

Christ Receiveth Sinners

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“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” —Isaiah 1:18

We are not to imagine that our hearts and lives must be changed from sin to holiness in any measure, before we may safely venture to trust on Christ for the sure enjoyment of Himself and His salvation.

WE are naturally so prone to ground our salvation on our own works that, if we cannot make them procuring conditions and causes of our salvation by Christ, yet we shall endeavour at least to make them necessary preparatives to fit us for receiving Christ and His salvation by faith. And men are easily persuaded that this is not at all contrary to salvation by free grace, because all that is in this way ascribed to our works, or good qualifications, is only, “That they put us in a fit posture to receive a free gift. If we were to go to a prince for a free gift, good manners and due reverence would teach us to trim ourselves first, and to change our slovenly clothes, as Joseph did when he came out of the dungeon into the presence of Pharaoh. It seems to be an impudent slighting and contemning the justice and holiness of God and Christ, and an insufferable affront and indignity offered to the divine Majesty, when any dare presume to approach His presence in the nasty pickle of his sins, covered all over with putrefying sores, not at all closed, bound up or cleaned; much more when they endeavour to receive the Most Holy One into such an abominable stinking kennel as a sinner’s heart is, before it be all reformed. The parable concerning the man that was to be bound hand and foot, and cast into utter darkness, for coming to the royal wedding without a wedding garment, seems to be intended as a warning against all such presumption” (Matt 22:11,13). Many that behold with terror the abominable filth of their own hearts are kept off from coming immediately to Christ by such imaginations, which Satan strongly maintains and increases in them by his suggestions, so that they can by no means be persuaded out of them, until God teaches them inwardly, by the powerful illumination of His Spirit. They delay the saving act of faith, because they think they are not yet duly prepared and qualified for it. On the same account, many weak believers delay coming to the Lord’s Supper for many years, even as long as they live in this world, and would be as likely to delay their baptism, if they had not been baptized in infancy. Against all such imaginations, I shall propose the following considerations.

1. The error is pernicious to the practice of holiness, and to our whole salvation. Whether holiness be made a procuring condition of our salvation through Christ, or only a condition necessary to qualify us for the reception of Christ, we are equally brought under those legal terms of doing first the duties required in the law, so that we may live. Therefore, we are equally bereaved of the assistance of those means of holiness, as union and fellowship with Christ, and the enjoyment of all His sanctifying endowments by faith, which should go before the practice of holiness, that they

may enable us for it; and we are equally left to labour in vain for holiness, while we are in our accursed natural state, by which our sinful corruption will rather be exasperated than mortified, so that we shall never be duly prepared for the reception of Christ, as long as we live in the world. Thus, while we endeavour to prepare our way to Christ by holy qualifications, we do rather fill it with stumbling-blocks and deep pits, by which our souls are hindered from ever attaining to the salvation by Christ.

2. Any the least change of our hearts and lives from sin to holiness, before our receiving of Christ and His salvation by faith, is not at all necessary according to the terms of the gospel, nor required in the Word of God. Christ would have the vilest sinners come to Him for salvation immediately, without delaying the time to prepare themselves for Him. When the wicked jailer enquired, "What he must do to be saved?" Paul directed him forthwith to believe on Christ, with a promise that in so doing he should be saved and, straightway, he and all his were baptized (Acts 16:30,33). Paul does not tell him that he must reform his heart and life first, though he was in a very nasty pickle at that time, having but a little before fastened Paul and Silas in the stocks, and newly attempted a horrid willful self-murder. Those three thousand Jews that were converted by Peter's preaching, and added the same day to the church by baptism (Acts 2:41), seemed to have as much need of some considerable time to prepare themselves for receiving Christ as others, because they had but lately polluted themselves with the murder of Christ Himself (Acts 2:23). Christ commands His servants to go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and to bring in to His feast the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind; yea, to go out into the highway and to compel them to come in, without allowing them to tarry until they had cleaned their sores, and shifted off their filthy rags, and swarms of lice. Christ would have us to believe on Him that justifies the ungodly, and therefore He does not require us to be godly before we believe (Rom 5:20). He came as a Physician for the sick, and does not expect that they should recover their health, in the least degree, before they come to Him (Matt 9:12). The vilest sinners are fitly prepared and qualified for this design, which is, to show forth the exceeding riches of grace, pardoning our sins, and saving us freely (Eph 2:5,7).

