for the love of Christ, is the life of a believer, Ephes. ii. 8, 9, 10. Obedience, duties, mortification of sin and the like, are precious stones to build with; but unmeet to be first laid, to bear upon them the whole weight of the building. The foundation is to be laid in mere grace, mercy, pardon in the blood of Christ. This the soul is to accept of and rest in merely as it is grace, without the consideration of any thing in itself, but that it is sinful and obnoxious to ruin.” Thus protestant divines used to direct a sinner to lay the foundation of his hope, not in any moral good thing felt in him or done by him, but wholly without himself, in the gospel-testimony and promise of God in Christ. In full consistency with this doctrine, they represented the sense or consciousness, which believers have, of the work of the

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77 Craighead on the Sacrament.
78 Owen on the 130th Psalm.
Holy Spirit in their own souls; and of their having in some measure the characters laid down in the scriptures of the children of God, as a great encouragement to continue in the exercise of faith, and as necessary to distinguish true faith from the presumptuous confidence of hypocrites.

Mr. Bellamy insinuates, that Mr. Hervey “compares what our Saviour calls a rock to the stalk of a tulip.” Mr. Hervey has indeed the following words: “When we are advised to prove our title to comfort by genuine marks of conversion; and taught, on this ground, to fix the capital of assurance; I would rather propose a question, than advance objections. Is not this somewhat like placing the dome of a cathedral upon the stalk of a tulip?”

A writer’s words ought to be understood agreeably to the manifest design of his discourse and according to their connection with what goes before and follows them. Mr. Hervey is here speaking of the foundation of faith, not of the evidences of it. For, in the very next paragraph of Aspasio’s discourse, he allows, that “the love of the brethren may very justly be admitted as an evidence that our faith is real, and our assurance no delusion.” As to the passage in Matth. vii. 24—28. it may be observed, that, though our Lord represents those, who hear his words and do them, as building upon a rock, it will not follow, that their own doings or inherent good qualities, (which Mr. Hervey compares in one respect to a tulip) are the rock upon which the truly wise build for eternity. Their doing Christ’s words is rather an evidence of their building upon the unshaken rock of the Mediator’s righteousness and Jehovah’s faithfulness pledged in the gospel-promise. “This rock,” as Chemnitius observes on the place, “is not our contrition nor our works. For Paul says, 1 Corinth, iii. 11. Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ. And what that rock is

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79 Mr Bellamy’s Dial. p. 98.
80 Theron and Aspasio, Dial. xvi.
upon which Christ will have his church built, so that the gates of hell may not prevail against it, Peter explains in his first epistle, ii. 4. Christ is apprehended and dwells in our hearts by faith. Faith, however, cannot be without repentance: a good tree brings forth good fruit. Doing Christ’s words may here be understood of every part of his doctrine; provided every part be kept in its own place; Christ being still regarded as the only foundation, and entitled to the whole glory and honour of our salvation.”

Mr. Marshal, having observed, that the saints recorded in scripture had an assurance of their interest in God and his salvation, “which was not founded on the certainty of their good qualifications;” Mr. Bellamy puts the following questions: “Was not Abraham,” says he, “certain of his sincerity, when, out of love and obedience to God, he left his father’s house, &c. Was not Moses certain of his sincerity, when he despised the treasures of Egypt? Were not Job, Hezekiah, Peter, so?” All this is granted, and what then? Why, concludes Mr. Bellamy, because they had assurance arising from the evidence of their sincerity; therefore, they had no assurance of faith previous to their attainment of that evidence. This conclusion is no better than it would be to infer that, because a man, having a farm or plantation, occupied by a tenant, obtains an evidence of his property in it by the tenant’s payment of his rent; therefore he has no other assurance of his title; no assurance of it arising from his possession of the deeds of conveyance. A person’s attainment of the assurance of sense upon a distinct view of the work of grace begun in him, is nothing against his having had, in some measure, an assurance of faith before. Hereby, says the apostle John, we know, that we know him, if we keep his commandments. This text is nothing against the admitting of both these kinds of assurance. By the assurance of faith we may first know, that God hath made over to us the saving knowledge of himself in the gospel-promise, Jerem. xxiv. 7, I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord. And then in the
consequent course of new obedience we may have an assurance of sense, that we have, in some measure, actually attained that knowledge. These two kinds of assurance, instead of being inconsistent, are mutually subservient to each other; as Mr. Erskine says,

Faith gives sense both life and breath,
And sense gives joy and strength to faith.

But it must be acknowledged that the assurance of sense is less constant than the assurance of faith. The latter will often continue, when the former disappears. “If experience,” says Dr. Sibs, “should wholly fail, there is such a Divine power in faith, that a very little beam of it, having no other help than a naked promise, will uphold a soul.” The ground of the assurance of faith is the unchangeable promise of God in Christ: whereas the ground of the assurance of sense is our gracious but variable experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls. Hence Aspasio had reason to say of the assurance of sense, that “what measure of it is already attained, may soon be unsettled by the incursions of daily temptations or by the insurrection of remaining sin. At such a juncture, how will the assurance of sense keep its standing! How retain its being! It will fare like a tottering wall before the tempest; or be as the rush without mire, and the flag without water.” Aspasio here cautions us against the danger of leaning on any sensible assurance we may seem to have attained; when we are grievously assaulted by inward corruptions and outward temptations. In such a case, our own attainments, while we look to them, instead of looking to the righteousness of Christ and the promise of God for defence, will prove but a tottering wall. Every true Christian desires to have the assurance of sense; and where there is no sincere pursuit of it, there is no evidence of saving faith. But it is deplorable, when the
degree of that kind of assurance which a person seems to have attained, is rested in, and occasions remissness\textsuperscript{81} in his endeavours to renew the direct acts of faith in the gospel-promise. David shows us, from his own experience, the danger of doting on any assurance of sense we may seem to have already attained, Psal. xxx. 7. Lord, by thy fervour thou hast made my mountain stand strong: Thou didst hide thy face; and I was troubled. And no wonder, that the Lord is hereby provoked to hide his face from a Christian: for this is a sin exceedingly grieving to the Holy Spirit. It is directly contrary to the end for which he grants sensible manifestations or sensible comfort to any; which end is, that they may be encouraged to persevere in the exercise of faith. Christians often find that the strong bias of their hearts to rest in sensible attainments includes many great evils; such as, an obstinate attachment to the idol of self-righteousness, sloth, carnal security; evils which are highly dishonouring to God, pernicious to the soul, and gratifying to the devil. Paul had much sensible assurance; but did he live by it? No; he says, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Did he stand by it? No; says he, By faith we stand. Did he confide or glory in it? He abhorred the thought of doing so. God forbid, says he, that I should glory, save in the cross, that is, the blood and righteousness, of our Lord Jesus Christ. I count all things, but loss and dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ. Did he rest in it? No, says he: forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which were before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Hence appears the great injustice of Mr. Bellamy’s accusation against Aspasio on account of the passage just now quoted. It is true, as Mr. Bellamy says, “when the storm arises, the house that is built upon the sand, will be like a tottering wall.” Yes, and that is;

\textsuperscript{81} that is, occasions negligence.
the very reason why Aspasio cautions us so much against resting on what we seem to have already attained; and directs us to build upon nothing as our foundation but the righteousness of Christ and the free promises of God in him. Mr. Bellamy also remarks, that “the faith of the saints is victorious.” But it is obvious that what Aspasio represents as apt to fail, is not the faith of the saints, but their sense or feeling rested in. He adds, “None will eat of the tree of life, but he that overcometh.” This was never denied by Aspasio. But he judges, that the way to overcome, is to make use of the shield of faith, whereby the fiery darts of satan may be quenched; and not to sit down upon what sensible evidences of a gracious state may have been already attained.

In short, Mr. Bellamy’s opponents have taught nothing on this head, from which it can be inferred, that they meant to decry or depreciate the assurance of sense. On the contrary, they always represented it as very precious, as the beginning of heaven; and pressed their hearers and readers to use the most vigorous endeavours to attain it. Only, in such passages as those now quoted, they directed Christians to keep it in its proper place, and put them on their guard against the abuse of it; particularly, that which arises from the remainder of legalism in the hearts of believers; and also to give faithful warning to many formal professors, who have a pretended assurance founded on some experience of superficial conviction and delusive comforts, while they are strangers to the very first step of true godliness, that of believing the testimony of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ.

Before we conclude this letter, it may be proper to take notice of another passage in Mr Marshal’s treatise; where, after several remarks, concerning, self-examination, he adds, these words: “You need not trouble yourself to find out a multitude of marks and signs on true grace; if you can find a few good ones. Particularly, you may know, that you are passed from death to life, if you love the
brethren: that is, if you love all whom you can in charity judge to be true believers, and for the truth's sake that dwelleth in them." This passage Mr. Bellamy, censures in the following words: “Your few good ones, are all counterfeit, if alone, separate from other good ones. For the true saint receives every grace from Christ, John, i. 16. Nor did, Christ mean, to single out a few in his sermon; but to give a brief summary of the whole Christian life. And he that heareth these saying of mine and doth them,—not a few of them, but doth them one and all. If there is not all, there is none.”

On these, words we may observe, that they imply a charge against Mr Marshal, as if he taught, that a person might have one of the genuine, saving grace of the Spirit, without the rest. But this is a supposition, directly contrary to the scope of his whole treatise, which is to show, that we are by faith to receive a new holy frame of soul, which includes all the graces of the Spirit, out of the fulness of Christ; and that all spiritual life and holiness continue, grow or decay in us, according as faith continueth, growth or decayeth in vigour. Because Mr. Marshal intimates that a true believer does not always discern every grace of the Spirit in himself and his doing all the sayings of Christ, as marks or signs of true grace; it will not follow, that he ever meant to teach, that a true believer is destitute of any of the graces of the Spirit, or allows himself in the neglect of any of the sayings of Christ. For while our sanctification is imperfect, it will still be one thing to have in reality the graces of the Spirit and a universal regard to the sayings of Christ; and another thing to be sensible of these attainments, and able to reflect upon them and discern them as certain marks of grace. The actings of one grace in a Christian may be more distinct and sensible, than those of another grace. Hence the scripture represents particular saints as excelling, some in one grace, some in another; Moses in meekness, Job in patience, and so forth. This seems to be the case, in some measure, with every Christian. Now, if there be any one particular gracious exercise which is more distinct than another,
more sensible, and more easily traced to an unfeigned faith as its principle; why may not this be allowed to be a sufficient mark of a saving interest in Christ, even when the other graces of the Spirit may be much out of sight; provided always that the supposed exercise is attended with an abiding concern to have the exercise of all the other graces of the Spirit?

This way of speaking is not peculiar to Mr. Marshal. “If you can find but one mark,” says a valuable writer, “you may draw a favourable conclusion. Should you have reason to conclude, that you love the brethren, that you love them for the image of Christ in them, you need not hesitate about your state: for this love is the exercise or going out of that grace which God has implanted. Sometimes one mark appears visible and sometimes another. If you have but one, be thankful, and give God all the glory.”

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82 See the xxvith of Pike and Hayward’s Cases of Conscience.
LETTER IX.

On the faith of the Gospel, as necessary to reconcile our heart to the law.

Christian Brethren,

Mr. Marshal and those who teach the same doctrine are represented by Mr. Bellamy as “denying, that the law of God was holy, just and good antecedently to the gift of Christ; or that it must appear such to every one whose eyes are opened to see it as it is.” Hence Mr. Bellamy calls his opponents “Antinomians of the devouter sort, who profess the assurance of the love of God, and at the same time appear the most avowed enemies of the law of God.” He represents them as teaching, that if God were to deal with men according to the tenor of his law, he would “act the part of a tyrant; that it is proper for him, not for sinners, to repent; that he ought to lay aside his law as unreasonable, sinful, wicked and tyrannical.”

Heavier charges could not have been brought against the grossest heresy that ever infested the Christian Church, than these which Mr. Bellamy brings against the doctrine of Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston and Mr. Hervey. The passage in Mr. Marshal’s treatise, which is principally insisted on as the ground of these charges, is the following. “Slavish fear,” says he, “may extort some slavish, hypocritical performances from us, such as that of Pharaoh in letting the Israelites go, sore against his will; but the duty of love cannot be extorted and forced by fear, but it must be won and sweetly allured by an apprehension of God’s love and goodness towards us; as that eminent, loving, and beloved disciple testifieth, 1 John iv. 18, 19. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment: he that feareth is not made perfect in

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love. We love him, because he first loved us. Observe here, that we cannot be beforehand with God in loving him, before we apprehend his love to us. That conscience, whereby we judge ourselves to be under the guilt of sin and the wrath of God, is accounted an evil conscience in scripture, though it perform its office truly; because it is caused by the evil of sin, and will itself be a cause of our committing more sin, until it can judge us to be justified from all sin and received into the favour of God. This evil guilty conscience so disaffecteth people towards God, that it cannot endure, that they should think, or speak or hear of him or his law; or that they should not rather strive to put him out of their minds by fleshly pleasures and worldly enjoyments.”

By this doctrine, according to Mr. Bellamy, sinners are emboldened to express themselves before their Maker in the following blasphemous manner: “The Divine law is so intolerably cruel, that, unless it is entirely set aside as to us, we can never be pacified toward our Creator. We proclaim in the sight of heaven, our cause is so just, that we can never lay down our arms, fall at the foot of our Sovereign and justify his law: nay, we can never have one good thought of him; till he first set aside his law, remove his curse, and grant us heaven upon our demand.”

The flagrant injustice of this charge against Mr. Marshal is manifest from the following considerations.

1. None can be more express than Mr. Marshal in asserting the unchangeable righteousness of the law. “The principal duties,” says he, “of love to God above all and to each other for his sake, whence all the other duties flow, are so excellent, that I cannot imagine any more noble work for the holy angels in their glorious sphere. They are the chief works, for which we were first framed in the image of God engraven upon man in his first creation, and for which that

84 Dialogue p. 12.
beautiful image is renewed upon us in our new creation and sanctification by Jesus Christ, and shall be perfected in our glorification. They are works which depend not merely on the sovereignty of the will of God to be commanded, or forbidden, or left indifferent, or changed, or abolished at his pleasure; as other works which belong either to the judicial or ceremonial law, or to the means of salvation prescribed by the gospel; but they are, in their own nature, holy, just and good, Rom. vii. 12. and meet for us to perform, because of our relation to our Creator and fellow-creatures. So that they have an inseparable dependence upon the holiness of the will of God, and thereby an indispensable establishment. They are duties which we are naturally obliged to by that reason and understanding, which God gave to man at his first creation, to discern what was just and meet for him to do. And the law, that requires them, is called the natural law and also the moral law; because the manners of all men, Infidels as well as Christians, ought to be conformed to it, under the penalty of the wrath of God for the violation of it. This is the true morality, which God approveth, consisting in the conformity of all our actions to the moral law. If those, who contend for morality, understand no other than this, I dare join with them in asserting, that the best morally honest man is the greatest saint; and that morality is the principal part of true religion, and the test of all the other parts; without which faith is dead, and all religious performances are a vain show and mere hypocrisy. For the faithful and true witness hath testified concerning the two great moral commandments of love to God and our neighbour, that there is none other commandment greater than these; and that on them hang all the law and the prophets, Matth. xxii. 36—40. Mark xii. 31.”

2. It is unjust to infer, that Mr. Marshal denied the obligation men are under, in point of duty, to have their heart reconciled to

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85 See the Gospel mystery, &c. in the explication of the first Direction.
the holy and righteous law of God; because he teaches, that true reconciliation of heart to that law cannot be attained by men, in their present fallen state, without the faith of salvation by Jesus Christ. Mr. Marshal was far from admitting the Arminian position, that we are under no moral obligation to do what our present fallen state has rendered us unable to do. “They,” says he, “who account their impotence a sufficient plea to excuse them or others, show that they were never truly humbled for that great wilful transgression of all mankind in the loins of Adam. Inability to pay debt excuseth not a debtor who hath lavished away his estate. Our impotence consisteth not in a mere want of executive power, but in the want of a willing mind to practice true holiness and righteousness. This is their just condemnation, that they love darkness rather than light. They deserve to be partakers with the devils, as they partake with them in their evil lusts; and their inability to do good will no more excuse them, than it excuseth devils.”

The truth is, a minister may as well be charged with denying the natural obligation of men to be reconciled to the law of God, for teaching that regeneration is necessary to their attainment of that end, as for teaching that the faith of the gospel is so.

3. When Mr. Marshal teaches that men cannot have a sincere love to the law according to its spirituality and vast extent, while they have no believing view of reconciliation with God through Christ; he evidently means, while they consider themselves as under the curse of God. To be under the curse is to be under a sentence of exclusion, not only from all true comfort, but also from any the least participation of sanctifying grace. And how is a person to love the law, while he considers it as excluding him from that grace without which he cannot love it? “When Adam,” says Mr. Marshal, “had once brought himself and all his posterity under the terrible sentence, *Thou shalt surely die*; all that knowledge of

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86 Gospel Mystery, &c. Direct. 5th.
God or his law, which before wrought for the continuance of life, was turned by that cursing sentence the contrary way, to work for his death, even for the death of his soul in sin, as well as for the death of his body: and therefore it quickly moved him to hide himself from God as his enemy.” If it be objected here, that Christ was under the curse of the law, and yet had no sin;—we answer, that we must distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental, to the punishment of sin. The former is the same, whoever is the sufferer of the punishment: the latter is varied according to the quality of the sufferer. Thus, the curse, subjecting men to all the misery, of which they are capable, shuts them up under the dominion of sin; which is a principal part of that misery. But, falling upon the surety, it found him an infinitely different subject, even such a one as was altogether incapable of sin; and yet capable of suffering the punishment due to sin. Thus a punishment, inflicted upon a person already under the power of some wasting disease, will necessarily occasion his death; but inflicted upon a person of a sound constitution, will not so much as endanger his health.

4. When Mr. Marshal says, that, “if we look upon God as contrary to us, as hating us, as purposing to damn us; our own innate self-love will breed hatred and heart-risings against him in spite of our hearts;” he speaks of men’s legal attempts to reconcile themselves to holiness by their natural resolution or ability; while they despise and reject the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. All that he intends by this representation is to show the vanity of that pretended virtue or holiness, which men seem to attain under the influence of legal principles and motives without faith in Jesus Christ; that virtue being such only as may be found in those who have nothing of the true love of God or of his law in their hearts. That this is his meaning appears from the very plan of his treatise; one principal part of which was to prove, that the persuasion of our reconciliation with God (in opposition to the consideration of
ourselves as under the curse) is to be received out of Christ’s fulness by unison and fellowship with him.87 The same thing is evident from the very paragraph in the explication of the vii. Direction, whence some of the expressions, so severely censured by Mr. Bellamy, are taken. “The first right holy thoughts” says he, “which thou canst have of God are thoughts of his grace to thy soul in Christ, which are included in the grace of faith. Get these thoughts by believing in Christ, and they will breed in thee love to God and all good thoughts of him, and free thee from blasphemous murmuring thoughts by degrees; for love thinks no evil. Thou wilt then be able to account God just and merciful, if he had damned thee, and extended his grace to others; and thou wilt be able to think well of his holiness and of his decrees, which many cannot endure to hear of. The way to get rid of raging lusts is by faith that purifieth the heart and worketh by love. Beg a holy fear of God, with fear of coming short of the promised rest through unbelief, Heb. iv. i. Such a fear is an ingredient in faith.” It is astonishing, indeed, how Mr. Bellamy came to charge Mr. Marshal with the horrid blasphemy of making the law of God culpable for the wickedness of our heart-risings against its precept and penalty: while Mr. Marshal declares abundantly, that the fault is not in the holy law, but only in our own hearts; and while it is the great design of his treatise to direct poor sinners to union and fellowship with Christ through faith, as the only effectual means of being delivered from such heart-rising, and of attaining true heart-felt delight in the law of the Lord.

Having offered these things in vindication of Mr. Marshal’s doctrine, are next to consider the opposite opinion of Mr. Bellamy, which runs through a great part of his dialogues and letters, and of his essay on the nature and glory of the gospel. It is plainly expressed in the following passages. “The awakened sinner under a

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87 Gospel Mystery, &c. Direction 3rd.
lively sense of the dreadfulness of eternal damnation, with particular application to himself, must (through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit) be brought to approve the law in all its rigour, as holy, just and good, as being really amiable and glorious in itself, before he can so much as believe (in the Scripture sense) the gospel to be true." 88 "The law appeared holy, just and good: I could not but approve it from my very heart: and said within myself, ere ever I was aware, let all heaven forever love and adore the infinitely glorious majesty, although I receive my just desert and perish for ever. Next came into view the gospel way of life by free grace through Jesus Christ." 89 "To have holiness appear beautiful to the soul is of the same nature as to love holiness; but to love holiness is holiness itself." 90

Thus, according to this author, a sinner must be reconciled to the law: he must have such a sight of the holiness of the law as will cause him to love it, that is, he must have holiness itself: he must feel, that he has all this, before he can so much as believe (in the scripture sense) the gospel to be true; nay, before he have any saving view of the gospel at all.

The notion expressed by Mr. Bellamy, in the words now quoted, is disapproved, as unsound, for such reasons as the following.

1. It appears to be inconsistent with that conviction of sin and misery which is supposed and implied in the first act of faith. When a man has this conviction, as Luther in his commentary on the epistle to the Galatians observes, “the law reveals to him his sin, his blindness, his misery, his impiety, ignorance, hatred and contempt of God; death, hell, the judgment and deserved wrath of God.” Thus conviction, before the discovery of Christ in the gospel, instead of reconciling the heart to the law, has an irritating effect,

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88 Mr Bellamy’s Dialog. p. 17.
89 Let. 2nd. p. 115.
making the powerful working of sin more impetuous and sensible, than before. The apostle assures us of this from his own experience, Rom. vii. 8, 9. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For, without the law, sin was dead: For I was alive without the law once; that is, I lived securely, pleased with the opinion of my own righteousness: but when the commandment came in its spirituality and power; sin revived, and I died, that is, sin raged more than ever; I hated the law more than ever; because it overturned the fabric of self-righteousness which I had been labouring to build. “When sin is discovered,” says Luther, “by certain bright beams, breaking into the heart, there is nothing more odious and more intolerable to man than the law.” All the conviction by the law to be found in man before faith in Christ, is of the same sort with that represented by the apostle in the words now cited. The approbation of the law which the apostle expresses from the 14th verse to the end of the chapter, is of a quite different kind: it is the experience of a true believer; of one whom the law of the spirit of life (which may well be understood of the gospel, called in another place, the ministration of the Spirit) hath made free from the law of sin and death.

This notion of Mr. Bellamy is inconsistent with those passages of scripture, which call sinners to come to Christ, while they have no money, no good qualification, Isai. lv. 1. It is unnecessary to understand the thirsting there mentioned of any other than the vain desire and expectation of satisfaction in earthly things or in self-righteousness which is represented in the 2nd verse. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? But according to Mr. Bellamy, none are to come to Christ, till they find they have got such a view of the holiness of God’s law, as engages them to love it. It is good news to poor sinners, that Christ is come to them in the character of the Physician of souls. But when they are told, that they must have such love to holiness as is holiness itself, or that they must be in a
great measure healed, before or in order to their application to him, the refreshing import of these news is quite destroyed; especially to those under thorough convictions of their sinful and miserable condition: which, in their apprehension, is so far from being in a more hopeful way by the application of the law, that, before they obtain a saving discovery of Christ in the gospel, they consider their case as every moment growing worse, and every moment in hazard of being beyond all possibility of relief.

3. The falsehood of the opinion in question appears from the necessity of the faith of the gospel as the appointed mean of reconciling our hearts to the law. That the faith of the gospel has this effect is certainly the doctrine of the Bible; as, by that faith, men apprehend, that they are delivered from the law as a covenant or condition of life, Rom. vi. 14. having no more to do with the law under that consideration, than a woman has to do with her deceased husband; Rom. vii. 1, 2, 3, 4. and that it only remains to be regarded in the new and engaging light of a rule of life in the hand of the blessed Mediator; requiring of believers universal obedience as a testimony of their interest in and of their gratitude for his great salvation; and as an acknowledgment of their absolute subjection to his royal authority, 1 Corinth, ix. 21. Isai. xxxiii. 22. Farther, the faith of the gospel reconciles us to the law; as, in the gospel-promises, it apprehends abundant security for all that grace which is requisite to dispose and enable up to an acceptable obedience. Faith hears God in Christ saying to us, I am the Lord who sanctifieth you. I will put my laws into your inward parts, and write them on your hearts. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.

4. We have no ground to believe that the Holy Spirit acts in fallen men, (particularly in adults) as a sanctifying Spirit, reconciling them to the law, otherwise than as a Spirit of faith,
causing them to know and receive the gospel. We are truely reconciled to the law no farther than as we are changed into the image of the Lord Christ, by beholding his glory in the glass of the gospel; which beholding we owe to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, 2 Corinth, iii. 18. “The beginning of the new life,” says Witsius, “is not from the preaching of the law, but of the gospel. The gospel is the seed of our regeneration and the law of the Spirit of life which frees us from the law of sin and death. While Christ is preached and life in Christ, the Spirit of Christ secretly enters into the souls of the elect, and creates in them the principal of spiritual life, James i. 18. Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth. Gal. iii. 2. Received ye the Spirit by the hearing of faith?”

Mr. Bellamy, in attempting to support this opinion, makes use of some reasonings without adducing any plain testimonies of scripture; a method which is always to be suspected in treating of revealed truth. “If,” says he, “the Divine Law, is a holy, just, good and glorious law, antecedent to the consideration of the gift of Christ, then it must of necessity appear such, to every one whose eyes are opened to see it as it is. He who has not such a sight of the law is spiritually blind.” Therefore, he concludes that reconciliation of heart to the law must go before the faith of the gospel.

Answer. This argument implies, that the immediate effect of regeneration is to bring us to a heart-reconciling view of the law, as contradistinguished from the covenant of grace or the gospel. But as regeneration is a benefit of the covenant of grace, altogether unknown to the law or covenant of works; so the immediate effect of that benefit, when it is granted to any soul, is the opening of the eyes of the understanding to behold the wonderful things of the covenant of grace. In John i. 12, 13. the receiving of Christ is

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91 Animadversiones Irenicae, cap. xv.
represented as that unto which we are immediately born of God, and in Ephes. i. 19. we read of the exceeding greatness of God’s power towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power; intimating, that whenever persons are the subjects of this Almighty operation, they are believers. Regeneration is the Father’s drawing us, not to the law-covenant, but to faith in Jesus Christ, John vi. 44. Nor is that which is given in regeneration to be understood of some ability only or power to believe. For, as Dr. Owen observes, “there is nothing mentioned in scripture concerning the communicating of power remote or next to the mind of man, to enable him to believe antecedently unto actual believing.”

It is true, after the first act of believing, persons have habitual or indwelling grace; which, however, is not able or sufficient to produce any spiritual act, otherwise than by the renewed effectual working of the Spirit of Christ. This working of Christ upon and with the grace, which we have received, is called his enabling us. But with persons unregenerate, and, as to the first act of faith, it is not so. God does not educe that act out of any pre-existing habit, but works it immediately. Thus it is given us on the behalf of Christ to believe on him. But how is it given us? By the power of God working in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, Philip i. 29. ii. 13. Such is the regeneration which we read of in scripture; but of another regeneration, previous to this, we do not read.

Again, it may be observed, that the principle of this argument tends to make the gospel-revelation unnecessary. The law, considered antecedently to the gift of Christ, must be the covenant of works: for it was only in that view that man had to do with the law antecedently to the gift of Christ. Now if, through the regenerating influence of the Spirit, men get such a view of the law-covenant, as delivers them from their enmity against God;

then it will follow, that men not only may be, but actually are saved by the law or covenant of works internally revealed in their minds, or by a spiritual view of the glory of God manifested in that covenant. Thus the law of works is supposed to be, directly by itself and considered antecedently to the gift of Christ, an effectual mean of giving life to the dead soul, and of taking away the natural enmity of the heart. All this is directly contrary to those scriptures in which the law is said to have a killing, instead of a quickening effect upon fallen men, and to be the strength of sin, 1 Corinth, xv. 56. 2 Corinth. iii. Rom. vi. 5. Farther, if, according to Mr. Bellamy’s supposition, men be saved by the law in some degree, why not in a greater degree? why not fully? The reconciliation of the heart to the holiness of the law, attained, according to him, by the just views of the law which the Holy Spirit gives the sinner in or immediately after regeneration, being a real salvation, the person supposed to be the subject of this work needs only an increase of these views of the law attended with the same efficacy. Where then is the necessity of the gospel of Jesus Christ or of faith in it?

The following is another of Mr. Bellamy’s arguments on this head. “You can never acquiesce,” says he, “in the blood of Christ as honourable to God, till the law first appears glorious in your eyes. You will rather feel the heart of an infidel in your breast.”

Answer. It seems too assuming and dictatorial to say, as Mr. Bellamy does here, Unless God make the law appear glorious and amiable to the sinner in the very way that I think most proper, it is not possible for his power and grace to make it appear so to the sinner in any other way. Why may not God give the elect soul a joint view of Christ’s righteousness, and of the law as magnified and made honourable by that blessed righteousness? May not the Lord, in a work of legal conviction, give the sinner very clear and distinct, though not heart-reconciling views of the law, as holy, just and good? May not the sinner under such a work have his mouth
stopped, seeing himself shut up under the commanding and condemning power of the law-covenant? May he not be brought to stand at the bar of God, stript of every plea and driven to despair? May he not thus be brought to conclude, that his salvation is utterly inconsistent with the honour of God’s law and justice? This is a great work; and yet it is no more than what reprobates themselves shall be brought to, sooner or later. There is nothing in all this of regenerating or saving grace. The most agonizing convictions may be, where there is no saving conversion. But who dare deny, that the former often precede the latter; or that the awful views, which persons get, before regeneration, of the law-curse, may be of use in or after that supernatural change, both to help them to a right understanding of the gospel of Christ, and to excite them to flee for refuge to the hope set before them? Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid. Yea, we establish the law. By faith in Jesus Christ we give it the highest honour, both as a covenant and as a rule of life. As a covenant, it is hereby presented with a righteousness wrought out by the Son of God in our nature; which not only answers all its demands, but magnifies and makes it honourable. As a rule of life, it is regarded as the perfect standard of that conformity to God in holiness, which is promised in the covenant of grace; which constitutes a principal part of our blessedness; after which we are incessantly to aspire while here, and which we hope to attain fully hereafter, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Such views of the law, as thus magnified and made honourable in Christ, are the most effectual means of reconciling the heart to it.

But, it is said, we turned enemies to God first, and therefore we are first to be reconciled unto God before he be reconciled unto us.

Answer. It may as well be said, that we ought to do all that the law requires, before God be reconciled to us. This indeed, is the plan of the covenant of works; but is diametrically opposite to the
plan of the new covenant, which is designed to cut off all occasion of creature-boasting; to set forth man’s impotence and nothingness; and to display the exceeding riches of the grace of God in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. A great part of Mr. Bellamy’s declamation proceeds upon this supposition, that whatever could not and should not have had place according to the old broken covenant, has not and cannot have place according to the new and everlasting covenant; a supposition which takes away the essential difference between the two covenants.

The promise, says the apostle, is of faith, that it may be of grace.\(^94\) It is manifestly of grace, when faith embraces it upon no other ground than the direction of it to sinners of mankind who read or hear it: but the case would be quite otherwise, were the faith, of our interest in the promise founded, according to Mr. Bellamy’s plan, upon our sincere approbation of the law, our love to God’s holiness, and other morally good qualifications; just as man’s claim to the promise of eternal life, if he had continued upright, would have been founded upon his own perfect obedience.

\(^{94}\) Rom. iv. 16.
LETTER X.

On the faith of the Gospel, as necessary in order to our attainment of true Love to God.

Christian Brethren,

Love to God is the chief and most necessary duty of all reasonable creatures. Hence our religious tenets may be justly tried by their tendency to promote this heavenly affection. On this account it is necessary to take notice of the following charges which Mr. Bellamy brings against the doctrine of his opponents.

1. He complains, “that many look upon the notion of loving God for himself as a mere chimera.” But who are they that do so? Not Mr. Marshal, who tells us, “that the duties of love to God above all, and to each other for his sake, are of the greatest excellency; that we are to love everything in God, his justice, holiness, sovereign authority, all-seeing eye and all his decrees, commands, judgments and doings. We are to love him not only better than other things, but singly as the only good, the fountain of all goodness.” The sanctifying, says he in another place, and glorifying of God’s name in all things is the first and chief petition, Matth. vi. 9. and is the end we ought to aim at in all our acting, 1 Cor. x. 31. Not Mr. Boston, who says in his Fourfold State, “A real Christian is one who loves God for himself as well as for his benefits; and that with a supreme love above all persons and all things.” Not Mr. Hervey, who directs us to put such questions to ourselves as the following: “Have we duly acquainted ourselves with the marvellous excellencies of the Lord Jehovah? Have we loved him with all our heart? Is our esteem for this immensely great and most blessed Being, high, superlative, matchless, like that expressed by the Psalmist: Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon

95 Dial. i. p. 21.
earth, whom I desire besides thee?” Not the ministers in a state of secession from the established church of Scotland, who, in their Judicial Testimony, published in the year 1736, in opposition to the opinion of Mr. Campbel, too much countenanced by the General Assembly of that church, express themselves in the following manner: “It is evident from the Word, that God’s infinite perfections and glorious excellencies are the main ground and reason of our loving, obeying and worshipping him, and not chiefly his benefits to us and his promoting our happiness; and though the prospect of it may be a secondary motive to our obedience; yet the scriptures declare, that what God is in himself, or his own infinite perfection, is the primary ground and formal reason of the whole of our obedience and worship. And all, who truly love God, do love him chiefly for himself.”

2. Mr. Bellamy represents his opponents as holding, that it is not the duty of unregenerate men, previous to the knowledge of the way of reconciliation to God through Christ, to love God on account of the goodness and excellency of his nature: whereas Mr. Marshal could not declare, that it is their duty more expressly, than he does, in the very words quoted by Mr. Bellamy himself. “The duties of love to God,” says Mr. Marshal, “and of love to our neighbour for his sake, are, in their nature, holy, just, good and meet for us to perform, because of our natural relation to our Creator and fellow creatures. So that they have an inseparable dependance upon the holiness of the will of God, and an indispensable establishment thereby. Even heathens are still obliged to the love of God and their neighbour by the light of nature without any written law or supernatural revelation.”

3. He represents it as the doctrine of his opponents, that men may have faith in God as their reconciled God, and may love him,

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96 Theron and Aspasio, Letter 1.
97 Dial. i. p. 10. “The first question is, Whether unregenerate sinners ought to love God.”
without regeneration. “Your faith,” says he, meaning that which is taught by Mr. Marshal, “may exist in an unregenerate heart: from the principles of nature we may love God thus.”

Here we may observe, that Mr. Bellamy’s opponents teach that unregenerate men are warranted and commanded to believe in Jesus Christ for their own salvation; and to love God above all things; but not, that they either do so, or have ability to do so. But what seems to have induced Mr. Bellamy to bring this charge against these divines, is his displeasure with them for teaching, that the faith of reconciliation with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, is necessary to our attainment of true love to God. This he denies; for, says he, “in regeneration which is before faith, our hearts begin to be right; therefore then, even at that instant, we begin to love God for his own loveliness.” We answer, that we are indeed brought by regeneration to love God for his own loveliness. But then regeneration has this effect, as it produces faith. Regeneration proceeds from God as a reconciled God in Christ, and causeth us to regard him in that engaging light, as was shown in the preceding letter.

When we say, that faith is the means of attaining the exercise of love to God, what we intend by faith is not a dream of peace with God which is grounded upon the conceit of self-righteousness and other delusive imaginations; and which may, no doubt, be found in unregenerate men; but such a faith of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, as is grounded on the gospel-promise and wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Nor is it meant, that our act of believing, can, of itself, slay the enmity of our hearts and warm them with true love to God; but that the object, apprehended by faith, the virtue of Christ’s death, and the grace of the promise, are effectual to that end. Faith is a self-emptying exercise; it makes no pretension to any wisdom, righteousness or power in itself; but

98 Dial. ii. p. 79. Dial. i. p. 20.
finds all in its glorious object, Christ Jesus: particularly, it finds in him a sufficiency of grace to circumcise the heart to love God, according to that promise, which we have in Deuteron. xxx. 6. *The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart to love the Lord thy God.*

From John iv. 19. *We love him, because he first loved us*; Mr. Marshal observes, “that we cannot be beforehand in loving God, before we apprehend his love to us.” But no, says Mr. Bellamy: “we begin to love God before we know that he begins to love us.”

