
SERMON I.

THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH.

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2 Pet. i. 1.

—To them that have obtained like precious faith with us.

IN the sacred oracles five objects, especially, are called PRECIOUS. The HOLY GHOST faith, *the* REDEMPTION *of the soul is precious.* The BLOOD of CHRIST, the price of our redemption, is *precious blood.* CHRIST, the glorious RANSOMER, is PRECIOUS to his ransomed people. The PROMISES of the gospel, in which he is exhibited to us, are *great and precious promises.* And, in our text, FAITH, which taketh hold of the promise of life in Christ Jesus, is called *precious faith.*

That is accounted precious which is of an excellent quality, especially, if it be rare.—Gold is preferred to brass,

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moral virtue to gold; but the faith of God's elect (which is the theme of our text) infinitely surpasseth these, and every acquisition below the sun. It is a rare jewel indeed; for *who hath believed our report? to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* And, in its operations and effects, it is most excellent, as, we doubt not, will appear in the sequel of these discourses.

What tends farther to raise the value of saving faith in our esteem, is, 1st, The manner in which we are made partakers of it, namely by the gracious and sovereign disposal of heaven. *Λαχυσι*, which our translation renders obtained, signifies to get or obtain a thing by lot. But the ordering of a lot is the sole prerogative of Jehovah, who giveth the prize to whomsoever he will. *So faith is not of ourselves: it is the gift of God.* The peculiar donation of heaven, 2d, That the weakest real believers share the blessing together with the strongest Apostles themselves, greatly magnifieth our idea of its worth—To them that have obtained *like* precious faith with *us*. The faith of believers in common may not be equal to that of Apostles in degree; yet, as well in its origin, objects, causes and effects, as in the nature of its operations, it is the very same with theirs. It is the glory of Christianity, that God revealeth the mysteries of the kingdom to babes and sucklings, while they are *bid from the wise and prudent*; and distributes to the weakest babe in Christ a share with Prophets and Apostles in the communion of grace.—*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

Doct. Saving faith is a most excellent donation of heaven to all who become partakers of it. In treating this subject, I shall,

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I. Explain the nature of saving faith.

II. Illustrate the Excellency of it.

III. Apply the whole in some practical uses.

I. I am to explain the nature of saving faith.

The proper idea of faith, is a credit given to testimony, grounded upon the veracity of the witness; which supposeth as well a trust in the person speaking, as a belief of his word. In this, faith differeth from every other species of evidence. Agreeably to this general idea of it, we observe, that saving faith consists in the *credit* the heart yieldeth to the testimony of Christ, and its *trust* in him for salvation. Some good divines have observed, that, "wherever saving faith is mentioned in the New Testament, it generally, if not always, signifieth trust in a person, as well as the belief of a doctrine."

FIRST, saving faith consists in the credit the heart yieldeth to the testimony of Jesus, "THE AMEN, THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS." This is sometimes called the mind's persuasion of, sometimes its assent to, the truth of divine testimony. This testimony we have delivered to us in the law and the gospel, each of which is necessary to be believed in order to salvation. By these the Spirit of Christ revealeth to our hearts the glory and will of God, which are the general objects of faith. By the gospel, particularly, Christ is revealed to us in his mediatorial characters, or, the glory of God shining in his face, *i. e.* in his person and mediation; which is the peculiar and direct object of saving faith;—more especially Christ as a priest, is the immediate object of faith, as justifying. Faith in its general as well as its more specific nature, will necessarily come into the description to be given of it, notwithstanding.

we have it chiefly in view, to give as brief a description of its operations and effects, with the practical improvement, as may be consistent with perspicuity and profit.