For this end the law of Moses entered that the offence might abound, that so, where sin abounded, grace might much more abound (Rom 5:20). He loved us in our most loathsome sinful pollution, so as to die for us, and much more will He love us in it, so as to receive us when we come to Him for the purchased salvation. He has given full satisfaction to the justice of God for sinners, that they might have all righteousness and holiness, and all salvation only by fellowship with Him through faith. Therefore, it is no affront to Christ, or slighting and condemning the justice and holiness of God, to come to Christ while we are polluted sinners; but rather it is an affronting and contemning the saving grace, merit and fullness of Christ, if we endeavour to make ourselves righteous and holy before we receive Christ Himself, and all righteousness and holiness in Him by faith. Christ loathed not to touch a leper and condescended to wash the feet of His disciples, and did not expect that they should be washed and perfumed beforehand, as some great ones of the world are said to do, when they wash the feet of poor men, in imitation of Christ.

3. Those that receive Christ with an unfeigned faith shall never want a wedding garment to adorn them in the sight of God. Faith itself is very precious in the sight of God, and most holy (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 20). God loves it, because it gives the glory of our salvation only to the free grace of God in Christ (Rom 4:16), and renounces all dependence upon any conditions that we can perform to procure a right to Christ, or to make ourselves acceptable to Him. It contains in it a hearty love to Christ as a Saviour, and a hungering and thirsting appetite for His salvation, and it is the mouth by which the soul feeds hungrily on Him. What wedding garment can sinners bring with them more

delightful than this to their bountiful God, whose great design is to manifest the abundant riches of His glorious grace and bounty in this wedding feast? The Father Himself loves them, because they love Christ, and believe that He came out from God (John 16:27).

But yet we see that the excellency of faith lies in this, that it accounts not itself, nor any work of ours, a sufficient ornament to make us acceptable in the sight of God. It will not be our wedding garment itself, but it buys of Christ white raiment, that we may be clothed, and that the shame of our nakedness may not appear (Rev 3:18). Though it loves and desires the free gift of holiness, yet it abandons all thoughts of practicing holiness immediately, before we come to Christ for a holy nature. It puts on Christ Himself, and in Him all things that pertain to life and godliness. Thus every true believer is clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1), even with the Sun of righteousness, the Lord Jesus, who is pleased to be Himself both our wedding garment and feast, and all our spiritual and eternal happiness.

For more full satisfaction and consolation of those distressed souls that lie under the terrible apprehensions of their own sinfulness and the wrath of God, and do not dare venture to trust steadfastly on Christ for their salvation, until they can find in themselves some change from sin to holiness, I shall mention particularly several of these things that such would find in themselves, and I shall show that, if some of them be not partly comprehended in faith itself, they are fruits and consequences of faith, and therefore they cannot be rationally expected before we trust on Christ for our salvation.

1. They think it necessary to repent before they believe on Christ for their salvation, because repentance is absolutely necessary to salvation: “Unless you repent you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3), and Christ places the duty of repentance before faith: “Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). But we are to know that Christ requires repentance first as the end to be aimed at, and faith in the next place, as the only means of attaining it, and, though the end is first in intention, yet the means are first in practice and execution, though both are absolutely necessary to salvation. For what is repentance, but a hearty turning from sin to God and His service? And what way is there to turn to God, but through Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life, without whom none can come to the Father? (John 14:6). And what way is there of coming to Christ but by faith? Therefore, if we would turn to God in the right way, we must first come to Christ by faith, and faith must go before repentance, as the great instrument afforded us by the grace of God for the effectual performance of it. Repentance is indeed a duty which sinners owe naturally to God, but the great question is “How shall sinners be able to perform it?” This question is resolved only by the gospel of Christ: “Repent and believe.” The way to repent is to begin with believing. Therefore the great doctrine of John, in his baptism of repentance, was that they should believe on Him that should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4).

