

A

CAUTION AGAINST

PREVAILING ERRORS:

BEING A CONVERSATION BETWEEN

A PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR AND HIS PARISHIONER.

BY W. M. M. ENGLER.

PHILADELPHIA :

PRESBYTERIAN TRACT AND SUNDAY SCHOOL SOCIETY.

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## PREVAILING ERRORS, &c.

*Parishioner.* I am glad to see you, Mr. M., and should be happy if you could afford the time for a little conversation on the present state of our church. During a late visit to one of our principal cities, I found the state of the church to be an absorbing subject, and, as I mingled much with respectable individuals of both parties, I had an opportunity of ascertaining that the points of difference between them, were much more serious than I had imagined. I feel constrained also to confess that the objections, which I have heard urged against the old method of stating the doctrines of the gospel, have, in a considerable degree, shaken my confidence, and reduced me, at length, to doubt what form of doctrine I ought to believe.

*Pastor.* I regret, Mr. C., that your belief in the Calvinistic doctrines, as generally exhibited in Presbyterian pulpits, should, in the least degree, have been affected; for these, according to my conviction, are the doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures; but I am not surprised, because your reception of them, in the first instance, was probably not so much the result of examination, as of mere education. You believed, because all around you believed; and hence you never felt the necessity of fortifying your position by arguments derived from the word of God. It is lamentably true, that many profess *orthodoxy* who cannot render one reason for their peculiar faith. The consequences of this easy credulity are readily foreseen. The first contact with error, if it be advocated with plausibility, unsettles the mind, and, unless there be an immediate and careful examination of the grounds of our faith, an entire revolution in opinion may take place.

*Parishioner.* I acknowledge, that I have received my creed too much on trust, and that I found myself incompetent to defend it, when it was ingeniously assailed. My present unhappy state of doubt, however, has made me

sincerely anxious to know in what the truth consists; and I think I shall not be so easily convinced as I have formerly been.

*Pastor.* I commend your caution; but still you must not verge to the opposite extreme, and instead of being too credulous, become proof against argument.

*Parishioner.* My mind is open to conviction, and I can sincerely say, show me the truth and I will heartily embrace it. Since, however, I have heard the doctrines of our church so differently stated by men who have been educated theologians, you will admit that it is natural that I should feel some difficulty in forming a definite opinion. Besides, theologians of both parties appeal, with the same seeming confidence, to the standards of our church as expressing their views. Sometimes, therefore, I am induced to believe that the differences are material and real; and sometimes that they are but different modes of expressing the same thing.

*Pastor.* That there exists a difference of opinion none can doubt, and from a careful examination of the subject, I am fully convinced that it is more than a contest about words; it is a substantial difference of views respecting the cardinal doctrines of the Gospel. I am aware that many affirm, that both parties alike admit the great facts of religion, and only disagree in the philosophy of those facts, or in their modes of explaining them; but if words and theories have any meaning, the language and theories of the two parties in the church, convey essentially different ideas.

The Calvinistic system is a nicely adjusted and intelligible system; it forms a whole, each part explaining every other part; the rejection or modification of any portion of it, necessarily leads to the rejection or modification of every other portion; and accordingly we find the innovations of the present day have been thrown into a regular system, which, in all its great features, is distinct from Calvinism. Both cannot be true; one must be false. If it be your desire, I shall be pleased to review the doctrines in dispute, not in the spirit of controversy, but in a meek reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.

*Parishioner.* This is precisely what I desire, and while I shall regard your statements with deference, I will freely communicate my difficulties as they arise.

*Pastor.* We will begin then with the subject of man's

APOSTASY and the doctrines connected with that event. I need not repeat the terms employed in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, to express these doctrines, as these are familiar to you already ; but will state my views of the subject in as simple a manner as possible.

Thus, at the creation of Adam, God entered into a covenant with him, regarding him as the head of the race, and suspending on his conduct, the holiness and consequent happiness, or the sinfulness and consequent unhappiness of all his descendants. In this transaction Adam is called a federal or representative head, from the fact that his obedience or disobedience was to benefit or injure his posterity. Adam failed in the prescribed act of obedience, and thus not only forfeited the favour of God and became a depraved being, but agreeably to the terms of the covenant, brought all his posterity under the curse of God. Every individual of the race is thus regarded by God, as chargeable with the *first sin* of their representative, just as if they had individually committed it themselves. That is, the sin is imputed to them ; it is set to their account ; and in the eye of the law, they are guilty of it, or answerable for its legal consequences. As a consequence of this sin, the whole race have become totally depraved, having lost their original righteousness and become corrupt in their whole nature. Having made this brief statement, I will now wait for your objections.

*Parishioner.* Your view of this subject is precisely the one which I had been accustomed to receive until important objections were suggested to my mind. And first permit me to inquire, what evidence you have that God ever entered into a covenant with Adam ? I cannot find the terms *covenant* or *representative* in the whole transaction, neither can I see that God dealt with Adam in any other than a personal manner.

*Pastor.* Well then, let us ascertain what a covenant is. It is an agreement between parties containing a stipulation of something to be performed, with the annexed conditions of a promise and a penalty. Thus in the present case, God and Adam were the parties contracting ; the duty or service required was abstinence from a particular fruit ; the promise, evidently implied, was life and happiness in case of obedience ; the penalty for disobedience, was death. These particulars evidently imply the idea of a covenant. Whether the terms themselves are found in the record is not mate-

rial, if the idea is evidently conveyed. The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, and yet it is generally adopted by evangelical Christians to express their belief in a cardinal doctrine of Scripture. Paul in his comparison between Christ and Adam, proceeds on the assumption of a covenant; and Hosea alludes to it, as might be shown, when he says, "But they like men (in the margin, *like Adam*) have transgressed the covenant." Hosea, vi. 7.

*Parishioner.* Permit me to interrupt you. You say a covenant implies an agreement between parties; but where have we the evidence that Adam expressed his consent? And even if he did, how do we learn that this covenant had respect to any but himself?

*Pastor.* As to his agreement, although not in so many words expressed, yet can we imagine any possible grounds on which it could have been withheld? He was a holy being; he had entire confidence in his Maker; and he could not have objected to the difficulty of the terms. God gave him access to all the trees of the garden except one, and merely required of him to abstain from that one. In the nature of things he could not have murmured at such an easy test of obedience. I will not urge, that God as a Sovereign had a right to demand his consent, but I do insist, that Adam could not have objected to a stipulation so reasonable and advantageous. Besides, if his consent had not been freely given, would he not have urged this after his transgression, as a reason why the penalty should not be exacted of him? This he might plausibly have done; yet, instead of thus expostulating, he attempted merely to excuse his disobedience, by pleading the enticement of Eve. Instead of saying, Lord thou knowest I never consented to this arrangement, he merely urged that he failed on his part of it, through strong temptation. So certain therefore was his concurrence, that there was really no necessity that it should be recorded.