In saving faith, the heart yields its assent to the divine law as holy, just, and good. By this glass the Holy Spirit reflects, as it were, rays of the majesty, purity, and justice of God, upon the sinner's conscience. In the light thereof he reads the righteous claims of Jehovah upon him; the strictness of the demands of the law; the depravity of his nature and practice, with his utter inability to raise himself from the ruins of his fallen state. He tries to pay the law its due, but in vain. He finds his heart averse to the duties it requires, and prone to the evils it forbids.—Then he tries to soften and cleanse his hard and polluted heart, that he may offer to God a more acceptable service; but in vain. The stone within him will neither break, nor melt; and the more he endeavours to wash himself, the deeper his stain appears.—No way of relief now appears for him, but Christ. Not daring, however, to venture to apply to the Saviour, in all his guilt and pollution, he tries to prepare himself for Christ, by working some good dispositions in his heart. This he also finds to be vain. For could one penitent sigh, one holy desire, one melting impression of love save him, he cannot command it. Now he is shut up to the necessity of coming as a totally ruined and helpless sinner; therefore at the call of the gospel, guilty and unworthy as he is, he attempts to take hold of Christ. But alas! The hand is withered, he has no power to stretch it out.—He can as soon tear strong mountains from their roots, or create a world, as root out his unbelief, and create faith in his dead and barren heart. Hence, at last, falling at the feet of his Judge and his Saviour, he cries, *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!* A poor, worthless, helpless, undone sinner! This is true conviction of sin, or a
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faith of the law wrought in the heart by the Spirit and word of God.

That such a faith of the law is necessary to a true faith of the gospel, or in other words, that a conviction of sin is necessary to induce us to flee to Christ for salvation, is evident from many express testimonies of scripture.—For *by the law is the knowledge of sin. I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* The operations of faith, with the images by which they are illustrated, clearly evince the truth of this doctrine. It is described by flying to Christ for refuge, which supposes a sense of danger. It receiveth him in all his offices, which supposes a sense of the need of him in all his mediatorial characters. The same truth also shines with irresistible evidence from the great designs of redemption by Christ, which were to stain the pride of man, and magnify free grace; to humble the sinner, and exalt the Saviour. That mercy might have a triumph in the saved sinner's bosom, he is stung with a sense of his sin and guilt, and made to glory only in the Lord.

One thing here merits your special notice, namely, “*although they that are regenerate and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet it is of general use, common to them with all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God, and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly, to convince them of their disability to keep it; and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience.*”

The law is of perpetual use to believers, not only as a rule of life, but to keep awake in their hearts a sense of

their need of Christ, in every respect, and for every thing. They cannot indeed be convinced that they are in a state of condemnation, though they may greatly fear it; (for the Spirit of God is not the author of contradictions) but they shall be taught, more and more, the sinfulness of their nature, with the absolute necessity of the blood and grace of Christ, to purge the guilt and stain of their corruptions; and the more they become acquainted with God and their own hearts, the more fully will they be convinced of this, and the more deeply abased under a sense of their own unworthiness. The most holy men are ever the most humble, have the deepest sense of the depravity of their nature, and make the fullest confession of their sin and guilt. This is most evident in the case of Job, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul. Believing views of God humble them in the dust, pour the filth of their corruption before their eyes, make them reject all their own righteousness as filthy rags, and groan for deliverance from the remains of sin, as a most offensive body of death*.

But what more especially claims your notice, is the credit which, in believing, the heart yields to the testimony
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* By these, with many other instances which might be adduced from the word of God, *their fallacy plainly appears*, who assert the perfection of grace in this life, and tell us they live without sin. *If we say we have no sin, (saith the apostle) we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*, 1 John i. 8. Such professors deceive themselves indeed, and plainly manifest their ignorance of God and his law, of their own hearts, of the nature of sin, and what it is that constitutes a perfection in grace. To evade the force of the argument against them, from Paul's complaint of the body of death, Rom. vii. 24. some of them tell us, *the apostle spake this of himself in a state of unregeneracy, or in a state merely of conviction*. Had they any just discernment,

of the gospel ; the substance of which is glad tidings of salvation through Christ, to whomsoever of our fallen race shall believe in his name.—The believing soul accepts it as a *faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, the chief of sinners ! And God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Whosoever believeth, even the guiltiest of the guilty, and the vilest of the vile ! *For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell, that of his fulness we might receive, and grace for grace.* This gracious publication invites your attention to the *power, mercy, and faithfulness* of Christ, the precious objects as well as grounds of, evangelical faith ; to which we shall add, the light or evidence by which these glorious objects are discerned.