Answer. The special love of God to us may, indeed, be inferred from our sincere love to him. But it will not follow, that there is no apprehension at all of the love of God in Christ to us, at the beginning of our exercise of love to him. For the love of God apprehended by the direct act of faith may begin that exercise; which may be afterwards promoted by reflecting upon the fruits and evidences of his love, as well as by the frequent renewing of that act. It cannot well be denied, that the text now quoted leads us to think, that the exercise of our love to God is begun by means of the direct act of faith, as it apprehends the preventing love of God in Christ. For this verse is to be understood in connection with v. 16. where the apostle says, *We have known and believed the love which God hath to us*: that is, the love manifested in Christ the *Saviour of the world*, v. 14. and the *propitiation for our sins*, v. 10. Hence it appears, that what is most immediately and directly intended by the expression, *He first loved us*, is not the secret love of God in eternal election, nor the secret operation of it in regeneration; but the public manifestation of his love in the gift of Christ as exhibited in the gospel; even that discovery of his love which is the object of the direct act of faith. This view of the text under consideration is confirmed by observing, that the apostle, in setting forth God as the object of our superlative love, uses this eminently sublime expression, God is love; intimating, that we

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99 that is, God’s love which goes before with spiritual guidance and help.
cannot love God, till we know him to be love, pure love, without any mixture of wrath against us, in Jesus Christ, his beloved Son.

But Mr. Bellamy is positive, that this expression, *We have known and believed the love which God hath to us*, must be understood of a knowledge and belief founded on the consciousness of such good qualifications in ourselves as are certain evidences of our being the children of God. “What is the character” says he, of the men who use this confident language: “Were they saints or sinners? They knew they were the children of God, because they knew God, loved him and kept his commandments, imitated the example of Christ, loved the brethren, &c.”

Answer. That such qualifications, as Mr. Bellamy enumerates, are the characters of those, who know and believe the love which God hath to them, is granted and abundantly taught by his opponents. But in order to overthrow the sense in which this text was understood by these authors, he should have shown not only that, according to the apostle, these characters belong to those who truly know and believe the love of God to them; but also that the consciousness of such attainments is the only ground of that knowledge and belief. The context, as we have already observed, leads us to consider this knowledge and belief as proceeding upon the ground of the gospel-testimony in verses 14 and 10. Calvin’s observation on this verse appears to be solid. *We have known and believed;* that is, says he, “we have known by believing. In a preceding verse the apostle had represented faith as our believing, that Jesus is the Son of God: but here he says, by faith we know the love of God towards us.” “Taught by Jesus Christ we know and believe,” says another expositor in Marlorate’s collection, “with our whole heart, that the infinite Majesty of God loves us, does not reject the unworthy and the sinner; does not abhor the unjust, nor despise the weak and contemptible. And why should we not know

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100 Dial. i. page 23.
and believe all this; while we behold his own Son, the unspeakably precious pledge of Divine love, taking away our sins by his death, and bearing us on his shoulders to the Father.” These commentators, as well as Mr. Marshal, understood the apostle’s words here, of the direct act of faith.

“If you leave,” says Mr. Bellamy, “the glory of the Divine Majesty, as he is in himself, out of the account, and love and worship him merely for his love to you &c. how will you free yourself from the guilt of idolatry.”

This objection, (which, in the various repetitions of it, runs through a great part of Mr. Bellamy’s work,) was anticipated in the following passage of Mr. Marshal’s treatise. “It is not legal or mercenary,” says he, “to be moved by the persuasion of the future enjoyment of everlasting happiness, while the persuasion itself is not gotten by the works of the law, but by free grace through faith, Gal. v. 5. It is not that carnal self-love, which the scripture condemneth as the mother of sinfulness, 2 Tim. iii. 2. but an holy self-love inclining us to prefer God above the flesh and the world, such as God directeth us unto, when he exhorteth us to save ourselves, Act. ii. 40. 1 Tim. iv. 16. It is so far from being contrary to the pure love of God, that it brings us to love God more purely and entirely. He draweth us to love him by the cords of a man, by such cords as the love of man useth to be drawn by, even by his own love to us.”

Mr. Bellamy’s doctrine may accord with the speculations of some Platonic philosophers, but not with the simplicity of revealed religion. He supposes, that, if our love to God be influenced by

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101 Dial. i. page 27.

102 This doctrine, “That God is to be loved for himself,” and “That the manifestation, which he makes of himself in the hearts and consciences of his rational creatures, and in the works of creation, is a sufficient means of bringing them to love him for himself,” is no other than natural religion; and would no doubt, have been verified in man, if he had continued upright. But the way of bringing fallen men to the true love of God by means of faith in Jesus Christ as having loved them and given himself for them, is purely a matter of supernatural revelation. Hence it appears, that, if what Mr. Bellamy teaches, namely, that men attain true love to God, before the gospel come into view, were agreeable to fact, there would be no need of the gospel: natural
the belief of our reconciliation to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, it is not genuine love to God, but self-love. From this opinion it would follow, that the Psalmist was only loving himself, when he loved God as his strength, his rock, fortress and deliverer, his God and the horn of his salvation, his high tower, Psal. xviii. 1, 2. The first Christians according to this opinion, were only lovers of their own-selves, when the love of Christ, manifested in his giving himself for them, constrained them; though, by this means, they lived not to themselves, but to him. God himself frequently enforces his commands with this declaration, I am the Lord thy God, intimating that he would have them believe their special interest in him as a principal incentive to the obedience of love.

Mr. Bellamy represents the appropriating faith of the love of God in Christ to us as alienating the heart from God and “leading it to seek its rest elsewhere.” The scriptures, on the contrary, represent the Lord’s loving-kindness to us in Christ, apprehended by faith, as the rest and refreshing of our souls, Psal. lxiii. 3, 5. Because thy loving kindness is better than life,—my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. Psal. cxvi. 7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. Heb. iv. 3. We, who have believed, do enter into rest, that is, we enter into the promised rest in believing. Whom have I in heaven but thee? says the Psalmist; and there is none upon earth, whom I desire besides thee. Thus, he represents the exercise of supreme love to God. And how did he attain this exercise? By the appropriating faith expressed in the preceding verses: I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by

religion would be sufficient. For they who love God for himself are, no doubt, truly Blessed. Thus it is evident, that the doctrine which Mr. Bellamy would substitute instead of that which Mr. Marshal teaches, is rank Deism; and is that which leads many professed Christians to hold, That the heathens may be saved by living according to the light they have; an opinion directly opposite to the Scripture, which assures us, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh, no one of the human race, Jew or Gentile, without or within the church, be Justified in the sight of God.

104 Dial. i. page 30.
my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.¹⁰⁵

Farther, Mr. Bellamy represents the faith of God’s love to us in Christ as leading persons to love the children of God “merely on selfish accounts; as because they love me, belong to my party &c.”

But it may be asked, How does this assertion comport with the numerous passages of scripture, which hold forth the love of God towards us in Christ, as a principal motive to the love of the brethren; whilst that love can be no such motive to any but those who believe it? John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,* Ephes. v. 2. *Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.* Coloss. iii. 13. *As Christ forgave you, so also do ye,* 1 John iv. 11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* According to these and other texts, the appropriating faith of the love of God in Christ to us is the most effectual means of kindling and maintaining in our hearts the fervent love of the brethren.

The following passage, taken from Dr. Owen’s treatise on communion with God, will serve for a proper conclusion of this letter. “Flesh and blood,” says he, “are apt to have very hard thoughts of God; to think, that he is always angry, yea implacable; that it is not for poor creatures to draw nigh to him; that nothing in

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¹⁰⁵ Psal. lxxiii. 23, 24, 25. It is true, that hypocrites may have a strong conceit, that God loves them, exciting such natural emotions and affections, as they take to be love to God. But that conceit is widely different from the faith, which believers have, of the love of God in Christ to them, which is the means of producing in them true love to him. The conceit, which hypocrites have of God’s love to them, is built upon a vain imagination; whereas the faith, which believers attain of the love of God to them in Christ, is founded upon his word. Hypocrites conceive God to be one like themselves, Psal. l. 21. and his love to them to be such as connives at and countenances their continuance in the neglect of known duty or the practice of known sin. But the faith of true Christians apprehends the love of God in Christ as taking away their sins, 1 John iii. 5. Hypocrites imagine, that they love God, because they feel a sort of natural gratitude to God for his benefits; whilst they regard nothing in these benefits but the gratification of corrupt self. Whereas believers are brought to the exercise of true love to God by means of faith apprehending such a manifestation of God’s love to them in Christ as serves most eminently to display the glory of his holiness, goodness, truth, and other perfections of his nature, 2 Corinth, iv. 6. Thus, they love God for himself as well as for his benefits: for, though the faith of God’s love to them in Christ is the means of kindling love to him in their hearts; yet, as their love to him is supreme love, it can have no other proper ground, than his infinitely glorious excellencies, or what he is in himself.
the world is more desirable than never to come into his presence, Isai. xxxiii. 16. *Who amongst us shall dwell with devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?* say the sinners in Zion. Luke xix. 21.

*I knew that thou wast an austere man,* saith the evil servant. The Lord takes nothing worse at the hands of his people, than such hard thoughts of him, knowing full well what fruit this bitter root is like to bear; what alienation of heart, what drawing back, what unbelief and *tergiversation* in our walking with him.”

“Consider then, in the first place, that the receiving of the Father as he holds out love to the soul, gives him the honour he aims at and is exceeding acceptable to him. He often sets forth his love in an eminent manner, that it may be so received. He commendeth it to us, Rom. v. 8. *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!*”

“But some may say, Alas! how shall I hold communion with the Father in love? I know not at all whether he loves me or not. And shall I venture to cast myself upon it? How if I should not be accepted? Should I not rather perish for my presumption, than find sweetness in his bosom? God seems to me as a consuming fire and everlasting burning, so that I dread to look up unto him.”

“I know not what may be understood by this knowing of the love of God. Though it be carried on by spiritual sense and experience; yet it is first received purely by believing. Our knowing it is just, our believing it as revealed. *We have known and believed the love that God hath to us: God is love,* 1 John iv. 16. This is the assurance, which, at the very entrance of walking with God, thou mayst have of this love. He who is truth hath said it. And whatever thy heart or satan says, unless thou wilt take it up on this account, thou doest thy endeavour to make him a liar who hath spoken it, 1 John v. 10.”

“I can believe, that God is love to others; for he hath said, He is

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106 that is, to turn one’s back.
love. But that he will be so to me, I see no ground of persuasion. There is no cause, no reason in the world why he should have one thought of love or kindness towards me; and therefore I dare not cast myself upon it to hold communion with him in his special love.”

“He hath spoken it as particularly to thee as to any one in the world. With regard to a cause of love, he hath as much to fix it on thee as on any of the children of men; that is, none at all without himself. So that I shall make speedy work with this objection. Never any one from the foundation of the world, who believed such love in the Father, and made returns of love to him again, was deceived. Neither shall any to the world’s end be deceived in so doing. Thou art then in this upon a most sure bottom. If thou believest and receivest the Father as love, he will infallibly be so to thee, though others may fall under his severity.”

“But I cannot find my heart making returns of love unto God. Could I find my soul set upon him, I would then believe his soul delighted in me.”

“This is the most preposterous course that possibly thy thoughts can pitch upon, a most ready way to rob God of his glory. *Herein is love*, saith the Holy Spirit, *not that we loved God, but that he loved us* first. Now thou wouldst invert this order, and say, *Herein is love, not that God loved me, but that I love him first*. This is to take the glory of God from him, that whereas he loves us without any cause that is in ourselves, and we have all cause in the world to love him; thou wouldst have the contrary, namely, that something should be in thee for which God should love thee, even thy love to him; and that thou shouldst love God before thou knowest any thing lovely in him, namely, whether he love thee or not. This is a course of the flesh’s finding out, that will never bring glory to God nor peace to thy own soul. Lay down, then, thy reasonings. Take up the love of the Father upon a pure act of believing; and that will open thy soul
to let it out unto the Lord in the communion of love.”
LETTER XI.

Of the Priority of justification to the exercise of Evangelical Repentance.

Christian Brethren,

The question, Whether a state of pardon goes before the first exercise of evangelical repentance, has been handled by various writers. The affirmative side appears to be sufficiently established by the arguments which Mr. Boston has advanced in his Miscellany Questions. The design of this letter is to state the same arguments, and to remove some exceptions to them offered by Mr. Bellamy and others.

To prevent the misconstruction of our doctrine on this head, the following observations are premised.

1. We hold, the exercise of repentance to be indispensably necessary, in all who are capable of it, not only as commanded by God, but as a mean, without which none may expect the comfortable enjoyment of communion with God, either here or hereafter.

2. When we speak of repentance being after justification, we speak of the order of nature, not of the order of time: for no justified person or true believer is impenitent. Farther, we speak of the formal exercise of repentance, not of the root of it. The root of repentance, being nothing else but the principle of spiritual life infused in regeneration, is the same with the root of all the other graces: in this respect, no one of these graces can be said to be either before or after another.

3. Repentance is either legal or evangelical. Legal repentance is a sorrow for sin and some forsaking of it, proceeding only from a fear of the judgment of God denounced in his law. Evangelical repentance is a godly sorrow for sin and a thorough renunciation of it, proceeding from faith’s apprehension of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ, as revealed in the gospel; an apprehension which
implies not only some general and slight taste of the gospel, but a rooted and firm dependance on it. It is granted, that there is a legal repentance before justification, but not an evangelical.

4. When God is said to forgive the sin of his people, it is to be understood, first, of the act of his free grace in bringing them into an unalterable state of actual justification, Coloss. ii. 13. Secondly, of the removal of rods, with which they have been visited, in the way of fatherly correction, 2 Chron. vi. 25. Thirdly, of the intimations and comfortable sense, which the Lord affords them of their justified state, Psal. xxxii. 5. It is granted, that the exercise of evangelical repentance is before the forgiveness of sin, in the second and third senses, but not in the first.

Our doctrine on this head being understood according to these observations, we proceed to the proof of it in the following arguments.

I. The actual exercise of evangelical repentance does not go before our state of justification in the sight of God; because there is no acceptable performance of good works before the attainment of that privilege.

The force of this argument lies in the evidence of two positions, which are, That the exercise of evangelical repentance is a good work, and That good works do not go before, but follow justification.

As to the first position, That the exercise of evangelical repentance is a good work, it is too evident to need much illustration. The scriptural definition of a good work undoubtedly agrees to it; which definition is, something commanded in the word of God, done in faith, and having the glory of God for its chief end; Heb. xiii. 21. May the God of peace—make you perfect in every good work, to do his will. Matth. xv. 9. In vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Rom. xiv. 23. Whosoever is not of faith is sin. Heb. xi. 6. Without faith it is impossible to please God. 1 Corinth. x. 31. Whether ye eat or drink; or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. It may be called an evangelical work; not, indeed, as if it were not contained in the
moral law; but as it, and every other truly good work, is done in the faith of Christ, as our only righteousness and strength. Thus done, the work of a servant in his station is an evangelical work, a serving of the Lord Christ, Coloss, iii. 24.

As to the second position, That good works do not go before but follow justification; it was hardly ever disputed among protestants in the early days of the reformation. The celebrated saying of Augustine was then admitted as an axiom, or undoubted principle, *Bona opera non procedunt justificandum; sed sequuntur justification.*

Thus in the xvth chapter of the Helvetian Confession we have these words: “Our love and works cannot please God, if they are done by us, whilst we are unjust: therefore it is necessary that we be just before we can love or do good works. But we are made just or we are justified through faith in Christ, freely by the grace of God, not imputing our sins to us, but the righteousness of Christ.” The members of the Synod of Dort, in the xxivth article of their confession, say: “We are justified by faith in Christ; and that before we do good works: otherwise they could not be good works,—any more than the fruit of a tree can be good, before the tree itself be good.” “Good works,” says the Westminster Confession, “are fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.—The persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him.” The truth of this position is evident to every reader of the Bible, who is not grossly blinded by prejudice. It is evident, in the first place, from the necessity of our being dead to the law or covenant of works in order to our living to God, Rom. vii. 4. *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

Now there are no good works, but what are included in bringing forth fruit unto God. But our spiritual marriage to Christ is necessary to our bringing forth fruit unto God; in which marriage to Christ we are dead to the law through his body: that is, we are justified or delivered from the law as a covenant through the

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107 Good works do not go before him who is to be justified, but they follow him who is justified.
righteousness which he wrought out in our nature, received by faith. Before this blessed change of state, the only fruit we bring forth is fruit unto death, v. 5. and the only religious service we attain, is that selfish, slavish, mercenary, carnal service, to which we are prompted by the terrors of the law and the pride of self-righteousness, and which is called, in v. 6. serving in the oldness of the letter.

The same thing is evident from Rom. vi. 14. Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace. From this text we learn, that while persons are under the law, that is, while they are not brought into a justified state, they are under the dominion of sin; and therefore are utterly incapable of performing any work which is spiritually good or pleasing to God. For, according to this text, freedom from the dominion of sin is the peculiar privilege of those who are not under the law, but under grace; that is of those who are justified freely by the grace of God in Christ. Farther, we observe, that, according to the order of the covenant of grace, God’s acceptance of our persons is, in the order of nature, before the acceptance of our works. We have an example of this order in Gen. iv. 4. And the Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering: first to Abel, and then to his offering. Thus, it appears, that there are none of our works that are accepted with God, before our persons are accepted with him in justification: and consequently that none of them done before our attainment of that privilege, are spiritually good. In fine, the apostle intimates that, before justification, men are ungodly, Rom. iv. 5. But to him who worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

But, says Mr. Bellamy, “you quite misunderstand Paul, whose real meaning is no more than this; That it is impossible, that a sinner ever should be justified under any other notion, than as being ungodly, Rom. iv. 5. For one sin in the eye of the law, and so in the eye of God the judge, denominates a man ungodly, and
subjects him to eternal damnation, Gal. iii. 10.”

Answer. It is readily granted, that one sin subjects a person out of Christ to the curse of the broken law; and that all the holiness attainable by believers is of no avail for their justification. This we allow to be included in the meaning of the apostle’s expression; but is far from being adequate to the whole import of it; for in order to cut off all pretence for allowing works any place or influence whatever in the affair of a sinner’s justification, he teaches, that when God comes to justify a sinner, he finds not only that he has no such holiness and good works as are sufficient for the purpose of justification; but also that he has none at all. The person whom God is here said to justify, is one who worketh not; that is, who has not, as yet, done any work, that is accepted, as such, with God; his faith not being, as yet, accounted a work, but rather opposed to all works: and to set this matter in the strongest light, the apostle adds, God justifieth the ungodly. To say, that the most holy persons may be denominated ungodly, merely because they do not good works with a view to justification, is not that sound speech that cannot be condemned. The glorified saints are made perfect in holiness. Yet they do nothing with a view to their justification before God; the justification which they obtained on earth, being complete and irrevocable. But who will venture on that account to call them ungodly? Besides, it can never be shown, that unbelievers, or such as are not yet in a justified state, ever do any work or seek any good qualification with any better view, than that of thereby obtaining acceptance with God.

108 Essay on the nature, &c. page 119, 68. where Mr. Bellamy adds, “Nor can any future penitency make any imaginable satisfaction.” It is strange, if he meant hereby to insinuate, that, when his opponents insist upon repentance as a fruit and evidence of justifying faith, they had said any thing that might lead persons to consider it as a satisfaction for sin. By teaching that true repentance comes after a sure interest in the satisfaction of Christ and complete pardon, they took the most effectual method in the world to prevent such an abuse of repentance.

109 This view of the text, under consideration, is the most suitable to the apostle’s design, which is, to guard the doctrine of justification by the free grace of God in Christ against the corruptions of legal teachers. For though men’s good works and qualifications be ever so positively excluded from belonging to that which constitutes our justifying righteousness; yet while they are contended for as conditions or prerequisites, or as any other than fruits of our justification, there is a dangerous departure from the simplicity of gospel doctrine.

110 We may add here the judgment of two eminent writers on this text. “Who can deny, that the ungodly is said by Paul to be justified, because he had been ungodly; and in the very act of justification could be considered no otherwise in himself? With his justification he is indeed endowed with the grace of God, whereby he shall afterwards live godly: but this is done neither before nor in the act of justification; for God absolves a
Though the position now under consideration, “That good works do not precede, but follow justification,” be a leading doctrine of the Protestant religion in opposition to Popery, and though it be plainly founded in the passages of scripture now produced; yet it has been represented as erroneous by Mr. Bellamy and others who profess to hold Calvinistic principles. “The freeness of justification,” say they, “does not depend upon the date of it. Holiness may precede justification, as to time, and yet have no causal influence on it. On the other hand, it may follow justification, as to time, and yet may be that which is accounted for righteousness. The righteousness of Christ was imputed to Old Testament believers long before it was actually wrought. Faith works by love from its first existence, and its thus working belongs to it as genuine justifying faith. Hence it is inferred that faith justifies as thus working. To allege that the property of working by love does not belong to the nature of faith as justifying, is to contradict the apostle, who speaks of receiving the love of the truth, that we may be saved, and pronounceth those persons unbelievers, who do not thus receive it. Abraham at the time when he is said to have believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness; and David, when the blessedness of which the apostle speaks came upon him, were not in a state of enmity to God; but had been his friends and servants for a series of years. The self-abasement of the publican preceded his going down to his house justified; yet it was not, on this ground that his justification rested.”

Answer. The scripture appears to lay much stress upon the date of our reconciliation and justification by the blood of Christ, as serving eminently to illustrate the freeness of the grace of God in the bestowing of these benefits. When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness when he was in uncircumcision. As it appeared, that circumcision was no cause or federal condition of man without works or previous piety,” Hoorobecius Socinianismus confutatus. “God justifieth the ungodly, that is, one who is such in himself, and was actually such, till, in regeneration, he is endowed with that faith by which he is justified.” Witsiis.
Abraham’s justification; because he was justified before he was circumcised: so it appears, that our good works are no cause or federal condition of justification; because we are justified, before any of our works are good and acceptable to God.

It seems a strange assertion, that holiness may precede justification as to time, and yet have no causal influence on it: since any active obedience of the creature, which we know to have been acceptable to God, either had a causal influence on justification, or justification had a causal influence on it. The former would have been the case with Adam’s obedience, (if he had not fallen) according to the covenant of works; the latter is the case with the obedience of believers according to the covenant of grace. Nor does it seem less strange, to assert, that the holiness or active obedience of the creature may follow justification as to time; and yet may be that which is accounted the creature’s justifying righteousness. For, it cannot be shown, that the righteousness of any mere man could justify him in the sight of God, before it was performed. The justification of a person by his own righteousness is the natural effect of his performance of that righteousness; and therefore to suppose him to be justified by that righteousness before the performance of it, is to suppose (what is absurd) that a natural effect may exist before its necessary cause. A legalist is so far blinded by his spiritual pride as to think, that he either has already attained or may attain a righteousness of his own sufficient for his justification; but his natural reason and conscience will not allow him to conclude himself justified by a righteousness not yet performed. Hence Papists, Arminians and other legalists, very consistently, deny, that an infallible assurance of our own justification is attainable in this life. But justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ is a quite different case. For the righteousness of Christ is of infinite value, he being God as well as man; and the imputation of it is made by a special appointment of the free and sovereign grace of God. Hence the efficacy of the righteousness of Christ is not to be measured by the natural efficacy of the righteousness of a mere man: and therefore we may well conceive it to have been sufficient for the justification of his
people long before it was actually wrought; as well as it has been since.

We are far from doubting, that it is the property of saving or justifying faith to work by love and to receive the love of the truth. But we say, in the first place, that faith does not justify the sinner as working by love; but as receiving and applying the justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus, set forth in the gospel. A thing may have several properties besides that by which it produces a certain effect. A person is enriched by a ring which he finds; but it is not by the circular figure of the ring, nor by the value of the ring itself, but by a precious gem inclosed in it. In the next place, we deny, that faith is considered and accepted of God as our work before justification. For, in the matter of justification, faith is not considered as a work at all; but only as a mean or instrument by which we receive the gift of righteousness. Thus we come to have acceptance with God; first the acceptance of our persons; then, that of our faith as a work; and, lastly, that of our other works or services flowing from faith.

It is a dangerous departure from sound doctrine to teach, “that Abraham and David were not in a state of enmity to God, but were his friends and servants for a series of years, before they were in a justified state.” For, though we allow, that regeneration is before justification in the order of nature; yet there can be no moment of time between the one and the other; justifying faith being wrought in us by regeneration. Whoever, therefore, is not in a state of enmity against God, is in a justified state; nor are any other than justified persons, to be reckoned amongst the friends of God. If it be insisted on, that, in Gen. xv. 6. “it is said, Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness, and, in the xxxii. Psalm, David has these words, I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin; and that these patriarchs were friends and servants of God long before the time to which these expressions refer, that is, before their justification:”—We answer, that this is justly denied; for there is sufficient ground to believe that these patriarchs were in a justified state before that time. With regard to Abraham, we are assured by
the apostle, that he had faith, and consequently was in a justified state, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance,¹¹¹ that is, several years before the vision recorded in Gen. xv. With regard to David’s experience recorded in the xxxii. Psalm, we may observe, with Mollevus on these words, I said, I will confess my transgression, that “this resolution includes or supposes faith; for no one will be brought to this language, till he believes that God freely forgiveth his sins.”¹¹² Hence we are to understand the forgiving of the iniquity of David’s sin in that passage, not of the Lord’s bringing him into a justified state, but of a new intimation or application of the pardon formerly granted, according to the case about which he was now exercised. So we may understand such passages as the following, 2 Sam. xii. 13. Nathan said unto David, The Lord hath put away thy sin. Isai. vi. 7. Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 1 John i. 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Besides, in the language of scripture a thing is often said to be or to take place, when the manifestation of it is meant,¹¹³ Rom. iii. 26. That he might be just; that is, manifested to be so. In the same manner we understand John xv. 8. So shall ye be my disciples. Matth. v. 45. That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven. Thus Abraham, David, and indeed any believer, might be said to be justified or pardoned upon a particular manifestation of their justified state; though they had been in that state long before. And though the persons, thus favoured, be now godly; yet as they were ungodly when God brought them into that state; and as there is only one justification, namely, that which took place, when the Lord brought them first to believe in Christ, while they were without good works or previous piety; so their justification may still be called, (what it was first) the justification of the ungodly.

In the sense now mentioned we may well understand the word

¹¹¹ Heb. xi. 8.
¹¹² Mollevus in Psalmas apud Polum.
¹¹³ Verba quae fieri, esse, vel agere quid significant quando que non tam essentiam vel actum, quam ejusdem notificationem, qualsunque illa sit, denotant. Glassius de Verbo.
justified in our Lord’s expression concerning the publican, *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*, Luke xviii. 14. As also in I Tim. iii. 16. Jam. ii. 21. The self-abasement of the publican, as it served to manifest his justification before God, supposed that he was already in that state.

In a word, from the general truth, that good works do not go before justification, we conclude, that the exercise of evangelical repentance, which is eminently a good work, does not go before that privilege, but follows it.

II. The exercise of evangelical repentance is not before justification in the sight of God; because it is not before justifying faith.

In the first place it appears, that, if evangelical repentance be not before justifying faith, it is not before justification: For faith and justification before God are so immediately connected, that no other grace or holy exercise can be considered as coming between them. Whereas if repentance were in the order of nature after faith, and yet before justification, then repentance would come in between faith and justification: then it might be said, in opposition to the apostle, that we are justified by repentance rather than by faith; as in that case the former would be more immediately connected with justification than the latter. All this is exceedingly absurd; since our justification is an act complete at once, in the first moment of believing in Christ as the Lord our righteousness.114

114 God’s eternal and unchangeable will to justify the elect, upon the account of a righteousness wrought out by Christ and imputed to them, has been called by judicious divines *active justification*. *Nota est distinctio, says Witsius, inter justificationem activam et passivam. Ilia est sententia Dei, qua sibi per Christum satisfactum profitetur, omnesque electos a reatu et solvendi debito immunes pronuntiat, etiam ante ipsorum fidem, hactenus ut ab ipsis nullam unquam solutionem exacturas sit. &c. Oeconomia Faed. Lib. ii. Cap. 7. Justification, considered as an immanent act of God, is called *active*: but, considered as terminating upon us, is called *passive*. The active justification of the elect was displayed in the resurrection of Christ: For, in raising Christ from the dead, God, as a righteous Judge, declared his acceptance of Christ’s obedience unto death as the full payment of the elect’s debt, Isai. iii. 11. Rom. iv. 25. Heb. ix. 26, 28. In virtue of this active justification, there is a special providence exercised about the elect, whilst in an unregenerate state, in subservience to their conversion. In virtue of this justification, the unconverted elect, though they are still lying under actual guilt, under the condemnatory sentence of the law, are secured against the actual execution of it. In virtue of this justification, the Holy Spirit enters into the dead soul and quickens it in the moment of regeneration. This, however, is not the justification, which is mentioned in scripture as the privilege of believers, which is in the order of nature after effectual calling, Rom. viii. 30. which is not only manifested, but actually brought to pass by faith as a mean, or instrument, Rom. iii. 28. Gal. ii. 16. iii. 8, 24. By faith a man’s relation to the law is changed, not in the decree
In the next place, evangelical repentance, as it is distinguished from justifying faith, comes after it in the order of nature. We say, repentance, as it is distinguished from faith, according to Acts xx. 21. Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true, that the word repentance does, in scripture, sometimes express the whole of that change which takes place in the conversion of a sinner unto God. In this sense, it comprehends faith in Jesus Christ, sorrow for sin and sincere endeavours after new obedience. It would be improper to say of repentance in this sense, that it is after faith in Christ. But then it still remains true, that repentance, taken in a stricter sense, as signifying godly sorrow for sin and sincere endeavours after new obedience, is distinct from faith and comes after it in the order of nature. And though in this sense, repentance is implied in faith, as an effect is implied in its cause; yet there is no ground for the following exception of Mr. Bellamy: “Repentance of God, but in his actual condition as standing before the tribunal of God: for, before faith, as to the actual state of his person, he stood at the bar of God under a sentence of condemnation: but, upon faith’s producing the plea of Christ’s righteousness on his behalf, he stands at that bar acquitted and accepted as righteous. Before faith, the law covenant was alive to us as our old husband, subjecting us to condemnation and death. But by faith apprehending Christ as the Lord our righteousness, the law comes in that respect, to be dead to us and we to it: because, upon our believing, we are espoused to Christ; and the law-covenant, as such, having got a full answer to all its demands from our new husband, has nothing to require of us. It is true, that the elect were in Christ as their representing Head from eternity, 2 Tim. i. 9. and this in-being in him is the ground of the active justification before mentioned. But there is another in-being in Christ, upon which their actual or passive justification proceeds; an in-being in him which takes place in the first moment of believing, John vi. 56. and with regard to which Paul says of some of his fellow-prisoners, that they were in Christ before him, Rom. xvi. 7. The actual condemnation of a person, on account of Adam’s first sin, supposes not only that he was represented by Adam in the covenant of works; but also, that he actually exists as one of Adam’s natural descendants. So our actual justification on account of the righteousness of Christ supposes not only, that we were represented by Christ in the covenant of grace; but also that we actually exist in him as his spiritual seed. But we do not actually exist in him, as such, till we believe.

The opinion of those who assert that men are actually justified from all eternity is justly condemned by our Confession of Faith, by the author of the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and others, as an Antinomian delusion. It is indeed an opinion which subverts the scriptural order of things; according to which order we are under the law before we are under grace. We are branches in the old stock of the first Adam, before we are ingrafted branches in the true vine, Christ Jesus. We are constituted sinners by the disobedience of the old covenant-head, before we are constituted righteous by the obedience of our new covenant-head. We are called, before we are justified. That the scriptural order in all these instances is reversed by this preposterous opinion of eternal justification, is too evident to need any illustration. This opinion, as Mr. Boston, in the second of his Miscellany Questions, observes, “overturns both law and gospel at one blow”: the law, which represents us as at first and by nature children of wrath, under condemnation, and consequently unpardoned: the gospel, which presents pardon to us, as being before we believe law-condemned criminals; and the garment of Christ’s righteousness as what we are destitute of, till we receive it or put it on by faith. It is particularly a great error to hold that justification by faith alone is only a manifestative justification: thus confounding it, as the Papists do, with that justification by works which is treated of in James ii. 21—24. a justification, which Protestant divines have always held to be manifestative in contradistinction to justification before God, which is by faith only, Rom. iii. 28. v. 1. The writer of these letters concurs heartily with the brethren of the Associate Reformed Synod in testifying against the doctrine of eternal justification, according to their act published in the year 1798.
is implied in faith; and therefore it is not after faith in the order of nature.”\textsuperscript{115} The fruit of a tree may be said to have been always seminally, or as to the principles of it, in the tree; yet nobody, on that account, will scruple to say, that the fruit is after the tree in the order of nature.

Were repentance before faith, sinners might go to God, without making use of Christ as the only way to him,—in direct opposition to the testimony of Christ concerning himself: \textit{I am the way:—no man cometh unto the Father but by me.} To suppose that we may exercise true repentance before faith in Christ, is contrary to all those scriptures that inculcate the necessity of faith, in order to our living, standing, or walking in a spiritual sense; or in order to our pleasing God in any exercise, Gal. ii. 20. 2 Corinth, i. 24. v. 7. Heb. xi. 6. John xv. 4, 5. Various passages of scripture, such as Joel. ii. 12, 13. Hose. xiv. 1, 2. Jerem. iii. 14, 22. Isai. lv. 7. propose the exceeding riches of the grace of God in Christ in order to excite us to repentance. But if repentance go before faith, such passages tend to deceive us. For we are led, by the most natural construction of these texts, to believe, that it is by means of a previous, believing apprehension of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ, that sinners are brought to a heart-hatred and total renunciation of sin. The doctrine of the necessity of true repentance before faith in Christ, has a manifest tendency, either to deter the awakened and convicted sinner from essaying the exercise of coming to Christ, as being sensible of his want of repentance; or to encourage the secure and self-conceited legalist to bring his pretended repentance as a price in his hand. The truth is, evangelical repentance is not otherwise to be obtained, than by looking on him whom we have pierced, according to that remarkable promise, Zech. xii. 10. and by receiving it from him who is exalted to give it, Act. v. 31.

It is true, that repentance is mentioned before faith in some places of Scripture, as in the text last quoted, in Act. xx. 21. in Mark i. 15. But things are not always mentioned in scripture according to

the order of nature. Thus it is not according to that order that in
the apostolic benediction, 1 Corinth, xiii. 13. the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ is put before the love of the Father; and that in 2 Pet. i.
10. the calling of believers is put before their election. So in the
passages wherein repentance is mentioned before faith, what, is
intended is not to point out the order of nature; but rather first to
propose repentance as the end; and then faith as the mean
necessary for the attainment of that end.

We conclude, that as repentance is after faith in Christ, so it is
after the pardon of sin, which is received by faith.

III. The exercise of evangelical repentance is not before
justification in the sight of God; because it is not before the
exercise of love to God.

Here two things are to be proved: one is, that repentance springs
from love to God: the other, that love to God follows a state of
forgiveness. The truth of both these propositions appears from the
example of the penitent woman recorded in Luke vii. 37—48. As to
the first of these propositions, our Lord, whose judgment is always
according to truth, put this construction upon her tears of sorrow
for her many sins, that they flowed from true love. No other sorrow
for sin or hatred of it belongs to true repentance, than such
proceeds from love to God. As to the other proposition, which is,
that love to God follows a state of forgiveness, it appears from our
Lord’s parable of the two debtors. For, by that parable, he shows,
that, as an effect is still according to its cause, so our love to God
will be according to the forgiveness of our sins apprehended by
faith. In this sense we are to understand what our Lord says to the
Pharisee concerning the woman; *I say unto thee her sins, which are
many, are forgiven; for she loved much.* The particle *for* does not
always denote the cause of a thing, but sometimes the effect and
evidence of it;¹¹⁶ as when we say, the spring is come; for the trees
begin to bud. So in John xvi. 27. *The Father himself loveth you; for ye
have loved me;* that is, your love to me is a certain evidence that the

¹¹⁶ The Greek particle rendered *for* denotes the proof of a thing, which, as Amesius observes, “is taken from
the following effect, as well as from the antecedent cause. That the woman’s love,” adds he, “is here pointed out
as the effect of the pardon of her sins, is evident from the whole discourse:” Bellarminus Enervatus.
Father loveth you. Our Lord’s argument here is evidently to this purpose: the person that is forgiven most will love most; but this poor woman, and not Simon the Pharisee, loves most: and therefore she is the person that is forgiven most. Her love is a sufficient proof, that her sins, however many, are all forgiven. With regard to the mean by which this woman attained the forgiveness of her sins, our Lord shows us what it was, when he says to her, *thy faith hath saved thee; thy faith,* not thy repentance or thy tears. “From the fruits of love,” says Chemnitius upon the place, “our Lord shows, that the sins of this woman were forgiven. When he had said, *Her sins are forgiven; for she loved much;* he immediately adds, (to prevent the mistake of his meaning with regard to the order of cause and effect,) *But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* He declares again and again, that remission of sin goes before and that love follows. Having said, *The creditor frankly forgave them both,* he adds, *Which of them will love him most?* Here it is observable, that the expression, *will love him,* is in the future tense, whereas the expression, *he forgave them,* is in the preterite or the past;—intimating that a person’s love to God follows the remission of sins, as the future follows the past.” “Here,” adds that evangelical writer, “Christ shows us whence true love to him springs. As long as insolvent debtors consider their creditor in no other light than that of a rigid exacter of his due, though they may sometimes flatter him with their mouths, they will never sincerely love him, they will hate and despise him in their hearts. Thus poor souls, that are ignorant of any way of pardon and reconciliation, on which they can rely with certainty, despise God, or hate and shun him, as an incensed adversary. Hence it is that, unless the gospel, which proclaims a free grant of the forgiveness of sins, be received by faith, the true love of God can neither enter into, nor abide in any soul.”