But again, you ask, where is the proof that his act was to affect any other than himself? The event proves that it affected his posterity. Thus, since his failure of obedience, the curse threatened against him has been transmitted through all ages, to every individual of his race. The earth was cursed, and all men suffer on that account; the peculiar curse pronounced against Eve in relation to pain in child-bearing, affects her sex; the loss of God's favour, and the depravation of nature, were not confined to Adam,

but fall upon all his posterity. These facts certainly prove that Adam acted in a public character. But still further, the first promise of a Messiah, which was given immediately after Adam's fall, was certainly not confined to him. It had a reference to the race, as ruined by this act of the first man. If God had not foreseen that the whole family of mankind were to be involved in sin and misery, in consequence of this transaction, there would have been no propriety in this early announcement of the advent of a Saviour who was to become a propitiation for the sins of the world.

*Parishioner.* You say, that in consequence of Adam's representative character, his first sin was so *imputed* to all his posterity, that they are regarded as guilty of it; now it appears difficult for me to conceive, how the personal sin of Adam could become my personal sin, or how I could become criminally involved in it.

*Pastor.* You misapprehend my statement. I never supposed the possibility of any such transfer of moral character as you allude to. Adam's personal sin is not my personal sin, nor is his criminality in that sin, my criminality. This is no part of the faith of our church, although many, to serve a purpose, have so represented it. The true doctrine of imputation is, that agreeably to a divine constitution, the descendants of Adam are held legally responsible for his first sin, and are individually answerable for its consequences. The act by which he broke covenant was his own act, and cannot possibly be so transferred as to become the personal act of any other individual; the criminality of the act is also his own, and cannot be transferred; but, as that act was performed by him as a public person, it is legally reckoned to all whom he represented, and the penalty incurred by it, is exacted from them.

*Parishioner.* Still it appears to me that it would be unjust to charge to me the consequences of an act, in which I had no agency, and which was committed thousands of years before I was born.

*Pastor.* With our imperfect and partial view of God's arrangements, there are many occasions, in which the charge of injustice may be urged with the same plausibility. Thus you might allege, that God was unjust in electing some to everlasting life, and in passing by others; and you might also say, he was unjust in making such wide distinctions in the worldly conditions of men. Such charges,

however, are always rashly made. But let us consider the charges in relation to the present transaction. By a legal arrangement, the justice and propriety of which are not questioned, a child is put under the care of a guardian, often without his consent, and yet he is bound to abide by the consequences of the acts of this guardian. In law, the acts of the guardian are the acts of the ward, and he is held answerable for them. Thus, also, the man who becomes security for another, in relation to a debt, is regarded by the law as answerable for the debt, and in case of the failure of the original debtor, he takes the place of the principal, and is treated exactly as if he himself had contracted the debt. This is illustrated in the case of Paul and Onesimus. (Philemon 18, 19.) An employer also becomes responsible for the acts of his agent; a country becomes liable for the acts of its ambassador at a foreign court; and, in our own land, although comparatively few have the right to vote for representatives in Congress, yet men, women, and children, are held alike responsible for the acts of their representatives. These few representatives may, for instance, declare war, which, in its consequences, may not only affect the lives of many, but the interests of every man, woman, and child in the nation. In all these cases, we have the idea of imputation, in which the acts of one man are reckoned to the account of those whom he represents, and yet we never hear the charge of injustice seriously urged against the law which has sanctioned this principle.

*Parishioner.* I confess that this view of the subject obviates in a great measure the objections which I had conceived against it; yet still, might not our relation to Adam be merely a natural one, such as that between son and father, and might not our sinfulness of character be merely the natural result of such a relation; just as the children of drunkards suffer poverty and disgrace from the intemperance of their parents?

*Pastor.* I have already shown that more than a natural relation subsisted between Adam and his posterity; but suppose your conjecture to be true, how would it alter the case? Would it not be as unjust in this case as in the other, that we should be made to suffer for the sins of another? Nay, would it not be much more strikingly unjust? For in the one case we would certainly suffer innocently, but in the other we would suffer according to a divine, and

therefore a just arrangement—just such an arrangement as we have already seen is recognised as wise and just, by all legal codes of civilized countries. Besides, this supposition of a mere natural relation, will not answer for want of analogy. Thus Adam sinned and his posterity without a single exception have become corrupt, but a drunkard sins, and yet his children are oftentimes temperate, respected, and prosperous.

*Parishioner.* This seems plausible, and yet I confess I should like additional proof of the existence and effects of this covenant relation.

*Pastor.* I would refer you then to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Chapter v. 12—21, in which for the purpose of illustrating the doctrine of justification, a comparison is instituted between Christ and Adam, in their representative character. I say in their representative character, for in no other respect, as I conceive, could the comparison hold good; and this view is confirmed by the expression of the Apostle, in which he styles Adam the *figure or type of him that was to come*, evidently meaning Christ; and also in 1 Cor. xv. 45, in which Adam and Christ are respectively styled the first and last Adam, plainly referring to their public character, as standing at the head of their respective races. Adam represented the whole family of mankind, Christ the whole family of believers. As the first Adam brought death and woe on all whom he represented, so the last Adam, or Christ, purchased life and immortality for all whom he represented.

Keeping this in view, we will now revert to the passage, Romans v. and examine it together. It reads thus:

“12. Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. 13. For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that is to come; 15. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16. And not as it was by one that sinned so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17. For if by one man's offence

death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. 18. Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19. For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20. Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; 21. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Such is the passage, and without entering into a minute and critical examination of its several parts,\* you will see obviously presented in it the following points: (1) That the sin of Adam is regarded as the source of our ruin; this sin is thus expressed, "by one man sin entered into the world," "through the offence of one," "by one man's offence," "by one man's disobedience." (2.) This sin of Adam caused death, that is the infliction of the penal evil which God had threatened as the punishment of sin; "by one man sin entered into the world, *and death by sin.*" (3.) This death or penal evil, affected not Adam alone, but all his posterity; "and so death passed on *all men,*" "through the offence of one *many be dead,*" "by one man's offence, *death reigned.*" (4.) This penalty of death, was inflicted upon all because they had become sinners in Adam, "and so death passed on all, for that *all have sinned,*" "by one man's disobedience, *many were made sinners.*" (5.) All men became sinners not merely by personal transgression, this is not the point the Apostle is discussing, but by the imputation of Adam's sin; "so death passed on all men, for that, [*or in whom,*] all have sinned," "for until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law, nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned *after the similitude of Adam's transgression.*" Here you will see that the Apostle asserts, that there could be no sin without law, and yet before the giving of the law of Moses, there was sin, and consequently death, and this death

\*A very satisfactory analysis of it may be found in Professor Hodge's Commentary on the Romans.

reigned universally, even over those who had not committed actual sin, or "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Even infants died before the law of Moses, and their death was the evidence of their sin. But they had not sinned actually, therefore it was by the disobedience of Adam that they were constituted sinners; in other words, as the whole drift of the passage evidently shows, they, with all others, were regarded and treated as sinners through the imputation of Adam's sin. Read over the passage in connexion with these leading ideas, and all appears clear and consistent; and then we can understand the other part of the comparison, in which Jesus Christ, as the representative of his people, is set forth as obviating the evils of the first man's apostasy. The free gift is by him, many are made righteous through his obedience, justification of life is by him. As sin abounded by Adam, grace did much more abound in Christ, and as sin reigned unto death, so grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord. I have but glanced at this passage, and yet how clearly do we see in it the representative character of the first and last Adam, with the respective consequences of their different conduct.