1. In believing, the soul is persuaded of the *power* of Christ to save it, guilty and wretched as it is ; for God hath *laid help upon One that is mighty to save ; One who is able to save them to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Fears

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discernment, or were they disposed to learn, they might be easily convinced of their error from the context. We hear Paul declaring in the 22d verse, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man.* Is this the temper of an unregenerate man ? or of one in a mere state of conviction ? The law of sin in his members, the body of sin and death, the thorn in his flesh, even after he had been in the third heaven, all united to give Paul the most full conviction of his imperfection. He was no perfectionist in principle, though a strong one in desire—*Not, says he, as though I had already attained, either were already perfect—But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

are apt to rise in the hearts of a convinced sinner, that Christ cannot, consistently with his glory, pardon him; because he has so often closed his heart and ears against the most alluring motives and pressing calls to turn and live. But no sooner is he enlightened in the all-sufficient fulness of Emmanuel, than he perceives an infinite virtue in his blood and grace to purge out guilt of the highest aggravations, and sins of the deepest dye. Now he fully believes that the righteousness and atoning blood of the Saviour have completely answered the demands of a broken law, —satisfied the claims of justice, quenched the flame of incensed wrath, glorified God in the highest, and procured heaven for the most heinous offenders, with all the influences of grace to prepare them for it. Therefore in Christ he finds a remedy for all his maladies, and a rich supply for all his wants.—Pardon for his guilt; cleansing for his pollution; liberty for his bondage; cloathing for his nakedness; sight for his blindness; strength for his weakness; riches for his poverty; comfort for his sorrow; the bread of life for his hunger; and the water of life for his thirsty soul.—And all this for the praise of infinitely rich grace! How do these views of a Saviour raise his sinking soul, and become to it as life from the dead!

2. In saving faith the soul gives full credit to this great gospel truth, that the *mercy* of Christ is equal to his power to save. Never will a convinced sinner take sanctuary under the cross, until he believes that Christ is as willing as able to save him, and God is well pleased for his righteousness sake. It is a property of nature to rise against, and be averse from, an enemy viewed as irreconcilable. But no sooner does an inclination to kindness and reconciliation appear in him, than it melts the heart and begets confidence. This is evident in the sinner's case. The more hopeless he is, the more hardened his heart grows.—The deeper his convictions, the more lively his corruptions; at least, he perceives

ceives them more sensibly. *When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

So great a sense of guilt seizeth the trembling conscience of the convinced sinner, that he fears if God could, consistently with his honour, forgive him; yet he will not; because his sins have been committed against so much light, so many mercies, warnings, calls to repentance, strivings of the Spirit, reproofs of conscience, and resolutions to amend. Such a sink of every abomination does his heart appear, and so odious his crimes, that he thinks hell itself can scarcely exceed his baseness. It is easier for him to believe that any sinner upon earth may be saved, than himself. What increaseth his fears, is, that instead of an humble and penitent frame under his convictions, as he hoped and strove for, his insensibility, his enmity, and other plagues of his heart gather strength. In this condition, some have found their hearts rising against the heavens. Some have sunk down into the very borders of despair; and it is common for convinced sinners to fly from the presence of infinite holiness, as fugitive Adam, when he ran to hide himself from the face of his Maker among the trees of the garden. But no sooner does the distressed sinner really believe in his heart, that *God's tender mercies are over all his works, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment*; no sooner does he believe this, than the chains of his captivity drop off, unbelief, the head of his body of death, dies, and all his other corruptions, which received strength and nourishment therefrom, weaken and die with it—his heart of stone is melted, his enmity broken, and his soul is reconciled to the cross and sceptre of Christ*.

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* If these observations be true, and both scripture and experience evince the truth of them, how absurd then *their* notion, who assert, that the flames of hell will produce penitence in the hearts of the damned, upon which God will discharge them

The Holy Spirit gives to believers those spiritual views of mercy and grace in the Saviour, by revealing to their hearts the excellency of his adorable characters;—the gracious designs of redemption; the love of the Father in sending his Son, and the love of the Son in coming to die for sinners;—the riches and freedom of gospel-promises and overtures;—or by impressing them with his earnest and tender entreaties and exhortations with them to hear and live. By all, or by any of these, or by whatsoever word of the gospel he pleaseth, Christ reveals to inquiring souls his tender mercy and grace to save the worst of sinners, and draws them into a cordial union with himself.