But, says Mr. Bellamy, “though repentance is always increased by a sense of the Divine forgiveness, the latter does not therefore at first go before the former.”117

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117 Essay on the Nature, &c. page 117
Answer. We do not say, that a person has no true gospel-repentance, till he attain a distinct sense of his being already in a justified state: the influence of pardoning mercy apprehended by faith, will produce real love to God and gospel repentance, not indeed before the person has been brought into a justified state, but before he has attained a distinct and comfortable sense of it. Thus the woman’s repentance, just now mentioned, which followed the Divine forgiveness of sin, (as we have seen from the application of the parable of the two debtors to her case:) was before the distinct and comfortable sense of that forgiveness arising from out Lord’s intimation of it in v. 48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. In this exception, therefore, Mr. Bellamy commits what is called Ignoratio Elenchii, that is, a mistake of the matter in question: for the question is not, whether repentance goes before the sense of forgiveness? but whether it goes before forgiveness itself? Or if we understand him as meaning (what he must mean if he oppose the doctrine of Mr. Marshal and Mr. Boston) that there is a repentance that goes before forgiveness; then it must be either of the same kind with that which follows forgiveness, or of a different kind. If it be of a different kind, then is it not that gospel repentance, which is of a gracious nature and acceptable to God in Christ: the only repentance of which we now enquire. But if it be supposed to be of the same kind, the falsehood of the supposition has been already shown; for we have seen, that, before justification by faith in Jesus Christ, men are destitute of that love to God which is essential to gospel-repentance, and which is an effect and evidence of the pardon of sin.

IV. This doctrine, that a state of pardon goes before the exercise of true repentance, is most agreeable to the order according to which God hath promised to bestow these blessings upon his people. Hosea xiv. 4. I will heal their backslidings: v. 6. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols. Isai. xliv. 22. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Ezek. xvi. 62, 63. I will establish my covenant with thee; that thou mayst remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy
shame; because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God. xxxvi. 25. I will sprinkle clean water, that is, the blood of Christ, upon you, for the remission of sins, and ye shall be clean, judicially purged or absolved from every charge of guilt. Ver. 26. A new heart will I give you. Ver. 27. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. Ver. 31. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and loathe yourselves for your iniquities and for your abominations.

The argument from these passages is not merely, that a justified state is mentioned before repentance; but that the latter is mentioned as the native effect of the former. Ephraim’s resolution to have no more to do with idols is the native effect of the healing of his backslidings. The Lord’s grace manifested towards Israel in his being pacified towards them for all that they have done, fills them with ingenuous shame and self-loathing. That there is another sort of repentance going before pardon and proceeding from legal convictions and the dread of the Divine judgments is not to be doubted; but that there is any exercise of repentance of a gracious nature or acceptable to God different from that godly sorrow and self-loathing which the Lord secures to his people in these promises, has never been proved.

V. The opinion of the necessity of repentance in order to the receiving of pardon tends to frustrate the manifestation of Divine grace in the gospel-offer. The gospel promises pardon immediately to those that believe, Act. x. 43. Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. But, says Mr. Bellamy, he shall not receive that blessing from the Lord, till he first get the exercise of true repentance. But how is he to get repentance? he has it not of himself. And while he views himself as still excluded from the pardoning mercy of God in Christ, he has not the least ground to expect, that God will give him repentance.

118 It is proper to understand this verse of justification, aa being a privilege distinct from regeneration and sanctification, which are promised in the two following verses. So this passage is understood by Polanus and Junius. See Pool’s Synopsis.

119 “Let them that will,” says that judicious and godly divine Mr. Boston, “repent that Christ may do for them; I shall desire always to believe what Christ hath done for me, that I may repent; not doubting that the being instructed therein is the plain way to smiting on the thigh, and saying. What have I done?”
opinion, in question, tends to the subversion of the gospel in two respects.

1st. The gospel teaches men to come empty handed to the market of free grace for the remission of sins and all other blessings included in eternal life. But he comes not empty-handed, who brings repentance along with him. If it be said, that faith is still something that we are to bring with us, we must repeat what we formerly observed, that, in the matter of justification, faith is not considered as a work or inherent righteousness, but only as our receiving of the gift of righteousness. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed. Repentance is very different in this respect; for there is no grace of the Spirit, which hath more of the nature of giving than repentance; as it is the turning of the whole man from sin unto God; and therefore, there is nothing which we should be farther from allowing any place among the means of our justification before God. The abettors of the opinion in question, have need to consider, whether, instead of the covenant of grace, they are not taking up with a sort of covenant of works; the tenor of which is, do this; turn from sin unto God sincerely, though thou canst not do so perfectly,—and thou shalt live in the favour of God. This plan is manifestly of the same nature with the covenant of works; while doing in both is the previous condition of acceptance with God: the difference between the doing in the one and the doing in the other with regard to the degree of perfection, makes no difference in the nature of the two plans. The one is evidently a covenant of works as well as the other.

2ndly, The gospel warrants any sinner of mankind to embrace the offer or free grant, which it makes, of pardon in Christ, immediately upon hearing and understanding the import of it: but, according to Mr. Bellamy's doctrine on this head, no person can find a warrant for doing so, till he be conscious to himself, that he has attained true repentance. It is laid down by the apostle as an established principle, that whatsoever is not of faith, is sin, Rom. xiv. 25. that is, if we do any thing, while we doubt in our conscience, whether it be agreeable to the will of God or not, it is sin. The
context makes it evident, that the apostle speaks there of the faith of God’s command. Supposing, then, that a person believes the pardon of sin to be offered in the gospel to none but the truly penitent, and supposing, that he doubts of himself, whether he be such a one or not, he cannot, in that case, without sin embrace the offered pardon: to him it is forbidden fruit. Nay, before he lay hold of it, his conscience must be satisfied, that his repentance is not legal but evangelical; and that it has all the characters which distinguish repentance unto life from that which may be found in unrenewed men. How can this consist with the gospel, which declares, that whosoever will is welcome to receive the water of life freely?

If any should attempt to retort this argument, and say, that, whilst we hold faith to be the only mean of receiving pardon, assurance of the reality of our faith must be as necessary in order to the embracing of the gospel-offer, according to our doctrine, as assurance of the truth of our repentance, on Mr. Bellamy’s scheme: we answer by observing, that there is a great difference between the priority of repentance to pardon held by Mr. Bellamy, and what we hold concerning faith as a mean of receiving pardon. In the former case, repentance is required as a previous qualification distinct from the embracing of the gospel-offer of pardon; and therefore it must be sinful for a person to attempt to lay hold of this offer, till he knows, that he has attained that qualification. But in the latter case, faith is not a qualification previously required in order to the embracing of the offer of pardon, but is itself the very act of embracing that offer; it is a receiving of pardon, as it is a receiving of Christ, exhibited in the gospel-offer. Here the previous consciousness, that we have believed, cannot be held necessary in order to the receiving of pardon; unless we would be so absurd as to say, that the consciousness of our having already received a thing, is necessary in order to our act of receiving it.

Such are the arguments from which we conclude that a justified state precedes the exercise of gospel-repentance. As to the objections which have been made to this doctrine, one of the principal of them is, that there are several texts in which
repentance is put before the forgiveness of sin, such as, Luke iii. 3. xxiv. 48. Acts v. 31. But with regard to these texts, it may be useful to recollect what was observed concerning the mention of repentance in some texts before faith, namely, that the order, in which things are mentioned in scripture, is not always the order of nature. Besides, repentance or turning from sin unto God, being as to the general nature of it, a duty required by the dictates of reason and conscience, may well be first preached to sinners in order to convince them of the necessity of it, and of their natural inability to attain it; and then will properly follow the doctrine of our free forgiveness with God in Christ; the faith of which is the only means of attaining that repentance. In this sense, repentance might, no doubt, be preached by John the Baptist and the apostles before the gospel-doctrine of forgiveness. Farther, the term repentance appears to be used for the relinquishing of false opinions. Thus, when John exhorted his hearers to repent, he may be understood as calling them to renounce the error of the Sadducees about the resurrection; and that of the Pharisees about a temporal Messiah and about justification before God by their own works. So the word repent may be understood in Acts iii. 19. where Peter, having told the Jews, that they had crucified him whom God had now glorified, shows them how they came to do so, ver. 17. Through ignorance ye did it. Therefore in ver. 18. he corrects their mistake, telling them that, according to the writings of the prophets, the Messiah was to suffer the very things which they had inflicted on Jesus of Nazareth. Hence he exhorts them, in v. 19. to change their mind, to renounce the dangerous error they had fallen into, with regard to the Messiah, and to turn to the Lord in the way of embracing the gospel of his grace. In fine, repentance is put for the whole of a

120 It is a reason for not understanding the word repent here of gospel-repentance, that such repentance is included in the import of the next expression, be converted: But though it were granted, that the word repent here may be understood of gospel-repentance; yet this passage will not answer the purpose of proving repentance to be the previous condition or means of the attainment of a pardoned state. For the blotting out of sin here may signify, not the act of God in bringing us into that state; but the manifestation of it. For, as was formerly observed, a thing is often said in Scripture to be done or to take place, when it is manifested. By the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, Calvin, Beza and other judicious commentators understand the day of judgment, when believers shall be refreshed by the most public and glorious declaration of their pardoned state; the time here referred to being the time of the restitution of all things, when Christ shall be sent from heaven, ver. 20, 21. It is plain, that the apostle's teaching, that repentance is before the glorious manifestation, of pardon at the last day, is no proof that repentance goes before pardon itself. Hence appears the
sinner’s conversion unto God, including both faith and godly sorrow for sin, as in Act. xi. 18. *To the Gentiles hath God granted repentance unto life.* In this sense, repentance may be said to be both before and after the acts of justification: before it, in respect of faith receiving Christ as the Lord our righteousness: after it, in respect of the exercise of godly sorrow for sin.

“John,” says Calvin on Luke iii. 3. “First declares that the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and having thus proposed the grace of God to his hearers, he thence exhorts them to repent. Hence it appears, that the mercy of God by which he restores the lost, is the ground upon which repentance proceeds. In this sense, Mark and Luke say that John *preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;* not to intimate, as some ignorantly suppose, that repentance is the cause of the remission of sins; but to teach us, that as the free love of God is first in embracing poor sinners, not imputing their sins unto them; so this pardon of sins, is granted us in Christ,—not that God may indulge us in our sins, but that he may heal us and deliver us from them.” “The baptism of repentance,” says Piscator on the same place, “means, that this ordinance was used to testify and profess repentance. The words *for the remission of sins* depend immediately, not on the word *preached* nor on the word *repentance*, but on the word *baptism*; and the import of the expression is, that baptism serves to signify and seal the remission of sins.” Piscator has a similar observation on Act. ii. 38. another text commonly adduced by those who plead for the priority of repentance to a pardoned state. “Here,” says that useful commentator, “the words for the remission of sins, do not depend upon the word *repent*, but upon the word *baptised;*” the sense of the exhortation being, that these convinced persons should repent, that is, should turn to God by faith and repentance; and should receive baptism, not as a means of obtaining the remission of sins, but a testimony of their receiving that and all other spiritual blessings in Christ by means of faith in him. It is evident from the

impertinence of Mr. Bellamy’s exception, which is, “that whatsoever entitles a person to pardon, according to the gospel now, will entitle to pardon at the last day.” We only observe that to speak of repentance entitling to pardon, savours more of the Popish, than of the Protestant religion.
connection signified by the causal particle for in ver. 39. that the apostle there lays down the promise of pardon and salvation as the ground upon which he calls them to repent: as if he had said; I exhort you to repent; and in order that you may do so truly and acceptably, believe that the promise is to you.

Another text, which has been supposed to countenance the priority of true repentance to a pardoned state, is Acts xxvi. 18. Here our Lord shows first, how he works faith in the hearts of sinners by means of the gospel, namely, by opening the eyes of the blind, and turning them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. And then he declares, that, by means of faith, thus wrought, they receive forgiveness of sin and inheritance among them them who are sanctified by faith which is in him. If it be said, that the expression, turning them from the power of Satan to God may signify the exercise of gospel repentance: we answer, that, as these words, turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, evidently describe the work of God by means of the gospel; so they are to be understood of that saving change, which is called regeneration, and which in other places is ascribed to the gospel as the mean of it, 1 Pet. i. 23. Jam. i. 10. Hence these words, as they stand connected in this passage, cannot be understood of evangelical repentance as it is our act or exercise. But the following expression that they may receive, may be connected with the words at the end of the verse, by faith that is in me; and may well be understood of our act of receiving by faith, which is inseparably attended with the exercise of gospel repentance. Thus, the words of Christ in this passage serve much to confirm our doctrine, as they represent our receiving the forgiveness of sins, and not the exercise of gospel repentance, as the most immediate effect of regeneration. If we take the words by faith that is in me to be immediately connected with the word sanctified, we have a farther confirmation of our doctrine; for thus the faith of

121 The first expression, to open the eyes of the blind, is used to describe the work and office of our Lord Jesus, Isai. xlii. 7. But it is no where said to be our act. The next expression, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, is parallel to bringing out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house: a work which is also ascribed to the Lord Christ in the same place but no where in scripture to the creature.
forgiveness through Christ is declared to be the means of our sanctification. But if that faith be the means of our sanctification, it is also the means of our repentance: for repentance is certainly included in sanctification: what is the means of the one is the means of the other: and therefore that faith must be before the exercise of gospel repentance, as the means are, in the order of nature, before the end.

But, say the advocates for Mr. Bellamy’s opinion, there are many other texts which prove a gracious saving repentance to be before the forgiveness of sin, such as Luke xiii. 3, 5. Except ye repent, ye shall all perish, Prov. xxviii. 13. He that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy. To the same purpose they quote Jerem. iv. 1, 3, 4. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Isai. lv. 7.

Answer. None could be more express and peremptory, than Mr. Boston and others whom Mr. Bellamy censures with such peculiar severity, in declaring that there is no pardon or salvation without repentance. But if every thing without which, according to the scriptures, men shall perish, must go before a justified state, as among the means of attaining it, then a holy life and perseverance therein unto death, must go before a justified state; and then it will follow, that a justified state in the sight of God is not attainable before death. For the scripture declares, that without holiness and enduring to the end as well as without repentance men will certainly perish, Heb. x. 38. xii. 14.\textsuperscript{122} Where as it has been usually taught by Protestant divines, that the justification of a sinner, as soon as he truly believes in him whose name is The Lord our Righteousness, is complete; or as the apostle expresses it, All that

\textsuperscript{122} The text in Luke xiii. 3. does not hold for a connection between repentance and pardon, but only between not repenting and perishing. There is a great difference between these two connections. Let the argument be this, Except ye repent, ye shall perish. Therefore if ye do repent, ye shall live. Here, as Mr. Boston observes, “the consequent is true, but the consequence is naught.” It is no better reasoning than it would be to say, Because he who does not pray, shall perish; therefore he, who prays, shall be saved. To this purpose Calvin’s answer to the Papists, when they allege, that men must be justified by their good works, because they are condemned for the want of them. Calvin’s Institutions, Book iii. Chap, xviii. sect 10. The contraries here, says Mr. Calvin, are not equal: for one deviation, however small, from the pure and perfect rule of God’s law renders a person unrighteous and liable to eternal death, Jam. ii. 10. But it is not one or a few good works, but an unremitted course of obedience, without any the least defect, that will constitute a person righteous in the sight of God. And it is a maxim with regard to a particular action, That it is not morally good, unless it has all the requisites of a good work: the want of one of them renders it evil.
believe are justified from all things. Acts xiii. 39. and to such there is no condemnation, Rom. viii. 1.

As to the text quoted from the Proverbs, Mr. Bellamy’s opponents teach, as the doctrine of it, that none evidence themselves to be partakers of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ, but such as are sincerely exercised in confessing and forsaking their sins. To say that such as are brought to this exercise shall have or receive mercy in the after course of their lives, Psal. xxiii. 6. and at the day of judgment, 2 Tim. i. 18. is perfectly consistent with our maintaining, that the mercy of a pardoned state is in the order of nature, before that exercise. Besides, it may be observed, that the expression in this text may include the confession of open and scandalous sins before men, and the exercise of mercy toward them, and indeed the practice of good works in general, as is evident from the import of forsaking sin, and from parallel texts, Matth. v. 7. Prov. xiv. 21. Thus good works in general will be introduced as previous conditions of our justification before God. If our old reformers had heard such doctrine taught amongst Protestants, would they not hare cried out with the apostle, O foolish people, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you?

With regard to Jerem. iv. 1, 3, 4. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. and other texts which inculcate the duty of repentance, it may be observed, that, in such passages, repentance is either taken in a large sense for the whole of conversion, in which faith in Christ, receiving the forgiveness of sins, as well as repentance strictly taken, is included; or the duty is simply enjoined; while the right manner of performing it, and its connection with privileges and with other duties, are to be learned by comparing various passages of scripture on the same subject. Such commands are given to a person or people both before justification for conviction and after justification for direction, with declarations of a sure connection between true repentance and life, (whether by life be meant temporal comfort or eternal blessedness)—in full consistency with the doctrine of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents. Nor can any texts serve
his purpose but such as would teach that God had either brought persons to the actual exercise of true repentance or had promised to do so, before or without the faith of his pardoning mercy in Christ. For, as we have already shown, to say that repentance is before a state of pardon is the same thing with saying, that it is before faith in Jesus Christ. But no such text has been or can be produced.

Another text quoted by Mr. Bellamy is that remarkable one in Isai. lv. 7. *Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto Jehovah and he will have mercy upon him,*¹²³ *and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.* It is evidently the design of this text, to set before the sinner the mercy of God in Christ, that he may first believe it or trust in it for pardon and for heart-turning grace; and then that by that faith or trust, he may exercise true repentance in turning from his wicked way and thoughts. “Here,” says Calvin upon the place, “the context is to be carefully attended to: for the prophet shows, that men must have the previous faith or confidence of pardon, otherwise they cannot be brought unto the exercise of repentance.—The doctrine of the Popish doctors on the nature of repentance is indeed egregious trifling. But even though they were to teach the true nature of it, it would still be unprofitable; whilst they omit what is the foundation of all right exercise of repentance, the doctrine of free forgiveness of sin; by which alone true peace of conscience can ever be attained. And indeed while the sinner is a stranger to this peace of conscience, and views God only as a judge dragging him to his tribunal to give an account of his ill-spent life, he will flee from God, instead of returning to him with godly fear and filial obedience.”

But farther, says Mr. Bellamy, “in token of repentance as what must precede forgiveness, the high priest under the law was, on the great day of atonement, to lay both his hands on the head of a live

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¹²³ This expression might be rendered, *who will have mercy;* the copulative particle *vau* being frequently put for the relative pronoun, as in Psalm cxviii. 27. *God is the Lord who &c.* or we may read with Dr. Lowth, *For he will have mercy,—for he will pardon.* So this particle must be understood in Gen. xx. 3. and many other places.
goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, in all their sins, and thus put them upon the head of the goat to be sent away into the wilderness. As this was to be done on that solemn occasion with relation to the iniquities of the children of Israel in general, so, if any particular man at any time committed a sin, he was to bring his bullock, and, in token of confession and repentance, to lay his hand upon his head, and substitute it to die in his room: and if he had not only sinned against the great God, but in his sin injured his neighbour, he must first, as became a true penitent, make restitution before the sacrifice was offered.”

Answer. The act of the persons in the cases now mentioned, in laying their hands upon the head of the devoted victim, was a profession of their faith in Christ Jesus as the true propitiatory sacrifice, and supposed, that they trusted in him for the pardon of all their sins. In this act, supposing it to have been sincere, they were actually in a pardoned state, (this being the case with all true believers ;) and therefore as this act was before the public confession of their iniquities, so it evidenced their pardoned state to be before that confession; before restitution, and other tokens of repentance. This is a great confirmation of the doctrine of Mr. Bellamy’s opponents about the priority of a pardoned state to the actual exercise of evangelical repentance: and what followed the confession of sins in the offering of the victim, the sprinkling of blood, the sending away of the live goat, was answerable to those intimations and comfortable manifestations of pardon which the good Spirit of God grants in and after the exercise of gospel repentance, by means of the word, sacraments and prayer.

Again, says Mr. Bellamy, “God declares to the people of Israel, that after they should become truly penitent, then he would forgive them, Lev. xxvi. 41, 42. If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers: if their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity;—then will I remember my covenant with Jacob. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 33. where God declares concerning the Jews in Babylon, that he will first bring them to repentance, and then restore them to their land. Solomon,
in his prayer, at the dedication of the temple, expressly and repeatedly holds forth this doctrine, that repentance is before forgiveness. One cannot well see in how strong a point of light this is set without reading the whole prayer. The temple was a type of the Son of God incarnate. And in all their prayers, the penitent Jews looked towards the holy temple, and then God heard in heaven his dwelling place. *When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they sinned against thee, if they pray towards this place and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, &c. then hear thou, in heaven, and forgive, &c.*”

Answer. These passages will not answer Mr. Bellamy’s purpose, unless it could be shown that the forgiveness therein mentioned is necessarily to be understood of that sentence by which God, in the first act of faith, brings a sinner into a justified state; and consequently, that all the exercise that precedes this forgiveness must be without or before faith. But this cannot be proved: for the exercises, that preceded this forgiveness, such as prayer and confession of sin plainly implied the true faith of those who were sincerely engaged in those exercises. Nay, looking towards God’s holy temple may well be considered as an Old Testament expression equivalent to believing in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as the persons, whose exercise is represented in these passages, had faith in Christ, or were true believers, before the forgiveness there mentioned, it follows, that they were in a justified state before it. Besides, forgiveness, as we observed in the beginning of this letter, sometimes signifies the manifestation of God’s favour towards his people in the removal of temporal calamities; and in this sense we are led to understand forgiveness in the passages under consideration, and particularly as respecting the deliverance of the Israelites from a state of captivity. It is true, Mr. Bellamy objects, that forgiveness cannot be so understood here; “because the penitent believer is exempted from spiritual and eternal, as well as from outward and temporal evil.” But granting the persons spoken of to have been exempted from eternal evil by the sentence of justification before God; it will not follow, that the forgiveness here mentioned is to be understood of that sentence,
and not of the removal of temporal strokes; for the removal of temporal strokes may be, and, no doubt, frequently is, to true believers a token of the sentence of their justification, which may have taken place long before. “It is clear,” says Mr. Boston, “that in such passages the people are considered in their national capacity under national strokes for national sins; for the removal of which repentance of the same kind is required. And though, in such a general repentance of a people, they that believe are spiritually and theologically serious; and with a removal of the common calamity from the society, of which they are members, get God’s countenance to shine on their souls; yet the generality are never evangelically penitent. But moral seriousness, in such a case, according to the Lord’s way of dealing with nations, is a mean of getting these temporal strokes removed, as may be seen in the case of the Ninevites, and many a time in the case of the Jews. It is generally allowed, that there is a twofold being under the covenant of grace; the one external, the other internal. The same person may be under the covenant of works and the covenant of grace: under the former in respect of his soul’s state, with God’s curse upon him; under the latter, as externally partaking of the external privileges, protections, deliverances, &c. given to the visible church.” Thus, God might be said to remember his covenant for the afflicted Israelites, when they confessed their sins with self-abasement, and God, at the same time, removed the temporal calamities which they lay under.

But what the opposers of our doctrine chiefly insist on is the supposed tendency of it to detract from the necessity of repentance. This is no other than the old hackneyed objection which has been always made by legal teachers against the doctrine of justification by faith alone; and the solid answers that were given by Paul to the Judaizing party, and by our Reformers to the Papists in that case, are abundantly sufficient in this: such as, that when we receive the death of Christ as the ground of our justification, we receive it as the procuring cause of repentance; that the Holy Spirit works repentance in us at the same time in which he works that faith by which we receive the righteousness of
Christ for our justification; so that, though justification be before repentance in the order of nature, the one cannot be said, at least in the case of adults, to be before the other in the order of time: that no believer can have the comfortable sense or evidence of his pardoned state without the exercise of repentance: that the negligence of believers in not exercising repentance for particular sins particularly, will bring upon them most heavy corrections in the present life: that all who live and die without repentance will inevitably perish: That it is not a genuine repentance or godly sorrow for sin to which the pardoning mercy of God and the love of Christ, apprehended by faith, are not constraining motives.

To one who duly considers the vindications of the Protestant doctrine on this head by Calvin and others, it must appear strange how a writer who professes his adherence to that doctrine in general, was led to express himself in the following manner: “If,” says he, “the necessity of repentance in order to forgiveness be given up, we shall not be in the practice of urging it on the unconverted. We shall imagine it will be leading souls astray to press it before and in order to believing; and afterwards it will be thought unnecessary, as all that is wanted will come of itself.” It is astonishing to hear a minister, who is neither a Papist nor an Arminian, insinuate, that he knows not how sinners are to be urged to repentance and other good works, without representing them as necessary in order to justification. Might he not show them, that, while they continue impenitent and unholy, they evidence themselves to be in a state of condemnation and in the broad way which leadeth to destruction? Might he not warn them, that impenitence, persisted in, will be their ruin? Might not the necessity of repentance be urged upon sinners as a motive to their believing in Christ; because repentance cannot be attained without believing in him? Nay, is not this the only profitable way of urging sinners to repentance? Is it not preposterous to press upon sinners the necessity of repentance, without pointing out the means by which it may be attained; as it would be to use much discourse with a sick man in order to persuade him to cure himself; while he neither knows himself, nor is shown by any other, how or by what
means he may be cured? Has not this ignorant way of pressing sinners to repentance the most fatal tendency, as it leads them to seek after, and at last take up with, some sort of legal repentance, which fills them with spiritual pride and with such a conceit of their self-righteousness, as, more than all the gross irregularities of which they pretend to have repented, hardens them in their opposition to the gospel of Christ? With regard to the case of believers, the author, for whom the general tenor of his writings leads us to have a particular regard and esteem, is chargeable with great inadvertence at least, in representing the doctrine of all who deny the priority of repentance to justification as rendering it unnecessary to urge believers to the exercise of repentance. Though, believers have in them the root and habit of repentance and of other graces; yet they need to be stirred up to the exercise thereof by means of the warnings and exhortations of the word. These are peculiarly necessary in the case of repentance on account of the powerful and subtle workings of indwelling sin, and on account of that spiritual sloth which is among the remainders of corruption, and which calls for continual reproof and correction. Hence the exercise of grace and fruits meet for repentance are, ordinarily, as little to be expected even in believers, without the use of means both inward and outward, as the production of good grain in the most fruitful soil without cultivation. Hence it appears to be the principal design of a great part of the word to excite believers to repentance. They are sometimes represented as wise virgins, who slumber and sleep with the foolish; and as having left their first love; and therefore they are called to remember from whence they are fallen, and repent.
LETTER XII.

Of the work of the Holy Spirit in saving conversion.

Christian Brethren,

Amongst the charges, which Mr. Bellamy brings against Messrs. Marshal, Hervey, Boston and others, there are none which he insists upon with more acrimony or with greater professions of concern for the danger of souls, than those which regard the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

In the first place, he charges them with denying, that regeneration is in the order of nature before faith. “The absolute necessity,” says he, “of regeneration, as antecedent to the first act of faith is a doctrine your author [Mr. Marshal] does not believe.”

In another place he says, “regeneration is previous to the first act of true faith; but your faith may exist in an unregenerate heart.”

It is true, the divines, whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, did not allow any regenerate person to be destitute of saving faith: because they considered regeneration as the supernatural work of God by which he produces the grace of faith, and, in adults, the first act of faith; and therefore they represented that act as the first motion or discovery of the new creation in the soul. “We cannot possibly find,” says Mr. Marshal, “that the Spirit of God doth effectually work faith, or give strength to believe, till we act it.” Hence he directs us to begin the exercise of believing, before we know, that the Spirit doth or will work in us savingly: and observes, that, if we be Christ’s people we will be willing to set about this work, Psal. cx. 3. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. These divines also taught that the ground or warrant, upon which we are to proceed in believing, is not the saving operations of the Spirit in

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125 Dial. ii. p. 79.
our heart, but Christ held forth to us in the word of promise; faith not being our sense or feeling of the former, but our spiritual apprehension of and single dependance upon the latter. Hence they would often warn their hearers and readers against building for justification and salvation upon their feelings or a Christ within them, instead of building upon Christ as exhibited in the gospel. But they still taught, that regeneration is, in the order of nature, before faith. Mr. Marshal, towards the close of the explication of his fourth Direction, has the following words: “We are first passive, and then active in the great work of the mystical union. We are first apprehended of Christ, and then we apprehend Christ. As the sun first enlighteneth our eyes, and then we see by its light. We may remark farther,” says this judicious writer, “to the glory of the grace of God, that this union is fully accomplished by Christ giving the Spirit of faith to us, before we act that faith in the reception of him. Because by the grace or Spirit of faith the soul is inclined and disposed to an active receiving of Christ. And, no doubt, Christ is thus united to many infants, who have the Spirit of faith, and yet cannot act faith, because they are not come to the use of their understanding. But those of riper years, who are joined passively to Christ by the Spirit of faith, will also join themselves with him actively by the act of faith. And, till they act this faith, they cannot know or enjoy their union with Christ, or make use of it in performing any other duties of holiness in this life.”

The occasion of Mr. Bellamy’s censure of Mr. Marshal on this

126 “Though the ministers of the gospel are to declare the warrant that sinners have in the word to believe in Christ as their Saviour, it does not follow, that all sinners have ability to believe; for we are to distinguish between the warrant to believe and the power to do so. The rule of faith is God’s speaking in the word; and not his speaking in the heart. The object of your faith is the gospel declaration, and not the Spirit’s operation. You are carefully to distinguish betwixt your warrant to believe and power to believe. Your right and warrant to believe is grounded on the gospel-offer and promise, together with God’s command to believe; this is that which makes believing your duty, and unbelief your sin. But power to believe is indeed from the Spirit of God in his saving operation. You ought, therefore, to cry for the Spirit of power to accompany the dispensation of the word. Though you do not feel this power exerted; yet, that not being your warrant, but the word itself, you ought, at the call of God, to essay believing; for though the power of God be necessary to believing; yet the feeling of his power is not so. Distinguish carefully between real power and felt power. If, upon the call of God, you be determined to embrace the promise, and accordingly essay it, there is real power, though it may not be felt till afterwards.” Mr. Erskine’s Pregnant Promise.
head seems to have been the following words in the explication of his viih. direction: “Faith is the first grace wrought in our regeneration and the means of all the rest. When you truly believe, you are regenerated, and not till then.” It seems unnecessary to add to what was advanced on this point in the ninth of the preceding letters. Dr. Owen expresses his judgment in the following words: “I confess,” says he, that the method, which the gospel leads unto, is, that absolution, acquitment or the pardon of sin is the foundation of the communication of all saving grace unto the soul; and so precedeth all grace in the sinner. But because the absolution or pardon of sin is to be received by faith, whereby the soul is really made partaker of it and of all the benefits belonging thereto; and that faith is the radical grace, which we receive in our regeneration. I place these two together, and shall not dispute as to their priority in nature; but in time the one doth not precede the other.”

In the second place, Mr. Bellamy insinuates, that the account given by his opponents, of the Spirit’s work in the conversion of a sinner does not include a sufficient measure of conviction. “The law,” says he, “requires perfect obedience on pain of eternal damnation. It requires us to love God with all our hearts as being infinitely lovely. If you take measure by this law, your true character will appear, dead in sin, at enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. If you judge of your state according to this law, you are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you. You are lost, you stand guilty before God. And, if the law is holy, just and good, your mouth is stopped. The Lord is righteous, when he speaketh, and clear, when he judgeth, although you should perish. All this you must see. Yea, you must feel it, through and through your heart, as did the apostle Paul, *The commandment came, sin revived, and I died*. It is for want of thorough conviction, that so many awakened sinners take up with

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127 On the cxxxth. Psalm, p. 36L.
false comfort. Their wound was never searched to the bottom. It was skinned over too soon. And such slight cures, though more easily performed, may prove fatal in the end. But let your legal convictions be ever so deep, you will perish, unless of his sovereign grace, he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in your heart, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Such is Mr. Bellamy’s account of a thorough work of conviction: but in what respect is it preferable to the representation of the same work given by Mr. Boston and Mr. Hervey? How far inferior is all that we find in Mr. Bellamy’s dialogues, letters and essay, on this subject, in respect of a discovery of the various false confidences of awakened sinners before they get a saving sight of Christ, to what we have in the third part of Mr. Boston’s *Human nature in its four fold state*; especially where he shows how the branches are cut off from the natural stock in twelve particulars! But what deserves particular notice, in Mr. Bellamy’s dialogues and letters, is the injustice done to Mr. Hervey’s Theron and Aspasio on this head. Theron had heard much from Aspasio about the necessity of such a work of conviction: as, for instance, in Aspasio’s application of the stag chase in the latter part of the ninth dialogue. In the fourteenth dialogue he tells Theron, that “so long as the convictions of our great depravity, our extreme guilt and our utterly undone condition, are slight and hover only in the imagination, we shall be like Galio, listless, indifferent and caring for none of these things. But when they are deep and penetrate the heart, then the righteousness of a Redeemer will be sweet, tasteful and inviting; as myrrh and frankincense to the smell, as milk and honey to the palate, and gold and silver to the ruined bankrupt.” When Theron had asked, what method he should use to get these convictions impressed on his heart; Aspasio gives him the following counsel. “Endeavour to understand God’s holy law. Consider how pure, how extensive, how sublimely perfect it is.
Then judge of your spiritual state not from the flattering suggestions of self-love, nor from the defective examples of your fellow creatures, but by the unerring standard of the sanctuary. Above all, beseech the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to send his enlightening Spirit into your soul. For indeed without the enlightening influences of the Spirit, we have the divine law in our hand; we may comprehend its grammatical meaning;—and yet be like blind Bartimaeus under the meridian sun. It is the blessed Spirit alone, who can rend the veil of ignorance from our minds, and show us either the wonderful things of God’s law or the glorious mysteries of the gospel.” He then recommends to Theron the expedient of keeping a diary, at least for some months. “Compile,” says he, “a secret history of your heart and conduct. Take notice of the manner in which your time is spent, and of the strain which runs through your discourse: how often the former is lost in trifles; and how often the latter evaporates in vanity. Attend to the principle from which your actions flow, whether from the steady, habitual love of God, or from some rambling impulse and a customary propensity to please yourself. Minute down your sins of omission: how frequently you neglect to glorify your Creator, to edify your fellow-creatures, and to improve yourself in knowledge and holiness. Observe the frame of your spirit in religious duties; with what reluctance is a sinner brought to confess himself sinful in every duty, sinful in every capacity! Strange perverseness! But the charge is undeniable. However unwilling, I must plead guilty. *Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting*, is evidently written on all I am, all I have, all I do. And if I am thus defective in my own estimation; if I am utterly condemned at the bar of my own conscience, what then shall I do, when God riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? I now see the necessity of an imputed righteousness. Without some such object for my trust, I am undone.” In the fifteenth Dialogue, Theron says to Aspasio; “My sins like an armed host are set in dreadful array, and surround
me on every side. Justice, like an injured and incensed foe, unsheathes the sword and makes a loud demand for vengeance. No righteousness of my own presents itself, to which I may fly for refuge. The method of salvation in which I formerly confided, is a bridge broken down, and leaves me without any possibility of escape.” In another place, Theron cries out, “O my Aspasio, I cannot believe. I feel my impotence. My mind is like the withered arm. I am ashamed to recollect what mistaken notions I once entertained concerning the easiness of believing, as though it were to be performed like the act of rising from our seat, or stepping into a coach, by our own strength and at our own time. What a stranger was I then to the blindness of my understanding and the hardness of my heart; to my bondage under unbelief, and averseness to the way of salvation by grace through faith?”

From these quotations it is evident, that Mr. Hervey’s Theron was the subject of a thorough work of conviction, whilst he was under the instruction of Aspasio: and therefore Mr. Bellamy cannot be vindicated, as a fair dealer, in representing the same Theron as an utter stranger to such a work, till he met with Paulinus. In the first of his Dialogues, Theron is made to give an account of his experience during his intercourse with Aspasio, without a single hint of the conviction so plainly represented in the passages just now quoted. When Mr. Bellamy makes Theron relate his conversion by means of the doctrine of Paulinus, all is new: Theron had never before discovered, “that he is liable by the righteous sentence of the law, to eternal damnation for every want of perfect obedience; that he is absolutely without strength, dead in sin, lost, condemned by law, self-condemned, his mouth stopped, guilty before God.”