*Parishioner.* I am satisfied on these points, and now, I should feel obliged if you would give me your views on the nature of the penalty incurred by our race in consequence of their legal connexion with Adam. We often hear of men being born with a nature totally depraved; how is this? Are men *physically* depraved? Is the very substance of the soul corrupt? Are they as bad as they can be?

*Pastor.* I perceive that you have been more or less affected by the misrepresentations of those who oppose the orthodox faith. They distort the truth, and then charge their perversions on those who utterly reject them. Orthodox Presbyterians neither affirm that the substance of the soul is corrupted by the fall, nor that all men are by nature as depraved as they can be. We can attach no very definite idea to the expression *physical depravity*, the doctrine with which we are charged; we, however, believe that all men are "*by nature* the children of wrath," that is, that on account of the transgression of our first father, they are born under the frown and curse of God; and also, that they are depraved in all the faculties of their souls. The penalty annexed to the covenant was death, a term

which is used by the sacred writers, to denote not only the separation of the spirit from the body, but all the penal consequences of sin. When we speak of the infliction of the penalty upon Adam's posterity on account of his offence, we do not mean that any positive evil was infused into them by the Almighty, as this would be an impeachment of his spotless perfections; but we mean, that they are destitute of that holy conformity to the image of God, in which Adam was created, and in which he continued until his disobedience; and that a positive disposition to sin, and universal corruption of the soul result from the defect or absence of this original righteousness. The first dispositions and inclinations are evil; the understanding is so darkened, that it perceives not the beauties of holiness; the will so rebellious, that it resists the divine authority; the affections so debased, that they exclusively fasten on sensual objects. This corruption is so *general* that none have escaped, "they have all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no not one;" it is so *extreme* and *radical*, that we are said to be "dead in trespasses and in sins."

The language of Scripture in portraying the fallen condition of our race is remarkably emphatic, and clearly conveys the impression that the disease of our nature is one of the most virulent character. "Shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin," our conduct proves that we are "transgressors from the womb;" the corrupt fountain is continually sending forth its corrupt streams. The natural tendency of this corruption, is obvious; it estranges us from God here, and if not rectified by grace, inevitably brings upon us the pains of the second death. Thus, original sin consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin or liability to punishment on account of it, together with the loss of original righteousness and the corruption of our whole nature. This may be an awful picture, and yet in no one lineament is it overdrawn. Look abroad through the world; see the universal spread of vice and misery; behold the triumphs of disease and death, even over the infant of a day old, who not having personally transgressed, could not thus be punished for personal sin; and explain, if it be possible, the painful facts, upon any other principle than that which has been already stated.

*Parishioner.* I admit the depravity of man in its fullest extent, but is it not sufficient to say, without any reference

to a covenant arrangement, that it results in some undefinable way from our connexion with Adam?

*Pastor.* I think not. This is, to say the least of it, an obscure way of speaking, and absolutely explains nothing. For my part, I feel anxious to justify the ways of God to man, and, as the Divine Being has condescended to explain his procedure, I rejoice to know that the calamity which has befallen our race, has not come in an undefinable way, but agreeably to a just divine arrangement.

*Parishioner.* Permit me, my dear sir, to inquire in this connexion, why it is, that some, in explaining the nature of sin, seem so strenuously to insist that all sin consists in voluntary action.

*Pastor.* The design is obvious. The opponents of the doctrine which we have been urging, have defined sin to be in every case a wilful breach of a known law; and, according to this definition, they have asserted that there is no original sin in the sense which the orthodox teach. If their definition of sin be exact and accurate, the doctrine of original sin must be abandoned. But their definition is not correct; sin is not merely a transgression of the law, but also a want of conformity to it; and besides, as we have already seen, sin may be *imputed*, upon principles of acknowledged justice. It is not therefore true that every sin consists in voluntary action. It is the dictate of common sense, as well as of Scripture, that before the voluntary act of sinning, there must be a previous sinful disposition. The bent or tendency of the mind is towards sin, and when not resisted and overcome, actual sin must ensue. We are told that "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts," &c. and this is on the principle that a "corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Men must therefore be corrupt in heart, before they can be corrupt in action, and it is utterly incredible that all men should become sinners, if it be true, as some maintain, that the heart has no inherent or native sinful bias or disposition.

*Parishioner.* I am satisfied. I find that my difficulties on this important doctrine of the Fall, arose not from any thing in the doctrine itself, but from my ignorance of the manner in which it should be stated and defended. Now sir, if you have no objection, we will converse on the method of MAN'S RECOVERY.

*Pastor.* I am most ready to comply with your request; and first we will consider the provision made for

our recovery by Jesus Christ, the last Adam. The doctrine of Atonement, as I understand it, I will briefly state. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, being God and Man in one person, offered himself by a divine arrangement, as the substitute of those who were eternally elected to everlasting life, and being recognized as standing in their place, he obeyed the preceptive law for them, and having their sins imputed to him, or set to his account, he sustained the penalty which was due to them. Here you will perceive is a double imputation, as we have explained it; our sins were set to Christ's account, and the law exacted from him the whole punishment that was due to them, and thus we become fully released from the penalty; and Christ's righteousness, resulting from his perfect obedience to the preceptive law, is set to our account, and thus we become entitled to heaven.

*Parishioner.* Before you proceed further I wish to propose a few questions; and first, permit me to ask how it is, consistent with our notions of such a relation, that Christ should be the *eternal* Son of the Father as you have just affirmed? I have been led to believe that Christ became the Son of God merely in consequence of his official designation as Mediator, and not by an *eternal generation*, of which I cannot form any adequate and distinct conception.

*Pastor.* I would state first in reply to your query, that the terms Father and Son are correlates; that is, if the first person in the Trinity was a *Father* from everlasting, the second person must have been a *Son* from everlasting; the one evidently implies the other. If we cannot with propriety style Christ the *everlasting* Son, neither can we style the first person in the Trinity, the *everlasting* Father.

Again, the peculiar designation of the second person in the Trinity is, the Son of God; his Sonship is his *proper personality*, and if we say that his Sonship was the result of the divine will, as was his appointment as Mediator, we at once declare his inferiority to the Father, or, in other words, divest him of his divine character. It is in full view of this result that we find the Socinians uniformly denying the eternal generation of the Son; and those who sneer at it in our own church, are just so far preparing the way for the introduction of Socinianism.

