

THE
REIGN
OF
GRACE

ABRAHAM BOOTH (1734-1806)

THE REIGN OF GRACE

from Its Rise to Its Consummation

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In this edition, the text is unabridged but has been carefully edited to improve readability. Synonyms have been substituted for less familiar words, punctuation updated, Elizabethan personal pronouns replaced, some sentences re-ordered, explanatory and biographical footnotes added, and headings and sub-headings added.

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PREFACE

I shall not offer any apology to the public for the following treatise. If the leading sentiments adopted and defended in it correspond with the unerring Scripture, I have no fear of the frowns of men. And if not, it would be impossible, by the most labored apology, to justify my conduct.

The doctrine of sovereign grace¹ is here maintained and handled in a practical manner. In the following pages, it has been my endeavor not only to state and defend the main truths of the gospel in a doctrinal way, but also to point out their peculiar importance, when applied, to awaken the conscience and comfort the heart, to elevate the affections, and to influence the whole conduct in the way of holiness.

To this edition of *The Reign of Grace*, I have made large additions, the principal of which is an entire chapter upon election, which renders the scheme of doctrines more complete and the contents of the book more answerable to the title. I also thought it my duty to bear a public testimony particularly to that important part of revealed truth, having in my younger years greatly opposed it in a poem: *On Absolute Predestination*. This poem, if considered in a critical light, is despicable; if in a theological view, detestable. This poem was an impotent attack on the honor of divine grace² in regard to its glorious freeness, and a bold opposition to the sovereignty of God. I now consider it to be such, and as such I here renounce it.

Even though the doctrine of reigning grace³ is sometimes decried as licentious,⁴ it is the very truth that God has delighted to honor in all ages and that the divine Spirit has owned for the information and comfort, for the holiness and happiness, of sinful men. Were I not fully persuaded of this, I would condemn my

¹ **sovereign grace** – God’s unmerited favor freely shown (as by a king), according to His will (Rom 9:15-18).

² **grace** – favor freely shown to those who deserve punishment.

³ **reigning grace** – God’s grace that governs men’s affairs and is always effective in accomplishing His purposes.

⁴ **licentious** – tending to encourage sin.

tongue to everlasting silence and my pen to perpetual rest, rather than appear as an advocate for it.

I have nothing further to add by way of preface, except my fervent prayers that a divine blessing may attend every reading of the following chapters, so as to make this book really useful and cause it to answer some valuable purposes for the great Redeemer's glory.

—*Abraham Booth*

INTRODUCTION

*“Even so might grace reign through righteousness
unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

—Romans 5:21

A. Opposition

1. *The World's Contempt*

The gospel of reigning grace, being a doctrine truly divine, has always been the object of the world's contempt. It was of old a stumbling block to the self-righteous Jew, and foolishness to the philosophic Greek (1Co 1:23). Paul—who was a resolute asserter of the honors of grace and tireless in preaching Christ—found it so by repeated experience; and that not only among the illiterate and profane,¹ but also among the learned and the devout. Nay, he had frequent occasion to observe that the religious devotees of his age were the first in opposing the doctrine he preached, and the most hardened enemies against the truth of God. The polite, the learned, the religious were all agreed to charge both his character and his doctrine with the foulest reproaches. Nor was this treatment peculiar to Paul, but common to all his contemporaries who embraced the same glorious cause and labored in the same good work. The doctrine they preached was charged with licentiousness.² Their enemies boldly affirmed that they said, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom 3:8). Thus were their character and their labors discredited, the former as hateful to God and the latter as destructive to man.

But what was the ground of this profane charge? Were they loose in their morals or scandalous in their lives? No such thing! Had they not as much regard for practical religion and true morality as any of their objectors? They had more, far more than they all! Did they never mention good works as necessary to answer any valuable end in the Christian life? They often pressed the performance of them as absolutely necessary to answer various important

¹ **profane** – those not professing Christianity.

² **licentiousness** – tending toward disregard for morality.

purposes, both in the sight of God and man. What then could be the reason of so hateful a charge? It was because their doctrine was not in the least adapted to gratify the pride of man. They taught that without the atonement³ made on the cross and the grace revealed in redeeming blood, the state of the best men would have been absolutely desperate, desperate as that of the devils and of those already damned. And as the apostles were free to declare that the state of the most respectable part of mankind was evil—dreadfully evil, evil in those things they most highly esteemed themselves for—so also they boldly preached a perfect Savior and a finished salvation to the most worthless and vile.

2. *The Self-Righteous Offended*

These early teachers and infallible⁴ guides were not in the least acquainted with those terms and conditions, prerequisites and qualifications—the performing and attaining of which are by many accounted so necessary to acceptance with God. They knew of only one way in which a sinner might be accepted of God and justified before Him, and that was entirely of *grace* through the perfect work of Christ alone. The way of justification⁵ that they taught is absolutely pure and unmixed. In their doctrine on this important subject, grace does not only appear, it shines, reigns, and triumphs. It is the *only* thing! There is not discernible in it the least bit of those notions that foster pride or cherish self-esteem. All those fine distinctions that are invented by the proud philosopher or the self-righteous moralist—that tend in any degree to support the opinion of human worthiness and to obscure our views of divine grace—are by them entirely set aside and totally destroyed.

The most shining deeds and valuable qualities that can be found among men, though highly useful and truly excellent when set in their proper places and referred to suitable ends, are—as to the grand article of justification—treated as nonentities. In this

³ **atonement** – act of bringing reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense. See Free Grace Broadcaster 227, *The Atonement*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴ **infallible** – not capable of error, because the writers of Scripture were divinely inspired.

⁵ **justification** – act of God's free grace wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21)—only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19) and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 32) See Free Grace Broadcaster 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

respect, the most zealous professor,⁶ with all his labored performances, stands on a level with the most profane. The apostolic⁷ truth—addressing all to whom it comes as guilty, condemned, perishing wretches—leaves no room for preference or boasting in any; so that the whole glory of our salvation may be secured to that grace which is infinitely rich and absolutely free.

At this, the devout Pharisee⁸ and the decent moralist are highly offended. Such doctrines being advanced, they think it required of them to stand up in defense of what they call a “holy life.” They think they must support the sinking credit of good works as having a considerable effectiveness in procuring our acceptance with God. Many persons frequently do this, much more by talking about the necessity of good works than by performing them. They think it their duty to rail at the preacher as an avowed enemy to holiness; nor will they spare to give him the honorable title of “friend of publicans and sinners” (Mat 11:19). Now innumerable slanders are cast on the doctrine of grace⁹ as being licentious, and on the ministers of it as opening the floodgates of all iniquity. For they suppose that everything bad may be justly expected from those who openly renounce all dependence on their own duties, and whose hope of eternal happiness arises, not from services that they perform, but from grace that the gospel reveals—not from the worth that they possess, but from the work that Christ has wrought. Thus they despise the gospel under the fair pretense of a more than common concern for the interests of holiness.

3. *The Exclusiveness of Grace*

Nor is this the only offense that the gospel gives. It is entirely inconsistent with the natural notions of men concerning acceptance with God, and contrary to every scheme of salvation that human reason suggests. It will admit of no copartner in relieving a distressed conscience or in bringing deliverance to a guilty soul. It leaves everyone that slights it and seeks for assistance from any

⁶ **professor** – one who says he believes in the Christian faith.

⁷ **apostolic** – coming from the twelve apostles of the New Testament.

⁸ **Pharisee** – member of the ancient Jewish sect noted for strict obedience to Jewish traditions, who were sinfully proud of their religious works.

⁹ **doctrine of grace** – name given to the system of theology usually known as Calvinism, which emphasizes that salvation is all of grace, and by the merit of Christ alone, based solely upon God’s unconditional election of sinners, absolutely without any addition from the works of man. See *The Doctrines of Grace in the Gospel of John*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

other quarter to perish under an everlasting curse. Thus the pride of the self-sufficient kindles into resentment against the gospel as a most uncharitable doctrine and quite unsociable.

Nor can the faithful dispensers of sacred truth fail to share in the honor of these reproaches. They dare to affirm that this gospel, so hateful to the sons of pride, exhibits the only way of a sinner's access to his offended Sovereign. They affirm that all who oppose it, and all who embrace its counterfeit, are left in the hands of divine justice without a mediator.¹⁰ Thus they are sure to be accounted persons of limited minds and very far from a liberal way of thinking. They are considered as the dupes of bigotry¹¹ and little better than the enemies of mankind. Indeed, he who pretends to be a friend to revealed truth, but is cool and indifferent to its honor and interest, whose extensive charity is such that he can allow those who widely differ from him in the chief articles of the Christian faith to be safe in their own way—may enjoy his peculiar sentiments without much fear of disturbance.

Such conduct may be applauded under a false notion of Christian candor¹² and of a catholic¹³ spirit. This may be the way to maintain a friendly communication among multitudes whose leading sentiments are widely different. However, it will be deemed by the God of truth as deserving no better name than a joint opposition to the spirit and design of His gospel. For such a timid and lukewarm profession of truth is little better than a denial of it, little better than open hostility against it. To seek for peace at the expense of truth will be found, in the end, no other than a wicked conspiracy against both God and man. Such, however, as love the truth will boldly declare against all its counterfeits and every deviation from it. And whatever may be the consequence, they will say

¹⁰ **mediator** – *literally*: one who goes between. “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest and king; head and savior of his church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹¹ **bigotry** – intolerance; prejudice.

¹² **candor** – openness; frankness.

¹³ **catholic** – broadminded.

with him of old: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel...let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).

4. *The Insult of the Gospel*

Thus the genuine gospel will always appear like an insult to public taste. Wherever it comes, if it be not received, it awakens disgust and provokes abhorrence. Nor can it be otherwise. For its principal design is

- to mortify the pride of man and to display the glory of grace
- to throw all human excellence down to the dust
- to elevate, even to thrones of glory, the needy and wretched
- to show that everything which exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ is an abomination in the sight of God
- to show that He Who is despised of men and hated by the nations is Jehovah’s eternal delight (Isa 49:7; Mat 3:17).

The ancient gospel is an unceremonious thing. It pays no respect to the academic because of his profound learning, nor to the moralist on account of his upright conduct. It has not the least regard to the aristocrat because of his pompous honors, nor to the devotee for the sake of his zeal or his righteousness. No, the potent prince and the lowly slave, the wise philosopher and the ignorant rustic, the virtuous lady and the infamous prostitute—stand on the same level in its comprehensive sight. Its business is with the worthless and the miserable, whomsoever they be. If these be relieved, its end is gained. If these be made happy, its Author is glorified, whatever may become of the rest. Towards these it constantly wears the most friendly aspect and rejoices to do them good. But the self-sufficient of every rank are treated by it with the utmost reserve and beheld with a steady contempt. The hungry it fills “with good things,” but the rich it sends “empty away” (Luk 1:53).

These considerations may serve to show us the true state of the case as it stood between Paul and his opponents. The situation of things was much the same between Protestants and Papists at and for some time after the Reformation.¹⁴ Nor will the apostolic doc-

¹⁴ **Protestants** – members of a Christian church whose faith and practice are founded on the principles of the Reformation, especially in the acceptance of the Bible as the sole source of revelation, in justification by faith alone, and in the universal priesthood of all the believers.

Papists – those loyal to the Pope; Roman Catholics.

Reformation – 16th century movement led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and many others, which sought a return from some of the erroneous beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church to the truths of the Bible.

trine ever fail to be attended with strenuous opposition and foul reproaches while ignorance of its real nature and legal pride prevail in the hearts of men.

Many, indeed, are the methods that have been devised to render the distasteful truth more generally acceptable, and to get rid of the offense of the cross. But what have been the consequences? The gospel has been corrupted; the consciences of awakened sinners have been left to grope in the dark for that comfort which nothing but the unmixed truth could give; and instead of promoting holiness, the reverse has terribly resulted. It therefore is necessary for every lover of sacred truth to let it stand on its own basis and not to tamper with it—to leave all its credit and all its success in the world to its own inherent worth, to that authority with which it is clothed, and to management by that sovereign Being Who ordained it for His own glory.

B. Affirmation

But though the doctrine of reigning grace may be despised by the self-sufficient, it will ever be revered by “the poor in spirit” (Mat 5:3). For by it they are informed of an honorable way of escape from the wrath to come, which they know they justly have deserved. To the sensible sinner, therefore, it must always be a “joyful sound” (Psa 89:15). Those who are ignorant of its nature, tendency, and design are always ready to imagine that it has an unfriendly influence upon morality and good works when preached in its glorious freeness. But we yet may boldly affirm that the gospel is the grand instrument ordained by a holy God for informing the ignorant, comforting the sorrowful, and rescuing the wicked from that worst of bondage: the slavery of sin and subjection to Satan. Such is the gracious tendency of the glorious gospel! Such is its friendly and sanctifying influence on the hearts of men!

I will indeed acknowledge that this doctrine *may* be held in licentiousness by those who profess it. But then I will as confidently maintain that whoever holds it in unrighteousness never received the love of that sacred truth or experienced its power. For to have a bare conviction of divine truth in the mind, and to experience its power on the heart, are very different things. The former may produce an outward profession; the latter will elevate the affections, turn the corrupt bias of the will, and influence the whole conduct.

With the steadiest persuasion, therefore, of the holy nature and tendency of the doctrine of divine grace—as it is in itself and as it operates on the minds and manners of all those who know it in truth—I proceed to give, not a full display (which is infinitely too high for mortals), but some brief hints concerning that grace which reigns and of the way in which it is manifested. And this is in order to demonstrate its power, glory, and majesty in the salvation of sinners. This I shall do by endeavoring to illustrate that important and charming passage, recorded in Romans 5:21, “Even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The author, conscious of his own insufficiency, looks up to the Spirit of wisdom for divine illumination so that he may write with all the precision and sanctity of truth in opening the noble subject of the ensuing treatise. He therefore entreats the reader to peruse, with candor and impartiality, the contents of the following pages.

1

THE MEANING OF GRACE

A. Definition

That we may proceed with greater clearness and certainty in our following inquiries, it is necessary to consider what is implied in the term *grace*. The primary and principal sense of the word is free favor, unmerited kindness. In this acceptation it is most frequently used in the inspired volume, and thus it is to be understood in the words of the Holy Ghost under consideration.¹ Grace, in the writings of Paul, stands in direct opposition to works and worthiness—all works and worthiness of every kind and of every degree. This appears from the following passages:

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt...Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace (Rom 4:4, 16).

For by grace are ye saved through faith...not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

Who hath saved us...not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace (2Ti 1:9).

As the word *mercy*, in its primary signification, has relation to some creature, either actually in a suffering state or liable to it; so *grace*, in its proper and strict sense, always presupposes unworthiness in its object. Hence, whenever anything valuable is communicated by the blessed God to any of Adam's fallen offspring, the communication of it must be of grace as far as the person on whom it is conferred is considered as unworthy. For so far as any degree of worth appears, the province of grace ceases and that of equity² takes place. Grace and worthiness, therefore, cannot be connected in the same act or for the same end. The one must necessarily give place to the other, according to that remarkable text:

If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work (Rom 11:6).

¹ **words...consideration** – Romans 5:21, “Even so might grace reign.”

² **equity** – distribution of justice or reward.

From the apostle's reasoning, it is evident that whatever is of works is not of grace at all; and that whatever is of grace is not of works in any degree. In the apostle's view of things, works and grace are essentially opposite and equally irreconcilable as light and darkness. Besides, Paul represents the main blessings of salvation as flowing from divine grace. Thus we are led to consider the persons on whom they are bestowed not only as having no claim to those benefits, but as deserving quite the reverse—as having incurred a tremendous curse, and as justly exposed to eternal ruin.

That grace, therefore, about which we treat may be thus defined: *It is the eternal and absolutely free favor of God, manifested in the granting of spiritual and eternal blessings to the guilty and the unworthy.*

B. Eternal

What those blessings are, we shall endeavor to show in the subsequent pages. Meanwhile, be it observed that, according to this definition, the grace of God is eternal. This is agreeable to the meaning of those reviving words, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3). It is divinely free and infinitely rich. Entirely detached from every supposition of human worth, and operating independently of all conditions performed by man, it rises superior to human guilt and superabounds over human unworthiness. Such is the eternal origin, such the glorious basis, of our salvation! Hence it proceeds and is carried on to perfection. Grace shines through the whole. For, as an elegant writer observes, it is "not like a fringe of gold, bordering the garment; not like an embroidery of gold, decorating the robe; but like the mercy-seat of the ancient Tabernacle,³ which was gold—pure gold, all gold—throughout."

Yes, reader, grace is the inexhaustible source of all those inestimable blessings that the Lord bestows on His unworthy creatures in this or in a future world. It is grace that, in all that He does or ever will do for sinners, He intends to render everlastingly glorious

³ **mercy-seat** – place upon the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, where God dwelt among His people under the Mosaic Covenant; made of a plate of solid gold and situated between two giant cherubims (Exo 25:17-18).

Tabernacle – portable sanctuary for the worship of Jehovah, the one true God, used by the Hebrew nation from their time at Mt. Sinai through the period of the Judges after the occupation of the Promised Land.

in their eyes, and in the eyes of all holy intelligence. Inscribed by the hand of Jehovah on all the blessings of the unchangeable covenant,⁴ the indelible motto is “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:6).

C. Opposed to Works

Grace in its own nature, and as it is exercised in our salvation, is directly opposite to all works and worthiness. From this we may learn that those persons are awfully deceived who seek to join them together in the same work and for the same end.

Their pretenses may be high toward holiness. Yet it is plain from the Word of God, and may in some degree appear from the nature of the thing, that they take an effective way to ruin their souls forever, except prevented by that very grace of which they have such false and corrupt ideas. For divine grace disdains to be assisted, in the performance of that work which peculiarly belongs to itself, by the poor, imperfect performances of men. Attempts to complete what grace begins betray our pride and offend the Lord, but cannot promote our spiritual interest.

Let the reader, therefore, carefully remember that grace is either absolutely free, or it is not at all [grace]. Let him remember that he who professes to look for salvation by grace either believes in his heart to be saved *entirely* by it, or he acts inconsistently in affairs of the greatest importance.

⁴ **unchangeable covenant** – sometimes referred to in theology as the Covenant of Mercy, or the Everlasting Covenant; the covenant “made from all of eternity and put into operation at the fall of man, to bring salvation from sin and its penalty. It is generally subdivided...into the covenant of redemption, made between the Father and the Son, and the Covenant of Grace, made between God and His elect.” (Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 112)

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR SALVATION

A. Grace Reigning

Grace is compared to a sovereign¹ in our text (Rom 5:21). A sovereign, considered as such, is invested with regal power and the highest authority. Grace, therefore, in her beneficent² government, must exert and manifest sovereign power. She must supersede the reign and counteract the mighty and destructive operations of sin—or she cannot bring the sinner to eternal life. For the Holy Spirit has compared sin to a sovereign whose reign terminates in death.

As *sin* appears, clothed in horrid deformity and armed with destructive power, inflicting temporal death, and menacing eternal flames; so *grace* appears on the throne, arrayed in the beauties of holiness and smiling with divine benevolence. She appears touched with feelings of the tenderest compassion and armed with all the magnificence of invincible power. This grace is fully determined to exert her authority and gratify her compassion under the conduct of infinite Wisdom—to the everlasting honor of inflexible justice, absolute truth, and every divine perfection. Grace does this

- by rescuing the condemned offender from the jaws of destruction;
- by speaking peace to the alarmed consciences of damnable delinquents;
- by restoring to apostate creatures and vile evildoers a supreme love to God and delight in the ways of holiness; and, finally,
- by bringing them safe to everlasting honor and joy.

In a word, the heart of this mighty sovereign is compassion itself. Her looks are love, her language is balm to the bleeding soul, and her arm is salvation. Such a sovereign is grace. Those who are delivered by her must enjoy a complete salvation. Those who live under her most benevolent government must be happy indeed.

¹ **sovereign** – king or queen; see *The Sovereignty of God* by A.W. Pink (1886-1952); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **beneficent** – doing good; performing acts of kindness and charity.

Divine grace, as reigning in our salvation, not only appears, but appears with majesty—not only shines, but triumphs. She provides and freely bestows all things necessary to our eternal happiness. Grace does not set our salvation on foot³ by accommodating its terms and conditions to the weakened capacities of fallen creatures; but it begins, carries on, and completes the difficult work. Grace, as a sovereign, does not rescue the sinner from deserved ruin, furnish him with new abilities, and then leave him alone to use those abilities in resisting the tempter. It does not leave him alone to mortify his lusts and to attain those holy qualities and perform those righteous acts that render him fit for eternal happiness and give him a title to it.

No! For if the province and work of grace were limited in this manner, things of most importance to the glory of God and the happiness of man would be left in the most uncertain and perilous situation. And, admitting the possibility of any sinner being saved in such a way, there would be ample scope for the exertions of spiritual pride and much room for boasting—which would be diametrically contrary to the honor of the Most High and would frustrate the noble designs of grace.

This matchless favor, far from being satisfied with only laying the foundation, raises the superstructure also. It not only settles the preparations, but executes the very business itself. The Pharisee in the parable made his acknowledgments to preventing and assisting grace,⁴ for “God, I thank thee” was his language (Luk 18:9-14). It is evident, however, that his views of grace were very constricted and his hopes arising from it very deceitful. Would we then view grace as reigning, we must consider it as the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end of our salvation—that the unrivaled honor of this greatest of all works may be given to “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10).

³ **set...on foot** – initiate.

⁴ **preventing and assisting grace** – Preventing (or prevenient) and assisting grace are categories of grace acknowledged in the Arminian system in which God gives sinners strength that enables them to overcome the effects of total depravity, respond to His call to salvation, and continue in that choice. Arminians would see this grace as resistible and primarily a means that lifts fallen man back to a position of being able to choose for God and walk with Him. Booth is critiquing this view as insufficient to account for the sovereign effectiveness of the scriptural concept of grace.

B. Your Response to Reigning Grace

Having taken this general view of reigning grace, I would now ask, What think you, reader, of this wonderful favor? Is it worthy of God? Is it suitable to your case? Or do you not know that you are by nature under the guilt and dominion⁵ of sin?—of sin, that dreadful sovereign; of sin, that worst of tyrants! “Sin hath reigned,” says the apostle (Rom 5:21); and the end of its reign, where the sovereignty of grace does not intervene, is eternal death. Can you sleep away your time and dream of being finally happy while under the power of so malicious a sovereign? Shall the toys and trifles of a passing world amuse, when your soul, your immortal *All*, is at stake? If so, how lamentable your condition! How dreadful your state! Awake! Arise! Bow the knee to divine grace, O stubborn rebel, while she holds out the golden scepter of pardon and of peace! Acknowledge her supremacy, submit to her government, before justice ascends the throne and vengeance launches her lightning bolts. For then, an eternal judgment will lie against every application for mercy, though arising from the most pressing need.

Or, if awake in your conscience, do you think it possible to effect your own deliverance? Alas! You are entirely without strength to perform any such thing. Grace was never intended as an assistance to help the weak but well-intentioned to save themselves. The mercy of God and the gospel of Christ were never designed to assist and reward the righteous, but to relieve the miserable and save the desperate—to deliver those who have no other assistance, nor any other hope. Were you acquainted with your complete bondage, were you convinced by the Spirit of truth that there is no possible way of escape but by reigning grace, then you would cry for help. Then the relief that grace affords would be all your salvation and all your desire.

On the other hand, you may be burdened with sin and harassed by tumultuous fears of being cast into hell. You may be sensible of your native depravity, the multiplied iniquities of your life, the many shameful defects attending your best services, and your present absolute unworthiness. You may be ready to sink in despondency! If so, remember that grace has erected her throne! This forbids despair, for her wonderful throne is erected not on the ru-

⁵ **dominion** – ruling power.

ins of justice, not on the dishonor of the Law,⁶ but on the blood of the Lamb. The inconceivably perfect obedience and the infinitely meritorious death of the Son of God form its mighty basis.

Here grace is highly exalted. Here grace appears in state, dispensing her favors and showing her glory. To such a benevolent and condescending⁷ sovereign, the lowest may have free access. By such a powerful sovereign, the most various, multiplied, and pressing needs may be relieved with the utmost ease and greatest readiness. Remember, sorrowful soul, that the name, the nature, and the office of grace enthroned loudly attest that the greatest unworthiness and the most wicked crimes are no bar to the sinner in coming to Christ for salvation, in looking to sovereign favor for all that he lacks. Nay, they demonstrate that the unworthy and sinful are the *only* persons with whom grace is at all concerned. This is amazing! This is delightful!

Ho! All you children of want⁸ and sons of wretchedness! Hither you may come with the utmost freedom. Be it known to you, be it never forgotten by you, that Jehovah considered your indigent case and designed your complete relief when He erected this wonderful throne. Your names are not omitted in the heavenly grant; nay, you are the *only* persons that are blessed with a right of access to this mercy-seat. If sinners more generally knew their condition and the glorious nature of grace as exalted in majesty, how would the throne of this mighty sovereign be crowded! It would be crowded, not by persons adorned with fine accomplishments, but with the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind (Luk 14:21). With longing hearts and uplifted hands, big with expectation and sure of success, they would throng her courts. They would flee there, as numerous as a cloud and as swift as doves—for there is provision made to supply all their needs.

Persons of all ranks and of every character are equally destitute of any righteous or valid plea for admission into the eternal kingdom. Thus, feeling their need of spiritual blessings, they have equally free access to this generous sovereign—and the same

⁶ **dishonor of the Law** – The author's point is that grace reigns, not by violating the just demands of His Law (which would be the case if God simply overlooked sin or lowered the requirements for sinners to earn their own salvation), but by upholding and vindicating it as He satisfied His own righteousness in saving sinners by the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

⁷ **condescending** – kindly stooping to show mercy to the unworthy.

⁸ **children of want** – needy persons.

ground to expect complete relief. Here, in this respect, there is no difference between the devout professor⁹ and the abandoned profligate,¹⁰ the chaste virgin and the infamous prostitute. For, being all criminals and under the same condemnation, they have not the smallest gleam of hope—except what shines upon them in that compassionate proclamation which is issued from the throne of grace by the eternal Sovereign.¹¹

That proclamation is expressive of the freest favor and the richest grace. It includes offenders of the worst characters, publishes pardon for sins of the deepest dye, and all ratified by truthfulness itself. It therefore affords sufficient encouragement to the vilest wretch that lives who is willing to owe his all to divine bounty, without hesitation to receive the heavenly blessing, and with gratitude to rejoice in the royal donation. Yes, thine it is, O sovereign grace, to raise “up the poor out of the dust, and [lift] the needy out of the dunghill” (Psa 113:7)! Thine it is “to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory” (1Sa 2:8).

Remember this, my soul, and let this be thy comfort! And may the Lord enable both the author and the reader to see eye to eye the riches of reigning grace!

Having endeavored to show how grace reigns in our salvation in general, I shall now proceed, in the following chapters, to reveal how grace reigns more particularly in our election, calling, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance in the faith to eternal life. These are so many essential branches of our salvation. And in the bestowal of these choice blessings, grace reigns—manifesting an authority and exerting a power truly divine and infinitely glorious.

⁹ **professor** – one who says he believes in the Christian faith.

¹⁰ **profligate** – one who is shamelessly sinful.

¹¹ See Isaiah 55:1-3; Matthew 11:28; John 6:37; 7:37; Revelation 22:17.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR ELECTION

A. Introduction

1. *God's Glory*

Among the various blessings that flow from sovereign goodness and that are dispensed by reigning grace, that of *election*¹ deservedly claims our first regard. It was in the decree of election that the grace of our infinite Sovereign did first appear: in choosing Christ as the head, and in Him, as His members, all that should ever be saved. Election, therefore, is the first link in the golden chain of our salvation, and the cornerstone in the amazing fabric of human happiness.

Jehovah is the One Who forms universal nature, the supporter and governor of all worlds. And it is not consistent with the perfection of an infinite agent to act without the highest and noblest design. Therefore, the adored Creator, before He imparted existence or time, commenced, proposed, and appointed an end² worthy of Himself in all He determined to do. This end was His own glory. This was His grand design in all the various ranks of existence to which His almighty fiat³ gave birth. There is not a single creature in the vast scale of dependent being but is connected with this as its ultimate end. The loftiest angel that surrounds the throne and the meanest insect that crawls in the dust have the same original parent and are designed, in different ways, to answer the same exalted end. To deny this, or to suppose that the most perfect Agent did not act for the most worthy purpose, is highly derogatory to the dignity of the First Cause.⁴

¹ **election** – God's choice of a people for salvation. "God having, out of His good pleasure from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life (2Th 2:13), entered into a Covenant of Grace to deliver them out of the state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer (Rom 5:21)." (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 19) See also *Whitefield's Letter to Wesley on Election* by George Whitefield (1714-1770); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **end** – aim; goal.

³ **fiat** – decree.

⁴ **First Cause** – God as the Creator of all.

Nobly conspicuous among the various orders of animate and inanimate⁵ existence in this lower creation was man when first formed and recent from the hands of his Maker. Man bears the lively impress of his great Creator's image (Gen 1:26). He possesses elevated faculties and large capacities for operation and enjoyment. He therefore was designed, in a peculiar manner, to answer this highest of all purposes.

Nor was the entrance of sin subversive of the grand design, but was made subservient to it in various ways. It was impossible such an event should bring confusion into that stupendous plan of divine operation which consummate⁶ wisdom had formed, for known to the omniscient⁷ God "are all his works [and all events] from the beginning of the world" (Act 15:18). All that is comprehended in what men call "contingent"⁸ is absolute certainty with Him Who is perfect in knowledge. Therefore, the entrance of sin among moral agents (whether angels or men) could not possibly frustrate Jehovah's purpose or render His original designs unsuccessful. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa 46:10).

2. *The Fall*

The entrance of moral evil among mankind was an awful event. Adam and every individual of his numerous offspring were contaminated, injured, and ruined by it. Yet it appears from divine revelation that He Who declares "the end from the beginning" (Isa 46:10), not only foresaw the Fall, but from eternity determined to display His perfections and promote His glory by it. His determination was to glorify Himself in the complete salvation and endless bliss of some of the apostate race, and in the righteous condemnation of others, so that a revenue of glory shall arise to the great Supreme from all mankind.

This glory shall arise as well from that haughty Egyptian monarch who renounced God's dominion and said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice?" (Exo 5:2), as from the king of Israel whose exalted character is "a man after [God's] own heart" (Act 13:22). As well from a traitorous Judas, who sold his Master's blood, as from a faithful Paul, who counted not his very life dear so that he

⁵ **animate...inanimate** – living and nonliving.

⁶ **consummate** – complete; perfect.

⁷ **omniscient** – all knowing.

⁸ **contingent** – things or events that are dependent or conditioned on other things.

might finish his course with joy and promote the Savior's honor. These shall be the monuments of sovereign grace, and those of righteous vengeance—and both for the glory of God to all eternity.

Nor is anything more agreeable to right reason, or the sacred Scripture, than to conclude that as Jehovah is the First Cause, so He should be the Last End, and that He should be at the most perfect liberty to dispose of His offending creatures in what way He pleases for His own glory. To dispute this is to deny His divine supremacy and (with Pharaoh) to renounce His eternal dominion.

Such being the final cause of the creation in general, and of mankind in particular, that sovereign Being, Who has an absolute right to do what He will with His own, having determined to create man and to leave him to the freedom of his own will, foreseeing he would certainly fall, of His free, distinguishing love⁹ chose a certain number out of the apostate race of Adam, and ordained them to a participation of grace here, and to the enjoyment of glory thereafter. In the execution of this purpose, He determined to glorify all His infinite excellencies by means completely appropriate to Himself. Such is that immanent¹⁰ act of God which is commonly called “election”—and is the subject of this chapter.

3. *Man's Worth*

The doctrine of election—or the doctrine of distinguishing grace, which is the same thing—is now very much despised. It is generally deemed unworthy of serious notice by the learned and philosophic gentlemen of the present age. They cannot deny it had a significant place in the doctrinal systems adopted by godly and learned men in former ages, and particularly by our first reformers from popery.¹¹ Yet, now it is ranked by many among the rash opinions of a gullible antiquity. It is set aside as a doctrine detested by reason, and as at eternal war with the moral perfections of God. It is consigned over to oblivion, as worthy of no more regard than the bold inquiries and wild conclusions, the laborious trifling and learned lumber of the ancient, doting, popish schoolmen.¹² It is

⁹ **distinguishing love** – love of God that sovereignly chooses some to salvation among all of mankind who alike deserve the just wrath of God.

¹⁰ **immanent** – internal; taking place within the mind of God.

¹¹ **reformers from popery** – Reformation heroes, such as Martin Luther, who broke from Roman Catholicism.

¹² **schoolmen** – teachers of philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages, also known as scholastics; examples are Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and John Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308).

also misrepresented as a declared enemy to practical holiness, and as highly injurious to the comfort and hope of mankind. This being the case, we need not wonder that it is now become quite unfashionable.

But what is the reason of this tragic outcry against it? If I am not greatly deceived, it is that this doctrine lays the axe at the root of all our boasted “moral excellence.” This doctrine, in its natural consequences, demolishes every subterfuge¹³ of human pride, as it leaves not the shadow of a difference between one man and another, or why the Deity should regard and save this person rather than that. Instead, it teaches all who know and embrace it to rest in that memorable maxim, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:26)—resolving the whole into divine grace and divine sovereignty.

Without paying the least compliment to the learning, discernment, or character of any who dare to accuse the divine conduct, it repels their insolence in the following blunt manner: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom 9:20). It further teaches that, as unmerited kindness and sovereign favor began the work of salvation, so the same grace must carry it on and complete the vast design—while the Most High, ever jealous¹⁴ of His honor, is determined to have all the glory. Other reasons might be mentioned, but these may suffice to show that the spirit of independence, which is natural to man and reigns in the unregenerate,¹⁵ must be fired with resentment by such an attack upon it. Hence the few advocates of this unpopular doctrine must expect reproach and ridicule, if not something more severe, to attend the profession of such an unrefined doctrine.

It is not, however, my present design to enter upon a labored defense of this “offensive” doctrine. I shall leave that to the friends of truth who have more leisure and greater abilities. This, indeed, has been already often performed, with great advantage to the church of God. I shall, therefore, content myself with taking a short view of the principal branches of this article of the Christian faith, with proposing a few arguments that appear to me plain and perti-

¹³ **subterfuge** – that to which a person resorts for escape or concealment; evasion.

¹⁴ **jealous** – intolerant of unfaithfulness or rivalry.

¹⁵ **unregenerate** – those spiritually unchanged by the Holy Spirit from their natural state; not born again (Joh 3:3).

nent in vindication of it, and with pointing out its proper and profitable use.

B. Establishing the Doctrine of Election

1. Scope

a. Particular individuals

Those who in the volume of inspiration are called the “elect” are a people distinguished from all others. All mankind are not included under this designation. These truths are so apparent as hardly to need any proof. They are so obvious as to leave no room for dispute, both from 1) the allowed meaning of the term, and 2) the tenor¹⁶ of divine revelation.

1) *From the meaning of the term:* because where all (whether persons or things) are equally accepted, there is no preference given. There is no choice made; there are none left. For to “elect” and to “choose” are the same thing. Where any are chosen, others must be refused.

2) *From the tenor of divine revelation:* as it is written, “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen...I have chosen you out of the world” (Joh 13:18; 15:19). The elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded (see Rom 11:7).

That those who are so named are not collective bodies¹⁷ appears with superior evidence from what is asserted concerning them in the same infallible rule of our faith and practice. They are described as having their “names...written in heaven” and “in the book of life” (Luk 10:20; Phi 4:3). They are said to be “ordained to eternal life,” and “chosen...to salvation” (Act 13:48; 2Th 2:13). And, in the boldest manner imaginable, it is asked by one who was thoroughly acquainted with their state and privileges, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33).

Now, a little discernment will enable us to conclude that these things cannot be truly affirmed concerning nations, churches, or communities of any sort, considered as such. But, on the contrary, they strongly imply that

¹⁶ **tenor** – meaning derived from the general flow or collective whole of revelation.

¹⁷ **collective bodies** – nations or groups, as opposed to individuals. Booth is opposing the common argument that the object of God’s election in Scripture is either the nation of Israel or the church universal rather than individual persons.

- the elect, as distinguished from others, are particular persons whose names are in a peculiar manner known to God,
- election relates to spiritual blessings and eternal enjoyments,
- the objects of it are dear to God and forever precious in His sight (Psa 116:15).

That the objects of election are particular persons may further appear from what follows. From the beginning, Jehovah designed to manifest His love in the salvation of sinners. The damnation inflicted on many puts it beyond a doubt that this design extended only to some; for all are not saved, and the divine purpose cannot be rendered void. That salvation was to be wrought by His own Son, as invested with the character and as performing the work of a mediator and surety.¹⁸ As a mediator and a substitute, He was to obey and bleed and die—die under a charge of the blackest guilt, and feeling the weight of the heaviest curse (2Co 5:21; Gal 1:4). It was necessary, therefore, to determine how many and who in particular should be included in this wonderful work and saved by it.

Their persons, as well as their situation and needs, must be known to Him and distinguished from others. For it is absurd to suppose that He should engage as a substitute—to perform obedience and pour out His blood, to lay down His life as a ransom to satisfy justice—and all this for persons unknown. When anyone engages, in a legal way, to become responsible for another in matters of debt or offense, he is always supposed to have some knowledge of the person for whom he engages, so as to distinguish him from all others who may be in similar circumstances and stand in the same need. And the name of the person whose cause he undertakes must also be mentioned in the contract, in order to render it valid.

Nor does it appear that the design of God in the salvation of sinners by the incarnation and death of His own Son could have been certainly answered on any other hypothesis. Supposing, for instance, that it had been the divine purpose to save, by the mediation of Jesus, all who should ever believe. In that case, without ascertaining the persons who should thus embrace the Redeemer, it would have remained dubious whether any would be finally

¹⁸ **surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another. As our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance, upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary's cross (Heb 7:22).

saved, because it would remain uncertain whether any would ever believe.

But if it were certain that some would believe, this certainty must arise from the purpose of God; for on any other foundation, nothing future can be absolutely certain. If it was determined that some should believe, the divine appointment must be considered as extending to every individual whose faith and salvation are supposed to be certain. For faith is a gift of grace, and could not be foreseen in any but those on whom the great Dispenser of every favor had determined to bestow it. Hence we may safely infer that, as the death of Christ was absolutely certain—in virtue of a divine purpose and the everlasting compact between the Eternal Three¹⁹—so all the individuals that should ever be saved by the undertaking of Jesus were chosen of God, were distinguished from others, and consigned to the great Shepherd as His peculiar charge.

b. Before time

It is equally clear that the elect were chosen of God before time began, for their election is one of the first effects of divine love. From everlasting, this love was the love of God to their persons. Their election to complete happiness must, therefore, be eternal. If indeed there had ever been a point in duration in which the blessed God had no thoughts of a mediator, nor any designs of manifesting His love to miserable and guilty creatures, then it might be supposed that there was an instant in which the favored few who are called His elect were not the objects of His choice. But

- if it was Jehovah's eternal purpose to manifest the riches of His grace by a mediator,
- if the Deity—subsisting in three distinct persons and acting under the personal characters of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—did, before all worlds, resolve on the measures to be pursued,
- if a mediator was appointed as the grand agent of divine operation in the wonderful work,

then we may safely conclude that the persons to be included in this mediation and benefited by it were fixed upon and chosen.

This is because both reason and revelation concur to forbid our supposing that the Son of the Blessed should engage as Mediator and act as a substitute for those whom He did not know; or that the

¹⁹ **the Eternal Three** – the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; see FGB 231, *The Triune God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

counsels of heaven should terminate in mere possibilities. It would be equally inconsistent for us to imagine that a resolution in the Eternal Mind concerning the work of redemption,²⁰ which is evidently the chief of all the ways of God, should have any other date than eternity.

The declarations of the Holy Ghost directly support and prove the point. “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation...He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (2Th 2:13; Eph 1:4). They were chosen in Christ as their head and representative. Christ and the elect constitute one mystical body—He the head, and they the members, “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23).

“Before the foundation of the world.” This emphatic phrase obviously expresses eternity. Before the world was formed or any creature existed, time had not commenced. The commencement of time and of created existence are of exactly the same date. Prior, therefore, to the formation of the universe, duration was absolute eternity. The same infallible writer in the same epistle, speaking of the amazing scheme of man’s redemption formed in the mind of God, calls it “the *eternal* purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). This, as we have before proved, necessarily infers the choice of the objects of that redemption.

This truth may be even more clearly shown by considering that the inheritance of glory was prepared for its future possessors before the foundation of the world. In the same way, grace and all spiritual blessings that were necessary to fit them for the enjoyment of it were “given [them] in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 1:9). These were lodged in His hands as their federal head,²¹ as the appointed Mediator, and for their use “before the world began” (2Ti 1:9; Eph 1:3-4). Nor can we conceive of any new determinations arising in the Eternal Mind, or any purposes formed by our Maker, that were not from everlasting—without supposing Him defective in knowledge

²⁰ **redemption** – deliverance of God’s elect from a state of sin into a state of salvation by the means and merit of the ransom paid by Christ on their behalf.

²¹ **federal head** – one who represents a group united to him by virtue of a covenant (as an illustration, a president acts for a country under the constitution). Here it is used of Christ Who represents His people, acts for them, and is united to them in covenant (Rom 5:12-21; 1Co 15:20-22, 45-49).

or changeable in His perfections. These are suppositions that very ill become the character of Him Whose name is Jehovah.²²

2. Merit

But is there any reason assignable *why* the elect were chosen to life and glory, while others were left in their sins to perish under the stroke of divine justice? None in the creature. For all mankind, considered in themselves, were viewed as in the same situation and on the same level. Notwithstanding, the great Author of all things and Lord of the world condescends²³ to assign the reason when He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15). In this, the adored Redeemer perfectly acquiesced, as appears from those remarkable words: "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Mat 11:26). In this the penetrating judgment of that astonishing man²⁴ who was caught up to the third heaven,²⁵ rested completely satisfied (Rom 9:15-16). And we all ought to rest in the same explanation for the divine procedure, without a murmuring word or an opposing thought. Nor can we rebel against the sovereign determinations of the Most High without incurring flagrant guilt; nor can we persist in so doing and escape without punishment.

a. Foresight

But, supposing there was no original difference between the objects of distinguishing grace and those who finally perish, yet did not the Omniscient *foresee* them as possessing faith, fruitful in holy obedience, and persevering to the end? And did not the righteous God consider these as the *cause* why He chose them rather than others whom He viewed as not having such recommendations?

By no means! For grace *reigns* in the choice of all the elect; and grace, as a sovereign, rejects with disdain every such proud pretense to a claim upon her. She never affords her smiles to any because they are worthy. She ennobles none because they are better than others. To do so would be quite inconsistent with her amiable character, and would be utterly subversive of her grand design.

²² **Jehovah** – the unchanging, self-existent, covenant-keeping God; the "I am that I am" (Exo 3:14).

²³ **condescends** – descends or stoops to communicate with man.

²⁴ Reference is to the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2.

²⁵ **third heaven** – place where God and His holy angels dwell. The ancients referred to three heavens: the earth's atmosphere (clouds), outer space (stars), and heaven itself where God's throne is.

Wherever she bestows her kind regards, it is with the condescension of an absolute sovereign. Wherever she intervenes with her helping hand, it is on behalf of those who have no other assistance nor any other plea. But as a further proof of the falsehood of the objection, I would offer the following arguments.

b. Cause and effect

Faith in Christ and holy obedience are represented by the unerring Spirit as the fruits and effects of election. They cannot, therefore, be considered as the *cause* without absurdity in reason and a contradiction to divine revelation. For it is written, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed...He hath chosen us...that we should be holy” (Act 13:48; Eph 1:4). They believed *because* they were ordained to eternal life; not ordained to eternal life because it was foreseen they would believe. They were chosen, not because they were or ever would be holy, but that they might become so. Those, and those only, partake of faith who are called by divine grace; but such only are called to faith and holiness who were predestinated²⁶ to be conformed to the image of Christ. For “whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (Rom 8:30).

Again, the chosen of God are the sheep of Christ. None but those who are so named believe on Him according to His own declaration: “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep” (Joh 10:26). By this we are taught that believing in Him does not *make* us sheep, or give us a right to the character of one of His sheep. Rather, believing is an evidence that we were considered as sheep in the sight of God and given into the hands of the great Shepherd to be saved by Him. Once more, God has

called us with an holy calling, not according to [not in consideration of] our works [whether past or future], but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us [which He purposed] in Christ Jesus before the world began (2Ti 1:9).

Then we are not called according to our works or worthiness, but according to the everlasting purpose and free, distinguishing grace “of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). Much less is it to be supposed that we were chosen according to our works, or in any foresight of them.

To illustrate the truth and confirm the argument, it may be further observed that *faith* and *holiness* occupy a middle station in

²⁶ **predestinated** – appointed beforehand by the eternal purpose of God.

the method of grace. They are neither the foundation nor the top-stone in the spiritual building. Though inseparably connected with election, they are neither its cause nor its consummation. Its cause is sovereign grace; its consummation is infinite glory. Faith and holiness, as one observes, are what stalks and branches are to a root, by which the organic juices ascend to produce and ripen the principal fruit. "By grace are ye saved *through* faith" (Eph 2:8). [You were] "chosen...to salvation *through* sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2Th 2:13). Consequently, our works are no more the cause of election than the means²⁷ necessary to attain any valuable end are the cause of appointing that end—nothing can be supposed more absurd than this!

Besides, if men were foreseen as possessing faith and holiness prior to and independent of their election, it is hard to conceive what occasion²⁸ there was for their being elected. There could be no necessity for it to secure their final happiness. For "the Judge of all the earth [must] do right" (Gen 18:25), and eternal misery was never designed to be the portion of any who believe and are holy. This is because peace and salvation are inseparably joined to such a state and to such characters. To have ordained those to happiness and glory that were foreseen to be thus qualified, therefore, would have been altogether unnecessary.

c. God's good pleasure

Further, election depends on the mere good pleasure of God, without any motive in us to influence the divine will. No other cause is assigned by Paul when stating and defending the doctrine; and no other reason is given by his divine Master. The former asserts that the King immortal "predestinated us...according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph 1:5). That "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy... Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will" (Rom 9:16, 18). And the latter with joy declares:

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight (Luk 10:21).

The revelation intended here is simply the *execution* of the divine purpose in election. And the only reason assigned by Him, Who is

²⁷ **means** – instruments; methods.

²⁸ **occasion** – cause of or reason for something.

the Wisdom of God and perfectly acquainted with the counsels of heaven, why the mysteries of the gospel are revealed to some, while others of superior abilities and greater reputation among their fellow-creatures are left in absolute ignorance, and suffered to oppose those mysteries to their aggravated ruin—is the sovereign pleasure of Him Who “giveth not account of any of his matters” (Job 33:13).

d. Romans 9:11-16

Much to our purpose are the words of Paul when professedly defending the doctrine of divine election. “The children [were] not yet born,” and consequently, “neither [had] done any good or evil” to obtain the approval or to provoke the resentment²⁹ of their Creator. This was so that “the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works” or worthiness in the objects of it, but of the grace “of him that calleth” (Rom 9:11).

As an instance of the divine procedure towards mankind in general, and as an evidence of the truth of the doctrine, it was said concerning Jacob and Esau, “the elder shall serve the younger” (Rom 9:12). And again, “There is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5).

Paul, the advocate for the doctrine of election, proceeds to confirm it by the following spirited argument. This is an argument taken from the nature of grace, as contrasted with all works and worthiness of every kind:

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work (Rom 11:6).

In this passage, the truth under consideration is asserted in the plainest manner and confirmed by the strongest reasoning. So that, if the positive dictates of the infallible Spirit demand any submission of judgment and conscience—if any regard ought to be paid to a decisive argument urged by the Lord’s ambassador—then here they are due, and here they ought to be paid. For Paul teaches and proves that our election to eternal glory must be either entirely of grace, or entirely of works, grace and works being directly opposite. They cannot, therefore, unite in producing the same effect or in promoting the same end.

²⁹ **resentment** – angry displeasure.

Whoever, then, acknowledges any such thing as an election of sinners to future happiness must necessarily maintain either a) that the sole reason why they were chosen rather than others was their own *superior worthiness*, without grace being concerned at all in the choice (and so their election is an act of remunerative³⁰ justice), or, b) that they were *equally unworthy* of God's care as any of those that perish (and so their election is an act of sovereign grace). He must hold one of these in opposition to the other. For if there be any other alternative, the apostle's argument is inconclusive. There is no reconciling scheme that can be devised by the wit of man.