This could not be, that Theron, who, under Aspasio’s dealing with him, had become a true believer; that is, according to Mr. Marshal, one who is under a deep and abiding conviction, “that he is by

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128 Bellamy’s Letters and Dial, pages 112, 113, 114.
nature a child of wrath, fallen from God by the sin of the first
Adam, dead in trespasses and sins, subject to the curse of God’s
law, to the power of Satan, to insupportable misery through all
eternity, under an utter impossibility of procuring reconciliation
with God or any spiritual life, by his own endeavours in the way of
the covenant of works; or of finding any way of escape from this
sinful and miserable condition by his natural reason or
understanding. A true sense of our sin and of our condemnation by
the law is necessary to make us fly to Christ: and for this, as one
great end, was the law given, Gal. iii. 22, 23, 24. Matth. ix. 13. Acts
ii, 37. Without sense of sin, there will be no prizing of Christ, or
desire of holiness; but rather abuse of Christ to carnal security and
licentiousness. Those that were stung with the fiery serpent,
looked up to the brazen serpent."

The truth is, a thorough conviction of our sinfulness and misery
is necessarily implied in the appropriating faith contended for by
Mr. Marshal and Mr. Hervey: for, without such conviction, persons
will not be brought to any serious dealing with God about the
ground of their application of Christ to themselves in particular.
Whereas the assent that persons give to the most important
speculative truths, as such, may be, and too often is, without any
serious concern about the condition of their souls.

In the third place, Mr. Bellamy represents Theron as under the
power of delusion; because, in his supposed conversion, he is
represented as having the testimony of the Spirit enabling him, in
the direct act of faith to call God his Father; according to the
following passage of Mr. Marshal’s Treatise in the explication of his
tenth direction. “We judge” says he, “that the Spirit beareth
witness, that we are the children of God, by giving us saving faith
itself, by the direct act of which all true believers are enabled to
trust assuredly on Christ for the enjoyment of the adoption of
children and all his salvation according to the free promise of God;
and to call God Father, without reflecting on any good qualifications in themselves.” “The holy Spirit,” says another of these evangelical writers, “brings Christ, his righteousness and salvation nigh to us in the promise of the gospel; clearing at the same time our right and warrant to intermeddle with all, without fear of vicious intromission; encouraging and enabling us to a measure of confident application to ourselves of all, as given freely, without money and without price.”

On account of these passages Mr. Bellamy’s Paulinus says to Theron: “Thus, at last, you give up your warrant from the written word, as in fact there is no such thing contained in the Bible: and now your recourse is to the Spirit. He cannot clear up a right or warrant where there is no such thing to be cleared up. It is not the business of faith to make new unscriptural revelation. If you trust to the testimony of the Spirit, without any regard to the sincerity of your graces, you have nothing but a Spirit, a naked Spirit to depend upon. And if your spirit should prove to be Satan transforming himself into an angel of light, you are deluded,—your soul is lost—forever lost.”129

The censure, which Mr. Bellamy passes in these words upon the Divines whom he opposes, is very unjust in two respects: 1st, in regard that they are thereby represented as directing men to rest on a naked Spirit without the word: 2ndly, by insinuating, that the persuasion, which these divines speak of in the passages quoted is an opinion that persons entertain of themselves, that they are already in a state of adoption. If I were labouring under some dangerous disease, and a physician offered a medicine, affirming it to be an infallible remedy for that disease; in the very act of accepting his offer; I would have an assurance of my recovery, proportioned to my esteem of the skill and honesty of the physician. Yet this assurance would be of a different sort from that

129 Dial. p. 67, 98.
which I would have upon any experience of an actual cure. Such is the difference between the assurance which a person has, in the direct act of faith, that God is his own God and Father in Christ, and the assurance that he has of the same thing by finding in himself the scriptural marks and character of a child of God. The consistency between these two sorts of assurance was shown in a former letter.

That believers have assuring views of their relation to God as their own Father in the direct act of faith; and that, in these views, they have the testimony of the Spirit, appears from what is ascribed to the Spirit as the worker both of faith and of prayer.

1. As the worker of faith, the Holy Spirit enables us to embrace the promise as yea and amen to us in Christ: among which promises are those of adoption: Jerem. iii. 13. But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father, and thou shalt not turn away from me. This work of the Holy Spirit lies in showing us the free access and full warrant, which we have, as perishing sinners of Adam’s family, to whom the gospel is preached, to make an immediate application of that gospel, and particularly of the promise of adoption in Christ, to ourselves. Nay, the Holy Spirit shuts us up to this immediate application by representing it as our indispensable duty and the neglect of it as the most heinous sin, 1 John iii. 23. v. 10. The matter of this testimony of the Spirit is not, that we are already brought into a state of adoption, or that we have in our hearts the gracious dispositions of God’s children; but that the gospel promise is the word of God, and his word to us in particular; a word to be depended upon as our security in Christ for every promised blessing. None will say, that this testimony of the Spirit is unnecessary, who duly consider what the scripture teaches, that faith is not of ourselves, being the supernatural gift of God;—and,
what each of us may feel, that our understandings are blind to the things of the Spirit of God, and our wills averse to the way of salvation by free grace through faith. Nor can this testimony be delusive; since the matter of it is no other than what we have in the Holy Scripture, applied, according to its true meaning, to our case; since this application of the word by the Holy Spirit is no other than that work of faith, whereby Christ is revealed in our hearts as the Lord our Righteousness. John xvi. 8, 9, 14. *When the Comforter is came, he will reprove or convince the world* (his own who are by nature of the world) not only of sin, but also of righteousness, of his own righteousness wrought out in their nature, being sufficient to satisfy all the demands of the Divine law. *He shall receive of mine*, says Christ, *and shall show it unto you.* And surely the things of the gospel-promise are amongst the things that he will show unto us.

This testimony of the Holy Spirit, clearing a person’s warrant to intermeddle with the gospel promise and to believe it with application to himself, if not the whole, appears to be a principal part of what is meant by our being *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*, Ephes. i. 13. It is true, that by the Ephesians being *sealed with the Holy Spirit* many valuable writers understand a work distinct from that which passed on them at their first believing. But this construction of the words does not seem necessary. For, though some gifts of the Spirit, such, for example, as were miraculous, were given to persons after their first believing; yet it will not follow, that the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of promise and the earnest of the heavenly inheritance, was not given to persons at the first moment of their believing. The giving of the Holy Spirit, in our first believing answers such purposes as are analogous to those answered by sealing among men; such as the purposes of distinguishing persons as the Lord’s peculiar people, and of insuring to them the full enjoyment of eternal life. Though the words of the apostle in our translation be rendered, *after that ye believed, ye were sealed*, yet it is obvious to any one who reads the
original, that the participle and the verb being in the same tense, may be rendered, *believing ye were sealed*. So words in the same construction are often rendered: Mark vii. 34. *And looking up to heaven, he sighed.* Luke xxiv. 18. *One of them whose name was Cleopas, answering, said unto him.* So that there is nothing in the form of the apostle’s expression against the following exposition of Mr. Hervey and some others. “In believing ye were partakers of this sealing sanctifying spirit, conformably to the expostulation of the the apostle on another occasion; *Received ye the Spirit, by the work of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*”

2. As our helper in prayer, the Holy Spirit enables us to call God our Father by the direct act of faith. When our Lord directs us to approach to God in prayer, saying, *Our Father*, he intimates, that some apprehension of God as our Father in Christ is necessary to acceptable prayer; and therefore if no well-grounded apprehension of God, as standing in that relation to us, can be attained in the direct act of faith; it will follow, that we cannot approach to God in prayer acceptably, but when we find in ourselves those good qualifications, from which we can certainly infer our sonship: and thus believers must be excluded from the throne of grace, when they *walk in darkness and have no light*; that is, when they are under a peculiar necessity of applying to that throne. But this is quite contrary to the doctrine of the Bible, which assures us, that every prayer offered up in the faith of Christ’s name is accepted. John xvi. 23. Mark xi. 24. and if any poor sinner is enabled to come in the exercise of faith, even though as yet he can find no good qualifications in himself, he shall not be cast out, John vi. 37.

Thus, it appears, that there is a testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to the word of the gospel in the hearts of believers; as well as a testimony which he bears to the work of grace in their hearts. Mr. Bellamy had no ground to set the one in opposition to the other. They agree well together. The testimony of the Spirit, setting home
the gospel-promise on our hearts, first brings us to the direct act or exercise of faith, which is productive of the fruits of new obedience. And then the testimony which the Spirit bears to the sincerity of our faith, as manifested by the fruits of it, encourageth us to go on in the exercise of that faith. They are inseparable: for the testimony of the Spirit, bringing a person to the direct act of faith, will be followed, in some measure, by the testimony of the Spirit to the work of grace in his heart. They who pretend to have the former, while they have no heart-felt concern to attain the latter, are self-deceivers, who take up with a feigned faith. They, on the other hand, who pretend to have the latter without or before the former, are legalists, who set up the idol of self-righteousness.

In the fourth place, Mr. Bellamy charges Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey, Mr. Boston and others with propagating delusion under the notion of conversion; because, according to him, their converts are “blind to the beauty of the Divine nature, and have no love to the Divine law.” Thus Theron, after he becomes a disciple of Mr. Bellamy’s Paulinus, acknowledges, that in the religion which he learned from Aspasio, “the infinite amiableness of the Deity was wholly left out;” and that Aspasio’s doctrine led him “to look upon law, obligation, duty, as disagreeable, dead and legal things.”

Enough has been said in the ninth and tenth of the preceding letters to show the falsehood of this charge against the doctrine of the writers now mentioned. Indeed one can hardly read a page of their excellent writings without being convinced of the baseness of this calumny. At present it may be sufficient to refer to the explication of the first direction in Mr. Marshal’s treatise on sanctification; and to add the character of a real Christian as drawn by Mr. Boston. “A real Christian,” says that judicious writer, “is one who loves God for himself as well as for his benefits with a supreme love above all persons and all things. He approveth the holy law

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130 Bellamy’s Dialogues and Letters, page 124, 127.
even in that very point, wherein it strikes against his most beloved lust. He is spiritual in the principle, motives, aims and ends of his service. After all, he sees nothing in himself to trust in before the Lord, Christ and his fulness being the stay of his soul.”

The truth is, because these writers will not allow our love to God and the good works, that flow from it, to belong to the ground of the appropriation of Christ to ourselves, which is in the direct act of faith; therefore they deny, according to Mr. Bellamy, that love to God and good works necessarily belong to the Christian; a conclusion as absurd as it would be to infer from a person’s denying the walls and roof to be the foundation of a house, that he denied them to be at all necessary to constitute the house.

In fine, a person is, no doubt, a self-deceiver, who thinks himself converted, without a supernatural change, without a thorough conviction of the sinfulness and misery of his natural state, without a scriptural ground of hope, without a spiritual discernment of the beauty of holiness. But none can be farther from representing such a person as a true convert than Mr. Marshal, Mr. Boston, Mr. Hervey and others who teach the same doctrine. Having considered some differences between Mr. Bellamy and his opponents on the head of saving conversion, which are only pretended; we may now proceed to point out some real differences between him and them on this subject.

1. Mr. Bellamy teaches, that sinners are not warranted to look to Christ as their own Saviour, immediately, or till they be so and so qualified. For, according to him, a person must not only be convinced of sin, but his heart must be reconciled to the Divine law: he must love it, and call upon all other intelligent creatures to love it, before the gospel come into view; and consequently before he look to Christ. If this be a just view of conversion,—then sinners are not to be called to look or come to Christ, till they be reconciled to the law and in love with it in all the extent of its precept and
penalty. But the divines whom Mr. Bellamy opposes, maintained, that sinners ought to look or come to Christ immediately upon hearing the gospel preached to them:—because the gospel-call is directed to sinners of mankind indefinitely, Prov. viii. 4. Isai. xlv. 22.—because Christ has given his ministers a commission to preach the gospel to every creature, Mark xvi. 15.—because they are to make an offer of Christ to those who know not (what is their real spiritual condition,) that they are *wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*, Revel, iii. 17, 18.—because the Spirit's work in convincing men of unbelief, supposes that Christ has been exhibited and offered to them, John xvi. 9.—because it cannot be denied, that the Lord may and does give some persons a spiritual view both of their perishing condition, and of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, at once. Of which case Zacchaeus, Luke xix. 9. the Samaritans, Acts viii, 5, 8. Lydia, Acts xvi. 14. are examples.

2. Mr. Bellamy appears to hold, that, under the operation of the Holy Spirit, sinners attain heart-reconciling views of God's law in its holiness and spirituality, before the gospel be believed or come into view. On the contrary, his opponents hold, that the Holy Spirit makes use of the gospel as the means of reconciling our hearts to the law; and that there is no genuine exercise of love to God or his holy law, till it please God to reveal his Son in us. These divines showed that conviction of sin by the law is subservient to the Lord's gracious design upon elect sinners, not by reconciling the heart to the holiness of the law, before the gospel come into view, but by teaching them their absolute need of gospel-grace in order to overcome their cursed enmity against the holiness of the law.

"If by being regenerated," says Mr. Bellamy, "is meant being enabled to see the holy beauty of divine truths, we are regenerated neither by the law nor by the gospel, but by the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. If by regenerated is meant holy affections being begotten and excited in the heart, in this sense we
are regenerated by the law and by the gospel and by every divine truth in general."\textsuperscript{131}

Answer. We allow, that a spiritual and saving knowledge of Divine truth is attained by regeneration; and that regeneration, strictly taken, is the immediate work of the Holy Spirit. It is his \textit{immediate} work, as preventing and excluding all causal activity of the creature which is the passive subject of it; but not as excluding his powerful word; without which regeneration is not to be expected, 1 Pet. i. 23. \textit{Being bom again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.} If it be asked, What word this is? we have an answer in v. 25. \textit{This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.} It is true, that, under the saving influences of the Holy Spirit, all Divine truths excite holy affections answerable to their nature in true Christians. But every Divine truth is not of such a nature as to afford a poor sinner a ground for the faith of salvation. The following propositions are Divine truths, \textit{The man that doeth these things shall live in them.} Cursed is every one that \textit{continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.} But who will say, that these truths, without the gospel, afford a sinner any ground for the faith of salvation? And yet without that faith there is no regeneration or saving conversion: and none have any holy affections without or before conversion; that is, while they have no spiritual life in them. It is allowed, that truly gracious affections are excited and promoted by means of the truths belonging to the law; but then it is in a soul that has been already quickened by the gospel. That sinners have their first spiritual quickening by the gospel appears by the designations that are given to the gospel; such as, \textit{The power of God unto salvation,} Rom. i. 16. \textit{The Spirit that giveth life, and the ministration of the Spirit,} 2 Corinth, iii. 6, 8. To the same purpose the apostle says in 1 Corinth, iv. 15. \textit{In Christ Jesus have I begotten

you through the gospel: an expression, which “holds forth,” as a commentator in Marlorâte’s collection observes, “two instrumental causes of regeneration; of which one is more immediate, that is, the gospel; the other more remote, which is the preacher. We are begotten again before God by means of the gospel. Take away the gospel, and we are but so many dead men under the curse.” Nor had Mr. Bellamy any reason to insinuate that anything else is taught in the following words of the xixth Psalm: The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. For the term law is often used, in a lax sense, for the whole of God’s revealed will, and sometimes is chiefly to be understood of the doctrines and promises of the gospel, as in Isai. ii. 3. Mic. iv. 2. Ps. cxix. 92. The apostle calls the gospel the law of faith in opposition to the law of works. Hence we cannot esteem these conversions to be of a saving kind which have been effected by means of the law working wrath, without the gospel, that is, without any spiritual views of the way of salvation by Christ crucified. For, though we allow, that the Lord’s work in saving conversion is not alike in all the subjects of it; but there may be and is diversity in the outward occasions of it, in distinctness of experience, and in other respects;—yet some things are, according to the rule of God’s word, so essential to that blessed work, that if any person think himself to be converted without them, he deceives himself. That a spiritual discernment of the way of salvation by grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, is one of these things, appears from such texts as the following. 2 Corinth, iv. 3. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, John vi. 40. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. Matth. xi. 25. At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. In these passages, it is represented as essential to the character of a true convert, that he not only has a capacity to
apprehend the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, but actually does apprehend it through a supernatural and saving revelation of it.132

3. Mr. Bellamy’s convert speaks much of his reconciliation to the law, but little or nothing of his being divorced from or dead to the law as a covenant. Whereas his opponents represent our death to the law in this view as essential to saving conversion, and as most difficult to be attained. A great part of the writings of these divines is taken up in discovering the various plausible pretexts, under which men, professing to be Christians, continue obstinately attached to their first husband, the law or covenant of works, depending on something they feel or do as the condition of their justification before God, and seeing no evil in that delusive and soul-ruining dependance. This attachment is kept up by reflecting upon what they reckon their virtuous dispositions and conduct; upon the many outward privileges, spiritual and temporal, which God has granted them; upon the mercy of God and the merits of Christ as what may supply the defects of their own righteousness; upon the faith and repentance, which they imagine they find in themselves, and which they vainly hope will entitle them to the benefit of the Redeemer’s righteousness. Upon such pretences do men even under the gospel dispensation, cleave to their first husband, the law; the most part, it is to be feared, to their eternal ruin; and even the elect; till the Lord the Spirit, beginning a work of saving grace in their souls, discovers to them the delusion; and

132 The opinion expressed in Mr. Bellamy’s words, just now quoted, reminds one of the Popish notion taken notice of in a former letter, namely. That faith justifies as well by believing the threatenings, the commands and histories, as by believing the promises of the word. Mr. Bellamy’s opinion seems to be favoured by the following words of an elegant writer “Divine truths,” says he, “are like chain shot, they go together, and we need not perplex ourselves which should enter first; if any one enter, it will draw the rest after it.” This remark is true, if it mean, that a minister, in handling a subject, may use any method which appears convenient: he may either speak, first, of the effects, and then of the causes of the subject; or first, of the causes and then of the effects: he may treat first of holiness in heart and life, and then of faith in Christ, uniting us to him, as the means of attaining that holiness; or on the contrary, first, of faith, and then of holiness as the fruit of faith. But if he takes no care to keep cause and effect, the means and the end, law and gospel, distinct, assigning to each its proper place and use, he does not rightly divide the word of truth; he is unfaithful both to the Lord Christ and to the souls of men.
shows them that unless their marriage to the law be dissolved by a new, spiritual marriage to Christ Jesus, they cannot be saved. To this event the law itself, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, contributes. Set home on their hearts in its spirituality and vast extent, it convinces them of the vanity of all their attempts to satisfy its demands. The tremendous voice of the threatening proclaims that sinners have nothing to look for under the law’s dominion but everlasting destruction; for as many as are of the works of the law, or seek life in the way of it, are under the curse. But it is properly through the body of Christ, through his death, apprehended by faith, that they become dead to the law, being married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that they may bring forth fruit unto God. As for any remaining bias in their minds towards their old husband, they see the evil of it, they groan under it; they hope and long for deliverance from it (as well as from the other deceitful lusts of their depraved nature,) through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This doctrine which is so mortifying to the pride of the human heart, has always met with the contempt and opposition of the world. But it is a doctrine which faithful ministers will insist upon, as peculiarly necessary for making a stand against various Popish and Arminian errors, and for directing exercised souls into the paths of true peace.

4. The faith attained in conversion, according to Mr. Bellamy, is only a general belief of God’s willingness to receive sinners that return to him by Jesus Christ. But, according to his opponents, there is, in the faith of every true convert, some measure of real confidence or trust, upon the ground of the gospel-promise, that God gives Christ to him in particular, and that Christ will deliver him from sin and wrath. This faith wrestles against all contrary doubts and fears. “The Spirit of the Lord,” says Mr. Boston, “carries home the gospel-offer on the soul; so that the man believes that the offer is to him in particular, that the refuge is open and the portion free to him, according to the word in 1 John v. 11. This is
The record, that God hath given to us eternal life. Thus poor sinners are brought to take a God in Christ for their refuge and portion in the land of the living.”

Upon the whole, Mr. Bellamy is chargeable with a dangerous departure from the simplicity of scripture doctrine concerning conversion; while, in opposing Mr. Marshal, Mr. Hervey and others, he evidently limits the gospel call to persons so and so qualified; while he holds that the law, as distinguished from the gospel and before the gospel come into view, may be the mean of regeneration; while there is such a striking contrast between the faithfulness of his opponents in warning sinners of their extreme danger from their obstinate attachment to their first husband the law, and the silence he observes on that subject through all his Dialogues and Letters; and, in fine, while he teaches sinners, that they have no ground in the gospel-offer to make an immediate application of Christ crucified to themselves in particular, and that there is no other belief necessary to saving faith, than a general belief of God’s willingness to receive sinners that return to him by Jesus Christ.

Having considered Mr. Bellamy’s account of saving conversion, we proceed to add a few remarks, which may be of use to prevent some mistakes (not uncommon in our day) on so important a subject and which may serve as a conclusion to this and the preceding letters.

1. The work of saving conversion is not effected by the word without the Spirit, nor by the Spirit without the word. Some persons have better natural parts and natural tempers than others, and are also more conformable in the general tenor of their conduct to the letter of the law. At the same time, they are under such a dispensation of word and providence, as tends, in its own nature, to their conversion. Yet none of these advantages, nor all of them, put together, are sufficient to produce that happy change.
Our Saviour intimates that the more ignorant and vicious are often pitched upon by the sovereign grace of God, whilst the more knowing and seemingly virtuous are left in their natural state, Matth. xi. 25. xxi. 31. The unbelieving Jews enjoyed the best means of grace under the ministry of Christ and his apostles; and yet, instead of being converted, they were more and more hardened, Act. xxxviii. 25, 26, 27. Nor is the conversion of the elect by the word to be ascribed to the natural power of their freewill; since the scripture represents them before their conversion as totally alienated from God, as incapable of any act or motion that is spiritually good or pleasing to God, as always unwilling, till the effectual grace of God make them willing.\textsuperscript{133} The truth is, conversion is the victorious work of the Holy Spirit; in which he not only makes an offer or proposal of sufficient grace, but actually bestows it: he not only offers to take away the stony heart, and to give a new heart, a heart of flesh, but he actually does so according to the promise.\textsuperscript{134} And, in doing so, he exerts almighty, irresistible power, Ephes. i. 19. Hence this work is called a being born again of the Spirit, a resurrection or spiritual quickening, a new creation, Ephes. i. 19. John iii. 5. Ephes. ii. 10. Hereby the Holy Spirit not only gives us a power of believing and walking in the path of duty; but he gives the very act, work or walk itself, Phillip, i. 29. ii. 13. Zechar. x. 12. Yet it does not follow, that the Holy Spirit, in this work, acts upon man as a stock or a stone; because he does not act without the word, nor otherwise than in opening the understanding to understand the word and in determining the will to receive it. The whole design of his blessed work is to render the subject of it conformable to his own word, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. Hence we cannot reckon unaccountable, involuntary bodily convulsions and distractions among the proper effects of this work: since these are none of the effects ascribed to it in scripture-promises or

\textsuperscript{133} Coloss. i. 21. Rom. viii. 7, 8. 1 Corinth, iv. 7.
\textsuperscript{134} Ezek. xxxvi. 26.
examples. Nor is any bodily exercise to be admitted as a proper effect of this work but what is most voluntary, rational and agreeable to the word.

2. The spiritual light of saving knowledge, which is attained by the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, is the true spring of all gracious affections. We grant, that it is not every sort of knowledge of religious truth, that is so: for persons may have much knowledge by the light of nature, by the letter of the word, and by such gifts and operations of the Spirit as these were endued with, whom our Lord represents as saying, *We have prophesied in thy name*; who were, notwithstanding that, such as never knew him in a saving manner. Nay, the apostle assures us that persons may *understand all mysteries and all knowledge*; and yet have no *charity*, no true love to God or to their neighbours for his sake. Their knowledge is a cold unprofitable assent to historical facts, to doctrines or notions; it is only such knowledge as puffeth up; it is not that glorious Divine light, by which true converts have such a view of their own vileness and the mercy and love of God in Christ, as fills them with wonder, love and praise; and by which they have such spiritual convictions of sin as excite a holy indignation against it and ingenuous shame and self-loathing on account of it before God. As this light is abiding, so are the affections which spring from it; if not in the same degree of sensible exercise, yet in the truth and reality of them. Whereas the religious affections which are caused by external impressions are like a land-flood that soon passes away. Such are most of those violent affections and pangs which occasion bodily agitations. We should examine from what root our religious affections spring. Unless they proceed from the abiding light of saving knowledge, they are not truly gracious affections.

3. The more that true converts are humbled under a sense of their own impotence or natural inability to do any thing spiritually good; and the more lively they are in the exercise of faith in Jesus
Christ as their righteousness and strength: they are the more active in every good word and work. This mark serves to distinguish true converts from what may be called evangelical hypocrites. Such hypocrites abuse the doctrine of their natural inability to do what is spiritually good as a pretext or excuse for their wilful neglect of duty. Whereas as the faith of this truth in true converts excites them to cleave to Christ alone as their strength; and thus they are animated to the practise of duty, as knowing, that, however weak in themselves, they have a sufficiency of strength in him. *He that abideth in me,* says Christ, *and I in him, bringeth forth much fruit:* and then he adds as the reason, *For without me,* ye *can do nothing;* thus intimating, that the deeper sense his followers have of their weakness or inability in themselves, they will be the more dependant on him; and the more dependant they are on him, they will be the more fruitful in good works. The notion, which hypocrites have, of justification by free grace through the imputed righteousness of Christ, flatters them in their sinful security. *Let us continue in sin,* say they, *that grace may abound.* Whereas true converts find nothing so effectual to stir them up to the mortification of sin as faith’s views of Christ’s obedience unto death, which procured the death of sin, in them. O, say they, shall we harbour sin, which Christ came to destroy? How can we spare these lusts, on account of which God spared not his own son! The faith of deliverance through the imputed righteousness of Christ from the law as a covenant or condition of life is the animating principle of their obedience to the law as a rule of life. This persuasion, that they are not their own, but that they are bought with a price, engages them to glorify God in their bodies and their spirits which are his. Farther, hypocrites abuse the doctrine concerning the work of the grace and Spirit of Christ in effectually determining and enabling us to do what is spiritually good, while they make it a pretence for giving themselves up to sloth and the neglect of the appointed means of salvation. But sincere converts,
who truly understand and believe this doctrine, find it to be the most powerful incentive and encouragement to the diligent use of these means. The more clearly they see, that God worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure; they are the more incited to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Thus the Christian self-abasement and a single dependance on the grace of God in Christ, which the blind world consider as good for nothing but to make men slothful, are the true principles of all holy obedience.

4. True converts seek to partake of the benefits of Christ’s purchase universally and in the way of union to his person. They are not for dividing the benefits of Christ from one another. They desire sanctification as well as pardon; a present as well as a future salvation. Nor are they for dividing his benefits from himself. Their great concern is to be found in him, and to receive his benefits in him and with him, 1. Corinth. i. 30. This is the great and fatal error of hypocrites, that they seek some of his benefits but not all; not a marriage union with himself, They seek the loaves, or some carnal, selfish gratification, but not himself. Or if they seem to seek himself, it is not for his own sake, but for the sake of something else.

5. The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion is a secret work, though every member of the church ought to seek and may attain the certain knowledge of his own conversion. It is still represented in scripture as a hidden and mysterious work, Eccles. xi. 5. As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. John iii. 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Hence every one is enjoined to use diligence, all diligence in order to attain
the knowledge of his effectual calling or conversion. The opinion, that little care or attention to our own hearts and ways is necessary to the attainment of this knowledge is both contrary to scripture and of a soul ruining tendency, as it leads persons to take up with a counterfeit conversion; which is one of the deep devices of Satan for preventing a real conversion. It is however a great truth, that we ought to get this knowledge; and while we want it, or so far as we are in the dark about our gracious state, we ought to be deeply humbled, on that account, before the Lord; and we ought to wait upon the Lord and look continually to him for this blessed attainment, in the use of the appointed means. We are to assure ourselves that, though it may be withheld from a true believer for a time, yet it will be at length attained by those that continue in the exercise of faith, in a holy watchfulness against whatever tends to darken their evidences, in self-examination, and in prayer for the Holy Spirit to shine upon His own work in their souls as well as upon his own word. For the Lord will not be a barren wilderness or a land of darkness to any that truly seek his face.

135 2 Pet. i. 10.
LETTER XIII.

Instances of a decline in purity of doctrine. Causes of that decline.

Christian Brethren,

Our holy religion is greatly recommended by a just comparison of it with other schemes of religion. What a horrible representation of the Deity was given by the Pagan idolatry, changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, to birds and four footed beasts and creeping things! How manifestly are the Jews condemned of themselves, in their obstinate rejection of Jesus Christ, whilst they acknowledge the Divine authority of the Old Testament! What an absurd medley of falsehood, superstition, and sensuality is the system exhibited in Mahomed’s Koran! With regard to the Socinians, I make little difference, said the celebrated Grotius, between them and the Mahomedans. They retain the name, but renounce the substance of Christianity. They are chargeable with blasphemy in denying the truth concerning the Divine simplicity, eternity, omnipresence and foreknowledge; in denying the Deity and satisfaction of Christ, and the Deity and Personality of the Holy Spirit. As to the Papists, they make the word of God of none effect by their traditions. They corrupt the spiritual authority, which Christ hath appointed in his Church, by adding to it an exorbitant worldly dominion in the offices of their pope, cardinals and other ecclesiastical dignitaries: they make their inherent grace or the pretended merit of their works the ground of their justification before God. They have introduced a multitude of men’s inventions into every part of religious worship. They have other objects of religious worship than the only true God; and other Mediators than

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136 In a letter to Walleus, written in the earlier part of his life, he has these words concerning the Socinians: Christianitatem (quantum ego intelligo) nomine retinent, re destruunt. Itaque hos a Mahumetistis non longe separo.
Jesus Christ. And then, in order to carry their obstinacy and impudence in maintaining such gross corruptions to the highest pitch, they ascribe infallibility to the judgment of their church. As to the Arminian scheme it manifestly sacrifices the independency of God in his decrees, and the glory of his free and sovereign grace to the idol of man’s free-will.\textsuperscript{137} It detracts from the efficacy of the blood and Spirit of Christ, in order that the creature may have some ground of glorification, as making itself differ. In this respect, it is diametrically opposite to the design of the gospel, Rom. iii. 27. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? nay, but by the law of faith. 1 Corinth, i. 29, 30. That no flesh may glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption, iv. 7. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

The systems of error now mentioned are very comprehensive: and to them may be reduced all the modifications of false religion, which have prevailed in the world.

But in opposition to such delusive and soul-ruining schemes, true Christianity, as it is represented in the Bible, and agreeably to the Bible, in the Confessions of the Reformed Churches, is the only religion, which gives all the perfections of God their due glory; which exhibits the person of Christ and his finished work as the only ground of our justification and salvation; and which makes ample provision for our sanctification and our comfort. It will be found to be the glory of these churches to retain the purity of that

\textsuperscript{137} “Right reason,” says a truly philosophical writer, “gives its voice most decisively in favor of the doctrine of the Reformed churches, and in favor of it alone. What is taught about God and Divine things by the various opposers of that doctrine is not only without reason but contrary to it. Their first and radical error is their denying, that God alone is absolutely independent: this is a truth, which, as it is constantly maintained by the orthodox, establishes the victorious grace of God, and overthrows its great enemy, the pride of man’s depraved nature.” Reformatae nostrae: fidei, atque uni nostrae, plaudit ac testimonium efficacissimum dicit ipsa recta ratio; dum circa Deum et res Divinas modis indigissimis, sine ratione ac contra rationem, delirat universa secus sentientium cohors, &c. Gerardi De Vries Exercitaciones rationales. Exercit. iv. Sect. 7.
religion in the doctrine of their ministers and in the profession of their members. But is not this glory, in a great measure, departed from most of the Reformed Churches at this day? Indeed there appears to be a decline in respect of the purity of doctrine even amongst those who still make a general profession of adherence to the reformation-cause. Of this decline the opinions of Mr. Bellamy considered in the preceding letters, are instances. To these it is proposed in this letter to add a few more, which claim the serious attention of our Christian brethren.

I. Some, who acknowledge, that there are three persons in the Godhead, deny the eternal and incomprehensible generation of the second Person, or that he is called the Son of God on that account, alleging, that this appellation is founded in his Mediatorial office, in his incarnation, or in a senseless fiction about the existence of his human soul long before any other created being. This opinion contradicts the most explicit profession both of the ancient churches against the Arians, and of the Reformed Churches against the Socinians: which profession is well expressed in the following words of the Synod of Dort: “We believe, that Jesus Christ, with regard to his Divine nature, is the only begotten Son of God; begotten from eternity, not made or created (for thus he would be a creature;) but of the same essence with the Father, coeternal, the express image of the Father’s person, and the brightness of his glory; in all things his equal. Who is indeed the Son of God not only from the time in which he assumed our nature, but from all eternity, as the following testimonies, compared together, teach us: Moses declares, that God created the world; and saint John, that all things were made by the Word, whom he also calls God; and the apostle, that God made the worlds by his Son; likewise that God created all things by Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, necessary to admit, that he who is called God, the Word, the Son and Jesus Christ was then existing, since all things were created by him: and therefore the prophet Micah says, His goings forth were of old from the days of eternity, and the apostle, He is without beginning of days, and without end of life. He is therefore the true, eternal and
almighty God, whom we invoke, adore and worship”.

The Sonship of Christ, if it were founded in his Mediatorial office, would imply inferiority to the Father; for, in respect of that office, he is the Father’s servant, Isai. xlii. 1. and xlix. 6. and therefore the Father is said to be greater than he, John xiv. 28. But it is plain, that the scripture teaches us to consider the Sonship of Christ as a title not implying any sort of inferiority, but expressing his equality with the Father, as being one in essence with the Father. When Christ called God his own Father, the Jews understood him as meaning such a claim of Sonship, as was the same with a claim of equality with God, a claim of being God: and this construction of our Saviour’s claim is not denied, but confirmed by his answer, John v. 18, 19. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doth, these also doth the Son likewise. The Son can do nothing of himself or separately from the Father? But does this imply any inferiority of the Son to the Father? By no means. For the Father can as little do any thing but what the Son does likewise: the reason is, that the Father and the Son are one and the same infinite Being; and the relation between these persons is such as necessarily supposes that they possess the same nature and perfections, John x. 30. and therefore they can do nothing without, or separately from, one another.

The eternal generation of the Son is very plainly revealed in Scripture. Psal. ii. 7. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. The matter of the decree, mentioned in the first part of this verse, is evidently set forth in the next two verses relating to the future enlargement of Christ’s kingdom. But the Sonship is evidently set forth as the ground upon which that decree proceeds. The Sonship must

138 Credimus Jestim Christum, secundum naturam suam Divinam, Unigenitum Dei Filium esse; ab aeterno genitum non factum aut creatum, [ita enim facet creatura;] sed ejusdem cum Patre essentiae,&cc. 
Acta Synodi Nationalis Dordehtanae.
139 The Greek words. Patera idion, signify his own Father.
therefore have been as ancient as the decree, that is, from everlasting. By this day in the text we are not to understand any one of man’s days, but God’s day, the day of eternity: which, with God, is all one permanent day, or a perpetual now; in which there is neither past nor future. Prov. viii. 24, 25. When there were no depths I was brought forth: before the mountains were settled; before the hills was I brought forth. There is no reason to doubt, whether by wisdom, introduced as the party speaking here, we are to understand the Son of God. The passage now quoted and several others in this chapter are such as it would be manifestly absurd to understand literally of God’s attribute of wisdom, or figuratively of any other person than the second Person of the Godhead. This was never questioned in the ancient church, no, not by the Arians themselves.¹⁴⁰ The expression I was brought forth, cannot well be understood of Christ’s mediatorial office. For if it be so understood, it must denote either his appointment to that office, or his actual execution of it. But this bringing forth cannot be understood of the latter, which was not from eternity, but in time. Nor can it be understood of the former; till it be shown, that, in the sacred scriptures, to bring forth signifies to decree or appoint to an office.

If the Sonship of Christ were founded in his office of Mediator; then it would be most proper to say, that God sent the Mediator, that he might be his only begotten Son: whereas the constant language of scripture is that he sent his only begotten Son to be our Mediator, 1 John iv. 10, 14. Christ’s bearing the office of our Mediator proceeded from his Father’s call and his own voluntary undertaking, Isai, xlii. 6. Heb. v. 4, 5. Psal. xl. 7. But both these suppose the Sonship of Christ; and therefore they could not be the cause or occasion of it.

But the deadly poison of this erroneous notion lies in its inconsistency with the scripture-doctrine of the Trinity. When the eternal Sonship of Christ, which is the primary and necessary distinction between the first and second Persons in the Godhead is

¹⁴⁰ Wisheart’s Thcologia, p. 748.
denied, how can the doctrine of the Trinity be maintained? For if the primary and necessary distinction between the first and second persons (on which the distinction between them and the third person depends) be once set aside, any other distinction will either be a mere external denomination, in respect of offices or works, like the title of Creator and Redeemer, such as the Sabellians of old allowed, while they denied, that there was any real distinction of persons in the Godhead;—or such as will be inconsistent with the unity of the Divine nature, and implying a plurality of Gods, according to the heretical schemes of the ancient Arians and Macedonians.