I have been the more particular here, because some honest Christians perplex themselves, and question their own sincerity, if they may not have obtained their first relief in the same manner others have obtained theirs, and from the very same words. The questions are not, in what manner, or by what word of the gospel have you been delivered from the spirit of bondage? Whether by a particular promise applied to your hearts, or by a spiritual description or view of gospel truths, in general, powerfully impressed on them? But the questions are, what has been the nature of your views of divine objects, and what their effects upon your souls?

3. In believing, the heart fully confides in the faithfulness of Christ to perform his promise of eternal life to all those

them from their prison. Were this doctrine true, hell would long since have been cleared of its inhabitants. A similar error are *they* guilty of, who tell us, that if God makes use of means at all in the change of a soul, it is the law exclusive of the gospel. This plainly manifests their ignorance of the holy scriptures, of the nature of sin, of the human heart, and the manner of divine operations upon it.

those who believe on him. The truth of the promise, founded upon the faithfulness of the promiser, is a glorious object of credit. Truth and mercy are ever celebrated in the songs of believers, and inseparably united as grounds of their trust.—*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever ; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said mercy shall be built up forever : thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.* The promises originated in mercy, and shall be fulfilled in faithfulness. *What eternal love hath spoken, eternal truth will bind.* And O ! what relief to the convinced sinner to behold rich mercy united with invariable truth inviting him to fly into the arms of a powerful Saviour !

The solicitous inquirer for salvation seeks the firmest grounds to go upon in believing. Here he finds it—The word of him who cannot lie ! The whole gospel may, in a general sense, be viewed as one large promise given as our warrant to believe. All its invitations, offers, calls, and every motive offered to persuade us to lay hold of eternal life, not only make a tender of mercy, but imply a promise to those who shall accept the offer. But more specifically and directly, the express promises, or those parts of scripture delivered in a promissory form, sanctioned by the oath of God, and enforced with his command to believe, afford us the strongest warrant to appropriate Christ and the whole of his salvation to our own souls.

His promises I say, as well the more general and absolute promises of grace, as the more special and characteristic. Convinced sinners often find great relief and clear directions from the more general, or absolute promises ; such as the pardon of sin for God's OWN NAME's sake, of cleansing from all our *filthiness*,—of giving a *new heart*, and taking away the *stony heart*. For although they may not plead

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an interest in the blessings contained in them as their own actual right, because they have never embraced the offer; yet as these promises manifest Jehovah's willingness to bestow mercies, and contain a free and generous offer of them, they afford the strongest encouragement to apply, and the firmest ground to plead for, the promised favours. Persuaded of this, the distressed sinner ariseth from his sinking discouragements, and ventures to approach a gracious and sin-pardoning Saviour, pleading his own word, Lord, *do as thou hast said.* Here is the very heart, the hard and filthy heart! Melt it with thy love, and cleanse it with thy grace! According to thy word, *pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.* Let a trembling sinner live, O Lord, and I will forever praise thee. Let rich grace forever shine in the salvation of a wretch so unworthy, and so hell-deserving!

The special and characteristic promises afford the afflicted soul the most pointed and peculiar encouragements to apply to Christ for relief—Such as these: *Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out.* For they not only hold up the rich grace of God to weary and heavy laden sinners, and invite them to Christ for it; but they give them the strongest security that they shall be accepted, and find rest, upon their coming. From any, or from all these, Christ persuadeth distressed souls of his faithfulness to perform his word, and excites their trust in him for salvation.