2. Regeneration also is necessary to salvation (John 3:3) and, therefore, many would find it wrought in themselves before they trust on Christ for their salvation. But consider what regeneration is. It is a new begetting or creating us in Christ (1 Cor 4:15; Eph 2:10), in whom we are partakers of a divine nature far different from that which we received from the first Adam. Now, faith is the uniting grace by which Christ dwells in us, and we in Him, and therefore it is the first grace wrought in our regeneration, and the means of all the rest: when you truly believe, you are regenerated, and not till then. Those that receive Christ by believing, and those only, are the sons of God, which are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12,13).

3. They account it necessary to receive Christ as their Lord and Lawgiver, by a sincere resignation of themselves to His government and a resolution to obey His law, before they receive Him as their Saviour. This is one principal lesson of the NEW DIVINITY,* and such a receiving Christ as Lord is made to be the great act of saving faith, without which such faith as I have described, by which we trust on Christ for salvation, is reckoned no better than gross presumption. They teach that Christ will not bestow His salvation on those that do not first yield their subjection to His kingly authority; but He calls them His enemies, because they would not that He should reign over them, and requires that they be brought and slain before Him (Luke 19:27). And I own it as a certain truth that Christ will save none but those that are brought to resign themselves sincerely to the obedience of His royal authority and laws.

But yet we must observe that they are not brought to this holy resignation, or to any sincere purpose and resolution of obedience, before they receive His salvation, but rather by receiving it. Men that were never thoroughly sensible of their natural death in sin easily bring themselves to resolve universal obedience to God when they are on their death-beds, or in any imminent danger, or when they would prepare themselves for the Lord's Supper, that so they may make their peace with God, and trust securely on Christ for His salvation. But all resolutions of that kind are vain and hypocritical, sooner broken than made. Those that know the plague of their own hearts do find that their mind is enmity unto the law of God and Christ, and cannot be subject unto it (Rom 8:7), and that they can as soon remove a mountain as give up themselves sincerely to obedience before they trust on Christ for His salvation, and for the gift of a new heart, by which they may be enabled both to will and to do anything that is acceptable to God. We should have been sufficiently obliged to all obedient purposes, resolutions and resignations, if Christ had never come into the world to save us, but He knew that we could perform nothing holily, except He made us first partakers of salvation, and that we shall never obey Him as a Lawgiver, until we receive Him as a Saviour. He is a saving Lord; trust on Him first to save you from the guilt and power of sin, and dominion of Satan, and to give you a new spiritual disposition; then, and not till then, the love of Christ will constrain you to resign yourself heartily to live to Him that died for you (2 Cor 5:14), and you will be able to say, with an unfeigned resolution, "O LORD, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds" (Psa 116:16).

4. It seems to them evident that some good works are necessary, before we can trust on Christ safely for the forgiveness of sins, because our Saviour teaches us that, if we do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will our heavenly Father forgive our trespasses, and directs us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12,15). Restitution was also to be made of things wrongfully got from others, before the sacramental atonement was made by the trespass-offering (Lev 6:5,7). I answer, this is sufficient to prove that forgiving others and restitution according to our ability, or at least a sincere desire and purpose so to do, are very closely joined with the forgiveness of our sins, and are very necessary to fit us for prayer, and for sacramental applications of pardoning grace to ourselves.

A lively faith cannot be without these fruits and, therefore, we cannot pray, or partake of sacraments, in faith, without them; but yet, if we strive to do either of these before we trust on Christ for our pardon and salvation, we shall do them slavishly and hypocritically, not in a holy acceptable manner. Our forgiving others will not be accompanied with any hearty love to them as to ourselves, for the sake of God, and our restitution will be but a forced act, like Pharaoh's letting the children of Israel go, or like Judas' restoring the thirty pieces of silver, being compelled to it by terror of spirit; and when the terror that forced us is removed, we shall be as ready to recall our

forgiveness, and to wrong others again, as Pharaoh was to bring the Israelites again into bondage after he had let them go (Exo 14:5). If you would forgive others heartily, so as to love them again, you must first, by faith in Christ, apprehend the love and mercy of God towards yourselves, and then you will be able, according to the apostle's instructions, to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you (Eph 4:32). The readiness of Zaccheus to make restitution followed upon a discovery of Christ's love to him, and his joyful receiving Christ into his house was fruit by which he evidenced the truth of that faith that was already wrought in his heart.