*Parishioner.* I see that it is so, and therefore I am not disposed further to object to the phraseology employed, to

express the peculiar relation between the Father and the Son. I proceed therefore to other parts of your statement. You say Christ was the substitute of his people, that their sins were imputed to him and for them he made atonement. To the doctrine of imputation I have no longer any objection. I can easily conceive, as you have already explained the doctrine, that the sins of men might be set to Christ's account as a surety, while he still remains, "holy, harmless, and undefiled." But I am anxious to know upon what ground you affirm that Christ was a proper substitute, and that his atonement was a real satisfaction to the divine law for the sins of his people?

*Pastor.* This is a vital inquiry and I will endeavour to answer it. Take this view of the case. The sins of men made them answerable to the justice of God; this justice demanded their death unless they could make reparation to the injured law; their character and circumstances, as you will admit, put it entirely out of their power to make such reparation; Christ appeared at this juncture to stand in their place; by assuming humanity he became a proper subject of law, and by the power of his divinity, he was adequate to the great undertaking; he accordingly, in this character of surety, became obedient even unto death, and with his expiring breath, declared that the work of atonement was "finished."

For the truth of this view, I will merely refer you to some of the simple declarations of the word of God. I affirm that Christ was a substitute for others, and the proof is contained in such inspired declarations as these: "Surely he hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows." "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him, and with his stripes, *we* are healed." "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all." "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin." "He bare the sin of *many*." "Even Christ *our* passover was sacrificed for *us*." "He appeared to put away *sin* by the sacrifice of *himself*." "He died the just for the unjust that he might bring *us* to God." "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet, peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for *us*." Such passages might be multiplied, but these will be sufficient to prove the vicarious character of Christ.

*Parishioner.* They are quite sufficient; but were the sufferings of Christ a *special* offering for the sins of the elect, that is, were they exclusively for their benefit?

*Pastor.* Strictly speaking, these sufferings were designed for the exclusive benefit of the elect; and for their salvation alone, the atonement is made efficacious. This is the only consistent view of the subject. Atonement was made for sin; sin can only exist in connexion with a sinner; it is never a mere abstraction; Christ's death therefore must have had reference to the sins of particular persons, and if efficacious, then these persons must be released from the claims of a broken law. To say, therefore, that Christ died or made atonement for the sins of any who shall be finally lost, is equivalent to saying, either that his atonement was so far a failure, or that God had unrighteously exacted from such, another payment of the debt, which had been discharged by Christ the surety. I know it is maintained that Christ made by his death, a general satisfaction to the justice of God, rendering it possible for him consistently to pardon whom he pleased. But this is language without meaning. Justice had specific claims against every sinner, and if it were satisfied at all, it must have been in relation to such claims. If Christ bore the penalty for all, then the specific claims of justice on each and all must be satisfied, and all will be saved; but if he bore the penalty only for some, then on the same principle only some will be saved.

There is another view of this subject which has unhappily gained currency, which represents the death of Christ as a mere tragical exhibition before the universe, to testify God's abhorrence of sin. In this theory, Christ's substitution is denied; he is not regarded as even guilty by imputation; his death was in no wise a sacrifice; nor were any of his sufferings of a penal nature; and the pardon of sin is effected by a mere act of God's sovereignty. This scheme, is not only absurd, but abhorrent and contrary to all Scripture. It can never be explained in consistency with such passages as we have already cited. How the sufferings of a perfectly sinless being, who was not guilty or liable to punishment on account of imputed sin, could prove God's abhorrence of sin, never has been and never can be explained.

Besides, it is evident that in no proper sense, could the death of Christ, under this view, be an atonement; for it had no special reference to sinners. The claims of the law

are still unsatisfied, and if any be saved, it is in consequence of God's withdrawing his just claims, and recalling his threatenings. Indeed, it seems to me that on this hypothesis there was no necessity for Christ's suffering at all, for God, as a Sovereign, could have pardoned the sinner as well without, as with a display, that made no amends to a violated law. Not one circumstance essential to the idea of an atonement enters into this scheme, and therefore it is one, with which even a Socinian could not quarrel. The advocates of it may very well say, that the atonement secures the salvation of no one, for certainly as they understand it, it *can* secure the salvation of no one.

*Parishioner.* The last scheme of atonement to which you have adverted, I utterly disclaim, as contrary to all just scriptural interpretation; still it seems to me that your idea of a definite atonement is liable to various objections. First, you say, Christ stood in the law place of his people, and becoming by imputation responsible for their sins, bore the penalty which was due to them. Now this penalty was, as you have intimated, death temporal, spiritual, and eternal, and in this latter are included despair and remorse of conscience; now surely Christ did not bear this penalty with the attending circumstances. And then second, if the atonement had not respect to all men, how can the Gospel offer be tendered to them, and how can they be blameworthy in their rejection of it?

*Pastor.* In relation to your first inquiry, I answer, the penalty of the broken law and nothing less, was endured by the Redeemer. If this were not so, then the penalty is not yet paid and justice still has claims against the sinner which will forever prevent his salvation. This penalty was death, but we are not informed, what is comprehended under that term. If this penalty is exacted of a mere creature, we are aware that it includes temporal death, the loss of God's image and favour, and consequently of personal happiness here, and eternal banishment from his presence hereafter. In this latter condition the sinner will ever despair of recovering from his ruin, and will be overwhelmed with remorse. These feelings, instead of being an essential part of the penalty, may be the mere result of its infliction on a sinful creature, who is conscious of his ill desert. But we are not told that these circumstances may not be materially modified in the infliction of the penalty on such a person as Christ, without at all affecting the na-

ture of the penalty itself. We do not degrade the subject by an attempt to measure the amount of our Saviour's sufferings, by a sort of arithmetical process; we merely insist that they were of a penal nature, and bore to the law the relation of a sanction; as it is said "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin;" and again, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Christ it is true, could not suffer eternally, neither could he be the subject of despair and remorse; and yet as God-man, capable of enduring infinitely more than we can conceive, it would be presumption in us to affirm, that he could not have borne the whole penalty, and the precise penalty, in his own person, in a few hours, which would have proved eternally destructive to the whole universe had it been inflicted on it. The penalty of the law is one thing, your circumstantial definition of it may be another. The penalty which made the mighty Redeemer sorrowful unto death for a few hours, may be the same penalty which calls forth the eternal wailings of hell. Thus, for the purpose of illustration; a man justly convicted of an offence against the laws of his country, is punished by imprisonment and hard labour. Conscious of his crime, he may feel the deepest remorse for its commission, while undergoing the infliction of this penalty. But suppose a disinterested friend should, from certain considerations, offer to endure the penalty in his stead, and the law should accept him as a substitute, he would actually endure the penalty of the law, and yet he could not possibly feel any remorse for the imputed crime.