4. For the farther illustration of this subject, I shall briefly take notice of the light or evidence by which true believers discern, and yield their assent to, the truths of the gospel. Now this is wholly supernatural.—*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.* That power only which produced

produced natural light, and no exertion of natural abilities in the subject of it, nor mere moral suasion, can produce this spiritual light in the soul. The gospel is a glass by which the Holy Spirit reflects the divine glories upon our hearts, as they shine in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore it is our duty to pay a careful attention to every instruction of it; for by motives divine power operateth upon our souls as moral agents. But every motive and every mean will prove ineffectual, until that energy which at first caused light to shine out of darkness, rends the vail from our darkened hearts, and reveals Christ in them. Their opinion is wholly unfounded, who suppose there is no difference between the assent of real and that of mere nominal believers, and that resting in Christ is the only essential act of faith. The full credit given by the heart to the testimony of the Spirit in his word, is peculiar to saving faith; there is therefore an essential difference between this and the assent of mere common professors. This difference chiefly consists in three things.

(1.) The transcendent glories of faith's object are truly discerned by the one; the other has only some dark ineffectual notices of them. The difference is as real and as great, as that of seeing an object and hearing of it only. I may hear of something at a distance, which I never saw, and may not doubt the truth of the account given of it; but if I see the thing itself, my perceptions of it will be quite changed. So by a general faith of the gospel, I may accept the report of it as true, without being sensible of any doubt as to the reality of it; yet never perceive the nature nor the transcendent glories of the objects it exhibits. In saving faith there is a just discernment of the nature and superior beauties of the object itself. To the true believer Christ appears as the *pearl of great price* indeed, for which he is willing
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vation. None but what flows from rich mercy and exalts the Saviour, suits either his wretched state, or his wishes. Had he ten thousand souls, he would venture them all upon Christ. Had he ten thousand hearts, they should all be given to him. Had he ten thousand tongues, they should all be employed in his praise. And all too little! all infinitely beneath his praise, his glory, or his worth.

2. Trust in Christ more specifically consists in the hearty acquiescence of the soul in him for salvation. Its leading exercise is, a rest in his propitiation for pardon, and then, being accepted in the Beloved for grace, for glory, and for every mercy. *He is all in all*—all things to all believers. Content that he do all the work, and have all the praise, they embrace him and his whole salvation, with all their hearts, committing themselves wholly to him, soul, and body, as his trust, and to be employed wholly at his pleasure. In this act of trust, they return to him, and to God in him, as their soul's everlasting rest; and, according to his gracious promise, find rest to their weary souls. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee*, expresseth the exercise of a soul resting in Christ. With a joy which the world knoweth not of, they feed, as on hidden manna, upon such precious words of grace as those; *I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul*. Hence some intelligent and very spiritual divines have described faith, as a well pleasedness with Christ and salvation through him. A well pleasedness it is indeed, an entire satisfaction in Christ and the fruits of his mediation—*I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste*.

In order to a more full and distinct perception of the nature of trust in Christ, let it be observed, that *we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered unto us in the gospel*. Faith is the very echo of the soul to the gospel offer—

offer—*so we preached, and so ye believed.* In like manner as we delivered unto you the testimony of Christ, ye received it, and rested upon him for salvation.

1. The gospel offers Christ fully in all his offices, *for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.* And faith corresponding fully with the offer, accepteth him as the only remedy for ignorance, guilt, slavery and every misery to which sin hath subjected a fallen world. Beholding his fullness, the soul replies, *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.* Not only justifying righteousness, but grace and strength for every duty, and every gracious exercise. The gracious heart thirsts as well for holiness and instruction, as for pardon; as well for deliverance from sin, as from wrath; and in one word, for every blessing the Saviour has to bestow. But hypocritical professors, like the harlot, would divide the Saviour;—would take pardon from him, without holiness;—salvation from hell, without qualifications for heaven. Nay, nothing do they more dislike than holiness and communion with Christ; *without which no man shall see the Lord.*

2. The gospel offers Christ in due order,—Christ himself first, and then his gifts. It inviteth us to come to him, and promiseth rest upon our coming. *To as many as received HIM, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* Christ himself is the immediate object of a believer's trust and affections, the secondary object is the promise of being heirs of God, and joint heirs of the inheritance with him. He is high in their esteem above every created object, *the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.* Whereas the hypocritical professor looks to the blessing only, but neglects the dispenser of it—Snatcheth at the promise, but rejecteth the promiser—Gives Christ his hand, but with-holds his heart.