We may attempt a coalition between works and grace, but it will be found impractical. In so doing, our pride and folly will be great and our disappointment certain. For such an attempt would not only bring the greatest confusion into all our ideas about works and grace; but, as far as possible, destroy the very things themselves. Such persons as maintain the contrary hypothesis may, to save appearances, say that election is of grace. But if it be on a foresight of faith and obedience, there is in reality nothing of grace in it, because grace is *free favor*. On this supposition, election is no other than an appointment of a reward to its objects, on a foresight of the required conditions being prescribed and performed by them. But as such, it is an act of remunerative justice, or at least of loyalty and truth. It cannot be called an act of mere favor or of pure benevolence without openly violating the common meaning of the terms.

It is Paul's purpose, when handling the subject in his epistle to the Romans, to exclude all consideration of human worthiness and to attribute the election of those who are saved entirely to the grace of God, as infinitely free and divinely sovereign. This appears from those objections to which he replies. For the objections made and the answers returned are such as would appear quite irrelevant and without the least shadow of reason to support them, if God, when He chose His people, had any regard to their superior worthiness in comparison with those who perish. The objections suppose that the divine conduct in election is unfair. But such a supposition could not have been made, such a charge could never have been laid against it, by any man of sense or of the least reflection, if the Almighty, in the decree of election, had proceeded to distinguish

³⁰ **remunerative** – serving to compensate for something earned.

between one man and another according to their personal qualities and moral worth.

The infallible writer, having addressed God's distinguishing love to Jacob and His rejection of Esau (Rom 9:10-13), starts an objection against the tenor of his arguing and the truth he maintained—an objection, he knew, that was both plausible³¹ and common. “What shall we say, then?” (v. 14). That is, what will be inferred as the necessary consequence of our foregoing assertion? Will anyone dare to conclude that there is “unrighteousness with God” because He dispenses or withholds His favors according to His own sovereign pleasure? Far be it! Such a consequence will be held in the utmost abhorrence by all who revere their Maker.

The apostle, having rejected the shocking inference in the strongest manner, proceeds to confirm his assertions and to prove his doctrine. This he does by appealing to the ancient Scriptures. “For he [whose name is Jehovah] saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (v. 15). From this memorable and ancient testimony he infers the following conclusion: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (v. 16).

From this it appears with striking evidence that Paul intended to prove, not only that some of the fallen race were chosen in contradistinction to others, but also that those objects of the divine choice were appointed to glory not in consideration of anything which caused them to differ from others, but purely, solely, entirely because it was the good pleasure of God to make them partakers of that mercy on which they had not the least claim, any more than those who perish. For, if we suppose the contrary, it would appear that his quotation from the writings of Moses, and the conclusion he forms upon it, were not at all to his purpose, but rather adapted to mislead his reader and to bias his reader's judgment in favor of error!

C. Erroneous Thinking about the Doctrine of Election

1. Fatalism

The zealous and tireless teacher of heavenly truth, in prosecuting his subject, meets with another objection that he is equally careful to deal with. For, after having asserted that Jehovah has

³¹ **plausible** – apparently believable.

“mercy on whom he will...and whom he will he hardeneth,” it is added, “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault” with any of His creatures or blame their conduct? “For who hath resisted his will” or rendered His purposes void (Rom 9:18-19)? This objection exhibits a faithful mirror in which every opposer of divine sovereignty may see his face and read his character. The most horrid and shocking consequences that are now charged on the doctrine of eternal, unconditional, and personal election are here included and summarized.

This objection, in modern style, reads thus:

According to the Calvinistic doctrine³² of election, men are mere machines. They are impelled to this or that by a fatal necessity. They are no longer the proper objects of praise or blame, of reward or punishment. Goodbye, therefore, to every virtuous action and all praiseworthy deeds. Whether we be righteous or wicked here, whether we be saved or damned hereafter, an arbitrary will and a sovereign, omnipotent decree are the cause of all.

Such persons, however, as are inclined to repeat the stale objection, may do well to consider in what manner the apostle refutes it, and how he treats the proud opposer of God’s sovereign right to rule. The objection is levelled against the sovereignty of God in making such an immense distinction between persons equally unworthy of divine mercy.

This objection is bold and blasphemous to the last degree! But the unerring teacher does not refute or attempt to remove it by informing the objector that he did not intend, by his last statement, to affirm that the sole cause of that infinite difference which shall subsist to eternity between the state of one man and of another—equally guilty and alike miserable considered in themselves—was the sovereign pleasure of God. No, he is far from giving any such hint, but immediately recurs to the *supreme dominion* of Him Who formed the universe as a consideration of sufficient importance—and sufficiently clear—to establish the point.

So far from softening his former assertions, however harsh they might seem, Paul at once confirms the truth he asserted and illustrates the appropriateness of his language. In doing this, he suggests that the objection, horrid as it is, cannot have the least

³² **Calvinistic doctrine** – the doctrine of election has often been characterized as Calvinism after Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564).

relevance or force of application, except it were proved that the Majesty of heaven had not an absolute right to dispense His favors just as He pleases. And the resolute asserter of Jehovah's honor was not willing to grant this. He could by no means allow this without denying the God that is above.

Paul, therefore, boldly repels the confidence of the proud objector by a strong exclamation and a humiliating question: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom 9:20). Shall a worm of the earth, an insect, an atom, accuse His conduct Who is Lord of the universe, and pronounce it unrighteous? Shall impotence and dust fly in the face of Omnipotence?³³ Shall corruption and guilt prescribe rules of equity by which the Most Holy shall regulate His behavior toward the rebellious subjects of His boundless empire? Far be it! "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd³⁴ strive with the potsherds of the earth" (Isa 45:9); but let not the despicable fragment presume to make war upon heaven, lest divine wrath break out and consume it like a devouring fire (Exo 24:17; Isa 30:27)!

The zealous and cautious disputant, having severely rebuked the opposer's folly and arrogance, proceeds to confirm his assertion and to illustrate the momentous truth by a familiar instance and by appealing to the common sense of mankind. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" For example: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom 9:20-21). None can deny it. Is this power allowed, by the common consent of mankind, to belong to the lowest craftsman; and shall it be denied to Him Who is the Creator of all things? Such a denial would be a monstrous compound of absurdity and blasphemy!

The apostle now proceeds to apply his illustration. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, [having] endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22), by their own rebellion against Him, should, in the end, pour out His vengeance upon them? Who shall dare to pronounce His conduct unrighteous? And what if the same sovereign Being, "that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto

³³ **Omnipotence** – (*literally*: "all power") the all-powerful God.

³⁴ **potsherd** – broken piece of clay pottery.

glory” (v. 23), determined to manifest infinite love in their complete deliverance from deserved destruction? Who has a right to complain?

Shall the eye of any be evil because their offended Maker is good? (Mat 20:15). Has He not an eternal right to do what He will with His own? Or is He a debtor to any of His creatures? If so, they shall be fully recompensed. Shall every petty sovereign in the kingdoms of this world be allowed to choose his own favorites—and in certain cases, to manifest his pardon to some delinquents, while he leaves others to suffer what their crimes deserve—without being subject to the control of his most common subjects in the performance of those sovereign acts? And shall He Who rules over all be denied the exercise of His supreme royal prerogative? This is absurd in supposition; it is impossible in fact!

But though God bestows His favor on whom He pleases, yet, as He is an infinitely wise agent, He must always have the highest reason for what He does. Divine sovereignty, therefore, must not be considered as a blind partiality,³⁵ or a dictate of mere *will without wisdom*; but as the exercise of an all-comprehensive understanding, and of a will that is inflexibly right, ordering all the affairs of Jehovah’s vast empire for the manifestation of His own glorious attributes. To conceive of a sovereign decree as detached from wisdom and righteousness is to picture to ourselves the conduct of a Turkish despot³⁶—not the appointment of Him Who governs the world.

2. Wisdom and Compassion

The love of God to His offending creatures must be considered, in the whole of its exercise, as under the direction of His divine understanding. As His boundless intelligence comprehends all possibilities, His love must be consummately wise in all its operations. The supreme perfection of Jehovah’s nature forbids our supposing that He can decree without wisdom, any more than govern without righteousness or punish without justice. Hence the apostle, when discoursing on the profound subject of eternal predestination,³⁷ concludes thus: “O the depth!” Of what? An arbitrary will or an absolute sovereignty detached from wisdom? Far from it! But,

³⁵ **partiality** – favoritism.

³⁶ **Turkish despot** – reference to Muslim sultans of the Middle East who exercised absolute rule.

³⁷ **predestination** – doctrine that all things are appointed beforehand by the eternal purpose of God. See *Calvin on Predestination and Election* by John Calvin (1509-1564); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

“of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33). To resolve into the divine will, detached from divine wisdom, those eternal decrees³⁸ that constitute the great plan of providence³⁹ is neither the doctrine of Scripture nor agreeable to sound reason. It is to represent the Supreme Lord under the notion of an eastern tyrant, rather than to give an idea of “God only wise” (Rom 16:27).

If then we consider the Almighty as choosing any of the fallen race to life and happiness, we behold Him exercising the mercy of a *compassionate Father* to His miserable offspring. But if we consider Him as choosing this person rather than that, when both were equally wretched, we view Him as vested with the character of a *sovereign Lord* and as the sole proprietor of His own favors. If, therefore, the question be asked, “Why were any chosen to salvation when all deserved to perish?” the answer is, “Because our Maker is merciful.” But if it be further asked why Paul, for instance, was chosen rather than Judas, the answer is, “Because He is Lord of all and has an indisputable right to do what He will with His own.”

But if this answer will not satisfy the curious inquirer, he is directed by the Spirit of inspiration to ask the potter what was the reason of his very different procedure with the same lump of clay; and why he formed the vessels into which it was wrought for such different and opposite uses. The potter’s ready answer is (as directed by common sense):

Not anything in the clay itself, but my own deliberate and free choice. For it was of the same kind and possessed the same qualities throughout the whole mass. Nor could one part dictate how it would be formed, or for what uses, any more than another.

Thus the most ignorant potter, without hesitation, would assert a kind of sovereignty over his clay. And is not mankind in the hand of God as clay in the hand of the potter? Or shall Jehovah’s sovereignty over His offending creatures be inferior to that of a puny mortal over passive matter? Reason and revelation forbid the thought. In election, therefore, we have a striking display of divine grace in its utmost freeness, and of God’s dominion in its highest sovereignty. Of the former toward the vessels of mercy; of the

³⁸ See FGB 237, *God’s Decrees*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³⁹ **providence** – God’s...most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 11; see also *God’s Providence* by Charles Spurgeon; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

latter toward all mankind. The former we behold with admiration and joy; the latter we revere in silence, well remembering Who it is that says, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psa 46:10).

D. God’s Purpose in Election

1. *Eternal Glory*

Having shown in the preceding paragraphs that election is an act of sovereign grace, I now proceed to consider the great *end* that the Supreme Lord intended by it. The ultimate end is His own eternal glory and, subordinate to it, the complete happiness of all His people. The glory of the Supreme Being is, as before observed, the final cause of all the eternal counsels and of all divine operations, especially of those that respect the salvation of sinners. They were all designed for the praise of His glorious grace.

We are too ready to imagine that the purpose and pleasure of God terminate in the happiness of those that are chosen and in the misery of those rejected, as though the eternal bliss and the everlasting torment of sinful creatures were the final cause of the divine decree. But this is a great mistake and represents the doctrine of predestination in a very false as well as unfavorable light. It would be pregnant with blasphemy to suppose that He Who is supremely blessed and supremely good should take delight in the infinite misery of a rational being without reference to a further and nobler end.⁴⁰ In the same way, we cannot conceive on any principles of reason or Scripture that He should propose anything short of His own glory in the wonderful economy of human salvation.

It would be highly injurious to the divine character to suppose a) that the misery of apostate creatures is the ultimate end at which the eternal Sovereign aims in the damnation of those who perish, or b) that anything short of His own glory, in the displays of His spotless purity and inflexible justice, was the end that He had in view. In the same way, it would be greatly unworthy of His infinite wisdom and boundless perfection for us to imagine that

⁴⁰ It is indeed said, “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:26). But then, as the learned Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722) observes, “What is said about God *anthropopathically* (in human emotional terms) should be understood prudently; not truly as if the destruction of miserable man, perishing by his own voluntary foolishness, brings God delight; but rather that the evils which the gravest sinners justly suffer are entirely in accordance with the principles of divine justice, in whose exercise God acquiesces and is satisfied.” *Comment. ad Canticum Mosi*, p. 133 —*Booth*

the glory of His own grace and the everlasting honor of all His adorable excellencies were not His supreme design in the free election and complete happiness of all His people.

Does He execute vengeance on any of the works of His hands? It is to demonstrate the infinite opposition of all His perfections to moral evil, and for the honor of His eternal justice as a righteous Governor. Does He spare any of the rebellious subjects of His vast dominions and save them from the death they deserved? It is to display His mercy in connection with truth and righteousness, and for the glory of all His unchangeable attributes. We may therefore conclude with Paul that the great end of election, and of all its ensuing blessings, is no other than to “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy” (Rom 9:23).

2. *God's Means*

The eternal glory of God, in the consummate happiness of all His chosen, is the exalted end of the decree of election. The *means* appointed to accomplish the wonderful design are equally worthy of infinite wisdom. They are such as proclaim the “just God and a Saviour” (Isa 45:21), such as demand the testimony of conscience that “the LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psa 145:17).

The principal of these means undoubtedly are the incarnation of the eternal Son and His divine mediation,⁴¹ the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. For thus we read, “God hath...appointed us...to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Th 5:9). “God hath...chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13). Redemption by the blood of Jesus and sanctification⁴² by the Spirit of God are equally necessary to accomplish the great design. For as there is no remission “without shedding of blood” (Heb 9:22), so, without holiness, “no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

As none shall be condemned to final damnation but those who did such things as were “worthy of death” (Rom 1:32), so none shall enjoy the inheritance of glory but those whom impartial

⁴¹ **mediation** – Christ’s work as the Mediator, or go-between, to reconcile God and man.

⁴² **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

justice shall entirely clear and undefiled holiness completely approve. And as none of the damned shall ever be able to assign any other cause of their infinite punishment but that sin which they freely committed, so all the elect shall ascribe their salvation to the grace of God and the work of Immanuel.

We may therefore conclude that, though Christ and His mediation were not the cause of election, yet His obedience and death were the grand means appointed for the execution of that gracious purpose. And though the Almighty chose no man to glory because of his future faith and obedience, yet provision was made in the sovereign decree for the sanctification of all its objects, prior to their enjoyment of blessedness.

3. A Perfect Plan

The purpose of God in election is *immutable*⁴³ and *infallibly connected* with the eternal bliss of all its objects. That this decree is unchangeable appears from the immutability of the divine purposes in general. For there is the same reason that the appointment of God in the choice of His people should unchangeably stand as there is for any other of His eternal designs. And the Scriptures abundantly show that immutability is stamped upon the divine decrees in general. Thus it is written:

The LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? (Isa 14:27).

My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (Isa 46:10).

He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth (Job 23:13).

To shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel (Heb 6:17).

Who hath resisted his will?...That the purpose of God according to election might stand (Rom 9:19, 11).

With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jam 1:17).

Nor can we suppose that God should reverse His decrees or alter His purposes without discrediting either His omniscience,⁴⁴ as though He did not foresee the events that would happen, or His power, as if He were not able to execute His own designs. Neither of these can possibly attend that infinite Being Whose will is fate⁴⁵ and Whose Word is the basis of the universe. If God were to change His

⁴³ **immutable** – unchangeable.

⁴⁴ **omniscience** – possessing all knowledge.

⁴⁵ **fate** – the fixed sentence prescribing future things; destiny.

mind, it must be either for the better or for the worse. If for the better, He was not perfectly wise in His former purpose. If for the worse, He is not wise in His present resolve. For there can be no alteration without an implied reflection on either the past or the present determination.

If a man change his resolution, he has apprehended some defect in his former purpose that has moved him to such a change. This must arise either from a lack of capacity to foresee, or from not duly considering the object of his counsel. But neither of these can be supposed of Him Who is supremely wise without denying His deity. A change of purpose may, indeed, be an act of wisdom in the rational creature; but it supposes folly in his former conduct, which is inconsistent with consummate perfection. The “only wise” God (Rom 16:27) had no occasion for second thoughts. As He is wise to perfection, He sees no cause of reversing His purposes. As He is boundless in power, He is subject to no control in executing His will or in making His people partakers of those blessings He designed for them. To suppose, therefore, that any who were chosen to eternal glory should finally fail of enjoying it is an absurdly impious imagination. This is because it suggests a charge of gross imperfection against Jehovah, and would make Him “altogether such an one” as ourselves (Psa 50:21).

That election is infallibly connected with eternal happiness appears from the following remarkable passage:

Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:30-31).

If the purpose of God in election be not immutable, or if the objects of it might possibly fail of the glorious end, there would be no certain connection between the several blessings that are here mentioned. On such a supposition, to argue, as the apostle does, from the past election of any persons to their future glorification,⁴⁶ would be exceedingly weak and completely illogical.

Nor would there have been any propriety in his joyful exclamation, “What shall we then say to these things?” Nor would there be any solid foundation for this bold conclusion: “If God be for us, who

⁴⁶ **glorification** – God’s final completion of the work of salvation, in which believers are conformed to the image of Christ in their bodies: they will be like Him (2Co 3:18; Col 1:27; Rom 8:28-30; 1Jo 3:2-3; Phi 3:20-21; 1Co 15:42-58).

can be against us?" If God may possibly change His purpose, or if His decree may prove so weak and ineffectual that the event intended by it in any instance may not be produced, there would be little reason for Paul thus to exclaim in admiration and joy from the consideration of God's electing love or with such confidence to conclude upon his own everlasting happiness. To attribute such illogical argumentation to him would be a major blot upon him as Gamaliel's⁴⁷ pupil. And it would be absolutely inconsistent with his more exalted character as a penman of the Spirit of wisdom.

We may therefore safely conclude that election to future happiness and the certain enjoyment of it cannot be separated, for "whom he did predestinate...them he also glorified" (Rom 8:30)!

E. Godliness

1. Holiness

Having considered this important truth under the several foregoing views, I shall now proceed to show that election is a doctrine according to godliness, and that it is nobly adapted to promote the holiness and comfort of true Christians. As an article of that faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), as an infallible truth of the gospel, its tendency must be beneficial, its influence must be sanctifying on all who cordially embrace it. Such will always find that it is a great friend to their progress in real holiness and to their enjoyment of substantial peace.

Could it be proved that election has no influence on these, we might venture, without hesitation, to renounce it as an error and to abhor it as an enemy. For that is no part of evangelical truth which, in its genuine tendency, is not adapted to promote the happiness of real Christians and to advance the interests of true holiness. This, however, is not the case with the doctrine under consideration. For a frequent and devout meditation upon it—by those who are taught from above and who view it in its proper connections—is clearly calculated

- to humble their souls in the dust before the eternal Sovereign,
- to inflame their hearts with love to His adorable name,
- to excite their gratitude for benefits received and blessings expected.

⁴⁷ **Gamaliel** – respected Jewish scholar of the first century AD; a Pharisee, member of the Sanhedrin (the high council of Jews in Jerusalem), and the one who taught Saul before his conversion (Act 5:33-40; 22:3).

Consequently, their holiness and comfort must be advanced by this doctrine of election, for humility, love, and gratitude are the vitals of real religion. As these abound in the heart, our spiritual joys are increased and our Maker is glorified. As these diminish, we lose the savor of divine things and the interests of religion decline. Where these have no existence, the most extensive round of duties, the most costly and shining performances, are of no esteem in the sight of God.

2. Humility

This doctrine is adapted to promote genuine humility. For it shows that all mankind, in their natural state, are equally liable to wrath and exposed to ruin. And it shows that, without the grace which appears and reigns in election, their condition is absolutely desperate. It allows not the least liberty for any of the sons of men to claim superior worth or to glory over their fellows. When self-admiring thoughts arise in the Christian's breast, it stops them short with needful and sharp rebuke:

Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (1Co 4:7).

Those who are the favored objects of distinguishing love and who look for salvation by it discover that their persons are alike sinful and their state equally wretched, considered in themselves, as the persons or state of those that finally perish. According to the genius of this doctrine, therefore, they cannot but lie low in humility before God. They are fully convinced that the eternal choice of their persons was not on account of the least possible difference between themselves and others. They are convinced that the whole reason of their hope centers in the grace that might have been manifested to others had the great Sovereign so determined. They therefore are at all times free to acknowledge that the chief of sinners and the most worthless objects are their proper characters. The influence of this humbling truth they feel in their consciences, and their ardent desire is to express it in their lives.

Let us attend the believer in his secret retirements. Let us behold him on his bended knee and hear him pouring out his soul to God. In his intercourse with heaven at the throne of grace, his language will be to the following effect:

Thou Great Supreme, Who art glorious in holiness and the infinite Sovereign of all worlds, Who humblest Thyself to behold the

things that are in the highest heavens, Whose condescension is unspeakably great in stooping to regard the persons or services of the most holy and exalted creatures, didst Thou consider *me* in my low estate as a fallen creature and a miserable sinner? Did Thy everlasting love fix on *me* as its object? I might, with the greatest equity, have been marked out as a victim for eternal justice. Is not my person polluted and my state by nature damnable? Was not my original depravity as great, and are not my actual transgressions as numerous, as any that can be found among the apostate sons of Adam? And hast Thou determined to make me an everlasting monument of sparing mercy, while millions are left to suffer the awful desert of their crimes?

Nothing in me couldst Thou behold but a shocking compound of impurity and folly, of guilt and wretchedness. Nothing in my conduct couldst Thou foresee but what was adapted to provoke Thy hatred rather than to obtain Thy regard. O Thou majestic Being! Why such mercy to a hardened rebel? Why such love to one who has always been an enemy? Obligated I am, in the court of conscience, to plead guilty to the complicated charge that Thy own righteous Law exhibits against me. I can find in myself no motive or cause of Thy tender regards.

Thy own sovereign will, Thy own free pleasure, these are the only cause why mercy is manifested to me, the vilest of sinners. For should a wretch who is now in hell advance a claim on Thy favor, grounded on his own worthiness, I must acknowledge it as well founded as any to which I can pretend. *Pride!* thou most detestable of all passions, forever depart from my breast! *Humility!* thou fairest flower of heavenly origin, thou brightest ornament of the Christian character, be thou my constant companion; be thou the dress in which I shall always appear!

Shall an evildoer who might have been justly doomed to damnation—shall a worthless worm indebted to grace for everything—entertain aspiring thoughts or assert his own importance? As well might Lucifer himself challenge a seat in Paradise!

O, my God, let me but view Thy electing love in all its freeness, and Thy distinguishing favor in all its sovereignty, and I shall be truly humble. Then shall my soul lie low in the dust, and reigning grace shall have the glory of all my salvation. Whatever blessings I now possess, whatever enjoyments I hereafter expect, I freely acknowledge the unrivalled honor belongs to Thee.

3. *Love*

The doctrine of election is also adapted to inflame the heart with sacred love. "Love is of God"; therefore, he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him (1Jo 4:7). The elect and regenerate soul will say,

Thou needest not the services of angels. Thou art infinitely perfect and infinitely happy in Thy own eternal Self. Didst Thou entertain thoughts of love towards me before the foundations of the world were laid? Did Thy purposes of communicating bliss terminate on a worm so common, on a wretch so vile? "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" (Psa 139:17).

Didst Thou record my worthless name in the book of life, and constitute me a member of that mystical body of which Christ is the head? Were my person and all my immortal interests consigned over, by an irreversible grant, into the hands of Thy only Son as the appointed Mediator, in order to secure my eternal happiness beyond the possibility of failure? Didst Thou, my God, in the original plan of salvation, provide for the honor of Thy justice as well as the glory of Thy grace by appointing a Surety to perform the obedience to which I am bound as a creature, and to suffer the punishment that I deserve as a criminal? And, in order to effect the amazing design, didst Thou determine, before I had a being or time commenced, to deliver up the Son of Thy love, clothed in humanity, to the stroke of incensed justice and to the most abhorrent death of the cross?

And all this to rescue and save, to ennoble and dignify, what? Be astonished at this, O ye heavens! A rebellious worm, a despicable insect, elated with pride and replete with hostility against Thee, Thou greatest and best of Beings! Stupendous goodness! Marvelous grace! O my God, was I the object of Thy eternal choice when viewed by Omniscience as fallen under guilt and sunk in ruin, loathsome as the dunghill and abhorrent as hell? And shall not my best affections and warmest love be devoted to Thee? Didst Thou number me among the objects of grace, when Thou mightest—with honor to Thy crown and dignity as a righteous Governor—have consigned me over to endless punishment? And shall not my heart flame with love to Thy adorable name? Didst Thou love and choose me when deformed and filthy, with dispositions partly like the beasts and partly like the devils?

Art Thou infinitely amiable in all Thy perfections and completely righteous in all Thy ways, and shall not my very soul love and

adore Thee? Hast Thou, of Thy mere grace, distinguished me as an object of Thy satisfied regards; and shall not Thou be the object of my warmest passions and most intense desires? Yes, blessed Lord! Come, possess my heart and sway my affections! Thine they are, and thine, through grace, they shall ever be.

Depart from me, ye rivals of my God! Ye idols of unregenerate hearts—pleasure, wealth, pomp, and power—get you hence! Address me no more with your soft solicitations; entice me no more with your gilded baits. Jehovah has condescended to take me for His own. I choose Him for my portion; I love Him as my all.

4. Gratitude

A devout consideration of this doctrine of election is also a noble incentive to gratitude. Gratitude is a delightful disposition and a lovely temper. It burns in heavenly bosoms, tunes the harps of celestial choirs, and gives the sweetest accent to all their songs. Love to the infinitely lovely God and gratitude to Him for His boundless goodness: these enter into the essence of all religion. These are the very life and soul of all intellectual happiness. In proportion, therefore, as these are promoted, the holiness and comfort of mankind are advanced. We may boldly assert that an interest in the election of grace and a sense of it warm on the heart are a powerful incentive to the most generous gratitude—because we have an authority for this that none can dispute.

Paul, we find, when contemplating the riches of grace in eternal election, breaks out in the following language:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-4).

Again:

We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (2Th 2:13).

Such are those grateful acknowledgments the apostle makes on the behalf of himself and his brethren to the Author of all good, in reference to their election. And similar will be the sentiments of gratitude in every regenerate heart, in proportion as this important truth is known and experienced.

Let us once more listen to the devout addresses and humble acknowledgments of the believer, when bending the suppliant knee before his Father.

O Thou Who art infinitely exalted above all blessing and praise! What shall I render to Thee for all Thy benefits? Hast Thou, my Father, and Thou, my God, chosen me to holiness, chosen me to eternal life, and that of Thy mere grace? And shall not Thy glory be the end of all my actions, while I possess either breath or being? Didst Thou enter into an everlasting covenant with the Son of Thy love to save me from final ruin and bring me to immortal bliss—and shall not I freely pledge with hand and heart to be Thine forever? Thine I am by right of creation; Thine I am by electing love; and Thine I would eternally be in the performance of every duty and in the exercise of all my powers.

Were the treasures of infinite wisdom displayed in contriving the way and in appointing the necessary means for my complete happiness? Were the stores of unbounded mercy and the riches of sovereign grace laid open in the eternal counsels of peace on my behalf? And shall not my life, my soul, my everlasting all (which are saved at such an expense) be devoted to Thee? Bind me, O blessed God, forever bind me to Thyself with the delightful cords of love; so that I may never desert Thy service, that I may never dishonor Thy name.

Dishonor Thee? Painful thought! May I ever choose to die a thousand deaths rather than act so shameful a part. Hast Thou chosen me out of the world? Didst Thou pity and spare my guilty soul while numbers were left in their perishing state? And do not reason and conscience, do not all the sentiments of honor and gratitude of which the human heart is susceptible, join with divine revelation to show that I am laid under infinite obligations to admire Thy goodness, and continually to speak Thy praise?

Such an everlasting and immense distinction as Thou hast made in election between creatures equally deserving of punishment motivates all possible thankfulness from the objects of discriminating love. Lord, here I am, Thy devoted servant! To love and adore Thy perfections, to know and perform Thy will—let this be all my delight and all my employ. I bow before Thee and acknowledge myself entirely Thine. I give myself entirely to Thy disposal as my only and sovereign Lord. As unformed clay in the hand of the potter, to be molded and fashioned according to Thy own will, I commit myself and all my concerns to Thee.

Such is the beneficial tendency of this doctrine, and such the language of all that are truly acquainted with it, in proportion as faith is in exercise.

F. Objections

1. Not Chosen?

a. The dilemma

However comfortable this truth may be to such as are persuaded of their interest in the love of God, some may object: Is it not adapted to discourage the inquiring soul and to overwhelm the awakened sinner with desponding fears? Does it not administer abundant occasion for the anxious mind thus to reflect:

I know not whether Christ and His salvation be free for me. If I am not of the number of God's elect, I clearly have no interest in Him, nor in anything that He has done. Consequently, however much I may desire to believe and be saved by Him, I never shall if I am not ordained to eternal life.

This objection, however plausible it may seem, or however much the conscience of an awakened sinner may be harassed by it, is weak and of no weight. It supposes that a person must know God's decision about him; that he must, as it were, peruse the eternal roll of God's decrees and read his name in the book of life, before he can apply to Christ for salvation upon solid grounds. But this is a grand mistake.

Let me illustrate the point. When food is presented to a person pinched with hunger, would it be wise, would it be rational, for him to hesitate about the appropriateness of eating it because he does not know whether his Maker has appointed that he shall be nourished by it? At the same time, he well remembers that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4). Therefore, he supposes that if he were to eat it without the concurrence of Providence, it will be of no service to him. Would he not rather say, "Meat was made for the use of man. I feel my need of it. I will endeavor to use it, therefore, as the appointed means of satisfying my craving appetite and of supporting my physical frame"?

Now Christ is the bread of life and the food of our souls. This heavenly food was provided by grace, is exhibited in the gospel, and freely presented to all that hunger without any exception. What, then, has the awakened sinner to do but, as the Lord shall enable

him, to take, eat, and live forever? It is very evident that he has no business to inquire about any further right to partake since [such a right] was not provided for sinners. Nor can it be of use to sinners under any other character or considered in any other light than that of miserable ones who are starving for lack of spiritual food.

b. The sequence

According to this doctrine, complete provision is made for the certain salvation of every sinner, however unworthy, who feels his need and applies to Christ. The gospel is *not* preached to sinners, nor are they encouraged to believe in Jesus, under the formal notion of their being elected. No, these tidings of heavenly mercy are addressed to sinners considered as ready to perish; and all the blessings of grace are displayed for their immediate relief, as convinced that such are their state and character. Without any exception of persons or any regard to worthiness, all who apprehend their danger and feel their need are invited by the Lord Redeemer to participate in spiritual blessings. And this is done prior to any inquiries about their election, which is a subsequent consideration.

The order established in the economy of grace, and in reference to this affair, does not require perishing sinners to prove their election before they are permitted—or have any encouragement—to trust in Christ for complete deliverance. But, seeing their state, they have all the encouragement that the Word of Jehovah can give to rely on the Savior without hesitation. And they have all the assurance which the oath of God can impart that, in so doing, they shall obtain pardon for their sins and peace for their consciences, a freedom from wrath and the enjoyment of glory.

These things are evident from the overall message of divine revelation. To conceive otherwise proceeds on a mistake of the doctrine and is followed by an abuse of the truth. Consequently, it administers no real occasion of discouragement or fear to the inquiring soul or the awakened sinner; that is, to none of the human race in whose esteem a Savior from the guilt and power of sin would be precious or welcome. As to those who are dead in sin and unconcerned about their souls—or that have a high opinion of their own righteousness—the Redeemer with all His glory and the gospel with all its blessings are despised by them, so that they must be out of the question.

c. Spiritual sloth

But may it not be inferred that this doctrine is calculated to support spiritual sloth and to encourage indulgently sinful practices in those who conclude that they are in the number of the favored few? I would never assert that none who are so persuaded will find themselves deceived in their expectations. I will not therefore affirm that there are no instances of persons *professing* to believe the evangelical doctrine, and *pretending* to an interest in the heavenly blessing, who do not abuse the profession and who may not fall infinitely short of that interest. But this I will boldly affirm: that whoever from such a persuasion encourages himself in spiritual sloth or licentious practices is guilty of basely abusing the doctrine of grace (which in its own nature has a directly contrary tendency). He marks himself out as a vessel of eternal wrath rather than an object of sovereign mercy.

This objection has no force unless you could prove that the infinitely wise God has appointed the end but entirely forgotten the means that are necessary to attain and enjoy it. To suppose this is highly unworthy of His character and contrary to His express declarations. For though the eternal Sovereign had no respect, in the choice of His people, to anything in them that was worthy of His regard or to any good works foreseen, yet His professed design in their election was that they might “be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph 1:4). Since this is the design of God for His chosen, it would be strange indeed, strange to a wonder, if the revelation of His immutable purpose should make them quite the reverse and become an incentive to their vilest lust!

It is written, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2Th 2:13a). How? According to this bold objection, one would suppose it was in such a way as allowed them larger scope and greater liberty for gratifying their lustful passions and lawless appetites than corrupt nature could otherwise have enjoyed. One would suppose it was in such a way as pays no regard to the interests of holiness, and as makes no provision for the honor of God in Christian conduct.

If this could be proved, the doctrine would deserve the utmost loathing; but it is far from being the case. For we are expressly informed by God’s holy Word, that the objects of this gracious purpose were chosen “to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13b). “Sanctification of the Spirit”

may be considered not only as an appointed and *honorable means* of attaining that exalted end (the salvation of the soul and the glory of God), but also as an *essential part* of that salvation to which they were chosen, which is begun on earth and completed in glory.

Taken in either view, it is obvious that this instructive and important text is a full proof that the alleged objection is of no weight at all and entirely void of truth to support it. Consequently, it is obvious that those who make it are influenced either by gross ignorance or hardened prejudice. For hence it appears that the holiness *and* the happiness of God's people are equally secured by the divine purpose. Besides, those, and those only, who live by faith on Jesus Christ and walk in the ways of obedience have any evidence that they are the elect of God. In proportion, therefore, as they lose sight of the glorious object of their dependence, and deviate from the paths of holiness, they lose sight of their interest in distinguishing love. Thus, their inward peace and spiritual joy are greatly dependent on godly conduct.

2. *Use of Means*

Nor is the following objection, so frequently and violently urged, any more to the purpose. Our opponents say,

If this doctrine be true, there is little or no occasion for the use of means in order to attain salvation. For if we are elected, we shall be saved without them; and if not elected, they will prove unsuccessful. On such a supposition, all our prayers, tears, and strivings—all our circumspection and self-denial—will be of no avail. Therefore, we may as well take our ease and rest contented, because a profession of religion is a useless thing. The final event is fixed by a predestinating God, and who shall reverse it?

This objection agrees with the former in supposing that the end is decreed without regard to the means—an obvious misconception and full of great absurdities.

Let us apply the principle on which the objection proceeds to the common affairs of life. I take it for granted that there is a superintending Providence over all human affairs, over all our smallest concerns. If so, either the great Ruler of the world from everlasting *determined* what He would do in all that infinite variety of circumstances in which any of His creatures should ever exist, or He did not. If not, innumerable millions of new determinations must have arisen in the eternal Mind since the world began, respecting His conduct toward His creatures. Or, He must have acted without any

prior determination at all, and so without a plan. Neither of these corresponds with our ideas of an infinitely perfect Agent. God did, from eternity, determine His conduct and form the extensive plan of His future operations respecting rational creatures. Therefore, it is evident that the same objection can be applied against our using means, or exerting endeavors, in order to obtain *any* promising advantage in common life, or to avoid any threatening evil. The objection applies just as much there as it does against making use of means in the important concerns of our souls, and in reference to a future world. For it is absurd to suppose that the divine purpose can be made void any more in the one case than in the other.

According to this way of arguing, trade and commerce, the labors of husbandry, and all the employments of life must stop. For who, among all the busy mortals on earth, can foretell the outcome or predict success? Who can tell, however promising something looks, but Jehovah's purposes may render all his plans and all his hard work entirely fruitless? Nay, further, upon this principle, we must not eat our common food, nor seek the needful refreshments of sleep; for we must confess that we are absolutely ignorant what the purposes of God may be as to the outcome in either case. If He determined that we shall enjoy health and vigor, what need for the one or the other? And if not, what good will they do us? For God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa 46:10).

But who, notwithstanding this, ever took it into his head to adopt the principle, and thus to apply it in affairs of the present life? Surely, none but a fool or a madman!

We firmly believe the existence of eternal decrees and discern the interventions of providence on ten thousand different occasions. Yet, while we have our sober senses in exercise, we never suppose that those everlasting purposes or providential workings were designed to supersede the use of means. We never suppose that they had any such tendency as to earthly concerns. Why, then, should we strive to separate the end from the means in things of infinitely greater importance? The dictates of inspiration, the maxims of philosophy, the principles of common sense, and the general conduct of mankind all unite in utterly disallowing such an irrational and absurd procedure!

3. *Foreknowledge*

This objection militates against the infallible foreknowledge of God as well against His purpose, for Jehovah is perfect in knowledge. Knowledge that is absolutely perfect cannot increase. Therefore, all the choices of moral agents and all the events that flow from them were present to the divine Mind from eternity and open to His omniscient eye. And as everything future was included in His all-comprehending view before the world began, so it would be absurd to suppose that any event should ever take place otherwise than as He foresaw it. With equal reason, therefore, might the objector infer from the divine foreknowledge that the use of means to attain any end is vain, as from the doctrine of predestination. For between the foreknowledge and the purpose of God there is a close and inseparable connection.

To illustrate the point and to apply the argument—admitting the perfect foreknowledge of God—the objector may thus argue against the use of means respecting his eternal state:

The foreknowledge of God is perfect. From eternity He viewed my final state. Either He foresaw me seated on a throne of bliss and exulting in a sense of His favor, or loaded with chains of darkness and groaning in the agonies of endless despair. As He from eternity viewed me, so it must inevitably be; for perfect foreknowledge is infallible. My eternal state is therefore a fixed point with the Deity. What need then of the use of means to avoid punishment, or to obtain blessing? Prayer and watchfulness, and all the exercises and all the duties of a careful profession, are entirely in vain. If the Omniscient foresaw me happy in the future world, I cannot be miserable. If He foresaw me miserable, I shall not, I cannot be happy—though all the angels in heaven and all the men upon earth were to afford me their united aid.

This argument, I humbly conceive, is as probable as the objection against the decree of election (with the inference from it) and infers the objection I have just refuted. But the truth is, neither that nor this has the least force or legitimacy. For when Jehovah decreed the end, He appointed the means and the application of them to their respective objects. In His eternal foreknowledge, therefore, He not only viewed the end, but also foresaw the means with their application and use as connected with the final event. As He foresaw none in the abodes of darkness but those whom He viewed as guilty and walking in the ways of destruction, so He determined to bring none to glory except in a way suited to His own

perfect holiness, and by the use of means that grace should render effective.

Hence, it appears that the objector must either give up his argument or deny that his Maker is perfect, which would be to undeify “the God that is above” (Job 31:28). This, indeed, with a bold irreverence, many have done in order to support their favorite notions about free-agency and the liberty of the human will, in opposition to the doctrine of sovereign grace and of divine predestination. They do so because they are well aware that whoever allows the eternal and perfect foreknowledge of God cannot consistently deny His decrees respecting the final state of men. The Socinians⁴⁸ have freely acknowledged this. “Admitting,” say they, “the infallible foreknowledge of all future possibilities, Calvin’s doctrine of the predestination of some by name to life, and of others to death, cannot be refuted.”⁴⁹ They therefore do their utmost endeavor to prove (horrid to think!) that He Who formed and governs the universe does not possess such a foresight—in other words, that He is not God. This they do by much the same arguments that others use in opposition to the doctrine here maintained.

4. Respect of Persons

To the foregoing objections, some perhaps may be ready to add with an air of confidence:

Does not this doctrine, in its inseparable connections, represent the Most High as partial in His conduct towards His creatures; and as a respecter of persons; and as dealing harshly, if not unjustly, with the far greater part of mankind?

In answer, this charge of partiality and respect of persons in God’s conduct is entirely without foundation. For wherever such a charge may be advanced legitimately against anyone’s conduct, it must be in the affairs of remunerative⁵⁰ or punishing justice, where the rules of equity are more or less transgressed. But such a charge

⁴⁸ **Socinians** – followers of the sect founded by Faustus Socinius, 16th century Italian theologian, who denied the deity of Christ, the Trinity, original sin, and that the cross brought forgiveness of sins; he influenced the development of Unitarian theology.

⁴⁹ Witsius, *De æconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* [Latin] (*The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*); 1. iii. c. iv. §12.

Herman Witsius (1636-1708) – Dutch theologian, pastor, and professor of divinity; studied at the universities of Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht.

⁵⁰ **remunerative** – compensation for something done.

cannot possibly have a place in matters of sovereign favor and mere bounty, as election is.

For instance, consider a person in the capacity of a magistrate, as invested with the executive power of the criminal laws of his country. Suppose he inflicts the penalties annexed to their respective crimes upon offenders who are poor, lowly, and of little account in the world. Suppose that he does this while he yet allows others of nobler birth, more elevated rank, and affluent circumstances to escape without punishment. We then would have great reason to object against such a procedure as a blameworthy partiality, a criminal respect of persons, and as no other than a perversion of justice.

But if we consider the same person under the character of a benefactor, and behold him dispensing his favors among his poor neighbors—in order to relieve their needs and render them happy—we never imagine that he is under any obligation to show an equal regard to *all* that are distressed with poverty. Suppose he distributes his bounty in great variety to the favored objects of his kindness. Suppose he indulges some with favors, while others, who stand in the same need, are entirely overlooked. Shall we accuse his conduct and call him a respecter of persons? By no means, for were that the case, there would be nothing indecent. If after he had manifested his beneficial regards to some, others were to come with a commanding voice and *require* his assistance in the same way and to the same degree, nothing could be more inappropriate!

In addition, *men* are under obligation to love and assist one another. And, being only stewards of what they possess, they are accountable to the Supreme Judge for the manner in which they use their faculties, time, and talents. Yet, *God* has the most perfect right to do what He will with His own. For no creature, and especially no *offending* creature, has any claim upon His bounty.

Now,

- if Jehovah must be termed a “respecter of persons,”
- if His conduct must be pronounced partial on supposition that He loved and chose some to everlasting happiness, while He rejected others and left them to perish under His righteous curse,
- if the equity of His proceedings in the affairs of grace must be called in question because He bestows eternal blessings on some and entirely withholds them from others

—then how shall we uphold the methods of Providence in ten thousand different instances? Does not God, as to the concerns of religion, afford those means of grace⁵¹ (His Word and ordinances) to some while they are entirely withheld from others? And where they are enjoyed, does He not regenerate and sanctify some by the Spirit of truth, while others, who have the same external means, continue in spiritual darkness and finally perish? If the uncontrollable God may do in time for some that which He is under no obligation to do for any, then none can doubt whether He might from eternity form such a resolution. This is because divine Providence is nothing but the execution of God's eternal purpose.⁵²

Similar to this is the conduct of God as to temporal things toward mankind. For it is perfectly evident that the Supreme Governor of the world is liberal in communicating enjoyments of every kind to some; while others, not more unworthy, are all their lives exposed to the greatest distresses. There is a vast disparity between temporal and eternal blessings. Yet, if His distinguishing between His creatures in bestowing or in withholding eternal blessings would in any way disparage His character, it must in proportion do so also in temporal blessings. For “the Judge of all the earth [must] do right” (Gen 18:25). None can, without open blasphemy, quarrel with the sovereign acts of Providence on account of that difference which subsists between one man and another in the present life. In the same way, none should indulge an overly critical temperament in finding fault with the methods of grace because their Maker does not demonstrate an equal regard to all.

5. Harsh?

Nor can it be inferred from anything implied in this doctrine that our eternal Sovereign deals harshly, much less unjustly, with any part of mankind. Here let me ask the objector, and let him ask his own conscience, Have all mankind sinned? Is sin a transgression of divine Law? Is the Law they have broken righteous and just in its requirement, and equitable in its penalty? If so, every man is guilty before God and every mouth should be stopped (Rom 3:19)—for all have deserved to die, to perish, to be destroyed with an utter destruction (Rom 3:23; 6:23).

⁵¹ **means of grace** – instruments that God is pleased to use in order to accomplish salvation and sanctification in the hearts of men: the preaching of the Word, Bible reading and study, prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and godly fellowship with others.

⁵² See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Either these things are acknowledged as undoubted truths, or the authority of the Bible is rejected. These truths being admitted, reason itself must allow that if all mankind had perished under a curse, the honor of their Maker, as the Supreme Governor and righteous Judge, must have still been blameless. But if so, it is impossible to conceive how His choosing some to life and happiness, and His rejecting others, can afford the least occasion for the charge suggested in the objection. For the election of those whom God determined to save does not injure the non-elect. Their situation would not have been at all the better if none had been chosen nor any saved. For non-election is not a punishment; it is only the withholding a free favor, which the sovereign Lord of all may bestow on whomsoever He pleases.

When the whole world is considered as guilty before God (Rom 3:19), we must allow that He had an unlimited right to determine the final state of men. He was at perfect liberty to determine whether He would save any, or not. He might have left all to perish, or He might have decreed the salvation of all. Or He might purpose to save some and reject others. And so determining, He might love and save whom He pleased, just as He might condemn and punish whom He pleased. Surely then, it cannot be absurd in reason, or inconsistent with the divine character, to suppose that He actually has chosen some to infinite glory and determined to punish others according to their demerit. To acknowledge that all have sinned against God, forfeited His favor, and deserve to perish, and at the same time to suppose that He is not at liberty to leave what number He pleased to condemnation and wrath, implies a contradiction. For those whom He is obliged not to reject, whether more or fewer, must have a claim on Jehovah's favor; consequently, they would not be justly liable to perish, which is contrary to the supposition!

It is eternally fit that God should order all things according to His own pleasure. His infinite greatness, majesty, and glory certainly entitle Him to act as an uncontrollable Sovereign, and His will should in all things take place. He is worthy, supremely worthy, of making His own glory the end of all that He does. He is so supremely worthy that He should make nothing but the dictates of His own wisdom and the determinations of His own will His rule in pursuing that end. He should do this without asking permission or counsel of any creature, and without giving an account of any of His matters. It is quite agreeable that He Who is infinitely wise and absolutely perfect should order all things according to His own

will—even things of the greatest importance such as the complete salvation or the eternal damnation of sinners. It is right that He should thus be sovereign because He is the first, the eternal Being, and fountain of existence. He is the Creator of all things, and they are universally dependent upon Him. It is, therefore, entirely consistent with His character that He should act as the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

If the objection under consideration were founded in truth, God could not exercise mercy in His own right, nor would the blessings of grace be His own to give. For that of which He may not dispose as He pleases is not His own. He cannot make a present of it to any of His creatures, they having a claim upon it, for it is absurd to talk of giving to anyone that to which he had a right in equity.

But what would this objection make of God? Must the High and Lofty One be so restricted in the exercise of His grace, that he cannot manifest it at His own pleasure in bestowing His gifts? If He dispense them to one, must He be obliged to give them to another? And if He does not, must He be liable to the charge of partiality and cruelty? Shocking to think! The very thought is blasphemy. This irreverent imagination arises, absurd as it is, from the high opinion we form of ourselves, and the small thoughts we entertain of our Maker.

But why should the objector be so much concerned about the honor of divine justice in the conduct of God toward mankind, on supposition that He has chosen some and rejected others? Why should he not be as much concerned that the glory of his Maker should suffer a stain by the final rejection of all the angels that sinned and fell from their first estate? Certainly, there is equal, if not superior, reason. Why, then, does he not plead the cause of those old apostates, those damned spirits, and quarrel with God because He hath shown more regard to fallen men than to fallen angels? Yet he is under no pain on their account; nor does he suspect that the divine character will lose any part of its glory because they are all, without one exception, the objects of Jehovah's eternal vengeance. Very likely, however, he concludes that they deserve to be damned.

True. And is it not the same with men? If not,
- then the Law of God is unrighteous, for it declares damnation
as the just consequence of sin,

- then the substitutionary death of Christ was an unnecessary and shocking event,
- then the main parts of the Bible are unworthy of the least regard,
- and the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity are no better than a dream, a fable, a gross imposition on all who believe them.

If we deny this fundamental truth—that men, considered as guilty creatures, deserve to perish forever—we can behold neither equity in the Law nor grace in the gospel. The eternal righteousness of the great Lawgiver and the amiable glories of the wonderful Savior are quite obscured. And the whole economy of redemption, as revealed in Scripture, is thrown into the utmost confusion. Consequently, the objector has no alternative but either to give up his point or blaspheme his Maker!

G. Applications

The truth maintained may now be considered by way of application to the careless sinner and to the real Christian.