The mistake on this point arises from a failure to distinguish between a mere creature, and the God-man mediator, suffering the same punishment. How will we venture to say, that Jesus could not endure the penalty of the law, when we mark the agony which he suffered? Independently of his excruciating bodily sufferings on the cross, when we observe the blood gushing from his pores in consequence of mental anguish, and hear his piteous cry under the desertion of God, by what rule are we to measure his pains? How can we say he could not endure this penalty, until we can first comprehend what is included in his being *bruised* by the omnipotent Father and made a *curse* for us?

But I come to your second inquiry. You ask how a general Gospel offer can be made upon the ground of a definite atonement; or how men can be charged with crimi-

nality in remaining impenitent? I can perceive no inconsistency between the two positions. Christ has told me, that he laid down his life for his sheep—this is definite atonement; and Christ has instructed me to preach the Gospel to every creature; his authoritative command therefore is my voucher. He has not instructed me to say to any particular individual that the blood of Christ was shed for him, neither has he authorised me to say to all in the mass, that an atonement has been made for them; he has merely told me to preach the Gospel to all; to display the wonders of his dying love; to unfold the ample nature of the atonement for the salvation of all who repose their faith in it; to explain the terms on which the soul may become interested in it; and to give his own blessed assurance, that whosoever believeth shall be saved. This appears to me to be perfectly plain.

But then you say, if there be some for whom no atonement was made, they must be exonerated from blame for their unbelief. This however is a mere cavil. No man is condemned on the ground that there is not a sufficiency in the atonement to save; for, considered in its own nature, it is of unlimited sufficiency, and its benefits are sincerely and affectionately offered to all, with the gracious assurance that “he that cometh to Christ shall in no wise be cast out.” The sinner, therefore, who perishes under the Gospel, is justly chargeable with his own destruction. He is righteously condemned, for his wilful and obstinate preference of sin to holiness. “This is the condemnation that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

*Parishioner.* You have cleared this subject to my satisfaction, and I will now revert to another part of your original statement. You said that Christ, by his sinless obedience to the law, wrought out a perfect righteousness which is imputed to his people for justification.

*Pastor.* Yes, I have said so. The imputation of the righteousness of Christ, who fulfilled the whole law both in its letter and spirit, constitutes the sinner just in the sight of God. Understand me; I do not mean that the personal righteousness of Christ becomes the sinner's personal righteousness, for that is impossible; but that it is set to his account, as if he himself had performed it, and in the eye of the law, he is regarded as righteous, and is said to be justified. In this righteousness the sinner becomes in-

terested by an exercise of faith; that is, the sinner upon conviction that he cannot obtain justification by the deeds of the law, makes a believing application to Christ as his surety, whereupon Christ's righteousness is set over to the sinner's account, and the law recognises it as his, as much as if he had accomplished it himself. Hence we are said to be justified by faith.

*Parishioner.* If we are justified in this way, entirely irrespective of our deeds, is there not a danger that we may feel a diminished sense of obligation to the law?

*Pastor.* Wicked men may pervert the doctrine, but those who believe it truly, are in no danger in this respect. The same Scriptures, which unfold this doctrine, declare the perpetual authority of the law as a rule of life. Our obligations to obedience are in no sense diminished. We do not indeed obey it in the hope of obtaining justification from it, but we obey it because God commands; because faith necessarily leads to obedience; because we cannot be personally holy without such obedience, and above all, because the sinner who is justified, is at the same time *renewed* in the image of God, and therefore loves the divine law, and desires above all things to comply with its holy requisitions. God forbids, and all the circumstances of the case forbid, that because grace is manifested in our justification, we should live in sin that grace may abound.

*Parishioner.* I have heard it affirmed that justification is no more than pardon.

*Pastor.* I am aware that this is said, but the opinion must be the result of a very partial and imperfect comprehension of the way of salvation. Justification is a term derived from legal proceedings, and is the act by which an individual is acquitted of a charge on evidence that he is not legally answerable for it. The act pronounces him just. On the contrary an individual may be pardoned by an act of clemency, when the law adjudges him guilty. In justification therefore, not only are our personal iniquities pardoned, but our persons are accepted as righteous in the sight of God, on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.

*Parishioner.* With what propriety can it be said that God pardons our sins, if Christ has made a full atonement for them? If he has *paid* our debt, how can God be said to *forgive* it?

*Pastor.* Christ it is true, paid our debt, but it was mere grace which accepted that payment instead of exacting it

from us personally; so with propriety it may be said to be forgiven us, although paid by our surety. The very ground on which alone our pardon was possible, was provided by the grace of God. He pardons us therefore, although he exacts from our substitute a full payment.

*Parishioner.* You say a man is justified by faith; is faith ever the proper ground of justification?

*Pastor.* Certainly not. The righteousness of Christ, the object which faith contemplates, is the exclusive ground of justification; and we are said to be justified by faith, because it is the means by which the righteousness of Christ is received and appropriated. To say that the mere act of believing in God's plan of mercy, is accounted our righteousness, and becomes the basis of our justification, is no better than to say, that we are justified by our works, for faith is our own act. This opinion is the necessary result of a denial of the doctrine of imputation. For if our sins were not imputed to Christ to be atoned for, and his righteousness is not imputed to us for justification, then, God must pardon us by a sovereign act, without any satisfaction made to his justice, or he must receive our own act of faith as cancelling our obligations, or we must perish.

In other words, our only hope must be that God will cease to be just in order that he may be merciful. But this can never be; God has no "*darling* attribute" in the way of preference, but all his attributes are equally dear to him, as being equally essential to his nature. Justice and mercy must concur and unite in the sinner's salvation, and this can only be the case on the principle before stated, that Christ as our substitute has not only endured the penalty of the law in our stead, thus saving us from the horrors of perdition, but that he has obeyed the law in our behalf, thus furnishing us a righteousness for justification, and thereby securing our title to heaven. What is called the New Divinity most fatally errs in this particular; commencing with the denial of imputation, it finally leaves the sinner without any scriptural title to heaven. Whatever others may say, it is my firm conviction, that the doctrine of justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is essential to the Gospel scheme. Take it out of the system and the Gospel is no longer good news; attempt to modify it, and the scheme of divine truth is marred; suggest a substitute for it, and God will pour confusion on the impious invention. Thus you may see that the doctrines of truth so far as they have fallen under our consid-

ration, beautifully cohere; while a system of error, the further we trace it, becomes worse and more disjointed.

*Parishioner.* I have never seen the importance of the doctrine of imputation in so clear a light as I do now, and I readily acknowledge that the admission of it, is necessary to a just comprehension of the plan of salvation. I am still anxious, however, to have my mind settled respecting the mode in which a sinner becomes interested in the atonement of Jesus Christ.