3. The gospel offers Christ and all the blessings of his
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purchase *freely, without money and without price*; and faith, disclaiming all goodness wrought in or done by the creature, as a ground of trust, in whole or in part, dependeth solely upon the righteousness and grace of Christ for pardon and complete salvation—*Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.* Here it is evident the apostle rejecteth all his own righteousness of every kind, both inward frames, and outward duties, as *loss and dung,—as filthy rags.* Instead of trusting any thing in himself, or done by him, as his righteousness, or as giving him a right to believe or hope for acceptance through Christ, the true believer sees that his best duties and frames are so deeply stained with sin and self, that he wonders God had not mingled his blood with his sacrifices. He is persuaded that his tears, his repentance, his prayers, and every duty, all need washing in the blood of Christ, as well as his person. Therefore he comes to him as *poor, wretched, miserable, blind and naked, for gold tried in the fire, that he may be rich; for white raiment, that he may be clothed; and for eye-salve, that he may see;* taking his encouragement to believe, from the gracious call of the gospel only, and they who expect salvation upon any other terms bewray their ignorance of the gospel, and deceive their own souls.

The only ground of real trust in Christ shines with bright evidence in the faith of Abraham, the father and example of the faithful in believing, *who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that word which was spoken, so shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,*

dead; being about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was also able to perform. His faith, laying hold on the naked word of promise, rose superior to every objection of reason from the strongest natural impediments. In like manner his spiritual seed, neither trusting their own righteousness in any shape, nor kept off by discouragement from the deadness and barrenness of their own unbelieving hearts, take hold of the word of promise, and plead to it, *Lord do as thou hast said.*

But the false professor builds on a very different foundation. He trusts as his righteousness, his convictions, his repentance, his frames, and his duties performed with some seriousness—or he hopes these will recommend him to Christ; that on account of them, the righteousness of Christ may recommend him to the favour of God. Thus he makes a saviour of his religious exercises, substituting them instead of the righteousness of Christ, or uniting them with his righteousness as the ground of his pardon and acceptance with God, he divides his salvation between himself and the Saviour. Mistaking the design of such promises as this; *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*, he connects the promise of rest with his distress, not with coming to Christ; whereas the promise is to be connected with believing, or coming to Christ, not with his distress as a condition either of his right to the blessing, or his right to come for it; and his distressful case is mentioned, to point him out as it were by name, and invite him to come to Christ for a free salvation. As though our Lord had said, ye labouring and sin-sick souls, who can find rest no where, come unto me, and I will ease you of all your burdens, and give rest to your weary souls. But

mistaking the design of the offer, as we have observed, the deceived sinner takes hold of the promise, not of the Saviour;—appropriates the blessing, not because it is freely offered, but because he has something to offer for it. This is a subtle deceit of the heart, a fine spun thread of self-righteousness, with which many deceive themselves, especially in seasons of common awakenings. Upon this hidden rock they dash to pieces, just when they seem to be arriving to the haven of rest. These are the fatal mistakes, I doubt not, of too many zealots in our day. I shall conclude this discourse with a few brief observations.

1. What ground of lamentation is it, and how surprising, that the far greatest part of those who profess the name of Christ, and the scriptures to be his word, have, notwithstanding, so little of him in their religion, and are such strangers to the doctrine of faith in his blood for salvation. Christ is the substance of both the Old Testament, and the New—His atonement, with the nature and necessity of faith in a crucified Saviour, are leading doctrines of revelation; and none are more frequently held up to view in the oracles of God. Is it not then amazing, that those doctrines, frequently taught as they are, and important as they are, should be treated by multitudes as mere idle and useless tales of the day? and that many, who are blessed with favourable advantages for instruction, and pay a respect to the gospel in profession, yet in practice, do still go *about to establish their own righteousness*, and will not submit *themselves to the righteousness of God*. Outward rites of worship, either of man's devising or God's appointing, duties, frames of the mind, or any deception whatsoever, will quiet their consciences, without the sprinkling of the blood of Christ! How strong must their deception be! How subtle the operations of legal pride in their deceived souls! How deeply

ly rooted their unbelief! How thick the veil of ignorance that clouds their carnal and blinded hearts.