5. I shall reckon up together several other qualifications that distressed souls would find in themselves, that they may be duly prepared to trust on Christ for their salvation, and when they have laboured anxiously a long time, and cannot get them, at last they lie down in sorrowful despondence, not daring to apply the consolations of the grace of God in Christ to their wounded consciences. Let perplexed souls mark the particulars, and observe whether the condition of their own souls be reached in any of them. O you afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted, what good qualifications are they that you would have, that you may be encouraged to lay hold on Christ for salvation?

It is likely you will answer, in the bitterness of your soul, "O let me have first some love to God and godliness in my heart, and freedom from my hateful heart-risings against Him and His service! Let me have some good thoughts of God, His justice, mercy, holiness, that I may be able to justify Him though He damn me, and that I may not be filled with murmuring and hellish blasphemies in my mind against Him. Let the raging of my lust be abated, and the stinking kennel of my wicked heart a little cleansed. Let me have some holy reverential fear of God, and not only a panic tormenting horror. I would be more affected with the wrath of God, and not be of a slighting heedless spirit. I would be more humbled for sin, loathe it, and be ashamed of, and sorry for it with a godly sorrow, not merely because of the punishment, but because it grieves and vexes the Holy Spirit of God. I would be able to make a willing and ingenuous confession of sin, and to pour out my soul to the Lord in lively affectionate prayer for forgiveness, and to praise and glorify Him heartily, and not be like a lifeless stone in the duty of prayer, as I am."

Are these the things you desire, O poor distressed soul? The best reply I can make for your speedy comfort is to inform you that the things are good, but your desires are not well timed. It is unreasonable for you to expect these holy qualifications while you are in your natural state, under the guilt of sin and the apprehension of the wrath of God, before you have received the atonement and the new spiritual life that is by Christ, through faith in His name.** You but exasperate your corruption and harden your heart and make your wounds stink the more because of your foolishness. Such good qualifications are included in the nature of faith, and for the most part they follow after it, so that they cannot possibly be obtained before you trust on Christ for your salvation, as I shall show concerning them particularly in their order.

A love to the salvation of God, and to the free gift of holiness, is included in the nature of faith, so that it cannot be hearty without it. Act faith first, and the apprehension of God's love to your soul will sweetly allure and constrain you to love God and His service universally: "We love Him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We cannot be beforehand with God in love; first we must perceive His love to make us love Him, for if we look on Him as a God contrary to us, that hates us and will damn us, our own innate self-love will breed hatred and heart-risings against Him, in spite of our hearts. That love, which is the end of the law, must flow from faith unfeigned (1 Tim 1:5). And, if hatred works in you more than love, how can you expect good thoughts of God, or any

other than blaspheming or at least murmuring thoughts of Him, in this condition? Ill-will never speaks or thinks well. The first right holy thoughts you can have of God are thoughts of His grace and mercy to your soul in Christ, which are included in the grace of faith. Get these thoughts first by believing in Christ, and they will breed in you love to God, and all good thoughts of Him, and free you from blasphemous and murmuring thoughts by degrees, for love thinks no evil (1 Cor 13:5).

Then will you be able to account God just and merciful, if He had damned you, and extended His grace to others, and you will be able to think well of His holiness, and of His decrees, which many cannot endure to hear of.

The way to get rid of your raging lusts is by faith, that purifies the heart and works by love (Acts 15:9; Gal 5:6). The soul must be brought to take pleasure in God and Christ by faith, or else it will lust after fleshly and worldly pleasures. And the more you strive against lusts without faith, the more they are stirred up, though you prevail so far as to restrain the fulfilling of them. Beg a holy fear of God, with fear of coming short of the promised rest through unbelief (Heb 4:1). Such a fear is an ingredient of faith, and it will breed in us a reverential, yea, a childlike fear of God and His goodness (Heb 12:28; Hosea 3:5). We must have grace by which we may serve God with reverence. It is in the margin, "We must have, or hold fast grace." And there is no other way to hold fast grace but by faith, and this will quickly calm all panic and tormenting horror.