*Pastor.* I will endeavour to make a plain statement on the subject. Thus we have already seen, that by the fall, men are entirely alienated from God; they are averse to all that is good, they are prone to all that is evil; they are the enemies of God and unwilling to be reconciled to him on the humiliating terms of the Gospel; in a word, to use the language of the Confession of Faith, "man by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation, so as a natural man being altogether averse from that which is good and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or prepare himself thereunto."

This is the situation in which the Gospel finds all men, and for the remedying of which it is especially provided. Although all men may hear the Gospel, yet only some receive its benefits, and the reason is, that they exclusively are made willing in the day of God's power while the rest, by a righteous exercise of divine sovereignty, are left to their own guilty choice in rejecting the offered salvation. The Holy Spirit, in such cases, accompanies the word with his almighty energy, and makes it effectual in enlightening the understanding, subduing the will, and renewing the heart. Regeneration is a thorough and instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit, implying a change in all the views, dispositions, and habits of the sinner, which could never be effected by any human power. In it the sinner who was once blind, now sees, he who was once dead, now lives.

*Parishioner.* Although I admit, sir, that man is depraved, yet I have been inclined to believe that he was not entirely disabled to good. I have supposed that his moral and not his natural faculties were affected by the fall, and hence that his inability referred merely to the will, and was manifested in his indisposition to receive the Gospel. And the reference of Scripture appears to be to this kind of inability, when it is said, "we are made *willing* in the day

of God's power," and in that other passage "ye *will not* come unto me that ye may have life." Do not these passages imply that a sinner possesses a natural, but not a moral ability to believe, and that he *can* if he *will* repent?

*Pastor.* If the distinction between natural and moral ability contemplates no more than this, that in our natural condition, we possess all the faculties of mind, which a regenerated man employs in the service of God, I am ready to admit it. The same natural faculties characterise both the regenerate and unregenerate, and the work of the Spirit on the mind does not increase the number of these faculties. But if the distinction implies that these natural faculties are not disabled by the Fall, this I deny, as being contrary to fact.

As an example, the understanding is called a natural faculty, and yet we are assured that it may be so blinded, that the natural man is not able to discern the things of the Spirit. And so it is of all the other faculties; they are perverted by the fall, and are just as much disabled to good, as the will, or governing faculty, as it has been called. The distinction under consideration, however, is of no service in the case, which it is intended to relieve. Let us suppose that the natural faculties of men were entirely unaffected by the Fall and possessed all their pristine vigour and purity, are they sufficient of themselves to accomplish true repentance and faith? Is it not, on the contrary, admitted by all that they are not sufficient? Have not the moral faculties an important part to act? If then the inability of the sinner resides solely in his will, is not the inability as complete and insuperable, as if it had reference to every other faculty? If I had but one hand, and a work was assigned me which could not at all be accomplished except by the aid of two hands, my inability would be just the same as to the result, as if I were deprived of both hands.

Besides, faith and repentance are eminently moral acts, and no natural ability, in the sense in which the terms are used, can possibly qualify a man for their performance. I admit that there is an inability arising from a defect of will or disposition, and hence it is said "ye *will not* come unto me that ye may have life;" but the inability refers to all the faculties, and hence it is said, "no man *can* come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." This entire inability is evidently presupposed in the very nature of the Gospel provisions, both in the work of Christ

and of the Holy Spirit. We are dead, until Christ gives us life—we are dead, until the Spirit quickens us into life. I feel therefore justified in saying, that it is deceptive to say to the sinner “you can repent if you will,” for there is no appropriate ability for the work, but that which is imparted by the Holy Spirit.

*Parishioner.* According to this representation, I cannot perceive on what principle the sinner can be charged with guilt in continuing impenitent. Is God so hard a master, as to require of us that which we are in no sense able to perform?

*Pastor.* You suppose a man's obligation is to be measured by his ability, and hence that the want of ability, cancels his obligation. Now this, if it be laid down as a general rule, is utterly untenable. A man may on this principle at any time escape from his obligations by bringing on himself an inability to fulfil them. Is not this a strange and dangerous sentiment? The truth is, that in the present case, our obligation arises from the command of God, our inability arises from our sin, and hence is a sin itself, instead of being an excuse for disobedience. We have seen that it was righteous in God to impute to us the sin of Adam. Now our inability is one of the consequences of this imputation and is in itself sinful. The criminal existence of it, therefore, can certainly be no reason why God should relax his claims upon us. It is just then that God should still continue to demand, although we have lost the requisite ability to obey. It is true that the sinner is under a solemn obligation to repent, believe, love God, and obey all his commandments; it is true that God expressly requires him to do these things; and yet it is equally true, that he can meet the requisition only in the strength of God, supernaturally communicated to him. It was in this view of our inability, that a Saviour was provided, who could furnish us with necessary ability, to believe, repent, and perform all holy acts. We have an ability therefore of some kind, but it is solely that ability which God imparts, when he enables us to work out our own salvation, by working in us both to will and to do. We never find Paul boasting of his natural ability, but we hear him exclaiming “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”

If you still say, that there is an apparent injustice in the case, I would answer, that the same difficulty attends

the scheme which ascribes to the sinner, moral inability. You acknowledge, that divine power must remove this moral inability before the sinner can receive Christ, of course until this be done, the sinner is released from his obligations; for a little reflection will show that the inability is just as real and insuperable in the one case as in the other.

*Parishioner.* If this be the condition of the sinner, he is surely to be pitied.

*Pastor.* He is indeed to be pitied as you say, but certainly not as an innocent person, for he is criminal in this defect, as we have already seen. But you may, on the same principle of sympathy, pity the Christian, for in himself considered, even after his renewal by the Holy Spirit, he is entirely dependant on gracious aid for all his ability. He cannot think a good thought, or perform a right action, without a divine influence. He feels this dependence; he recognises it in all his prayers; and in all his undertakings he is sensible that his sufficiency is of God. Why then should we ascribe an ability to the sinner which does not even belong to a saint? or why should we consider it a case of hardship for the sinner to be wholly indebted to God, for all his ability to obey the law, when God's own chosen and beloved people can do nothing acceptably, but as they are aided by grace and help from on high?

*Parishioner.* I see the force of your remarks, but would it not be wise to insist upon the distinction between moral and natural ability, for the purpose of evincing to the sinner his inexcusableness, and inducing him to exert himself? I have sometimes thought, that to insist on the doctrine of total inability has a tendency to quiet the anxiety of a sinner, and induce inactivity, under an impression, that all he has to do, is to wait God's time.