1. *Careless Sinner*

As it respects the *careless sinner*. Is this your character, reader? If so, the doctrine of election is happily adapted to strike your conscience and alarm your fears, to arouse your sluggish soul and awaken your inquiries after eternal bliss. You have seen that it is a righteous thing with God to execute justice on all who are guilty; and that if He had left all mankind to perish, none would have had any reason to complain. Now, though of His mere goodness He has chosen a number of the fallen race and determined to bring them to glory, yet millions are left to suffer the awful punishment of their crimes. How, then, do you know but this may be your case? Remember, thoughtless mortal, that if you be rejected of God, you are lost forever! So, are you still unconcerned about your soul? Then the sentence of a broken Law and the wrath of a terrible Judge abide upon you.

You are in the hands of an offended God, and (shocking to think) it is dreadfully uncertain what He will do with you. You are, it may be, sometimes afraid what will become of you, afraid lest you should have your portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Yes, and be it known to you that while you are habitually careless about your eternal interests, and a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God, you have reason to fear. Your apprehensions of

eternal punishment have a real foundation. You have reason to tremble every moment!

You will do well to remember that—though you be ever so much afraid of the final event, though everlasting damnation be ever so dreadful—yet it is what you have deserved. You wronged your Maker and offended your Sovereign, and He may inflict it upon you and be righteous, holy, and glorious in it. However dreadful it now is to your view, or however intolerable it would be to you in its execution—yet, in regard to God, neither the one nor the other can render it the less righteous. You should remember, sinner, that your Maker sustains the character of a universal Sovereign and of a righteous Judge. His honor, therefore, is deeply concerned in punishing the guilty.

Though damnation be worse than the loss of being, yet you have no reason to complain of injustice. Maybe if you could form a perfect estimate of what degree of guilt attends innumerable acts of rebellion against unlimited authority, infinite majesty, and boundless perfection; and upon a just comparison of the degree of guilt with the intenseness and duration of the punishment, you could pronounce them unequal. But who can tell to what an enormous height the guilt of one single act of rebellion against infinite Majesty must arise in the boundless empire of God? We may boldly affirm that none but the Omniscient—none but He Who is possessed of that peerless majesty—can solve the question. Meditate on these awesome truths, and may the Lord enable you to flee from the wrath to come!

The doctrine of God's general and equal love to mankind, and the sentiment of universal redemption, are clearly calculated to lull the conscience asleep under a false presumption—a presumption of having a claim to the Redeemer and of happiness by Him, where there is no evidence of love to God and His ways. However, the doctrine of distinguishing grace, and of the Mediator's substitution in the stead of His chosen seed, has an obvious tendency to alarm the careless sinner and to awaken the drowsy formalist.⁵³

2. True Christian

Does my reader profess to believe and embrace this divine truth? Has he tasted that the Lord is gracious, and is he a *real*

⁵³ **formalist** – one who practices outward conformity to Christianity, without the inward reality of spiritual life. See *Formality* by J.C. Ryle (1816-1900); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Christian? This doctrine informs him from where his happiness flows and to whom the glory is due. From it he learns that grace is an absolute sovereign, that she dispenses her favors to whomsoever she pleases, without being subject to the least control. Here she appears, maintaining her rights and asserting her honors, with a grandeur appropriate to herself. Yes, reader, this doctrine presents you with grace on the throne, while as a herald, with a friendly persistence and a commanding voice, it cries in your ear: "Bow the knee!"

And as this doctrine presents you with a view of grace in its sovereign glory, so it points out the objects of eternal love as in a state of the utmost security. For "who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom 8:33). To know your interest in the election of grace is therefore a matter of great importance. That such knowledge is attainable is evident from the exhortation of the Holy Ghost: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10)—sure to your own mind and satisfactory to your own conscience.

That such a persuasion, grounded on truth, is intimately connected with a Christian's peace and joy, is beyond a doubt. Nor is there any other difficulty in attaining the certainty than what attends a well-founded persuasion of our being called by grace. Whoever has reason to conclude that he is called by the gospel and converted to Christ may, from the very same premises, infer his election. For none but those that were chosen to life and happiness are born of God or believe in Christ.

If then you embrace the doctrine, you should not be satisfied with merely avowing the idea as an article of your belief, but should consider it as a truth according to godliness, and seek the advantage resulting from it. For you will find it of little use that you have adopted the idea into your theological system, if you experience no benefit from it in a way of humility and love, of consolation and joy. Viewed in such a connection with practical religion, you should meditate on it. Considered as thus important, you should endeavor to defend it from the hateful charges of the sons of pride.

Are you, on divine authority, not only convinced that the doctrine is true, but also persuaded of your interest in the love it reveals? Then remember the exalted privileges to which you are chosen. Chosen you are to a participation of grace, with all its im-

mense donations—to the enjoyment of glory, with all its eternal bliss. Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance in faith: these, Christian—with all that inconceivable bliss which results from the enjoyment of God Himself—are the blessings designed for you in the decree of election.

Surely, then, with such blessings in hand and such prospects in view, it is but reasonable that you should be entirely devoted to God and live as His obedient servant. If gratitude has any persuasive energy, or if love has any constraining influence, here they should operate with all their force. Henceforth, the glory of God and the honor of that adorable Person by whose mediation you come to enjoy these wonderful favors should be your main concern and the end of all your actions.

Remember the honorable character conferred upon you in the sacred writings. Among those names of distinction which the people of God bear, that of “the elect” is one of the most remarkable. The Spirit of wisdom reminds believers of this character when He urges upon them the duties to which they are called. “Ye are a chosen generation...a peculiar people” (1Pe 2:9). Would we know to what end they are chosen, and why they are a people distinguished from others as God’s peculiar property? The following words inform us: “That ye should shew forth the praises of him who,” as a fruit of His electing love, “hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9). Here is the Christian’s duty in general; and to perform it should be his constant business, for he was “chosen...in him [Christ]...that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph 1:4).

3. False Professor

Or is my reader one of those to whom the remark would be applicable:

This man entertains high notions in religion and pretends to sublime attainments in knowledge. Eternal purposes and absolute sovereignty, unchangeable love and distinguishing grace, are his favorite topics. Yet he lives in open neglect of the plainest precepts and of the most important duties. All of this while pride and covetousness, wrath and malice, with various other unsanctified tempers, govern his conduct and render him a scandal to Christianity!

The very thought of such a reflection is grieving to godly persons, for the state of that professing Christian to whom it may be justly applied is lamentable. You may dispute as long as you please

to defend divine sovereignty in the affairs of grace, but it will be to little purpose as to yourself. This is because it is plain that you are an enemy in your heart and a rebel in your life against that infinite Sovereign Whose rights you pretend to maintain. By such a neglect of His precepts and such a transgression of His laws, you virtually deny His absolute authority and renounce His supreme dominion. Sinful appetites are the law you obey, and carnal⁵⁴ pleasure the end you pursue, while your Maker and Lord has neither the affection of your heart nor the service of your hands. May that omnipotent, sovereign grace of which you talk without any experience deliver and save your sinking soul! For, verily, it would be hard to find a more shocking character outside of hell!

⁵⁴ **carnal** – fleshly; unspiritual; sensual.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR EFFECTUAL CALLING

A. Overview

We have seen in the preceding chapter that grace presided in the eternal counsels; it reigned as an absolute sovereign in the decree of election. Let us now consider the same glorious grace as exerting its benevolent influence in the regeneration¹ and “effectual calling”² of all that shall ever be saved.

Election makes no alteration in the real state of its objects. As they were considered in that gracious purpose to be in a sinful, dying condition, so they continue in that situation till the energy of the Holy Spirit and the power of evangelical truth reach their hearts. The means being decreed as well as the end, it is absolutely necessary, to accomplish the great design of election, that all the chosen in their several generations should be a) born of the Spirit and converted to Jesus, b) called of God, and c) bear His image.

That important change which takes place in the mind and views of a sinner when converted to Christ is frequently termed in the infallible Word as being “called of God,” “called by grace,” and “called by the gospel.” In performing this work of heavenly mercy, the eternal Spirit is the grand agent and evangelical truth the honored instrument.

Are men, in their natural state, considered as asleep in sin and dead to God? When they are called, their minds are enlightened and spiritual life is communicated. The Spirit of God, speaking to the conscience by the truth, quickens the dead sinner, shows him his awful state, and alarms his fears. “The dead shall hear the voice of

¹ **regeneration** – God’s act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power; the new birth (Joh 3:3).

² **effectual calling** – Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit (2Ti 1:9) whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery (Act 2:37), enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ (Act 26:18), and renewing our wills (Eze 36:26), He does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel (Joh 6:44-45). (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 30)

the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (Joh 5:25). "Awake thou that sleepest" (Eph 5:14).

Are they considered as having departed from God and at a distance from Him, as being in the way of destruction yet afraid to return? Then the language of the gospel is, "Return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7). "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). Such a revelation of grace being made in the gospel, and such invitations being addressed to perishing sinners, the Spirit of truth (Joh 16:13) in effectual calling gives them encouragement from these declarations to return to God, and enables them to look for salvation from the hand of Him against Whom they have sinned, and from Whom they have so deeply revolted. Such, in a general view, is the nature of that heavenly blessing which is the subject of our present inquiry.

B. Awakening

That any sinner is "called...out of darkness into his marvellous light" is entirely owing to divine grace (1Pe 2:9). "God...called me by his grace" is the language of Paul (Gal 1:15); nor do the saints ascribe their conversion to any other cause. Man—being by nature dead in sin, unacquainted with its evil, and elated with a fond conceit of his own abilities—looks upon his offences against God rather as pitiable failings than shocking crimes. He excuses his faults and magnifies his duties. He depreciates the work of Christ and relies on his own supposed good performances.

Since man is entirely ignorant of his moral weakness, the total corruption of his nature, and the extensive demands of divine Law, he therefore endeavors, if at all concerned about his soul, to establish his own righteousness as the principal ground of his acceptance with the high and holy God. He trusts in some general mercy to be exercised toward him through Jesus Christ, in order to make up the deficiencies attending his own sincere attempts to perform his duty. In case of a relapse into open and scandalous offenses, he flatters himself with hopes of pardon and of having a part in the love of God—if he does but forsake his past transgressions, be sorry for them, and amend his ways for the future. This, he thinks, is the obvious and easy way of satisfying an offended God and obtaining the divine favor. On such a sandy foundation are the hopes of men commonly built (Mat 7:26-27). Thus we are asleep in sin and yet dream of happiness, on the verge of a dreadful cliff and

yet unapprehensive of danger—till reigning grace exerts her influence to recover us from our native ruin.

But when the Spirit of God convinces of sin by the holy Law and manifests its extensive demands to the conscience of a sinner—when he is informed that every sin subjects the offender to a dreadful curse—then his fears are alarmed and his endeavors are quickened. Being aroused from his spiritual slumber, he is more earnest and punctual in the performance of religious duties, in endeavors after holiness, and in the pursuit of happiness. He is not content with the careless and superficial way of performing devotional services that before had satisfied his conscience and gratified his pride.

For now, guilt burdens his soul and conscience sharpens her sting, while the terrors of the Almighty seem to be set in array against him. The duties he has neglected, the mercies he has abused, and the daring acts of rebellion he has committed against his divine Sovereign crowd in upon his mind and rack his very soul. The justice of the Lawgiver appears ready to vindicate the Law as holy and good, and—like an incensed adversary—unsheathes the sword and makes a loud demand for vengeance. In such a situation, the sinner cannot but earnestly seek to escape impending ruin. But yet, his heart being deeply leavened³ with legal pride, and unacquainted with the divine righteousness, he labors to obtain salvation “as it were by the works of the law” (Rom 9:32).

When, by the Spirit and Word of truth, he is further made sensible of his natural depravity and of the defects attending his best performances—when he considers how very imperfect they shall appear in his own eye, and that a perfect righteousness is absolutely necessary to his acceptance with the eternal Judge—then his hopes of salvation by his own obedience vanish, and his apprehensions of eternal punishment increase. Thus “when the commandment came,” shining in its purity and operating on his conscience with power, “sin [is] revived” (Rom 7:9). A sense of deserved wrath possesses the soul, and his former self-righteous hopes expire.

³ **leavened** – permeated with an altering influence; biblically, that which continually spreads to corrupt sound doctrine (Gal 5:9; 1Co 5:8).

He now reflects on his past ignorance and pharisaical⁴ pride with the greatest amazement and the deepest self-abhorrence. However reluctant, he is obliged to give up his former exalted notions of his own moral excellence, and is compelled, with the polluted leper, to cry, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev 13:45). Now he perceives an appropriateness—now he feels an energy—in those emphatic Scripture phrases that describe the state of a natural man: a filthy sow wallowing in the mire, a dog in love with his vomit (2Pe 2:22), and an open sepulcher emitting the abhorred stench of a decaying carcass (Rom 3:13). These objects, he is fully convinced, are infinitely less offensive to the most delicate person and the keenest sense, than the moral pollution that has defiled his whole soul in the sight of a holy God.

Now he freely acknowledges that what he used to look upon as trivial offenses are shocking crimes. He is thoroughly convinced that the various transgressions of his life, however vile and enormous, are so many streams from a corrupt fountain within and that they proceed from a desperately wicked heart. He is amazed, he is confounded, when he reflects on his inbred corruptions and views his native depravity. His eyes being opened to behold the spirituality and vast extent of the divine Law, he considers his whole life as one continued scene of iniquity. Instead of living every moment of his time in the uninterrupted and most fervent love of God, as the Law requires, he finds, to his grief and shame, that he has lived in the love of self and sin—self-love having been his law and self-pleasing his only goal.

Viewing the holy Law as a transcript of divine purity, he plainly sees that he is no less obliged to love God with all the powers of his soul for the sake of His infinite excellencies, than he is to avoid the horrid crimes of murder and adultery. In a word, he considers himself as the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:15). The sentence of the Law, though terrible to the last degree, he affirms to be just. The execution of it he cannot but dread; yet from his heart he clears both the Law and the Lawgiver of any unrighteous severity, even if he never should taste of mercy. His language is, “The Law is just, and death is my due.”

⁴ **pharisaical** – hypocritically self-righteous and condemnatory, as were the Pharisees, a strict Jewish sect in Jesus’ day that carefully observed the Mosaic Law in order to earn God’s favor.

C. Conviction

Methinks I behold the awakened sinner, sobbing with anguish and bathed in tears, deep in thought, reflecting on his dangerous condition:

The Law, how holy, that I have transgressed! The curse, how awful, that I have incurred! My crimes, how numerous! Their aggravations, how dreadful! How wretched beyond expression is my state, for my soul, my immortal all, is in the utmost jeopardy! What shall I do? Whither shall I flee for refuge? Shall I look for relief to carnal enjoyments and sinful pleasures? Shall I quaff the sparkling bowl,⁵ or frequent the circles of polite amusement? Such a procedure would enhance my guilt and increase my torment; it would be like seeking shelter in hell.

Shall I plead with my Sovereign and Judge that I have not been so wicked as others? But how shall I prove the fact? Or if I could, the debtor that owes but fifty pence, having nothing to pay, is equally liable to an arrest and a prison with one that owes five hundred. For Jehovah declares, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10).

But have I performed no good works, nor any obedience, from which I may extract some comfort, on which I may build my hope of acceptance? Here, alas, I am entirely destitute. Conscious I am that I have not loved God, that I have not sought His glory—and without these there is no acceptable obedience. My very prayers need an atonement and my tears need washing. Shall I promise to change and vow reformation if He, to Whom I have forfeited my life, will be pleased to spare it? Shall I say, with him in the parable that owed ten thousand talents, “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (Mat 18:26)? This would be an evidence of extreme pride and an instance of the greatest folly. My debt, like his, is enormous; and would my Creator settle for the widow’s two mites, I should still be bankrupt.

I now find by experience that I am utterly without strength. But supposing I possessed abilities and were to perform a perfect obedience in the future: even this would make no amends for my past transgressions. The old and heavy score would still stand against me. Had my offenses been committed against a fellow-creature, I might possibly have been able to make compensation. But they are against my Maker, to Whom I owe my time and talents—all

⁵ **quaff the sparkling bowl** – drink down an alcoholic beverage.

that I have and all that I am. “If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him” (1Sa 2:25); or, how shall the offender atone for his crime? It is the infinite Jehovah against Whom I have sinned; it is the eternal Sovereign of all worlds against Whom I have rebelled. Who, then, shall entreat for me?

Yes, I have trampled on infinite authority. The language of my stubborn heart and abominable conduct has been, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey” Him (Exo 5:2)? As the universal Governor, I have renounced His dominion and seated self on the throne. As my constant Benefactor, I have abused His mercies to His dishonor. Infinitely perfect and supremely amiable as He is in Himself, I have neither loved nor adored Him. I have treated Him as though He deserved neither affection nor reverence. I have—shocking irreverence!—I have preferred the vilest lusts and the gratification of the worst appetites to His honor and service. How have I neglected the divine Word and sacred worship! I have treated the Bible as if it were not worthy of serious reading, and in so doing have been a practical deist.⁶ The assemblies of the saints, my closet,⁷ my conscience, all bear testimony against me that I have lived as without God in the world.

Or, if at any time I have attended religious worship in public or private, how have I mocked my Maker! I have behaved myself in His awesome presence as though He had been a senseless idol—one who neither knew nor cared how he was worshipped. When I pretended to acknowledge my sins, my confessions froze on my formal lips. And if I asked for heavenly blessings, it was as though I had little or no necessity for them. With delight and extreme enthusiasm, I have pursued transitory pleasures and wicked enjoyments; but as to the worship of God, I have been ready to cry, “Behold, what a weariness is it!” (Mal 1:13). I have said to God with the language of my heart and conduct, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” (Job 21:14-15).

Can I doubt then—can I question for a single moment—whether I deserve to die, deserve to be damned? Damned! Dreadful punish-

⁶ **deist** – one who holds the belief that God is distant, that He created the universe but then left it to run its course on its own following certain “laws of nature” that He had built into the universe, yet He does not intervene in human affairs.

⁷ **closet** – private room as a place of prayer.

ment! Imagination recoils at the thought. The idea chills my blood! May heaven prevent the impending, the righteous, vengeance!

But God is just, and justice requires that sin should not escape without due punishment. Does it not follow, then, that my eternal misery is inevitable? In what other way can the rights of the God-head—the honor of divine holiness, truth, and justice—be maintained? If no other way can be found—wretch that I am!—I am lost forever.

D. Hope

Thus the awakened sinner lies at the feet of sovereign mercy. As a rebel against the Majesty of heaven, and conscious that he deserves to perish, he lies deep in the dust of self-abasement⁸ and low at the footstool of divine grace. But his *all* being at stake for eternity, and not being sunk into absolute despair, he ventures to address the blessed God. He is well persuaded that if his request be granted and his person accepted, his soul shall live. And he is equally well persuaded that if his prayer be rejected and his person abhorred, he can but die. With trembling hands and a throbbing heart, with downcast looks and faltering lips, he therefore thus proceeds:

Offended Sovereign! I am justly under sentence of death; and should I eternally perish, yet Thou art righteous. My mouth must be stopped; I have no right to complain. But is there nothing in Thy revealed character that may encourage a miserable creature and a guilty criminal to look for mercy and hope for acceptance? Art Thou not a compassionate Savior as well as a just God? Is not Jesus Thy only Son, and hast Thou not set Him forth as a “propitiation⁹ through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25)? To Him, therefore, as my only shelter from divine wrath, I would flee.

Yet if repulsed, I dare not—I cannot—object, for I have no claim on Thy mercy. Only, if it seem good to Thee to save the vilest of sinners, the most wretched of creatures—if it please Thee to extend infinite mercy to one who deserves infinite misery and is obliged to condemn himself—the greater will be the glory of Thy compassion. However, as a suppliant at the throne of grace, as a

⁸ **self-abasement** – humiliation.

⁹ **propitiation** – Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice. (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)

perishing sinner who has no hope but in sovereign mercy and in the blood of the cross, I am resolved to wait until freely received or absolutely rejected. If rejected, I must bear it as my just desert; if accepted, boundless grace shall have the glory.¹⁰

Thus, the name and the work of Jesus forbid despair, and shed a beam of hope on his dark soul.

E. Resistance

One would imagine that the gospel of reigning grace, that the tidings of a free Savior and a full salvation, would be embraced with the utmost readiness by a sinner thus convinced. One would suppose that, so soon as he heard the divine report, he could not keep from exclaiming in joy,

This is the Savior I want! This salvation is every way suitable to my condition, perfect in itself and free for the unworthy sinner. Wonderful truth! Astonishing grace! What could I have, what can I desire more? Here I would rest; in this I will glory.

But alas! This is not always the case. Observation and experience prove that the awakened sinner is frequently reluctant, exceedingly reluctant, to receive comfort from the glorious gospel. This arises not from any defect in the grace it reveals or in the salvation it brings, nor because it has not provided complete relief

¹⁰ Let none of my readers imagine that the process of conviction here described is designed as a standard for their experience. Let none imagine that I would limit the Holy One of Israel to the same way and manner of working on the minds of sinners when He brings them to know themselves, their state, and their danger. I have no such intention, being well aware that God is a Sovereign and acts as He pleases in this as in all other things. For though every sinner must feel his need before he will either seek or accept relief at the hand of grace, yet the Lord has various ways to make His people willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3). Some He enlightens in a more gradual way and draws them to Christ by gentler means, as it were with the cords of love. At the same time, He strikes conviction in the minds of others, as with a voice of thunder and sudden as a flash of lightning. They are brought to the very brink of despair, and are shaken, as it were, over the bottomless pit. Nor have we any business to inquire into the reasons of this difference in the divine conduct. As the Lord saves whom He will, so He may bring them to the knowledge of His salvation in what way and by what means He pleases. If anyone doubt whether his convictions be genuine, let him remember that the questions he should ask himself, in order to attain satisfaction, are not: "How long did I lie under them? To what a *degree of terror* did they proceed? By *what means* were they wrought?" But, "Does it stand true in my conscience that I have sinned and deserve to perish? Is it a fact that nothing but the *grace of God* can relieve me?" These are the questions that demand his notice. And a suitable answer solves the query.—*Booth*

for the sinner in every necessity and distress. Instead, it arises because he does not behold the glory of that grace which reigns triumphant in it, and the design of God in making such a provision. He wants to find himself in some way *distinguished* as a proper object of mercy by holy character and sanctified affections. This is a bar to his comfort; this is his grand embarrassment. In other words, he is ready to fear that

- he is not sufficiently humbled under a sense of sin,
- he has not a suitable abhorrence of it,
- or he has not those fervent breathings after Christ and holiness which he ought to have, before he can be warranted to look for salvation with a well-grounded hope of success.¹¹

Thus the sinner, even when his conscience is oppressed with guilt and earnestly desirous of salvation, opposes the true grace of God by desiring some worthiness of his own. Whence it appears that the genuine self-denial of the gospel is the hardest sacrifice to human pride.

F. Grace Reigns

But grace reigns. The Spirit of truth (Joh 15:26) has as a principal part of His business, in the economy of salvation, to testify of Christ and of sovereign mercy by Him. He still calls the poor alarmed wretch by the gospel. This evidences to his conscience not only the all-sufficiency, but also the absolute freeness of the glorious Redeemer. This manifests that there are no good qualities to be obtained, no righteous acts to be performed, either to gain an interest in Him or to qualify for Him. This shows yet further that convictions of sin and a sense of need are not to be accounted conditions of our acceptance with Christ and salvation by Him. Nor ought they to be esteemed previously necessary to our believing in

¹¹ Here it should be well observed that deep distress, arising from the fear of hell, is not required of any in order to peace with God; for such distress does not belong to the *precepts* of the Law, but to its *curse*. Terrifying apprehensions of eternal punishment are no part of that which is required of sinners, but of what is inflicted on them. There is indeed an evangelical sorrow for sin that is our duty, which is commanded and has promises annexed to it. But legal terrors proceeding from the curse of the Law, not from its precept—expressing a sense of danger *from* the Law, rather than of having done evil *against* the Law—are no marks of love to God or of a holy temper. An awakened sinner, therefore, wishing for distresses of this kind, is a person seeking the misery of unbelief, that he may obtain a permission to believe. See Dr. Owen, *Works*, Vol. 3, *On the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 360.—*Booth*

Him, on any other account than as a sensibility of our spiritual poverty and wretchedness renders relief in the way of grace truly welcome. This is needful, not as inclining God to give, but as disposing us to receive. A sinner will neither seek nor accept the great atonement until he is sensible that divine wrath and the damnation of hell are what he deserves and what he must unavoidably suffer without the propitiation of the adorable Jesus.

I take it for granted we must come to Christ under that character by which He calls us. Now, it is evident that He invites us by the name of “sinners.” Therefore, as sinners—miserable, ruined sinners—we must come to Him for life and salvation. The gospel of peace is preached to such, and then the gospel calls, even those who are not conscious that they are the objects of any good disposition.

Yes, sorrowful sinner, be it known to you, be it never forgotten by you, that the gospel with all its blessings, that Christ with all His fullness, are a glorious provision made by the great Sovereign (and by grace as reigning) for the guilty and the wretched. The gospel and Christ are for such as have nothing of their own on which to rely, and utterly despair of ever being able to do anything for that purpose. The undertaking of Jesus Christ was intended for the relief of such as are ungodly, altogether miserable, and without hope in themselves. Such was the good purpose of God, and such is the beneficial genius of His gospel. Delightful, ravishing truth! Enough, one would think, to make the brow of sadness wear a smile.

Let me indulge the pleasing thought and once more express the charming idea. The blessings of grace were never designed to distinguish the worthy or to reward merit, but to relieve the wretched and save the desperate. These—hear and rejoice!—these are the beneficiaries in the heavenly grant; yea, they have an exclusive right. There are those who imagine themselves to be the better sort of people, who depend on their own duties and plead their own worthiness, who are not willing to stand on a level with publicans and harlots. For all these, Christ has nothing to do with them, nor the gospel anything to say to them! They are too proud to live upon alms, or to be entirely indebted to sovereign grace for all their salvation. Therefore, they must not be offended if they have no assistance at all from that quarter. They depend on the Law, and by it they must stand or fall.

Therefore, he who believes in Christ relies on Him as the justifier “of the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). Nor does he consider himself in any other light, or as bearing any other character, in that very moment when he first believes on Him. If he did, he could not believe on Him as the justifier of such. The only encouragement a sinner has to apply to Christ for all that he wants, consists—not in a consciousness of possessing any pious disposition, of having come up to terms, performed any conditions, or as being any way different from what he was before—but [only] in that grace which reigns and is proclaimed in the gospel. Yes, the free declarations of the gospel concerning Jesus contain a sufficient warrant for the vilest sinner, in the most desperate circumstances, to look for relief at the hand of Christ. These include such declarations as,

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance
(Mar 2:17).

The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost
(Luk 19:10).

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth (Isa 45:22).

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mat 11:28).

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (Joh 6:37).

Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life
(Joh 3:15).

G. Trusting

In these, as in similar passages of holy writ, the sinner is encouraged to look to the Lord Redeemer with assurance that in so doing he shall not be disappointed. He looks not as one whose character and state are different from those of the world in common, but as a guilty creature and ready to perish. These free declarations are founded on the glorious undertaking and finished work of Christ, Who “suffered...for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18); Who “died” for men while they were sinners and “ungodly” (Rom 5:6); and Who “reconciled” them to God when they were “enemies” (Col 1:21). So that “all things are now ready” for the sinner’s enjoyment and happiness (Luk 14:17)—here in a life of faith and holiness, hereafter in the fruition of glory. These divine testimonies are only a sample of what might be produced for the purpose. Together with others of the same meaning, they are the proper ground of our faith in and dependence upon Christ for everlasting salvation.

Hence it appears that the sinner who is effectually called of God is not led by the Holy Spirit to believe in a dying Redeemer under a persuasion of his being now distinguished from his ungodly neighbors and former self—in other words, of his being a much better man than he was before, in virtue of any good habits or qualities. Nor does his comfort arise from any such supposed alteration. No, the divine Spirit does not bear witness to our spirits concerning our own inherent excellencies, or inform us how much we are superior to others (Rom 8:16). But He witnesses to our spirits concerning the all-sufficiency, suitableness, and absolute freeness of Christ, and of all the blessings included in His mediation. The basis of a believer's hope and the source of his spiritual joy are not a consciousness that *he* has done something toward his own salvation (call it “believing” or what you will). But the basis of his hope is the *truth* he believes and the *Savior* on Whom he relies—which truth, possessed in the heart, is also the spring of his holiness.

Under the influence of the blessed Spirit and by the instrumentality of the gospel, a sinner is brought to renounce every false confidence and legal hope. He pours contempt (as to acceptance with the Most High) on every righteousness that is not in all respects perfect. Such a sinner leans on Christ as the Rock of ages, cleaves to Him as the only hope of the guilty, and rejoices in Him as “able...to save...to the uttermost” all, without exception, “that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25).

Now a new scene of things opens to his view. He beholds with amazement how God can be just, and yet the justifier of the “ungodly” (Rom 4:5). The just God and the Savior appear in the same point of light. Now the everlasting covenant unveils its infinite stores to his ravished sight, and the gospel pours its healing balm into his wounded conscience. Jesus Christ and His righteousness are now his only hope. He finds a sufficiency in the glorious Immanuel, not only to supply all his needs, but to make him infinitely rich and eternally happy. In Him he rests completely satisfied. A little before, he stood trembling and confounded at the tribunal¹² of conscience. He could scarcely imagine that God would be righteous if He did not pour out His vengeance upon him. But now he finds the work of the heavenly Substitute a complete fulfillment of the rights of justice, and an everlasting foundation for his strongest confidence. This wonderful means, so well adapted to glorify God

¹² **tribunal** – panel of judges convened to administer justice.

and save the sinner, he beholds with astonishment and contemplates with rapture. Yes, beholding grace on the throne, he bows, adores, and rejoices. Gratitude abounds in his heart and praise flows from his lips.

When he

- reflects on his present unworthiness and former state;
- beholds the enmity he cherished in his bosom against his Maker;
- considers how carnal his affections, how stubborn his will, how proud his heart;
- considers how often he had, in his conduct, adopted the language of those who say to the Almighty, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14)

—at these times he is amazed that he was not long since sent to hell.

When he further considers

- how reluctant he was to acknowledge divine sovereignty and bow to heavenly mercy;
- how long he resisted the calls of Providence;
- how often he stifled the protests of conscience;
- that, if less than an infinite Agent had been employed in reducing a stubborn rebel to obedience, he had been finally unyielding and eternally miserable

—when he thus reflects, he is filled with pleasing astonishment.

When he compares what his offenses deserved and what God has bestowed, he cannot help but exclaim, "What hath God wrought! What a miracle of mercy!" He is convinced...that his *calling* must be ascribed to reigning grace. He is fully persuaded that God was the first mover in this—as well as in every other blessing bestowed, in every other benefit enjoyed or promised. When he meditates upon his calling, his language is, "I am fount of Him Whom I neither loved nor sought. He is manifested to me, after Whom I did not inquire." He will say, "I am *known of* God; I am *apprehended of* Christ"; rather than "I know God, I apprehend Christ" (Luk 15:4-5; Rom 10:20; Gal 4:9; Phi 3:12).

Thus to be called of God is an instance of reigning grace and an evidence of distinguishing love. Happy are you, reader, if you know by experience what it is to be called by grace. If such be your state, it becomes your indispensable duty to "walk worthy" of your calling (Eph 4:1), for it is high, holy, heavenly. Yes, believer, your calling is truly noble. You are "called...out of darkness into his marvellous

light" (1Pe 2:9); and out of worse than Egyptian bondage into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. You are called out of the world into fellowship with Jesus Christ. Called, you are, out of a state of open rebellion against God and painful anxiety of mind—into a state of reconciliation and friendship, of conscious peace and heavenly joy. What shall I say! You are called from the slavery of sin to the practice of holiness, into a state of grace here and to the enjoyment of glory hereafter.

In short, it is the high God that called you; it is the way of holiness in which you are called to walk; and it is an unfading inheritance, an eternal kingdom, you are called to enjoy. Here is your blessedness and here is your duty. The consideration of these things as a noble incentive to obedience should fire your mind with godly zeal, should fill your heart with Christian gratitude, should direct your feet in the paths of duty, and manifest its constraining influence through your whole conduct.

H. Uncalled

To you that are *uncalled*, what shall I say? Your state is awful! For, leaving the world in your present situation, you are lost forever; you die to eternity. For none shall be glorified *hereafter* but such as are called *here*. If death should summons you hence before you are converted to Christ, what will become of you? As dry stubble, you must fall into the hands of Him Who is "a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). You may entirely neglect the concerns of your soul. You may, for a season, trifle with the affairs of religion, and hear the gospel with a careless indifference. But if grace should not intervene for your rescue, dreadful will be the result. The Word of God and the gospel of Christ will be a swift witness against you another day. They will be "the savour of death unto death" to your soul (2Co 2:16), while God, even God Himself, will be your eternal enemy. "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver" (Psa 50:22).

If you attend on a preached gospel and frequent the house of God, do not take it for granted that you must of necessity be a Christian. You even may make a public profession and yield a cool assent to the truth. This thousands have done; this you may do, and yet perish forever. If not divorced from the Law, if not renewed in your mind and enabled to believe in Christ as a miserable, helpless sinner, it will soon appear that you have only chosen a more decent, though less frequented path, to the regions of darkness. It will

soon appear that you are damned with the single advantage of having left a respectable character among your fellow-sinners. This is a poor compensation for the loss of an immortal soul, and an awful result of a religious profession! God grant it may not be the case with the reader!

Nor let anyone mistake a set of evangelical notions, received by education or learned under a gospel ministry, for true conversion and faith in the great Redeemer. A mistake here is fatal and has been the ruin of multitudes. A professing Christian may be wise in doctrines and able to defend the truth against its opposers, while his heart is entirely carnal, cold as ice, and barren as a rock. "Though I...understand all mysteries, and all knowledge...and have not charity [that is, love to God and love to His people], I am nothing" (1Co 13:2). Vain, then, are the pretensions of all those—whatever knowledge they may have of the gospel—who live in sin, who love not God, nor seek His glory. They may shine in religious conduct; they may display their talents and feed their vanity by defending truth and refuting error. They may be conscious of superior abilities and may look down with a solemn pride on persons of less ability and less understanding in the doctrines of grace. But their superior knowledge will only aggravate their future woe and render damnation itself more dreadful.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR PARDON

A. Description

Pardon of sin¹ is a blessing of utmost worth, because it is absolutely necessary to present peace and future salvation. Without it, no individual of Adam's race can be happy. When the conscience of a sinner is wounded with guilt and oppressed with fears of divine wrath, pardon is vigorously sought as the most desirable thing. It is received with joy as the first of all favors.

But as great and necessary as the blessing is, had it not been for that revelation contained in the Bible, mankind would have lain under a sad uncertainty whether there was any such thing as forgiveness with God. Being conscious of guilt, yet partial in their own favor, they might have pleased themselves with conjectures that He would not finally condemn all His offending creatures. But they could never have arrived at certainty. For by whatever means they might have come to the knowledge of God as the Author of nature and Sovereign of the world, by the same means they must have known that perfection is essential to the divine character; and, consequently, that the Deity must be infinitely opposite to moral evil.

But unassisted reason could not have determined whether rebels against their eternal Sovereign might be forgiven consistently with His perfections and purposes, without violating His honor as a righteous governor. How obligated we are, then, to adore the condescension and goodness of God, Who has not left us to grope in the dark or to form a thousand wild conjectures about an affair of such vast importance! For, possessing a divine revelation of the richest grace, we are taught with absolute certainty that "there is forgiveness" with our Maker and Sovereign (Psa 130:4).

This revelation of mercy is of great antiquity, almost as old as time itself. It was known to the patriarchs; it was exhibited in a clearer manner under the Mosaic economy. But by the incarnation

¹ See *Forgiveness* by J.C. Ryle (1816-1900); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

and work of the Son of God, it has received the highest confirmation and shines in all its glory.

Jehovah's pardoning goodness was loudly proclaimed to Moses, and figures conspicuously in that sacred name by which the God of Israel was known to the church in the wilderness:

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, 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 (Exo 34:5-7).

Yes, to the eternal Sovereign "belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him" (Dan 9:9).

This primary blessing of the New Covenant is represented in the book of God by many strong metaphors² and in a rich variety of language. Yet, all are in exact correspondence to the different views which are there given of the dreadful nature and complicated evil of sin.

Is the sinner described as all over defiled, and loathsome with hateful impurity? Then his pardon is denoted by the *perfect cleansing* of his person, and by the covering of all his filth (Psa 14:3; 32:1; 85:2; 1Jo 1:7; Rev 1:5).

Is he compared to a wretched bankrupt, and his offenses to a debt of ten thousand talents? Then his pardon is represented by *blotting out* of the debt, or by a non-imputation³ of it (Psa 32:2; 51:1, 9; Mat 18:24).

Is he likened to a person who labors under the weight of a heavy burden, which galls his shoulders and sinks his spirits? Then his forgiveness is represented by *lifting up* and by *removing* the painful burden (Psa 38:4; 32:1; Mat 11:28).

Are his transgressions, for their nature, number, and effects, represented by clouds—black, threatening, low-hung clouds, which are just ready to burst into a storm and to deluge the country? Then his pardon is described by their *total removal*, by blotting them out from the face of heaven, so that no trace of them shall be

² **metaphors** – figures of speech containing an implied comparison, in which a word or phrase ordinarily used of one thing is applied to another.

³ **non-imputation** – not charging the debt to his account.

found nor any mortal be able to tell what is become of them (Isa 44:22).

Is disobedience to the divine Law pronounced rebellion against the Majesty of heaven, and the sinner considered as a convict under the sentence of death? Then forgiveness consists in *reversing the sentence* and in *remitting the penalty* due to his crimes. Under this consideration, which is the proper notion of pardon, the language of a gracious God is, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24). The Lord is pleased to represent the same invaluable blessing by casting our sins behind His back (Isa 38:17); by casting them into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19); by removing them as far from us as the east is from the west (Psa 103:12); by remembering them no more (Jer 31:34); and by making scarlet and crimson offenses to be white as wool, yea, whiter than snow (Isa 1:18).

In this forgiveness, grace reigns and the riches of grace are displayed. It is an absolutely perfect pardon. And to make it so, three things are required: It must be *full*, *free*, and *everlasting*. That is, it must extend to all sin; it must be granted without any conditions to be performed by the sinner; and it must be absolutely irreversible. These things, then, deserve a more particular consideration.

B. Full

That forgiveness which is equal to the needs of a sinner, must be *full*. It must include *all* sins, be they ever so numerous; and extend to all their aggravations, be they ever so enormous. Every sin is a transgression of divine Law, and every transgression subjects the offender to a dreadful curse. Therefore, if the guilt of every sin be not removed, if the penalty due to every sin be not remitted, the curse must fall upon us and wrath must be our portion. Hence appears the necessity of a full pardon in order to happiness. And as it is essentially necessary, so it is granted.

1. The Testimony of Scripture

The Scriptures declare that, when our offended Sovereign pardons any of the human race, He forgives all their sins. For, says the King, Whose name is the Lord of hosts,

I will cleanse them from *all* their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon *all* their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me (Jer 33:8).

Delightful declaration! To forgive sin is a divine prerogative. None can dispense the unspeakable favor but God. This He declares that He will do—and that He will not only forgive some sins, or a few, but *all*, all entirely!

Let us hear another ambassador from the court of heaven. The prophet Micah, when speaking of the King Eternal with an air of thanksgiving and of joy, declares,

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast *all* their sins into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19).

“He will turn again,” not as an incensed adversary to execute vengeance, but as a friend and a father to demonstrate His grace. Beholding with pity our miserable condition and helpless circumstances, “He will have compassion upon us”—that is, He will relieve our distress and richly supply our various needs. As disobedience is the cause of all our misery and that abominable thing which He detests, “He will subdue our [stubborn] iniquities.” He will remove their guilt by atoning blood and annul their dominion by victorious grace. “And,” as a further expression of pardoning love, “thou wilt cast” not a few, or the greater part only, but *all* “their sins into the depths of the sea.” Their sins—as a burden too heavy for them to bear and as an object too hateful for God to behold—He will forever remove from them, forever cast out of His sight. Here the fullness and the perpetuity of divine forgiveness are expressed with all the force of language.

Another infallible writer expresses the glorious truth (and celebrates the indescribable blessing) in language of exultation. To hear his words is delightful; to partake in his joy is transporting:

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name...Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities; who healeth *all* thy diseases (Psa 103:1-3).

Such is his language and such the ground of his exuberant joy—and a solid foundation it is for continuous thanksgiving. For when and to whomsoever God pardons sin, He so forgives it that, as to the eye of His justice, He *sees it no more*; there is none to be found that can be charged upon them (Num 23:21; Jer 50:20; Rom 8:33). Hence there is no condemnation to such persons.

This forgiveness is worthy of God, and suitable to the chief of sinners. Proceeding from sovereign grace, it reaches the foulest crimes and the most abominable transgressions. By this gracious

pardon, scarlet and crimson sins are made white as wool, yea, whiter than snow (Isa 1:18). The bloody sins of Manasseh, the madness of rage in a persecuting Saul, the bitter taunts of the thief against the Son of God when both were in their expiring moments, and the sin of crucifying the Lord of glory—these, all these, with their various and horrid aggravations, have been pardoned.⁴ These [sins], though inconceivably aggravated, and some of them such as were never committed either before or since, have been forgiven by a gracious God. The blood of Christ possesses infinite energy, arising from the utmost dignity of Him Who shed it, and is able to cleanse from all sin (1Jo 1:7)—from each sin, be it ever so great; from all sins, be they ever so numerous. Thus grace, like a mighty and compassionate monarch, passes an act of oblivion⁵ on millions and millions of the most aggravated offenses and complicated crimes.

2. *Hope*

Did the most abandoned evildoers know what forgiveness there is with God, they would no longer be held by the devil under that injurious persuasion and fatal snare: “There is no hope.” Nor would they form the rash conclusion: we “have loved strangers, and after them will” we go (Jer 2:25). Jehovah is the God of pardon. This is His name and this is His glory (Exo 34:6-7; Neh 9:17)! For thus saith the Lord,

I will pardon all their iniquities...And it shall be to me a name of joy, praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth and all the angels in heaven, which shall hear all the superlative good that I do unto them (see Jer 33:8-9).

Astonishing words! The Sovereign of all worlds seems to glory in pardoning mercy as one of the brightest jewels in His own eternal crown. Well, therefore, might the church cry out in a transport of joy, “Who is a God like unto thee? that pardoneth iniquity” of the most complicated and shocking kind, “and passeth by” with the utmost readiness “the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever.” And the glorious reason is a reason that ought never to be forgotten: “because he *delighteth* in mercy” (Mic 7:18).

⁴ The author is not alluding to universal atonement, but that the Scripture shows that each of these were pardoned when they exercised the faith and repentance God gave them by grace.

⁵ **act of oblivion** – general pardon.

3. Response

Come, then, poor trembling sinner—though conscious that the number and magnitude of your sins are inexpressibly great—come, let us reason together and contemplate the riches of grace.

Though you are by nature an apostate creature and a child of wrath;

Though you have, by innumerable transgressions, violated the Law of God and incurred its everlasting curse;

Though you are grown old in rebellion against your divine Sovereign, and look upon yourself as a monster of iniquity;

Though your sins of heart, lip, and life—sins of omission and sins of commission, sins of ignorance and sins against knowledge—besiege you on every side like an armed host prepared for terrible battle and call aloud for vengeance on your guilty head;

Though, to heighten your misery, the enemy of mankind should come in like a flood and load you with horrid accusations;

Though he should tell you that, by your offenses, you have dared God's vengeance to His face and solemnly mocked Him in your duties, and so set a keener edge on all your sensations of guilt;

And to complete your distress, though your own conscience turn evidence against you, ratify the dreadful verdict, and pronounce the deserved sentence, so that you are ready to conclude you are almost a damned soul, and that your case is absolutely desperate

—yet still there is relief to be had!

Notwithstanding all these deplorable circumstances, there is no reason to sink in despair. For behold, there is full forgiveness with God; and such is His mercy that He waits to be gracious in bestowing the invaluable blessing (Isa 30:18). As He never confers favor on account of anything amiable in the object, so He never withholds it on account of any peculiar aggravations in the sinner's conduct or character. To dispute this is to deny that salvation is by grace. Divine mercy is not conditional, narrow, or limited. It is not like that which is exercised by men: reluctant to intervene till something inviting appear in its object. No! It is divinely sovereign and absolutely free.

Consider, O mournful soul, how many millions now inhabit the regions of immortal purity and exult in bliss, who were once

loathsome with sin, laden with guilt, pressed with fears, and ready to sink in despair. In a word, they were altogether as abominable and wretched as you can possibly be! Reflect a moment and see whether you cannot find, among those “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23), such as were by nature the same as yourself—and before mercy was shown, no better by practice than yourself. There you will find the one who was adept in every kind of wickedness: the idolatrous and bloody Manasseh (2Ki 21; 2Ch 33). There you may see the faithless Peter: the man who—contrary to the dictates of his conscience, to the warnings of his Master, and to his own most solemn protestations—denied, with oaths and curses, his Lord and Savior (Mar 14:71). There you may behold many of the recklessly immoral Corinthians, persons that were once a reproach to their country and a scandal to human nature. While near to the Son of God and seated on thrones of bliss, you cannot but behold many of those Jerusalem sinners who stained their hands in the blood of our divine Lord.

These make a distinguished figure among the shining hosts, the very thought of which must revive the heart of a drooping sinner. In a word, there you will see sinners of every sort and of every size. So that, be your sins like a debt of millions of talents⁶—be they more in number than the stars in the firmament, and heavier than the sand of the sea—yet this *full* forgiveness super-abounds. Let this be your rest and this your joy, that grace reigns in the pardon of all sin.

C. Free

The next requirement in a complete pardon is that it be *free*; or in other words, not dependent on any conditions to be performed by the sinner. In regard to Christ our Surety, the pardon of any, even the least offense, was suspended until *He* performed the most dreadful conditions and the hardest terms. The terms and conditions were a) His incarnation, b) His most perfect obedience to the divine Law, and c) His subjection to the most infamous death on the cross. As to Christ our Substitute, blood was the rigorous condition; blood was the dreadful demand; even the pouring out of “his own blood” was the righteous requirement of divine justice (Heb 9:12). For “without shedding of blood,” even the blood of the Prince of life and Lord of glory, there “is no remission” of any offenses

⁶ millions of talents – an enormous amount of money.

(Heb 9:22). The atonement of our glorious High Priest is that which satisfies the claims of justice, procures the pardon of sin, and pacifies the consciences of men when pained with a sense of guilt.

This forgiveness is, notwithstanding, absolutely free to the pardoned sinner. It is dispensed according to the riches of divine mercy and is received in a way of grace. As it is written, "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7). The death of Christ is the meritorious cause and the glory of God is the ultimate end that Jehovah has in view when He bestows the blessing. "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32). "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake" (Isa 43:25).

1. *Isaiah 43:22-25*

The prior passage is so remarkably appropriate that I cannot help transcribing it more completely.

But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities (Isa 43:22-24).

After such a heavy charge—rather, after such a complication of charges exhibited against them—who could expect but the next words would flash vengeance and denounce utter destruction. But, lo! Rejoice, O ye heavens, and shout for joy, O ye children of men! Every syllable is balm; every word is full of consolation. Jehovah speaks; let the worst of sinners attend and hear! "I"—Whom you have so notoriously offended—"even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions" (43:25). This is not because you are humble, or in any way qualified for mercy, but "for mine own sake"; that is, to demonstrate the riches of My grace and to display the glory of all My perfections.

And so fully and effectively shall this be done, that He "will not remember thy sins" anymore. Here we have a good example of the apostle's declaration, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20). In the instance before us, we behold a people, highly favored of the Lord, neglecting His positive commands, though those commands were easily performed. We behold them

restraining “prayer before God” (Job 15:4), and quite weary of His worship. Yea, we hear their Sovereign complain that they have caused Him to serve with their sins and wearied Him with their multiplied crimes. And yet these disrespectful wretches are pardoned! Amazing mercy! Sin abounds like a flood, but grace abounds like an ocean. If pardon in this example were not absolutely free regarding the criminal, I think it would puzzle the most fruitful invention to contrive a form of words to express any such a thing.

2. *Isaiah 57:17-19*

The Spirit of inspiration, speaking by the same prophet in another place, declares:

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart (Isa 57:17).

What means does the Lord try next? Since these milder methods did not reclaim the stubborn, rebellious, covetous wretch, it might naturally be expected that God would proceed immediately to lay on severer strokes, and to make him feel the vengeance of His lifted arm. But reigning grace does wonders, such wonders as will fill heaven with hallelujahs to all eternity:

I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him (Isa 57:18-19).

“I have seen his ways,” says the Lord (v. 18). Surely, then, He will teach him not to offend any more by inflicting an awful punishment, and by making him an eminent example of avenging justice! Such would be the determination and conduct of men in dealing with a stubborn yet impotent adversary.