It is not enough, to believe, that there is a distinction in the Deity. It is necessary also to believe, that this distinction lies in certain personal properties revealed in the holy Scriptures; namely, that it is the personal property of the Father to beget the Son, that of the Son to be begotten of the Father, and that of the Holy Spirit to proceed from the Father and the Son. The manner of these personal properties is indeed inconceivable to us. But that there are such properties is a revealed truth, upon which our salvation depends. Nor is it any wonder, that a finite mind should be unable to comprehend the manner of that which is Infinite.

II. Some, who teach the doctrines of particular election, effectual calling and the perseverance of the saints, seem to waver in their adherence to that of particular redemption. Amesius and the other champions against the Arminians in the seventeenth century considered all these doctrines as inseparably connected. The Lord Jesus, would they say, gave himself for the church; and laid down his life for the sheep. But the church, the sheep, of Christ do not comprehend all the individuals of mankind; but those only that were given to him by the Father, John x. 11, 29. Christ makes intercession for all those for whom he died. A priest under the law would have been deficient in the duty of his office, if he had not
prayed for those for whom he offered the sacrifice of a bull or goat. And can we suppose that Christ will fail to pray for any of those for whom he offered the sacrifice of himself? But he says to the Father, *I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me*, John xvii. 9. Since, then, our Lord Jesus does not intercede, we may well conclude, that he did not lay down his life, for all the individuals of mankind. They for whom Christ died were objects of his love, of his distinguishing love, Ephes. v. 25. A love which will not suffer any of its objects to perish in their sins. The end of his death was, that they for whom he died, might obtain spiritual blessings; such as, pardon, Ephes. i. 7. peace with God, Coloss. i. 20. adoption, Gal. iv. 4. sanctification 1 Peter ii. 24. saving faith, Philip, i. 29. eternal life, Rom. v. 21. And therefore if Christ died for all the individuals of mankind, we must either suppose that they all, in the event, obtain these spiritual blessings; a supposition which is manifestly false; or we must suppose, that the death of Christ fails of obtaining its end; a thought which is inconsistent with the infinite merit of his death and with the infinite wisdom of God in the appointment of it. It is said, indeed, that Christ died for all, 2 Cor. v. 15. But who are the all here meant? They are those for whom he also rose again; who live not to themselves, but to him; who are new creatures; to whom the Lord imputeth not their trespasses; and who are made the righteousness of God in Christ, v. 15, 17, 19, 21. Again, who are the all for whom Christ is said to have tasted death in Heb. ii. 9? They are called many sons, who are to be brought to glory; to whom Christ is a captain of salvation; who are sanctified; whom he calls his brethren, and the children whom God hath given him, v. 10, 11, 13. Thus the universal terms used with regard to the objects of Christ’s death, are to be limited by what we find in the context, or in other scriptures relative to the same subject. Such universal terms are used concerning the death of Christ to signify the whole world of the redeemed, or all of every nation, kindred and language, who belong to the election of grace; and to intimate that God hath set
him forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to sinners of every description.

Such was the plain language that the people were accustomed to hear in the reformed churches, agreeably to the judgment of the synod of Dort against the Arminian doctrine of universal redemption. But now many public teachers, though they profess a general adherence to Calvinistic doctrine, are far from being explicit as to the article of particular redemption; and rather allow that Christ died, in some sense, for all men:141 that is, if they mean any thing different from the doctrine of Amesius and other opposers of the Arminians, for all the individuals of mankind. Sometimes, this expression is used without any attempt to determine in what sense Christ died for all men; but sometimes explanations are offered, which are plainly erroneous.

It has been pretended, that this proposition, That Christ died intentionally for all men, is the ground of that appropriating faith, to which sinners are called under the gospel dispensation. But the falsehood of this opinion appears by considering that the only true ground of saving faith is the Divine Testimony, including a revelation of Jesus Christ, of his righteousness and salvation, and a free grant or promise of what is thus revealed, bearing such a general direction to the hearers of the word, as warrants each of them to take all home to himself. This Divine Testimony is that which unbelief rejects, and which true faith builds upon for eternity. But the scheme of Christ’s having died intentionally for all men affords no such ground of hope. For there is no hope of eternal life included in our relying upon a notion that Christ died

141 David Pareus observes that one person is said in scripture to die for another, —1. When he dies for the sake or for the good of another. In this sense Paul speaks of his suffering for the church, for the Corinthians or the Colossians, that is, for their benefit, or, as he sometimes expresses it, for their consolation and salvation. In the same sense, John says. We ought to lay down our life for the brethren, 1 John iii. 10. —2. When he dies in the room of another, to the end that that other may be saved from death, and have his life preserved. In this sense David wished, that be had died for his son Absolom. In this sense Paul speaks of one dying for a righteous man, Rom. v. 7. In this sense Christ the good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, John x. 11. In neither of these senses can it be said, that Christ died for those that perish in their unbelief. See an addition to Ursin’s explanation of the XL. question of the Heidelberg Catechism.
intentionally for us no otherwise than for those that perish. Hence a person who takes up with this notion as the ground of his faith in the death of Christ, will be under the necessity of seeking some other ground than the death of Christ for his hope of eternal life; some ground for it in his exercises and feelings,—in his own righteousness. This scheme, therefore, leads men away from the gospel method of seeking righteousness by faith alone, to a carnal method of seeking it, as it were, by the works of the law: and thus they stumble at that stumbling stone, Rom. ix. 32.

It has also been said, that the common benefits granted to reprobates, as well as to the elect, such as food and raiment, the outward privileges of the visible church, the common operations of the Spirit, must be ranked among the benefits purchased by the death of Christ. But the scripture-account of the necessity of his death will not allow us to believe that it was appointed for the purchase of such things. The demands of vindictive justice upon the sinner, if they had obtained no answer from the Surety, would have been an effectual bar to the sinner’s attainment of any spiritual blessing, such as, the pardon of sin or the renewing and sanctifying of our nature. For vindictive justice, in that case, would have necessarily required the sinner’s exclusion from the special grace of God here, as well as everlasting punishment hereafter. So that no sinner could have attained any spiritual blessing, if Christ had not removed the bar arising from the demands of vindictive justice by his satisfaction. But the case of temporal benefits granted to the wicked is quite different. For what vindictive justice necessarily requires is no bar to all the enjoyment, that wicked men attain, of these benefits; it being an enjoyment of them fully consistent with their exclusion from the special grace of God here, and with their everlasting punishment hereafter; nay, an enjoyment which belongs to the begun execution of God’s wrath; for the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. Hence it is evident that the demands of vindictive justice were not a bar to men’s
attainment of temporal benefits, as they were to their attainment of spiritual blessings; and therefore the death of Christ was not necessary to procure the former, as it was to procure the latter. It is agreeable to the whole tenor of scripture to hold, that these benefits, as bestowed upon reprobates, proceed from the goodness and forbearance which God exercises in his common providence; and are allotted to them, as meat and drink are allowed a condemned malefactor, till the day of execution. For the same reasons, we cannot allow, that the outward privileges of the visible church or the common operations of the Spirit, as they are granted to the reprobate, are to be considered as fruits of Christ’s purchase; though they are made subservient to the blessed design of his purchase; and though we allow that all the saving benefit, which is conveyed to the souls of believers through the outward means, and all the subserviency of the outward dispensations of providence to their salvation, are fruits of his purchase. Farther, the scripture teaches, that it is only in the way of union to the person of Christ, that any can enjoy the benefits of his purchase; and that whoever receives one of these benefits, shall, in the time and way settled in the covenant of grace, receive all; they are blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings, Ephes. i. 3. 1 Corin. i. 30. Rom. viii. 30. It is true, there are promises of the covenant of grace respecting the good things of this life. But what is secured to believers in these promises is not these things in their mere earthly nature, or as they are allowed to reprobates; but as they come attended with a special blessing and are subservient to the good of the soul. It may be useful to add here the following important words of Mr. Haliburton: “A wise merchant,” says he, “will not give pearls for trifles; far less the only wise God this precious blood for things of no or small value. Here, if any where, the believer may see them, beyond all rational contradiction, real, great, durable and
eternal."  

142 This principle. That nothing can be justly ascribed to the virtue of Christ's mediation, which might have taken place, consistently with the honour of God's law and justice, without that mediation,—is to be firmly maintained. So the scripture represents the exercise of God's mercy in pardoning sinners and receiving them into favour, as the fruit of Christ's mediation. But the acts of God's providence in preserving man and other creatures in being, and in ordering and disposing them in their natural course toward their natural ends, cannot be considered in that light. There is nothing suggested by reason or revealed in scripture concerning God, that would have hindered such acts of providence from being exercised, though no Mediator had been appointed. Osiander, in the period of the blessed reformation from Popery, held, as some of the schoolmen had done before him, that Christ would have assumed the human nature, though man had not sinned. Others have taught, that Christ by his mediation obtained the confirmation of the angels or the continuance of the earth and its inhabitants in being, after the entrance of sin. These opinions proceed upon the supposition, that Christ might have been or was appointed to be a Mediator for other ends, than the glory of God in the salvation of elect sinners; a supposition without any foundation in the holy scriptures. *Scriptura*, says Turretine, *non alium finem proposuit missionis Christi, quam peccatorum salutem, nec fas est longius inquirere, tacente scriptura*.

It is a truth, that whatever the Divine election of some of mankind presupposes, the mediatorial office of Jesus Christ also presupposes: because his appointment to that office be longs to or rather supposes the election of his people. But the election of some of mankind, in all their successive generations, presupposes the foreseen existence of all these generations: just as the act of the potter in taking so much clay of the same lump to make some vessels of one sort, and so much to make some of another sort, presupposes the existence of the whole lump. Therefore, since election presupposes the existence of mankind in their successive generations; so does the mediatorial office of Christ. His appointment to that office from everlasting supposed their decreed or unforeseen existence; and his execution of it in time supposes their actual existence. But a thing cannot be the cause of that which it supposes as previous to itself. The actions of a man cannot be the cause of his life; since they suppose it as previous to them. Hence it is evident, that the mediatorial office of Christ cannot be the cause of men's natural existence; nor, according to the same reasoning, can it be the cause of any of the ordinary means of that existence, such as, food and raiment, natural and civil relations; because God's decree, or purpose of continuing men's natural life, includes his purpose of granting them all the requisite means of its continuance.

Objection. Was not man, as soon as he sinned, liable to immediate death, according to the threatening of the covenant of works.

Answer. Death, according to that threatening, was to take place on the day, on which he ate the forbidden fruit. But it does not follow, that it was to end on that day; for the death threatened was eternal death; even that which is the wages of sins, in direct opposition to that eternal life, which was promised in the first covenant as the reward of man's obedience, and which, according to the second, is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom. vi. 23. Besides, as Adam represented all his natural offspring in the covenant of works; so, in consequence of his transgression, the death threatened was to reach the whole equally with himself, according to the tenor of that covenant, Gen. ii. 17. Rom. v. 12–19. I Corinthians, xv. 21, 22. If annihilation had then taken place, the threatening could not have been executed on Adam's offspring; nor the honour of the Divine faithfulness, pledged in that threatening, maintained. To say, that the mediation of Christ was necessary to preserve the human race in being, is to say, that his mediation was necessary in order to the execution of the threatening of the broken covenant; necessary to ensure the eternal damnation of sinners. The scripture gives us a very different account indeed of the end of Christ's mission, John iii. 17. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Objection. Christ the Mediator is said to uphold all things, Heb. i. 3 and to establish the earthy Isai. xlix. 8.

Answer. Christ, as being the same true God with the Father, is the Maker and Upholder of all things. He upholds them in their being, not by his mediation, but by the word of his power. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; exercising an absolute dominion, of both natural and moral government, over all persons and things in this world. Such is that necessary and essential kingdom, which belongs to him as God.

But he has also a Mediatory kingdom, which, as well as his essential kingdom, extends to all persons and things. This Mediatory kingdom or government is given to Christ, Matth. xxviii. 18. The great end, for which it was given to him, is in subordination to the glory of God, the good of his church, which is his spiritual kingdom, John xvii. 2. Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him, Ephes. i. 22. He gave him to be Head over all things to the church. It is given him as the reward of his obedience unto death, Philip. ii. 8, 9, 10.

With regard to the expression in Isai. xlix. 8. to establish the earth, it is to be understood, agreeably to the connection, of Christ's mediatory work in raising up and establishing his church, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. "He shall repair," says Henry upon the place, "the decays of the church and build it upon a rock. He shall establish the earth, or rather, the land, the land of Judah, a type of the church." Vitringa upon the place has these words: "Sayest thou, the earth here signifies the elect? That I deny not; but the desolate places
One reason why so many professed Calvinists in our day deny or slight the doctrine of particular redemption, seems to be the neglect or misunderstanding of another precious doctrine of the gospel; the doctrine of Christ’s representation of his people in the covenant of grace. Christ speaks frequently of *those that the Father had given him*, John vi. 37. x. 29. xvii. 6, 9, 24. who are called his *seed*, Isai. liii. 10. Christ put himself in their place, and condescended to bear their name, as in Isai. xlix. 3. *Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.* So in the first promise, both he and they are called *the seed of the woman*, Gen. iii. 15. In this respect, Adam is said to have been a *figure of him that was to come*, that is, of Christ, Rom. v. 14. In this sense, the apostle calls Adam the first man, and Christ the *last man*, 1 Corinth, xv. 47. each of them bearing such a public character as never can be ascribed to any third man. As Adam’s fall, by virtue of his representation, constituted all his natural posterity sinners; so the obedience of Jesus Christ, by virtue of his representation, constitutes all his people righteous. Particular redemption necessarily follows from Christ’s representation of those that were given him in the covenant of grace; for in Christ, as their representing Head, each of them, is considered as having given such a full satisfaction to the law and justice of God, as not only expiates all their sins, but entitles them to eternal life. Nor can he be said to have died for any more or fewer of mankind than his spiritual seed or those whom he represented, Isai. liii. 10, 11. They, and no others, were crucified, dead, and buried with him: they and no others are also risen with him and sit together with him in heavenly places.

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signify the same thing. It is, therefore, enquired what is to be understood by the earth and the desolate heritages. This prophet, if I mistake not, uses the same phrase, in two other places, in describing the spiritual privileges believers were to enjoy under the New Testament dispensation.” Chap. liv. 3. and lxi. 4. “In these places as well as in this, you are to understand the prophet as representing by this phrase the condition which the Gentiles were in for a long time, while they were alienated from the communion of God, grossly ignorant of God and true religion, and therefore producing no spiritual fruit, pleasing to God, or profitable to men, through their kingdoms, the hereditary possession of which was promised to the seed of Abraham.—To establish the earth, or to raise up these desolate places, is to bring these Gentiles to the knowledge of the true religion by the doctrine of the gospel, to implant in their minds the seeds of true faith, piety and virtue, &c.” The expositions of judicious commentators, collected in Pool’s Synopsis, are much to the same purpose.
This doctrine must be preached to sinners. For, though it cannot be known, otherwise than by the event, what particular persons were included in Christ’s representation, this being among the secret things that belong to the Lord our God; yet sinners must be taught, that there is such a relation between Christ and his chosen people; that, in the gospel, he is exhibited to them to be received and rested on by them as their New Covenant Head; and that, when they are determined to appoint to themselves one Head, as the expression is in Hos. i. 11. they thus manifest themselves to be among those whom Christ represented in the covenant of grace. Here it is to be carefully observed, that the preaching of the blessedness, attainable by sinners through the representation of the Lord Christ, includes or supposes the preaching of that sinful and miserable condition they are in through their connection with their first covenant Head; and of the necessity of their being cut off from that killing Head; and united to Jesus Christ, the new covenant-Head.

With regard to believers, the usefulness of this doctrine to them is too obvious to be insisted on. There are none of their distressed cases, in which this evangelical truth will not afford them strong consolation. Nor is there any part of Christian practice, to which it does not incite us by the most powerful motives and encouragements.

However much this doctrine of Christ’s representation in the covenant of grace may be despised, that it was not so in the days of our forefathers is well known. The two following instances of their esteem of it deserve to be remembered. The one is in the Memoirs of the life of Mr. Robert Blair; where he is giving an account of his ministry in the north of Ireland in the year 1630. “After sermon,” says he, “on the Lord’s day, one of the judges wanting to confer with me, sent for me to his lodging, where he professed his satisfaction with what I had delivered, especially in my last
sermon: for therein said he, you opened a point, which I never heard before, viz. the covenant of redemption made with Christ the Mediator as Head of the elect. He intreated me to go over the heads of the sermon with him. And opening his Bible, he read over and considered the proofs cited: and he was so well satisfied, that, if his calling did not tie him to Dublin, he would gladly come to the North, and settle under such a ministry.” The other instance is in Mr. Robert Trail’s Vindication of the Protestant doctrine concerning justification from the charge of Antinomianism, where he has the following words: “No other Headship to Christ do we find some willing to admit but what belongs to his kingly office. As to his Suretyship and being the second Adam, and a public Person, some treat it with contempt. I have heard, that Dr. Thomas Goodwin was in his youth an Arminian, or at least inclining that way; but was, through the Lord’s grace, brought off by Dr. Sibbs clearing up this same point of Christ’s being the Head and Representative of all his people.”

III. Some who profess to teach Calvinistic doctrine, have offered such explanations of the inability of fallen man to do what is spiritually good as appear to deviate from the principles of the reformation. The common objection of the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians is to this purpose: “To suppose that God commands what we have no ability to perform, is to represent him as unjust. We cannot be under a moral obligation to do what is not in our power.” In answer to this objection our old divines commonly observed, that, though God could not, consistently with his justice and goodness, require of man any obedience, which he had not ability, in the state wherein he was created, to perform; yet, when man by the fall had wilfully thrown away that ability, God did not thereby lose his right of requiring obedience.143 But this answer is now

143 Frustra se opponunt Pelagiani et Semi-Pelagiani omnes; objicientes, Deum sic in mandatis fore injustum, et hominem in peccatis excusabilem. Respondetur, neutrum sequi, quia impotentia hominis est culpabilis, et voluntarie contracta, per quam Deus jure suo non excidit. Marckii Medulla, capite xv.
deemed insufficient. Our new divines pretend that the objection is better answered, by distinguishing between natural and moral ability; alleging, that men, in their fallen state, have still a natural ability to believe in Christ, to repent of sin, and to perform every other duty acceptably; but have no moral ability to do so. On this point it may be useful to offer a few observations.

1. There are indispositions and inabilities of body and mind, which are not, in themselves, contrary to the holy law of God; such as the inability of an idiot to acquire knowledge, the inability of the blind to read the scriptures, the inability of the heathens to comply with the offers of salvation, which they never heard. Such inabilities may be called physical or natural: they are not, in themselves, contrary to the holy law of God, which, by no means, requires what is thus physically impossible. We are far from saying, that the inability of fallen man to do what is spiritually good, is natural in this sense: for every one must allow the inability of those who are grown up and have the exercise of reason, to know their Creator aright, and to love him above all things, according to the external revelation which is actually made to them in his works, and especially in his word, to be of a quite different kind from the inabilities just now mentioned. This inability, considered as, in itself, contrary to the holy law of God, may rightly be called moral inability. But it may also be justly called natural, as the whole nature of man is subjected to it; as it is the want of that original righteousness, which was natural to man, till he lost it by the fall; as it is so absolute, that no man, before a change of nature in saving conversion, can exert a single act spiritually good; every imagination of the thoughts of his heart being only evil continually. Thus, though we allow, that the unregenerate man’s inability to believe in Christ is moral and voluntary, so that he alone is the blameable cause of it; yet it cannot be justly called moral in opposition to natural, as now explained; or, as if the act of the will in refusing to close with the gospel-offer, were the only bar or hindrance to his attainment of saving faith; for that act itself is hindered negatively, by the want of that supernatural grace, which
being imparted, saving faith necessarily follows, and which being withheld, it is impossible: and *positively*, not only by the will, but also by the corruption of the whole nature, by which the will in the unregenerate is so completely enslaved, so bound as with a chain, that it can do nothing towards its own deliverance.  

2. If the spiritual impotence, which man has contracted by the fall, be no more than the want of inclination or willingness to do what is spiritually good; then it is no more than such inability as that of a man in perfect health to go out of his house; or that of a good scholar to write, when he has no inclination to do so. As it would be manifestly absurd to express the want of inclination in these cases by saying, he *cannot* go out of his house, he *cannot* write; so if the spiritual impotence of fallen man were no more than what is now represented, it would be no less absurd, to say, as the scripture does, He *cannot* come to Christ, he *cannot* please God; he has no *strength*, no *life in him*. Upon that supposition, there would appear to be no room for the apostle’s distinction between...
being actually not subject to the law of God, and being utterly incapable of subjection to it; and between God’s working in us to will and his working in us to do.¹⁴⁶

3. It is much to be observed, that, according to the Scripture, man’s spiritual impotence lies in the understanding as well as in the will, 1 Corinth. ii.14. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* If it be said, that the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man, because he wilfully misrepresents them; no, says the apostle, it is because he cannot know them: and farther, if it be said, that it is only from his inattention, that he cannot know them; the apostle answers, that this inability cannot be remedied by any efforts of the natural man but only by the supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit: *they are discerned spiritually,* by that new capacity of understanding which is given us by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. To this purpose is that which Moses said to Israel towards the end of the forty years during which they sojourned in the wilderness, *The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.* It is true, that wisdom and knowledge are often in scripture to be understood practically, as including the will’s approbation of and delight in the object known; as in Job. xxviii. 28. *Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.* But in such passages the understanding is undoubtedly commended as directing the will to depart from sin and adhere to the path of duty, a holy practice being both the effect and evidence of a savingly enlightened understanding.

4. It is a dangerous error to say, “That if men are unable to understand, believe and love the gospel in a saving manner, then they must be unable to shut their eyes against it, to disbelieve and

¹⁴⁶ Rom. viii. 7. Philip, ii. 13.
reject it.” For, according to the scripture, men’s natural inability to perform any duty, instead of rendering them unable to practice the contrary sin, disposes them to practise it more and more. Thus, the more unable men are to discern the truth in a saving manner, the more do they shut their eyes and ears against it. The Jews, in the time of our Saviour and his apostles, were unable to understand, believe and love the gospel in a saving manner, not only from the common depravation of human nature, but also from a peculiar efficacy of God’s righteous judgment upon them, John xii. 38, 39, 40. Rom. xi. 7, 8, 9, 10. Did it follow, that they were unable to shut their eyes against, to disbelieve and reject the gospel? Quite the contrary; for by means of that judicial induration, their opposition to the gospel was increased, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost. The defenders of the doctrine of grace against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians have shown abundantly, that, in order to justify God in condemning fallen men for their unbelief and other sins, it is by no means necessary to suppose, that they have still, in their fallen state, sufficient ability to perform the opposite duties in an acceptable manner.

If it be asked, how can men, who are unable of themselves to believe in Jesus Christ, be justly condemned upon this ground, that they had ability and lost it in the first Adam; since Adam himself, in his upright state, could not be said to have had faith in Jesus Christ; We answer, that the law, which was written upon man’s heart in his creation, bound him to believe whatever God reveals. But the general duty of believing whatever God reveals, comprehends the more particular duty of believing the gospel upon the proposal of it: and by whatever means we lost ability for the former belief, by the same means we lost ability for the latter.

If it be said, that sinners are hereby rendered secure by fixing the guilt of their conduct upon their father Adam. We answer, that, while men are not brought to humble themselves for their sin in
Adam, they are not duly exercised in humbling themselves for any other sin. The doctrine of man’s natural inability to do what is spiritually good, is only abused,—when persons make it a pretence for their slight thoughts of actual sins;—when they are not filled with a self-abasing sense of their helpless and lost condition; and when they are not thus excited to look for all their salvation in Jesus Christ as exhibited in the gospel. Besides, when sinners are hardening themselves in their pernicious courses; though they may occasionally attempt to excuse themselves from the doctrine of man’s natural impotence; yet they give sufficient evidence that they disbelieve it, by the large promises of repentance and reformation, which they usually make when under convictions; and by their delaying the work of turning from sin to God, as if it were a work which they have sufficient ability for doing at any time. The truth is, the case of natural men under the gospel-dispensation is like that of a servant, who, while he labours under a disease that renders him incapable of serving his master, has, at the same time, such an aversion to the service, that, rather than return to it, he chooses to continue under his disease. Unrenewed men are totally impotent as to any act that is, spiritually good; and they have a reigning enmity against the only remedy of their impotence.

To what has now been observed on this point, it may be of use to add a quotation from a valuable writer, whose praise is in the churches.147 “The learned Amyraldus,” says he, “did no service to the cause of the reformation by his distinction between a physical and a moral power of believing in Christ. He supposed the sinner to have the former, but not the latter. He held, that Christ died for all men according to a decree of God, by which salvation was secured to sinners upon condition of their faith; which general decree, according to him, was to be considered as going before the particular decree, about giving faith to the elect. When it was

147 Leydecker de Veritate Religionis Reformatae et Evangelicae, Lib. ii. Chap. 6. Sect. 82.
objected to him, that his notion of the general decree now mentioned was absurd, as it suspended the end of Christ’s death upon an impossible condition he denied, that the condition was impossible. For, said he, though I do not, with the Arminians, deny the impotence of fallen man, or his inability to believe, (I allow him to be morally impotent;) yet I hold that man has still a physical or natural power of believing; as he possesses the natural faculties of the understanding and the will. Herein Amyraldus has given a sad example of the abuse of great parts. Shall we suppose, that when Christ undertook for sinners in the covenant of grace, he considered them any otherwise than as most miserable, lost, dead in sin, utterly impotent, Rom. v. 7, 8. viii. 3. or that the wisdom of God gave Christ to die for this end, that sinners might attain salvation by a natural power of believing; a power, which, Amyraldus confesses, could never be exerted? Farther, is not faith a most holy and moral act, and, as it takes place in the sinner, purely supernatural? and shall we allow, that a principle which is not moral, but merely physical, can be productive of such a moral and supernatural act? Ought not an act and its principle to correspond with one another? Let the same thing be said of love, which Amyraldus has said of faith, and the Pelagians will triumph; who used to speak so much about a natural faculty of loving God above all things. Indeed upon this scheme, there will be no keeping out of the Pelagian opinion about the powers of pure nature, and about physical or natural faculties in man of doing what is morally good. For, in confuting that opinion, out Divines still maintained, that the image of God was requisite in the first man, in order to his exerting such morally good acts as those of loving and seeking true blessedness in the enjoyment of him. But Amyraldus overthrows this doctrine, while he is led, by the distinction he makes between natural and moral power, to hold, that the conception of man’s rational nature necessarily includes in it a power of exerting acts morally good, such as those of desiring and endeavouring to obtain
the restoration of communion with the infinitely holy and blessed God. The tendency of this scheme became more manifest, when Pajonius, a disciple of Amyraldus, began to deny the necessity of the Spirit’s work in the internal illumination of sinners, in order to their saving conversion. For, said Pajonius, nothing more is necessary to that end, than that the understanding, which has in itself a sufficiency of clear ideas, (according to the language of the Cartesian Philosophy then in vogue,) should only be struck by the light of external revelation, as the eye is struck by the rays of light coming from a luminous object.”

This quotation may lead to useful reflections on the connection between the opinion before mentioned and several other errors which have been broached, in opposition to the purity of gospel doctrine.

IV. Another instance of defection from the doctrine of the reformation is, that many professing, in other respects, to hold Calvinistic doctrine, teach that such a knowledge of God is attainable by means of the works of creation and common Providence, together with tradition, as is sufficient for the salvation of the heathens, if they were sincere in the improvement of that knowledge. This opinion is directly opposite to those scriptures, which represent the heathens, before the gospel was preached to them, as without God and without hope in the world, Ephes. ii. 12. as in such a state, that whatever wisdom they attained by tradition or otherwise, they knew not God, 1 Corinth, i. 21. Any knowledge of God, which they could attain in that state, was of no avail for their salvation; as it was a knowledge of him only according to the law or covenant of works. For the apostle shows abundantly, that no justification or salvation is attainable by the law, Rom. iii. 20. viii. 3. Gal. iii. 10, 18, 21. iv. 24. Ephes. ii. 8, 9. Their knowledge of God, while in that state, included no knowledge of the only Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus;
no knowledge of the promises of God as yea and amen in him. Thus, they were ignorant of the only ground of hope ever revealed to sinners. Besides, the knowledge, attainable by heathens without the word, has no promise of being blessed to fallen men as a means of removing their natural blindness and enmity; nor can it be certainly shown, that it has ever had such an effect. The whole history of the heathen world evinces the unprofitableness of their knowledge of God for producing either true holiness or true comfort.¹⁴⁸

Such tenets, as we have now considered, are taught by many who profess a general adherence to the doctrine exhibited in the confession of the Reformed Churches; while the avowed oppositions of others to that doctrine is verging to the Pelagian and Socinian extremes.

With regard to the primary causes of such defection from the faith and profession of evangelical truth, they are the same in all ages and countries, namely, the opposition of man’s depraved nature to the things of the spirit of God and his inability to apprehend these things aright without supernatural illumination; together with the unwearied attempts of Satan to seduce men from the truth and entangle them in pernicious errors. But there are secondary causes or occasions of this defection, which are, at least in the remarkable prevalence of them, peculiar to the state of the church in certain periods or places of the world. It is the design of the remaining part of this letter to take notice of some such causes or occasions of the present decline from the doctrine of the reformation.

First, it has been often observed, that, during a long continuance of outward peace, a church seldom retains her first purity; she contracts corruption insensibly, as iron, not used, gathers rust. The truths of the gospel were taught in their native simplicity, while

¹⁴⁸ See Haliburton’s Principles of the Modern Deists, Chap. x. Sect. 3d.
professors were exposed to suffering on account of their faithful adherence to them. But after some time of ease and prosperity in the Protestant churches, various tenets began to be advanced in opposition to the doctrine of our Reformers; such as, That the gospel is a new law; that the act of saving faith includes no persuasion that Christ is a Saviour to us in particular; that what had been held by orthodox divines about a specific difference between saving grace and the greatest attainments of natural men, was false and hurtful to the souls of men; That the union of believers to Christ can mean nothing but their adherence to him by love and obedience; That God hath promised saving grace to such a diligent use of the appointed means, as men in their natural state are capable of attaining. It was a very different sort of doctrine which the Lord blessed for the support and consolation of his people in suffering times. We refer to the letters and discourses of the Martyrs in England during the reigns of King Henry the eighth and Queen Mary, and Patrick Hamilton’s Determinations concerning the law, the gospel, and faith,\textsuperscript{149} and in general to the first Confessions of the Protestant churches.

The acknowledged improvements of the present age in politics, in natural philosophy and other sciences, lead many to suppose that the fashionable opinions in religion must be more correct than those of our old reformers. But it is certain, that when people grow more knowing in worldly things, they often grow more ignorant of the things of the spirit of God. Those things are often hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes, Matth. xi. 25. Besides, we are apt to suppose, that we see farther than our predecessors, because we enjoy the fruit of their labours and stand upon their shoulders: the old Popish schoolmen might have the like thoughts of the ancient fathers. But the use of such reasoning about our knowledge of the things of God may be very fallacious. For we may

\textsuperscript{149} See Fox’s Martyrology, and Knox’s history of the Reformation of religion in Scotland.
not be able to see so far in these matters as our predecessors, if they were better enlightened by the spirit of God to understand the mystery of the gospel.

Secondly, another thing, which contributes to the decline of the knowledge and esteem of reformation-principles, is a prevailing prejudice among the teachers and students in Divinity against one of the best means, in due subordination to the holy scriptures, of an accurate understanding of these principles; namely, the use of the systems of Christian doctrine delivered by our first Reformers and their successors. In these systems the leading truths of our holy religion are distinctly stated in such an order as exhibits their connection with, and dependance upon, one another. Some object to these systems, that there is nothing in them but short hints on many questions, which admit of a much larger discussion. But it is not the design of such compends to handle those questions at large, but to state in few words the particulars that are most necessary to be attended to in order to a just determination of them. These particulars, however, are, with few exceptions, so judiciously related and arranged, and so clearly proved by the texts of scripture quoted, that to an attentive mind, disposed to meditation, no human writings are more helpful. Some complain of the scholastic terms used in these systems. But several of them, such as Calvin's Institutions, are not at all liable to this objection. Others, such as Altingius, Maccovius, Turretine, make use of some scholastic terms, with manifest advantage; for when these terms are understood, (and it requires but a little trouble to understand them,) we are convinced that hardly any other terms could be found, in which the writer could have conveyed his meaning with equal brevity and precision. “Laboured and prolix dissertations,” as a judicious writer observes, “are far from being so helpful to the memory and often tend to give a wrong bias to the judgment, by keeping the mind too long intent on one particular head of doctrine; whence it is often diverted from the consideration of
another equally necessary to be known, and kept from having a just view of the connection between one truth and another; by not attending to which men frequently fall into the shameful inconsistency of setting one part of revealed truth in opposition to another. The method of teaching by such prolix dissertations seems indeed well calculated for propagating error and false doctrine; as it affords the teachers of it an opportunity of using various artifices for concealing, colouring over, and insinuating with advantage and success, notions and opinions, the falsehood, folly and absurdity of which would appear at first view, were they set forth in a plain simple dress, or put into the form of systematic treatises.”

Thirdly, the decline of purity in doctrine appears to be promoted by the fashionable mode of preaching in our day. In former times, when a Protestant minister had laid down a doctrine or position, he would immediately establish it by quoting one or two texts of scripture. Even in pathetic addresses to the people, as well as in confirming points of doctrine, ministers made use of such quotations, as the most effectual means, through the Divine blessing, not only of enlightening the judgment, but also of awakening the conscience and reaching the heart. The sermon of an old Protestant minister was just a series of particulars, deduced from his text, each of which particulars was confirmed by one or more pertinent texts, and applied to the particular cases of his hearers. But in our day, we read and hear many sermons in which, though many passages of scripture may be repeated, we are never once referred to any passage as the ground of our faith in what is delivered. It is true, the preacher does not fail to give reasons for

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150 See that valuable work of the late Rev. Mr. David Wilson, entitled Palemon’s Creed examined.

151 It is not meant by any thing here advanced, that ministers should not make use of reasoning in their sermons: for that would be to say, upon the matter, that they should not deal with their hearers as rational creatures at all. Reasoning is continually necessary,—particularly, in discovering what is necessarily implied in the words of scripture, or justly deducible from them; in confirming the doctrine we find to be contained in any text from the antecedents and consequents of that text, and from the comparison of it with other places of scripture; in showing the agreement of one revealed truth with another, and its inconsistency with error. Besides, it is often proper for ministers first to show their hearers, that such a particular revealed in the word, as a matter of faith or practice, is agreeable to the remains of light in their natural reason; and then to urge that agreement
what he advances; and the reasons may often be solid; but then they are given, as if they had been derived from no other source than the common reason and experience of mankind. By this method men’s attention is turned away from the consideration of the word as the word of God, or as the means of his appointment for our conversion and sanctification: under which consideration alone we are to expect that God will bless and make the truths delivered effectual to these salutary ends. Besides, when people are accustomed to receive doctrines upon the ground of their own reason, without any reference to the authority of God speaking in the scriptures; their natural prejudice against receiving the mysteries of the gospel upon the ground of that authority alone, is countenanced and increased; and they are prepared to imbibe any corrupt opinion, when recommended to them, by some plausible reasoning.