And if you would be free from carelessness and slighting the wrath of God, your way is first, by believing, to avoid despairing, for people grow careless by despairing and, for their own quiet, they will endeavour to slight evils which they have no hope to prevent, according to the proverb, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32). True humiliation for sin is either a part or fruit of faith, for, on our believing, we shall remember our own evil ways and doings, that were not good, and shall loathe ourselves in our own sight, for all our abominations (Ezek 36:31). We shall also then willingly renounce our own righteousness, and account it but dung, that we may win Christ by faith (Phil 3:7,8). But beggars will make the most of all their nasty rags till they are furnished with better clothes, and cripples will not cast away their crutches, until they have a better support to lean on.

Godly sorrow for sin is wrought in us by believing the pardoning grace of God, as it is found by experience. A pardon from a prince will sometimes sooner draw tears from a stubborn malefactor, than the fear of a halter will. Thus the sinful woman was brought to wash Christ's feet with her tears (Luke 7:37,38). We are not likely to be sorry for grieving God with our sins, while we look on Him as an enemy that will ease Himself well enough of His burden, and right Himself on us, by our everlasting destruction.

The belief of God's pardoning and accepting grace is a necessary means to bring us to an ingenuous confession of sins. The people freely confessed their sins, when they were baptized of John in the Jordan, for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4,5). The confession of despairers is forced, like the extorted confessions and cryings out of malefactors upon the rack. A pardon sooner opens the mouth to an ingenuous confession than, "Confess and be hanged," or, "Confess and be damned." Therefore, if you would freely confess your sins, believe first that God is faithful and just to forgive your sins through Christ (1 John 1:9).

And if you would pray to God, or praise Him, with lively affections, you must first believe that God will hear you, and give you what is best for you for Christ's sake (John 16:23,24), otherwise your praying will be only from the teeth outward, for how shall they call on Him in whom they

have not believed (Rom 10:14)? You must come first to Christ, the altar, by faith, that by Him you may offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Heb 13:10,15).

Finally to pass from particulars, to the general assertion laid down in the direction, if you ask, “What shall we do that we may work the works of God, or get any saving qualifications?” I must direct you first to faith, as the work of works, and the great saving preparatory to all good qualifications, by answering in our Saviour’s words: “This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent” (John 6:28,29).

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious”—1 Peter 2:2,3

Be sure to seek for holiness of heart and life only in its due order, where God has placed it, after union with Christ, justification and the gift of the Holy Ghost and, in that order, seek it earnestly by faith as a very necessary part of your salvation.

I hope the reader will observe warily in all these directions, that the holiness aimed at as the great end in the whole discourse does not confide in the grace or act of faith required peculiarly by the gospel, which, though it be a saving gift of Christ, yet it is here considered rather as a means precedent to the reception of Christ and His salvation, than a part of His salvation received. But the holiness aimed at consists in conformity to the whole moral law, to which we are naturally obliged, if there had never been any gospel, or any such duty as believing in Christ for salvation.

Now, in this direction, three things are contained that are very necessary to guide us to the attainment of this great end, and therefore worthy of our serious consideration.

Firstly, it is a matter of high concern, to be acquainted with the due place and order in which God has settled this holy practise in the mystery of our salvation, and a great point of Christian wisdom to seek it only in that order. We know that God is the God of order, and that His infinite wisdom has appeared in appointing the order of His creatures, which we are forced to observe for attainment of our ends in worldly things; so also in spiritual things God has made an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure (2 Sam 23:5). The benefits of it have an orderly dependence each upon the other, as links of the same golden chain, though several of them, and a title to them all, are given to us at one and the same time. And I think enough has been said already to show in what order God brings us to the practice of the moral law. He makes us first to be in Christ by faith, as branches in the vine, that we may bring forth much fruit (John 15:4,5). He first purges our consciences from dead works by justification, that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:14). He makes us first to live in the Spirit, and then to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). This is the order prescribed in the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation, though the law prescribes a quite contrary method, that we should first perform its commands, that so we may be justified and live, and in this way it proves a killing letter to us.

Now, mark well the great advantages you have for the attainment of holiness by seeking it in a right gospel order. You will have the advantage of the love God manifested towards you, in forgiving your sins, receiving you into favour, and giving you the spirit of adoption, and the hope of His glory freely through Christ, to persuade and constrain you by sweet allurements to love God again, who has so dearly loved you, and to love others for His sake, and to give up yourselves to the obedience of all his commands out of hearty love to Him. You will also enjoy the help of the Spirit

of God to incline you powerfully to obedience, and to strengthen you for the performance of it against all your corruptions and the temptations of Satan, so that you will have both wind and tide to forward your voyage in the practice of holiness.