But Jehovah’s methods of reclaiming offenders, and of softening the hearts of His hardened enemies, are not like ours. They are in a peculiar manner His own and highly becoming Himself. He therefore adds (amazingly gracious indeed!), “and I will heal him” of these his deep corruptions (v. 19). I will pardon all his offenses and lead him also in the ways of obedience. And, having shown him the infinite evil of his former conduct, and possessed his heart of godly sorrow, I will restore comforts unto him and to all his mourners.

A gloriously free pardon indeed! Here grace takes the rebels in hand. And what is the consequence? Why, their spiritual diseases

are healed; their crying sins are pardoned; the sons of Belial⁷ are reduced to obedience and made partakers of heavenly joy.

3. Paul

Let us now consider some few of those eminent and everlasting monuments of grace as it reigns in the free pardon of sin, which stand recorded in the New Testament. Saul, afterward called Paul, was a barbarous persecutor of the children of God. The sacred historian informs us that his malicious heart breathed out “threatenings and slaughter” against the saints of the Most High (Act 9:1). Had it been in his power, he would have dealt destruction among the Christians by every breath he drew.

Would you see a further description of his malice and rage against the peaceful and holy disciples of Jesus? Would you behold this tiger in human form pursuing and devouring the innocent lambs of Christ to the utmost extent of his power! Then read the following words: “I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being *exceedingly mad* against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Act 26:11). Is it possible for words to express a more diabolical temper or a more savage barbarity?

What had the objects of his irreconcilable fury done, that he became so highly incensed against them? The grand offense was: they loved our Lord and owned Him for the true Messiah. For this, he stirred up all his rage and would not suffer them to live. He might well acknowledge, when he came to his right mind, I “was...a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1Ti 1:13).

Yet this man—the greatest enemy to God, the most vile and unworthy, this butcher of the members of Christ—“obtained mercy” (1Ti 1:13). On a sudden, when his thoughts were big with slaughter and his heart thirsting for blood; when he was aiming, if possible, to totally destroy the Christian character and to cause the remembrance of a crucified Messiah to cease from the earth—even *that* was the time the persecuted Savior chose to manifest His love to him. He was powerfully struck with conviction, called by grace, pardoned, and justified—and became an heir of eternal salvation. Nor was he required to perform any condition as in the least entitling to these blessings, or as qualifying for them. Is it recorded of him that he was “exceedingly mad” against the Christians (Act

⁷ **sons of Belial** – Hebrew phrase for wicked, ungodly men (1Sa 2:12; 2Sa 23:6).

26:11)? His own pen has informed us that the grace of our Lord was “exceeding abundant” toward him (1Ti 1:14). So that though “sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom 5:20).

But some, perhaps, may be inclined to think that the grace exercised toward Paul was as extraordinary as the means of his conversion were miraculous. Let the apostle himself determine the case. He says, “For this cause I obtained mercy, that”—what? that I might appear as a unique instance of divine mercy? That I might enjoy a favor not given to any of my fellow-sinners? No. But “that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, *for a pattern* to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1Ti 1:16; see also Eph 2:6-7). Hence it is plain that the longsuffering and grace which were manifested in the pardon and salvation of Saul the persecutor are to be considered not as a particular instance of sovereign bounty, rarely, if ever, to be repeated but as the very example of what should be showed to millions and millions of transgressors in succeeding ages, even to all who should afterward believe on Christ to life eternal.⁸

⁸ That lively and evangelical writer, Hervey, when treating on the conversion of Paul, expresses himself in the following manner:

“Observe this man in his unconverted state. He breathes out threatenings and slaughter against the Christians. Can anything denote a more evil and savage temper? The roaring lion and the raging bear are gentle creatures compared with this monster in human shape. Still more the description of this barbarity heightens: ‘I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and [was] exceedingly mad against them’ (Act 26:11)—the practice not of a man, but of a fiend! ’Tis the very picture of an incarnate devil! What has this infernal wretch that may recommend him to the divine favor? If ever there was a sinner on earth that had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, beyond the possibility of pardon, surely it must be this Saul of Tarsus.

“But the divine mercy, disdaining all limits, is overflowing and unmeasurable. Where sin has abounded like a flood, divine mercy abounds like an ocean. The favor of man is reluctant to intervene till something amiable and inviting appears in the object. But the grace of God is immensely rich and infinitely free. It comes to the most vile and hardened rebels. It brings every necessary recommendation in its own unspeakably beneficial nature. It accomplishes all its blessed ends, not by any favorable disposition in the sinner, but by that one glorious righteousness provided in the Savior. This overtook the persecutor Saul on his journey to Damascus. Light and life were poured upon him, not from any dawn of reformation in himself, but from a very different quarter: by opening a window in heaven, as it were, while he was sojourning even in the suburbs of hell. He saw that Just One (Act 9:3-5). He received the inestimable gift. He was made partaker of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

“See, now, what an effect this faith has upon his conduct. It causes a total revolution in the sentiments of his mind. It gives a new bias to every faculty of his soul. It introduces an absolute change into the whole tenor of his be-

4. *Zacchaeus, Samaritan Woman, Philippian Jailer*

The cases of Zacchaeus the publican, of the Samaritan woman, and of the Philippian jailer loudly attest the glorious truth for which I am pleading.

Zacchaeus was chief among the publicans,⁹ and, it is highly probable, was not the least among the extortioners (Luk 19:1-10). Among his neighbors, his employment was detestable, his character recklessly immoral, and his company scandalous. That his employment was detestable none can doubt. That his character was immoral appears from hence: the office of chief among the publicans was what no son of Abraham who had not lost his reputation, or who was not of an abandoned, shameless character, would undertake. And that his company was esteemed scandalous is evident from that keen reflection upon the conduct of Jesus, when He became a guest at his table. "They all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner"—a worthless, infamous fellow (Luk 19:7). It is a complaint of the same kind with that of Simon the Pharisee: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner"—a person of ill-fame, one that is a reproach to her sex (Luk 7:39).

But, notwithstanding the unworthy character or conduct of this Jewish publican, he is instantaneously converted. No course of duties, prior to his believing on Christ, is assigned him. No qualifications, as predisposing for pardon, mentioned. "This day," without any previous preparation, "is salvation come to this house" (Luk 19:9).

Nay, before our Lord expressed those gracious words, *Zacchaeus* made haste, came down from the tree, and received him *joyfully*. Now, from the circumstances around entertaining Christ, he probably would not have received Him joyfully without believing in

havior—as great and marvelous a change as if you should behold some mighty torrent, turned by the shock of an earthquake; or as if rolling the waters to the east that from the beginning of time had flowed without ceasing to the west. He adores that Jesus Whom he lately blasphemed. He preaches that faith that he once destroyed. And he is ready to lay down his life for those believers whom, not long ago, he persecuted unto death." (Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio*; Vol. 3; 5th edition; 233-234)—*Booth*

James Hervey (1714-1758) – Calvinistic Anglican clergyman, writer, and contemporary of George Whitefield and John Wesley.

⁹ **publicans** – Jews appointed by the Romans to collect taxes, and therefore hated by other Jews.

Him; nor could he believe without receiving the remission of sins. This, therefore, is a noble instance of an absolutely free and unconditional pardon.

The conversion of the *Samaritan woman* suits our purpose well (Joh 4). This woman lived in ignorance of God and His worship and in the vile practice of adultery, till, by a remarkably gracious providence, she met with our Lord. He made Himself known to her. She believed on Him, confessed her faith in Him, and consequently received that forgiveness which is by Him. Nor can we suppose, without violating reason and Scripture, that Christ considered her as having complied with any terms, or having performed any conditions, qualifying for that pardon and those blessings which were granted to her.

The conversion of the *Philippian jailer* is equally appropriate and equally strong in proof of our point (Act 16:23-34). The jailer was a Gentile idolater, a barbarous persecutor, and, in purpose, a self-murderer. Yet, being awakened in his conscience, he was directed by an infallible guide to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” immediately, with the strongest assurance that in so doing he should “be saved” (v. 31).

Had Paul and Silas thought of any predisposing or qualifying conditions, to be attained in any way, or performed by any means; had they thought the performance of religious duties, a course of humiliation for sin, or the evidence of any degree of love to God previously necessary to faith in Jesus for pardon and acceptance—no doubt but those ambassadors of Christ, who shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God, would have given some intimation of these things to the trembling inquirer. But as they directed him immediately to trust in the Savior, as free for any, free for the vilest of sinners, without giving him any such intimation, we may conclude that they did not consider anything necessary for that purpose. Their judgment and conduct in these important affairs are acknowledged to have been according to the mind of God. Therefore, we may venture to assert that there is no good disposition, no holiness, nor any fruits of sanctification required as the condition for pardon.

5. *The Thief on the Cross*

To the same purpose, I might produce various other instances from the volume of revelation, but I shall content myself at this time with selecting one. It is that of the thief on the cross. And as

his case is very remarkable, the reader will excuse me if I enlarge upon it a little. This man died the most disgraceful death—a death that was not commonly executed on any offenders but such as were the refuse of mankind and guilty of atrocious crimes. To this death he was deservedly brought, his own conscience acknowledging the justice of the execution. We find that he was a hardened villain, according to the testimony of two Gospels, even after he was fastened to the cross. Matthew informs us that “the *thieves* also, which were crucified with Christ,” took up the words of reproach and blasphemy that were uttered by the chief priests, scribes, and elders against Jesus the Son of God (Who was then dying for the sins of men) and “cast the same in his teeth” (Mat 27:44). And Mark says, “*They* that were crucified with him reviled him” (Mar 15:32). Hence it appears that they were both most hardened wretches; that they were both guilty of persecuting the dying Savior to the utmost of their power, and of blaspheming His offices and work.

This vilest of criminals, justly suffering for his own crimes, could not be ignorant that Jesus was nailed to the cross for claiming to be the Son of God and for professing Himself to be the Messiah. Nor could he be unacquainted with the meaning of those sarcastic reflections that were cast upon him by evil rulers and a rebellious rabble. Yet he joined the common cry; he poured the bitterest reproaches on the most innocent and glorious Person that ever appeared in the world.

This he did when Jesus was in His dying moments, and when his own body was extended on a cross, transfixing with nails in the most sensible parts and racked with extreme pain. Such a conduct, in such circumstances, clearly discovers the most astonishing degree of impenitence for his own crimes, the greatest abhorrence of the bleeding Immanuel, the highest insensibility of his own state toward God, and unconcern about the momentous affairs of an eternal world. He acted as if his tormenting of others was a relaxation of his own pains. Where could such conduct come from? Where, indeed, but from the principles of atheism or from the rage of a devil!

Such was the state of this thief even while he was being crucified. Such were the qualifications that he possessed which should have prevented his pardon. Yet he, though enormously vile (let reigning grace have the glory!), was pardoned. He became convinced of the superior dignity of Jesus Christ, as well as the injus-

tice of His condemnation. He began to understand the design of His sufferings, and of the nature of that work He was then finishing.

When the other thief, his companion in wickedness, continued his abusive language, he rebuked him sharply, and addressed a prayer to the dying Jesus. In that prayer, he acknowledged His deity, owned Him as Lord of the unseen world, and as having authority to dispose of crowns and thrones in glory to whomsoever He pleased. In doing this, he paid Him the highest honor that mortals can pay to the true God. His petition is, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luk 23:42)! Jesus answers him with that majesty and condescension which becomes none but the Supreme Possessor of heaven and earth. "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (23:43).¹⁰

The petition of the dying criminal supposes faith in the illustrious Sufferer as the all-sufficient Savior; and the gracious answer that Jesus returned undeniably proves it. His comprehensive petition being readily granted, we may infer that his offenses were pardoned and his person accepted. Now, can it be supposed that the dying Redeemer, when He bestowed pardon on him, considered him in any other light than that of a notorious offender, a most ungodly wretch? Is it possible to conceive, with any appearance of reason or of Scripture, that this thief performed any entitling or

¹⁰ How amazing the methods of grace! How mortifying to human pride is the conduct of Christ! In the time of His public ministry, He was addressed by a very decent, respectable, and apparently devout young ruler (Luk 18:18-23)—a person who, to outward appearance, was very promising and likely to be an honor to the Redeemer's rising interest. Yet, notwithstanding all his recommendations of worldly property and polished manners, of honorable character and devout address, he was sent away "exceedingly sorrowful."

But here at the cross, we behold the holy Jesus returning the most gracious answer to the very first petition of an abandoned criminal, a thief, even just before he breathed his last. Consequently, he was so far from having any recommendations, either of person or of character, that everything about him was quite the reverse. So true are those words, though spoken with an ill intent, "Behold...a friend of publicans and sinners" (Mat 11:19). The "whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick" (Mar 2:17) appears to have been the maxim on which Messiah formed His conduct.

And why should the righteous or the self-sufficient be offended at this? If they can do without the manifestation of such grace, others cannot. But if the elder brother will be displeased because the prodigal is accepted, who can help it (Luk 15:28)? Such, however, as feel their need and look to the cross alone for relief will entirely submit to the conduct of Christ, being well persuaded that it is for His eternal honor and for their everlasting salvation.—*Booth*

qualifying conditions previous to the mercy and forgiveness that were granted and manifested to him?

Can we imagine that this thief, when he said, "Remember me," could possibly consider himself as any other than the vilest villain? Yet, with great boldness and no less acceptably, he uttered the words. Nature teaches and pride suggests that this is a kind of language suitable for none but the dying lips of prophets, of apostles, or of martyrs; of such as have been eminent for good works and pious services all their days. Whence, then, could this infamous man derive such a degree of holy boldness, so acceptable to the bleeding Immanuel? With what confidence or upon what ground could he say, "Remember *me*"? It is impossible, I should think, for the invention of man to find any other reason—nor can all the hosts of angels find a better—than the grace that reigns. Let angels and the spirits of just men made perfect dwell on the charming sound! Let the worst of sinners look at it and rejoice in it! That grace was the only basis of hope for the greatest apostles and the most holy among the children of men. That grace is an all-sufficient ground of dependence even for blasphemers and persecutors, for thieves and murderers—or, as Paul says, for the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:15).

Here we behold with wonder and contemplate with joy the conduct of the Lord Redeemer in making choice of one (the thief on the cross) as His companion to glory when He made His exit and left the world. [Our Lord's chosen companion] was not like Enoch, who walked with God; not like Abraham, who rejoiced to see the day of Christ and longed for its commencement; nor like old Simeon, who waited with fervent expectation for the consolation of Israel. Instead, he was one who had devoted all his time and all his talents to the service of Satan, for nothing appears to the contrary. He was one whom the sword of civil justice permitted not to live, and who, in the eye of the public, was less worthy of mercy than Barabbas himself, who was guilty of "sedition and murder," a vile incendiary and a bloody ruffian (Luk 23:25).

This is an astonishing procedure of Jesus, the Judge of the world! When such a wretch is saved, who can despair? At that ever-memorable and amazing period when the Son of the Highest was in the pangs of death, Jehovah was determined to show by an incontestable fact that the salvation which was then being accomplished originated in sovereign mercy, flowed in atoning

blood, was equal to the needs of the most abominably wicked, and terminated in His own eternal glory as its ultimate design. This is grace indeed! Grace, “Not to be thought on but with tides of joy; Not to be mentioned but with shouts of praise.”

Can we cease to admire the power of His divine grace in the salvation of this thief? What an amazing difference takes place in a few hours as to his character and state! When first extended on the cross, we view him as one of the most hardened wretches whose character is recorded in all history. Then we hear him pray and behold him as a sincere penitent. And lo, before the day is elapsed, even while his body—a deformed spectacle!—still hangs on the gibbet¹¹ and declares to all the world that he was not fit to live, his immortal spirit enters the portals of Paradise and is blessed with the beatific vision.¹² Surprising transition! As a nuisance to society and a pest to the public, he is brought to the cross, and from thence is translated to a throne of glory. Here also we behold, in a striking light, the sovereignty of grace; for the other thief, though not more unworthy, dies unrelenting and is lost forever. Here the Almighty shows that He will have “mercy on whom he will have mercy” for “one shall be taken, and the other left” (Rom 9:18; Luk 17:36).

6. Relief to the Greatest Offenders

I cannot conclude my remarks on this very extraordinary fact without this observation: The death of the Son of God was the most awe-inspiring event that ever did or ever will take place in the theater of the world. It was intended to be a foundation of hope for sinners in the most desperate cases. Therefore, the very circumstances attending it were wisely adapted to answer that gracious design in its utmost scope. The Prince of Life was “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12; Mar 15:28), being crucified between two thieves. He died not only the most abhorred of deaths, but in the worst of company. Nor did this just happen: it was determined by Jehovah and was the subject of ancient prophecy.

This was graciously ordered, in the purpose and providence of God, to afford relief to the most flagrant offenders. If even the least regard had been paid to moral character and human excellence in that most amazing of all transactions, then unbelief and pride

¹¹ **gibbet** – execution stake or post; here, a cross.

¹² **beatific vision** – (Latin: *visio beatifica*) in Christian theology, the ultimate face-to-face communion of God with the person who enters heaven.

would soon have concluded that it was principally intended for the more respectable part of mankind—those who need but little assistance and would be able to do tolerably well without it. On such a supposition, what must have become of notorious criminals and of those who consider themselves as awfully guilty and wretched? What but absolute despair would have awaited the entirely worthless, even though they are the persons in whose salvation Mercy delights, and for whom the great atonement was provided?

Had the companions of Christ on the cross been persons of a shining character for humanity and godliness—nay, had they been of equal repute with Ezekiel's worthies (Noah, Daniel, and Job; Eze 14:14-20), though mankind by common consent might have agreed to pronounce their execution an outrageous violation of justice, and to denounce the judge who condemned them—yet the dying Jesus still would have been “numbered with the transgressors” (Mar 15:28; Isa 53:12).

But this would have afforded small encouragement to those who not only are condemned by divine Law and stand guilty in their own consciences, but have also incurred the public condemnation by criminal conduct. Such would have been ready to infer that their case was entirely hopeless; and, therefore, as despair of the future was the most rational thing, they would have still more eagerly pursued present pleasures, however sinful. But reigning grace was by no means willing that the most abhorred of men should be reduced to such a dreadful situation.

In order, therefore, to prevent this, the Holy One of Israel was not only crucified, to show that He died under a charge of the highest guilt, and was made a curse, but He was crucified between two convicts that were thieves and ruffians. He made His exit and was numbered with such as all the world agree to pronounce “transgressors”—with such as have ever been esteemed by all nations as unworthy to live. But why was this, if not to show that, as the best of men have no solid foundation of hope except the blood of the cross, so the very worst and the vilest that ever deserved a gibbet have no reason to sink in despair while they behold the Lord of life expire in such company—and especially when they remember that He took one of those villains with Him to glory.

Perhaps my reader thinks it a gross insult to his character when I assert that he stands on the *very same terms* with this thief regarding acceptance with God, and that the most upright of men

have nothing more to plead before their Maker than he had. Yet this is a certain truth; for salvation is entirely by grace, and grace is *unconditional* favor. Grace, therefore, has no regard to any real or supposed difference among men. All whom it relieves are considered as on the same level. The most moral and the most degenerate are equally without help and hope in themselves. We may therefore conclude that whoever looks for salvation by any other grace than that which saved this thief will meet with a dreadful disappointment.

In the several foregoing instances, grace in the free pardon of sin not only appears, but appears with majesty. It not only shows itself, but demonstrates its power to be infinitely great and supremely glorious. These remarkable cases stand written by the pen of inspiration as so many acts and precedents of the court of heaven. They were recorded for our—yes, reader—for *our* observation, instruction, and comfort. They were ordered to be transmitted to posterity by the King eternal so that “in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace...through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7).

7. *The Effects of Grace*

The blessed effects produced on the minds and morals of all these enormous offenders by the demonstration of grace and a grant of pardon deserve our consideration. This is because they are a standing testimony to the truth of the saying, “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Psa 130:4).

When *Paul* came to experience the power and taste the sweetness of pardoning grace, no labors were too great for him to undertake, no sufferings were too severe for him to undergo, on the behalf of his divine Master. He counted not his very life dear so that he might spread the glorious truth and promote his Redeemer’s honor.

Zacchaeus was instantly changed in his disposition and conduct, for the extortioner made restitution and put on bowels of mercy (Luk 19:2-8). The *woman of Samaria* immediately drew numbers to hear that gracious voice which quickened her own soul; and to receive Him as the Christ by Whom she was instructed, pardoned, and comforted (Joh 4). The *jailer* manifested a ready obedience to the commands of our Savior as King in Zion by submitting to the ordinance of baptism (Act 16:23-24). He evinced his love to the saving truth by washing the stripes of his

two illustrious prisoners, and by treating them at his own home with a cordial welcome. And the *thief*—in the few moments he had to live after he enjoyed the blessings of grace—confessed his offenses (Luk 23:39-43), justified God in the punishment he then suffered. In love to the soul of his partner in villainy and infamy, he reproved him for his blasphemy and warned him of his danger—the dreadful danger of suffering eternal wrath.

I am persuaded that the testimonies and facts already produced and pleaded are quite sufficient in order to prove that pardon is *free*—detached from all works, dependent on no conditions to be performed by the sinner. Otherwise, I might easily add to their number by producing other examples and more declarations from the sacred volume. But these I omit, and shall only remind my reader of that remarkable and truly evangelical text, “When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). Now, none can deny that pardon of sin is essential to a state of reconciliation with God. It is therefore impossible that the reconciliation and forgiveness of those who are *enemies* to Him should ever take place on account of anything amiable that they possess, or of anything good that they have done. Such a supposition, if any were absurd enough to make it, would confound the two absolutely contradictory ideas of enmity and friendship.

8. *By Shedding of Blood*

Here let us pause a moment for reflection. Is there no forgiveness of any offender or of the least offense but by “shedding of blood” (Heb 9:22)—the infinitely precious blood of Jesus, our incarnate¹³ God? How awfully evil, how inconceivably great the malignity of sin! Consider the dignity of the Person Who suffered for it, the utmost interest He had in His Father’s love, and the more than mountainous weight of divine wrath that He bore in His complicated sufferings. These much more strongly express the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the infinite purity of God than does the everlasting punishment of the damned. Here we behold in the clearest light that our Sovereign is absolutely just, as well as divinely merciful, in granting a free pardon to the worthless and guilty. Here we behold the righteous Judge and the suffering Sav-

¹³ **incarnate** – Jesus Christ the Son of God, took to Himself a full human nature and was born in this world as a man so that He could live, suffer, and die as the Mediator for His people, the God-man: two natures in one glorious Person. See Free Grace Broadcaster 234, *Incarnation*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ior, inflexible justice and triumphant grace, in the same point of light. The curse is executed in all its rigor, and mercy is manifested in all its riches.

Here the great Lord of all appears, dispensing innumerable and free pardons. He appears in such a way as preserves the honors of His Law without violation and maintains the rights of His divine government. He appears in such a way as is the surprise of angels and the wonder of heaven. To contrive it was the work of infinite wisdom; to manifest it, a display of boundless grace.

In such a method of dispensing forgiveness, how safely may the alarmed conscience rest! For while this method of grace is most happily adapted to impress the mind with an awful sense of the infinite evil of sin, the purity of the divine nature, and the extensive demands of the holy Law, yet it encourages the most unreserved confidence in mercy thus revealed, and cherishes the liveliest hope in grace thus reigning.

Is there a full and free forgiveness, a forgiveness given without any terms or conditions to be performed by the enfeebled and corrupted creature? How shamefully then do those persons injure the grace of God, and veil its most shining excellencies, who teach (or imagine) that pardon of sin is not to be expected nor can be received till the sinner is prepared for it by a course of humiliation, self-denial, or holy behavior? This pardon, far from being suspended on conditions to be performed by us, flows from sovereign grace, is according to the infinite riches of grace, and is intended by Jehovah to exalt His grace in the view of all the redeemed (and before the angels of light), both here and hereafter.

God's forgiveness is such as befits the Majesty of heaven, such as is suited to His infinite excellencies. When the Lord of the world pardons offenders, in so doing He demonstrates His deity. And He demonstrates that He is infinitely superior to all His creatures in acts of forgiveness, as well as in every perfection of His nature. For thus it is written: "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim" (Hos 11:9). What is the reason of this forbearance? It follows: "For I am God, and not man."

In reference to the pardon of sin, Jehovah again declares, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa 55:8-9).

He freely forgives our ten thousand talents, whereas we can scarcely forgive those who are indebted to us “an hundred pence” (Mat 18:24-28). Thus the Lord, in bestowing a full and free pardon on guilty, perishing creatures, not only exceeds the utmost of human merit and the highest instances of human compassion but exceeds rather *all* our expectations and *all* our thoughts!

May a lively sense of this free forgiveness rest on the mind, comfort the heart, and elevate the affections of my reader! Then shall his conduct declare that, as it is a blessing immensely great, and comes to sinners through atoning blood, so it is connected with true holiness. Then shall his conduct declare that it is a strong incentive to fear the Lord: to love, adore, and obey Him. Then shall he be “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:11).

D. Eternal

1. *Description*

This forgiveness is *everlasting* and irreversible, which is the last and crowning requirement of complete pardon. Various passages in sacred writ declare this glorious truth. Among many others, that charming clause in the New Covenant is one of the most remarkable: “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:12). This declaration and the blessing signified by it enter into the very essence of the new, the better, the unchangeable, covenant. If the Lord, whose royal prerogative it is to punish or pardon the criminal, declares that He will remember his iniquities “no more,” we may rest assured that it is an everlasting pardon, a forgiveness never to be reversed.

This declaration is not simply a promise (though a mere promise from the God of truth is irrevocable), but it is a promise in a federal form:¹⁴ an absolute promise that faithfulness itself is engaged to fulfil. The continuance of a pardoned state does not depend on conditions to be performed by the sinner, but on the perpetual effectiveness of our Lord’s atonement and the unchanging faithfulness of the eternal God. This being so, there is every possible security that a full and free pardon, once granted, shall ever abide in its full force and in all its glory.

¹⁴ **federal form** – form of a covenant.

The same comforting truth is taught and confirmed by David: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psa 103:12). Hence we infer that the sins of those who are forgiven shall never come against them to their condemnation—unless those two opposite points, the east and the west, should ever meet (and so cease to be what they are).

Nor can that blessedness which the psalmist, in another place, ascribes to the pardoned sinner, be accounted for on any other basis: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Psa 32:1). For if *all* his offenses were not forgiven, and that forever, what peace for his conscience here, what hope of glory hereafter, could he enjoy? If the continuance of his pardoned state depended on his own obedience; if, by a relapse into sin, he should again be liable to condemnation and wrath, then all his present enjoyments and future hopes would not deserve the name of "blessed," because the basis by which they are held was so precarious! Precarious? I retract the expression, for there would be all the *certainly* on the opposite side that could be had, and not the least probability in his favor, or the least ground to suppose that he would ever obtain eternal happiness! The conscience being awake, present peace will always keep pace with a hope of future blessedness.

Another inspired penman thus expresses the joyful truth, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19). The transgressions of the pardoned sinner are here compared to a stone or some other heavy thing, which, when cast into the fathomless deep, is absolutely irrecoverable by all the art and power of man. The loftiest towers, the most enormous mountains—with all their heavy load of rocks and forests—if cast into the ocean, would all entirely disappear and be lost forever. By this expressive and striking image does the Holy Ghost represent the permanence of that forgiveness which is with God and is given to the believer. In like manner, the Lord says, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found" (Jer 50:20). The reason of this assertion is contained in the words that follow: "For I will pardon them whom I reserve." This is a convincing proof that those who are pardoned by the God of grace have all their sins forgiven—and that forever.

Isaiah, the evangelist of the Jewish church, has a passage much to our purpose. He represents the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, addressing His people in the following manner:

As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee (Isa 54:9-10).

Here we have not only the word but the oath of Jehovah testifying to the glorious truth. And if these fail, "The pillar'd firmament is rottenness, And earth's foundation stubble."¹⁵

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, having this glorious truth full in his view, is bold to challenge every enemy and to defy every danger. What less can be the meaning of that heroic language: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?...Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom 8:33-34). If the blessing of pardon were ever to be reversed; if a sinner, having been once cleared from condemnation, should again fall under the curse and be liable to perish, there would be no foundation for these bold expressions.

Such is the nature and such the properties of divine forgiveness, even of that forgiveness which is the purchase of Immanuel's pains, and the price of redeeming blood. The doctrine of pardon is an essential branch and a core article of that truth which is by way of eminence called "the gospel." For the cheering language of that heavenly message is: "Be it known unto you...men and brethren, that through this [illustrious Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Act 13:38). This is the significance of the evangelical testimony; and the glorious blessing is received by faith in the dying Redeemer. As it is written, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Act 10:43). Believing the infallible record that God has given of His Son, we receive the atonement. The propitiating¹⁶ blood of Christ is sprinkled on our hearts, pardon is applied to our consciences, and peace enjoyed in our souls.

¹⁵ John Milton, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, "Poems Written at Horton" (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), 48.

John Milton (1608-1674) – English poet and scholar best known for the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, an account of humanity's Fall in sin.

¹⁶ **propitiating** – that which satisfies God's offended justice and appeases His just wrath.

2. *Objections*

It is no real objection to the truth advanced that the Lord lays His chastising hand on the objects of this forgiveness. For though He corrects them on account of their backslidings, and frequently with some degree of severity, yet those chastisements are instances and evidences of His paternal affection and of His constant care over them. They have the strongest assurances that He will never take from them His lovingkindness, nor suffer His faithfulness to fail.

Nor is it in any way inconsistent with the doctrine maintained that *believers* are expressly commanded to pray for the pardon of sin. This command has been frequently acknowledged in the conduct of eminent saints whose characters are recorded in the holy Scriptures. For, to use the words of a learned author,

Very frequently when the saints pray either for the forgiveness of their own or others' sins, their meaning is that God would, in a providential way, deliver them out of present distress; remove His afflicting hand that lies heavy upon them; or prevent such judgments that seem to hang over their heads and very much threaten them, which, when he does, is an indication of His having pardoned them. We are to understand many petitions of Moses, Job, Solomon, and others in this sense (Exo 32:32; Num 14:19-20; Job 7:21; 1Ki 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50).¹⁷

Besides, when believers now pray for the pardon of sin, their meaning is that they might have the sense, the manifestation, and application of pardoning grace to their souls. We are not to imagine that as often as the saints sin, repent, confess their sins, and pray for the forgiveness of them, that God makes and passes new acts of pardon. Rather, whereas they daily sin against God, grieve His Spirit, and wound their own consciences, they have need of the fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus, and of renewed manifestations of pardon to their souls. It is both their duty and their interest to return to the throne of grace for this.

¹⁷ John Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts*; Vol. III; "A Discourse on Prayer" (London: George Keith, 1778), 571.

John Gill (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.

E. Conclusion

1. Summary

How glorious, then, is that forgiveness which is with God, that pardon I have been describing! It has every condition to make it complete in itself and suitable to the poor, miserable sinner. It has not one discouraging circumstance to forbid the most guilty or unworthy from applying to the ever-merciful Jehovah for it. It is full, free, and everlasting—every way complete and worthy of God. It was absolutely necessary to the peace of our consciences and to the salvation of our souls that it should be of such unlimited extent, of such unmerited freeness, and of such everlasting effectiveness. Less than this would not have supplied our needs or served our purpose.

If it had not been *full*, taking in every kind and every degree of sin, we ourselves must have suffered the punishment due to some part of our sin—and then we had been lost forever. If it had not been entirely *free*, we could never have enjoyed the inestimable blessing, for we have nothing, nor can we do anything to purchase it or to qualify for it. And if it had not been *everlasting*, never to be reversed, we should have been under continual anxiety and painful apprehensions lest God should, on account of our present unworthiness or future failings, recall the blessing after He had bestowed it.

But since it possesses these properties, the vilest sinner has no reason despondingly to say, “My sins, alas, are too many and great for me to expect pardon.” None have any cause to complain, “I long for the blessing; it is dearer to me than all worlds, but my strong corruptions and utter unworthiness render me incapable of ever enjoying it.” Nor have any occasion to fear lest, after the comfortable enjoyment of the exceedingly great privilege, they should forfeit it and again come under condemnation and wrath.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound” in a perfect pardon (Rom 6:1)? God forbid! So to act would, if possible, be worse than devilish and more damnable. Rather, let the pardoned criminal say—yes, he *will* say with the warmest gratitude—

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy

diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies (Psa 103:1-4).

2. *Dr. Owen*

Before I conclude this momentous part of my subject, I will transcribe a few lines from a celebrated author of the last century. He was celebrated not more for his very superior learning than for his great penetration in spiritual things and his experience in the Christian life. Treating of divine forgiveness, he says,

The forgiveness that is with God is such as becomes Him, such as is suitable to His greatness, goodness, and all the other excellencies of His nature—such as that wherein He will be known to be God. What He says concerning some of the works of His providence, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psa 46:10), may be much more said concerning this great effect of His grace: Still yourselves, and know that He is God! It is not like that narrow, difficult, partial, and bound forgiveness that is found among men, when any such thing is found among them; but it is full, free, bottomless, boundless, absolute—such as fits His nature and excellencies. It is, in a word, forgiveness that is *with God*, and by the exercise of which He will be known so to be.¹⁸

If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes Him to give. When He pardons, He will abundantly pardon. Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons with reserves and limitations, unto the sons of men. It may be [that] it may suit them; it is like themselves. That of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence He is said to do this work with His whole heart and His whole soul: freely, bountifully, largely to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and “to cast them into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19)...Remember this, poor souls, when you are to deal with God in this matter.¹⁹

If we let go the free pardon of sin without respect unto anything in those that receive it, then we renounce the gospel. Pardon of sin is not merited by obedience beforehand, but is the strongest obligation unto future obedience. He that will not receive pardon unless he can one way or other deserve it, or make himself fit for it, or

¹⁸ John Owen, *An Exposition upon Psalm 130*, in *Works*, Vol. 6, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 499.

¹⁹ Owen, 502.

pretends to have received it and finds not himself obliged to universal obedience by it—neither is nor shall be partaker of it.²⁰

3. Application

Now, reader, what think you of this glorious pardon? Is it suitable to your needs? Is it worthy of your acceptance? You are, perhaps, one of those *careless mortals that are at ease in their sins*, and eagerly pursuing the tantalizing pleasures of this uncertain life. But can you be contented to live and die in utter ignorance of this forgiveness? Is pardon a blessing of small importance, or have you no occasion for it? Sinned you have, condemned you are, and without forgiveness you die to eternity! Awake, O awake from your stupor!²¹ Your state is dreadful, though not desperate. Your sins are upon you, the Law of God curses you, and you are in extreme danger of eternal damnation. You are tottering, as it were, on the brink of a dreadful cliff, and nodding on the verge of the burning lake (Rev 20:15). Can you sleep in your sins, can you rest in an unpardoned state, when the next hour might transmit you into an eternal world, place you at the judgment seat of God, and put you beyond the possibility of relief? May divine grace forbid your continuing another moment in such an awful situation! For another moment, and your life may be gone. Another moment, and your soul may be lost. And then your loss will be irreparable, inconceivable, and eternal.

Is my reader *sensible of his need* and longing for the matchless blessing? Then look to the dying Jesus. Your iniquities, it is true, abound; but pardoning mercy through His atonement super-

²⁰ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistles to the Hebrews*, Vol. 6, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 169, under Hebrews 8:12. This eminent writer loudly proclaims the charming truth. He no more feared this doctrine leading to immorality based on freedom from restraint, than he valued the applause of the self-sufficient moralist. He treats of a full, free, and final forgiveness. Like one who knows its real value, experiences its unutterable sweetness, and glories in it as his own privilege, he carefully writes of his noble subject and repeats the joyful truth. Even though many of our modern preachers pretend to reverence the doctor's memory, admire his profound learning, and in a general way applaud his judgment, yet when handling the same subject, they either directly contradict him or whisper the grand truth in faint accents. They do this as if they questioned the certainty of what they would seem to affirm, or were apprehensive of some bad consequences attending it.—*Booth*

John Owen (1616-1683) – Congregational theologian and author; chaplain to Oliver Cromwell; called the “Prince of the Puritans.”

²¹ **stupor** – daze of insensibility or carelessness.

abounds. Be of good cheer, take encouragement, for the favor you so earnestly desire is a free gift. Blessed be God for the amazing mercy! Such are the methods of grace, and such is the nature of this forgiveness, that as your eternal salvation is bound up in the enjoyment of it, so the everlasting honor of Jehovah is unspeakably advanced by freely bestowing it. There is no reason, therefore, that you should stand at a trembling distance, as if there were no such favor for you. But with boldness you may look for it in a way of grace through the blood of Christ. And truth itself has most solemnly declared that you shall not be disappointed.

Are you *comfortably acquainted* with the pardoning goodness of God? Then having much forgiven, you should love much. The remembrance of a blessing so immensely rich, the sense of a favor so extremely high, should enlarge your heart with all holy affections toward the Lord Redeemer. It should animate all your devotional services. It should cause you to have compassion for your offending brother in forgiving him his hundred pence, considering that God has forgiven you ten thousand talents. It should make you zealous for every good work.

This forgiveness, far from being an incentive to vice, will bias your affections on the side of virtue. It will cause you to love God as infinitely holy and to abhor sin as a direct opposition to His spotless purity and revealed will. Yes, a sense of pardon, when warm on your mind, will work in you godly sorrow for all sin—for the hidden corruptions of your heart no less than the open transgressions of your life. It will cause you to confess them before God with shame and grief. Such are the genuine effects of divine forgiveness. These fruits will necessarily appear in some degree. But he who professes to know the pardon of his transgressions, yet does not forgive his offending brother and lives under the dominion of sin, “is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4).

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR JUSTIFICATION

A. Definition

The doctrine of justification¹ makes a very distinguished figure in the religion that is from above, and is a core article of the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Far from being a merely speculative point, the doctrine of justification spreads its influence through the whole body of divinity, runs through all Christian experience, and operates in every part of practical godliness.² Such is its grand importance that a mistake about it has a dangerous effect, and is attended with a long train of dangerous consequences. Nor can this appear strange when it is considered that this doctrine of justification is no other than the way of a sinner’s acceptance with God. Being of such peculiar importance, it is inseparably connected with many other evangelical truths—the harmony and beauty of which we cannot behold while we misunderstand this. Till this appears in its glory, they will be covered in darkness. It is, if anything may be so called, a *fundamental* article, and certainly requires our most serious consideration.³

¹ See FGB 187, *Justification*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **practical godliness** – virtuous character and good works evidenced in Christian conduct and decision making.

³ Let the reader carefully observe that, though I here discuss justification as distinct from pardon, yet I am fully persuaded that they are blessings which cannot be separated. For he who is pardoned is justified, and he who is justified is also pardoned. I readily allow that there is, in various respects, a great resemblance between the two blessings. They are both gifts of grace; both given to the same person at the same time; and both are communicated through the mediation of Christ.

Notwithstanding such agreement, the *meaning* of the terms and the *nature* of the blessings intended by them are so far different as to lay a sufficient foundation for distinguishing between the one and the other. I would just hint at a few things in confirmation of this. When a person is pardoned, he is considered as a *transgressor*; but when he is justified, he is considered as *righteous*. A criminal when pardoned is freed from *obligation to suffer death* for his crimes; but he that is justified is declared *worthy of life* as an innocent person.

Wisdom is said to be justified, *Christ* is said to be justified, and *God* Himself is said to be justified (Mat 11:19; 1Ti 3:16; Luk 7:29; Rom 3:4). But neither

“How should [sinful] man be just with God?” (Job 9:2) is a most important question to every child of Adam. This question, notwithstanding its infinite importance, could never have been resolved by all the reason of men, nor by all the insight of angels, if the Lord of heaven and earth had not exercised and manifested reigning grace toward His disobedient and rebellious creatures. But with the Bible in his hand and the gospel in view, the mere infant in religious knowledge and in Christian experience is at no loss for an answer—for “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). Indeed, such is the pleasure of God that He frequently reveals this truth in its glory to those who are esteemed fools by the haughty sons of science, so that no flesh might have the least ground of boasting.

Justification is a forensic⁴ term, and signifies the declaring or pronouncing a person righteous according to law. Justification is not the “making” a person righteous by a real, inherent change from sin to holiness—in this the nature of sanctification consists. But justification is the act of a judge “pronouncing” the party acquitted from all judicial charges.

That the blessing of which we speak does not consist in a real change from sin to holiness will further appear from considering that justification is the complete opposite to condemnation. Now the sentence of condemnation is never supposed to make the person criminal on whom it is pronounced. There is no infusion of evil qualities into the culprit’s mind; nor is he made guilty either in the eye of the public or in his own estimation. But being tried as a criminal and proven guilty of a capital offense by the law that tries him, he is esteemed worthy of death and condemned accordingly. So in justification: the subject of it is pronounced righteous in the eye of the Law, is deemed worthy to live, and his right to life is declared. Hence that justification of which the Scripture speaks, and is now the subject of our inquiry, is called the “justification of life” (Rom 5:18). That the words *just*, *justified*, and

God, nor Christ, nor Wisdom is ever said to be pardoned; nor indeed is it possible, in any sense, that they should be forgiven. Therefore, though we may affirm with the Scripture that they are justified, we cannot say they are pardoned without absurdity or blasphemy. I believe this one consideration is an undeniable proof that there is a real and important difference between justification and pardon. To which I may add, Paul treats upon them as distinct blessings in Acts 13:38-39.—*Booth*

⁴ **forensic** – legal; pertaining to the actions of a court of law.

justification are used by the sacred writers in a forensic sense, and as opposed to the words *condemn*, *condemned*, and *condemnation*, is manifest to every attentive reader.⁵

Justification, in a theological sense, is either *legal* or *evangelical*. If any person could be found that has never broken the divine Law, he might be justified by it in a manner strictly legal. But in this way none of the human race can be justified, or stand acquitted before God, for “all have sinned...there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:23, 10). The whole world, having transgressed, are guilty before the eternal Judge and under the sentence of death by His righteous Law. On this ground, every offender is excluded from all hope and abandoned to utter destruction. For as an obedience absolutely perfect is the only righteousness that the Law can accept, so punishment inconceivable, or death eternal, is the least penalty it will inflict on those that fall under its curse.

That justification, therefore, about which the Scriptures principally treat, and which reaches the case of a sinner, is not by a personal, but an *imputed* righteousness⁶—a “righteousness...without the law” (Rom 3:21), provided by grace and revealed in the gospel. For this reason, the obedience by which a sinner is justified, and his justification itself, are called “evangelical.”⁷

In this affair, there is the most wonderful display of divine justice and of boundless grace. *Of divine justice*, if we regard the meritorious cause and ground on which the Justifier proceeds in absolving the condemned sinner and in pronouncing him righteous. *Of boundless grace*, if we consider the state and character of those persons to whom the blessing is granted.

Justification may be further distinguished as being either at the judgment seat of God and in the court of conscience, or in the sight of the world and before our fellow-creatures. The former is by mere grace through faith, and the latter is by works. It is the former of these I shall now consider, which may be thus defined:

Justification is a judicial but gracious act of God, by which a sinner is absolved from the guilt of sin, is freed from condemnation,

⁵ To this purpose the following texts, besides many more, may be consulted: Exo 23:7; Deu 25:2; 1Ki 8:31-32; Job 13:18; 27:5; Pro 17:15; Mat 11:19; 12:37; Luk 7:29; Rom 2:13; 3:4; 8:30, 33-34.—*Booth*

⁶ See FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ **evangelical** – pertaining to the faith or principles of the gospel.

and has a right to eternal life—adjudged merely for the sake of our Lord's obedience, which is imputed to him and received by faith.

B. The Justifier

1. Who Justifies?

To justify is clearly a divine prerogative: "It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33). That Sovereign Being against Whom we have so greatly offended, Whose Law we have broken by ten thousand acts of rebellion against Him, has (in the way of His own appointment) the sole right of acquitting the guilty and of pronouncing them righteous. Jehovah, Whose judgment is always according to truth, is the Justifier of all that believe in Jesus. Here grace reigns. For the infinitely wise God appoints the way; the righteous and merciful God provides the means; and (let the sacred name be repeatedly mentioned with profound reverence) the God of all grace imputes the righteousness and pronounces the sinner acquitted, in perfect agreement with the demands of His violated Law and the rights of His offended justice.

What is here affirmed (as well as in several passages of Scripture) concerning God, considered in His essence, is, in some places of the infallible Word, more particularly appropriated personally to the Father. It is manifest, however, that all the three divine Persons are concerned in this grand affair, and each performs a distinct part in this particular aspect, as also in the whole economy of salvation. The eternal Father is represented as appointing the way, and as giving His own Son to perform the conditions of our acceptance before Him. The divine Son is represented as engaging to sustain the curse and make the atonement, to fulfil the terms and provide the righteousness by which we are justified. And the Holy Spirit is represented as revealing to sinners the perfection, suitableness, and freeness of the Savior's work; as enabling them to receive it, as exhibited in the gospel of sovereign grace; and as testifying to their consciences' complete justification by grace in the court of heaven.

Thus the triune God justifies. And may we not ask, in the triumphant language of Paul, "Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom 8:34). If Jehovah pronounces the sinner acquitted, who in earth or hell shall reverse the sentence? If the Most High entirely justifies, who shall bring in a second charge? There is no higher court to which any appeal can be made. There is no superior tribunal at which a complaint can be lodged, against any of those happy souls whose invaluable privilege it is to be justified by the eternal God.

When He acquits in judgment, He absolves from all guilt; He accepts as completely righteous. Otherwise, a person, immediately after he is justified, must be supposed to stand in need of a further justification, which is highly absurd.

This divine sentence shall never be made void by any unworthiness of him on whom it is passed, nor by the accusations of Satan: but shall stand, firmer than the everlasting hills, unshaken as the throne of God. This sentence—let my reader dwell on the ravishing truth, let his very soul feast on the precious doctrine—this sentence, being the “justification of life” (Rom 5:18), is pregnant with all the blessings of the everlasting covenant, with all the happiness of the world of glory.

2. Application

Superlatively great, glorious, and divine is the blessing of justification. Most ardently to be sought, most thankfully to be enjoyed. Can anyone, conscious of possessing it, cease to exult in God his Justifier—Who, by being so, is also the God of his praise? Or who that is convinced of his guilty, condemned condition can cease to pray and most earnestly to long for it? O sinner! Are you insensible to the worth of this blessing and carelessly negligent about it? Be assured, then, that you are in your sins and under condemnation. The justification of which we treat is far from you!

And what if you should never be justified? What if your offended Sovereign should swear in His wrath that He will never forgive, never accept you; but that you shall die under the curse already passed upon you? In such a case, though awful beyond conception, what could you have to object? You have trampled His authority under your feet and cherished a spirit of the most bitter enmity against Him. Your conscience testifies that you have neither obeyed His Law nor loved His gospel, that you have had little concern whether He was pleased or offended, so that you could but gratify your lusts and obtain your foul purposes.

You have, it may be, never considered the death of the Son of God as worthy of your serious notice, though it is the greatest and most wonderful event that ever took place in the universe, and the only thing that can save you from final condemnation. Remember, thoughtless reader, that you have a cause to be tried at the judgment seat of God, and before Jehovah your Judge, which involves your all. An eternal hell to be suffered or an eternal heaven to be enjoyed will be the awful or the glorious consequence of being cast

or acquitted in judgment. Can you rest, then? Can you take any comfort, while entirely ignorant whether the immortal Judge will absolve or condemn you? Consider the ground on which you stand and the reason of that hope which is in you. A mistake about the way of acceptance with God will be attended with the utmost danger—such danger that, where it is final, inevitable and eternal ruin must be the consequence. May the God of grace and the Father of lights awaken the sleepy consciences of the careless into an earnest concern about it! And may He direct the steps of such as are anxiously inquiring, “How shall a man be just with God?”

C. The Justified

1. *The Ungodly*

The persons to whom the wonderful favor is granted are sinners and ungodly. For thus runs the divine declaration,

To him that worketh is the reward [of justification, and of eternal life as connected with it] not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth [whom? the righteous, the holy, the eminently pious? Nay, verily, but] *the ungodly*, his faith [or that in which he believes] is counted [unto him] for righteousness (Rom 4:4-5).

From this remarkable text we learn that the subjects of justification, considered in themselves, are not only destitute of a perfect righteousness, but have performed no good works at all. Nor are they only described as having performed no good works, but also as being entirely destitute of every heavenly quality and righteous disposition. They are considered as “ungodly” when the blessing is bestowed upon them. The mere sinner—the ungodly person, he “that worketh not”—is the subject on whom grace is magnified, toward whom grace reigns, in justification. Thus it is written in those sacred canons of our faith and practice, which are unalterable [the Bible].

2. *Dr. Owen*

Before I dismiss this important passage, I will present my reader with the thoughts of Dr. Owen upon it.