Fourthly, the fashionable systems of philosophy have contributed much to the present defection from the doctrines of the reformation. It is generally allowed, that even in the first three centuries, many were chargeable with corrupting the doctrines of the Christian religion by mixing them with the opinions of the Platonic philosophy; a scheme, which gave birth to the Gnostics, the Valentinians and other heretics, in that early period. Thus, many professors are obstinately attached to the false tenets which they have learned from the modern systems of philosophy:

upon them, as a motive to their cordial reception of what God has revealed, and as rendering the crime of rejecting it more heinous and inexcusable. But the fashionable mode of reasoning in the pulpit, which this passage points out as reprehensible, is the inculcating matters of faith or practice upon the ground of their agreement with the dictates of men’s natural reason; while the scripture is not referred to, or at least not as the only ground upon which the hearers are to receive the doctrine delivered. For no doctrine is received by a Divine faith, or will be effectual to any saving-purpose, unless it be received as the word of God, 1 Thessal. ii. 13. 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15, 16. and apprehended by the saving illumination of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinth. ii. 14 Matth. xvi. 17. The manner of preaching here censured has a manifest tendency to corrupt not only the more mysterious doctrines, such as those relating to the sacred Trinity and to the union of the two natures in the person of Christ: but even the most plain and practical doctrine: as it is a method which diverts the attention from Jesus Christ the centre and sum of them all; and from the necessary connection of each of them with the rest, even with the most mysterious, as being all parts of the same truth as it is in Jesus. This manner of preaching seems to be that which made the excellent Mr. Haliburton apprehensive of a sort of rational religion coming in among the Protestants in his time; whence people would fall into a way of serving God, which is mere Deism, having no relation to Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God.
systems, which represent the doctrines of God’s eternity without succession, his omnipresence without extension as unintelligible jargon; which describe the powers of human nature in a manner inconsistent with its present fallen state; which hold the nature of things, men’s, feelings, or something else than the revealed will of God to be the standard of moral virtue; which reduce the evil of sin to a light and trivial matter, by calling it a human frailty or imperfection, of little account in the eye of the Deity; and which allow us no other ground for the faith of what is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, than human reason or human testimony. We would not detract from the praise due to sound philosophy, which teaches to study distinctness in our conceptions of these things and accuracy in reasoning about them; and which by its discoveries heightens our views of the wisdom, power and goodness of God in his works, and promotes the conveniency and comfort of human life. Philosophy may be also a handmaid to faith. But, in order to be useful in this respect, it must be duly subordinate to the authority of Divine revelation.\footnote{Habuit se ad Theologiam philosophia in scholis quorundam saltern Patrum, ut sociæ; in gymnasii scholasticorum, ut domina; in reformatorum cathedris, ut ancilla: That is, Philosophy was to Theology in the schools of the Fathers, a sister or equal; in the disputations of the Schoolmen, a mistress or superior; but in the seminaries of the Reformed churches, only a handmaid. To this observation of Dr. Arrowsmith, an eminent Divine of the seventeenth century, may be added some remarks of the celebrated Voetius, a contemporary writer. Vide Disput. de Errore et Haeresi. In the epistle to the Coloss, ii. 8. Christians are warned of the danger they are in of being spoiled, or made a prey of, through philosophy. But then it is such philosophy as is but vain deceit. It is not that philosophy, which God himself teaches, as he is the Author of nature and of right reason. The apostle here intends those false opinions and sects of philosophers, which, being too much followed and admired by many professors of Christianity, were a principal cause of their departure from the truth. Thus he condemns endless, vain or fabulous genealogies, 1 Tim. i. 4. Science falsely so called, 1 Tim. vi. 20. false revelations, 2 Thessal. ii. 2. and gaudy or sophistical eloquence, 1 Corinth, ii. 1, 4. but not the genealogies we have recorded in scripture, nor any true science, revelation, or eloquence. Here the maxim holds, That the abuse of a thing may be taken away, without taking away the thing itself or its use. It is true, some positions, usually admitted as axioms by Philosophers in treating of natural things, seem repugnant to the mysteries of faith, such as, That nothing is made of nothing, and that a power or habit, totally destroyed, cannot be restored. But we justly allow, that these axioms hold true of second causes, operating according to the ordinary course of nature. And we no more deny the necessity and usefulness of them within their own sphere, when we say, that they are not to be applied to matters of faith, which cannot be known but by supernatural revelation; than we deny that the manner of knowing external objects by means of our bodily senses is useful and necessary in the present state; when we say, that that manner of knowing is not to be extended to objects purely intellectual; an abuse, which has led some to hold, that pure spirits and even the Divine Essence may be seen with the bodily eye. True philosophy ministers, as an handmaid; to the Christian religion, not only as it teaches us to handle every subject with accuracy and precision; and as the knowledge, thereby attained, helps us to make use of natural things, by way of comparison or similitude, for the illustration of spiritual things: but especially as it serves to expose the vain pretensions of a false philosophy, by which many labour insidiously to undermine the foundations of our faith.}
Fifthly, the decline of stedfast adherence to the doctrine of the reformation has been promoted by lax schemes of church-communion. There is no particular church which has not some articles of revealed truth, which have been solemnly acknowledged as belonging to her profession and to the bond of her communion. When the office-bearers of a particular church admit the known deniers and opposers of such articles, they are chargeable with gross dishonesty, and with a flagrant contempt of the charge, that Christ hath given his people, to hold fast what they have attained. It is a vain excuse, that the truths denied are less fundamental; while they belong to the bond of the church’s communion; while they bear the same stamp of Divine authority with those which are deemed more fundamental; and while there is such a connection among the truths revealed in God’s word, that the denial of the less fundamental leads to the denial of those which are more so; and while the authority of God speaking in his word may be no less despised by the denial of the former, than by that of the latter. Thus the Papists trample as much upon his authority in withholding the cup from the people in the Lord’s Supper, as in denying the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers for their justification. For though the matter of duty rejected in the former case may be deemed less important, it is no less clearly revealed than the matter of faith denied in the latter. Besides, they who hold the grossest errors, will often profess adherence to the...
essentials of Christianity, and will make frequent use of the very expressions of scripture, which plainly contain the truths which they obstinately deny. A Socinian will say, I believe in the Holy Spirit; but then he adds, that the Holy Spirit is not a person, but only an attribute or operation of the Deity. Again, I believe, says he, the resurrection of the body; adding, however that he does not mean the resurrection of the same body. An Arminian will say, there is an election, of Christians to salvation; but then it is such an election, that the execution of it is suspended upon man’s free-will by which it may be frustrated. Thus persons may profess adherence to the essentials of Christianity, and to many scriptural propositions expressing the articles of our faith; and yet they could not be honestly admitted to church-communion by the office-bearers of the reformed churches; while they are well known to understand the said propositions in a heretical sense; and to deny the truth really contained in them. That such admissions, however, often take place in the Protestant churches at this day, is too evident, from the prevailing contempt of Confessions of faith; 153

The practise of the Protestant churches in requiring their ministers and other members to make a solemn profession of adherence to their public Formulas or confessions of faith is warranted by all those passages of scripture in which we are enjoined to confess Christ before men; to hold fast the form of sound words; to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; to strive together with one mind for the faith of the gospel. It is, indeed necessary to contend for the words of the scripture as the very words of God. But this is not enough. For many, who, in profession, hold the words of scripture, wrest them to their own destruction, 1 Peter iii. 16. In the time of Christ and his apostles, the Sadducees and the Judaizing teachers professed their belief of the Old Testament, scriptures; whilst in various points they denied the true sense of these scriptures. Thus, our Lord maintained not only the words which God spoke to Moses out of the bush, but also the true sense of these words in opposition to the error of the Sadducees, Luke xx. 37, 38. In like manner, the apostle Paul declares the sense of various words of the Old Testament in opposition to the legal doctrine of the Judaizing teachers, Gal. 8, 11, 16, 21, 22. Now as there were false teachers and heretics in the times of the apostles, so our Lord warned us of the rise and spread of such in the last times, 2 Tim. iii. 1. iv. 3, 4, 1 Corinth, xi. 19. 1 John iv. 3. 2 Peter ii. 1. Such, in the present day, are the Socinians, the Arminians and others: and it is the duty of Christians to maintain the truths of God denied by these heretics, and to testify against their errors and blasphemies. Christians ought to do so, not only as individuals, but as a church; for the maintaining of Divine truth is one principal end of their visible union in that capacity. In this respect the church may be called the pillar and ground of truth, 1 Timothy iii. 15. But a particular church cannot discharge her duty in this respect without declaring her adherence not only to the words, but also to the true sense of scripture; which is denied by these heretics. And such is the declaration which is made by a particular church in her Formula, Confession of Faith, or Judicial Testimony. Besides, who can deny, that such a plain and distinct representation of the first principles and leading doctrines of the Christian religion, as is made in the Catechisms and Confession of Faith compiled by the Westminster Assembly, must be of great use to the generality of Christians? In every church, not only children, but many others, have need of such means of instruction in the first principles of the oracles of God. Nay, we have examples of such compositions in the summaries which the scripture itself gives us of our holy religion; such us,
from the loose casuistry of many about the conduct of those who subscribe articles of the church's faith contrary to their own faith; and from divers and strange doctrines daily propagated in these churches by the pulpit and press. While this laxness continues; we need not be surprised at the decline of the reformation cause with regard to purity of doctrine.

Lastly, as men's ignorance and denial of the genuine doctrines of the gospel tend to the ruin of vital piety; so, on the other hand, the decay of vital piety is attended with indifference and heart-aversion to these doctrines. They have no certain hold of the truths of the gospel, who have not received them in faith and love, and have no, gracious experience of their sanctifying influence on the heart and life. When there is little exercise of believing prayer for the Spirit of truth, who guides us into the saving knowledge of all gospel-truth; when professors are puffed up with the conceit of their own wisdom; when their eagerness in the pursuit of worldly things allows them no leisure for composed meditation on the truths of the gospel; when all seek their own things, not the things of Christ; when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxeth cold; the reformed churches, while such is the ruling character of their members, must be on the decline with regard to the purity of gospel doctrine.

But amidst all the evils of the times, there are still some comfortable signs, which give us ground to hope, that he who keeps the truth, will, in due time, make it prevail over all opposition. He continues his word and ordinances with us. He takes occasion from the opposition made to the various articles of his truth, to make the evidence, the necessity and importance of these articles, shine with more conspicuous lustre. The sword of the civil magistrate being no more abused, as formerly, in the persecution of Christ's witnesses; they are not afraid to lift up their voice in defence of his truths.

the ten commandments, what is commonly called, the Lord’s prayer, and various other passages, such as Matth. xxii. 37 38, 39, 1 Tim. iii. 16. Heb. vi. 1. Acts xx. 21.
They who explore the remote parts of the earth in pursuit of science or of gain, and who thus render the intercourse of the nations with one another more general and extensive, are employed (though they have no such design) by Divine providence, in preparing a way for the propagation of the gospel, and for the enlargement of the Redeemer’s kingdom. It seems, indeed, that the church has to go through some severe trial before a thorough reformation. Hence he gives his people that call in Isai. xxvi. 20. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.* But a blessed remnant shall be preserved, Zechar. xiii. 9. *I will bring a third part through the fire and will refine them, as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.* We have also ground to expect that, on the other side of these calamities, the condition of the church will be better than it has been since the days of the apostles. The beauty of purity and power in her profession and ordinances; the beauty of unity among her members will then be attained in an eminent degree, Isai. xxx. 26. *The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.*
Post Script.

On the Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ.

The truth concerning the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ, is stated in the preceding letter, but as this important doctrine meets with much opposition, it seems not improper to add the following extract from a discourse on that subject.

We propose first to state, in some particulars, the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son; and Secondly, to confirm the truth of it.

1. Human generation bears some sort of analogy to and is some shadow of the eternal generation of the Son of God. The son amongst men is of the same nature with the father and bears his image or likeness. So the eternal Son is of the same nature with the eternal Father: he is *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his Person*. But,

2. There is an infinite disproportion and difference between the Divine generation of the Son and human generation. By human generation the Father and the Son, though of the same specific nature, are two beings. But by this Divine generation, the Father and the Son are of the same numerical nature, or, in other words, they are one being. Hence, whilst a father and his son among men have different endowments, the excellencies and perfections of the Divine Father and his Son are necessarily the same.—By human generation, the son exists separately from his father and without his father: but in the Godhead, though the Son be a distinct person from the Father; yet he has no subsistence without the Father. Hence it is said of these Divine Persons, (what cannot be said of a human father and his son) that the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father; and that he who *hath seen the Son, hath seen the Father*. No human son can say to his father what Christ says to his
Father, *All things that are mine are thine, and that are thine are mine.*\(^{154}\) Human generation is temporal; the father is in time before the son, and begets one younger than himself. But the Divine generation of the Son is eternal. For the generation of the Son is the eternal act of the eternal Father; both co-existing eternally in the same individual essence. The generation of the son amongst men is contingent: an event that may or may not be. But the generation of the Son of God is as necessary as the being of God. For it is as necessary for God to be whatever he is, as it is for him to be at all. Thus though there be some faint analogy between the Divine generation of the Son and human generation, yet we are by no means to admit that the former is properly comparable with the latter; as the Divine perfections are not properly to be compared with any shadows of them among creatures. Isai. xlvi. 5. *To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal or compare me, that we may be like?* And yet it may be justly said, that the generation of the Son of God is the most proper and perfect generation; in regard that he, the express image of the Father’s Person, being the same Divine being with the Father.

3. The generation of the Son does not imply any inequality to the Father. For, according to this generation, the Father and the Son possess the same individual Godhead or Divine nature; and they possess it eternally: so that there can be no priority of the father to the Son.

4. The Divine essence is neither the principle nor the term of this generation. It is not *the principle*, or that which begets; for that is the person, as such, of the Father: nor is it *the term*, or that which is begotten; for that is the person, as such, of the Son. Hence our saying, that the Lord Christ, considered as the Son, is not of himself, but of the Father; consists well with our saying, that he is God of himself. He is of the same necessarily existent, underived,

\(^{154}\) John xvii. 10. So the Greek words may be most properly rendered.
independent, absolutely eternal Godhead with the Father.

5. The manner of this eternal generation is to us absolutely incomprehensible. If it be asked, How the Son comes to be of the same numerical or individual nature with the Father, and yet co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; we must answer, that we cannot tell. Nor is it any just objection against the eternal generation of the Son that we cannot understand the manner nor find out the reason of it; for the finite mind can have no positive conception but of finite things; being absolutely incapable of fathoming what is infinite. Nor does it follow that it is unprofitable to seek the knowledge of this mystery; because a true knowledge of what God hath revealed concerning it is attainable and necessary to our salvation; necessary to our preservation from soul-ruining errors with regard to the Person of our Redeemer.

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the sense now declared, and not, as some assert, by his mediatorial office, is the doctrine of the holy scriptures.

I. The eternal generation of the Lord Christ is plainly asserted in various passages; as in the second Psalm ver. 7. *I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said to me: Thou art my Son: This day have I begotten thee.* Here God the Father himself condescends to tell us upon what ground Christ is his Son; and assures us, that it is not on the ground of his mediatory office, but on that of his eternal generation. It cannot be pretended, that the Father’s *begetting the Son* signifies appointing him to an office; it is evident, that the phrase will not bear such a construction. Nor can it be understood of his birth of the Virgin Mary, in which he became the Son of man, not the Son of God; or of his resurrection, though the apostle in Acts xiii. 33. in speaking of his resurrection, quotes this text, because by his resurrection he was *declared to be the Son of God*, Rom. i. 4. But neither in his birth nor in his resurrection did he *become* the Son of God: for it is plain from the 12th verse of this
Psalm, that it was the duty of all in David’s time to kiss the Son, to worship him as then the Son of God; his Son who had been begotten from eternity. As with God there is neither yesterday nor tomorrow; but a perpetual present day; So the expression this day, is fitly used to signify, that the generation of the Son was from all eternity. It is true, God says, I will declare the decree: But the generation of Son is not the matter or effect of that decree, for that is inconsistent with the literal meaning of the words, which plainly respects the present time, and from which we are not to depart without necessity. On the contrary, this generation is manifestly the foundation of that decree, the matter of which is set forth in the next two verses; for unless Christ had been the true and eternal Son of God, he could never have been appointed to be our Mediator or to obtain the kingdom of grace which belongs to him as such.

Another passage to this purpose is that in Prov. viii. 24, 25. When there were no depths I was brought forth: Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. Wisdom, as applied to God, signifies an essential attribute of his nature: but here, as in many other places, the abstract is put for the concrete, or wisdom for him who is possessed of it. To understand it of an attribute in the abstract would be quite inconsistent with the context. It cannot be said of the attribute of wisdom, that it was brought forth or set up from everlasting; that it was from everlasting by the Lord as one brought up with him. The more we consider the whole context, we will be the more satisfied, that the party speaking is a person; and that this person is no other than the Lord Christ. As this wisdom was by the Lord when he gave the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth; so the Word was in the beginning, and was with God, John i. 1, As this wisdom was the delight of the Father; so Christ is his beloved Son, Matth. iii. 17. As this wisdom was set up or anointed from everlasting; so the Son was foreordained to the office of Mediator before the foundation of the world, 1 Peter i. 20. As this wisdom was brought forth before the
hills; so Christ was before all things, Coloss. i. 17. As by this wisdom kings reign; so Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. As this wisdom calls men to repentance both immediately by herself and by her maidens; Christ did so both in his personal ministry and by his apostles and other ministers. Christ is also called Wisdom in the New Testament, Luke vii. 35. xi. 49. 1 Corinth, i. 24. But no one, who allows the Lord Christ to be the party speaking here, can rationally deny that the expressions in the 24th and 25th verses are to be understood of his eternal generation. The word brought forth is the very same in the original, which David uses to express his own generation, Psal. li. 5. A very different expression, I was set up or anointed, ver. 23. is used to express the eternal appointment of the Son to be our Mediator.

We have also a remarkable passage to this purpose in Micah v. 2. Out of thee, that is, out of Bethlehem, shall he come forth to me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting. This passage is an illustrious prophecy of Christ expressly applied to him in the New Testament, Matth. ii. 6. Here is a going forth from everlasting, distinct from another going forth in time. As the going forth in time is to be understood of one sort of generation, which was to belong to him as man; so the going forth from of old, from everlasting, is to be understood of another sort of generation which had belonged to him as the second Person of the adorable Trinity from eternity. Goings forth are mentioned in the plural number to represent the incomprehensible perfection of this eternal generation; just as blessedness is used in the 1st v. of the 1st Psalm, in the original Hebrew, to denote the perfection of that blessedness which is secured to the godly as their portion in Christ. The latter going forth cannot be understood of God’s decreeing, that Christ should go forth; for the prophet evidently speaks of his going forth itself, and not of any decree about it. By such a gross perversion of language, the going forth or actual existence of all things might be said to be from eternity, because they were
II. This truth appears from those texts which represent Christ as the only begotten Son of God, John 1. 14. *We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* See also John iii. 16. 18. 1. John iv. 9. Others are called sons of God, as the angels on account of their creation after the image of God, Job. xxxviii. 7. believers on account of their adoption, John i. 12. magistrates on account of their office as bearings some shadow or resemblance of God’s dominion over the creatures, Psal. lxxxii. 6. Now if Christ were the Son of God by creation, by adoption, or by appointment to an office; or if he were begotten of the Father in any of these senses, then he would not be the only begotten of the Father; because, upon this supposition, there are others begotten of him in the same way. Thus, it appears that it is vain for the opposers of our doctrine to say, that Christ is the only Mediator; for what is here represented as making the Sonship of Christ peculiar, is the foundation of it, or the personal property of his being begotten of the Father. Christ’s being the Son of God upon the ground of the call and appointment of God to an office (it makes no difference whether the office be more or less important) would not be peculiar to himself. Magistrates are called the children of the most High upon this ground. Aaron also might have been called the Son of God upon this ground. And therefore something else must be meant by that *begetter*, which is a ground of Christ’s sonship peculiar to himself: which is such that: it would be horrid blasphemy to say, that any creature was in any degree or in any respect, begotten of the Father in the same sense. Though the Son’s being begotten of the Father be an incomprehensible mystery, yet, one thing is certain from Divine revelation, which is, that it necessarily carries in it, the Son’s possessing the same individual Godhead or Divine nature with the Father. In this respect, he is the *only begotten Son of God*; and also *his own*, or *his*
proper Son, as he is called in Rom. viii 32. and God is called his own Father, his proper Father, John v. 18. If Christ’s Sonship were founded in his Mediator office, then he would be the Son of God in a metaphorical or figurative sense, not, as the texts now quoted import, in a strict and proper sense.

III. This truth appears from these texts which represent the sending of Christ to be our Saviour as the greatest demonstration that ever was given of the love of God to mankind, in this respect, that the Person sent was his only begotten Son, his own, his proper Son, John iii. 16. Rom. viii. 32. The force or emphasis of this representation is, in a great measure, if not entirely destroyed, when we understand the mediatory office of Christ as founding or constituting his Sonship. According to this opinion, he is the Son of God, because he was sent as our Mediator: whereas it is evidently the sense of these texts, that he was sent as our Mediator, because he was the Son of God; and consequently the only fit Person for that wonderful office. Nay, this opinion would reduce some texts, pregnant with heavenly instruction, to something little better than tautology. Thus when it is said, in John iv. 14. The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. These words according to this opinion, would mean, that the Father sent the Saviour to be the Saviour, or the Mediator to be the Mediator; for the character of Christ as a Mediator includes his character as a Saviour; and therefore there can be nothing in the latter but what is in the former.

IV. Christ is also called the Son, where there appears to be no reference to his Mediator office, as in Prov. xxx 4. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name and what is his Son’s name, if thou canst tell? God who is the supreme Governor of all nature, the only true God is here represented as having a Son,
whose Sonship, name and glory are incomprehensible.

V. The title Son of God is continually distinguished from such titles as Jesus Christ, the sent of God, High Priest, &c. signifying his Mediatorial office, Matth. xvi. 16. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Acts viii. 37. John vii. 29. I am from him, as his eternal Son; and he hath sent me, in the character of Mediator. John viii. 42. The apostle, in Heb. v. 5, 6. opposes the character of Christ as a Son to that of a servant in preferring him to Moses, saying, Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant; but Christ as a Son over his own house. If by Son here we understand the office of Mediator, we destroy the opposition: for, as Mediator, Christ was the Father’s servant Isai. xlii. 1. The same observation holds with regard to the opposition implied in Heb. v. 8. For to suppose his being the Son denotes only his being the Messiah, whose office it was to suffer and die for sinners: would make the apostle say, though it was his work to learn obedience by sufferings, yet he learned obedience by sufferings. He was made Lord and Christ, Act. ii. 16. He was made an High Priest, Heb. vii. 16, 28. But he is never said to be made the Son of God.

VI. This truth appears from Matth. xxviii. 19. and 1 John v. 7. Father and Son are correlates; and if the second Person was not a Son previous to the Mediatorial office; neither was the first Person a Father previous to it: if the one be not the eternal Son, neither is the other the eternal Father. “These glorious persons,” as one observes, “are distinguished from each other by personal characters, by personal properties and relations. But if there be no Father and Son in the Trinity, there can be no such distinctions. And if all personal distinctions be lost, a Trinity of persons must be given up with, or it must land in the distinction of three Divine Beings,—three Gods.”

See a view of the Covenant of Grace by Mr. Gib,
Remarks on the characters of Mr. Hervey and Mr. Marshal, from Hayley’s life of the celebrated Cowper.

Among many instances, which might be given, of the truth of the remark at the foot of page 12, the following testimony of Mr. William Cowper, the author of The Task and other celebrated poetical compositions, is here added, as recent and striking. It is taken from some Letters published in the account of his life by Mr. Hayley, vol. 1st, p. 52, 60, 62.

“I think Mr. Hervey one of the most scriptural writers in the world.”

“Marshal is an old acquaintance of mine; I have both read him and heard him read with pleasure and edification. The doctrines he maintains are, under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, the very life of my soul, and the soul of all my happiness; that Jesus is a present Saviour from the guilt of sin by his most precious blood, and from the power of it by his Spirit; that corrupt and wretched in ourselves, in Him, and in Him only, we are complete; that being united to Jesus by a lively faith, we have a solid and eternal interest in his obedience and sufferings, to justify us before the face of our heavenly Father, and that all this inestimable treasure, the earnest of which is in grace, and its consummation in glory, is given, freely given to us of God; in short, that he hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. These are the truths, which, by the grace of God, shall ever be dearer to me than life itself; shall ever be placed next my heart as the throne whereon the Saviour himself shall sit, to sway all its motions, and reduce that world of iniquity and rebellion to a state of filial and affectionate obedience to the will of the most Holy.

These, my dear cousin, are the truths to which by nature we are enemies—they debase the sinner, and exalt the Saviour to a degree which the pride of our hearts (till almighty grace subdues them) is
determined never to allow. May the Almighty reveal his Son in our hearts continually more and more, and teach us to increase in love towards him continually, for having given us the unspeakable riches of Christ.”

“I think Marshal one of the best writers, and the most spiritual expositor of Scripture, I ever read. I admire the strength of his argument, and the clearness of his reasonings upon those parts of our most holy religion, which are generally least understood (even by real Christians) as master-pieces of the kind. His section upon the union of the soul with Christ, is an instance of what I mean, in which he has spoken of a most mysterious truth with admirable perspicuity, and with great good sense, making it all the while subservient to his main purport of proving holiness to be the fruit and effect of faith.

I subjoin thus much upon that author, because though you desired my opinion of him, I remember that in my last, I rather left you to find it out by inference, than expressed it as I ought to have done. I never met with a man who understood the plan of salvation better, or was more happy in explaining it.”

To this testimony the following extract from p. 179 of the 2d Vol. of Mr. Hayley’s work, adds weight.—“few ministers of the gospel have searched the scripture more diligently than Cowper; and in his days of health, with a happier effect; for a spirit of evangelical kindness and purity pervaded the whole tenor of his language and all the conduct of his life.”

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END OF THE LETTERS.
THE

STONE ROLLED AWAY;

OR

THE HAPPY ISSUE
OF THE
BELIEVER’S EXERCISE
ABOUT HIS DIFFICULTIES;

A Sermon,
PREACHED BEFORE THE CELEBRATION
OF THE LORD’S SUPPER.

By the Rev. John Anderson.
Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou
wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God. —
John xii. 40.

PITTSBURGH,
FROM THE ECCLESIASTICAL AND LITERARY
PRESS OF ZADOK CRAMER.
This discourse was delivered several years ago on Saturday before the celebration of the Lord's supper, in Chartiers. Some Christian friends expressed a desire of its publication. It is added here as, in some measure, a practical improvement of the doctrine vindicated in the preceding letters.

THE

STONE ROLLED AWAY, &c.

Mark xvi. 3, 4.

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? and when they looked, they saw, that the stone was rolled away, for it was very great.

The diligence of these women in seeking Jesus, was undoubtedly
a pattern for our imitation. No doubt, the circumstance of the women’s inquiry about the stone, which had been rolled to the door of the sepulchre, served to corroborate their testimony concerning our Lord’s resurrection; as it shows that in this matter, they had no collusion with others; since they would have had no occasion for their anxiety; if they had known it as a matter agreed on, that the stone would be rolled away by the disciples or some others. But what we have in view at present, is their anxious concern, and exercise, about the difficulty of getting the stone rolled away, and the happy issue of their coming to the sepulchre in finding it removed. These particulars bear a manifest analogy or resemblance to the experience of those who are sincerely seeking the Lord Jesus in his ordinances. Therefore, we take occasion from the words now read, to offer the two following observations.

1st. True Christians are distinguished by their exercise about the bars in the way of their attaining communion with Christ.

2ndly. While Christians are sincerely essaying to go forward in the path of duty, they find their difficulties gradually removed; “And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away.”

In discoursing on the first of these observations; it is proposed, through divine aid, to point out,

1st. Some of these bars in the way of our attaining communion with Christ. 2nd. Some of the distinguishing exercises of the Lord’s people about such bars.

We are first to point out some of the bars to our attaining communion with Christ.

The first and great bar is the natural enmity of our heart against God and his revealed will. Rom. viii. 7. “The carnal mind,” or as some render it “the wisdom of the flesh, is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God nor indeed can be.” This enmity in unrenewed men is like a great stone or dead weight, that keeps
them from any real or sincere compliance, with the Lord’s call or
commands. If they seem to comply on some selfish or carnal
account, their compliance is partial; some part of the Lord’s
command being wilfully neglected. Such was the compliance of
Saul with the divine command about the destruction of the
Amalekites; whilst in contempt of that command he spared Agag.
This enmity renders unrenewed men utterly impotent, and
incapable of making any acceptable approach unto God. The
remainders of this enmity in believers, are a great bar, or hindrance
to their honest endeavours in seeking and serving him. Hereby they
often find that they cannot do the things that they would. On account
of this enmity, therefore, they may well cry out “Who shall roll us
away the stone.”

2. Ignorance is another great bar to our attainment of
communion with Christ. Eccl. x. 15. “The labour of the foolish
wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go up to
the city.” Sometimes persons are ignorant of the matter of their
duty, or prejudiced against it; as Paul was before his conversion,
with respect to the duty of confessing Christ. But many a poor soul
has some knowledge of the matter of his duty, while he is in
absolute darkness as to the right manner of performing it; that is,
in the way of a single dependence on the righteousness of Christ
for acceptance, and the strength of Christ for the performance. “He
knoweth not how to go to the city.” This darkness so far as it prevails
in the Lord’s people; is a great bar to their progress in his way, and
a continual grief of heart to them. With regard to which they are
still saying, Who shall roll us away the stone?

3. Unbelief is another great bar to our attainment of communion
with Christ. He is set forth to us in the gospel as made of God into
us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Unbelief
holds him to be utterly unfit to answer these purposes. Unbelief
treats the record of God concerning his Son, and concerning eternal
life for us in him, as a cunningly devised fable; as a thing no way to be depended on for eternity. Unbelief shuts men up under their natural incapacity of any good thought, word or work; and so far as it prevails in the Lord’s people, it incapacitates them for spiritual exercises; particularly, for partaking of the Lord’s Supper, which will be unprofitable without that faith by which we feed upon Christ crucified; and therefore so far as it prevails, in the Lord’s people, they will say concerning it: Who shall roll us away the stone?

4. Attachment to the world and the things of it, is a great bar to the attainment of communion with Christ in his ordinances. Many decline waiting on God in his ordinances, when they find, that the profits, pleasures or honours of this world are not to be had in that way. The case of such is represented in the parable of the Supper, Luke xiv. 17. He sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden come, for all thing’s are now ready; And they all with one consent began to make excuse, The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground and I must need go and see it, I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove them, I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come. With regard to worldly honour, we see how it hindered the Jews from believing in, and confessing Christ, John v. 44. How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only. John xii. 42, 43. Among the chief rulers many believed on him—but they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. There can be no sincere waiting on God where the love of the world has the dominion: for says the apostle, Whoso loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The world is the element of natural men; and therefore they delight in their inordinate attachment to it; but the remainder of that attachment in the Lord’s people is their grief and burden; and as it is a principal hinderance to their exercise in seeking communion with Christ, they are still saying
concerning this evil, *Who shall roll us away the stone?*

5. Another great bar to the attainment of comfortable communion with Christ, is a sense of guilt, and prevailing apprehensions of God’s wrath. Men are naturally under the dominion of the guilt of sin. While the time of God’s forbearance and of the outward favours of his providence continues, they usually get the thoughts of it diverted and their consciences kept quiet by the opinion of their own righteousness, and of the general mercy of God. And though the native tendency of the truths which God has revealed in his word, be to break this false peace or quiet under the guilt of sin; yet the speculative or mere head knowledge and the outward profession of these truths, are often abused to the promoting of this cursed and fatal delusion. To the same purpose natural men make use of duties, church privileges, good meanings and resolutions, legal convictions and sorrows. But when the Lord is pleased to make them feel the power and spirituality of his law in their consciences; all these schemes prove but mere cobwebs; they are soon swept away; their hope is then found to be as the giving up of the ghost; it ends, if sovereign mercy prevent not, in utter despair; as we see in the cases of Cain, and Judas. Oh, it is dangerous to hate convictions and awakenings of conscience. Those who do so, who cannot bear to have their sin and misery discovered to their conscience, have reason to fear; that, in a little, it will be awfully discovered, to their eternal confusion. As to the Lord’s people, they have got their hearts reconciled to conviction. They are willing to have the worst of their case discovered to them by the word and Spirit of God. They have seen the vanity of all other ways of relief from the guilt of sin, than that of the application of the blood of Jesus Christ. When they are enabled to the lively exercise of faith in his blood as that which cleanseth them from all sin; their consciences have a sweet and solid rest. In this divinely precious blood, they see the Lord’s anger turned away from them; they see him *pacified towards them for all that they have*
done.

But this faith is never without a conflict. There is still remaining unbelief, which often sadly prevails and deprives them of sensible comfort. In which case, they are filled with apprehensions of God’s anger on account of former iniquities, and feel much backwardness to the exercise of drawing near to God. Their sense of guilt is so great as to make them ready to cry out with Peter, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.* They have a real knowledge that relief is to be had only by the blood of Christ: but their views of it are darkened by prevailing unbelief and other corruptions. So that nothing appears to sense; but great and crimsoned coloured guilt: the sight of which makes their knees feeble and their hands hang down. They look upon their guilt as the greatest in the world, and they are saying, How shall we come to experience the benefit of the blood of Christ, in taking it away? *Who shall roll us away the stone?*

6. Another bar to the attainment of communion with Christ in his ordinances, particularly in the solemn ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, is the difficulty of the right observation of it; the great danger of unworthy communicating. Those that rest in a form of godliness, find little difficulty in this or any other duty: they have their end, which is to get their consciences kept quiet by going the round of duties. The right manner of performing them in the sight of God, gives natural men little or no concern. But it is far otherwise with true Christians. They see, that, while they perform duties, in a carnal, unbelieving manner, they do so to the dishonour of God and to the wounding, and hurt of their own souls. They see, that they must have faith exercised on the Lord Jesus as their righteousness and strength; they must have a supreme love to him; they must have gospel repentance, a broken and a contrite heart; they must not only have no particular prejudice or grudge against their brother; but they must have a real and hearty concern for his temporal and spiritual welfare, as for their own. They must
have a cordial delight in the saints as belonging to Christ and bearing his image; they must have sanctuary preparation, for they, are to **seek the Lord after the due order. Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.** They see that, in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, they must have a real discerning of his body as the proper and life-giving food of their souls, which is a spiritual and supernatural attainment; otherwise they would be chargeable with the dreadful crime of unworthy communicating, and they would be really guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, as his crucifiers were in the days of his flesh. When the Lord’s people thus consider the difficulty of the duty to which they are called; and the danger of mismanaging it, they will be under great and anxious concern, making them cry out, **Who shall roll us away the stone?**

7. Another bar in the way of communion with Christ in the ordinances of the Lord’s supper is the fear, that, if they should go forward to his holy table, and afterwards be so overcome by some corruptions or temptation as to prove a reproach to their holy profession it would be better that they had not engaged in such a solemn exercise. There is indeed a numerous generation of church members who have no such fear, but a great deal of confidence in their own wisdom and resolution, in their own righteousness, and in the manifold privileges and advantages they possess; so that they cannot see themselves to be in any danger; and yet it is often from this self-confident generation that religion receives its deepest wounds. But the Lord’s people know by the word of God and by experience; that the heart is deceitful above all things, and that they are surrounded with snares that are spread for them by satan and the world. Hence they see themselves to be in continual hazard of falling. This fear is indeed owing to the weakness of their faith. The language of which is, that the Lord Christ is their keeper; that with him they are in safety. But then there is as great a difficulty in believing this, as there would be in believing that a
bush we saw in the midst of the flames would be quite safe; and not a twig of it hurt. Thus, the sense, which the Lord’s people have, of their danger from inward corruption and outward temptation, fills them with deep concern, causing them to say, *Who shall roll us away the stone?*

8. It is a great and terrible difficulty in the way of some of the Lord’s people who are essaying to make a solemn approach to him in his ordinances, that they are assaulted with horrible suggestions of Satan. For that adversary, besides the deep hand he has in aggravating the difficulties already mentioned, is sometimes permitted, to cast multitudes of fiery darts, and astonishing blasphemies into the souls of the Lord’s people. Alas! say such poor souls, pressed with these onsets of the Devil, we can hardly get a composed thought: such and such a horrid temptation or suggestion continues to be so violently pressed upon us. How can we go forward in the solemn duties of religion, while we are in such a distracted case. *Who shall roll us away the stone? Who shall turn the storm into calm?*

Having pointed out some of the bars, which appear in the way of the Lord’s people that are seeking communion with him in solemn ordinances; we may now proceed to show what is their duty and exercise about such bars.

1st. The Lord’s people are distinguished from others by the humbling sense they have of the bars in the way of their attaining the enjoyment of communion with Christ. They are much conversant with their own hearts; they are concerned to examine and to know themselves. Hence they have an humbling sense of their natural enmity, ignorance, unbelief, inordinate attachment to the world, and of their danger from temptation; they are much exercised in considering their ways, the nature, multitude and aggravations of their sins. Hence they know what it is to be in soul-distress about the guilt of sin. When they are called to any duty
they are concerned to understand the nature and importance of it; hence they have a heart affecting sense of the difficulties attending it.

Secondly, the Lord’s people are convinced, that it is necessary in order to their acceptable approach to God in his ordinances, that they have a sure and well grounded persuasion that their difficulties shall be removed in due time; that these stones shall be rolled away. How can they set forward in the Lord’s way, while they see no solid ground to believe that he will deliver them from all their guilt, their heart enmity, their ignorance, unbelief, inordinate affection to the world. How can they set forward, unless they see ground to believe that the Lord will afford them strength to carry them through all trials, and that he will bruise satan under their feet shortly?