Contrariwise, if you rush upon the immediate performance of the law, without taking Christ's righteousness and His Spirit in the way to it, you will find both wind and tide against you: your guilty conscience and corrupt dead nature will certainly defeat and frustrate all your enterprises and attempts to love God and serve Him in love, and you will but stir up sinful lusts instead of stirring up yourselves to true obedience, or, at best, you will but attain to some slavish and hypocritical performances. Oh, that people would be persuaded to consider the due place of holiness in the mystery of salvation, and to seek it only there where they have all the advantages of gospel grace to find it! Many miscarry in their zealous enterprises for godliness and, after they have spent much labour in vain, God makes a breach on them, even to their everlasting destruction, as He did on Uzzah, to a temporal destruction, because they did not seek Him after the due order (1 Chron 13:10).

Secondly, we are to look upon holiness as a very necessary part of that salvation that is received by faith in Christ. Some are so drenched in a covenant of works that they accuse us for making good works needless to salvation, if we will not acknowledge them to be necessary, either as conditions to procure an interest in Christ, or as preparatives to fit us for the receiving Him by faith. And others, when they are taught by the Scriptures, that we are saved by faith, through faith, without works, do begin to disregard all obedience to the law, as not at all necessary to salvation, and account themselves obliged to it only in point of gratitude; if it be wholly neglected, they do not doubt but free grace will save them harmless. Yea, some are given up to strong Antinomian delusions, that they account it a part of the liberty from the bondage of the law, purchased by the blood of Christ, to make no conscience of breaking the law in their conversation.

One cause of these errors, that are so contrary one to the other, is that many are prone to imagine nothing else to be meant by salvation, but to be delivered from hell, and to enjoy heavenly happiness and glory; thus they conclude that, if good works are a means of glorification, and precedent to it, they must also be a precedent means of our whole salvation; and that, if they be not a necessary means of our whole salvation, they are not at all necessary to glorification. But, though salvation is often taken in Scripture, by way of eminency, for its perfection in the state of heavenly glory, yet, according to its full and proper signification, we are to understand by it all freedom from the evil of our natural corrupt state, and all those holy and happy enjoyments that we receive from Christ our Saviour, either in this world by faith, or in the world to come by glorification. Thus justification, the gift of the Spirit to dwell in us, the privileges of adoption, are parts of our salvation which we partake of in this life. Thus also, the conformity of our hearts to the law of God, and the fruits of righteousness with which we are filled by Jesus Christ in this life, are a necessary part of our salvation.

God saves us from our sinful uncleanness here by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, as well as from hell hereafter (Ezek 36:29; Titus 3:5). Christ was called JESUS, that is, a Saviour, because He saved His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Therefore it is a part of our salvation to deliver us from our sins, which is begun in this life by justification and sanctification, and perfected by glorification in the life to come. Can we rationally doubt whether it be any proper part of our salvation by Christ to be quickened, to live to God, when we were by nature dead in trespasses and sins, and to have the image of God in holiness and righteousness restored to us which we lost by the Fall; and to be freed from a vile dishonourable slavery to Satan and our own

lusts, and made the servants of God and to be honoured so highly as to walk by the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? And what is all this but holiness in heart and life?

We then conclude that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity, as part of the end itself. Though we are not saved by good works, as procuring causes, yet we are saved to good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace, which God has prepared that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10). It is, indeed, one part of our salvation to be delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works; but the end of this is, not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery) but that we may fulfill the royal law of liberty, and that we may serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Gal 5:13; Rom 7:6).

Yea, holiness in this life is such a part of our salvation as is a necessary means to make us suitable to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heavenly light and glory; without holiness we can never see God (Heb 12:14), and are as unfit for the glorious presence as swine for the presence chamber of an earthly prince. I confess, some may be converted when they are so near the point of death that they may have little time to practise holiness in this world, but the grace of the Spirit is active like fire (Matt 3:11), and, as soon as it is given, it will immediately produce good inward working of love to God and Christ and His people. This will be sufficient to manifest the righteous judgment of God in saving them at the great day, when He shall judge every man according to His work; though some possibly may not have so much time to discover their inward grace in any outward works, as the thief upon the cross (Luke 23:40,43).