To say he who “worketh not” is justified through believing is to say that his works, whatever they be, have no influence in his justification. Nor hath God, in justifying him, any respect unto them. Wherefore he alone who worketh not is the subject of justification, the person to be justified. That is, God considers no man’s works, no man’s duties of obedience, in his justification—seeing we are

justified “freely by his grace” (Rom 3:24). And when God affirms expressly that He justifies him who “worketh not” (Rom 4:5), and that “freely by his grace,” I cannot understand what place our works, or duties of obedience, can have in our justification.

For why should we trouble ourselves to invent of what consideration [works] may be in our justification before God, when He Himself affirms that they are of none at all? Neither are the words capable of any other interpretation. He “that worketh not” is he that worketh not, let men say what they please and distinguish as long as they will. And it is a boldness not to be justified,⁸ for any to rise up in opposition to such express divine testimonies, however they may be harnessed with philosophical notions and arguings, which are but the thorns and briers which the Word of God will pass through and consume.

But the apostle further adds, in the description of the subject of justification, that God “justifieth the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). This is that expression which has stirred up so much wrath among many, and on the account whereof some seem to be much displeased with the apostle himself. If any other person dare but say that God “justifieth the ungodly,” he is presently reflected on as one that, by his doctrine, would overthrow the necessity of godliness, holiness, obedience, or good works. For what need can there be of any of them, if God justifies the ungodly?...This is His prerogative and property; as such He will be believed and worshipped, which adds weight and emphasis to the expression. We must not forego this testimony of the Holy Ghost, let men be as angry as they please.

[However,] the difference is about the meaning of the words. If so, it may be allowed without mutual offense, though we should mistake their proper sense. Only it must be granted that God “justifieth the ungodly.” That is, say some, those who *formerly* were ungodly; not such who *continue* ungodly when they are justified. And this is most true. All that are justified were before ungodly; and all that are justified are at the same instant made godly. But the question is, whether they [were] godly or ungodly prior...to their justification? If they are considered as godly, and are so indeed, then the apostle’s words are not true (that God justifieth the ungodly); for the contradictory proposition [would be] true: God justifies none but the godly.

Wherefore, although in and with the justification of a sinner he is made godly (for he is endowed with that faith which purifieth the heart, and is a vital principle of all obedience, and the conscience

⁸ **justified** – defended; accepted.

is purged from dead works by the blood of Christ), yet before his justification, he is ungodly and considered as ungodly; as one that “worketh not”; as one whose duties and obedience contribute nothing to his justification. As he works not, all his works are excluded from being the cause [of his justification]. And as he is ungodly, [all works are excluded] from being the condition of his justification.⁹

3. “*Freely by Grace*”

That the sinner as a sinner is the subject of justification appears from the following: The Spirit of God speaking in the Scripture repeatedly declares that we are justified by grace. But grace, as already observed, stands in direct opposition to works—all works and worthiness of every kind and of every degree. Whoever therefore is justified by grace is considered as absolutely unworthy in that very instant when the glorious blessing is granted to him. This momentous truth is yet more strongly expressed in the following emphatic words: “Being justified freely by his grace” (Rom 3:24).

“Freely by...grace.” If these words do not prove that justification is entirely free, without the least regard to any supposed holy qualities in the sinner, or any good works performed by him prior to his being possessed of the unspeakable favor, I think it is impossible to express any such thing. The greatest creativity would be at a loss to contrive a form of words to better express the communication of a benefit in a way of mere favor. This text informs us that, in regard to God, justification is an act of pure, unmixed grace—exclusive of all good works and absolutely independent of any such thing as human worthiness.

And in respect of us, it is entirely *without cause*, for so the adverb in the original signifies. The word *freely* does not so directly refer to either the blessing itself or the giver, as it does to the state and character of the persons to whom the inestimable blessing is granted. It denotes that there is no cause in them as to why they should be thus treated by a righteous God. In this sense, the original word is used and translated in the following passage: “They hated me without a cause” (Joh 15:25; Psa 35:19; 69:4 Septuagint¹⁰). Was the holy Jesus hated by the hostile Jews without the

⁹ John Owen, *On Justification in Works*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1862), 315-316.

¹⁰ **Septuagint** – translation of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, made in approximately the third century BC.

least cause in Himself? Certainly! To assert the contrary would be a contradiction of the sacred text and blasphemy against the Son of God. The person, therefore, that is justified freely by grace, is accepted *without any cause* in himself. Nothing in him or about him is considered by the sovereign Dispenser of every favor as preparing or qualifying for it when He bestows the blessing.

Therefore it appears that, if we regarded the persons who are justified and their state prior to the enjoyment of this immensely glorious privilege, then divine grace appears and reigns in all its glory. There are no conditions or prerequisites, no terms to be fulfilled or good qualities to be obtained, either with or without divine assistance, in order to a full discharge before the eternal Judge. Justification is a blessing of pure grace, as well as transcendently excellent. So the true believer esteems it and as such rejoices in it. In this, as in every other part of his salvation, he is willing to be nothing, less than nothing, that grace may reign, that grace may be all in all.

The various facts and testimonies produced from sacred writ when treating about the freeness of pardon equally prove the point under consideration, and might, with many others, be pleaded on this occasion. For he that is pardoned is justified; and he that is justified is pardoned, as before observed. Consequently, if our pardon be free, our justification cannot be conditional. But to avoid being tedious, I shall not further enlarge in proof of this glorious truth. I would just observe that so great a blessing, yet absolutely free—so divine a favor, yet not suspended on any condition to be performed by the sinner—manifests astonishing grace. This must silence the fears and raise the hopes of the guilty, the accursed, the self-condemned. And may their hopes be raised by such a consideration, and also by beholding the glory of that infinite Being Whose honor and sovereign prerogative it is to be perfectly just, yet the *Justifier of the ungodly*!

D. The Way of Justification Considered

Having considered the prior condition of the person whom God justifies, and the freeness with which the important blessing is bestowed upon him, the way appointed in the eternal counsels and revealed in the everlasting gospel—in which the condemned criminal may be honorably acquitted before the divine tribunal, and accepted as righteous—now demands our attentive regard. Here we behold immaculate holiness and strict justice harmonizing with

tenderest mercy and freest favor. Nor can it be otherwise. The Judge of all the earth must do right. He can acquit none without a complete righteousness. For to justify a person and judicially to pronounce him righteous are the same thing. Justification is evidently a forensic term, and the thing intended by it a judicial act. So that, were a person to be justified without a righteousness, the judgment would not be according to truth; it would be a false and unrighteous sentence.

1. Perfect Righteousness

That righteousness by which we are justified must be perfect. It must be equal to the demands of that Law according to which the sovereign Judge proceeds in our justification. Every judge, it is evident, must have some rule by which to proceed in his judicial capacity. This rule is the law. To talk of passing judgment without having any regard to law, is absurd and involves a contradiction. For to “judge” is nothing else but to determine whether the object of judgment is according to rule. A judge first considers what is fact, and then, comparing the fact with the rule of action, he pronounces it right or wrong, and approves or condemns the performer of it.

Therefore, an imperfect obedience before a judge is not righteousness. For, in this case, “righteousness” is no other than a complete conformity to that law which is the rule of our conduct. To accept of any obedience short of the rule, instead of that which perfectly answers it, is to act, not in the capacity of a righteous judge, but under the character of an absolute sovereign. So Jehovah Himself declares that

- He “will by no means clear the guilty” in judgment (Exo 34:7);
- He will not at all acquit the wicked; and consequently,
- He will justify none without a perfect righteousness.

That obedience, therefore, which is available for this grandest of all purposes, must answer the demands of divine Law. It must be such as will vindicate the honor of eternal justice—and of perfect truth, in declaring the justified person completely righteous. Yes, reader, it must be such as you may venture to plead, without the least imputation of arrogance, at the throne of grace and the bar of judgment. It must be such to which you may warrantably ascribe your happiness in the heavenly world, and in which you may glory to all eternity.

Many persons talk of (I know not what) *conditions* of justification. Some suppose one thing, and some another, to be the condition of it. But here it appears that the only condition of our acceptance with God is a *perfect righteousness*. This the Law requires; nor does the gospel substitute another. For as the divine Law can have no more, so it will allow no less.

Those persons, therefore, who think of anything short of complete obedience being sufficient (let them call the supposed condition by what name they please), may do well to consider how they can free themselves from the charge of Antinomianism.¹¹ For the gospel does not, in any degree, make void the Law. So far from it, that the voice of the gospel and the death of Christ demonstrate Jehovah to be absolutely inflexible as to all that His holy Law requires or forbids. The way in which sinners are justified does not in the least infringe on the Law's rights; for, considered as moral, it is unalterable and eternal. It demanded perfect obedience from man in a state of innocence as the condition of life. Perfect obedience it still requires of man, though in a fallen state. And perfect obedience it must have, either at our own or a surety's hand, or we must fall eternally under its curse.

2. Works

Where then shall we find, or how shall we obtain a justifying righteousness? Shall we flee to the Law for relief? Shall we apply ourselves with diligence and zeal to the performance of duty in order to attain the desired end? Such a procedure, though it might flatter our pride, would betray our ignorance, disappoint our hopes, and result in eternal ruin. The apostle of the Gentiles, when professedly handling the doctrine of justification, positively affirms and strongly proves that there is no acceptance with God "by the works of the law" (Rom 9:32; Gal 2:16). Now, the works of the Law are those duties of piety and of humanity that the Law requires. Nor can any acceptable obedience be performed which is not required by that Law which demands perfect love to God and perfect love to man. So that when the infallible teacher excludes the works of the Law from having any concern in our justification, he entirely rejects all our works, all our duties of every kind.

But let us hear his words and consider their import.

¹¹ **Antinomianism** – belief that rejects the abiding validity of God's Moral Law, either doctrinally or practically.

“By the deeds of the law,” by our own obedience to it, however sincere, “shall no flesh be justified in his sight,” be accepted of God and pronounced righteous (Rom 3:20). The reason is evident: “for by the law is the knowledge of sin,” that is, sin as opposed to God’s revealed will and as deserving an everlasting curse (3:20b). But if “by the law is the knowledge of sin,” it is absolutely impossible that we should be justified by it; for a Law that proves us guilty is far from pronouncing us righteous in the eye of the Lawgiver!

“The law entered,” was pronounced at Sinai, “that the offense might abound,” that the abundance of our iniquities might be manifested and their exceeding sinfulness appear (Rom 5:20).

“The law worketh wrath” (Rom 4:15). It reveals the wrath of God “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). It fastens a charge of guilt on the criminal and works a sense of deserved wrath in his conscience. Far from justifying any offender, it denounces utter destruction against him and unsheathes the sword of vengeance.

“As many as are of the works of the law”—who do their best endeavors to keep it and are looking for justification by it—“are” what? In a promising way to obtain acceptance with God, and to be rewarded with life eternal? No. Quite the reverse! They are “under the [dreadful] curse: for it is written” by the pen of infallibility, and it is awfully¹² expressive of Jehovah’s unchangeable purpose: “Cursed is every one,” without any respect of persons, without any regard to pleas, “that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10).

From this alarming text we learn that there never was nor can be any acceptance with God without a perfect obedience—an obedience perfect in its principle, complete in all its parts, and without the least interruption in thought, word, and deed. For he who “offends in one point,” breaks the Law, is guilty before God, and is exposed to ruin (Jam 2:10).

To prove his point, the apostle argues from the opposition there is between living *by faith* and living *by the works of the Law*. These are his words: “That no man,” however excellent his moral character, however righteous in his own esteem, “is justified by [his own obedience to] the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just,” the truly righteous and justified person, “shall live by faith”

¹² **awfully** – full of awe; inspiring awe.

(Gal 3:11). That he does not obtain the character or enjoy the blessedness connected with the Law in virtue of his own obedience, appears from hence: "the law is not of faith." That is, it makes no mention of a Redeemer or of believing in Him. "But" its uniform language is, "the man that doeth them," the man that punctually performs the duties commanded and entirely avoids the things prohibited, he, and he only, "shall live in them," that is, shall find acceptance and enjoy peace (3:12).

The inspired penman, always jealous of his Master's honor, always concerned for the glory of God's grace, argues from an absurdity, an absurdity that is obvious to the most common capacity and shocking to every mind that has the least esteem for the Lord Redeemer. "If righteousness come by the law," that is, if men either were or could be justified by their own duties and endeavors, "then [it would inevitably follow that] Christ is dead in vain," and that all His obedience and all His sufferings were useless things. There was no need for them (Gal 2:21).

Again, "If they which are of the law be heirs"—that is, if they who rely on their own legal performances be accepted of God and entitled to the heavenly inheritance—then "faith [in a dying Redeemer] is made [entirely] void, and the promise [of life by Him is] made of none effect" (Rom 4:14).

Nor are the works of the Law, which Paul so expressly and repeatedly excludes from having any concern in our justification, to be understood only of an obedience to those positive institutions of Jehovah that, being of a temporary kind, were abrogated by the death of Christ. His design was to set aside all our obedience to every law, all our works and duties of every kind. That this was his intention appears from the following considerations.

The apostle excludes *all works* in general: "God imputeth righteousness without works." "By grace are ye saved...not of works." "If by grace, then is it no more of works." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." "Who hath saved us...not according to our works" (Rom 4:6; Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6; Ti 3:5; 2Ti 1:9). He not only says that we are not justified by the works of the Law, but also that we are not justified by works, performances, duties, or obedience in general, what rule soever may be their object or however they may be denominated. He does not give the least hint as if he meant only to exclude the works of some particular law or duties of some particular kind in contrast to others. And

when the Spirit of God declares, without limiting the phrase to any particular kind of duties, that we are not justified “by works,” what authority have we to confine the sense to this or that sort of works, to the exclusion of others? For as all duties performed in obedience to a law are works, whether the law be considered as moral or ceremonial, old or new, so all works, whatever they be, are here excluded without any exception.

3. *Moral Law*

The Law that the apostle is talking about stands in direct opposition to the grace of the gospel and the promise of life. It stands in direct opposition to faith in Christ and the righteousness of faith.

The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the *righteousness of faith*. For if they which are of the law be heirs, *faith* is made void, and the promise made of none effect. Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of *faith*, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed (Rom 4:13-16).

Now it is the Moral and not the Ceremonial Law¹³ that stands opposed to grace and the promise—opposed to faith and the righteousness of faith. The Ceremonial Law exhibited in various ways the grace of God, the promised Messiah, and life by Him as the great objects of faith and hope under the ancient Jewish economy. It cannot be stated and considered in this contrasted view without a manifest impropriety. But the Moral Law is *not of faith*; it contains no revelation of grace. It exhibits no foundation of trust and no object of hope for sinners; nor does it make the least promise to them—but all the reverse. Besides, the Law here intended “worketh wrath”. By a transgression of it, wrath is incurred. And by a conviction of the evil of such disobedience, a sense of deserved wrath possesses the conscience. This, therefore, is perfectly applicable to the Moral Law and to mankind in general as breakers of it. But it cannot be affirmed of the ceremonial institutions, neither in regard to Jews nor Gentiles. This is because, as to the Jews, those rites were long since abrogated; and, as to the Gentiles, they never were under any obligation to observe them.

¹³ **Moral Law** – eternal laws reflecting God’s character that apply to all men everywhere throughout time, embodied in the Ten Commandments (Exo 20).
Ceremonial Law – laws given by God through Moses that applied to the nation of Israel to govern their worship of God.

The important reasons assigned by the sacred writer, why we cannot be justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus, make it evident that he intended to exclude not only all ceremonial performances, but also all our moral obedience. Having asserted that there is no justification by the deeds of the Law, he adds, "For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20).

Now, the apostle informs us from his own experience that the knowledge of sin comes by that Law which forbids all irregular desires and every unsanctified affection: "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom 7:7). Hence it is plain that all the duties of the Law by which is the knowledge of sin are entirely excluded from all concern in our justification. It is also plain that the Law which convinces of sin is spiritual. It reaches the thoughts and intents of the heart, saying, "Thou shalt not covet." Whether it be the Moral or the Ceremonial Law that is here intended, the reader, I presume, will be at no loss to determine.

Another reason assigned is, "Lest any man should boast," for thus it is written,

By grace ye are saved...not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

To declare...at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith (Rom 3:26-27).

Whence the apostle infers the following conclusion: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28).

Now, of what are men ready to boast, in a religious view, but of their supposed moral goodness? Of what except the integrity of their hearts and the regularity of their lives, their sincere intentions and their pious performances? These, therefore, we may justly infer, are entirely excluded. For if no works be excluded but those of a ceremonial kind, and if our moral obedience be any way concerned in procuring acceptance with God, how is boasting excluded? Does not the performance of moral precepts afford as fair a ground for boasting as a submission to ceremonial rites? And were not the ancient Pharisees guilty in both respects (Luk 18:11)?

4. *Faith*

Nor is faith itself our righteousness, or that for the sake of which we are justified. For though believers are said to be justified *by* faith, yet not *for* faith. That faith is not our righteousness is evident from the following considerations. No man's faith is perfect; and if it were, it would not be equal to the demands of the divine Law. It could not, therefore, without an error in judgment, be accounted a complete righteousness. But the judgment of God, as before proved, is according to truth and according to the rights of His Law. That obedience by which a sinner is justified, is called "the righteousness *of* faith" (Rom 4:13); "righteousness...*by* faith" (Phi 3:9); and is represented as "revealed...*to* faith" (Rom 1:17). Consequently, it cannot *be* faith itself. Faith, in the business of justification, stands opposed to all works.

"To him that worketh not, *but* believeth" (Rom 4:5). Now, if faith were our justifying righteousness, to consider it in such a light would be highly improper. For in such a connection, it falls under the consideration of a work or a condition, on the performance of which our acceptance with God is clearly suspended.

If faith itself were that on account of which we are accepted, then some believers are justified by a more, and some by a less perfect righteousness, in exact proportion to the strength or weakness of their faith. For example, Abraham "was strong in faith"; and then there is "O ye of little faith" (Rom 4:20; Mat 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; etc.). Consequently, either more of justice and less of grace must appear in the justification of some than in that of others; or else it must be concluded that some are more fully justified than others—each of which is absurd.

That which is "the end of the law" is our righteousness—which certainly is not faith, but the obedience of our exalted Substitute. "Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness* to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:4). That righteousness by which many are justified is the obedience of One.

The believer, therefore, is not justified for the sake of his own faith, for then there must be as many distinct righteousnesses as there are justified persons. Were faith itself our justifying righteousness, we might—without either pride or folly—depend upon it, plead it before God, and rejoice in it. For whatever the Most High is pleased to accept as our justifying righteousness may be pleaded before Him as such. Whatever may be so pleaded must be

esteemed a proper ground of our confidence. It may be used as an argument in prayer at the throne of grace and as the foundation of our expecting final happiness. Whatever is the ground of our confidence must be the source of our spiritual joy. So that, *according to this hypothesis*, not Christ but faith is the primary thing, the object to which we must look. In that case, the glorious Redeemer and His undertaking are only considered as auxiliaries in the affair of justification, while faith is the grand requirement, as it renders Immanuel's work effective and crowns the whole.

To understand those words, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness" (Rom 4:9) in the Arminian¹⁴ sense, is to contradict the whole scope and design of the apostle's argumentation when treating about the justification of sinners. For his main design is to prove that the eternal Sovereign justifies *freely*, without any cause in the creature. But according to the Arminian hypothesis, *faith* is the condition, is the cause, is that on account of which we are accepted as righteous—for it is considered under the formal notion of righteousness. But here it appears that it is not faith itself, but its glorious *Object* which Paul intends when he speaks of faith being imputed for righteousness.

But is not that law, which man was originally under, which requires an absolutely perfect obedience, and denounces a curse on the least offender, abrogated by the mediation of Jesus Christ? And is not a new, remedial, milder law introduced in its place—one that is more happily adapted to the infirmities of a fallen creature, requiring only a *sincere* obedience, as the condition of acceptance before the sovereign Judge? No! For—not to take notice that such a scheme represents the gospel as making "void the law" (Rom 3:31), and not to mention many other things which might be urged—the sentiment supposes that the old, eternal Law of God was either too strict in its precepts, or too severe in its penal sanction.¹⁵ It supposes that the Law's requirements never were, nor ever will be, performed either by ourselves or by our Surety. This is an imagination that deserves the utmost abhorrence. In one view, it denies perfection to that Law which is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom

¹⁴ **Arminian** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) pertaining to the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers' understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation, teaching instead that salvation is based on the individual's choosing to have faith in Christ by his own free will cooperating with God's grace.

¹⁵ **penal sanction** – prescribed punishment for breaking the Law.

7:12). In another view, it highly discredits the wisdom, equity, and goodness of the supreme Legislator for enacting a Law that had to be repealed in order to accomplish the designs of His grace.

Besides, the scheme is absurd. For it supposes that the Law which man is now under requires only an *imperfect* obedience. But an imperfect righteousness cannot answer the Law's demands, whether it be denominated old or new. For every law requires perfect obedience to its own precepts and prohibitions. Whatever law we are under, it must be the standard of duty and the rule of our obedience; and every rule requires, and must require, a complete conformity to itself. That law which forbids every irregularity in our attitudes and conduct, whatever name it may bear, is the rule of our duty, the law which is now in force. Otherwise, such irregularity would not be sin; such a deviation from perfect righteousness would be no fault. That which is not prohibited, that which is the breach of no law, cannot be sin; "for sin is the transgression of the law" (1Jo 3:4).

If then we are forbidden to commit sin, it must be by a law that is now in force. And if every sin be a breach of it, nothing short of perfect obedience can be required by it. Consequently, nothing can be accepted as righteousness by our eternal Judge but an obedience in all respects complete—a perfect obedience, either performed by us or imputed to us.¹⁶

¹⁶ To forestall objections and to enforce my argument, I will introduce a paragraph or two from [Jonathan Edwards], who, when touching upon this subject, observes:

"They [Arminians] strenuously maintain that it would be unjust in God to require anything of us beyond our present power and ability to perform; and also hold that we are now unable to perform perfect obedience, and that Christ died to satisfy for the imperfections of our obedience, and has made way that our imperfect obedience might be accepted instead of perfect—wherein they seem insensibly to run themselves into the grossest inconsistency. For they hold, 'That God, in mercy to mankind, has abolished that rigorous constitution, or Law, that they were under originally; and instead of it has introduced a more mild constitution, and put us under a new law, which requires no more than imperfect, sincere obedience, in compliance with our poor, infirm, impotent circumstances since the Fall.'

"Now, how can these things be made consistent? I would ask, What law these imperfections of our obedience are a breach of? If they are a breach of no law that we were ever under, then they are not sins. And if they be not sins, what need [is there] of Christ's dying to satisfy for them? But if they *are* sins, and the breach of some law, [then] what law is it? They cannot be a breach of their new law; for (according to their principles) that requires no other than imperfect obedience, or obedience with imperfections. And, therefore, to have obe-

5. Holiness

Nor are we accepted of God on account of any holiness wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, or of any good works performed by us through the assistance of divine grace after regeneration. For, however attained or performed, if it be ours by way of inheritance, it comes under the category of *our own righteousness*. But all our own righteousness is extremely imperfect and is therefore entirely

dience attended with imperfections is no breach of it; for it is as much as it requires. And they cannot be a breach of their *old* Law; for that, they say, is entirely abolished, and we never were under it.

“They say, it would not be just in God to require of us perfect obedience, because it would not be just to require more than we can perform, or to punish us for failing of it. And, therefore, by their own scheme, the imperfections of our obedience do not deserve to be punished. What need, therefore, of Christ’s dying to satisfy for them? What need of His suffering to satisfy for that which is no fault and, in its own nature, deserves no suffering? What need of Christ’s dying to purchase that our imperfect obedience should be accepted when, according to their scheme, it would be unjust in itself that any other obedience than *imperfect* should be required! What need of Christ’s dying to make way for God’s accepting an obedience that it would be unjust for Him not to accept? Is there any need of Christ’s dying to prevail with God not to do unrighteously?

“If it be said, ‘Christ died to satisfy that old Law for us, so that we might not be under it, but that there might be room for our being under a milder law,’ still I would inquire, What need is there of Christ’s dying that we might not be under a law which, by their principles, it would be in itself unjust that we should be under, whether Christ had died or not? Because, in our present state, we are not able to keep it.

“So the Arminians are inconsistent with themselves, not only in what they say about the need of Christ’s *satisfaction* to atone for those imperfections that we cannot avoid, but also in what they say of the grace of God granted to enable men to perform the sincere obedience of the new law. They grant that, by reason of original sin, we are utterly disabled for the performance of the condition without new grace from God. But they affirm that He gives such grace to all, by which the performance of the condition is truly possible—and that upon this ground He may and does most justly require it.

“If they intend to speak properly, by ‘grace’ they must mean that *assistance* which is of grace, of free favor and kindness. But yet they speak of it as very *unreasonable*, *unjust*, and *cruel* for God to require *that* as the condition of pardon which is become impossible by original sin. If it be so, what grace is there in giving assistance and ability to perform the condition of pardon? Or why is that called by the name of grace that is an absolute *debt* which God is bound to bestow, and which it would be unjust and cruel in Him to withhold—seeing He requires that, as the condition of pardon, which we cannot perform without it?” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* [London: Thomas Nelson, 1845], 178-180).—*Booth*

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) – American Congregational preacher. Regarded as America’s greatest evangelical theologian and well-known for his preaching in the Great Awakening along with George Whitefield.

excluded. This appears from the following. All righteousness consists either in habit or in act; either in principle or in practice. Now, if our external obedience to the commands of God be not *our own righteousness*, there is no such thing; and so the phrase, as used in the sacred writings, would be entirely destitute of all propriety. As to the principle of all obedience, what is it but the love of God? This is purity of heart; this is true holiness.

And though this heavenly affection is not natural to man but is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), yet it is included under the general idea of *our own righteousness*. For there is no such thing as righteousness or moral goodness where God is not the object of supreme affection, where our Maker is not sincerely loved. A rational creature who does not love the infinitely amiable Jehovah, far from having anything that may be called righteousness, is actuated by Satan's disposition and bears Satan's very image. For where divine love has no place in the heart the dispositions of the mind are entirely sinful and the whole conduct is in direct opposition to the revealed will of God.

Consequently, if nothing be worthy the name of righteousness where the love of God has no influence—and if all our own obedience be excluded, in the article of justification—then all that holiness and all those duties which follow regeneration and are performed by the assistance of the Holy Spirit must be totally set aside as to this important affair. Consider these words: "By grace ye are saved...not of works." What works? Those to which they were "created in Christ Jesus," and in which "God hath before ordained that [they] should walk" (Eph 2:8-10). Hence the apostle very evidently distinguishes between that righteousness by which he was justified (in which also he desired to be found), and all his own righteous deeds:

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 (Phi 3:9).

Nor can any man, with the least shadow of reason, suppose that the apostle ever imagined himself to have attained that holiness without the divine assistance—or to have performed those good works included under the general phrase, "mine own righteousness."

6. *Two Covenants*

To assert that our own righteousness is the condition of justification is to confuse the two opposite covenants of works and of grace.¹⁷ What was the Covenant of Works?¹⁸ Was it not a constitution that required personal obedience as the condition of life, and promised acceptance with God on the performance of that condition? This was the meaning of it, and in this its particular nature consisted. Whatever covenant therefore proceeds on the same terms, whether expressed or implied, is a covenant of works, however it may be varied in other respects. Whenever God renewed the first promise of the Messiah that contained the essence of the Covenant of Grace,¹⁹ in substance it was always the same. [Its substance remained the same] when the Sovereign Dispenser of all good was pleased to vary His language and to exhibit His mercy in different views under the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian eras. In the same way, whatever variations we may suppose have taken place respecting the Covenant of Works, wherever its grand characteristic, “Do this and live” (see Gal 3:12), is retained, it is nevertheless the same covenant.

To set the point in a clearer light, observe that our first parents before the Fall were under the Covenant of Works, and suppose they performed the condition of it. They would have had a right to life and would have enjoyed the promised blessing. Now, though the enjoyment of life was conditioned on the performance of perfect obedience, yet that was easier to them in their original state than the least supposed condition would be to us in our fallen, corrupted state. And how great so ever the disparity was between the obedience prescribed and the blessing promised; yet, had the condition been performed and life enjoyed in consequence of it, the happy state would have been possessed, not as a gift of grace, but as a *reward* of covenantal *debt* (Rom 4:4). Nor would it have been of grace at all, in that sense in which the sacred writers use the term in relation to the justification of sinners.

¹⁷ See *The Covenants: Of Works and of Grace* by Walter J. Chantry; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁸ **Covenant of Works** – covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It affirmed man’s obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17).

¹⁹ **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, and accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Gen 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3).

But suppose the condition of that covenant had been performed by our first father, and that life had been enjoyed by him as the reward of his own obedience. How, or by what means, could he have performed it? It would have been by that power and righteousness with which his nature was endued. But Who gave him that power and righteousness? Who endued him with holy qualities and fitted him for such obedience? Who maintained those moral abilities and preserved him in existence itself? The answer is obvious! It is plain, however, that his being furnished with sufficient capacities, and having them preserved by the Lord his Maker, would not have prevented the reward from being *by his works*. Life would still have been by the legal covenant, and entirely opposite, therefore, to that way of justification which is revealed in the gospel.

Yet further to establish the truth and confirm the argument, observe that the Covenant of Works itself did not require, even from innocent Adam, the performance of its condition by a power independent of divine assistance. Nor could it have been otherwise if it was to be consistent with the nature of a dependent being—as man in his best condition, and every mere creature, must necessarily be. For preservation depends as much on God's power as creation itself. Those holy qualities, therefore, with which man was at first endued, could not be maintained except by a continual divine influence from his Creator and Preserver. For if God's agency is necessary to continue in mere existence, it must certainly be allowed as necessary to a holy and happy existence such as our original parents would undoubtedly have enjoyed had they continued in a state of innocence. If then we talk of terms and conditions for the Covenant of Grace, the question is not whether they be great or small, hard or easy, but whether, properly speaking, there be any condition *at all* to be performed by the sinner in order to obtain acceptance with God. Any such idea annihilates the radical difference between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace?²⁰

²⁰ If the Covenant of Grace be duly considered, it will appear that the execution of it and the final happiness of those in the covenant do not depend on the proper exercise of the human will, or on any condition to be performed by man. That covenant has all its virtue and good effectiveness from the authority, love, and faithfulness of God Himself. This glorious constitution [the New Covenant] consists of *absolute promises* (Eph 2:12; Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10-12). Nor is there anything like a *condition* that is not contained in the promises themselves. Therefore, people who try to explain the nature of this divine covenant by considering the properties of common human compacts act very

E. Imputed Righteousness

1. *What This Righteousness Is*

If then the person who is justified is, in himself, ungodly; if the Supreme Governor of the world neither will nor can justify any without a perfect righteousness; and if such a righteousness cannot possibly be found in our own performances, nor in faith itself, nor in any of the graces or fruits of the Holy Spirit, [then] it is absolutely necessary that righteousness wrought out by a substitute²¹ should be imputed to us or placed to our account.

Where then—where but in the finished work of Jesus Christ—shall we find this vicarious righteousness? Yes, the spotless obedience, the bitter sufferings, and the accursed death of our heavenly Surety constitute that very righteousness by which sinners are justified before God. That amazing work which the incarnate Son completed when He expired on the cross is the grand requirement for our justification before the heavenly tribunal. To this, and to this only, the eternal Sovereign has respect when He pronounces the sinner just and acquits Him in judgment. Hence we are said to be “made righteous” by the obedience of Christ and to be “justified by his blood” (Rom 5:19, 9).

This shed blood and the obedience performed by our divine Substitute on the sinner’s behalf and in his nature are placed to the sinner’s account—as fully and as much to his advantage as if he had in his own person underwent the sufferings and performed the obedience. The sufferings of the Holy Jesus, those dreadful sufferings of the Son of God and the Lord of glory, considered in connection with this complete obedience to the preceptive part of the Law,²² for the super-excellency of it, is called the *righteousness of God*. These, including all that the righteous but broken Law requires, being accepted by the Judge and imputed to sinners, are the united cause and the only ground of their full pardon.

Let me indulge the pleasing idea and repeat the precious truth. This work of Christ, without any addition of any sort whatever, is

unwisely. In so doing, they entirely obscure the glory of sovereign grace and leave the awakened sinner destitute of all hope. See Dr. Owen’s *Theologia Pantodapa*, l. iii; c. 1; and Witsius; *Econ. Fed.* l. iii. c. 1, section 8, 13; and *Acta Synod. Dordrecht*, part iii. 312; and Hoornbeek, *Summa Contravers.* l. x, 805.—Booth

²¹ See FGB 207, *Substitution* and FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

²² **preceptive part of the Law** – commands of God’s Law.

that work for the sake of which the wretched sinner is pronounced just, and adjudged to life, by Him Who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab 1:13). By this obedience, the Law is honored and eternal justice completely satisfied. Jehovah declares Himself well pleased with it and treats all those that are found in it as His children.

2. *Three Examples*

a. Abraham

That we are justified, not by a personal, but by an imputed righteousness appears with the best evidence from Scripture. There the doctrine is taught in the plainest terms. There the important truth is set in the strongest light. It was in this way that Jehovah justified Abraham, the father of the faithful. Paul referred this notable example of divine grace and free acceptance to the consideration of his Jewish brethren for their conviction, and for the instruction of all who should at any time inquire after the methods of grace. Abraham was the famous forefather of the Israelite nation, and he was honored with that exalted character, “the Friend of God” (Jam 2:23). His resignation and faith, his obedience and piety, stand on everlasting record. Few among all the saints ever manifested such cheerful a submission to God’s will or such unreserved confidence in God’s promise.

As soon as the true God signified His will to Abraham that he should leave his native country and his father’s house, he “obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Gen 12:1; Heb 11:8). As soon as the Great Possessor of heaven and earth disclosed His sovereign pleasure that Abraham should sacrifice his only son, his Isaac whom he loved, he readily submitted (Gen 22:1-19). He did this even though the heavenly command was quite unprecedented, and the thought of performing it enough, one would think, to astonish and confuse him.

Yet these acts of obedience, though highly pleasing to God, and such as will be had in everlasting remembrance, were neither the cause nor the condition of his justification. They, indeed, afforded the noblest testimony that his faith was genuine and his piety real. In *that* sense he was justified, or declared righteous, “by works” (Jam 2:21-25). But his works were far from being placed to his account in the matter of divine acceptance. For “if Abraham were justified by [his own] works”—though amazingly great, and in one instance quite unparalleled—“he hath whereof to glory” (Rom 4:2)

in comparison with others, who come far short of that elevated level of obedience to which he arrived.

But though he might, if justified by works, have gloried before his fellow-creatures, yet “not before God.” For “what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed [the promise of] God” concerning the Messiah and the work to be accomplished by Him, “and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:2-3).

Nor was God’s method of proceeding in justifying this illustrious patriarch in any way unique. In this respect he had no exclusive privilege. For it is added,

Now it was not written [in the ancient Scriptures] for his sake alone, that it [the work of a dying and rising Redeemer] was imputed to him; But for us also [whether Jews or Gentiles], to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead...[For] they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Rom 4:23-24; Gal 3:9).

Now if a person of such victorious faith, exalted piety, and amazing obedience as he was did not obtain acceptance with God on account of his own duties, but by an *imputed* righteousness, then who shall pretend to gain the heavenly blessing by his own sincere endeavors or pious performances?—performances not fit to be compared with those that adorned the conduct and character of Jehovah’s friend.

The apostle, then, has shown in what way the father of the chosen tribes was justified before the King immortal. He has shown that the patriarch was considered as an *ungodly* person, as one who had *no good works* when the Lord imputed righteousness to him in order to his final acceptance.

b. David

Now the apostle illustrates and confirms the momentous truth: he presents his reader with a description that David gives of the truly blessed man. And how does the royal psalmist describe him? To what does he attribute his acceptance with God? To an inherent righteousness or to an imputed righteousness? Does he represent him as attaining the happy state and as enjoying the precious privilege by performing sincere obedience and keeping the Law to the best of his power? No such thing! His words are,

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom 4:7-8; Psa 31:1-2).

The blessed man is here described as one who is, in himself, a polluted creature and a guilty criminal—as one who, before grace made the difference, was on a level with the rest of mankind, equally unworthy and equally wretched. And the sacred penman informs us that all his blessedness arises from an imputed righteousness. For what else can be intended by those remarkable words with which he introduces the evangelical declaration: “Even as David...describeth the blessedness of the man”—What man? Why—“unto whom God imputeth righteousness *without works*” (Rom 4:6).

The righteousness here intended cannot be understood of a person’s own obedience, because it is expressly said to be “without works.” His own virtues and duties, however excellent, contribute nothing toward it. No, it is perfect in itself and entirely detached from everything that he either has done or can do. The phraseology of the inspired writer is very remarkable. He does not only speak of blessedness as the result of an imputed righteousness, but he describes the obedience that is thus applied to the sinner as being “without works.” This he does to assert more strongly the truth he defends, and more effectively to secure the honor of grace.

“Righteousness imputed,” “righteousness without the law,” “righteousness without works”—such was the language of Paul (Rom 4:11, 22; 3:21; 4:6). Such was the doctrine that he preached. And such was the faith of the early church. Now, alas, the phrases are put away as obsolete and are become offensive. They are become so offensive that their frequent use is considered by most who call themselves Christians as a definite sign of a fanatical turn of mind. And as the language is disapproved by multitudes in the present age, so the sentiment expressed by it is discarded with contempt as offering an insult to common sense. But, however much the doctrine of imputed righteousness may be despised as absurd, or abhorred as licentious²³ by any of our modern professors, it is evident that the great apostle considered it as intimately connected with the happiness of mankind, and esteemed the blessing as the only solid basis of all our hope and of all our comfort.

c. *Paul*

We have seen what Paul says concerning the justification of Abraham, and the application he makes of that description which David gives of the “blessed man.” Let us now consider what was the

²³ **licentious** – promoting looseness or immoral behavior.

foundation of his own hope of eternal happiness, and on what righteousness he relied. Of these particulars the infallible teacher informs us in the following passage:

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 (Phi 3:8-9).

In this context, the apostle relates his own experience. In these words, he declares what was the frame of his mind, and what were his views of the doctrine of justification. Here he presents himself as a guide and a pattern to all that inquire about the way to happiness. Let us attend to his words and a little more particularly consider their meaning.

“Yea, doubtless,” I affirm it with the utmost confidence, and am determined to abide by it, that I “count all things but loss”—my birth privileges and pharisaical zeal, my submission to ceremonial rites and performance of moral duties. These—all these—I esteem “but loss.” Nor do I only reject all my duties before conversion. But also I count of no worth in the grand article of divine acceptance whatever I now have and all that I now perform. These works—though highly ornamental, useful, and excellent when standing in their proper places and aimed at suitable ends—are little, are nothing, are “loss” itself, compared with “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Yea, such is the love that I have for my Savior, and such the dependence I place on His righteousness, that for His sake “I have [cheerfully] suffered the loss of all things” which once I so highly valued. “And [I] do,” with the greatest deliberation, again declare in the presence of Him Who searches the heart, that I “count them” vile as the offals²⁴ which are thrown to the dogs and loathsome as “dung” which is cast out of sight. Such is the worth of my own performances and such my estimate of them, if set in competition with the work of Jesus or presuming to stand in the place of His righteousness.

Now, therefore, it is my chief desire and supreme concern “that I may win Christ,” Who is able to supply every need and to render me completely happy. That when the Judge ascends the throne at

²⁴ **offals** – parts of a butchered animal that are unfit for use or rejected.

the last tremendous Judgment, when all nations shall appear before Him and when none but the perfectly righteous are able to stand, I may be “found in him,” the Beloved, as “the LORD [my] righteousness” (Jer 33:16). Then impartial justice must entirely acquit, and immaculate holiness completely approve.

Would you know more particularly what I mean by being “found *in him*”? It is my “not having,” not depending upon, or so much as once mentioning “mine own righteousness, which is of the law,” even the holy qualities I now possess, and the righteous deeds I have performed in obedience to the Law as a rule of conduct, and by the influence of grace as the principle of spiritual life. Instead, being “found in him” is

- being adorned with and relying upon that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ;
- relying upon His righteousness which was finished by Him, is revealed in the gospel, and is received by faith;
- relying upon His obedience which, being performed by the incarnate Son, is dignified with every excellence, and bears that exalted character, “The righteousness...of God by faith” (Phi 3:9).

3. Righteousnesses of Law and of Faith

On this instructive and very important passage, I would further observe that the manifest design of the sacred penman is to show in what a sinner may safely confide and what is a warrantable ground of rejoicing. He implies that there can be no confidence toward God, no acceptance with Him, and consequently no cause of spiritual joy—without a righteousness. For condemnation and wrath must be our portion if we appear in our sins before the righteous Judge!

He further suggests that there is a twofold righteousness. The one he calls “our own” and informs us it is “of the law.” The other he describes as “through the faith of Christ,” and this he characterizes as “the righteousness of God.” These, he signifies, are entirely distinct and far from working together in procuring our justification. They are so far from it that they are opposite and absolutely inconsistent as to any such purpose. In reference, therefore, to acceptance with the Most High, he who embraces the one must reject the other; and on the one or the other all mankind depends.

He also informs us, with all the fervor of holy zeal and in the most emphatic manner, which of these obtained his regard and

supported his hope—which was the ground of his confidence and the source of his joy. Now the Judaizing teachers,²⁵ of whom he speaks in the beginning of the chapter, “have...confidence in the flesh” or depend on their own duties (Phi 3:2-3). But Paul was determined to adopt a very different method and to seek for acceptance in a contrary way. Having warned the Philippians of their danger and guarded them against the Judaizers’ destructive heresies, Paul declares that the righteousness which he esteemed sufficient was not his own, was not “of the law,” but was a gift of grace and “through the faith of Christ.” It is the obedience that our Lord performed in the capacity of a surety, which was without works and without the Law. This was the object of his dependence, and in that only he gloried.

But as to all that is included under the phrase “mine own righteousness,” he accounted it of no avail when he considered the purity of the divine Law, the majesty of the eternal Judge, and that he must soon stand before Him. Under such a consideration, he rejected his “own righteousness” with disdain and poured the utmost contempt upon it, calling it “loss” and “dung.” Such was the experience and such was the hope of that wonderful man, whose apostolic gifts and Christian graces, whose ministerial usefulness and exemplary conduct, rendered him an eminent blessing to the world and an honor to the great Redeemer’s cause.

4. Making Christ’s Righteousness Our Own

Many are the arguments that might be shown from the unerring Word in proof of this core doctrine and comforting truth, but I shall only present my reader with the few that follow. I have already proved that the subject of justification is an ungodly person. His pardon and acceptance, therefore, cannot be the result of his own obedience. And it is equally clear that *as* ungodly he cannot be justified. He must stand right in the eye of the Law and unreplicable before his Judge before he can be acquitted in judgment.

Consequently, his pardon must be by the righteousness of another. But what or whose righteousness can it be? Not the obedience of our fellow-mortals who are already justified. That would be

²⁵ **Judaizing teachers** – first century false teachers in the Roman province of Galatia (modern day Turkey) who required Christians to be circumcised and keep the Law in order to be right with God.

to adopt the exploded doctrine of supererogation.²⁶ Not the sanctity of angels, because they never became responsible for us. Not the essential righteousness of the divine nature, for that is absolutely incommunicable from God to mortal men. It must therefore be the righteousness of Christ: His complete conformity to the holy Law as a voluntary substitute for the ungodly.

Now, in what way can His obedience be applied to us except by *imputation*? I believe this argument will remain conclusive until it be proved either 1) that the subject of justification is not in himself ungodly, or 2) that the Judge of all the earth can justify without a righteousness. The former is expressly contrary to the divine testimony, and the latter involves a clear contradiction.

5. *First and Second Adam*

Paul, when writing about our awful ruin by sin and our wonderful recovery by grace, and when directly handling this core doctrine, informs us that Adam was a “figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5:14), even of the Lord Messiah. He forms a striking comparison between the first and the second Adam; between the disobedience of the one and the obedience of the Other, together with the effects of each. He represents Adam as a public person, as constituting the federal head of all his posterity, and Christ as the representative of all the chosen seed.

Paul says that the first offense of the former was imputed to all his natural offspring, and the complete obedience of the latter is imputed to all His spiritual seed. By the imputation of Adam’s offense, all mankind were “made sinners” (Rom 5:19), and came under a charge of guilt and the awful sentence of condemnation to eternal death. However, by the imputation of Christ’s obedience, all who believe are made righteous, are acquitted from every legal charge, and adjudged to eternal life. And as it was one offense of one man that brought death and misery on all the human race, so it is by the one righteousness of the one Man, even the Lord from heaven and Jehovah’s Fellow, that spiritual life and eternal happiness are introduced. This is according to that saying:

²⁶ **supererogation** – In Roman Catholic theology, works over and above what God commands are considered to be meritorious in the sight of God and available for others. Thus Rome erroneously teaches there is a great treasury of merit available to needy souls, provided by the excess obedience and righteousness of the saints who voluntarily did more than God commanded. (Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, third edition, 2002)

As by the offense 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. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19).

That the “one offense” and the “disobedience of one” are to be understood as Adam’s actual transgression of the divine Law, none can dispute. By his first iniquitous act and bold offense, many were “made sinners” before they were guilty of actual²⁷ transgression. They so were made sinners as to be, on principles of justice, liable to condemnation and death. Nor is it conceivable how this could be except by imputation. For this imputation, their natural relation to Adam and his federal²⁸ relation to them were a sufficient foundation. It is equally evident that the “righteousness of one” and the “obedience of one” refer to the complete performance of divine precepts by our Lord Jesus Christ—His actual conformity to the holy Law.

The contrast in the text requires this; the scope of the apostle’s reasoning demands it as well. By this perfect obedience shall “many be made righteous.” By this one most excellent righteousness, all who believe are justified and entitled to immortal glory—without any good works of their own and before they have performed any acceptable duty. Now, in whatever way the first offense of our original parent was made ours to condemnation, in the same way is the righteousness of his glorious Antitype²⁹ made ours to justification. If that was by imputation, so is this.

6. Christ Made Sin

The momentous truth for which I am pleading is emphatically taught in the following powerful passage: “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Hence it is plain that, as Christ the surety was made sin, so are we made righteousness. In the very same way that our sins were made His does His obedience become ours.

How, then, and in what sense, was the Holy One of God “made...sin”? By being *punished* for it? No, for He was made that sin of which He “knew no sin” (but He knew by painful experience what it was to be punished). Besides, He could not have been pun-

²⁷ **actual** – in act; committed by the person himself, as opposed to original sin.

²⁸ **federal** – covenantal.

²⁹ **Antitype** – person or thing represented by the type or symbol; here, Christ.

ished for sin if He had not stood guilty in the eye of the Law—for punishment always supposes guilt, either personal or imputed. A person may suffer, but he cannot be punished without a previous charge of guilt, that is, without being considered as the breaker of some law. This is because punishment is no other than the evil of suffering inflicted for the evil of sinning.

Was He made sin by becoming a *sacrifice* for it? That He was an expiatory³⁰ sacrifice is readily granted; this is the Christian's glory. But that this is the sense of the phrase may be justly questioned. For, to omit other considerations, it is plain from the text that He was made that *sin* which stands opposed to *righteousness*—which cannot be affirmed of an expiatory sacrifice. Nor could He have been offered as an atoning victim without having sin transferred to Him prior to His being offered, so that He was in some way or other made sin before He shed His blood and made expiation. Was He then made sin by *inhesion*,³¹ or by *transfusion*?³² Was it communicated to Him so as to *reside* in Him? The idea is absurd, the fact was impossible, and the very thought is blasphemy.

It remains, therefore, that if He was made sin, sin which is opposed to righteousness, it must be by *imputation*. This was the way in which our adorable Sponsor came under a charge of guilt. Hence it follows by necessary consequence, according to the rule of opposition, except we would entirely destroy the apostle's beautiful contrast and the whole force of his argument, that those who are truly righteous are made so by imputation, and by imputation only.

It is impossible that any person who is perfectly innocent should be made sin but by having the sins of others placed to his account or charged upon him in a judicial way. In the same way, those that are in themselves guilty cannot be made righteous in another, and by his obedience, without having it imputed to them. And as the blessed Jesus is said to be “made...sin,” so we are said to be “made...righteousness.”

This strongly implies that it was not by any criminal conduct of His that He became sin. In the same way, it is not by any pious activity of ours that we become righteous. It was not on account of any evil qualities infused³³ that He was treated by divine Justice as

³⁰ **expiatory** – making satisfaction for offense; removing or covering guilt.

³¹ **inhesion** – inherence; the state of being inherent in something.

³² **transfusion** – transmission; transference.

³³ **infused** – imparted in such a way as to change one's character.

an offender. In the same way, it is not in virtue of any holiness worked in us that we are accepted and treated as righteous. That sin for which Jesus was condemned and punished was not found in Him, but charged upon Him. In the same way, that righteousness by which we are justified and entitled to happiness is not inherent in us, but imputed to us.