*Pastor.* As to the propriety of insisting on the distinction for the purpose you propose, I cannot admit it; for first, if it be not a just distinction, it will create a false impression, and induce sinners to believe that they have powers which they really do not possess; and secondly, sinners may be led to conclude, that by virtue of these fancied powers, they have repented and believed, while actually impenitent; thus fatally deceiving their souls and contenting themselves with a spurious religion: or they may be induced under the same delusion, to postpone repentance to a dying hour, in the vain hope, that they may then suc-

cessfully exert their powers in preparing themselves for their last change. On the other hand, apathy and slothfulness are by no means the necessary consequences of a belief in human inability. The doctrine it is true, may be abused like any other doctrine of revelation, yet still, a genuine persuasion that we are utterly helpless, that we can do nothing effectively towards our own salvation, is precisely the state of mind in which we can perceive the value and necessity of the Gospel provision. When once convinced that we can do nothing for ourselves, our self-righteous notions are dissipated, and we are driven to the Saviour with the appropriate petition, "Lord, save, or I perish." "Be merciful to me a sinner."

*Parishioner.* As connected with this subject permit me to ask, in what regeneration consists? I have heard it urged with some plausibility, that all that was required of the sinner was, that he should change the governing purpose of his mind, or as I understood it, that he should undergo such an alteration in his disposition, as to incline to the things of religion.

*Pastor.* I have heard this language employed, and under circumstances which made me suppose, that the speaker intended to convince his hearers, that they could at once be religious, by a simple resolution to be so. If we rely for information on the illustrations which are employed, regeneration, according to this view, is a very inconsiderable change. Thus a physician becomes a merchant, and in doing so, he changes his *governing purpose*; and if the illustration holds good, a sinner becomes renewed, whenever he changes his external pursuits from interested motives. If, however, by this expression something more is intended, and a change in the prevailing disposition of the heart is implied, then I would remark, that this change is beyond human power, and cannot be effected by a mere determination of the will. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, neither the leopard his spots, and there is the same difficulty for him who has been accustomed to do evil, to learn to do well. A man may bring the whole weight of his natural power to bear upon his prevailing inclinations, and yet find them too stubborn in their resistance, to be overcome.

But I have another objection to this phraseology; it does not express with sufficient comprehensiveness the great change which we style regeneration. It is a much

more extensive and thorough work than this phraseology seems to imply. It is described in sacred Scripture as a new birth, a new creation, a resurrection from the dead; these are emphatic expressions and convey the idea of a marvellous transformation. Such in truth it is, evincing in every feature the mighty power of God. Spiritual things are discerned and relished, by a heart once blind and averse from them; love to God succeeds to enmity; alacrity in duty succeeds to indifference and reluctance; holy habits are substituted for habits earthly, sensual, devilish; in a word, old things pass away, and all things become new. The vile sinner who was an abhorrence to all holy beings, becomes entitled to take his place in their holy assembly.

*Parishioner.* Is the change of which you speak effected by a direct divine influence, or by the persuasive and constraining influence of motives presented to the mind?

*Pastor.* God does not work irrespective of means; he presents in his word and providence the most affecting motives; he appeals to a sinner's fears and hopes; to his reason, his conscience, his self interest, his sense of gratitude, and in the use of these means and motives, the sinner is often brought to the foot of the cross; but in none of these means is there any inherent energy. Truth may be presented to the mind without any sensible effect, the powerful appeals of Scripture may prove ineffectual to move it to repentance; and a Gospel of grace may become to the sinner a savour of death. The precise condition of the sinner, in his inability to improve the truth without divine aid, is thus expressed by an Apostle. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." By mere *moral suasion* therefore, as it has been termed, no sinner has ever yet been converted from the error of his ways; and hence the necessity of a more efficient agency. God by a direct and supernatural influence, accompanies the presentation of the truth, and in that way alone it becomes effectual to salvation. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." So manifest is this in every case of genuine conversion, that it is marvellous that any professing the Christian's hope, should imagine that a work so wonderful should

ever be accomplished by any other agency than the "mighty power of God."

This view will also show the absurdity of that scheme which ascribes *activity* to the sinner in his regeneration. God is the only *actor*, man is the *passive* subject. The only activity which man can display in relation to his regeneration is in *resisting* the Holy Ghost; to aid God in effecting it, would not only be impossible, but unnecessary. Should any active part in the work be ascribed to man, just so far it would not be of grace; but it is by grace alone we are saved from first to last; being "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." While sinners therefore are passive in the hands of God, he creates them anew in Christ Jesus.

*Parishioner.* Do you say that the work of regeneration is completed at once? if so, how do you account for the many imperfections perceptible in the most advanced Christians?

*Pastor.* I say the work is instantaneously performed. There is no medium condition between life and death. A sinner must either be an heir of heaven, or an heir of hell; he must either be regenerate, or unregenerate. The Spirit finds the sinner in his enmity and sin, and at once reconciles him to God; he finds him an heir of wrath, and at once makes him an heir of glory. Whatever may have been his preparatory exercises, there is a point at which he is translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

While I affirm that regeneration is complete at once, inasmuch as the sinner is thereby radically changed and placed in an entirely new relation to God, yet I have not said that the subject of it is thereby perfected. When regenerated, the sinner is converted or turned from the path of hell to the path of heaven, and as he pursues his pilgrimage, he is instructed, guided, strengthened, and comforted by the Holy Spirit. As he proceeds, he becomes more like God, more inimical to sin, more meet for heaven. Thus while regeneration is *instantaneous*, sanctification is *progressive*; and the latter is never completed until mortality is swallowed up of life.

*Parishioner.* My dear Pastor, I cordially thank you for the instruction I have received in this interview. My doubts are removed; the painful state of my mind is relieved; and I now embrace the faith of my fathers with

more intelligence than formerly, and I trust I shall not so easily be moved by every wind of doctrine. The Catechisms of our Church which I learned in my youth, evidently set forth the same doctrines which you have enforced, and I am struck with astonishment that any one should profess to receive these formularies, and yet substantially overturn every principal statement contained in them. Will you oblige me by explaining the remarkable fact that ministers and others, professing to receive the same doctrinal standards, should still be characterized by such discrepancy of views?

*Pastor.* I will endeavour to do so. You are aware that creeds are not designed to supersede the Bible, but as the Bible is subject to conflicting interpretations, a creed is nothing more than a particular interpretation, which is adopted by any individual or class of individuals. Thus any number of persons who agree in what they suppose the Bible teaches, write their creed which becomes to them a bond of union. It was in this way that the Westminster Confession of Faith was written, and all who could cordially receive it, were permitted upon a declaration of such concurrence, to unite with the Presbyterian Church of which this Confession became the symbol. The question proposed to every minister and elder of the Presbyterian Church, at their induction into their respective offices, is in the following words, viz: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?" And to this an affirmative answer is returned.