The third and last thing to be noted in this direction is that holiness of heart and life is to be sought for earnestly by faith, as a very necessary part of our salvation. Great multitudes of ignorant people that live under the gospel harden their hearts in sin, and ruin their souls for ever, by trusting on Christ for such an imaginary salvation as does not consist at all in holiness, but only in forgiveness of sin and deliverance from everlasting torments. They would be free from the punishment due to sin, but they love their lusts so well that they hate holiness, and would not be saved from the service of sin. The way to oppose this pernicious delusion is not to deny, as some do, that trusting on Christ for salvation is a saving act of faith, but rather to show that none do or can trust on Christ for true salvation, except they trust on Him for holiness; neither do they heartily desire true salvation, if they do not desire to be made holy and righteous in their hearts and lives. If ever God and Christ give you salvation, holiness will be one part of it; If Christ does not wash you from the filth of your sins, you have no part with Him (John 13:8).

What a strange kind of salvation do they desire, that do not care for holiness? They would be saved, and yet be altogether dead in sin, aliens from the life of God, bereft of the image of God, deformed by the image of Satan, his slaves and vassals to their own filthy lusts, utterly unsuitable for the enjoyment of God in glory. Such a salvation as that was never purchased by the blood of Christ, and those that seek it abuse the grace of God in Christ and turn it into lasciviousness. They would be saved by Christ, and yet out of Christ, in a fleshly state; whereas God frees none from condemnation, but those that are in Christ, that walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; or else they would divide Christ, and take a part of His salvation, and leave out the rest, but Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13). They would have their sins forgiven, not that they may walk with God in love in time to come, but that they may practise their enmity against Him without any fear of punishment.

But, let them not be deceived, God is not mocked. They do not understand what true salvation is, neither were they ever yet thoroughly sensible of their lost estate, and of the great evil of sin; and that which they trust on Christ for is but an imagination of their own brains, and therefore their trusting is gross presumption. True gospel faith makes us come to Christ with a thirsty appetite, that we may drink of living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (John 7:37,38), and cry out earnestly to save us, not only from hell, but from sin, saying, “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Psa 143:10); “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jer 31:18); “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10). This is the way by which the doctrine of salvation by grace necessitates us to holiness of life, by constraining us to seek for it by faith in Christ as a substantial part of that salvation which is freely given us through Christ.

Footnotes:

* “When we speak of faith merely as it is justifying, we maintain against all the subtile Popery in the world, that it respects Christ only as a Priest, as a sacrifice and propitiation; but not Christ as a King. For, to make that act of faith, that receives Christ as a Lord, to be the justifying act of faith, is the very soul of Popery, that builds justification upon sanctification, or upon sanctifying faith; whereas it is the receiving of Christ as a Priest, that alone justifies before God.

It is true, faith in Christ as a Saviour and a Lord, go hand in hand together; they are inseparably connected; even as the eye and ear are both joined together in one head; yet it is not the office of the eye to hear, or of the ear to see; no, but it is the office of the eye to see, and of the ear to hear; even so, though faith in Christ as a Jesus and as a Lord go together in one and the same believer, and at one and the same time, yet they have their different offices; Christ, as a King and Lord, is not the object of justifying faith, but only Christ as a Priest and a Saviour.

It is not Christ as the Lord, subduing my sin, that is the matter of my justification before God, but Christ, as a Priest, paying all my debt; it is not my personal righteousness, even in my gracious subjection to Christ as a Lord, that can be the ground of justification; but it is the righteousness of Christ alone as a Priest, his doing and dying, that is the ground of justification. And therefore it is not faith dealing with Christ as a Lord that justifies, but faith’s dealing with Christ as a Priest, a Saviour, and a complete Righteousness.

This is the doctrine of the word; which, when our Reformers began to publish, they were branded as enemies to holiness and good works; and if something like this be not at the root of many reproaches in our day, I know not what it is; and if this be the ground of these reproaches, we may gladly bear them as our glory.”

— By Ralph Erskine (1685-1752), taken from the 2nd sermon of 12 delivered on Colossians 2:6, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”

**Exodus 34:5-7, “And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the *name* of the LORD...The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”