7. *Response to Objections*

The objections also with which the apostle meets, and the way in which he refutes them when handling the doctrine of justification, strongly imply that his design was entirely to exclude all the works of every law and all duties of every kind. And consequently, it shows that his design was that our acceptance with God is a blessing of pure grace and only by an imputed righteousness. These objections plainly suppose that the method of justification that Paul clearly states and fully explains is not only injurious to the interests of holiness but subversive of all morality. His doctrine was charged with making void the divine commands—with encouraging those by whom it was adopted to “continue in sin” because they were “not under the law”; to multiply transgressions that grace might abound; and to do all manner of evil that good might come (Rom 3:8-31; 6:1, 14-15).

Suppose Paul had taught or implied that righteous deeds or holy dispositions were in any way necessary to a sinner’s justification. Suppose, in reference to that issue, he had not in the fullest sense renounced all human obedience and directed sinners to place their whole dependence on the work and worthiness of Christ alone. If so, then it is highly improbable that the apostolic gospel would have been charged with such horrid consequences. For on that supposition, the enemies of sacred truth would not have had the least reason for labeling his doctrine as licentious.³⁴

Suppose that some, through stupid ignorance or violent prejudice, have so far mistaken his meaning as to imagine that Paul entirely rejected all holy desires and pious endeavors, without exception, as constituting no part of that righteousness for the sake of which a sinner is justified. And suppose at the same time that they thought he only excluded a false kind of holiness and works of a particular sort. In that case, we may reasonably conclude that, in Paul’s replies to those reproachful charges against his ministerial character and against that gospel which was dearer to him than his

³⁴ **licentious** – promoting carelessness and immoral behavior.

very life, he would not have failed to point out the plain mistake on which the objector proceeded by distinguishing the works he did admit from those that he renounced.

Suppose Paul had rejected only the works of the Ceremonial Law, or such duties as are performed prior to regeneration and without the aids of grace, while he maintained the necessity of evangelical obedience. If so, then it would have been easy, natural, and necessary for him, when refuting the blasphemous accusations, to have drawn the line of distinction in order to prevent future mistakes. But not the least part of any such distinction appears in his answers to the several hateful charges. He does not so much as hint that the objector was under a mistake in supposing that he entirely excluded all the duties and works of men without any difference.

When he puts the objection, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" he answers with a strong negation expressing the utmost abhorrence of any such thought: "God forbid." Then he argues from an absurdity: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" He signifies by this that those who are the subjects of grace and believe in Jesus Christ, being dead to sin, cannot walk in the ways of ungodliness. For so to do would be absolutely inconsistent with their new state, and with that principle of spiritual life which they have received. But he gives not the least indication of the necessity of holiness or of obedience in order to gain the favor of God or to procure acceptance before Him.

If my reader should suppose that his views of justification are the same which Paul had, and yet is persuaded that some holiness or moral goodness of his own is necessary to obtain pardon or to procure acceptance, I would advise him to consider whether, if his sentiments were charged with being licentious, he would not immediately think of a different reply—one better adapted to answer his purpose than any of those that the apostle made in a similar case. Let him consider whether he would not be ready to defend his creed by observing that, as he had an expectation of being accepted before the eternal Sovereign with [some assistance from] a personal obedience, to charge him with making "void the law" or with saying, "Let us do evil that good may come," could proceed from nothing less than the most obvious mistake or the greatest malice (Rom 3:31, 8).

Such persons, however, as maintain the necessity of good works in order to justification before God, are in little danger of being charged by ignorant people with holding licentious principles. This is a strong presumptive argument that the doctrines which they hold are not the same that Paul preached and which the early saints professed. For that their character and sentiments were so defamed is clear beyond a doubt. Nor does it appear that natural men are any more capable of discerning spiritual things now, or any more friendly toward the genuine gospel, than they were in the apostolic times.

8. *Free Gift*

That righteousness by which we are justified is a free gift as appears by the following words: “They which receive abundance...of the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:16-17). Notice, the apostle represents believers not as performing but as *receiving* it. The gospel of sovereign grace proclaims the sufficiency, suitability, and freeness of the gospel. It is therefore termed “the word of righteousness” and “the ministration of righteousness” (Heb 5:13; 2Co 3:9). And one of the glorious characters that our divine Sponsor bears is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6). In perfect correspondence with this, He is said to be “made unto us...righteousness.” And it is affirmed of believers that they are “made the righteousness of God in him” (1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21).

Hence it is that they are declared, by the Spirit of infallibility, to be “justified” in Him, “accepted” in Him, “complete” in Him, and “saved” in Him (1Co 6:11; Eph 1:6; Col 2:10; Isa 45:17). Such is the divinely appointed method of justification; and such the provision that grace has made for the final acceptance of guilty, ungodly, and wretched creatures.

9. *Design of the Gospel*

The grand design of the gospel is to *reveal this righteousness* of God, and to display the riches of that grace which provided and freely bestows the wonderful gift. In regard to justification, the gospel informs us that what is required of the transgressor—both as to doing and suffering—was performed by our adored Substitute. This perfect obedience was revealed in the Word of truth for the justification of sinners. Therefore, it is the business of true faith to receive this perfect obedience as absolutely sufficient to justify the most ungodly sinner, and as entirely free for his use. It is not the business of true faith to come in as a condition, assert its own

importance, nor share the glory with our Savior's righteousness. For what is evangelical faith but the receiving of Christ and His righteousness (Isa 45:22; Joh 1:12; Rom 1:17; 5:17)? In other words, what is it but a dependence on Jesus alone for eternal salvation? What is it but a dependence upon Him as all-sufficient to save the most guilty, as every way suitable to supply the needs of the most needy, and as absolutely free for the vilest of sinners?

If the divine Redeemer and His finished work are the object of faith³⁵ and the report of the gospel its warrant and ground, to believe is to trust entirely without reserve on the faithful Word that God has spoken and on the perfect work that Christ has wrought. Such is the faith of God's elect. The comfortable evidences of the truth and reality [of this faith] are the love of God, holy obedience, peace of conscience, and hope of glory. These, to a greater or lesser degree, are its proper effects and genuine fruits.

Happy, thrice happy, are they who have part in this divine righteousness and have received the atonement! All such are pronounced righteous by the eternal Judge; there is nothing to be laid to their charge. They are acquitted, with honor to all the perfections of Deity, and are everlastingly free from condemnation. Their sins, though ever so numerous or ever so hateful, are purged away by atoning blood. Their souls have received that most excellent robe, the Redeemer's righteousness (Isa 61:10). Thus they are without "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph 5:27). They are presented by their great Representative in the body of His flesh through His death "holy and unblameable and unprovable" in the sight of Omniscience (Col 1:22). They are fair as the purest wool, whiter than the virgin snow (Isa 1:18).

Yes, let believers exult in the thought! The work and worthiness of the Lord Redeemer give them acceptance with infinite Majesty and dignity before the angels of light. These afford consolation on earth and procure estimation in heaven. Through these they shall stand with courage at the bar of judgment and make their appearance with honor among the inhabitants of glory.

Let the legalist boast of his good works, his devout services, and strict holiness. But if they are set in competition with Christ or presuming to stand in the place of His righteousness, then the

³⁵ This is agreeable to those remarkable and instructive words, "To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 1:1).—*Booth*

man that is taught of God esteems them all as worthless as dross,³⁶ vile as the dung, lighter than vanity, and worse than nothing! Suppose he were endued with all the shining virtues that ever adorned the lives and characters of the most excellent saints. Suppose he were possessed with

- the exemplary meekness of Moses,
- the amazing patience of Job,
- the ever-active zeal of Paul, and
- that love which glowed in the bosom of John.

If all this were so, then he would not, he dare not, advance the least claim to justification and eternal life on that footing!

No, blessed Jesus! it is in Your righteousness only that he dares to confide; it is only in Your obedience he presumes to glory. This obedience is an immovable basis for the anxious mind to rest upon by faith. This is a sure foundation to support the believer's hope of glory, even when he views the righteous Law in its full extent and unabated purity. This foundation of confidence will support the soul in the view of death and when in the confines of an eternal world. Nor will it fail (such is its high perfection and sovereign power) in the near approach of the awful judgment. Here, then, grace reigns, in freely bestowing this righteousness and in our complete justification by it.

10. Exhortation

a. Nothing to plead

As it is the imputed righteousness of Christ, and that only, by which any of the children of men can be justified, let us look to it, rely on it, and glory in it. For it is dignified with every honorable character and free for our use. Cheering thought! This way of justification is completely fitted to pull down the pride of the self-righteous professor, who considers himself as standing on more respectable terms with his Maker than his ungodly neighbor (Luk 18:9-14).

Nor is it less happily adapted to raise the drooping spirits of the trembling sinner, of him who has nothing to plead why the sentence of condemnation, already pronounced upon him, should not be executed in all its rigor. If, indeed, we were not allowed to look to this unequalled obedience till conscious of having some righteousness of our own, we might then be discouraged. Despair would

³⁶ **dross** – scum formed from impurities on the surface of molten metal.

be rational and damnation certain. But, thanks be to God for the unparalleled favor! This righteousness and justification by it are free, perfectly free for the worst of sinners. For the works of every law, in every sense as performed by man, are entirely excluded from having any concern in our acceptance with God.³⁷

Since, therefore, it is in Christ alone—as our head, representative, and surety—that we are or can be justified, He alone should have the glory. He is infinitely worthy to have the unrivalled honor. Then let the sinner, the ungodly wretch, trust in the obedience of the dying Jesus, as being absolutely sufficient to justify him, without any good works or duties, without any good habits or qualities, however performed or acquired. Eternal Truth has declared for his encouragement that he shall not be disappointed.

O sinner, self-ruined and self-condemned, even you that are tempted to abhor the day of your birth on account of your multiplied provocations and utter unworthiness! Here is a complete righteousness revealed for your full relief and immediate comfort! In this righteousness you may read the divine character: “Just, yet the Justifier of the ungodly” (see Rom 4:5).

True it is that, if nothing but equity had appeared in Jehovah’s name, then nothing but misery could have been expected by the guilty. But when we behold the idea of a compassionate Savior connected with that of a righteous Judge, then such a character, though supremely revered, is greatly inviting. For it speaks deliverance and administers consolation. Yes, sorrowful soul, though you have no righteousness nor any recommendation, yet the wisdom of God has appointed a way for your full discharge before the great judgment seat of God. And the infinite riches of sovereign grace have provided effective means for this discharge as well. It has provided for attaining that honor and joy which are equal to your ut-

³⁷ Dr. Owen, having quoted Romans 3:23, 4:5, 11:6, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Titus 3:5, adds,

“I am persuaded that no unprejudiced person—whose mind is not prepossessed with notions and distinctions [in which] not the least [warrant] is offered to them from the texts mentioned, nor elsewhere—can but judge that the Law, in every sense of it, and all sorts of works whatever (at any time or by any means [which] sinners or unbelievers do or can perform), are not in this or that sense, but in *every* way and in all senses excluded from our justification before God. And if it be so, it is the righteousness of Christ alone that we must betake [resort] ourselves unto, or this matter must cease forever.” (John Owen, *On Justification in Works*, vol. 5 [Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1862], 278)—Booth

most wishes. This honor and joy exceed your highest conceptions and shall render you happy to all eternity!

Is my reader oppressed with guilt and harassed with tumultuous fears of deserved ruin! Is he wearied with “going about to establish [his] own righteousness” (Rom 10:3)? Is he sensible that he is possessed of no worth, nor anything that might be a probable means of recommending him to the Redeemer? Remember, distressed fellow mortal, that no such recommendation is needful. Nothing is required at your hand for any such purpose. “Come...let him take...*freely*” is the language of Jesus (Rev 22:17). He has all that you lack, however impoverished you may be; and He gives all with the most liberal hand. Grace reigns! Let that be your encouragement when thinking about acceptance with Christ, and of your justification in Him before the Almighty.

b. Character of God

Does my reader, notwithstanding all that has been said, yet think it prudent and safe to depend on his own obedience? Then before I dismiss the subject, let me remind him of the absolute purity and infinite holiness of God, of the transcendent³⁸ majesty and awesome glories of that God with Whom he has to do and before Whom he must soon appear.

Consider, presumptuous mortal, that with your supreme Judge is terrible majesty. That He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...will by no means clear the guilty...[and] is a consuming fire” (Hab 1:13; Exo 34:7; Heb 12:29). His righteous judgment is that “they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32), and therefore His Law denounces an awful curse on every offender.

Remember that He Whose divine right it is to justify is a “jealous God” (Exo 20:5). He is jealous of His honor as a righteous governor and determined to support the rights of His throne. So terrible is His indignation that, when once His wrath is kindled, it will consume every refuge of lies and “shall burn unto the lowest hell” (Deu 32:22). So awfully³⁹ majestic is Jehovah that before Him the everlasting “mountains quake...the pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof” (Nah 1:5; Job 26:11). As His condescending⁴⁰ smile enlightens the countenances of angels and

³⁸ **transcendent** – superior in excellence; surpassing all else; altogether higher.

³⁹ **awfully** – inspiring awe.

⁴⁰ **condescending** – descending or stooping to things unworthy.

crowns them with unutterable bliss, so His righteous frown is nothing less than absolute destruction!

So flaming is His purity and so dazzling His glory, that He looks “to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight” (Job 25:5). In His presence the seraphim,⁴¹ those most exalted of mere creatures, veil their faces and cover their feet in token of profound humiliation, while they cry in loud responsive strains, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:2-4).

c. Day of Judgment

To use the language of Bildad in Job, “How then can man be justified with God? or how can he...that is born of woman...be clean” before his Maker (Job 25:4)? God’s eyes are as a flame of fire, Whose peculiar province it is to search the human heart and to explore its latent evils. When He shall sift your conduct and mark your offenses; when He lays “judgment...to the line, and righteousness to the plummet”⁴²—then you will not be able to “answer him one of a thousand” (Isa 28:17; Job 9:3)! And to what refuge will you then flee?

Trusting in your own duties, you slight the great atonement, you despise the revealed righteousness; and Christ shall profit you nothing. You may talk in lofty strains about man’s moral excellence and the dignity of human nature, the worth of personal obedience and the effectiveness of tears of repentance. You may assert the necessity of good works and reject with disdain the doctrine of imputed righteousness—while your conscience is unimpressed with a sight of the divine purity or with a sense of the divine presence.

But when you come to consider yourself as before the Most High, and that the important question is, “How shall I be just before the Most Holy?”—when you form your ideas of the God of heaven, not from the character you have drawn of Him in your own imagination, but agreeably to that which is given in the inspired volume—then your pretensions to personal worthiness must subside and your mouth must be stopped. Or if it is not entirely silent, you must exclaim with the men of Bethshemesh, when Jehovah’s hand was heavy upon them: “Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?” (1Sa 6:20). Then, if the atonement is not presented for your

⁴¹ **seraphim** – angelic beings around God’s throne (Isa 6:2, 6).

⁴² **plummet** – piece of lead attached to a string, used to set walls straight; hence, something used for measuring things against a right standard.

immediate relief, you will be ready to add, "Who...shall dwell with the devouring fire? who...shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa 33:14).

The Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scripture, directs us to conceive of justification as "before God" and "in his sight" (Rom 2:13; 3:20). This implies that, when final acceptance is the subject of our inquiry, we should look upon ourselves as in the immediate presence of Him Who will soon ascend the "great white throne" to pass the irreversible sentence. We should consider on what ground we shall be able to stand when "the earth and the heaven" flee away from the face of our Eternal Judge and "no place" shall be found for them (Rev 20:11).

Yes, reader, if you would not deceive yourself in a matter of the first importance; if you would come to a satisfactory persuasion in what righteousness you may venture to trust, then you should consider yourself as at the judgment seat of God. Consider yourself as having a cause that is filled with your everlasting fate, a cause that must inevitably end either in your eternal happiness or infinite misery. In your own meditations, you should anticipate that great decisive day, and then ask your own conscience, "On what shall I then depend? Or what shall I dare to plead when my astonished eyes behold my Judge?" This is because it would be extreme folly for you *now* to rely on any obedience, or now to claim it as necessary to justification, of which your own conscience cannot approve as a plea that will *then* be admitted as valid.

d. Greatest saints

Consider the honest acknowledgments and deep confessions of the greatest saints and holiest men that have ever lived. When their acceptance with God, Who is glorious in holiness (Exo 15:11), came under consideration, they confessed their impurity and sinfulness.

Job was an eminent saint. He had not his equal on earth, according to the testimony of God Himself. Conscious of his integrity, he avowed it before men and defended his exemplary conduct against the accusations of critical friends. But when the Almighty addressed him, and when he considers himself as standing before the divine tribunal, he says not a word about his inherent righteousness or his pious performances. Then, in language of the deepest self-abasement, he exclaims, "Behold, I am vile...I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4; 42:6)! Yea, he declares, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say I am

perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect," in my own apprehensions, "yet" before Him that is infinitely holy, I would be so far from pleading my own extraordinary attainments, that "I would not know my soul"; nay, "I would despise my life," with all its most shining accomplishments (Job 9:20-21).

For "if I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; Yet shalt thou," O righteous and eternal Judge, "plunge me in the ditch." You will show me to be a polluted creature and a guilty criminal, notwithstanding all my endeavors to obtain purity and find acceptance. I would be so abominably filthy and highly criminal that my "own clothes," were they sensible of my pollution and guilt, would "abhor me. For he," to Whom I am accountable, "is not a man, as I am," but a Being of such discernment that the minutest faults cannot escape His notice. He is so perfectly holy that the least spot of defilement is infinitely abhorrent in His sight. It is therefore absolutely impossible "that I should answer him." [It is impossible I should] plead my cause and gain acceptance on the foundation of my own obedience or that "we should," on any such footing, "come together in judgment" without inevitable ruin to my person and all my immortal interests (Job 9:30-32).

David, the man after God's own heart, made it his earnest request that God would not "enter...into judgment" with him according to his own obedience. He was well aware that neither he nor any man living could be justified in that way. To rebuke the pride of self-righteous confidence, he asks with emotions of holy reverence and sacred awe, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" That is, who can be acquitted? (Psa 143:2; 130:3).

Isaiah also, though an eminent prophet and a distinguished servant of God, when he beheld Jehovah's glory and heard the seraphim proclaim His holiness, loudly exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). Nor was his consternation removed or his conscience relieved, till pardon through the atonement was applied to him (Isa 4:2-7).

Now, is it prudent or can it be safe, to trust in your own imperfect duties when persons of such eminent character and exalted godliness made these acknowledgments, and had such views of themselves and of their own attainments? *If their* personal obedi-

ence would not bear the divine scrutiny, what a wretched figure must yours make before the heart-searching God?

If Jehovah charged “his angels...with folly” (Job 4:18) and if “the heavens are not clean in his sight,” what then is man who “drinketh iniquity like water” that he should presume to “be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should [pretend to] be righteous” (Job 15:14-16)? For between human obedience and angelic holiness there is no more comparison than between a clod of the field and a star in the firmament.

“Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). Proud man would be righteous, though loathsome with sin and liable to ruin. But, however highly the self-sufficient may think of their own obedience, the sinner whose conscience is pressed with a sense of guilt and every real Christian will deplore appearing in their own righteousness before the final Judge. Yea, the man who is taught of God will ardently cry,

Fall upon me, ye rocks! Cover me, ye mountains! Yea, rather let me lose my existence than appear before the Most Holy in the filthy rags of my own duties or in any righteousness but that which is perfect, in any obedience but that which is divine.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR ADOPTION

A. Definition

Those whom God has justified and admitted into a state of reconciliation¹ with Himself, He has also adopted for His children. Hence their interest in all the blessings of grace and the unknown riches of glory depends not merely on the favor of friendship (even the noblest), but also upon an indisputable right of inheritance. This right they have by virtue of adoption.²

The word *adoption* signifies that act by which a person takes the child of another, not related to him, into the place of his own son and entitles him to his privileges. Among the Greeks and Romans, it was customary for a man of wealth with no sons from his own body to make choice of some person upon whom he put his name, requiring him to relinquish his own family, never to return to it again, and publicly proclaimed him his heir. The person thus adopted was legally entitled to the inheritance upon the decease of his adopter. And, though previously he had no claim to such a benefit or any expectation of it, he was invested with the same privileges as if he had been born an heir to his benefactor.³

That spiritual and divine adoption about which we treat, is *God's gracious admission of strangers and aliens into the state, relation, and enjoyment of all the privileges of children, through Jesus Christ*. This is according to that glorious promise of the New Covenant: I "will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2Co 6:18).

Reconciliation, justification, and adoption may be thus distinguished. In *reconciliation*, God is considered as the injured party, and the sinner as an enemy to Him. In *justification*, our Maker sustains the character of supreme Judge, and man is considered as

¹ **reconciliation** – change in relationship from hostility to harmony.

² See FGB 246, *Adoption*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ From Henry Venn, *Complete Duty of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1838), 401-402.

Henry Venn (1725-1797) – English evangelical minister within the Anglican Church. Born in Barnes, Surrey, England; educated at Cambridge University.

a criminal standing before His judgment seat. In *adoption*, Jehovah appears as the fountain of honor, and the apostate sons of Adam as aliens from Him, as belonging to the family of Satan, and as children of wrath. In reconciliation we are made friends; in justification we are pronounced righteous; and in adoption we are constituted heirs of the eternal inheritance.

B. Declared in the Scriptures

That believers are the children of God the Scriptures expressly declare. They may be so called as they are begotten and born from above, as they stand as the bride of Christ (Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17), and as they are adopted into the heavenly family. These different ways in which the Scripture speaks of their filial⁴ relation to God are intended to aid our feeble conceptions when we think upon the grand, indescribable blessing. One mode of expression supplies, in some degree, the ideas that are lacking in another. To express the original of spiritual life and the restoration of the divine image, we are said to be *born* of God. To set forth, in the liveliest manner, our most intimate union with the Son of the Highest, we are said to be *married* to Christ. And, that we might not forget our natural state of alienation from God, and to denote our title to the heavenly inheritance, we are said to be *adopted* by Him. The condition, therefore, of all believers is most noble and excellent. Their heavenly birth, their divine Husband, and their everlasting inheritance loudly proclaim it.

The beloved apostle, amazed at the love of God manifested in the privilege of adoption, could not forbear exclaiming with astonishment and rapture, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1Jo 3:1)! Here grace reigns. The vessels of mercy were predestinated to the enjoyment of this honor and happiness before the world began (Eph 1:4). The great Lord of all chose them for Himself, chose them for His children, that they might be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

This He did, not because of any worthiness in them, but of His own sovereign will. As it is written,

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace (Eph 1:5).

⁴ **filial** – pertaining to a son or daughter.

“According to the good pleasure of his will”: this is the eternal source of the heavenly blessing. “By Jesus Christ”: this is the way of its communication to sinners. “To the praise of the glory of his grace”: this is the grand purpose of bestowing it.

C. The Subjects of Adoption

The persons adopted are sinners of Adam’s race who, considered in their natural state, are estranged from God and guilty before Him, under sentence of death and liable to ruin. Their translation, therefore, out of this deplorable condition into a state and relation so glorious, is an instance of reigning grace. That the children of wrath should become the inheritors of glory, that the slaves of Satan should be acknowledged as the sons of Jehovah, and that these enemies of God should be adopted into His family and have a secure right to all the privileges of His children—[these realities] are astonishing to the last degree.

Our character and state by nature are the most indigent, wretched, and abominable. They render us fit for nothing after this life but to dwell with damned spirits and accursed fiends in the abodes of darkness and despair. But by the privilege of adoption we are invested with such a character, and are brought into such a state, as render us fit to associate with saints in light, with angels in glory. What but omnipotent, reigning grace could be sufficient to effect so noble, so astonishing, so divine a change!

If we take a cursory view of those invaluable privileges that the saints possess, and of which they are heirs in virtue of adoption, our ideas of the extremely wonderful blessing will be still heightened. They have the most honorable *character*; for they are called not merely the servants or friends, but the sons of God. This dignified character is unalterable; for the Lord Himself declares that it is “an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isa 56:5). If David so highly esteemed the character of son-in-law to an earthly king (1Sa 18:23), how much more should believers esteem that sublime title, “the sons of God,” of Him Who is King of kings and Lord of lords! They are also called “kings and priests” (Rom 8:14; Rev 1:6; 5:10). Besides these grand and esteemed titles, they are distinguished from the world by a rich variety of others that are obvious to every intelligent reader of the sacred writings.

The dignity of their *relation* is immensely great. For, being the children of God, Jehovah Himself is their Father, and Christ acknowledges them for His brethren. Nor do they stand in relation

to Jesus merely as brethren; they are also His bride. Nothing can be conceived more honorable or more beneficial than their marital relation to Him. For He is “the chiefest among ten thousand...and altogether lovely” (Song 5:10, 16). When David, though not yet in possession of the crown, sent his men to Abigail to take her to wife, that discreet widow “bowed herself...to the earth” and said, “Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord” (1Sa 25:41). Now, may not the believer, for infinitely greater reasons and with gratitude and astonishment, adore that gracious hand which broke off his yoke of most shameful servanthood and joined him to David’s Antitype—the heavenly Bridegroom? God joined him in a marriage covenant that shall never be broken, in a union that shall never be dissolved!

Believers, being the children of God, are the objects of His paternal affection and unremitting care. As a father, He guides them by His counsel and guards them by His power. Their disobedience He visits with a rod of correction; and in their distresses He feels for them with bowels of paternal compassion. In the whole of His dealings with them, He manifests His love and causes all things to work together for their good (Rom 8:28). Yes, they are the darlings of Providence and the charge of angels. Those ministering spirits, who are active as flame and swift as thought, encamp around them and, in ways unknown to mortals, subserve the designs of grace in promoting their best interests.

D. Inheritance

Nothing can exceed the riches and excellency of that inheritance to which believers have a right in virtue of their adoption. That eternal inheritance is bequeathed to them by an unchangeable covenant. This testament, recorded in the sacred writings, was confirmed by the death of Christ. Their inheritance includes all the blessings of grace here and the full enjoyment of glory hereafter. As to temporal things, they are frequently poor and much afflicted. Yet, the blessings of common providence are dispensed to them in such measures as paternal wisdom sees best for their spiritual welfare and the glory of God. “Godliness...having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8). Their “heavenly Father knoweth that [they] have need” of His providential favors while they continue in the present state (Mat 6:32).

So, whether they be things temporal, spiritual, or eternal; whether they be things present or things to come, all are theirs.

According to that admirable text, “All things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all* are yours” (1Co 3:21). But this is yet more emphatic, the highest that words can express, and the utmost our ideas can reach: the divine Spirit declares that they are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ”⁵ (Rom 8:17).

Each, therefore, has a right to say, Jehovah Himself is my reward, my portion, and my inheritance (Psa 16:5). Yea, such is the mutual property that God and His people have in each other, that the inheritance is reciprocal between them. “For the portion of Jacob...is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts is his name” (Jer 10:16). All the awesome, amiable, adorable attributes of Deity will appear glorious in the children of God and be enjoyed by them to their everlasting honor and unutterable bliss. What can the heart of man desire more? Or what good thing will God withhold from them for whom He gave His Son, to whom He gives Himself?

In testimony to this, their sublime relation, and as an earnest⁶ of their future inheritance, they receive the “Spirit of adoption,” by Whom they cry with appropriation and confidence, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). The Spirit of adoption, as opposed to the spirit of bondage, is the Spirit of light and of liberty, of consolation and of joy. He glorifies Christ in the believer’s view, and sheds divine love abroad in his heart. He brings the promises to his remembrance and enables him to plead them at the throne of grace. He elevates the affections to heavenly things and seals him, as an heir of the kingdom, to the day of redemption. Such are the privileges of God’s adopted sons, in the granting of which grace reigns.

E. Contrast

What a mercy might we esteem it not to be ashamed before the God of heaven! What a favor to obtain the least indulgent regard from the King eternal! What an honor to be admitted into His family, to occupy the place and to bear the character of His most common servant! But

- to be the adopted children of Him Who is the fountain of all bliss,

⁵ “**joint-heirs of Christ**” – So it is literally; and so Montanus, Beza, Castalio, and many others render the passage.—*Booth*

⁶ **earnest** – portion of something promised given as a pledge of what will be given in greater abundance afterward.

- to be the espoused bride of Him Who is the Sovereign of all worlds,
 - to have Him for our everlasting Father Who is the One Who forms all things,
 - to have Him for our Husband Who is the object of angelic worship
- these are blessings divinely rich indeed!

Sinful mortals may justly say “to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (Job 17:14). It is an astonishing, delightful, transporting thought that these should be permitted to say to the infinite God, “You are our portion. All that You have and all that You are are ours, in order to render us completely happy and eternally blessed.” These are blessings of which none greater can be conceived; none more glorious can be enjoyed.

Let the noblemen of the earth and the sons of the mighty boast of their high birth and large revenues, their pompous titles and splendid courts, their delicate fare and costly adorning. Still, the poorest peasant that believes in Christ is incomparably superior to them all. They may shine in silk and embroidery, or glitter in gold and jewels. Their names may be adorned with the highest compliments that men can bestow, while a profusion of worldly riches is poured into their lap. But yet they must soon “lie down alike in the dust,” on a level with the most common of mortals. The “worms shall [quickly] cover them,” and their memory “shall rot” (Job 21:26; Pro 10:7).

But your name, O weakest of Christians, your new name is everlasting! However neglected or despised among men, it shall stand forever fair in the book of life. Though you are not distinguished as a person of eminence while you proceed on your pilgrimage, and receive not the acclamations of the people, but walk in the valley of life, yet you are high in the estimation of heaven and have the greatest honors! Your praise is not of men, but of God. He knows the way that you take and commands the angels to consider you as the object of their regard.

Though you cannot boast of illustrious ancestors or of noble blood; yet, being born from above, the blood-royal of heaven runs in your veins. Though not a favorite of your earthly government, yet like a prince you have power with the God of Israel. Though ever so poor as to this world, the unsearchable riches of Christ are

all your own. Though you have not a numerous train of attendants, and though your mansion be a cobwebbed cottage, yet the holy angels are your guard and minister to your good. The God of glory not only condescends to come under your lowly roof, but even to dwell with you!

Yours is the honorable character. Yours is the happy state. This is happiness that all the wealth of the Indies cannot procure. This is honor that all the crowned heads in the world cannot confer. The Lord of hosts has purposed to stain the pride of all other glory, but this honor shall never be laid in the dust.⁷

What a shadow it casts on every secular distinction when forced to feel how very fleeting it is! How encouraging to reflect on the durable and exalted happiness of the sons of God! Christianity! You ennoble the human mind and make it really great. Grace! You raise the poor from the dunghill and the needy out of the dust. You number them among the princes of heaven and seat them on thrones of glory.

F. Exhortation

And now, reader, what is your character? You, very probably, call yourself a Christian. If so in reality, you are a child of God and an adopted heir of immortal glory.

Do you know then, by experience, what are the privileges attendant on such a state and connected with such a character? If not, you bear the name in vain. So far from being a Christian, you are—How shall I speak it? Will you believe it? Can pride forgive it?—you are an enemy to God and a child of the devil! For these two characters, the children of God and the seed of the serpent, include all mankind. Consider, then, where to classify yourself and what is your proper name.

Are you a believer? A child of God by adoption and an heir of eternal riches? Then be careful to act agreeably to your high character and exalted privileges. Let the children of this world satisfy their little minds and be captivated by the low enjoyments and perishing vanities of the present state. But you should disdain to act upon their principles or to be governed by their maxims. You

⁷ From William McEwen (1735-1762), *A Select Set of Essays, Doctrinal and Practical*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: John Gray & Gavin Alston, 1767), 309-312. Scottish secessionist, born at Perth, studied divinity under Ebenezer Erskine and James Fisher; known as an excellent writer and preacher.

should be far from desiring the riches of the world, which engross the cares of the covetous; its honors, which are so earnestly pursued by the ambitious; and its various pleasures, in which the sensualist delights. Why should you be discontented at the lack of that which, though enjoyed in all its fullness, could not make you happy?

Equally far should you be from performing religious duties on the same principles and with the same views as the legal moralist and selfish Pharisee—which generally are either to obtain the applause of men or their own acceptance with God. Performing religion in order to get the applause of men is the most abominable hypocrisy in the sight of Him Who searches the heart, and is abhorrent to every honorable mind. Performing religion to get acceptance with God is a criminal usurpation of the office of Christ, and the highest dishonor to His undertaking. For it proceeds on a supposition that the work of the Lord is either not perfect in itself, or not free for the sinner. The former basely reflects on His power or faithfulness, and the latter on His grace. Both of these are equally far from honoring the adored Redeemer under His cheering and sacred character, *Jesus*. The children of light should act from the most generous motives and for the highest end. Love to their heavenly Father and gratitude to the bleeding Savior should ever be the fruitful source of their obedience. And the glory of God should be the exalted end.

Are you an heir of the kingdom? You should be careful to preserve a steady conduct in the church of God and in the world. Not only to be zealous for your Father's honor—by fits and starts as we commonly say—but also to maintain a uniform behavior through the whole of your conduct. Endeavor to make it appear that you are a diligent servant of God, as well as a dignified son. Your practice should be, as much as possible, agreeable to your holy profession and your glorious hope.

Remember that, like your gracious Father and loving Husband, your glorious relatives and bright inheritance are all in heaven: there should be also your heart and your conduct. For though you are an heir of a kingdom, it is not of this world. And though you are *in* this world, you are not *of* the world. Nor will you have any reason to be surprised or ashamed if the world should hate you (Joh 17:14; 15:9; 1Jo 3:13).

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest [grave or revered], whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phi 4:8).

So the children of God undoubtedly ought, above all others, to think on these things.

No man can free himself from the odious charge of being a dishonor to Christ, and a reproach to his Christian profession, if he lives under the dominion of sin and is a servant of Satan. Whatever speculative knowledge such a person may have of the doctrine of grace, or whatever his professions of love to it may be, he is destitute of the faith of the gospel and an enemy to the cross of Christ. He is a stumbling block in the way of young converts. Leaving the world in this condition, he will feel severer vengeance to all eternity as he falls under double damnation.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR SANCTIFICATION

*“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,
that we may obtain mercy, and find grace
to help in time of need.”*

—Hebrews 4:16

A. A Main Part of Salvation

Having treated upon the relational change that takes place in the state of God's people in justification and adoption, I now proceed to consider that real inner change which is begun in sanctification¹ and made perfect in glory. This real change is absolutely necessary. For though Christ is proclaimed in the gospel as entirely free for the sinner, and though we are considered as ungodly when the obedience of the righteous Jesus is imputed to us for our justification before God, yet before we can enter the mansions of immortal purity, we must be *sanctified*.

Christ, indeed, finds His people entirely without holiness and without any desire after it—but He does not leave them in that state. He produces in them a sincere love to God and a real pleasure in His ways. Hence they are called “an holy nation” (1Pe 2:9). Holiness is the health of the soul and the beauty of a rational nature. It is the brightest ornament of the church of God and essential to true blessedness. Therefore, in this treatise on reigning grace, it must by no means be overlooked, for we may assure ourselves that grace reigns in it.

The vast importance of sanctification and the rank it holds in the age of grace appear from the following. It is the end of our eternal *election*—a central promise and a distinguished blessing of the Covenant of Grace. It is a precious fruit of *redemption* by the blood of Jesus and the design of God in *regeneration*. It is the primary intention of *justification*, the scope of *adoption*, and absolute-

¹ See FGB 215, *Sanctification*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ly necessary to *glorification*. In the sanctification of a sinner, therefore, all the divine operations respecting that most glorious of all works, redemption, are united in their great design.

Sanctification, therefore, may be justly considered a main part of our salvation, and is much more properly so termed than a condition of it. For to be delivered from that bondage to sin and Satan under which we all naturally lie, and to be renewed after the image of God, must certainly be esteemed a great deliverance and a valuable blessing. Now, in the enjoyment of that deliverance, and in the participation of this blessing, consist the very essence of sanctification. Hence the word is used to signify *that work of divine grace by which those who are called and justified are renewed after the image of God*. The effect of this glorious work is true holiness, which is a conformity to the moral perfections of the Deity—in other words, love to God and delight in Him as the chief good.

B. Justification and Sanctification

“The end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart” (1Ti 1:5). To love the Supreme Being from a pure heart is directly contrary to the bias of corrupt nature. For as natural depravity consists in our aversion to God, which manifests itself in ten thousand various ways, so the essence of true holiness consists in love to God. This heavenly affection is the fruitful source of all obedience to Him and of all delight in Him, both here and hereafter. Nor is it only the true source of all our obedience, for it is also the sum and perfection of holiness. This is because all acceptable duties naturally flow from love to God—they are not anything else but the necessary expressions of that divine principle.

Justification and sanctification are both blessings of grace, and they are absolutely inseparable. Yet they are so clearly distinct that there is in various respects a wide difference between them. This distinction may be thus expressed:

Justification

- considers the person in a legal sense,
- is a single act of grace,
- terminates in a relative change: freedom from punishment and a right to life.

Sanctification

- regards him in a physical sense,
- is a continued work of grace,

- terminates in a real change as to the quality both of habits and actions.

The former is by a righteousness outside of us;

the latter is by holiness wrought in us.

The former precedes as a cause;

the latter follows as an effect.

Justification is by Christ as a priest and regards the guilt of sin;

sanctification is by Him as a king and regards the dominion of sin.

The former annuls sin's damning power;

the latter its reigning power.

Justification is instantaneous and complete in all its real subjects;

but sanctification is progressive and perfecting by degrees.

The persons on whom the blessing of sanctification is bestowed are those that are justified and in a state of acceptance with God. For concerning them it is written (and it is the language of reigning grace): "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10). The blessing here designed, the favor here promised, is the love to God and delight in His Law and ways that are implanted in the hearts of all the regenerate. These constantly incline them to obey the whole revealed will of God, so far as they are acquainted with it. Sanctification is a blessing of the New Covenant, and in that gracious constitution it is promised as a choice privilege, not required as an entitling condition.

C. The Role of Works

Those happy souls who possess the invaluable blessing and are delivered from the dominion of sin "are not under the law"—neither seeking justification by it nor liable to its curse—"but under grace" (Rom 6:14). They are completely justified by the free favor of God and live under its powerful influence. This text strongly implies that all who are under the Law as a covenant, or are seeking acceptance with the eternal Judge by their own duties, are under the dominion of sin. This is regardless of what their character may be among men or how high their false claims may be to holiness. And as those that are under the Law have no holiness, they can perform no acceptable obedience. For "they that are in the flesh [that is, in their carnal, unregenerate state] cannot please God" (Rom 8:8). Everyone that is under the Law is condemned by it. And while his person is accursed, his duties cannot be accepted, because a man's person must be accepted with God before his works can be pleasing to Him.

1. *What Makes a Work “Good”*

To set the subject in a clearer light, it may be of use to consider that, in order to constitute a work as truly good, it must be done from a right principle, performed by a right rule, and intended for a right end.

It must be done from a right *principle*, which must be the love of God. The great command of the unchangeable Law is, “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart” (Deu 6:5). Whatever work is done from any other principle, however it may be applauded by men, is not acceptable in the sight of Him Who searches the heart. For by Him, principles as well as “actions are weighed” (1Sa 2:3).

It must be performed by a right *rule*, which must be the revealed will of God. His will is the rule of righteousness. The moral Law in particular is the rule of our obedience.² It is a complete system of duty; and, considered as moral, it is unchangeably the rule of our conduct. However chargeable therefore any work may be to him that performs it, or however diligent he may be in its performance, yet, if it be nowhere commanded by the authority of heaven, it stands condemned by that divine query, “Who hath required this at your hand?” (Isa 1:12).

In their conduct, the dupes of superstition,³ both ancient and modern, have generally pretended that the love of God is the principle for their good works and the glory of God is their end. However, if the conduct is nowhere enjoined in our only rule of faith and practice (the holy Scriptures), it is no better than “reprobate silver” and will certainly be rejected of God (Jer 6:30). So that, however highly the performer may please himself by the deed or gratify his own pride, he cannot be commended for his obedience. For where there is no command, explicit or implied, there can be no obedience, and, consequently, no good work.

It must be intended for a right *end*, which is the glory of the Supreme Being. “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” is the absolute command of the Most High (1Co 10:31). And as this is the end for which Jehovah Himself acts in all His works, both of

² See my *Death of Legal Hope, the Life of Evangelical Obedience*, section 7, where this subject is professedly discussed in opposition to the Antinomians.—*Booth* (Available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.)

³ **dupes of superstition** – followers of a religion based on fear or ignorance rather than God’s Word.

providence and grace, so it is the highest end at which we can possibly aim. No man, however, can act for so sublime an end except he who is taught of God and fully persuaded that justification is entirely by grace. And this is in such a sense by grace as to be detached from all works and dependent on no conditions to be performed by him. For until then, he cannot but refer his supposed good actions principally to self and his own acceptance with God.

This is the highest end for which such a person can possibly act, though other and baser ends are often proposed by him. But those works that are truly good and which the Holy Spirit calls “the fruits of righteousness” are to “the glory and praise of God” in the design of their performer as well as in the result (Phi 1:11). Now, an unregenerate man may do those things that are materially good and by a right rule. Yet none that are ignorant of the gospel of divine grace can act from that generous principle and for that exalted end, which are absolutely necessary to constitute a good work.

To confirm the argument and illustrate the point, I would observe that man is a fallen creature, entirely destitute of the holy image and love of God. So far from loving his Maker or delighting in His ways, he is an enemy to Him. The language of an unregenerate man’s heart and conduct is that of those profane wretches in the book of Job, who say to God,

Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? (Job 21:14-15).

I humbly conceive the following regarding the unregenerate man:

- his habitual forgetfulness of God,
- the uneasiness he feels when the thoughts of his Maker and Judge dart into his mind,
- his endeavors to exclude such thoughts as unwelcome intruders,
- his passion for sinful pleasures,
- his love for present enjoyments,
- the enmity he has toward the people of God,
- his aversion to serious, religious, heavenly conversation,
- the treatment with which the gospel meets in his breast, even the gospel of saving grace, that brightest mirror of the divine perfections.

These all are evidences of this humbling truth and fully prove the awful charge. Is not this striking proof that a divine power, an invincible agency, is necessary to regenerate the soul and convert the heart?

2. *Love to God*

Neither the commands of the divine Law, though the strictest and purest imaginable, nor all the vengeance threatened against disobedience to those commands, can work in our hearts the least degree of love to God, the Lawgiver. The nature of things makes it impossible, since we are apostate creatures and under the curse. For the more pure the Law's precepts are, they are so much the more contrary to the bias of corrupted nature. And it is evident that the Law's awful penalties cannot be approved by a person who is liable to its condemning power. Consequently, the divine Lawgiver can have no share in our affections while we continue in this deplorable condition.

Fallen man therefore cannot love God except as He is revealed in a Mediator. He must behold his Maker's glory in the face of Jesus Christ before he can love Him or have the least desire to promote His glory. Now, there is no revelation of the glory of God in Christ but by the gospel, and we cannot behold it but by faith. Therefore, it necessarily follows that no man can sincerely love God or desire to glorify Him while ignorant of the truth. Now, there is the brightest display of all the divine perfections in Jesus Christ as the gospel reveals Him in His glory and beauty. Therefore, through the sacred influence of the Holy Spirit, when sinners behold the person and work of Emmanuel,⁴ they are actually beholding the infinite loveliness and surpassing glory of God.

The gospel is a declaration of that perfect forgiveness that is with God and of that wonderful salvation which is by Christ—and these are full, free, and everlasting. Therefore, by whomsoever the gospel is believed, peace of conscience and the love of God are in some degree enjoyed. In proportion to the believer's views of the divine glory revealed in Jesus, and his experience of divine love shed abroad in the heart (Rom 5:5), will be his returns of affection and gratitude to God—as an infinitely lovely Being considered in Himself, and as inconceivably gracious to needy, guilty, unworthy creatures.

⁴ **Emmanuel** – Jesus Christ as “God with us” (Mat 1:23).

His language will be, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits?...Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 116:12; 103:1)! Being born from above, he delights "in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22). He is habitually desirous of being more and more conformed to the Law, as it is a transcript of the divine purity and a revelation of the divine will. Now he is furnished with that generous principle of action: love to God.

D. Dead to the Law

1. How "Dead to the Law"

The obedience he now performs, and that which God accepts, is not the service of a mere mercenary, which is performed in order to gain a title to life as a reward for his work. His obedience is much less that of a slave, who is driven to it by the goad of terror. Rather, it is the obedience of a child or a spouse; of one who regards the divine commands as coming from a father or from a husband. Being dead to the law, he lives unto God (Gal 2:19).

I said, being "dead to the law." This is the case of none but those that are poor in spirit and have received the atonement in the blood of Christ. It is the case only of those who rely on His work alone as completely sufficient to procure their acceptance with God, and as perfectly satisfying an awakened conscience. So says the apostle:

Ye...are become dead to the law by the body of Christ...We are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held (Rom 7:4, 6).

In these remarkable words, the believer is described as being dead to the Law and the Law as dead to him. This signifies that the Law has no power over a believer to exact obedience as the condition of life or to threaten vengeance against him in case of disobedience. The Law has no more power for this than a deceased husband has to demand obedience from a living wife or, on account of disobedience, to threaten her with punishment. It signifies that the real Christian, being dead to the Law, has no more expectation of justification by his own obedience to it than a living wife has of assistance from a dead husband. And it signifies that, as she can have no expectation of receiving any benefit from him (he being dead), so she cannot rationally have any fears of suffering evil at his hand.

The Law *as a covenant* ceases to have any demands on “them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Yet, *as a rule of conduct* and as in the hand of Christ, it is of great utility to believers and to the most advanced saint. Nor, thus considered, is it possible that it should be deprived of its authority or lose its use. For it is no other than the rule of that obedience which the nature of God and man, and the relation between them, render necessary. To imagine the Law abolished in this respect [as a rule] is to suppose that relation to cease which has always existed and cannot but continue to exist: the relation between the great Sovereign and His dependent creatures who are the subjects of His moral government.

Nor, thus considered [as a rule], are its commands burdensome or its yoke galling to the real Christian (Mat 11:29-30). He approves of it; he “delight[s] in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). For as a friend and a guide, it points out the way in which he is to manifest his thankfulness to God for all His favors. The new disposition he received from his Law-fulfiller in regeneration inclines him to pay the Law the most sincere and uninterrupted regards. The obedience he now performs is in “newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).

2. Establish the Law

Should any pretenders to holiness (who are the genuine offspring of the ancient Pharisees) object that we “make void the law through faith,” our answer is ready: “God forbid”! Yea, rather, “we establish the law” (Rom 3:31), both by the doctrine and principle of faith.

By the doctrine of faith: because we teach that there is no salvation for any of the children of men without a perfect fulfilment of all [the Law’s] righteous demands. This, though impossible to a fallen, enfeebled creature, was exactly performed by Messiah, the Surety. This, when placed to the account of a believing sinner, renders him completely righteous.

Thus the Law, so far from being made void, is honored and magnified to the highest degree. The obedience performed to the preceptive part of the Law by a divine Redeemer, and the sufferings of an incarnate God on the cross in conformity to its penal sanction, more highly honor the Law than all the obedience that an absolutely innocent race of creatures could ever have yielded. They honor the Law more than all the sufferings that the many millions of the damned can endure to eternity.

By the *principle* of faith. Faith purifies the heart from an evil conscience (Heb 10:22) through the application of atoning blood. In the same way, faith works by love—love to God, His people, and His cause—in some degree conformable to the Law as the rule of righteousness. Hence it is that those who believe are said to be “sanctified by [that] faith that is in” Jesus (Act 26:18). If anyone therefore, pretends to believe in Christ, to love His name, and to enjoy communion with Him, who does not pay a habitual regard to His commands, then he is “a liar, and the truth is not him” (1Jo 2:4). For our Lord says, “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (Joh 14:23). He informs us also that the reason why anyone “keepeth not my sayings,” is because he “loveth me not” (Joh 14:24), whatever he may profess to the contrary. That is no love which is not productive of obedience; nor is that worthy the name of obedience which springs not from love. Pretensions to love, without obedience, are glaring hypocrisy; and obedience, without love, is mere slavery.

The great and heavenly blessing of sanctification is the fruit of our union with Christ. In virtue of that union which subsists between Christ as the head and the church as His mystical body, the chosen of God become subjects of regenerating grace and are possessed of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit of truth and the Word of grace that any sinner is or can be sanctified, according to those emphatic and instructive words: “Without me,” without vital union with Me, similar to that of a living branch to a flourishing vine, “ye can do nothing” that is truly good and acceptable in the sight of God (Joh 15:5). As it is written, “Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22). Hence we read of the “sanctification of the Spirit,” of the “true holiness” or holiness of truth, and of being “sanctified through the truth” (1Pe 1:2; 2Th 2:13; Eph 4:24; Joh 17:19).

3. *The Means: Gospel Truth*

By comparing these passages together, it is evident that the divine Spirit employs evangelical truth as the appointed instrument in producing holiness in the heart and life of a Christian. This holiness is included in the blessing and is signified by the term *sanctification*. For this reason, our great Intercessor prays, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,” and asserts, “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (Joh 17:17; 15:3).