2. From what hath been said, many professors of religion might be easily convinced, did they yield to the evidence of it, that they have not the true faith of the gospel, but are still held in the chains of unbelief and condemnation! For *he that believeth not is condemned already*. They who rest in a general belief that Christ is the Son of God, and Saviour of the world—without a sense of their need of him, and without a particular application of him, to their own souls, have never embraced the Saviour, by a living faith.—They who rest in a general blind notion of mercy without respect unto justice, neither believe his justice nor his mercy; but are under the curse of the woe denounced against *them that are at ease in Zion*, and settling on their lees, say in their heart, *the Lord will not do good nor will he do evil*. They who feed upon empty scientific speculations, without scriptural discoveries of his glory, and all who *see no beauty in him that we should desire him*, have never fed upon him, as hidden manna; nor had *the arm of the Lord revealed to them*. The servants of sin, either of heart or life, are under the power of unbelief; for it is the promise of Christ to the faithful, *that sin shall not have dominion over them*. All who rest in any thing short of Christ for salvation, have no interest in the Saviour—On a forced, or furious zeal, for certain opinions, or for a sect that might have obtained some character for purity and zeal—On the piety of ancestors; *We have Abraham to our father*—on the outward privileges of their church, as the boastful Jews of old, who cried, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord; are these*—Or those who rest on their outward duties and sanctity, as the self-righteous Pharisee; *God I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican; I fast twice in the week, and pay tithes of all that I possess*. Those who put their hand to the plough,

and look back, are not fit for the kingdom of heaven, but clearly manifest that there is in them an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. These seem to begin in the spirit, but end in the flesh; and it is happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. Of all the classes of unbelievers, these sink deepest into the gulf of apostacy; and of all others, some of them become the most ungenerous and bitter enemies to Christianity. Most dangerous, indeed, and deplorable is their case; for the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it;—but beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. These various characters, and each of you who have never experienced the operations of a living faith, are yet in unbelief, and shall die in your sins, unless you speedily apply for pardon to that blood, which you have profanely trodden under foot.

3. I most earnestly beseech unbelievers of every description, to acknowledge your character fully and freely. Admit the conviction of your guilt and danger, fall at the feet of mercy, and beg for the life of your souls. By all the terrors of perishing, by all the joys of salvation, and by all the regard you should pay to the happiness of your never-dying souls, I entreat you to deceive yourselves no longer; but awake from your fatal security, and flee from the wrath to come, unto the Lord Jesus Christ, as your only safety. Many have a testimony in their conscience, that they are in a state of sin and awful condemnation, who nevertheless do not fully own their guilt to their Judge and Saviour, but with infidel Jews, in our Saviour's day, quench the conviction, and would gain the time, by still requiring further signs of what they already have sufficient evidence, did they not close their eyes against the light. Their aversion to the pangs of conviction, and the self-denying exercises necessary to their

their relief, are the reasons of their soul-ruining delay, until a more convenient season. Sad infatuation! Dangerous, awfully dangerous, conduct. Which are hardest, the momentary pangs of conviction now, or the pains of *the worm that shall never die, and the fire that shall never be quenched*. And if you resolve to enter thoroughly upon the work at any time, is it not better to do it soon than at a late period. How do you know whether ye shall ever see the time you hope will be a more convenient season? An hour's delay may cost you an eternity of sufferings. Or if ye were certain of the time to come, will repentance be less bitter, or sin the more easily subdued, the longer it is in acquiring strength. For God's sake, for your precious soul's sake, I entreat you to improve the present moment; let not the present opportunity slip. *Now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation*. Therefore, *to day if ye will hear his voice, barden not your hearts*. Now, and not hereafter; to-day, and not to-morrow, is ever the language of scripture calls—Most carefully, therefore, improve the day of life, while it lasts—Improve the day of grace, while it shines upon you; lest your sun set in everlasting darkness.

- “ Seize the kind promise while it waits,
- “ And march to *Zion's* heavenly gates;
- “ Believe and take the promis'd rest,
- “ Obey and be for ever blest.”