If it be asked,—Where they are to see a good and solid ground for this persuasion: that he will roll away these stones, that is, remove the bars to the enjoyment of communion with Christ? We answer in Christ himself, as he is exhibited in the word of the gospel. You cannot have any right or suitable view of his person, offices, names and relations as set forth to you in that word, but you must see a solid ground to rely on for the removal of all these bars? For example: Are you oppressed with a sense of guilt? are you under apprehensions of the divine wrath? Look to the priestly office of Christ and there you will see God not imputing any of your trespasses to you; they having been all imputed to Christ; and law and justice having got full satisfaction for them all in him; for, as the church says; *The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all*. Are you distressed on account of ignorance? On account of your ignorance of the righteousness of Christ, of the grace of Christ, of the right way of coming to God by him? Then look to his prophetical office; and there you will see a solid ground to believe that he will open the blind eyes, that he will reveal his blood and righteousness to
you by his Word and Spirit, that he will reveal to you the fulness of his grace, that he will *instruct thee and teach thee the way that thou shalt go, that he will guide thee with his eye*. You see you have no wisdom of your own, then rejoice in Christ Jesus as made of God into you wisdom. Do you find your natural enmity against God and the things of God to be very strong and deeply rooted; Can you see nothing but unbelief and distrust of God and of his promised salvation in your souls? Even in this deplorable case, you have good and solid ground to believe, that he will subdue the enmity and rebellion of your hearts; that he will fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power. O, sirs, you cannot look to the offices of Christ as set forth to you in the glorious gospel; but you must see ground to believe that he will remove all your difficulties. Look to his names: he is Jesus a Saviour, Jehovah Tzidkenn, the Lord our righteousness. Jehovah Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee, Jehovah Sireh, the Lord who will see and provide; Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace; Jehovah Nissi, that is, the Lord my banner; Jehovah Shamma, the Lord is there. Look to his relations: he is our friend, our elder brother, our everlasting father, our husband, our head. Does not the import of these wonderful names, and endearing relations, secure the rolling away of every stone; the removal of every bar, that stands in the way of your attaining communion with God? Besides, in the believing contemplation of Christ crucified, we may see that the great stone of God’s vindictive wrath is already rolled away; a work which cost the Son of God a long end ignominious course of service and suffering, till he poured out his soul unto death. And now since this stone is rolled away, the removal of all the other stones; such as the power of sin, the opposition of the world, and the tyranny of the Devil, is of course infallibly sure. Has he done the greater and will he not do the less?

Again, the Lord’s people see good and sufficient ground in the great and precious promises of the gospel to believe, that he will
remove these difficulties, that he will roll away the stones. These promises are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus; you are to look for the accomplishment of them in him and for his sake: Behold, therefore, solid ground, in the promise of pardon, to believe the removal of the guilt of your sin, Isai. xliii. 25. I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins:—See ground in the promise of the new heart, to believe the removal of your heart enmity, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: Deut. xxx. 6. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul:—See ground in the promise of divine teaching and illumination, to believe your deliverance from ignorance and spiritual darkness, Isai. xlvi. 17. Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God, who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee in the way that thou shouldst go: and John vi. 45. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God.—See ground to believe deliverance from your inordinate attachment to idols, in such a promise as that in Isai. xxx. 28. Ye shall defile the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth, thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence:—See ground to believe that strength shall be afforded for carrying you through duty and difficulty, in such a promise as that in Zech. xii. 10. I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord.—See ground to believe that you shall be overcomers at last, whatever temptations you may meet with, in such promises as these, 1 Cor. x. 13. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Gen. xlvi. 19. Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last. Rom. xvi. 20. The God of peace shall bruise satan under your feet shortly.
If you ask, How may I know that such promises belong to me or that they will be forthcoming to me for the removing of my difficulties? We answer, these promises are an essential part of that gospel, which we are commanded to preach to every creature. They are all comprehended in the gospel promise, which is directed to you, Acts ii. 39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Believe, therefore, and doubt not that the promise belongs to you; in such a manner as to warrant a present application of it to yourself: and unless you put it away from you; and count the word of God, who cannot lie, unworthy to be depended on, unworthy of credit, these promises will undoubtedly be forthcoming to you. We would only remind you of two things. One is, that you are to look upon the righteousness of Christ, as the foundation of all the promises, and you are to expect all the good of them no otherwise than in and with him, and for his sake. The other is, that what God has joined together in the promise, ye must beware of putting asunder. For example, God in his promise hath joined together the pardon of sin and the sanctification of the spirit; and you are by no means to expect the one without the other.

Thus, having observed, that true Christians are distinguished from others by their humbling sense of the bars in the way of their attaining communion with God in his ordinances; and that a well grounded persuasion that God, for Christ’s sake, will remove these bars, is necessary to an acceptable approach unto God: we go on to observe, In the third place, that experience of the Lord’s loving kindness, in removing these bars, is sought by his people in the use of means, particularly, in the use of the word and of prayer. As to the word, it is the glass wherein Christ is to be seen by faith, 2 Cor. iii. 18. We behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord; in the glass of the word. Here God hath given to us his exceeding great and precious promises. As to prayer, it is a special mean of obtaining right views of our difficulties, and of getting our faith in Christ and in the
promise exercised and increased. It is a special mean of receiving the Holy Spirit, Luke xi. 13. If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. They are blessed indeed, whose difficulties bring them to God’s throne of grace, where they obtain mercy and find grace to help them in the time of need; bring them to wrestle with the angel of the covenant, and to get his blessing. In a word, if we would have comfortable experience of the removal of our difficulties, we are not to neglect any of the means of divine appointment, such as, fasting, the sacraments, covenanting, Prov. viii. 34. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the ports of my doors.

In the last place, the Lord’s people are concerned to wait on him patiently for the removal of their difficulties. Even though there should be as yet, no sensible prospect of the removal of them, they will hope in his word; utterly refusing to go to any other door for relief; Saying with the Disciples, Lord, to whom shall we go; thou hast the words of eternal life. They desire and purpose, through grace, to continue in prayer. It is the design of a great part of Christ’s word to encourage his people to persevere in this exercise, See particularly, Luke xviii. 1–8.

We now proceed to speak a little on the second proposition, which we laid down, namely, that in setting forward in the Lord’s way, at his call, his people often get a comfortable view of the removal of their difficulties: as these women, when they came to the sepulchre, saw, that the stone was rolled away.

Here we may speak, first, of setting forward in the Lord’s way at his call, Secondly, of the view that his people get of the removal of their difficulties.

With regard to setting forward in the Lord’s way, we observe, that it includes these four things: First, a steady view of the Lord’s
command as our warrant. His authority ought to be both the rule and the reason of what we do. To those that ask us why we do such things, we should have it to say, The Lord in his word hath bidden us; and we dare not, and will not neglect them.

Secondly, a steady view of our encouragement in the word of grace and promise.

Thirdly, an humbling sense of difficulties both from within and from without.

Fourthly, a resolution to adhere to the direction of the Lord’s command, and to the encouragement of his promise amidst all the sensible difficulties that arise. Christians should say with the Psalmist,

"Though I in midst of trouble walk,  
I life from thee shall have:  
"'Gainst my foes' wrath thou'lt stretch thine hand;  
"Thy right hand shall me save.  
Psal. cxxxviii.

With regard to the experience which the Lord’s people have, of their difficulties being removed; while they are setting forward in his way in obedience to his call, we observe two things. First, it is often the case that when they set forward in any duty in obedience to the Lord’s call, and in dependance on his grace, they have a gracious experience of the actual removal of some particular difficulty with which they had been sorely oppressed; They found themselves so much distracted by some particular temptation, that they were ready to say, That it was vain for them to attempt such a duty. Yet, in actually setting about it from a regard to God’s authority, their fears have been secretly disappointed; for they have found the temptation in a great measure, if not entirely, removed, as when the children of Israel were in a great strait. On the one side insuperable rocks; and on the other side and before them, the red sea. While they were in this situation, they were
commanded to go forward, and, in doing so, a safe passage was opened to them, by the miraculous recess of the waters of the sea.

The Second thing we observe, is, that, even when the difficulty itself is not sensibly removed, the Christian, in setting forward at the Lord’s call, finds such seasonable support afforded, as encourageth him to hold on in his way: So that, even in this case, the stone is in effect roiled away, Thus when Paul was going forward in the exercise of prayer about a certain temptation of Satan, the temptation itself was not removed; but the Lord gave him a sweet assurance of support and through bearing under it, 2 Corinth, xii. 9. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. This was, upon the matter, a rolling away of the stone: accordingly, he adds, Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

We conclude with a word of exhortation. Consider deliverance from the guilt and power of sin as your great concern. Unless you get these stones rolled away, you can have no communion with God: you must perish for ever. Concerning this matter we, in the Lord’s name offer you the following cautions.

1. Beware of carelessness about the deliverance of your soul from the guilt and power of sin. Careless persons, inattentive to the concerns of their souls, indifferent about the truths revealed and the duties enjoined in God’s word, not knowing the plague of their own heart, neglecters of prayer, despisers of Divine ordinances, are manifestly in the broad way that leadeth to destruction.

2. Beware of thinking to roll away the stones by your own wisdom and strength. Jerem. ix. 23. Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But Let him glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.
Isai. xl. 30. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail. 1 Sam. ii. 9. By strength shall no man prevail. The gospel way of salvation excludes boasting, and pours contempt on all the glory of man’s own wisdom, righteousness, and strength. Here Christ is all, and free grace reigns through his righteousness unto eternal life. Coloss. iii. 11. Rom. v. 21.

3. Beware of the devices of Satan in this matter. One of these devices is, to make you think the guilt and power of your sins which are the real bars to your attainment of communion with God, to be no bars at all, or so trivial, that you yourselves may remove them at any time. O remember, that they are fools, who make a mock or make light of sin; and that nothing can take away the guilt of sin but the infinitely precious blood of Christ; and nothing can overcome the power of it but the Almighty operation of the Holy Spirit. Another of his devices, is to make, you take up with some false or pretended method of removing these real bars; such as that of trusting in the absolute mercy of God without a Mediator or that of going about to establish your own righteousness, either under the notion of its being formally your justifying righteousness, or under the notion of its being a condition or qualification giving you a right and title to the righteousness wrought out by Immanuel. There are but two ways of justification before God: the one is that of an innocent person on account of his own righteousness: the other is that of a sinner on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. The one is attained by working: the other in the way of an immediate dependance on Him whose name is the Lord our Righteousness. A third device of Satan, which we warn you to beware of, is his raising a variety of false bars to prevent you from embracing the only effectual way of getting the real bars to your attainment of true blessedness removed, that is, the way revealed in the glorious gospel. One of these false bars is, that it is folly to think, that believing in Christ, or relying on his promise, is the way to get these difficulties removed, these stones rolled away. Thus
Satan made the polite and learned Greeks account the preaching of Christ crucified foolishness, 1 Cor. i. 23. Another of these false bars is, the difficulty of the Christian life. Satan represents it as impracticable to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow Christ. But these false bars vanish, before the light of God’s word and Spirit let into the mind and discovering Christ crucified to be the power of God and the wisdom of God unto our salvation; discovering Christ’s yoke to be easy and his burden to be light. Cry for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that he may give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ. Ephes. i. 17, 18. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

FINIS
Editors of the Repository and Review:—The late Rev. David Goodwillie of Barnet, Vt., during his long ministry kept up an extensive correspondence with the first ministers of the Associate Church in America, and with some of the chief ministers of the Associate Synod in Scotland. Their letters have been carefully preserved, and throw light on the history of the Associate Presbyterian Church. Along with these letters I found many lectures and sermons in manuscript written by some of the chief ministers of the Associate church in Scotland and America. Among them is a bound manuscript volume containing many sermons of Rev. Alexander Moncrief, one of the four ministers who seceded from the Established Church of Scotland, which, according to the dates prefixed, were written before the secession in 1733. I have also some manuscript volumes of lectures and sermons written by Rev. John Anderson, D.D., Rev. Joseph Shaw, D.D., Rev. Archibald White, and some sermons of Rev. Thomas Beveridge, late of Cambridge, N. Y. I send you a copy of one of Dr. John Anderson’s sermons, which he wrote fully and correctly, like the rest of his manuscripts. He was highly esteemed, not only as a godly man, but as a great divine, even by the late Rev. Drs. M’Crie and Chalmers of Scotland, and other eminent divines of Great Britain.

T. G.

Barnet, January, 1867.

SERMON.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. ii. 10.

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155 From “The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Review” 1867.
The second and third chapters of this book contain epistles directed to the seven churches of Asia. These epistles contain a variety of doctrines and exhortations, commendations and reproofs, promises and threatenings which were at first directed to these churches, but which all others are to consider as spoken to them so far as they are applicable to their case. The text is a part of our Lord’s epistle to the Church of Smyrna. It is observable that our Lord brings no charge against this church as he does against several of the other churches. Not that they were altogether free from fault, but they were in general honestly aiming at faithfulness, amidst manifold trials and sufferings. He warns the members of this church to expect still farther trials. He tells them that they should have tribulation ten days, that is, for a certain space of time, or as long as their Lord saw necessary for the glory of his name and for the trial of their faith and patience. But he bids them to guard against despondency in the prospect of such afflictions; and in the words of the text he exhorts them to persevere in that faithfulness to which in some measure they had already been enabled. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” These words are addressed to the angel or ministry of the church of Smyrna, as representing all the members of that church. The Lord Jesus said to each of them, and he is saying to every church member still, “Be thou faithful unto death.”

What we propose on this subject is, through divine help, to inquire, what it is to be faithful unto death, and to speak of our Lord’s giving us a crown of life.

Head I. The duty of being faithful unto death.

Here we are to inquire what it is to be faithful, and how it is to be attained.

1. To be faithful is to keep or improve what we are entrusted with to the ends for which we are entrusted with it. Faithfulness in this respect is illustrated in the parable of the talents. A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return, and he
called his servants and gave unto them several sums of money, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. And what was the event? Such of these servants as were faithful, improved the talents, with which they had been entrusted according to the charge their Lord had given them. One of them who was unfaithful is represented as having laid up his talent in a napkin, that is, he neglected to use it for the purpose for which it had been given him. Thus, when God made the covenant of works with man, the great trust of his holiness and happiness was committed to his keeping; but man proved unfaithful, and all was lost. The Lord continues in the exercise of his providential bounty and forbearance to give men many endowments of mind and many outward good things, which might be used to the glory of God, but instead of using them to the ends for which they were given, men pervert them to sinful and abominable purposes. The gospel written and preached is a great and distinguished privilege; but instead of being improved by a thankful receiving of it, it is, with respect to multitudes that are favoured with it, only an occasion of a greater discovery of their ingratitude, hardness of heart and enmity against God. Any particular gifts that men are favoured with, such as knowledge, prudence, utterance; any profession of the truth of God, or any reformation of life that men have attained, are talents with which God has entrusted them, and when they lose these by their negligence and backsliding they are chargeable with a criminal breach of trust. Indeed, this world is filled with unfaithfulness to God, and in a way of righteous judgment God gives them up to unfaithfulness to one another. We have continually occasion for saying with Solomon, “Most men will proclaim every man his own goodness, but a faithful man, who can find?” Who is it that has any concern to glorify God in the use of the talents with which he is entrusted? But though there are few, yet, blessed be God, there are some enabled, by his grace, to study faithfulness in keeping the trust committed to them. Such are studying to be diligent in the work of the Lord in present duty. They are aiming at the glory of God and the spiritual good of men. The talents of such will increase in their hands, while they are studying to improve them for the ends for which the Lord hath given them, as the talents in the hands of the faithful servant increase his talents.
Whatever good things of this life the Lord has bestowed on them, they consider themselves not as absolute possessors of these things, but rather as stewards of them; to each of whom it will be said, in a little time, “Give an account of thy stewardship.” As to the truths of God, to which they have been led to profess adherence, they are concerned to keep them in the way of abiding in the faithful possession of them. They belong to “the righteous nation that keepeth the truth.” They also continue in the study of a tender and circumspect behaviour and conversation. They hold fast whatever measure of public and private reformation they have attained. Whatever gifts or grace they are blessed with, they are concerned to exercise them and have them increased for the glory of God and the good of his church. Whatever place or station they are in, they are concerned to embrace the opportunities offered to glorify God and “to do good to all men, especially them that are of the household of faith.” They consider their place in the visible church, whether as members or officers, as a precious talent entrusted with them for the glory of God and their own good, and the good of others.

In these respects the Lord’s people are concerned to improve the talents with which God has entrusted them to the ends for which the Lord gave them.

2. To be faithful is to act according to the obligations we are under to the Lord, as our God and Redeemer. We may take notice of two kinds of obligations that we are under to the Lord.

In the first place, we are under obligations to him in virtue of his authority over us, and also on account of the benefits he has bestowed on us. We are under obligations of duty and gratitude. Honesty and gratitude are necessarily included in faithfulness:—honesty, by which we are concerned to pay our debts, that is, to discharge our duty; and gratitude, by which we are concerned to make suitable returns for his kindness shown us. Though the Lord’s people cannot perform any duty perfectly, yet they may acceptably, so far as he gives them a willing mind, and enables them to such an actual performance as evidences their willingness.

In the second place, we are under obligations to him for our own
consent, given in our private and public resolutions, vows and engagements. Such are the vows and promises that persons are apt to make in danger and sickness. Such are the obligations we are under from our partaking of baptism and the Lord’s supper. Such are those engagements we come under in personal and public covenanting. Those that endeavour through grace to be faithful, will be keeping up a lively and habitual remembrance of such engagements. Each of them will be saying, “The vows of God are upon me; I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and, I cannot go back.” The Lord’s people are sensible of daily short-comings in the payment of their vows, yet the full purpose of their heart is to adhere to them, and to look to the Lord for grace to walk more answerably to them, and they are daily mourning for their breaches of them.

3. To be faithful is to persevere in the way of duty amid trials and temptations. This is our Lord’s commendation of his disciples: “Ye are they,” said he to them, “who have continued with me in my temptations.”

When persons have become followers of Christ and are steadfastly adhering to his truths and ways, then they may expect to meet with great opposition. Their own lusts and corruptions, the frowns and smiles of the world, and the temptations of Satan will unite in tempting to seduce them and turn them aside from following the Lord. We cannot be faithful unless we are concerned, through the grace of Christ, to hold on our way in spite of all that our enemies can do to hinder us. Let us attend to Solomon’s counsel, “Turn not to the right hand nor the left; remove thy foot from evil.”

Here we may observe, that the phrase “unto death” sometimes signifies some violence or affliction so great as to take away natural life. In this sense to be faithful unto death is to undergo every sort of affliction, even the greatest, and to part with every thing, nay, with life itself, rather than to depart from the path of duty. As it is said of the martyrs that “they loved not their lives unto the death,” the opposition of the world to Christ, if not restrained, will not stop short of the death of his followers. Hence the Lord’s people have need to be all martyrs in
 resolution.

But the phrase “unto death” may signify to the end of life, and then being faithful unto death signifies persevering in a faithful adherence to Christ and his way unto the natural end of life. True faithfulness is that which endures to the end. “He that endureth unto the end shall be saved.”

We may next inquire how this faithfulness is to be attained.

1. This faithfulness is merely an effect of the divine mercy. Every one, as a child of Adam, is unfaithful and deceitful. The character of natural men is that they are “deceiving and being deceived.” Therefore if any attain to be faithful, it must be through the riches of divine distinguishing mercy: so that boasting is excluded altogether. 1 Cor. iv. 17: “Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?”

2. The grace whereby the Lord’s people are enabled to be faithful, was procured by the death of Christ. He laid down his life that he might have a company of faithful followers. Hence the martyrs, who loved not their lives unto the death, are said to “overcome by the blood of the Lamb.”

3. The mercy of the Lord actually takes effect on them, making them faithful in their effectual calling and progressive sanctification. The Lamb’s followers are said to be “chosen and called and faithful,” no real faithfulness is in our depraved nature or can proceed from it. “In me,” saith the apostle Paul, “that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” But the Lord endows his people with, a new principle of holiness which is called in scripture, spirit, the new creature, the new man. A man must be a partaker of this new principle; otherwise he cannot approve himself faithful unto God. There is no cleaving to God sincerely for his own sake without partaking of this divine principle. No resting on Christ for a whole salvation without it, and no living, not to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again.

4. The Lord employs means to stir up his people to faithfulness. Particularly he makes use of the commands of the Scripture, of the calls,
exhortations, promises and threatenings of the divine word. He also stirs up his people to faithfulness by means of their mutual exhortations. 2 Sam. x. 12: "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good."

Head II. Of the encouragement here given to faithfulness.

1. The excellency of the gift, not merely life, but a crown of life;—an honourable and glorious life. The Lord here makes use of that which among men is esteemed the highest honour, to set forth the glory which he has in reserve for them who are faithful unto death. The greatest object of strife among men is a “corruptible crown,” but that which the Lord sets before us for our encouragement to faithfulness is an “incorruptible crown;” an amaranthine crown, or one which fadeth not away. This crown is no less than the enjoyment of eternal life and glory with Christ in heaven.

2. The consideration that this crown is the free gift of divine grace is a great encouragement to faithfulness. This crown is not procured by the faithfulness of the saints, but was fully procured by the price of Christ’s blood. It cost him very dear, but it comes to them freely. It is called a reward, but it is Christ’s reward. It is the travail of his soul; he and his people are one. He gives his people this crown after they have gone through a course of labour and suffering in their adherence to him while in this life. In this respect it is a reward of grace. It was free and distinguishing grace that made them faithful, and the same free grace gives them the crown. O, sirs, ye are to trust in the same grace for making you faithful, which will give you the crown of life. 156

3. It is an encouragement to faithfulness that it is a certain pledge and evidence that in Christ we have a right and title to the crown of life. It is a great truth that none of us may expect the crown of life but such as are found faithful unto death. But it is equally true that every one who obtains mercy to be faithful unto death, shall not fail to receive this

156 The above sermon was preached by Dr. J. Anderson, upon the occasion of installation of elders in his own congregation and his addresses to them are fully written out and offered as a part of the conclusion of the sermon.
glorious reward.

We conclude, exhorting believers to dwell much on the consideration of these things, that you may be stirred up more and more to live like the Lord’s faithful servants to whom he will at last give a crown of life.

It is matter of great lamentation that there are so few in our day and generation who are faithful followers of the Lamb of God.

As to such as are still strangers to Christ, we exhort them to come in among the faithful followers of Christ, come in among them in the way of believing; in the way of freely taking a whole Christ and a whole salvation, closing with his righteousness and offices, taking up his cross and espousing his cause. Without union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and faithfulness to him till death, you cannot expect to wear the crown of eternal life and glory.
SERMON,
By The Rev. John Anderson, D. D.

“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.” (Prov. xix. 27.)

In this exhortation, which speaketh to us with peculiar earnestness, as to children, we observe, 1. An evil of which men are in danger, which is, that of erring from the words of knowledge. By the words of knowledge, we are to understand the truths which God hath revealed in his word; which the apostle calls wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. To err from them is to deny them, or to be obstinately attached to any contrary opinions or practices. 2. The cause of that evil, which goes under the specious name of instruction, but which is to be understood of the schemes or methods that are taken to draw away persons from the faith, love and profession of the words of knowledge. 3. The duty to which we are exhorted with respect to this pretended instruction, which is, that we should cease to hear it; that we should be on our guard not only against erroneous doctrines, but against all the

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157 Found in, “Biographical Sketches and Sermons, of some of the first Ministers of the Associate Church in America” by James P. Miller, 1839.

158 This Sermon was published shortly after it was preached, to which was prefixed the following Preface by the Author:

“The substance of the following discourse was delivered on the Monday after a communion Sabbath. Some, it seems, have represented it as of a schismatical tendency; and others, as having little or no relation to practical religion, and therefore improper for the occasion on which it was delivered. The writer hopes, that the candid and deliberate perusal of it, will with many, be sufficient to remove these objections.

What is aimed at in this discourse is, to strike at a principal root of the numerous divisions now in the visible church. It teaches that we ought not to be in a state of separation from any church-communion, but upon such grounds as are scriptural; and upon such considerations, as involving the declarative glory of God, are of inconceivable and infinite importance. Were this doctrine embraced, there would be no separate church-communions upon trivial pretences; or for the sake of religious tenets or usages in the worship of God which have no foundation in his word; no separate church-communions on account of local customs, uncertain opinions, or uninstituted ceremonies; no separate church-communions founded on the narrow and interested views of a faction.

What is here attempted is a seasonable application of the cautions, with which the scriptures abound, against false teachers. To direct church-members to the right use and application of such cautions will be the endeavor of the faithful ministers of Christ; an endeavor which is rendered peculiarly necessary by the corruptions which prevail in the present state of the visible church.

Those who reckon that practical religion is not concerned in the subject of this discourse, should consider that true believers have it for their distinguishing character, that they abhor false doctrine, and avoid communion with the teachers, of it. (John x. 5. Rev. xiv. 4.)

That he who chooses the weak and despised things of the world to confound the most boasted things of it, may accompany this attempt with his blessing, is, through grace, the desire of the Writer. York Borough, May, 7th, 1794.”
schemes or methods that are taken to propagate them.

It is now proposed, through divine aid,

I. To consider the evil of erring from the words of knowledge:

II. To enquire what is to be understood by that instruction which causeth to err; and

III. To explain and enforce the duty of ceasing to hear all such instruction.

I. The evil of erring from the words of knowledge appears from such considerations as the following:

1. Erring from the words of knowledge is direct rebellion against the authority of God, whose law binds us to believe whatever he reveals. The language of obstinate error is, I prefer my own wisdom and my own will in such a particular to the wisdom and will of God himself. Besides, it is a direct breach of an express command frequently repeated, Do not err—Be not deceived.

2. Supposing the erroneous not to be so far given up to a desperately wicked and reprobate mind, as openly to deny the authority and majesty of God shining in the holy Scriptures; supposing them to be such as allow the Scriptures to be the word of God, the only rule of faith and practice; yet their sin is exceedingly aggravated in regard that, while they Represent their error as contained in the Scriptures, they make the God of truth a liar; nay, they make him the father of a lie. Since there is so much impiety and blasphemy in the perversion of Scripture for the support of falsehood, with what fear and trembling should we guard against that perversion against walking in craftiness, or handling the word of God deceitfully?

3. Error proceeds from the corrupt bias which the human heart received at the fall. The understanding was then involved in darkness, and the will possessed with the love of it. It has ever since been the case with respect to spiritual and eternal things, that men have loved darkness rather than light. God made man upright, but they sought out many inventions; among which none were fraught with more malignity than opinions pertinaciously maintained in opposition to the simplicity
of revealed truth.

4. Erring from the words of knowledge is that which chiefly begins and keeps up divisions in the church of God. That it must be so, is evident, if we only consider what is the true unity of the church, namely, the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God; a joint or unanimous adherence to the words of knowledge. It is also evident from the history of the church, especially since the New Testament dispensation took place, which is almost wholly taken up with the account of the divisions occasioned by erroneous opinions with respect to the doctrine, the worship or the government of the church. When we lament the divisions of the visible church, we should not forget to lament the numerous errors and corruptions that support those divisions.

5. Error is ruining to the souls of men. Heresies are among the works of the flesh; of which the apostle says, “They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Hence the apostle Peter represents the unlearned and unstable as wresting the scriptures unto their own destruction. Who can tell how much danger there is in making God a liar? But those errors which are manifestly contrary to what has been already known and acknowledged by the church of God, are more dangerous than such as cannot be said to be so; as being errors which imply a peculiar contempt of the charge which our Lord, repeatedly gives to his people, That which you have hold fast. To signify the danger of error to men’s souls, the teachers or propagators of it are called in scripture, subverters of souls, and ravenous wolves, not sparing the flock.

Such being the evil and danger of error, how much ought professors to watch against it! Many of them have such confidence in their own wisdom and understanding, that they are under no apprehension of being seduced by the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. This glorying is not good. Those whom the Lord graciously keeps from error are made sensible that they cannot keep themselves from it; they dare not lean on their own understanding. They are aware of the unspeakable hazard of resting in mere head-notions of divine
truly, that is, in such knowledge as may be attained by our natural understanding. They are sure that it is another sort of knowledge which is given to some in virtue of such promises as these: “Thus saith the Lord the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord thy God, who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go: I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free: When he who is the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.” Believers have such a spiritual discernment of divine truths in their native beauty and excellence, as makes them cleave thereto with purpose of heart: And according to the measure of this spiritual and saving knowledge of divine truths, the inward frame of their minds and their outward practice are moulded into conformity to the truths thus spiritually and savingly known.

II. We are next to enquire, what is the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge?

By this instruction we are to understand, as was hinted before, the various methods that are taken to ensnare church-members, or to seduce them from the faith, love and profession of the truth. These methods are so many and various, that volumes might be filled with an account of them. They are such as the following: Magnifying one truth or duty, and then setting it in opposition to another, from which there is a design of seducing us: representing an error as inseparable from something which is undoubtedly truth or duty: building upon detached expressions of scripture, without regard to the scope or connection of the place in which they stand, or to the current doctrine of the scripture on the same subject: sometimes immoderately extolling, sometimes invidiously disparaging societies or particular persons, in order to gain credit to some favorite error, or to divert attention from some hated truth: first proposing an error as a harmless inoffensive opinion, which it would be uncharitable to suppose a man to be a whit the worse for entertaining; and then representing all endeavors to discover the real nature and tendency of such an opinion as nothing but controversy, which Christians are advised not to meddle with; repeating, at the same
time, the most groundless misrepresentations of the contrary truth, as if they were arguments.

He must be ignorant indeed of the opposition which has been made to the cause of God and truth in former and in present times, who can be at any loss for examples of such methods as these now mentioned; which have been commonly employed to cause church-members to err from the words of knowledge.

In general, the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge, is either that of individuals, or that of particular societies or church-communions. The instruction causing to err, of individuals, lies either in the sophistry and color of reasoning, by which they attempt to justify their error, or in the good words and fair speeches, whereby they deceive the hearts of the simple. The instruction that causeth to err includes all the sleight of individuals and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

With regard to a particular church communion, it is chargeable with the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge, so far as some error in doctrine, or some corruption in worship, or in government, serves to distinguish it from other communions, the support of that error being the scope of its peculiar constitution, and, in a great measure, of its public administrations. Thus, when Jeroboam was raised to the throne of the ten tribes, he got a new church-communion constituted for the maintenance of some errors, which seemed to be for the interest of his government; such as, that it was not necessary for the people to go up three times a year to Jerusalem: that persons of the other tribes might officiate as priests, as well as those of the tribe of Levi: that the passover might be kept on the day which Jeroboam devised of his own heart, as well as on the day appointed in the law of Moses. These tenets were employed in the whole of the public worship that was performed at Dan and Bethel, and in all the public administrations of the priests of that corrupt communion, whether they formally insisted on them in their discourses or not. They never appeared in the character of public teachers, or of priests which Jeroboam had made; but they might be justly considered as teaching
and propagating the tenets now mentioned. Hence they were continually a snare in “Mizpeh, and a net spread upon mount Tabor.”

In like manner, every particular church-communion, considered as distinct from, and opposite to other church-communions, exists for the sake of some peculiar errors or truths whereby they are distinguished from others.

Thus, the Popish church exists for the purpose of maintaining the universal headship of the Pope over the visible church, the equality, or rather superiority of the church’s authority to that of the scriptures, justification by works, the worshipping of saints and angels, and of images; purgatory, transubstantiation, and other abominations. The Episcopal church exists for the support of a certain order of pastors to whom they appropriate the name of bishops, and who are rulers of other pastors; and also for the maintaining of some superstitious modes of worship, as the use of a liturgy or prescribed forms of prayer in public worship, the keeping of certain holy-days, the posture of kneeling at the Lord’s table. The Methodist church exists for the singular purpose of maintaining the inutility of all particular forms of worship or church order; and the utility, notwithstanding that, of their own, which is neither taken from the scriptures, nor agreeable to the practice of any of the Reformed Churches;—for the purpose of maintaining that the officers of the church ought to be travelling preachers, who have no particular charge, class-leaders, stewards, and a number of others lately instituted;—lastly, for the purpose of teaching that there is hardly any religion in holding any set of opinions; but a great deal in holding all the five articles (as they have been commonly called) of the Arminians. Independent churches exist for the purpose of maintaining, that the exercise of church government and discipline belongs to the whole body of church members, and not in any peculiar sense, to the pastors; and that the whole power of governing each particular congregation (that is, each society consisting of such a number as can conveniently join together in the same time and place, in the same acts of public worship) is confined within itself. The Baptist church exists for the purpose of maintaining that adult persons are the only subjects capable of baptism,
and that there is no baptism by the application of water in sprinkling, or in any other way than immersion or dipping.

It may be asked, “for what purpose does the communion of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania exist in this country, and what are their distinguishing principles?” We answer, that it exists for the purpose of holding a public and judicial testimony for the doctrine and order of the church of Christ: In which they testify and declare from the word of God, such articles as follow—That the covenant of works was made with Adam as the representative of all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation—That man is now in a fallen and ruined state, and cannot help himself by his doing or suffering therefrom—That the Lord Jesus Christ, as the surety of the elect, has, by his obedience to the law as a covenant, and satisfaction to the justice of God, purchased eternal redemption for all his people, and they only;—as election, redemption, and his intercession, are of equal extent—That the gospel, strictly taken, only contains precious promises, and all precepts and threatenings belong to the law. That there is a free and unconditional grant or offer of Christ made in the word to all sinners of mankind, wherever the gospel comes, without any regard to previous qualifications—That the surety righteousness of Christ is the true and proper condition of the covenant of grace, and not faith, repentance or sincerity—That saving faith is a persuasion wrought in the heart of a poor sinner by the Holy Spirit, and grounded on the gospel grant alone of Christ being indeed a Saviour, a Prophet, Priest and King, to him in particular—

159 “This is the same with what is called ‘deed of gift.’ The deed of gift is the free and indiscriminate exhibition of the Saviour to mankind sinners, as such, or that which affords them an unexceptionable warrant to receive him by an appropriating faith. The phrase is very consonant to the word of God, as is evident from the following texts: ‘Is it a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel? I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth: My Father gives you the true bread from heaven: This is the record of God, that he hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.’ The indiscriminate right which sinners have to Christ, not only signifies their warrant to receive him, but the general interest they have in him, as he is God in their nature, and official Saviour of the world, in opposition to fallen angels, with respect to whom it cannot be said in any sense that he is their Saviour.”— Ass. Presbytery’s answer to the 7th Question of the Committee of the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, 1770.

160 The different sentiments of the Synod of Philadelphia and New-York, now the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in America, and the Associate Presbytery, may be seen in the New Castle Presbytery’s Warning, published 1755; and Mr. Arnot’s reply, in the second part of the Detection Detected; and Mr. Gellatly’s observations: also in the answer of the Committee of the Synod, 1770, to the Associate Presbytery’s
through Christ, and a regard to the glory of God, are the motives of obedience in the hearts of true believers, and not the hopes of heaven and the fears of hell—That the Lord will never leave nor forsake his Saints, so that they shall totally or finally fall away from a state of grace—That all saints are imperfect in the present state—That the punishment of the wicked will be for ever and ever—That a Confession of Faith is necessary for the well-being of the church, and every article of it should be a term of communion—That public covenying, or the public avowal of the truths and ways of God, with the solemnity of an oath, is both warranted by the word, in New Testament times, and seasonable at this time—That the Psalms of David are proper to be sung in worshipping assemblies, and in families, and not psalms or songs of human devising—That Presbyterial church government is the only form of government of divine institution—That the whole church ought to have (what the nature of presbyterial government requires) the same

second question. It is this: "Faith does not consist in an assent to the doctrines of the gospel exhibiting Christ in the character of a Saviour, as true, but formally, in the hearty approbation and consent of the will, whereby the sinner rolls over his guilty soul upon Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour, and rests upon his righteousness alone for his everlasting salvation.” The Associate Presbytery, in the answer to the Committee’s first question: “We are so far from believing that an assurance or persuasion of our having actually obtained a personal and saving interest in Christ, or of our being already in a state of grace, is essential to saving faith, that we constantly declare to the contrary. But we assert, with all orthodox Protestants, that faith includes an appropriation which amounts to a persuasion that he now conveys to us a distinguishing interest in himself, and that we shall be saved through grace, as it reigns through his everlasting righteousness. This persuasion we think is essential to faith considered as justifying, and in the relation it has to our own salvation as its final object: Though we do not affirm that it constantly triumphs in the minds of believers, who, through the prevalence of indwelling sin, and the intrusion of temptations, may lack it for a considerable time. The commanding efficacy faith has upon the heart, when it is duly exercised, the joy and peace which spring from it, the expressive designations which are given to it in Scripture, the constitution of the gospel testimony, which is its immediate object, and the gospel call, which lays an obligation on sinners, not only to believe something concerning Christ, but to believe on him for something, even their own salvation, afford demonstrative evidence of the justness of this opinion. We presume this account of faith will be found upon strict trial to be more agreeable to the word of God and the excellent definitions of it in our Catechisms, and the experience of true believers, to that given by the committee, who are pleased to tell us, that ‘it formally consists in the hearty approbation and consent of the will;’ which, though necessarily connected with faith, cannot with propriety be called a believing in the name of the Son of God.”

161 "As a Confession of Faith exhibits what a church believe not only to be true, but also profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness, and necessary to make the man of God perfect, and to furnish him unto all good works, it is very rational to think an approbation of all the principles therein held forth, should be insisted upon as a term of communion. The design of a Confession is defeated by the admission of persons to communion, upon terms utterly inconsistent with an earnest contending for the whole of the faith therein delivered. If we should dispense with one article in our Confession to show our charity to pious scruplers, we should for the same reason dispense with every article that in our variable opinion is not essential to it as a system, and consequently we may carry a dispensing power so high that our Confession will exhibit what few of us thoroughly believe, and serve only to demonstrate to mankind our inconsistency and insincerity in the matters of God.” Ass. Presbytery’s answer to the 9th Question of the Committee of the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, 1770.
terms of church-communion in all its particular congregations—That the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper ought to be both alike publicly administered and accompanied with the preaching of the word—That the revolutions which take place in the kingdoms of this world, or church members living under different civil governments, do not affect the unity of the church of Christ, and therefore there is no such thing as foreign jurisdiction in the church of Christ, of whom he says, “my dove, my undefiled, is but one”—That it is a dangerous principle to give up with these truths that are disputed among men esteemed pious and learned, and that an appearance of saintship alone, without a sound profession of the faith, and a gospel conversation, is all that is necessary for church-communion.