The truth of the gospel is the mirror in which we behold the gracious designs of God respecting us: the all-sufficiency of Christ and His finished work wrought out for the guilty. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Co 3:18). After his familiar converse with Jehovah, the countenance of Moses shone with such dazzling radiance that the chosen tribes could not steadily behold it. In the same way, the believer, viewing the King of glory in His matchless beauty, derives a likeness to the glorious object of his views and his love. The more frequently he beholds Him, the more fully he knows His perfections, of which His holiness is the ornament. The more he knows them, the more ardently he loves them. The more he loves them, the more he desires a conformity to them, for love aspires after a likeness to the beloved. The more he loves the transcendently amiable God, the more frequently, attentively, and delightfully will he behold Him. Thus he obtains, by every fresh view, a new feature of Jehovah's glorious image.⁵

Hence it appears that our advances in true holiness will always keep pace with our views of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In other words, a life of holiness to the honor of Christ, as our King and our God, will always bear an exact proportion to a life of faith upon Him as our Surety and our Savior.

As the Word of grace is the proper warrant and ground of faith, the more clear our conceptions are concerning its truth and certainty, the more firmly shall we confide in it. Consequently, the fruits of holiness will more abundantly adorn our conduct. For the gospel "bringeth forth fruit" in all who know it in truth (Col 1:6). And it is by the "exceeding great and precious promises" contained in it that we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4).

Hence the gospel is compared, by an infallible Author, to a mold into which melted metals are cast, from which they receive their form and take their impression. "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [into which ye were] delivered" (Rom 6:17).⁶ The gospel of peace is the doctrine here designed, and it is according to godliness. In the same way, those that receive impressions from it must, in proportion to its heavenly influence, have their character and

⁵ Witsius, *Econ. Fed.* 1. iii. c. xii, section 1, 11.

⁶ So the original reads.—*Booth*

conduct conformed to the Law of God as the rule of righteousness. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the truth becomes effectual to produce that purity of heart which is the health of the soul and those good works which are the only ornament of a Christian profession.

As all the ordinances of grace are calculated to increase our knowledge and love of Christ, so they are adapted to promote the work of sanctification. Therefore, whether they be those of personal or family devotion, whether public or private, they ought by all means to be conscientiously observed by all who profess themselves as the disciples of the Holy Jesus. All that attend upon them in faith shall certainly find them the happy means of promoting their knowledge of the true God, their growth in grace, and their advancement in real holiness.

E. Motives to Sanctification

We may now consider the principal motives that are used in the book of God to stir up the minds of believers to seek a larger enjoyment of sanctification and to abound in every good work. There are a variety of motives, but all evangelical.⁷ Believers are exhorted to obedience from the consideration of their distinguishing characteristics as “the elect of God” and “a peculiar people” (Col 3:12-14; 1Pe 2:9).

1. Redeeming Love

a. Christ's love

The purchase that Christ has made of His chosen and the unequalled price that He paid for their deliverance afford a charming and constraining motive to be holy in all manner of conduct. The price with which they were bought is nothing less than the infinitely precious blood of Jesus, our incarnate God. Therefore, a remembrance of it should kindle in their hearts the most fervent glow of heavenly gratitude and elevate them to a pitch of angelic devotion.

This should be so, even more especially, when they reflect on that total slavery and miserable state in which they were viewed by the Lord Redeemer when He undertook their cause and gave His very life a ransom for them. In the sufferings of Christ on the cross, we behold His tenderest compassion to perishing souls, His intense regard to the rights of His Father's violated Law, and the concern He had for the honor of His divine government. These are consid-

⁷ **evangelical** – based on or flowing from the truth of the gospel.

erations most happily calculated to mortify our lusts and quicken our graces, to make us loathe sin and love the Law as being “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12).

Here we see the tenderest compassion to our perishing souls expressed in a way superior to all the power of language, superior to all finite conception. He expressed this compassion in tears and cries, in groans and blood. In this, be astonished, ye inhabitants of the heavenly world, while all the redeemed of the Lord are transported with holy wonder and filled with adoring gratitude! Consider Him, O believer, loaded with reproaches by His enemies, deserted by His friends, and forsaken even by His God (Mat 27:46). Consider Him in these circumstances of unparalleled woe and see whether it will not fire your heart with holy zeal, and arm your hands with a heavenly resolution to crucify every lust, to mortify every vile affection.

Did Hannibal,⁸ by the command of his father, swear at the altar to maintain an irreconcilable enmity against the Romans? So should the Christian, when standing as it were at the foot of the cross and beholding the sufferings of His dying Savior, swear to maintain a perpetual opposition against every lust and every sin. Here he will form his firmest resolves to enter into no alliance, to admit of no truce, with those enemies of his soul and murderers of his Lord. Such a consideration, set home by the blessed Spirit, will be more effective than a thousand arguments to persuade, more than a thousand incentives to prompt to cheerful obedience. So struck was Paul with a view of this astonishing love and the righteous claim that Jesus has to every heart, that he accounted a lack of love to Him the highest level of ingratitude and wickedness. He boldly pronounced the state of such to be accursed to the last degree (1Co 16:22).

Here we behold the Redeemer’s love to His Father’s Law and the great regard that He had to the honor of His divine government. He was determined that the rebels should be saved from deserved destruction. Yet, rather than the least reflection should ever be cast on the violated Law that its precepts were unreasonable or its penalty cruel, He Himself would obey—He Himself would bleed. By this procedure He declared, in the most emphatic man-

⁸ **Hannibal** (247-183 BC) – military commander of Carthage, considered one of the greatest commanders in history. One of his most famous achievements was marching an army from Iberia over the Alps into Italy.

ner, that the Law in its precepts is entirely holy and good; and in its penalties, perfectly just. At the same time, He demonstrated how justly those who die under its curse are punished with everlasting destruction.

b. Our response

Reflect upon this, believer, and see whether it will not prove a noble incentive to labor and strive after a more perfect conformity to the holy precepts of God's Word in all your thoughts, words, and actions—in all that you are and in all that you do. The Lord out of love to your soul and in honor to the Law, refused not to die the most infamous death for your salvation. Therefore, you must see that you are laid under the strongest obligations to love His name and reverence the Law, to confide in His atonement and imitate His example.

When the Christian considers that his whole person is the object of redeeming love and the purchase of Immanuel's blood; when he reflects that the end intended by this purchase is that he should "serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness...all the days of [his] life" (Luk 1:74-75); and that he should "live...unto him which died for [him], and rose again" (2Co 5:15)—beholding such a deliverance by such stupendous means and for such a glorious end, he will exclaim with Ezra (on an infinitely less important occasion), "Seeing that thou our God...hast given us such deliverance as this; Should we again break thy commandments?" (Ezr 9:13-14).

The heart that is not moved by such considerations as these to love the Redeemer and to glorify His name is harder than stone and colder than ice. It is entirely destitute of every grateful feeling. Were believers more fully acquainted with the love of a dying Savior and the infinite effectiveness of His atoning blood, then their dependence on Him would be more steady and their love to Him more fervent. Were this the case,

- how patient they would be under all their afflictions,
- how thankful in all their enjoyments,
- how ardent in all their devotions,
- how holy in all their conversation,
- how useful in all their behavior;
- yea, how peaceful, how joyful in the prospect of death and a future world!

Then would their lives be happy indeed. The purchase made by the Holy One of God is therefore a noble, a constraining motive to holiness of life.

2. *Other Motives*

The *calling* of the believer is another consideration used to motivate to holiness of life. "As he which hath *called* you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1Pe 1:15). The Christian should often meditate on the nature and excellence of his high, holy, heavenly calling. Being called by grace, he is translated "out of darkness into...marvellous light," and from under "the power of darkness...into the kingdom of his dear Son" (1Pe 2:9; Col 1:13). Out of a state of wrath and of alienation *from* God, he is brought into a state of peace and of communion *with* Him. Now, the very end of his calling is that he might be holy, that he might show forth the praises of his infinite Benefactor here below and finally attain His glory in the upper world. How great the blessing itself! How gracious, how glorious the design of God in bestowing it! The remembrance of this must necessarily have a tendency to holiness in every heart that is in the least acquainted with it.

The *mercies* of God in general, and more particularly that special mercy manifested in the free pardon of all their sins, and the everlasting justification of their persons, constitute the noblest attractant to the heart, a most powerful attractant to draw forth all the powers of their souls in a way of cheerful obedience to the ever-merciful God (Rom 12:1). Far from being an incentive to vice, the forgiveness that is with our Sovereign and the manifestation of it cause them to fear and reverence, to love and adore Him.

The state of believers as *not being "under the law"* is considered and applied to the same excellent purpose: "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom 6:14). On what is this positive assertion grounded? Is it because they are bound to obedience on pain of incurring the curse of a righteous Law? Or on the dreadful peril of suffering eternal ruin? Far from it! The reason assigned, which ought ever to be remembered, is "For ye are not under the law, but under grace" (6:14b). Here grace is described as having dominion. Here grace reigns! This consideration the apostle applies as a powerful motive to holy obedience.

The *filial relation* in which believers stand to God and their hope of life eternal constitute another motive to answer the same important end (Eph 5:1; Phi 2:15). The inspired writers frequently

take notice of that sublime relation to remind them of the dignity and privileges attending it, and to promote a suitable conduct. And surely, the children of God should act from nobler principles and have more elevated views than the slaves of sensuality and the servants of sin. A consideration of their heavenly birth, their honorable character, and infinite inheritance must animate them to walk appropriately as the citizens of the New Jerusalem and those who expect an eternal crown.

The *indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, together with the safety and comfort of believers (which in various respects arise from it), are considered and urged for their advancement in holiness (1Co 3:16-17). The absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's abiding presence with the people of God is no small inducement to avoid grieving the sacred Inhabitant by a loose and careless lifestyle (Eph 4:30).

The *promises* all "are yea, and in [Christ] Amen" (2Co 1:20). These "exceeding great and precious promises" relate both to this world and that which is to come (2Pe 1:4). These promises are a further motive to induce the children of God to press forward after all holiness of heart and life (2Co 7:1). The apostle Peter, as before observed, considering their tendency and design, affirms that it is by them—by their influence on the soul—that we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4b). These glorious promises are as great as the heart of man can conceive, as great as Jehovah Himself can make.

3. *Chastening*

The consideration of *chastisements* is another motive to stir up God's children to follow after holiness, and to make them watchful against the attacks of temptation (Psa 89:30-32). The Lord, as a father, corrects His children when they are remiss in their duty and negligent in the practice of good works. Now, I said that the Lord as a father chastises, not punishes, for it is the property and business of a tender father to correct his children when disobedient. But it is a property of a judge and an executioner to pronounce a person worthy of punishment and to inflict it—which, in the proper sense of punishment, is no part of God's conduct toward the heirs of glory.

When their heavenly Father chastises them, it is not merely to demonstrate His own sovereignty, but to correct for faults committed—and that not in wrath, but in love. Yea, He does it *because* He loves them, in order to make them "partakers of his holiness," and

that they may “not be condemned with the world” (Heb 12:5-11; 1Co 11:32). This is the design of God in chastising His people, and the severest chastisements are a fruit of His paternal care. Though the means are grievous, yet they are beneficial—and the end is glorious. Correct them He will, but not disinherit them. He will make them sting for their folly, but He will not abandon them to ruin. This is according to the declaration,

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail (Psa 89:30-33).

As the Lord corrects His children when disobedient, so He reveals more of His love to them when they *walk steadily* in the paths of duty. Those who maintain the closest communion with Him and most punctually obey His commands have reason to expect richer displays of His love. They can expect to live more under the smiles of His countenance and, consequently, to be more joyful in their pilgrimage here on earth because they have larger foretastes of future glory. While His people that backslide more frequently and are not as careful to perform His will come more often under His correcting hand. Their comfortable communion with Him is more interrupted.

This motive of chastening, it must be confessed, is of a less generous kind than those before mentioned; notwithstanding, in the present imperfect state, it has its use. Nor is it destitute of holy love. The redeemed of the Lord certainly fear the frowns of their Father’s face and the lashes of His correcting rod. Yet they do not live under the slavish apprehensions of eternal wrath, nor are they kept in the way of duty by the tormenting fears of that awful punishment. Though they may justly expect more abundant displays of their Father’s love when they walk in obedience to Him, yet they do not obey to obtain life or to gain a right of inheritance. No, they are already heirs. They are not only servants, but sons. Thus they have a familial affection for Him Who has begotten them to a lively hope.

Therefore, though the motive of chastening is not so free, pure, and noble as those before mentioned (which are taken from blessings already conferred), yet it reflects love to God and has a regard to His glory. The obedience performed under its influence

is of a different kind from all the duties of the most zealous moralist, who is unacquainted with salvation by grace. It must, however, be granted that the more pure our views are of the glory of God, the more perfect is our obedience, and the more acceptable it is in the sight of our heavenly Father.

Yet, far be it that we should indulge the thought of our duties (when performed to the utmost of our ability) as being accepted of God for their own sake! The acceptance with which they meet at the hand of God is not because they are perfect or we worthy, but because of our union with Christ and the justification of our persons in Him. These duties, being the fruits of holiness, are produced in virtue of our union with Him, are considered as evidences of that union, and are accepted through Him as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. They are accepted, not to the justification of our persons, but as a testimony of our love and gratitude, and of our concern for the glory of God.

I am far from supposing that these are all the motives to obedience with which the Scriptures furnish believers, and which they are bound to keep in their view. But I think these are some of the main ones. If, therefore, these have their proper influence upon the saints, they will be neither “barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:8).

F. Summary

It is evident from the foregoing paragraphs that sanctification is an important part of that salvation and blessedness which are promised and provided to the people of God. Let the reader, therefore, be careful to look upon it and seek after it under its true character. Be diligent in the pursuit of holiness, not as the condition of your justification, but as the brightest ornament of a rational nature, as the image of the blessed God, and as that by which you bring the highest honor to His name.

In this, the perfection of your intellectual powers consists, and everlasting glory is its genuine result. The children of God should always remember that holiness and good works give them no title to life, for that title is the royal right of divine grace, through the Mediator’s work. Yet they must also remember that a higher and still higher degree of holiness is to be sought with all persistence. While they walk in Christ, Who is the “way” (Joh 14:6), their proper business and great blessing is to evidence, by holiness and good works, that they are in Him—and so free from all condemnation.

It also is true that no obedience is acceptable to God except it proceeds from a principle of *love to His name* and is performed with a view to *His glory*. It is also true that no man possesses that heavenly principle or is capable of acting for that exalted end but the true believer, the justified person. Therefore, it must be very absurd, and entirely useless, to exhort sinners to do any good work in order to gain an interest in Christ—or as preparation for justification by Him. For an interest in Christ is not acquired by the sinner but freely bestowed by God. It is a primary fruit of eternal, distinguishing love.

Nor are the best works of an unbeliever anything other than splendid faults: neither spiritually good in themselves, nor acceptable to Him that searches the heart. Until we receive the atonement that is by Christ, and the forgiveness that is from Jehovah, all our duties arise from a slavish principle and are directed to a selfish end. Dr. Owen said,

All that you do without this, however it may please your minds or ease your consciences, is not at all accepted with God...You run, it may be, earnestly; but you run out of the way. You strive, but not lawfully, and shall never receive the crown. True gospel obedience is the fruit of the faith of forgiveness. Whatever you do without it is but a building without a foundation, a castle in the air. You may see the order of gospel obedience in Ephesians 2:7-10. The foundation must be laid in grace, riches of grace by Christ, in the free pardon and forgiveness of sin. From hence must the works of obedience proceed, if you would have them to be of God's appointment or find acceptance with Him.⁹

It is the gospel of reigning grace that, under the agency of the divine Spirit, produces true holiness in the heart and furnishes the Christian with such excellent motives to abound in obedience. Therefore, this glorious truth is absolutely necessary in order to reform the world. It is necessary to be known, known in experience, so that we may please God and answer any valuable purpose in a holy way of life. For only the gospel can furnish us with such principles and motives to obedience that will cause us to take delight in such obedience. When we know the "truth [as it] is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21), then, and not till then, "the way[s] of wisdom" will be "ways of pleasantness" (Pro 4:11; 3:17). Then "faith" will work "by love" to God and our neighbor (Gal 5:6).

⁹ John Owen, *An Exposition upon Psalm 130*, in *Works*, Vol. 6, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 533-534.

Let it be your concern, believer, to keep in view the many motivations for holiness that abound in the book of God and that it urges upon you. Always consider it as your indispensable duty and proper business to glorify God by a holy, heavenly, useful way of life. Remember, “ye are not your own...for ye are bought with a price” (1Co 6:19-20)—your whole person is the Lord’s. Nothing is a more powerful persuasive to holiness than a consideration of the love of Christ and the glory of God, which are manifested in the atonement made on the cross. Let that be the subject of your frequent meditation. For the cross and the work finished upon it exhibit the brightest view of the divine perfections.

Endeavor, then, to obtain clearer views of Jehovah’s glory, and of your reconciliation to Him by Jesus Christ. Then you will have a greater abhorrence of all sin and be more humbled in your own eyes. Contemplate the bitter sufferings that Jesus underwent not only for your good, but in your stead; then you will be pained at the heart on account of your past transgressions and present corruptions (Zec 12:10).

The more you become acquainted with the divine love that was manifested in the redemption of your soul from the pit of destruction, the more it will constrain¹⁰ you to love, to adore, and to glorify the Lord Redeemer (2Co 5:14). The love of God is displayed in Christ, proclaimed in the gospel, and experienced by faith. As that love first fixes our affections on Him, so the more we view it, the more will our love be heightened. And as love to God is the only principle of true obedience, the more it is heightened, the more will it influence our minds and conduct in all respects. Grace provides, reveals, and applies the blessings of salvation. That grace is the master who teaches and the motive that persuades. It is the reigning sovereign that sweetly constrains a believer to deny himself and walk in the ways of holiness (Ti 2:11-12).

¹⁰ **constrain** – provide motivation for some activity; urge on; impel.

THE NECESSITY AND USEFULNESS OF HOLINESS AND GOOD WORKS

A. Regeneration

We have considered the nature of sanctification, the character and state of those happy souls who enjoy that blessing, the way in which they come to possess it, and the many compelling motives to engage believers in the pursuit of holiness¹ and practice of true virtue. I shall now proceed to show the necessity of holiness, and the various important purposes which are answered by the performance of good works.

Love to God, being by regeneration implanted in the heart of a sinner, he is fitted for spiritual communion with the great Object of all religious worship, in his ordinances and with his people in the church below. And, he is fitted for a more perfect communion with God in the world of glory. True happiness, both in time and in eternity, consists in this fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Believers *are* blessed with this fellowship in the present state, and they *will be* blessed with that more intimate fellowship with God that is enjoyed by the spirits of “just men made perfect” above (Heb 12:23).

But the unsanctified soul is absolutely incapable of such refined pleasures. There must be a spiritual discernment and a heavenly taste before things of this kind can be either enjoyed or desired. For while a man continues in his natural state (at enmity with God and in love with sin), he neither has nor can have any real pleasure in approaching his Maker. Two cannot walk “together, except they be agreed” (Amo 3:3). Hence it is that our Lord says, “Except a man be born again, he *cannot* see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). With this the apostle agrees when he asserts that without holiness “no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

The holiness that the Scripture so expressly requires in order to the enjoyment of God is possessed by everyone who is born from

¹ See *Holiness* by J.C. Ryle (1816-1900); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

above and in a justified state—for every person regenerated by grace loves God. Love to God being the grand principle of holiness, and the source of all acceptable obedience, none can enjoy it and not possess real holiness in some degree. Nay, we may venture to assert that whoever loves the infinitely amiable God already has all that holiness, in principle, which shall flourish and adorn his future conduct, and that shall shine in him to all eternity. Such a one, therefore, must not only have a title to heaven, but also be in a state of preparation for it.

B. Sinless Perfection

Some professing Christians who hold the notion of “sinless perfection,” and think of themselves as the best proponents of holiness, talk indeed of persons being in a regenerate and justified state while they are yet unsanctified. Consequently, they are quite incapable of having communion with God in His ordinances here. And they are entirely unfit for the sublime enjoyments of the heavenly world hereafter. Therefore, if they leave the present state in such a situation, everlasting misery must be their portion.

The doctrine of sinless perfection *in this life* boldly opposes the testimony of God and is contrary to all Christian experience. In the same way, this imagination of *people being regenerate and justified and yet unsanctified* is equally false and disquieting. For either they mean the same things by the terms *regenerate* and *justified* as does the Scripture, or they do not. If not, what they say is nothing at all to the purpose and therefore unworthy of a moment’s regard, whatever may be their meaning.

But if they intend the same things by these expressions that the Holy Spirit does in the infallible Volume, then it is evident from divine revelation that they labor under a great mistake. For what is intended by the justification of a sinner, but that the eternal Judge pronounces him righteous according to Law and freed from every charge? What is implied in the regeneration of a sinner, but a communication of spiritual life and the restoration of the image of God in man? Now, is it possible

- that a person should be regenerated and justified,
 - that he should stand clear in the eye of the Law,
 - that he be viewed by Omniscience as possessed of spiritual life,
and as bearing his Maker’s image,
- while he is yet unsanctified and quite unfit for glory?

There is no such flaw in the blessing of justification, nor any such imperfection in the state of a regenerate person, as to leave him at such a distance from the eternal inheritance. We are not, in order of time, first renewed by the Spirit of truth and justified by an imputed righteousness, in virtue of which we are entitled to glory, while we yet remain entirely destitute of holiness (that is, a capacity for enjoying eternal bliss), for which we must labor and strive in hope to attain it at some future period. For, being freed from the curse and entitled to blessedness, we are the members of Christ. We are in a new state and live a new life. We possess both a right to glory and a preparation for it at the same time, though not by the same means.

C. Holiness of Conduct

Holiness *of heart* is absolutely necessary to communion with God and to the enjoyment of Him. In the same way, holiness *of conduct*, or an external conformity to the divine revealed will, is highly useful and answers various important purposes in the Christian life. I would now consider the most important of these. By obedience to the commands of God, we evidence the sincerity of our holy profession. By this our faith is declared genuine before men, who have no other way to conclude that it is genuine but by our works. Whosoever pretends to believe in Jesus and is not habitually careful to perform good works, his faith is worthless, barren, dead (Jam 2:20). By good conduct, in which our light shines before men, we edify our brethren, silence opposers, and preserve the gospel from those reproaches that would otherwise be cast upon it as if it were a sensual doctrine.²

Exemplary conduct in professing Christian has often been owned of God and made happily useful to convince the ignorant and remove their prejudices against the truth. The result is to make them impartial inquirers after truth, and frequently of winning them over to an approval of it. By walking in the paths of duty, we express our gratitude to God for His benefits, and also glorify His holy name—which is the great end of all obedience.

The works of faith and labors of love that believers perform will be remembered by Jesus the Judge at the last and great day of accounts. He will especially remember those good works done to the poor, despised members of Christ and for His sake. These will be

² **sensual doctrine** – doctrine that promotes sin.

mentioned at that awesome time as fruits and evidences of their union with Christ and their love to Him. They will distinguish real Christians from the openly wicked and mere formalists, from all who were punctual in the performance of a round of duties that cost them nothing, from all who raised their character among men and never were exposed to shame or suffering—but who were yet exceedingly reluctant to part with their money for the support of the cause of God, or to assist the poor and the persecuted members of Christ.

These are the principal of those “necessary uses” for which good works are to be maintained (Ti 3:14).

D. Holiness Not Part of Justification

1. Not Our Works

It is, notwithstanding, carefully to be observed that neither our external obedience nor inherent holiness constitutes any part of that righteousness by which we are justified. Neither the one nor the other is either the cause or condition of our acceptance with God. For, as before observed, that righteousness by which we are justified must be absolutely perfect. But our personal obedience is greatly defective, even in the best of men and in their most advanced state while in the present life. If God were to enter into judgment with us on the ground of our own holiness or duties, none of us could stand in the awful trial.

Our holiest dispositions would be found far short of that perfection which the Law requires; and our best duties could not answer for themselves, much less atone for our transgressions. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). We have need of a High Priest to “bear the iniquity of [our] holy things” (Exo 28:38). For who among mortals dare say to the omniscient God,

Search and try this or that duty performed by me. You shall not, on the strictest examination, find any defilement cleaving to it, nor any sinful defect attending it! I am willing to risk my soul’s eternal salvation on its absolute perfection, even after such an exact scrutiny is made!

The boldest heart must very much tremble at such a thought. Nor would the most upright dare to make the solemn appeal, or to venture his immortal all on such a foundation.

Paul was the great teacher of the Gentiles. He was a most eminent saint, notwithstanding all his extraordinary gifts—as shown in his virtuous labors, exemplary conduct, and painful sufferings for

the cause of truth and the honor of his divine Master. He utterly disclaimed all pretensions to personal worthiness. When taking a prospect of the awful tribunal, he earnestly desired to “be found in [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law”—consisting in his own holiness and righteous deeds—“but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:9).

2. *Obedience of Christ*

The obedience of Christ, and this only, can support our hope and comfort our hearts when we think of standing before Him Who “is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). The righteousness that was wrought out before we had a being is the only ground of a full discharge before our final Judge. This being so, it is the source of all our comfort and all our joy as to that grand affair.

If any person, therefore, anxiously inquire, How shall I appear before my Maker? the answer is, In the obedience of Christ, which is perfect in itself and entirely free for the guilty. But if the inquiry be, How shall I express my thankfulness to God for His benefits and glorify His name? then the answer evidently is, By living in conformity to His revealed will and by devoting yourself, all that you are and all that you have, to His honor and service. Thus, provision is made in the Covenant of Grace for the believer’s peace and joy by a direct view of the finished work of Christ. Provision also is made for the exercise of every virtue and the performance of every duty, whether it be religious or moral—and all for the noblest end, even the glory of God.

Hence it is clear that though our good works are of no consideration at all in justification or in obtaining a title to life; yet, on many other accounts, good works are highly necessary. It is of the greatest importance to be rightly acquainted with the proper uses of good works. Otherwise, we shall inevitably run into one of those opposite and fatal extremes: Arminian legality or Antinomian licentiousness.³ The former will wound our peace, infringe on the honors of grace, and exalt self. The latter will turn the grace of God into wantonness, harden the conscience, and render us worse than avowed infidels. Therefore, we should be exceedingly careful to

³ **Arminian legality** – the doctrine that good works are necessary as direct agents in order to maintain salvation, leading to a guilty conscience or pride.

Antinomian licentiousness – the belief that, since we are saved by grace, we are free to neglect holiness or continue to live in sin.

distinguish rightly between the foundation of our acceptance with God [in which our good works have no part], and that superstructure of practical godliness [which includes good works] that must be raised upon it.

3. Dr. Owen

Let us once more hear the discerning Dr. Owen. Speaking to this point, he says the following:

Our *foundation* in dealing with God is Christ alone, mere grace, and pardon in Him. Our *building* is in and by holiness and obedience, as the fruits of that faith by which we have received the atonement. Now, there are great mistakes in this matter that bring great entanglements on the souls of men. Some are all their days laying the foundation and are never able to build upon it to any comfort to themselves or usefulness to others. And the reason is because they will be mixing into the foundation the stones that are fit only for the building's structure. They will be bringing their obedience, duties, mortification of sin, and the like unto the foundation. These are precious stones to build with, but unfit to be first laid to bear the whole weight of the building.

The foundation is to be laid, as was said, in mere grace, mercy, and pardon in the blood of Christ. This the soul is to accept and rest in, merely because it is *grace*—without the consideration of anything in the soul itself but that it is sinful and deserving of ruin. This it finds a difficulty in, and would gladly have something of its own to mix with it. It cannot tell how to fix these foundation-stones without some “cement” of its own endeavors and duty. And because these things will not mix, they spend a fruitless labor about it all their days. But if the foundation be of grace, it is not at all of works; for otherwise “grace is no more grace” (Rom 11:6). If anything of our own be mixed with grace in this matter, it utterly destroys the nature of grace—which, if it be not alone, it is not at all.

But does this not tend to promiscuity and fleshly sensuality? Does this not render obedience, holiness, duties, mortification of sin, and good works needless? God forbid (Rom 6:1-2)! Yea, this is the only way to order them aright unto the glory of God. Have we nothing to do but to lay the foundation? [No], all our days we are to build upon it, when it is surely and firmly laid. And these are the means and ways of our edification. This then is the soul to do, who would come to peace and settlement. Let it let go of all former endeavors, if it had been engaged in any of that kind. And let it alone receive, admit of, and adhere to mere grace, mercy, and

pardon, with a full sense that in itself it has nothing for which it should have an interest in them—but that all is of mere grace through Jesus Christ. “Other foundation can no man lay” (1Co 3:11).

Depart not [from this] until this work be well over. Continue an earnest endeavor with your own hearts to submit to this righteousness of God, and to bring your souls into a comfortable persuasion that God, for Christ’s sake, has freely forgiven you all your sins. Stir not hence until this is achieved. If you have been engaged in any other way—that is, to seek for the pardon of sin by some endeavors of your own—it is not unlikely but that you are filled with the fruit of your own doings. It is likely that you go on with all kinds of uncertainties, and without any kind of constant peace. Return then again hither. Bring this foundation work to a blessed result in the blood of Christ; and when that is done, up and be doing [serving God by doing good works to His glory]!⁴

E. Warnings

1. *Hypocrisy*

It is greatly to be feared that the distinction so carefully pointed out in the preceding quotation is but little known or considered even by many who are earnestly concerned in a religious profession. It is undeniably plain that great numbers of professing Christians know nothing in reality concerning Christ. In their conduct, they are more like incarnate devils than real saints. There are many who perform a round of duties very exactly and have a high opinion of their own religious profession. Notwithstanding, they are far from possessing holiness and performing the good works that are essential to the Christian character.

View them in their places of public worship and in the performance of devotional duties: they assume a serious air, as though they were greatly concerned about their everlasting welfare. See them in their families and in the common concerns of life: there they are full of levity, objectionable and loose in their habits. Some of these pretenders to Christianity will also attend that seminary of vice and profaneness, the theater, and other amusements of this licentious age, as far as their circumstances will permit.

You may see them vain and extravagant in dress and show, while their pious neighbors of the same religious community, with

⁴ John Owen, *An Exposition upon Psalm 130*, in *Works*, Vol. 6, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 564-565.

all their industry, are hardly able to acquire decent clothing. Yet these children of carnal pleasure either do not at all regard their distress, or content themselves with saying, “Be ye warmed” (Jam 2:16). They will be lavish at their own tables, while the poor among the people of God are almost starving by their side! Yet such is their love to Christ and His members, that they will think it an instance of great condescension if they concede to visit them and say, “Be ye filled.”

2. Covetousness

a. Sin of covetousness

If these pretenders to godliness be naturally of a more grave and serious disposition, then view them in their trade and business. There you will find them covetous, grasping, and oppressive—making it their chief design to lay up fortunes for their dependents and to raise their families in the world. These, like their forefathers, “for a pretence⁵ make long prayers,” even when—by usury, extortion, and oppression—they “devour widows’ houses...and grind the faces of the poor” (Mat 23:14; Isa 3:15). They lay up in their coffers that which of right belongs to the needy who labor under them—the rust of which shall be a swift witness against them another day, which “shall eat [their] flesh as it were fire” (Jam 5:3).

Is not the church defiled and the gospel dishonored by such hypocritical wretches as these? Such persons—whether more light in their disposition and conduct, or more grave in their personality and behavior—are alike the children of the devil and the slaves of sin. They are on a level, in the sight of God, with the most profane. As to the covetous, those followers of money and wealth, however they may dislike their associates, they stand ranked in the book of God with extortioners and thieves, with drunkards and adulterers. Nay, they are branded with the most detestable character of “idolaters” (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5)!

The sin of covetousness is, I fear, greatly misunderstood and much overlooked by many professors. Were it not, the remark would not be so often made, “Such a person is a good Christian, but a covetous man.” Whereas it might with as much correctness be said, “Such a woman is a virtuous lady, but an infamous prostitute”! For the latter is not more contrary to sound sense than the former is to the positive declarations of God recorded in Scripture.

⁵ **pretence** – false show; pretended reason.

When we hear people commonly talk about covetousness, we are tempted to look upon it as a merely trifling fault. But when we open the volume of heaven, we find it pronounced “idolatry” and considered as a major crime. Jehovah denounces damnation upon the wretch that is guilty of it (1Co 6:9-10; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5; Psa 10:3)!

In what then does this aggravated sin consist? I answer, Covetousness, in the language of inspiration, *is the desire of having more, the desire of obtaining or of increasing in wealth*. Whoever, therefore, is habitually desirous of riches is, in the estimate of heaven, a covetous man—whatever his station in life or profession of religion may be. The language of the covetous heart is that of the horseleach’s daughters, “Give, give” (Pro 30:15). The covetous man is always desirous of more, whether he have little or much.

And, if a professing Christian, he will always find some pretense to hide the iniquity of his idolatrous heart. Such a professor may cover his crime under reasonable pretenses of many kinds. He may imagine himself safe in being a member of some visible church, and free from its censure. However, the time is coming when the mask shall be stripped off. Then it shall be fully known where his affections have been and what god he has served. Then it shall plainly appear whether Jehovah or Mammon⁶ swayed his affections and ruled in his heart. Perhaps there are few sins for the practice of which so many excuses are made, and plausible pretenses urged, as that of covetousness or a love of the world. Consequently, there are few sins against which professors have greater occasion to watch. Therefore, it was not without the greatest reason that our Lord gave the solemn caution to all His followers: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness” (Luk 12:15).

From what is here asserted, none will suppose that I mean to encourage idleness or extravagance. No, far be it! Those who, through indolence, pride, or prodigality, waste their substance and fail in the world, can hardly be too severely censured. They not only impoverish themselves, but injure their neighbors, are the pests of society, and are public robbers.

b. Henry Venn

The reader, I presume, will not be displeased if I present him with a longer quotation on this subject, from my worthy and honored friend, Mr. Henry Venn.

⁶ **Mammon** – wealth; used in the Gospels as a personification for riches (Mat 6:24; Luk 16:9).

It is remarkable that the covetousness against which we are so earnestly warned in God's Word is not of the scandalous kind, but such as may govern the heart of a man who is esteemed very virtuous and excellent by the world. In Psalm 10:3, "the covetous" whom the Lord is there said to "abhor" are the very persons whom the wicked "bless"! This could never be the case if their love of money made them either villainous in their practice, or miserably stingy in their attitude—for men of this stamp none commend. The same thing is observable in that solemn caution given by our Redeemer: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness" (Luk 12:15). It is evident by this Jesus meant no more than a rooted persuasion that the comfort of life consists in abundance, and desiring (from such a persuasion) to be rich. This was the covetousness our Lord condemns.

And that this admonition might sink the deeper, He represents the workings of that extreme greed which He condemns in a case that passes every day before our eyes. It is this: A man grows rich in his business, not through fraud and extortion, but by the blessing of God upon his labor and skill. As is usual, he is highly delighted with his success; he exults in the prospect of being master, in a few years, of an independent fortune. In the meantime, he is determined to be frugal and diligent, until he takes his final leave of business to enjoy all the sweets of ease and splendor (Luk 12:19).

Now, where are the people governed by the common maxims and principles of human nature, who see anything the least to blame in this man's sentiment or conduct, who do not applaud and imitate it themselves? Yet this very man our Lord sets before our eyes as the picture of one engrossed by a covetous desire of the things of this world. This very man He represents as summoned, in the midst of all his golden hopes, to appear a most guilty criminal at his despised Maker's seat of judgment. Lo! This is the man whom our Lord exposes as a miserable wretch, by whom all others are to take warning and resist covetousness. In the same way, such a fool and such a sinner as this, "is he that layeth up treasure for himself" (that is, every earthly minded man who seeks after wealth as if it were the foundation of happiness) "and is not rich toward God"—that is, rich in faith, hope, and holiness (Luk 12:21).

Paul, in perfect harmony with his Lord, forbids the desire of wealth as a criminal effect of extreme greed. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). And where a desire of increasing in wealth is cherished

instead of this self-denied temper, there snares, defilement, and ruin are declared to be the certain consequences. For “they that will [note: the original word *will* signifies the simple desire] be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Ti 6:9-10).

Now, if it should be said, Do you mean then to affirm that it is wrong for any man to arise to a state of great wealth? I answer: The Scripture condemns only the *desire* of riches, and the passion for them, as defiling and sinful. Therefore if, while your whole heart is given to God, He is pleased to prosper whatever you take in hand and give you an abundant increase, then your wealth is clearly as much the gift of God as if it came to you by legacy or inheritance. It is God’s own act and deed to call you up (you who were content to sit down in a low place) to a higher point of view, and to entrust you with more talents⁷ in order to improve them for His glory.

Now, the difference between possessing wealth thus put into your hands and desiring to grow rich is as great as that between a worthless, ambitious intruder into a place of honor (seeking nothing but his own base interest) and a man sought out for his worth and invested with the same office for the public good. And those who can see no material or necessary distinction in the two cases are already blinded by the love of money.⁸

We may, therefore, conclude, that though the absolute freeness of Christ, as exhibited in the gospel to the worst of sinners, must be maintained with confidence; yet we are bound to affirm, with equal assurance, that though a man pretends to faith in Jesus, if he does not habitually live under the benign influence of love to God, and of love to his brother *for the truth’s sake*, and does not manifest his heavenly affection by a suitable conduct, he has no claim to the Christian character.

⁷ **talents** – money; resources.

⁸ From Henry Venn, *Complete Duty of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1838), 332-335.

GRACE REIGNS IN OUR PERSEVERANCE

A. Man's Need

From the preceding chapters, it appears that the state of believers, whether considered as relative or as real, is highly exalted in their justification, adoption, and sanctification. And it appears that the privileges attending their state are of incomparable excellence and of infinite worth. In each of these particulars, it has also been proven that grace reigns and that the exceeding riches of grace are visibly displayed.

Notwithstanding, the believer who knows himself will be ready to inquire with great solicitude:

How shall I persevere in this happy state? By what means shall I attain the desired end? What provision has the Lord made that, after all, I shall not come short of the expected bliss? Grace, I thankfully acknowledge, has done great things for me; to reigning grace I own myself unspeakably obliged. But if grace, as a sovereign, does not still exert her power, I not only possibly may, but certainly shall, finally miscarry.

Every Christian will conclude this when he considers the number and power, the malice and subtlety, of his obstinate spiritual enemies compared with his own inherent strength to resist them. For the world, the flesh, and the devil are combined against him. These, in their several ways, assault his peace and seek his ruin. These attempt, in various forms, to cause him to wallow in the mire of sensuality as the filthiest brute or to puff him up with pride as Lucifer. By insinuating wiles or open attacks, with the craft of a serpent or the rage of a lion, they endeavor to achieve his ruin.

And, alas, how small his ability, considered in himself, to resist and overcome! The corruption of nature, even in the regenerate, renders the believer's desires after that which is good as too often exceedingly sluggish, and exhausts all his moral powers. His pious frames are fickle and uncertain to the last degree; nor can he place the least confidence in them with safety.

This humbling truth was exemplified in the case of Peter. His confident language was, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended” (Mat 26:33). Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You. But, alas! In a very little while his frame of mind is altered and his courage fails. His pious resolutions hang their enfeebled heads and, notwithstanding his boasted fidelity, he cannot watch with Christ so much as one hour, though there be the greatest necessity for it. He is brought to the trial and, like Samson, his locks are shorn; his presumed strength is gone! He trembles at the voice of a silly maid and, shocking to think, denies his Lord with dreadful oaths and horrid cursing.

Such are the inherent abilities of those who are to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such, considered in themselves, are the best of saints.

Now, can these unstable and impotent creatures hope to persevere¹ and to attain eternal life? Can those who know not how to trust their own hearts for a moment (Pro 28:26; Jer 17:9)—whose moral strength, in a comparative view, is mere weakness; who are continually surrounded with crafty, powerful, and unwearied adversaries—rationally expect a complete victory and an everlasting crown?

B. God’s Answer

Yes, these very persons “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” them (Phi 4:13). God can enable even a “worm” to “thresh the mountains” (Isa 41:14-15). They shall not only come off victorious, but be “more than conquerors” over all their enemies (Rom 8:37). Nor can this appear strange or in the least incredible when it is considered that omnipotent grace reigns. The love, power, wisdom, promises, covenant, and faithfulness of God, and all the divine Persons in the eternal Trinity, and every perfection in the Godhead—all are concerned in the saints’ preservation and engaged to maintain it.

1. The *love* of God is engaged for their everlasting security. Having chosen them to life and happiness as a primary fruit of His own eternal favor, then His love must fail or His purpose be rendered void before they can finally fall. But if “the LORD of hosts hath purposed...who shall disannul it? [If] his hand is stretched out” for the execution of His gracious designs, then “who shall turn

¹ See FGB 179, *Assurance and Perseverance*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

it back” before the end be accomplished (Isa 14:27)? As He “thought, so it shall come to pass”; and as He “purposed, so shall it stand” (Isa 14:27, 24).

Nor shall His love to their persons ever diminish. For “he will rest in [that is, He takes the highest satisfaction in the exercise of] his love” (Zep 3:17), and in all its favored objects. Such is Jehovah’s delight in His people that “he will joy over them with singing” and take a divine pleasure in doing them good (3:17b). His love is as unchangeable as Himself and unalterably fixed upon them. Consequently, they shall never perish. Though the manifestations of His love may vary, yet infinite wisdom is capable of directing, and almighty power of executing, His gracious purposes toward them. In agreement with this, we hear the apostle exulting in God’s unchangeable love. He affirms that nothing in the heights above nor anything in the depths beneath—nothing present nor anything future—should be able to separate him from God’s love (Rom 8:38-39).

2. The *power* of God is also engaged on the behalf of all those who are “begotten...again unto a lively hope.” They “are kept by” it, as in a garrison, “through faith unto salvation” (1Pe 1:2-5). His power surrounds them, as “a wall of fire,” to be their protection and the destruction of their adversaries (Zec 2:5). Omnipotence itself is their shield and keeps them “night and day” (Isa 27:3).

3. As Omnipotence is their guard, so Omniscience is their guide, the honor of divine *wisdom* being concerned in their preservation. If a regenerate soul, one that has been rescued out of Satan’s hand, were finally to fall and perish forever, then it would argue, if not a lack of power in God to maintain the conquest, yet a change of resolution. And so it would bring no honor to the wisdom of His first design.

It is no reputation to the wisdom of a craftsman to permit a work—by which he determined to manifest, in ages to come, his exquisite skill, and upon which his affections were placed—to be dashed in pieces before his eyes by an inveterate enemy, when he had power to prevent it. Now, the Scriptures inform us that in the method of redemption, the wisdom of God is peculiarly concerned, greatly diversified, and in the most wonderful manner displayed. Jehovah “abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” in forming the stupendous plan, and in choosing suitable means to attain the wonderful end (Eph 1:8). But if any of the chosen, re-

deemed, and called were to be finally miserable, how could God's wisdom appear in that?

4. The **promises** of God, those "exceeding great and precious promises" that are made to His people (2Pe 1:4), afford them strong consolation respecting this matter. For the Father of mercies has declared that He will "confirm [them] unto the end," and "will preserve [them] unto his heavenly kingdom" (1Co 1:8; 2Ti 4:18). So that

- the "righteous...shall hold on [their] way," and
- they shall grow "stronger and stronger" (Job 17:9);
- they shall never depart from Him,
- but fear Him forever (Jer 32:40),
- as they are in His hand and in the hand of Christ, they shall never be plucked thence; and, consequently,
- "they shall never perish" (Joh 10:28).

Yes, the blessed God has repeatedly and solemnly declared that He "will never," no, never "leave [them], nor forsake" them (Heb 13:5). And the reason is not because they are worthy, or any way better than others, but rather for the glory of His own eternal name, and because He has chosen them to be His peculiar people. "The LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make [them] his people" (1Sa 12:22).

These promises, with many others of a similar kind, "are yea, and...Amen". That is, they are made and unalterably confirmed in Christ Jesus (2Co 1:20). Divine faithfulness is pledged in them and infinite power is engaged to perform them. These promises—let Christians exult in the cheering thought!—these promises were made by Him Who cannot lie! To which (amazing to think!) He has annexed His most solemn oath with this professed design: that every sinner who has "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before" him "might have a strong consolation" (Heb 6:18). Now, the promise and oath of God, being "two immutable things," must make the believer's final happiness certain.

5. Jehovah's **covenant** with His people in Christ affords another glorious testimony to this encouraging truth. That covenant is "ordered in all things" (2Sa 23:5), stored with heavenly promises, full of spiritual blessings, and absolutely sure. It is the covenant of peace that never shall be removed. It runs thus:

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me (Jer 32:38-40).

The stability of the New Covenant is here asserted in the strongest terms. This gracious covenant is entirely different from that which was made with our great ancestor Adam, the condition of which was perfect obedience, and the promise of life was suspended² on that condition. It is also very different from that covenant which was made with the people of Israel at Sinai, which, being broken by them, was abrogated by the Lord Himself. The language of this, on the other hand, is that of a legal will. It consists of absolute promises, requires no condition to be performed by man, and is perpetual.

Here that sovereign Being, Who cannot lie, declares in the strongest manner that those who are included in this covenant “shall not depart from” Him, and that He will never cease “to do them good.” Security greater than this is not to be conceived, nor can be had. This new and better covenant is without conditions to be performed by man, a covenant that displays rich goodness and boundless grace. It would indeed be absurd to suppose that God should make a “better covenant” (Heb 8:6) than the one He made with Adam, or the one with Israel at Sinai, and that, after all, the covenantees should be as liable to the dreadful forfeiture of life and happiness as our first father when under the Covenant of Works.

Nay, if the New Covenant had been conditional—if perseverance and immortal happiness had depended on our performance of any condition, whether greater or less—then our state as believers would have been much more hazardous than Adam’s was while under the Covenant of Works. This is because of the very great disparity between that state of uprightness in which he was created and that state of corruption into which we are fallen. Perfect obedience was easier to him than the least possible condition would be to us.

6. The *faithfulness* and unchanging truth of God give further assurance of the saint’s perseverance. The rocks, though of the

² was suspended – depended.

hardest flint, shall melt away; the everlasting mountains shall be removed; yea, the whole terrestrial globe itself shall disappear. But the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His covenant, and the truthfulness of God in performing His promises, are unchangeable and eternal. "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from" the destructive power of every evil (2Th 3:3). And He has declared that He will not "suffer my faithfulness to fail" (Psa 89:33). Yea, He has "sworn by his holiness" (Amo 4:2), by the glory of all His perfections, that He will be faithful to His covenant and promises respecting Christ and His chosen seed.

Therefore, if there is immutability in the purpose of God, if any stability in His covenant, if any fidelity in His promises, then the true believer shall certainly persevere. Rejoice, then, you feeble followers of the Lamb. The basis of your confidence and consolation is firm and strong—stronger than all the troubles of life, stronger than all the fears of death, and stronger than all the terrors of approaching judgment. Why should you not dismiss every slavish fear when the God of power, truth, and grace has made such ample provision for your deliverance from every evil you had any reason to fear? [Further He has provided] for the enjoyment of every blessing you ought to desire, whether in this or a future world.

The *merit* of the Redeemer's blood, His *intercession* for His people, and His *union* with them strongly argue their final preservation and heighten their assurances of it.

7. *The merit of His blood.* Jesus Christ loved His people enough to give His life a ransom for them. He suffered extreme tortures of body and horrors of soul in their stead. He drank the very dregs of the cup of wrath so that joy and bliss might be their portion forever. Is it probable, I say, that He should ever allow those who are in the most emphatic sense His particular purchased people, and His own property, to be taken from Him by craft or power—and that by the most abhorred of beings and His greatest enemy? Such a supposition is very absurd! Such an event would be highly injurious to the Savior's character.

Jesus Christ underwent so much for them in the garden and on the cross. He bore the curse and suffered the pains of hell in their stead, even while they were enemies. Will He not protect them now that they are become, by converting grace, His friends? Why was He willing to be at such an amazing expense in their purchase if, after all, He permits their avowed enemy to make them his

easy prey? That is far from Him! May the thought be far from us! No, while there is compassion in His heart or power in His hand, while His name is Jesus and His work salvation, then He must “see of the travail of his soul, and...be [completely] satisfied” (Isa 53:11).

It cannot be that one soul for whom He gave His life and spilled His blood, whose sins He bore and whose curse He sustained, should ever finally perish. For if that were the case, divine justice (after having exacted and having received satisfaction at the hand of the Surety) would make a demand on the principal—in other words, would require double payment. Besides, the faithfulness of Christ to His promises greatly depends on the everlasting happiness of all His redeemed. For we cannot forget Who it is that says,

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me *I should lose nothing*, but should raise it up again at the last day (Joh 6:38-39).