In process of time, however, when the Presbyterian Church had increased and assumed a commanding stand, many felt inclined to enter her communion, who demurred at many of her doctrines. They accordingly began to torture the above form of subscription, to elicit from it a meaning which the words did not obviously express. They at length fell upon an expedient; it was that they adopted only "the *system* of doctrine" contained in the Confession, or, in other words, that they adopted it only "for *substance* of doctrine." To detect the subterfuge here employed, recur again to the words of the formula. "Do you sincerely, (that is, without prevarication or mental reservation) receive and adopt the Confession of Faith." The answer is, I do adopt the *Confession of Faith*, that is wholly and

entirely, (for there is no saving clause introduced,) and I adopt it *because* it contains "the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." Hence it is not the mere general system contained in the Confession, which is adopted, but the Confession itself, and that, because it contains the Bible system. The evasion resorted to by some is not only unworthy of their intelligence, but it is a blot on their honour and honesty. How men possessing godliness, can fail to see the evident and only import of such simple language, is what I cannot explain. It certainly never was designed that any should enter the Presbyterian church, under the cover of such a glaring subterfuge. I have already said, that a creed is designed as a bond of union, and as a defence against error, but it loses its virtue, whenever it is received merely for "substance of doctrine." Men may differ very widely in their notions of what constitutes the substance of doctrine. The Arminian may give it as his opinion, that the Sovereignty of God in election, and the perseverance of the saints, are not essential to the Presbyterian system, and hence he adopts it for substance, with these exceptions; the Universalist may reason in the same way, in relation to the doctrine of future punishments; and the Socinian may follow his example, in relation to the Divinity and atonement of Christ, and they may all enter the Presbyterian church on the convenient plea, that they embrace what they consider the substance of its doctrines. Every man is left to judge for himself, what constitutes the substance, and the Unitarian is not to be condemned any more than the Pelagian, in making his exceptions and modifications.

Such being the true and necessary operation of this principle, if it receives countenance, what becomes of the unity of the church? I grieve while I say it, this evasive conduct has already destroyed the unity and harmony of our church, by the introduction of many, who not only do not believe in the doctrines of our Confession, but are busy in undermining and subverting them. So many have entered our communion "for substance of doctrine," that there is great danger that the church will eventually lose the very substance of the Gospel itself.

*Parishioner.* I confess, my dear sir, I am amazed at these disclosures. Whether the new divinity which I was so much in danger of imbibing, be true or false, it is now clear to my mind that it cannot be held by any honest-

hearted Presbyterian. Surely they who are not cordial in adopting the Westminster Confession, should leave our church, and seek one whose doctrines they can embrace.

*Pastor.* This certainly is the dictate of common honesty, to say nothing of religion. As long as they remain, there will be controversy, for those who love the truth, and wish to secure the stability of the Presbyterian church, must, from a sense of duty to their Master, resist the encroachments of errorists, the tendency of whose course, is to subvert, both the doctrine and polity of our beloved Zion. The truth incorporated in our standards, is precious; it is worth contending for; and if the foe comes to destroy, he must be met and resisted. Just in proportion as error prevails, the souls of men are endangered; and how can the faithful watchmen of Zion, who see the danger, fail to give the alarm, or refuse to buckle on their armour?

In reviewing the whole subject you may perceive that the controversy existing in the Church, involves some of the most precious articles of our faith. The covenant made with Adam, his representative character, and the imputation of his first sin to his posterity, are clearly denied; the representative character of Christ, the imputation to him of his people's sins, his endurance of the proper penalty of the law, and the imputation of his righteousness to believers for justification, are also denied; total depravity, the entire inability of sinners, and the direct agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, are equally impugned. They who reject these cardinal doctrines, also assert that men are born free from original sin, that their sin is entirely the result of voluntary action, that the atonement was not a satisfaction to divine justice, that sinners have a full ability to repent and believe, except so far as relates to their indisposition, that their act of faith is imputed to them for justifying righteousness, that men are active in regeneration, and that their regeneration is progressive. Here is not only the denial of some of the principal points of the system of revealed truth, but the assertion of a contrary system which is but a series of errors.

We are often told, that none of these points affect the essential faith of a Christian, and that as matters of speculation, they may be entertained without endangering the personal salvation of man. This we have every reason to deny; but even if it were true, still the known tendency of error is from bad to worse, until it amounts to a direct

denial of the "Lord that bought us." While we have abundant reason to be alarmed, we should also feel that our hope is in God. To Him should unceasing, fervent, and importunate prayer be made, that through his mighty power, his own truth may be maintained and the peace, spirituality, and efficiency of the Church restored.

## PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH.

**O LORD GOD** most merciful, who, in infinite goodness, and condescension, hast established a church in the world, against which thou hast promised the gates of hell shall not prevail, and for the redemption of which, thou hast sent thy well beloved Son, to suffer and die ; send down the dews of thy grace upon the vine which thou hast planted, that it may bring forth fruit abundantly to thy praise.

May the ordinances which thou hast instituted be faithfully administered, and prove efficacious in opening the blind eyes, in subduing the obdurate heart, and in edifying thine own children, whom thou hast chosen out of the world.

Let thy ministers whom thou hast appointed to proclaim the great salvation, be clothed with humility, and inspired with zeal to declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear. May they inquire for the good old way, and walk therein, zealously maintaining the doctrines of thy word, and carefully instructing the flock of Christ committed to their charge. May they be instrumental in convincing men of their depravity and ruin, of the enmity of their hearts to God, of the necessity of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of their sinful inability to escape from a merited condemnation, without Divine aid, and of their entire dependence on the Holy Spirit to quicken them into spiritual life. May thy

servants never fail to hold up to the view of the perishing, Christ crucified as the only hope of their souls, and to point to his perfect righteousness, as the only ground of justification.

We live, O Lord, in a day of rebuke ; for our manifold sins we justly suffer, and especially for our want of vigilance and fidelity in guarding thy holy truth. Error has come in like a flood, and many have been swept from the true foundation. The ways of Zion mourn, because thou hast withheld thy Spirit ; but, O Lord, long suffering and kind, return to thy church, take away her reproach, restore thy truth, and bind up the wounds which thou hast justly inflicted.

Restore, by true repentance, those who have taught or imbibed error, and may they no longer give thine ark a wrong touch, or weaken the defences of Zion ; and forbid, we beseech thee, that precious souls should be led astray by the vain speculations of a philosophy falsely so called.

May those doctrines which strip the sinner of every plea for glorying in himself, and which ascribe all praise and glory to Thee, be perpetuated, and be maintained by thy faithful servants, in love, in meekness, and in wisdom.

O Lord, most holy, restore purity and peace to thine afflicted church, remove all causes of strife, build up the walls of Jerusalem, and hasten the day, when Zion shall become a praise and a joy in the whole earth. Especially we beseech thee, to pour out on our Clergy, Ruling Elders, and Communicants, the healthful influence of thy grace, that they may stand fast in the truth, be of one mind, resist the doctrines and devices of men, and by a holy life,

adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. May they not only experience thy grace in their own hearts, but desire its universal diffusion; and may the Church which has cherished them, become, through their instrumentality, earnest in imitating the Church of old, in sending forth the Gospel, to those who sit in the region and shadow of death. May thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

These mercies we ask, in humble dependence on thy Spirit, and in full reliance upon the Atonement and Intercession of the Redeemer, who are worthy with the Father to receive endless praise. **AMEN.**

**THE END.**