Thus, it is manifest, that each particular church communion exists for the sake of the tenets or principles for which it is distinguished from other church communions: for it is plain that there is no occasion for its existence in order to the maintaining of what it holds in common with other church-communions. And the maintaining of such distinguishing tenets being the end of any particular church communion, the propagation of them must always be one end of its public administrations.\textsuperscript{162} If these tenets be really errors, or instances of

\textsuperscript{162} Let none from hence conclude that the ministers and people belonging to the Associate Presbytery, judge that the administrations of those that are not of their communion, are invalid. The validity of ordinances is derived from their agreeableness to the word. The Lord will never bless any error or corruption in his church to promote her edification; but where there are many things wrong in churches the Lord has his servants and people, as was the case in the seven churches of Asia: These evils being reproved by the Lord, shows that the Lord is a strict observer of the state of matters in every church. After the reproofs and warnings given to the churches of Thyatira and Pergamos, if they did not reform, it was doubtless the duty of the people of the Lord, desirous to cleave to the Lord’s cause, to separate from their communion. The Apostle in like manner reproves the corruptions and laxness that had tarnished the glory of the Corinthian church, but still he supposes persons may build on the foundation, wood, hay and stubble; and may be at great pains and expense to promote this building with wood, hay, and stubble; for which they shall suffer the loss of their pains in so doing: “but he himself will be saved, yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor. iii. 12—16.) It is a gross aspersion cast on us, that we think none will get to heaven but ourselves. Whoever will get to heaven it will be by Jesus Christ alone. Some say that the various religious professions are like the different ways to a city; but the fact is, that the way to heaven is one, and the Lord’s people among the different denominations all travel one way, have one guide, and have communion with Christ only in the way of his truths. It would be blasphemy to suppose the Lord would bless any thing contrary to his blessed word, as a mean of edification to his church. But how far the Lord may bless the truths of his own word, or the ordinances of his appointment, though dispensed with many corruptions, would be presumption in any to determine. Eminent lights have appeared and shone forth among Independents and Episcopalians, but yet their defences of gospel truths, and their distinguished piety, do not make these different forms of religion any more agreeable to the word, but only show that we know in part, and prophesy in part; and that we ought to call no man master, nor follow any man, however learned or pious, farther than he follows Christ.
departure from the true faith, then the public administrations of such a church-communion are so far for the maintenance of error, and thus belong to the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge. The precious truths that may be taught in such public administrations will no more hinder the propagation of some particular error from being a principal end of them, than the precious truths advanced in the discourses of Job’s three friends hindered the support of their uncharitable judgment concerning him, from being the scope of those discourses.

III. We come now to offer some explanation of the duty of ceasing to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.

This duty implies knowledge and care to distinguish good and wholesome instruction from that which is of dangerous tendency. So Christ says concerning his sheep: “My sheep know my voice; a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

As soon as we have sufficient ground to believe that it is the scope of any pretended instruction to cause us to err from the words of knowledge, we are to depart from it. It is not the way of Christ’s sheep to countenance such instruction; for they know not the voice of strangers, and will flee from them. With respect to our private deportment, we are to beware of contracting private intimacies, and of frequenting unnecessarily the company of those from whom we expect to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge; for “evil communications corrupt good manners: and the companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

With respect to our public deportment, we are to withdraw from those church-communions whose constitutions are founded on error and defection from the truth, and whose public administrations are thereto subservient.

What we chiefly intend on this head, is a particular consideration of the following question or case of conscience, namely, Whether the members of a church, which is in a state of separation from another
church, may, without sin, occasionally attend on the administration of public ordinances in that other church?

In this question three things are supposed:

1. That the persons of whom we speak, are upon good grounds, persuaded that the church-communion from which they are in a state of separation, is so far chargeable, in her profession and obstinately continued practice, with the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge, as to render a state of separation from her warrantable, and, according to the circumstances of the case, necessary.

2. That they are in full communion with a church in the state of separation now supposed.

3. That the two churches are in a stated opposition to one another as to some articles of truth or duty, held by the one, and rejected by the other.

These things being supposed, we say, it is unwarrantable for church members to attend upon, or countenance the administration of public ordinances, in any church-communion from which they are, on solid and scriptural grounds, in a state of separation. This we maintain for such reasons as the following:

1. The attendance of church-members, on public ordinances, in a church-communion from which they are in a state of separation, is directly contrary to the divine command in the text, and in other places of scripture. For, in the supposed case, the public administrations of such a church communion always carry in them instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge; it has been shown that they always proceed upon or imply such instruction. The practice in question is contrary to all those passages of scripture which enjoin us to beware not only of false doctrine, but of the teachers of it: And surely nothing can be more reasonable than to consider every public teacher as a teacher of all that error or corruption of which he is not ashamed to make a public profession; as he certainly does of whatever error or corruption is professed and justified by the church communion to which he belongs, especially when it is professed and justified in opposition to the truth
maintained by another communion. We are enjoined to *mark such as cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and to avoid them*. Nothing is plainer than that they who teach such doctrine, and justify such corruptions, as render a state of separation necessary, are causing divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and are therefore to be avoided; that is, their public administrations are not to be countenanced by us, lest we be chargeable with countenancing their corrupt schemes, whereby they cause divisions and offences.

2. The attendance of church-members, on the dispensation of public ordinances, in a church-communion from which they are in a state of separation, is inconsistent with the weight and importance of a warrantable separation. When a particular church hates to be reformed; when its obstinacy, in rejecting some of the truths and institutions of our Lord Jesus, is come to such a height, that, in its communion, a suitable exercise of the keys with which Christ hath entrusted his ministers for the joint or judicial maintaining of those truths and institutions, is altogether impracticable; then separation at last becomes necessary. While any particular church, from which we are in a state of separation, continues obstinate in her defections, our state of separation from it ought to continue. In this case, the Lord says to us, as he said to Jeremiah, “Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them.” Hence it is manifest, that when a state of separation is warrantable, the church-communion from which we are separated, and that with which we join, can not be so much alike, that we can be either in the one or in the other indifferently with a safe conscience. On the contrary, the evil of rejecting the truths or institutions of our Lord Jesus, on account of which a just separation is stated, is so great, that we can not countenance those public administrations, which, according to our separation, have the maintaining of that evil for one part of their scope and design, without being chargeable with gross inconsistency and unfaithfulness to our own light. If a separation were warrantable, which is only on account of the greater convenience of attending on ordinances in the church that is in a state of separation, we might, then, notwithstanding such a separation, upon the absence of the ordinary
pastor, attend on the ministry of one of another communion, though his
gifts were not so agreeable, or his situation so convenient to us. But a
separation of that sort would sacrifice the peace and unity of the church
to private convenience and humor; would harden persons whose evil
character, in Jude 19 is, that they “separate themselves,” and must be
abhorred by every man of principle and conscience. But a warrantable
separation is a quite different affair; the grounds of it are so weighty, as
to render an occasional as well as a stated attendance on the public
ordinances of the church-communion from which we are in a state of
separation, quite unwarrantable.

3. An occasional attendance on public administrations in a church-
communion from which we are in a state of separation, tends to subvert
the order and discipline of the church of Christ. It can not be denied,
that the errors and offences of those church-communions from which
we are justly in a state of separation, are in their own nature, being open
violations of God’s law obstinately persisted in, sufficient grounds of
church-censure: Nay, if the consciences of church-members who are in
a state of separation on account of these errors and offences, be not
exceedingly stupefied, they must acknowledge that the ministers and
people from whom a separation is thus justly stated, are, in effect, under
the censure of the church by a scriptural testimony against them, and by
a necessary separation from them. But how does the holy scripture
direct us to behave towards those that are under church-censure? It
certainly directs us to behave to them in such a manner as may be
expressive of the sense we have of the evil of their ways; in such a
manner as may make them ashamed; in such a manner as is directly
contrary to the countenance given to corrupt church-communions by
our attending on their public administrations. “Now we command you
brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw
yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the
tradition which he received of us. And if any man obey not our word by
this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may
be ashamed.” (2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.) On the other hand, when we give
public countenance to those who are the objects of church-censure, and
behave towards them as if they were in full communion, we are attempting to defeat the design of the church's censure. The aim of church-censure is to bring church-members to a humbling sense and hearty renunciation of sin: but this conduct hardens them in it. Church-censure tends to inspire church-members with a sense of the heinousness of the evil for which it is inflicted; but this conduct leads them to consider it as a light and trivial matter. This conduct, therefore, manifestly tends to destroy all the use of church-censure: for if church-members allow themselves to trample upon it in one case, (in which, as in this, they can not with any consistency dispute the justice of it,) they must be ignorant indeed of human nature as well as of God's word, who can suppose that any due regard to it in other cases will be long maintained.

If it be excepted, that it seems improper for a particular church to censure such as are not in her communion; We answer, there are two ways in which a church may censure even those that are out of her communion. The first is, by a judicial and authoritative condemnation of their errors and corruptions. Thus Zion is to “condemn in judgment every tongue that riseth up against her.” The second way is by the contrariety of her pure profession and holy practice to the profession and practice of others.

4. Occasional attendance on the public administrations in a church-communion, from which we are warrantably in a state of separation, does not comport with that watchfulness and jealousy over our own hearts, which are so suitable to our condition in the militant church. For these are ministrations in which, it is acknowledged by the persons we speak of, there is much of the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge; if not in what is actually delivered in their hearing, at least in the profession of religion which is made in such a church-communion, and to which all the public administrations there are in a designed subservience. Many do not scruple to attend on the ministrations of false teachers, as apprehensive of no danger from them; for, say they, we are not so ignorant as not to know what is to be received as true, and what is to be rejected as false. To such we say, the
Lord forbids you not only to believe the instruction that causeth to err, but even to hear it: he commands you to cease from giving even an outward attention to it: and therefore in your attendance thereon, you are manifestly going out of the Lord’s way; you are trampling on his authority. And while you are doing so, your confidence that you shall not be seduced, is but a vain and presumptuous leaning on your own understanding, and running a greater risk than eating food mixed with poison. Whilst you are thus venturing out of the plain road of duty, you are in a great hazard of being left to follow the bent of your corrupted nature, and to embrace error instead of truth. You should consider that there is a hellish energy attending error, as well as a heavenly energy attending divine truth; for we read of the “working of Satan with all power and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.” It is true, that, even when we have the best ground to expect a pure dispensation of word and ordinances, public speakers are not exempted from inadvertent and unguarded expressions. But we are to judge of a dispensation of ordinances in any church-communion by the scope and tendency of it: and of the scope and tendency of it, by the peculiar and distinguishing principles and avowed practice of the church-communion in which it is. And, according to our judgment thus formed, we ought or ought not to attend.

The needless reading of erroneous books, that is, of books which are well known to be intended and calculated for the propagation of gross error, is to be avoided. Yet there is a difference between the private reading of an erroneous book and attending on the administrations of an erroneous teacher: for, First, as it is more especially by the preaching of the word that church-members are converted and edified; so it is more especially by the preaching of error that they are seduced. Secondly, in the preaching of error there is a prostitution of the sacred office of the ministry, which is not in the mere proposal of opinions in common conversation or in books. Thirdly, it can not be pretended, that in the private reading of a book published by an erroneous teacher, there is any public countenance given to him in the character of a church-officer, or any sort of church-communion with his followers, as there certainly is in a public attendance on his ministrations. Fourthly,
the private reading of books is of the nature of that private communication of sentiments to one another, which is previously necessary in order to a state of church-communion. Thus, reading is a proper mean of acquiring the information which is needful to determine us whether we ought to join in such a particular church communion or not: or whether we ought to attend on the public administrations thereof or not. If we find, in the use of this and other means, that we ought not to attend on them, we should, according to the opportunities of our place and station in the church, to warn others of the danger of attending on them. Hence the examination of erroneous books, when it is performed with honesty and judgment, is a real service to the church of Christ.

5. An occasional attendance on the public administrations from which we are justly in a state of separation, is contrary to the due exercise of charity towards our fellow church-members: for supposing (what we are far from allowing to be ever the case in fact) that a church-member had attained such a measure of knowledge and establishment in the truth, as to be in no danger of receiving hurt to his own soul, by his attendance on the public administrations of the erroneous; yet he can not but know that the weaker sort of his fellow church-members are in great danger, who may be emboldened to attend on the same administrations by his example. Is he not hereby chargeable with putting a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way? This is properly, in the scripture sense, giving offence to our brethren: for giving them offence, is not, as is commonly imagined, displeasing them, but rather being any way an occasion of their falling into sin. Besides, it is breaking the bonds of church-communion in vexing the hearts of our brethren, who rightly judge occasional hearing to be a sin, and inconsistent with our profession of Christ’s name.

6. An occasional attendance on the public administrations in different and opposite church-communions, is contrary to the right manner of attending on gospel ordinances; which our Lord enjoins upon us, when he says, “Take heed how ye hear.” For in the first place, this occasional attendance on ordinances is a self-contradictory attendance:
for whoever attends on the public ordinances of God in any particular church, must be considered either as a mere spectator of the public exercises there, or as having communion with that church in them. But a mere spectator he can not be: because the public exercises of praying, praising, and hearing the word, are of such a nature, that for a person to be present at them from choice, is to be under the highest obligation to join in them: a person that deliberately attends on such exercises as a mere spectator, is a profaner of God’s name; and will find, sooner or later, that there is no such thing as being an unconcerned spectator of God’s ordinances in the visible church. Whoever attends on the public ordinances of any particular church, must, therefore, be considered as having public communion with that church. Thus, in the supposed case, the person is involved in a contradiction. His attendance on the public ordinances of one particular church, says, he approves of the constitution and principles of that church; and that he is “one body, one bread,” with the other members of it; but all this is contradicted by his attendance on the public ordinances of another church which is in a state of separation from the former. Nay, in the second place, is not this occasional attendance on the administrations of different churches a blasphemous attendance? In attending on public ordinances we profess to have come to hear what God the Lord shall say to us, by those whom he sends to speak to us in his name. But when we go to hear it declared to us according to the profession of one church, as what the Lord himself speaks to us, That Christ died for the elect only; and that Presbyterian church-government is the only form of it which Christ hath appointed in his word: and afterwards go to hear, as the Lord’s message, according to the profession of another church, That Christ died for every individual of mankind; and that Independency or Episcopacy, or no particular form of church-government at all, are appointed in the word; is it not plain, that our attendance on public ordinances, in such opposite communions, is either a piece of solemn mockery, or a charging the Most High with contradictions? If we do not go to hear God speak what we know is to be spoken to us in his ordinances, our attendance is a blasphemous mockery; and if we do go to hear him speak, as is now represented, we blasphemously charge him with
contradictions. In the third place, it is a partial attendance on ordinances. When persons, in the supposed case, attend on the public administrations of a church-communion from which they are in a state of separation, they are chargeable with putting asunder what God hath joined together; namely, the preaching of the word and the dispensation of the sacraments. Where will they find a divine warrant to receive one as authorized to preach the word to them, from whom it is unwarrantable to receive the sacraments; or to join in communion with a particular church, in such public exercises of divine worship as prayer, praise, and hearing the word preached, while it is unwarrantable to join with the same church in baptism and the Lord’s Supper? Paul appears to represent the public and authoritative dispensation of the word as the principal part of the trust that was committed to him as a minister of Christ: “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” (1 Cor. i. 17.) “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (Eph. iii. 8.) It seems unwarrantable, therefore, to consider the preaching of the word as a less sacred or important part of the ministerial office than the dispensation of the sacraments. In the fourth place, this occasional attendance on the public administrations of different church-communions, is, from the nature of it, apt to be prostituted to carnal purposes. This sort of occasional attendance is not necessary to the enjoyment of the gospel and its ordinances in purity and simplicity; for these may be had in a steadfast adherence to one church-communion. But the great inducement to that sort of attendance is, that thereby men’s vain curiosity, or fondness for something new in the gifts of a speaker, or in his manner of address, is gratified: on this account, men “heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” Nay, persons are often induced to this attendance out of compliment to their friends or neighbors; or because, according to the atheistical temper of the present age, it is accounted a mark of liberality and enlargement of mind. In the fifth place, some give evidence that they make an idol of ordinances, by their attendance on them in church-communions, from which they are in a state of separation. This is the case of those who do not scruple to turn aside from the path of duty to
what they can not deny to be sinful, for the sake, as they pretend, of the public ordinances. There are some who allow it to be an important duty to bear testimony, even in a way of separation, for reformation principles, in opposition to the corruptions or backslidings of those called Presbyterians, as well as to those of others. They also allow, (what indeed no considerate person can deny) that attendance on public ordinances, as dispensed by those that are in a stated opposition to that testimony, is inconsistent with a due maintenance of it, and that a practice, which carries in it that inconsistency, is sinful: and yet these very persons will allow themselves and families in this practice, confessedly sinful as it is. Their apology is to this purpose: That they are almost destitute of ordinances dispensed under a testimony for truth, by reason of their great distance from the place where ministers are settled, and because they have seldom any supply of preaching in the way they desire to have it. To this we answer, by directing to such persons the following enquires:

1. Should it not be our end in attending on public ordinances, that we may not sin against God? But how can we pretend to do what is inconsistent with our holy profession, and therefore sinful, that we may not sin? Shall we dishonor God, that we may honor him? Shall we do evil, that good may come?

2. Can you be said to be destitute of ordinances while you have the Bible in your hands, and Catechisms, and other helps towards the right understanding of it, while you have daily opportunity of family worship, and of meditation and prayer in secret; and also of family catechising, and of family discipline? Is it not owing to negligence, or to formality and deadness in the use of these private means, that your families grow up in ignorance, and also that the Lord is provoked to withhold from you the enjoyment of public ordinances? For it is his ordinary way to grant more means and privileges to those who are diligent in improving those which they have.

3. Have you not had too little regard to the enjoyment of pure ordinances, in your removals from place to place? Have not the situations you have chosen for your families, been rather where they
might get large worldly estates, than where they might have a prospect of obtaining the green pastures of public ordinances for their souls?

4. While you continue in the practice of an occasional attendance on the public administrations of church commumions that are in a stated opposition to a seasonable testimony for the doctrine and order of the church of Christ, is not your adherence to that testimony thereby rendered doubtful and uncertain? Is not a steady and consistent adherence to that testimony the way to obtain the enjoyment of public ordinances under the banner of it? Without the study of the former, the desire of the latter must be but lukewarm, and the expectation of it groundless. For it is “the longing soul that the Lord will satisfy, and it is the hungry soul that he will fill with good.”

It may be proper here to take notice of some other pleas, which are commonly offered for occasional attendance on the public administration of church-commumions, from which we are in a state of separation.

1st. It is said, that such occasional attendance is according to the apostle’s exhortation, “Prove all things.” (1 Thess. v. 31.)

We answer, 1. The occasional hearing against which we have been arguing, was all along supposed to be that of persons so far convinced of the corrupt state of the church whose administrations they occasionally attend, that they judge it necessary to be in a state of separation from it. This is a thing, therefore, which these persons are supposed to have already proved.

2. Nor is occasional hearing a proper way of coming at the knowledge of the peculiar principles of a particular church: for you may frequently hear the public discourses of its preachers, without ever getting any proper or satisfactory account of those principles. It would be unjust to lay every unguarded thing to the charge of a church which may fall from one of its public speakers: and on the other hand, it would be rash to conclude, that a church, as such, holds every article of divine truth that the public speakers of it may happen to utter.

3. To prove all things, in the sense of the apostle, is to bring every
doctrine or practice to the touchstone of the written word. If you are duly exercised in doing so, you will pay a suitable regard to the other part of the exhortation; namely. *Hold fast that which is good:* you will take a decided part against whatever you find conformable to the infallible rule. You will not be ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth.

2ndly. It is said, that the ministrations which are occasionally attended, are those of regular ministers of the gospel; those of a true church, in which, we have ground to believe, persons have communion with Jesus Christ the head.

In answer to this it might be sufficient to observe, that if it proved anything, it would prove too much for the purpose of justifying those who attend on the public administrations of church-communions from which they are in a state of separation; for if we may warrantably attend on the administrations of such ministers occasionally, we may attend on them always, and we may receive the sacraments from them as well as the word, and then separation from them must be unnecessary; and if unnecessary, then unlawful. But as this plea is commonly in the mouths of those that plead for occasional hearing, it may be useful to introduce here a few observations of some valuable writers on this subject. “A secession,” says a judicious divine,163 “may be warrantably declared from a church on account of her corruptions and back-slidings, when yet she is not unchurched. Though the dissenters in England and Ireland have stated a secession from the church of England, on account of her corruption in worship, government and discipline, they do not therefore, unchurch her; they do not refuse her the character and denomination of a Protestant church. Nay, they do not dispute that many have lived and died in communion with the church of England, through ignorance of her corruptions, and the sinfulness thereof, who have had communion with Christ.”

To the observation of this divine, we may add, that, in the same manner, a minister of such a corrupt church may be called, in a large

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163 Wilson’s Defence, page 69.
sense, a minister of the gospel; though as a minister of such a corrupt church, he be chargeable both with teaching false doctrine himself, and with holding communion with those who do so: and therefore when we withdraw from the communion of a corrupt church, we are of course, to withdraw from the public administrations of its ministers. “The primitive church,” says Claude, in his historical defence of the Reformation, “never had any union with such as taught false doctrine; and to shew how necessary and indispensable they judged a separation from them to be, they went so far as to refuse communion with the orthodox themselves, when either by surprise or weakness, or some interest, they had received heretics into their communion, although as to themselves they had kept their faith in purity. Thus the orthodox of the church of Rome refused to hold communion with Felix their bishop, because he held communion with the Arians, although he entirely held the creed of the council of Nice.” We may add what Dupin, in his Bibliotheca Auctorum Ecclesiasticorum, relates of Hilary, bishop of Poictiers. That pious man, having come to a synod that met at Selencia, in the year 350, did, at his first entrance into the Synod, make confession of his faith according to the decisions of the council of Nice; upon which he took his seat in the Synod. But soon observing that many of the bishops were Arians, he departed, and would not be any more present with them. It is to be observed, that the Synod admitted of this confession of his faith; yet he would have no church-communion, where Arians were sitting as members. This example is agreeable to the word of God, wherein we are forbidden to receive such as bring corrupt doctrine, or to say a confederacy with them that say a confederacy. But it is objected, that they are but small truths or omissions on account of which we are in a state of separation from some churches. We answer, that the truths concerning Presbyterial church government being an ordinance of the Lord Christ, concerning public covenanting being the duty of the church under the New Testament, and seasonable at present, concerning the use of the scripture songs in our solemn worship, concerning the duty of the church, as such, to bear a suitable testimony against the errors and corruptions of the present times, are such as none will represent as small matters, but those that are ignorant
of them. But even with respect to truths comparatively small, says Mr. Fleming, in the Fulfilling of the Scriptures, “They may be great in their season, when they are the word of Christ's patience. Nay the lesser a truth seems, and of mean value with many, it makes the Christian's adherence to it a greater testimony. It is clear, that so close a concatenation there is among the truths of God held forth in the scripture, that one part thereof cannot be reached without a special prejudice to the whole. Yea, it may be said, every corruption of the truth hath an aim at the very soul of religion, by a direct tendency thereto.”

With respect to omissions, such as omitting to censure the erroneous, to bear a particular testimony against the errors and corruption of the present times, or to comply with the call now given to set about reformation in the way of covenanting; We answer in the words of another divine; “Omissions,” says he, “are so heinous and grievous in the sight of God, that when sentence is passed upon men at the great day, omissions only are mentioned, (Matth. xxv. 41, 42, &c.) For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat, &c. Omissions may even turn the purest churches into synagogues of Satan. If the erroneous are not censured, and error is not condemned, a society professing to be a religious society may soon become a herd of blasphemous Arians and Socinians, and of wicked Arminians, and of the like gross perverters of the truth.” But it is farther objected, that we refuse to have communion with those with whom the church’s Head holds communion. We answer in the words of the same divine: “Though corruption and superstition can never have the approbation and countenance of heaven, it does not therefore follow, that when we depart from communion with a particular visible church on account of her corruptions, our separation is interpretatively a condemning of Christ the head of the church, as if he were to be blamed, if he, in his adorable sovereignty, communicate himself and his grace, even to those who remain in communion with a corrupt and degenerate church. The sovereignty of grace may be glorified among those whom it is not safe nor warrantable for us to hold communion with as members of the same ecclesiastic body. The hidden and secret communications of the Redeemer, are neither the standard nor rule of our duty.”
Lastly, it is objected, that the scheme of putting a stop to the practice of occasional hearing, tends to widen the breaches among the various church-communions of Christians, which we should rather endeavor to heal.

Answ. There will be no genuine healing of breaches, till churches be brought to an humbling sense of their errors and defections, and to a sincere, unanimous, particular acknowledgement of the various articles of divine truth which they have injured, either by denying or refusing to own. In order to this healing, churches and their members must be brought under such deep concern to attain the true knowledge, and to walk in a steadfast adherence to it, as will cure them of the levity of occasional hearing. When the healing Spirit is poured from on high, each church-member will be saying, “Here are two opposite doctrines; they can not both be of God; for there is no inconsistency in him. I now see it to be a matter of infinite importance for me to have a certain knowledge of the truth which is of God. Nor will I rest till through the Lord’s blessing on the use of the means, namely, searching the scriptures, communication with fellow church-members, meditation, and ardent prayer for the illumination of the Spirit, I attain a solid knowledge and full satisfaction as to this matter. And when I have thus bought the truth, that is, when the Lord has freely given me the understanding of it, I will make a consistent adherence to it in profession and practice, the study and the business of my life.” When such a disposition becomes general among church-members, one might venture to say that the time of the church’s healing is not far off; it would be a token of the set time to favor Zion being come. With respect to occasional hearers, they contribute no more to true peace between opposite church-communions, than whisperers and tale-bearers do to the reconciliation of two persons at variance. In both cases, they seldom or never fail to embitter the parties against one another by their anecdotes and misrepresentations. If each church-communion were to declare with precision and particularity, what is unanimously held by them in every article wherein they differ from others; and if their members were required to evidence a steady adherence to every article thus declared, the good consequences would soon appear. For, in the
first place, the misrepresentations of tale-bearers, otherwise called occasional hearers, would no more obtain credit, the means of refuting them being always at hand. In the second place, church-communions would have more real esteem of one another in proportion as they evidenced themselves to be acting from principle. In the third place, seeing one another in earnest in maintaining their respective tenets, each would be led to consider the tenets of another with more seriousness, and to enquire with more diligence what truth or what error is in them: an enquiry which would be much less difficult, were every church-communion honestly and plainly to ascertain their distinguishing tenets by a public and particular declaration.

Since the grand apostasy in the papal church, there have been two most remarkable periods, wherein several churches gave suitable evidence of sincerity and earnestness in endeavoring to attain the knowledge and pure profession of the truth. The first was that of the glorious Reformation from Popery; when the Lord brought so many churches from the bosom of Antichrist with confessions of faith and testimonies to his truth in their hands. The second period was about the middle of the last century, when so resolute and successful a stand was made against superstition in the worship of God, and against the tyrannical government of Episcopacy. But the time of going forward in reformation was short, and was succeeded by a grievous defection from what had been attained. In the course of which defection, the Protestant churches as such, have fallen into great lukewarmness and indifference to the purity of their holy profession: which indifference has been excused and increased by the prevailing opinion of latitudinarianism: ——Latitudinarianism, which makes religion consist sometimes in such emotions and passions as are excited by pictures and musical sound, sometimes in such mere outward morality as might be found in heathens, in any thing rather than in a single adherence to the truths revealed in God’s word:—Latitudinarianism, which makes an attachment for any gross error or corruption which ever plagued the church of God, pass for great piety:—Latitudinarianism, which, in vast multitudes bearing the Christian denomination, is already ripened into open and avowed profanity, infidelity and atheism:—Latitudinarianism,
an idol to which this generation seems to be so absolutely attached, that there is reason to apprehend that such a severe calamity will be necessary to wean them from it, as was necessary to wean the Jews from their idolatry. Let us hope and pray, that the blessed work which was begun in the Reformation from Popery, which was advanced in the Reformation from Prelacy, and which is still earned on amidst great and manifold opposition, may speedily issue in the more eminent glory of the latter day.

We conclude with an exhortation to those that are engaged in a professed adherence to a testimony for the principles of the first and second Reformation, against the various defections therefrom, in the present state of the visible church. We call you, in the Lord’s name, to study a firm and consistent adherence to that testimony in profession and practice. The charge which the adversaries of Paul brought against him, and from which he vindicated himself, that his word towards the Corinthians was *yea and nay*, an affirmation and denial of the same thing, holds lamentably true against many professors at this day. One part of their conduct says, *yea*, they are adhering to a testimony for the truth; another part of it says, *nay*, they are making light of it. Be concerned that your adherence to the present truth may, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be *yea*, that is, steady and consistent. Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering. And that you may do so, we offer you the following advices.

1. Be careful to attain a competent knowledge of the several articles of the present truth and testimony of Jesus. Study to know these, not merely as contained in our subordinate standards, such as, our Judicial Testimony, our Catechisms and Confession of Faith, but also according to what the nature of these subordinate standards require, as contained in the scriptures of truth, which are the supreme standard, and the only foundation of a genuine faith. When adversaries represent our subordinate standards as turning away men’s attention from the holy scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, they are propagating what, if they be acquainted with these standards, their own consciences must allow to be a base calumny, and an open shameless contradiction
to the letter, and to the whole nature and design of such standards; they being nothing more than the declared adherence of the church, in the articles specified, to the word of God alone; and there being no other way conceivable in which the church, as such, can make a faithful opposition to the various errors and corruptions, according as they come to prevail. To fall in with the design of these subordinate standards, it is necessary for you to be like the Bereans, “searching the scriptures daily, whether these things be so.”

2. Study to have distinct views of the testimony for truth, to which you adhere, being the cause of God. It is his cause, because every article of revealed truth is a letter of his name; and the denial of it is an open contempt of his authority, and an impeachment of his veracity. It is this persuasion that must animate you to steadfastness in your holy profession, under all the changes of outward appearance; and to activity in the support of it in your several places and stations.

3. Let your attendance, on gospel ordinances, while you have them in purity, be regular and exemplary. Carelessness in this respect is rebellion against the Lord’s command, and evidences a criminal neglect of his declarative glory, and of the welfare both of the church and of your own precious and immortal souls. Be concerned that your frame of mind, on the calls you have to attend on public ordinances may be like that of David, as represented in the 122nd Psalm, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

4. Beware of resting in any knowledge of the truth which is not saving and experimental, and which has not a sanctifying effect on the heart and life. The truth, received into the heart by faith and love, is a root and principle of holy obedience, according to Ephes. iv. 21, 22, 23, 24. “If so be that ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, winch is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

5. Continue in the exercise of faith and of prayer. Remember that ye owe all your steadfastness to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. The more
steadfast your views of him, whose name is the Lord our Righteousness, you will be the more steadfast in your holy profession. Behold your strength and standing to be not in yourselves, but in Him. And if ye would have faith exercised, evidenced or increased, be much in prayer. “Come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help you in the time of need;” that ye may join with the people of God in all ages, in saying, “A glorious high throne, from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.”
A LETTER TO A DYING FRIEND.
Rev. JOHN ANDERSON, D. D.¹⁶⁴
[For the Evangelical Repository.]

Dr. Cooper,—Dear Sir,—The following letter by the late venerable
John Anderson, D. D., was written in a time of sore bodily sickness from
which the Doctor was beginning to recover. Mr. James Frazer, to whom
it was addressed, had completed his academical studies, and was
engaged in the study of Theology under Dr. A., at that time Professor of
Divinity in the Associate church. Mr. Frazer, by his engaging manners,
amiable disposition, and unaffected piety, was greatly esteemed by his
acquaintances, and particularly by his pastor and teacher of Theology.
He was the only child of his aged parents. He died on the 12th of May,
1817, on which day the letter was written and read to him a few hours
before his departure. In compliance with the request of one of the
Doctor’s elders, I send you a copy of the letter that it may be published
in your paper, and go to many for their edification.

Wm. M. McElwee.

My very dear Sir,—What shall I say to you? But a few days ago I
thought that this illness, from which I am not yet recovered, would
bring me to the house appointed for all living; and still it behooves me
to consider my departure as at hand. How are we to be exercised on the
brink of eternity?

1. In acknowledging our guilt and vileness. It is necessary that we
have the sentence of death in ourselves, knowing that we are wretched
and miserable, poor, and blind, and naked.

2. In looking away from ourselves and every other creature to Jesus
Christ for righteousness and salvation according to his call, Look unto

me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. Considering ourselves as poor sinners to whom God speaks in the word of the gospel, let us be persuaded that he gives us Christ to be the true bread—to be our righteousness and salvation, for as much as he says, My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. Let us depend on the righteousness of Christ alone, as the ground of our pardon and acceptance with God, counting all things but loss and dung that we may be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Let us look away from everything in ourselves, from all our doings and sufferings, from our frames and feelings, and even from our own act of faith, to him who is the object of faith, whose name is the Lord our righteousness. Let each of us call him by this name, with application to ourselves in particular, saying, He is the Lord my righteousness, not doubting that in thus betaking ourselves to him, God will own us as having a sufficient justifying righteousness, on account of which we shall be forever accepted before his throne, and obtain the full possession of the everlasting inheritance. In betaking ourselves thus to Christ, we come out of the region of the broken law, where there is nothing but condemnation and wrath, into the region of the new covenant where there is nothing to be heard but peace through the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel. We should send the law, conscience, and Satan, to Christ our surety for answer to all their claims and challenges. No exercise is more pleasing to God the Father than this; because, hereby, we honour the Son in the character wherein the Father hath sent him, the character of our propitiation, our righteousness.

3. On the brink of eternity we should be exercised in embracing the promises, “as all yea and amen in Christ.” The promises are all in Christ in two ways: first in respect of his righteousness, which is the condition of all the promises, on the account of which we are to look for their fulfilment.—God gives us the promise of pardon, of a new heart, of the Holy Spirit, and of eternal life, to assure us that he is willing to give us these blessings for the sake of his Son’s righteousness. O what encouragement is this to plead the promises, saying to a promising God
in Christ, *Do as thou hast said.*

In the second place, the promises are in Christ, as God gives all promised blessings in giving us Christ, and we receive them all in receiving him. We are to live in faith and die in faith, as the patriarchs did, having seen the promises as a sure foundation for faith to rest upon, being persuaded of them and embracing them, (Heb. xi. 13.) Let us believe our full warrant to rest upon the promises immediately, as our security for the blessings specified in them. The inhabitants of Jerusalem rested on the words of Hezekiah in a time of danger: what infinitely greater reason have you and I to rest upon the words of divine faithfulness for eternal salvation.

4. We should be exercised in depending upon the grace and Spirit of Christ for carrying on and completing the work of our sanctification. Our hearts soon fail; they are never to be trusted. But Christ by his grace and Spirit is the strength of our heart, the strength of our spiritual life, the strength of our faith, of our love, of our repentance, and of our holy desires. We should be encouraged to have our hearts weaned from the world, but we must be willing to owe this to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who giveth power to the faint and increaseth strength to them who have no might. He giveth his Spirit to them that ask him, and then he is said *to be shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Let us seek of him the grace of patience; for he is the *God of all patience and the God of all comfort.* Let us patiently wait for him even when he delays to give us the fulfilment of his word in the sensible answer of our desires and prayers. Let us rest upon his naked word, and continue in prayer until our prayers be turned to praise. Do we know in whom we have believed? we could find no rest in the law, in the world, or anywhere else but in him. We have our righteousness, our strength, our light, our life, our comfort in him; we seek the enjoyment of him as our true and everlasting blessedness,—we should then be persuaded that he will keep that which we have committed to him against that day.

5. My dear friend, it becomes us in all things to be resigned to the will of God in Christ. This resignation is not of ourselves, but in this, as in any other respect, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for us.
If it be his will to spare you, which, with submission to the Lord’s will, is the desire of your sympathizing friend, as well as the desire of your parents and of many others, he will bring you back from the gates of death and will be with you here; but if he is calling you away from the present life, he is about to receive you to himself and your death will be an answer to his intercessory prayer, Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me. (John xvii. 24.) O that the Lord may be with you, when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is no longer formidable to us in Christ; it is but a shadow, it has lost its sting. In looking to Christ we look away from all our fears of death.

6. When we are leaving the church on earth we should offer up some petitions for her welfare—that the Lord may still take care of his own cause—that he may still have a seed to serve him.

I am, dear and much esteemed friend, ever yours,

John Anderson.