Now Jesus, to Whom the elect were given and by Whom they were redeemed, became responsible for them to the Father at the Last Day, as His own declarations signify. If He were not fully to execute the divine will in raising up all that were committed to His care, He would (I speak it with reverence) fail in the performance of His own engagements. Consequently, either His power or His faithfulness would be called into question—an absurd supposition and blasphemous assertion.

8. The *intercession* of Christ for His people in the heavenly sanctuary affords another evidence of the glorious truth. This intercession is founded on His perfect atonement for all their sins. Such atonement is a firm foundation for the purpose of intercession. Therefore—notwithstanding all the accusations of Satan lodged against them, notwithstanding all their weakness and all their unworthiness—the intercession of Jesus the Son of God, of Jesus Christ the righteous, must afford His people the highest security. For “their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause” (Jer 50:34).

And as every believer is included in this intercession, so Jesus, the Advocate, is never denied in His requests (Joh 17:20; 11:42). His plea is always valid, and always effective to the end intended. This end is, as He expressly informs us, that their “faith fail not,” and that they may be preserved “from...[destructive] evil” (Luk 22:32;

Joh 17:15). Our ascended Redeemer is not, in this part of His mediatorial undertaking, like a mere petitioner who may or may not succeed. This is because He has a previous right to all the blessings He solicits on their behalf. He can claim them in virtue of the promise made to Him and His spiritual seed, because, as their substitute, He fully performed the conditions of the everlasting covenant. Yes, believer, the compassion of Him Who bled on the cross and the power of Him Who pleads on the throne make your final happiness certain.

9. That indescribable *union* that subsists between Christ and His people implies the truth for which I am pleading and clearly proves the important point. Every believer is a member of that mystical body of which He is the head. Therefore, the members shall never die while there is life in the head—neither by the wiles of craft nor the assaults of power. For He Who rules over all with a constant regard to the church declares concerning His people: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19). His life as Mediator is the cause and support of theirs; and they are “the fulness [and glory] of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:22-23).

As it is written, “Christ...is our life” and “your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3-4). Your life “*is hid*”—like the most valuable treasure in a secret place. “*With Christ*”—committed to His guardianship and lodged under His care, Who is able to keep that which is entrusted into His hands. “*In God*”—the bosom of the Almighty is the sacred repository in which the jewel is safely kept. Cheering thought! For Jesus, the Guardian, will never be bribed to deliver up His charge to the power of an enemy. Nor shall any sacrilegious hand ever be able, by secret fraud or open violence, to plunder the chest where Jehovah lays up His jewels (Mal 3:17).

The life of believers is “bound in the bundle of life with the LORD [their] God” (1Sa 25:29). The bond of that union shall never be broken, the mysterious connection shall never be dissolved. For “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” with Him, and is therefore absolutely inseparable (1Co 6:17).

10. The *indwelling of the Holy Spirit* in believers furnishes them with another convincing argument in proof of the joyful truth that they shall persevere unto the end. The Holy Spirit is in them “a well of [living] water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). As a guide and a comforter, He is given to “abide with [them] for ever” (Joh 14:16). His design in regeneration is their

complete holiness and everlasting happiness. His gracious purposes in taking up His residence in them are to fit them for more heavenly enjoyments, to secure their perseverance, to guard them through life, and to conduct them to glory.

By Him they “are sealed unto the day of redemption,” and He is “the earnest of [their] inheritance” (Eph 4:30; 1:14). An earnest is part of the whole and is given in assurance of enjoying the whole. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit is called the “earnest” of our everlasting inheritance, the words must imply the utmost certainty of our future bliss since we are now possessed of this earnest. Otherwise—which would be shocking to affirm—it must be considered as uncertain, as not answering the purpose for which it was given.

11. The **Word and ordinances** of God, on which it is both the duty and privilege of believers to attend, happily support the great design. By these, as through the whole, the great Agent of the covenant works in a way suited to the nature of a rational being. For though the saints “are kept by the [invincible] power of God,” yet not by means merely physical, but “through faith” (1Pe 1:5). Whatever, therefore, is adapted to increase and confirm our faith in the great Redeemer at the same time tends to our preservation. This the Word and ordinances do. In the divine Word, believers have

- many great and precious promises to encourage them,
- many exhortations to direct and animate them in the performance of duty,
- many warnings given and dangers pointed out to deter them from evil,
- many examples of suffering patience and victorious faith, for their imitation, comfort, and support whenever they come into similar circumstances, and
- many glorious things affirmed concerning that inheritance which God has provided for them, in order to raise their affections to heavenly things, and to invigorate their hope of eternal blessedness.

All of these are adapted to promote their edification and to preserve them in the way of peace.

12. The **ordinances** of God in general must be happily conducive to their preservation. They are compared to green pastures in which the sheep of Christ delight both to feed and rest (Psa 23:2), being adapted to nourish their souls and to increase the vigor of their spiritual life. By a suitable attendance on divine institutions,

believers have their faith confirmed, their holiness advanced, and their hope brightened. In them they have the bread of God dispensed, by which they are nourished up to life eternal. On those appointments of heaven, therefore, it is their duty and their blessing to attend. Nor can they, without the highest presumption, expect preservation in the faith while they neglect the means to that end.

13. Nor are the divine *chastisements* without their use in this respect. For the children of God are chastened of their Father, that they might “not be condemned with the world” (1Co 11:32; see also Psa 89:30-34).

Summary

On the whole, then, we have the utmost reason to conclude with Paul that wherever God begins “a good work” He will certainly “perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6). For He that formed the universe is not such an inconsiderate builder as to leave His work unfinished, after laying the foundation of a sinner’s complete happiness in His own eternal purpose and in the blood of His only Son. No, it shall never be said by His infernal enemies,

Here God “began to build,” but “was not able to finish” (Luk 14:30). He once loved, redeemed, regenerated, and designed to have saved these wretched souls. But His love abated; His purpose altered—or, which is more to our honor and His disappointment, we have rendered His plan of operation futile! Now we torment, with a vengeance, myriads that were once high in Jehovah’s favor and numbered among His children.

However, though this be the consequence of the opposite doctrine, Lucifer himself, with all his pride and enmity, will never entertain such a thought nor thus blaspheme his Maker.

The following quotation may serve to exhibit, in a concise view, the substance of the foregoing paragraphs.

“Since we stand not, like Adam, upon our own bottom, but are

- branches of such a vine as never withers,
- members of such a head as never dies,
- sharers in such a Spirit as cleanses, heals, and purifies the heart,
- partakers of such promises as are sealed with the oath of God...

“Since we

- live, not by our own life, but by the life of Christ,

- are not led or sealed by our own spirit, but by the Spirit of Christ,
- do not obtain mercy by our own prayers, but by the intercession of Christ,
- stand not reconciled to God by our own endeavors, but by the propitiation wrought by Christ,
 - Who loved us when we were enemies and in our blood (Eze 16:6),
 - Who is both willing and able to save to the uttermost, and to preserve His own mercies in us,
 - to Whose office it belongs to ensure that none who are given unto Him be lost

—then undoubtedly, that life of Christ in us—which is so upheld, though it be not exempted from temptations nor backslidings—yet it is an *abiding* life. He Who raised our soul from death will either preserve our feet from falling or, if we do fall, will heal our backslidings and will save us freely.”³

C. Objections

1. *Lack of Holiness*

Some, perhaps, may be ready to object:

If the preservation of believers depends upon God in the manner asserted, they have no occasion to be at all careful how they live. No great harm can befall them, for they are certain of being finally safe.

In answer to this I shall only observe that Satan tried the strength of this objection long ago upon our Lord Himself. But as it appeared of no force to Him—though the tempter proposed it as the necessary consequence of those promises made by the Father to Christ, as Man and Mediator, respecting His preservation—so it appears to have as little in the present case. The major proposition in the devil’s argument was, “If You are the Son of God, then His angels will certainly preserve You; You cannot be injured.” And his conclusion was, “Therefore, without any danger, You may cast Yourself down from this tower” (see Mat 4:5-7).

So, in the present case, the argument contained in the objection is:

³ Edward Reynolds, *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds*, vol. 1 (London: B. Holdsworth, 1826), 403-404.

If you are a child of God and in union with Christ, your perseverance must be certain. For, being the charge of Omnipotence, it is impossible you should finally fall. Therefore, you may safely say goodbye to all carefulness. You need not fear sin or its consequences. Nor is there any occasion to be concerned about walking with God in the ways of holiness.

Our Lord had not the least doubt of the special care of His Father over Him. Yet He rejected Satan's proposal with the utmost abhorrence, knowing it was a temptation to evil, and that the argument used to enforce it was an abuse of the Scripture. The believer is in a similar situation. He may be fully persuaded that grace reigns in every part of salvation and that it strongly appears in the special care of God, which is continuously exercised over him in his perseverance to eternal life. At the same time, he is well convinced that he must *not* continue in sin so that "grace may abound." On every such suggestion, therefore, he will from his heart say, "God forbid" (Rom 6:1-2).

Besides this, there are many important purposes answered by walking in the ways of obedience, respecting the Christian himself, his neighbor, and his God. I shall not particularly mention them here, having considered them already.

2. *Need to Pray*

Nor can it, with any propriety, be objected against the doctrine of perseverance that the saints are exhorted to pray

- for the continual aids of grace,
- for divine support in times of trial, and
- for protection against their enemies

—as if this implied that their state is uncertain with reference to the final judgment. Christ was absolutely sure of happiness, and could not possibly fail of enjoying the reward that was promised to Him as Mediator, nor come short of possessing that glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Yet He prayed for these things with as much fervor as any saint can possibly do for the most desirable blessing (Joh 17:1, 5; compare 2Sa 7:27-29). This is a noble example of assurance of faith regarding our eternal state, and of an unreserved reliance on the divine promises, being perfectly consistent with earnest and constant prayer for the fulfilment of them! Besides, whoever dares to act on the principle of this objection has no reason to consider himself as a Christian, but rather as dead in sin and in the broad way to final ruin!

The Lord has promised that His people shall never perish, yet He has nowhere implied that they shall not fall into sin. And because moral evil is provoking to the eyes of His holiness, believers are bound to use the utmost caution, lest by disobedience they move Him to use the scourge of chastening. The frowns of the Father will be hard to bear, because their spiritual peace and joyful communion with Him will be much interrupted by such disobedience and the chastisement for it.

The children of God, when careless in their walk and guilty of backsliding, have severely smarted under His correcting hand. The sorrowful confessions and bitter complaints of David after his scandalous intrigue with Uriah's wife are a standing indisputable proof of this observation. Their confidence of being included in the everlasting covenant has been terribly shaken, if not lost for a season, so as to wound their hearts with keenest anguish (Psa 89:30-32). But after many prayers and great watchfulness, they have been again indulged with the smiles of Jehovah's countenance and the joys of His salvation (Psa 51:8, 12).

The remembrance of this, and a consideration how God the Father and His incarnate Son are dishonored, the Holy Spirit grieved, the glorious gospel reproached, weak believers offended, and the hands of the wicked strengthened by the careless conduct of Christian professors, afford a sufficient reason for those multiplied cautions which are given to the disciples of Christ in the book of God, that they indulge not any criminal passion, in the least degree, without supposing that their final happiness depends on the steadiness of their walk or on the goodness of their conduct. For our perseverance in faith and holiness depends on the excellency of our state as being in covenant with God, His adopted children, and the members of Christ—not upon our obedience and endeavors.

Hence you may learn, believer, that as the enemies of your soul are persistent, subtle, and powerful, and your spiritual frames changeable, it is highly necessary you should live under a continual remembrance of those awakening considerations. What could be more advisable, what so necessary for you, as to walk carefully, to watch and pray "lest ye enter into temptation" (Mar 14:38)? A sense of your own weakness and insufficiency should always abide on your mind and appear in your conduct.

As the corruption of nature is an enemy that is always near you, and always in you while on earth, and as it is very strongly

disposed to agree with every temptation from without, you should “keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23). Watch, diligently watch, over all its imaginations, motions, and tendencies. Consider whence they arise and to what they incline before you execute any of the purposes formed in it. For such is the supreme deceitfulness of the human heart (Jer 17:9) that he who “trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Pro 28:26)—ignorant of his danger and unmindful of his best interests.

This consideration should cause every child of God to bend the suppliant knee with the utmost frequency, humility, and fervor. He should live, as it were, at the throne of grace and not depart thence till far from the reach of danger. Certain it is that the more we see of the strength of our adversaries, and of the danger we are in from them, the more shall we exercise ourselves in fervent prayer.

Can you, O Christian, be cool and indifferent, be dull and careless, when the world, the flesh, and the devil are your irreconcilable and unwearied opposers? Dare you indulge yourself in carnal delights or in a slothful profession while the enemies of your peace and salvation are always active and busy in seeking to achieve your fall, your disgrace, and if possible your eternal ruin? “Awake, thou that sleepest” (Eph 5:14)! Mistake not the field of battle for a bed of rest! “Be sober, be vigilant” (1Pe 5:8)!

3. Confidence

Notwithstanding the believer’s weakness and the power of his enemies, are there such strong assurances given of his perseverance, complete victory, and final happiness? Then, though with fear and trembling he should often reflect on his own insufficiency, he may rely on a faithful God as his unerring guide and invincible guard, with confidence and joy.

The remembrance of that will be a constant motive to humility and watchfulness. The exercise of this will maintain peace and consolation of soul, will be an inexhaustible source of praise, in spite of all the attempts of the deep-rooted malice of his most enraged foes. For the Almighty says, “Fear not...I am thy shield” forever to defend thee and “thy exceeding great reward” to render thee completely happy (Gen 15:1). While “the eternal God is [his] refuge, and...everlasting arms” his support (Deu 33:27), there is no occasion to fear. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

When the gates of hell and the powers of earth unite to assail the believer, menacing destruction to both body and soul, then the name, the promises, the oath, and the attributes of Jehovah are “a strong tower,” an impregnable fortress (Pro 18:10). And, conscious of his own inability to resist the enemy, he “runneth into it, and is safe” from every attack, however crafty or violent (18:10b). The righteous man, the real Christian, dwells on high, out of the reach of every evil. His place of defense is “the munitions of rocks” (Isa 33:16)—immovable as their solid foundations, inaccessible as their lofty ridges.

Nor shall the favored inhabitants of this everlasting fortress ever be obliged to surrender for lack of provisions. A fullness of “living bread” and streams of “living water” are united with invincible strength (Joh 6:51; 4:10; 7:38). For it is added, “Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” (Isa 33:16). He shall lack neither nourishment nor protection, outward defense nor inward comfort.

Happy, then, thrice happy, are they that are under the reign of grace! Every attribute of Deity is engaged to promote their happiness. All the eternal counsels terminate in their favor; and Providence, in the whole course of events respecting them, has a special regard to their advantage. Thus divine grace appears and reigns in the perseverance of true believers. For grace provides the means necessary to it, grace applies them, and omnipotent grace crowns them with success—to its own eternal honor and praise.

GRACE REIGNS BY THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The person of Christ,¹ considered in connection with His work, is an abundant and exalted subject, infinitely deserving our most attentive regards. For His person is dignified with every excellency, divine and human; and His work includes every requirement for the complete salvation of our guilty souls.

A. Must Be Man

The constitution of our Mediator's wonderful person was an effect of infinite wisdom and a manifestation of boundless grace. The hypostatic union² of His divine and human nature is a fact of the first importance to our hope of eternal happiness. For by the personal union of these two natures, He is rendered capable of performing the work of a mediator between God and man. If He had not possessed a nature inferior to that which is divine, He could neither have performed the obedience required, nor have suffered the penalty of death as threatened by the holy Law—both which were absolutely necessary to the salvation of sinners.

1. *Human*

Nor was it sufficient merely to assume a created nature, for it was to be that which is common to men. Because the Law was given to man, the obedience required by it (as the condition of life) was to be performed by a man—a real, though sinless man. The wisdom and equity of the Supreme Legislator could not have appeared in giving a Law to our species, if it had never been honored with perfect obedience by any in our nature—even so much as in one instance.

Man had become a transgressor of the Law, under its curse, and bound to suffer eternal misery. It was therefore necessary that He Who should undertake his deliverance, by substitutionary suf-

¹ See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **hypostatic union** (Greek: *hypostasis*, “person”) – union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ Jesus.

ferings, should be Himself a man. It would not have appeared consistent if a different nature from that which sinned should have suffered for sin. Had it pleased the infinite Sovereign to have saved the angels that had fallen, for example, we may suppose (with reverence) that it would have appeared suitable to divine wisdom for their deliverer to have assumed the angelic nature.

But as man, having lost his happiness, was the creature to be redeemed; and as humanity, having lost its excellence, was the nature to be restored, therefore it was necessary that redemption, and this restoration, should be effected in the human nature. For “as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,” brought under condemnation and liable to eternal death, “so by the obedience of one [man, Jesus Christ,] shall many be made righteous,” be delivered from condemnation and accepted to everlasting life (Rom 5:19).

It was necessary also that the human nature of Christ, in which He was to accomplish our deliverance, should be derived from the common root and fountain of it in our first parents. For it does not appear suitable to answer the various purposes designed by the assumption of our nature that it should be created directly out of nothing. Nor yet that His body should be formed out of the dust, like that of the first man. Because on that supposition, there would not have been any such alliance between Him and us as to lay a foundation for our hope of salvation by His undertaking.

It also was necessary that He Who should sustain the character and perform the work of a Redeemer should be our *Goel*, or “near kinsman,” one to whom the right of redemption belonged (Lev 25:48-49; Ru 2:20; 3:9 margin³). So it was declared in the first promise: the seed of the woman, and no other, shall bruise the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). He was not only to assume the nature of man but to partake of it by being made of a woman.

Thus He became our kinsman and our brother. According to that saying, “both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one [nature]: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:11). Amazing condescension is this:

- that the Son of the Highest should become the child of a virgin,
- that the God of nature should become the Seed of her who, with a bold and presumptuous hand, had plucked the fatal fruit which entailed death on all our species,

³ **margin** – an alternate reading in a translator’s note beside the main text.

- that He Whom angels adore should appear in our nature when it was sunk in ruin, so that He might obey and bleed and die for our deliverance!

What words can express, what heart can conceive, the depth of that condescension and the riches of that grace which appear in such a procedure!

2. *Sinless*

Notwithstanding, it was absolutely necessary that the nature in which the work of redemption was to be performed should not be so derived from its original source as to be tainted with sin. It should not partake, in any degree, of that moral defilement in which every child of Adam is conceived and born (Isa 1:6; Eze 16:6). It suited us to have such an High Priest as was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26). For as a priest, He was to atone for our sins and ransom our souls. If the human nature of Christ had partaken in any measure of that pollution which, since the Fall, is hereditary to us, then it would have been destitute of the holy image of God—such as we are prior to regeneration. And consequently, He would have been rendered incapable of making the least atonement for us. He who is himself sinful cannot satisfy divine justice on the behalf of another, because by one offense, he forfeits his *own* soul.

Here, then, the adorable⁴ wisdom of God appears in its richest glory. For though it was necessary that our Surety should be man and the seed of the woman, yet He was conceived in such a manner as to be entirely without sin. Yes, Jesus, though born of a woman, was absolutely free from the guilt of the first transgression, and from every degree of that depravity which is common to all the offspring of Adam. The perfect purity of our Mediator’s humanity, being an article of the first importance to our salvation, is frequently and strongly asserted in the sacred writings. The complete righteousness of His heart and the unspotted sanctity of His life are there displayed in lively colors.

3. *Original Sin*

In order to explain and illustrate this momentous truth, it may be of use to consider how it is that we, who are the natural descendants of Adam, became guilty through the first transgression and are made partakers of a depraved nature. As to *guilt* by the first

⁴ **adorable** – worthy of adoration and worship.

offense, it may be observed that the whole human nature was present in our original parents when it was committed, and that Adam was our public representative. Hence it is that his offense became the sin of us all, and is justly imputed and charged to us. In him, as our common representative, we “all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Such being our natural state as the descendants of an apostate head, we justly bear his humbling and awful character; we are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3).

But Adam was not a *federal head* of Christ. “The Lord from heaven” was neither included in him, nor represented by him (1Co 15:47). For the blessed Jesus was conceived in a way entirely supernatural and born of a virgin. He was not born according to those prolific words by which the great Creator blessed the marital state before the Fall: “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen 1:28). Rather, He was born according to a gracious promise made after the Fall, when Adam had ceased to be any longer a public person.

Neither was Jesus *represented* by Adam, for our great ancestor was the representative of none but his natural offspring. The holy Jesus, therefore, not being naturally descended from him, could not be represented by him. It appears, indeed, highly inconsistent for us to imagine that Adam, who was “of the earth, earthy,” should be the representative of Christ, Who is “the Lord from heaven” (1Co 15:47)—Who is, in all respects, his great superior. It could not be that one Who is the Son of God, as well as the seed of a woman, should acknowledge Adam for His federal head.

Our Lord, therefore, had no concern in Adam’s guilt as a descendant from him—which is the case of all his natural posterity. The promised Seed—not being included in that Covenant of Works under which the first human pair stood—could not be chargeable with any part of that guilt which attended the violation of it. Original guilt becomes ours in virtue of Adam’s relation to us as our public representative, and hence it is imputed to us by a righteous God. For if we had not been in some way involved in the first transgression, before it was imputed to us, it could not justly have been charged upon us. This is because it is not the imputation of Adam’s offense that makes it ours, but, being *legally* ours in consequence of our natural and federal relation to him, it is justly imputed to us.

Nor could the Lord Redeemer be liable to the necessary consequence of Adam’s offense; that is, *depravity* of nature. This immediately followed as the natural effect of his first transgression. This

transgression, being committed by him as our representative, is legally ours. Therefore, we share with him in its natural and awful effects. In other words, we derive a corrupt nature from him because we were guilty with him.

Nor was the imputation of his offense to us the cause of this woeful effect, for his offense was legally ours prior to that imputation. But as Christ was not concerned with him in original guilt, having no relation to him as a federal head, the natural consequence of that guilt could not take place in Him as it does in us, who are represented by Adam and descended from him according to the common course of nature.

Thus was the human nature of Jesus Christ entirely free from all contamination. And thus “that holy thing” (Luk 1:35), which was formed in the womb of the virgin by the power of the Most High, was constituted the second Adam in opposition to the first (1Co 15:47). This production of the human nature of our glorious Immanuel, being in a way supernatural and divine, is called the creation of “a new thing in the earth” (Jer 31:22). Thus Christ became a partaker of the nature that had sinned, without the least sinfulness of that nature.

B. Must Be God

1. Necessity of Divinity

It also was absolutely necessary that our Mediator and Surety should be God as well as man. For as He could neither have obeyed nor suffered if He had not possessed a created nature, so, had He been a mere man, however sin-free, He could not have redeemed one soul. Though He had possessed the highest possible created excellencies, they would not have been sufficient because He still would have been a dependent being. For, as it is essential to Deity to be underived and self-existent, so it is essential to a creature to be derived and dependent. The loftiest angel that sings in glory is as really dependent on God, every moment of his existence, as the meanest worm that crawls on earth. In this respect, an angel and an insect are on the same level.

Every intelligent creature, therefore, whether human or angelic, has received existence from the Almighty, and is continually dependent on Him as the all-producing, all-supporting first cause. Therefore, he is obliged to perpetual obedience by virtue of that relation in which he stands to God as his Maker and Preserver. It is highly absurd to suppose it possible for any creature to superero-

gate,⁵ or to do more in a way of obedience to Him from Whom his all was received, than he already is under the strongest obligations to perform in consequence of his absolute and universal dependence.

However, whatever is previously due from anyone on his own account, cannot be transferred to another without rendering the first devoid of that obedience which it is absolutely necessary for him to have. Universal obedience, in every possible instance, is so necessary in a rational creature, as such, being dependent on God and created for his glory, that the omission of obedience, in any degree, would not only be criminal, but expose to everlasting ruin.

The righteousness, therefore, of a mere creature, however highly exalted, could not have been accepted by the Great Supreme as any compensation for our disobedience. This is because whoever undertakes to perform a vicarious⁶ righteousness must be one who is not obliged to obedience on his own account. Consequently, our surety must be a divine Person, for every mere creature is under indispensable obligations to perfect and perpetual obedience on his own account.

Now, as our situation required, so the gospel reveals a Mediator and Substitute thus exalted and glorious. For Jesus is described as a divine Person, as One Who could claim independence without any arrogance or the least disloyalty. When thus considered, He appears fit for the task.

However, of such an One we could have had no idea without that distinction of Persons in the Godhead which the Scriptures reveal. Agreeably to this distinction, we behold the rights of Deity asserted and upheld, with infinite majesty and authority, in the person of the *Father*. At the same time, we view every divine perfection displayed and honored, in the most illustrious manner, by the amazing condescension of the eternal *Son*—by the humiliation of Him Who, in His lowest state of subjection, could claim an equality with God. Such being the dignity of our wonderful Sponsor, it was by His own voluntary condescension that He became incarnate, and “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7). By the same free act of His will, He was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4) in order to

⁵ **supererogate** – Roman Catholic term for performing works above and beyond what God requires, meritorious to the benefit of others.

⁶ **vicarious** – substitutionary; on behalf of others.

perform that obedience in our stead to which, as a divine Person, He was in no way obliged.

2. *The Evil in Sin*

The necessity there was that our Surety should be a divine Person might be further proved by considering the infinite evil there is in sin. That sin is an infinite evil appears from the following.

Every crime is more or less evil in proportion as we are obligated to the contrary. The criminality of any disposition or action consists in a contradiction to what we ought to possess or perform. Therefore, if we hate, disobey, or dishonor any person, the sin is always proportional to the obligations we are under to love, honor, and obey him. The obligations we are under to love, honor, and obey any person are in proportion to his loveliness, his dignity, and his authority. None can doubt this.

Therefore, if infinite beauty, dignity, and authority belong to the immensely glorious God, then we must be under equal obligations to love, honor, and obey Him. And a contrary conduct must be infinitely criminal! This sin, therefore, is a violation of infinite obligation to duty; consequently, it is an unlimited evil and deserving of infinite punishment. Such being the nature of our offenses and the aggravations attending them, we stand in absolute need of a surety, the worth of whose obedience and sufferings should be equal to the unworthiness of our persons and to the demerit of our disobedience.

In addition to the evil there is in every sin, let us take into consideration

- the vast number of sinners that were to be redeemed,
- the countless millions of enormous crimes that were to be atoned for,
- the infinite weight of divine wrath that was to be sustained.

All of these were to be completed in a limited and short time, in order to reconcile man to God and to effect his eternal salvation. Thus we have still stronger evidence in proof of the point.

Were a defense of the proper deity of Christ my intention, the Scriptures would furnish me with ample matter and abundant evidence in favor of this core truth. This is because the names that He bears, the perfections ascribed to Him, the works He has done, and the honors He has received, loudly proclaim His eternal divinity. But I waive the attempt and proceed to observe the following.

C. Unity of Person

1. *Both Natures*

It was necessary our Surety should be *God and man* in unity of person. This necessity arises from the nature of His work, which is that of a Mediator between God, the offended Sovereign, and man, the offending subject. If He had not been a partaker of the divine nature, He could not have been qualified to deal with God; if not of the human, He would not have been fitted to deal with man. Deity alone was too high to deal with man; humanity alone was too low to deal with God. The eternal Son therefore assumed our nature so that He might become a middle person, and so be rendered capable of laying “his hand upon...both” (Job 9:33) and of bringing them into a state of perfect friendship. He could not have been a mediator in regard to His office if he had not been a middle person in respect of His natures. Such is the constitution of His wonderful person, and hence He is called Emmanuel, “God with us” in our nature (Mat 1:23).

2. *Offices*

The perfect performance of all His offices as priest, prophet, and king requires this union of the divine to the human nature.

As a *Priest*. It was necessary He should have something to offer, so that He should offer Himself. But pure Deity could not be offered. It was necessary therefore that He should be man, and taken from among men, as every other high priest was.

Now, had He not been God, then He could not have had an absolute power over His own life to lay it down and take it up at His pleasure. *In the same way*, the offering of the human nature, if not in union with the divine, would not have made a proper atonement for our transgressions. It would by no means have removed that enormous load of human guilt for which He was to suffer.

Nor could His death have been an equivalent, in the eye of eternal justice, to that everlasting punishment which the righteous Law threatens against sin, unless He was also deity as well as man. Everlasting punishment must have been the sinner’s portion, as it is his just desert, if such an admirable Sponsor had not appeared on his behalf. But when we consider that He Who suffered, “the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18), was a divine Person incarnate, we cannot but look upon Him as perfectly able to bear the punishment and to perform the work. For as the infinite evil of sin arises from the majesty and the excellence of Him against Whom it is committed,

so the merit of our Surety's obedience and sufferings must be equal to the dignity of His person. How great, how transcendently glorious are the perfections of the eternal Jehovah! And so great, so superlatively excellent, is the atonement of the dying Jesus!

As a *Prophet*. Had He not been the omniscient God, He could not, without a revelation, have known the divine will respecting His people. Nor could He have had a perfect acquaintance with that infinite variety of cases in which, through every age and nation, they continually need His teaching. And if He had not been man, He could not so familiarly, in His own person, have revealed the divine will.

As a *King*. If He had not been God, He could not have ruled in the heart or have been the Lord of conscience, nor would He have been able to defend and provide for the church in this imperfect and militant state.⁷ Neither could He, in His own right, have dispensed eternal life to His followers, or everlasting death to His enemies, at the Last Day. And if He had not been man, He could not have been a head, either political or natural, of the same kind with the body to which He is united, and over which He is placed as King in Zion. Consequently, He could not have sympathized with the members of His mystical body, as He clearly does.

But as His wonderful person is dignified with every perfection, divine and human—as He possesses all the glories of deity, and all the graces of sinless humanity—these render Him a Mediator completely amiable and supremely glorious. He is an adequate object of the sinner's confidence and of the believer's joy.

Hence it appears that Christ is a glorious, divine Mediator—a Mediator that has power with God and with man. He is able, therefore, “to save...to the uttermost,” to all perfection and forever, all that “come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). The obedience of such a Surety magnifies the Law and renders it highly respected. It has an excellence and a merit incomparably and inconceivably great. It must be of more value than the obedience of all the saints in the world, or of all the angels in glory. The sufferings undergone by this heavenly Substitute, the sacrifice offered up by this wonderful

⁷ **militant state** – The church militant is the people of God on earth today, who are engaged in spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness to bring light to the world and the souls of men. It can be contrasted with the church triumphant, as it will be in heaven, having conquered all its foes and appearing as the Bride of the Lamb to enjoy His blessings forever.

High Priest, must be all-sufficient to expiate⁸ the most accumulated guilt, must be omnipotent to save the most horrid transgressor. His obedience is in worth what his person is in dignity. His person is infinite in glory, and his obedience is boundless in merit.

D. The Sacrifice Must Be Deity

1. The Sacrifice Must Be Infinitely Great

a. The greatness of His person

The greatness of an offense is proportional to the dignity of the person whose honor is invaded by it. In the same way, the value of the satisfaction made by the sufferings of any substitute must be equal to the excellence of the person satisfying. Sin, being committed against infinite Majesty, deserved infinite punishment. The sacrifice of Christ is of infinite worth, being offered by a person of infinite dignity. It was the sacrifice, not of a mere man, not of the highest angel, but of Jesus the incarnate God, of Him Who is the brightness of the Father's glory and Head over all creation (Heb 1:3).

As the infinite glory of His divine Person cannot be separated from His humanity, so infinite merit is necessarily connected with His obedience and sufferings. In all that He did and in all that He underwent, He was the Son of God—as well on the cross as before His incarnation; as well when he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psa 22:1; Mat 27:46) as when He raised the dead and reversed the laws of nature.

He was Jehovah's Fellow when He felt the sword of justice awake upon Him. He thought it not robbery to assert an equality with God, even when He was fastened to the bloody tree and expired under a curse (Zec 13:7; Phi 2:6-8; Gal 3:13). Was the sin for which He suffered infinitely evil? Then the Person Who satisfied the debt is infinitely excellent. Did an infinite Object suffer in His honor by our offenses? Then the injury is repaired by a Subject of infinite excellence making an atonement for them. Our sin is infinite in respect of the object; our Sacrifice is infinite in regard to the subject. Jehovah considered our Surety as His fellow when He smote Him; and we should consider Him under the same exalted character when we believe on Him and plead His atonement before

⁸ **expiate** – atone for.

God. “Here is firm footing, here is solid rock.”⁹ In the divine dignity of the Redeemer’s person and in the consummate perfection of His work, there is an everlasting basis for faith, the assurance of faith, the full assurance of faith—a basis as firm as the pillars of nature, immovable as the eternal throne.

The Socinians suppose that Jesus had no existence before His conception in the womb of the virgin, and so look upon Him as a mere man. The Arians¹⁰ imagine Him to be a kind of superangelic spirit united to a human body, though some of them compliment Him with ascribing all divine perfections to Him except for eternity and self-existence (which is absurdly impious). But both groups yet rob Him of proper deity, make Him a dependent being, and reduce Him to the rank of a mere creature.

If we should do this, we would deprive ourselves of that foundation of confidence in Him that His true character affords. For we never could persuade ourselves that the sufferings of a mere creature (and those for so short a time) could be accepted by the most high and holy God as a righteous compensation to His Law and justice for the sins of innumerable millions of hell-deserving transgressors.

Hence it is that those who deny the proper deity of Christ also commonly deny that He made satisfaction to divine justice for sin. Thus far they are consistent and “rational” (as they pretend to be). But they may do well to consider whether they themselves are able to satisfy eternal justice, and how they can expect admission into the kingdom of glory by the sin-avenging God without any satisfaction made for their crimes. For certain it is that He Who governs the universe is inflexibly just, as well as divinely merciful. “A just God and a Saviour” is His revealed character (Isa 45:21). We must know Him and trust in Him as thus revealed if we would escape the wrath to come.

b. The Father and the Son

Here let the reader admire and adore the love of the eternal Father and the condescension of the divine Son.

⁹ From “Away My Needless Fears,” hymn by Charles Wesley (1707-1788), *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Volume 2 (Bristol, England: Felix Farley, 1749), 305-307.

¹⁰ **Arians** – followers of Arius, a bishop of Alexandria (AD 250/56-336), who taught that God the Son was at one point created by God the Father and that before that time the Son did not exist.

1). The Love of the Father

First let us consider the love of the eternal Father. The glorious person described is the Son of God and the Father's gift to sinful men. All the angels and all worlds bestowed upon us for an inheritance would be trifling and next to nothing in comparison to Him because all created things are equally easy to divine power, being only the effects of the simple will of God. The formation of an angel or of an insect, of a thousand systems or of a thousand grains, is the same thing to Omnipotence.

For this reason, there can be no comparative greatness in any such gifts. If, therefore, the eternal Father would show His love to an uncommon degree; if He would so gratify His mercy in blessing His offending creatures as to have an appearance of doing violence to Himself—it must be by giving “his only begotten Son” (Joh 3:16), Who is one in nature and equal in glory with Himself. It must be by giving Him to be their substitute, their propitiation, and their Savior.

In this view, how great the propriety, how striking the beauty of those apostolic sayings:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?...God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 8:32; 5:8)!

Here the Father's divine love appears in the utmost advantage; here it shines in all its glory. For its rich donation is infinitely excellent, and the blessedness resulting from it is complete and eternal.

2). The Condescension of the Divine Son

Jesus Christ, Who was “in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6). Angels obey and adore Him, before Whom they veil their faces as conscious of their own comparative commonness, or as dazzled with the blaze of His infinite glories. That *He* should be made flesh, take upon Him the form of a servant, perform obedience, and give up Himself to the most infamous death, is amazing! But that He should surrender Himself to die for sinners, for enemies, and for such as were in actual rebellion against Him, is unspeakably more amazing! These are demonstrative proofs that the Lord Redeemer is as much superior to His creatures in the riches of His grace as He is in the depths of His wisdom or in the works of His power. Let all the heavens adore Him! And let the children of men be filled with wonder and burn with grati-

tude! For this glorious Redeemer is accessible by sinners and was designed for sinners, and on them His power and grace are magnified.

2. *Scripture Requires Christ's Deity*

Such is that representation that the gospel gives of divine, redeeming love. But were we to deny the proper deity of Jesus Christ and to reject the reality of His atonement, we should, in reference both to the Father and the Son, obscure its glory, weaken its force, and almost destroy its very being. On Socinian principles, many of the most emphatic terms and phrases of inspiration relative to our salvation by the Son of God would have to be understood in a sense directly contrary to their natural meaning. In other words, the language of Scripture would have to be reversed.

For instance, our Lord says, "God so loved the *world*, that he gave his only begotten Son" (Joh 3:16). But Socinianism teaches us to understand the divine declaration thus: "God so loved the *son of Mary*, that He gave him the government of the world."

Paul says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2Co 8:9). But according to this false hypothesis, the meaning and the fact would be,

You know the grace of God to the man Jesus. He was by nature as poor as any that are born of a woman. In the whole of his life, he was equally dependent on the Father's power and pleasure as any other person can possibly be. Neither the labors of his ministry nor the pains of his martyrdom were equal to those of many among his disciples. Yet, for his own sake, and as the reward of his obedience, he became, through divine bounty, incomparably rich.

In another epistle, the same apostle says:

Christ Jesus...being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phi 2:5-8).

Now, according to the principles of Socinus, this may be paraphrased thus:

Jesus, being a merely human creature, existed in the form of a man. Conscious of this, he thought it the most impious robbery on the honors of Deity for him to be equal with God, whether it were by bearing His names, by claiming His attributes, by presum-

ing to perform His works, or by receiving His worship. Yes, being made in the form of a servant (because as a mere creature, it was impossible he should exist in any other form) and feeling his own emptiness, he was contented to appear in the likeness of men. And seeing he was a mere man, there is no reason to wonder that he was found in fashion as a man. And there is no reason to wonder that—as a righteous person and a teacher of truth—he was greatly humbled by poverty and reproach, as many other good men have been. Nor yet, feeling himself entirely at the divine disposal, is there any reason to be surprised that, as a martyr, he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross—because he knew that such was the will of his Creator and Sovereign. But as he had

- no bodily disease to affect his imagination with melancholy gloom,
- no guilt on his conscience to excite despondency,
- no unhallowed attachment to family connections, to religious friends, or to any sensible object,
- no doubt of special interest in the Father's love,
- nor any fear with regard to his own final felicity

—then the wonder is that, in his last sufferings and before any human hand was upon him, he should be so full of alarm, so penetrated with anguish. He sweat blood and exclaimed, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death...My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 26:38; 27:46). We may well be astonished at this, because many of His disciples—even when in the hands of their barbarous executioners and though conscious of personal guilt—have sustained the most extreme sufferings without one complaint, and sometimes with indications of exuberant joy.

Besides all this (Jesus dying only as a martyr, being perfectly innocent of the crimes laid to his charge, and suffering nothing at all from the hand of eternal justice for the sins of others), the love he expressed to men like himself was far from being so unselfish, so fervent, or so great as multitudes have imagined. For he was absolutely certain of rising again from the dead within the space of three days. And, as the reward of his obedience to death, he was certain of being exalted to the throne of a universal empire. Yes, he knew that God would highly exalt him, and give “him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:9-11).

Now, as he was a mere man; as his death was only that of a witness to divine truth; as he lost his life only for three days; and as he had

the most certain expectation of such an unbounded reward—it cannot with reason be supposed that his love to men considered as neighbors, or his compassion to men considered as perishing in ignorance and in superstition, was much superior to that philanthropy which prophets, apostles, and martyrs have displayed. Because it is clear that, had self-love been the only principle of his conduct, he could not have promoted his own advantage so effectively in any other way. Who that loves God and man, who that pursues his own supreme honor and happiness, would refuse to undergo similar sufferings, provided he were absolutely certain of an equal reward? Nay, did not Codrus,¹¹ did not the Decii,¹² voluntarily devote themselves to death for the good of their respective countries, even though, being enveloped in pagan darkness, the only reward they had to expect was a little posthumous renown?

Thus are the grand principles of Socinianism abhorrent to the language and sentiments of divine revelation! On those false principles, the actual phraseology of inspired writers would be extremely strange and very confusing. It would be so confusing that, instead of saying, “Great is the mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16), we may justly exclaim,

Unaccountably unusual and profoundly mysterious is the *language of prophets and of apostles* respecting the person and work of Jesus Christ! For though the things intended are plain and easily apprehended by common capacities, yet the *terms* by which those things are expressed are so extremely obscure that the most diligent study and the greatest insight are absolutely necessary to develop their meaning.

Christians have been accustomed to considering Scripture mysteries as relating to certain important facts, which facts, being plainly revealed, are believed on the authority of divine testimony. But this new theology teaches us to look for those mysteries in the unparalleled forms of *biblical expression*. I said “unparalleled,” for surely if the Socinian system were true, no set of writers who had not lost their senses, and who intended to be understood, ever expressed common ideas in such mysterious language as that

¹¹ **Codrus** (ca. 1089-1068 BC) – last of the semi-mythical kings of Athens. He was an ancient example of patriotism and self-sacrifice.

¹² **Decii** (~495 BC) – plebeian family that became illustrious in Roman history by two of its members sacrificing themselves for the preservation of the country.

which is used by the inspired penmen concerning Jesus Christ and the great work of redemption by Him.¹³

E. Admonitions

Fully persuaded, therefore, that the Scriptures mean as they speak, let the sinner who is conscious of nothing but misery and wretchedness about him flee to the all-sufficient Mediator. Let him trust in Him as mighty to save, and truth itself has engaged that he shall not be disappointed in his expectations. As a divine Person, Christ

- must be able to act agreeably to every character He bears,
- must be perfectly qualified to execute every office He has undertaken,
- must be completely fitted to fill up each relation in which He stands to His people.

Let us rest in the most unreserved confidence in His atonement and intercession as our Priest, look to Him for instruction as our Prophet, and be subject to Him and expect protection from Him as our King. Let us manifest the most fervent love to Him as our Redeemer, yield Him the most cordial obedience as our Lord, and pay Him the sublimest worship as our God. I will add a message to all those who deny His proper deity and reject His substitutionary death. They refuse to honor Him as a divine person and to accept His righteousness as Mediator. Let them be aware lest, when it is too late, they feel their lack of His atonement and be compelled to acknowledge that He “is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5).

Let my reader contemplate with wonder and with joy the infinite honor that is conferred on the human nature in the person of our great Mediator. For our nature is in everlasting union with the Son of God, Who is now seated on a throne of light, is the most glorious of all creatures, and is the eternal ornament of the whole creation.

Yes, believer, He on Whom you rely, in Whose hands you have entrusted your soul, still wears your nature while He pleads your cause. That very body which hung on the cross and was laid in the

¹³ See Dr. Abbadie on the deity of Jesus Christ as essential to the Christian religion in *Treatise on the Deity of Jesus Christ* (1689); pertinent information occurs throughout.—*Booth*

Jakob Abbadie (c. 1654-1727) – French Protestant minister and writer. He pastored the French refugee churches in Berlin and London. His other famous work is the *Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion* (1684).

grave, that very soul which suffered the keenest anguish and was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Mat 26:38), are now, and ever shall be, in close connection with the eternal Word. Mysterious, indescribable union! Full of wonder and comfort! Jesus is clothed with the very humanity in which He suffered afflictions and trials of every kind and of every degree. How encouraging it is, then, to consider that He cannot forget His tempted, despised, and afflicted people in this militant state. In Himself He sees their image; in His hands He beholds their names. He feels for them, He suffers with them (Heb 2:18; 4:15; Isa 49:15-16). He never will, He never can overlook their persons or be unmindful of their best interests.

GRACE REIGNS THROUGH THE WORK OF CHRIST

We have taken a view of the person of Christ, and His qualifications for the work of a Mediator arising from His personal excellencies considered as Immanuel. We must now consider that perfect work¹ through which grace reigns, and in virtue of which her favors are dispensed.

“So might grace reign,” says God’s Word, “through *righteousness*” (Rom 5:21). Righteousness in this place I understand as including a) the whole of that obedience which the Redeemer, under the character of a surety, performed to the preceptive² part of the Law, and b) all those bitter sufferings that He underwent in conformity to its penal sanction. Through this obedience, grace reigns in a way strictly conformable to the rights of divine justice. By this most perfect work of Christ, the tenderest mercy is shown to miserable sinners, and meets with the truth of Jehovah’s righteous threatenings against sin. Here the righteousness of God, as the Lawgiver, appears in taking vengeance on sin so as to produce substantial and lasting peace to the sinner. Happy instrument! Wonderful grace!

But let us a little more particularly consider the nature and excellencies of this evangelical righteousness.

A. Nature of Evangelical Righteousness

As to its nature, it is a complete conformity to the divine Law. Whatever the precepts of Jehovah’s Law demanded, the adorable Jesus performed in its fullest extent. His nature being perfectly holy, the principle of His actions was absolutely pure; the end for which He did them entirely right; and the matter of them and rule of their performance without any defect. He submitted to whatever the Law, considered as broken, threatened by way of punishment against the offender in all its dreadful severity. For God “made him

¹ See FGB 225, *The Work of Christ*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **preceptive** – relating to authoritative commands; by precept.

to be sin for us" (2Co 5:21) and "made [Him to be] a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). He suffered—amazing love, unparalleled condescension!—He suffered the greatest shame, the most excruciating pain that the malice of men or the subtlety of devils could invent or inflict. And what was infinitely more: He suffered the wrath of God!

The duration of His passion was indeed comparatively short; but for this the infinite dignity of His person was a full compensation. We must consider that it was the Son of God and Lord of glory Who bled and died under every circumstance of disgrace and pain. All the dreadful monuments of divine justice inflicted on the sons of rebellion in past ages and transmitted to posterity in the most authentic records; all the misery that awaits the licentious world and is denounced in the Scripture—all these cannot raise our ideas of Jehovah's avenging justice to so high a pitch as a remembrance of the bitter though transitory sufferings of the divine Jesus.

B. Excellencies of Evangelical Righteousness

The excellencies of this righteousness appear from the characters it bears in holy writ. To signify its unspotted purity, it is called "fine linen, clean and white" (Rev 19:8). To denote its completeness, it is called a "robe" (Isa 61:10). To hold forth its exquisite beauty, richness, and glory, it is called "clothing...of wrought gold" and "raiment of needlework" (Psa 45:13-14). To point out its unequalled excellency, it is called "the best robe" (Luk 15:22).

It is better than the robe of innocence with which our first parents were clothed before the Fall. Yea, it is better than the righteousness of angels in glory, for theirs is but the obedience of mere creatures, of dependent beings. But this—which is the highest title that language can give—this is "the righteousness of God" (2Co 5:21). Its nature and properties are such that the Lord Himself seems to glory in it, frequently calling it His own "righteousness" (Rom 10:3; Jer 23:6; Isa 46:13; 51:5-8; 56:1).

It is an "*everlasting* righteousness" (Dan 9:24). It is a robe whose beauty will never be tarnished, a garment that will never decay, and clothing that will never wear out. When millions of ages have run their ample round, it will continue the same that it was the first day it came into use. And when millions more are elapsed, there will be no alteration. The continuance of its effectiveness, beauty, and glory will be as lasting as the light of the New Jerusalem and unfading as the eternal inheritance.

It is a righteousness *already performed*. It is not something *now* to be wrought in us by the operation of the Holy Spirit. No, it was completed when the divine Redeemer cried, "It is finished... and gave up the ghost" (Joh 19:30). But here many persons fall into a fatal mistake. Ready they are to imagine that sinners are accepted of God in virtue of righteousness wrought in them and performed by them through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This assistance, they suppose, was purchased for them by the death of Christ. But while such an imagination prevails, they never can experience what it is to be in a justified state.

Besides, when the blessed Jesus died, He did not do something to assist our weak but willing endeavors to save ourselves. He did not lay in a provision of grace, or purchase the Spirit for us, in order to supply the defects of enfeebled nature and render us capable of performing the condition of our justification. But, at that awesome and ever-memorable period, when He bowed His head and expired, He, by Himself alone, perfectly finished that righteousness which is the proper condition and the grand requirement of our justification.

That the Spirit of grace and truth, as *given* to any, is a precious fruit of the death, resurrection, and glorification of Christ, is freely acknowledged. But that Jesus died to purchase the Spirit to *work* in us any part of that righteousness on account of which we are accepted of God, must be denied. For the principal work of the Spirit in the method of grace, our Lord Himself bearing witness, is to testify of Him and reveal His glory to the sinner's conscience. "He shall testify of me...He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (Joh 15:26; 16:14; see 1Co 2:12).

Nor does the Spirit of truth act as a sanctifier until, in order of nature, we are perfectly justified. And when justified, He effects our sanctification by that very truth which reveals the obedience of Christ as a finished work. To think otherwise is according to the popish³ scheme that confounds justification with sanctification, but is very far from being the doctrine of the apostles. It is also contrary to the sentiments of our first reformers,⁴ and of all their genuine successors both at home and abroad.

³ **popish** – Roman Catholic.

⁴ **first reformers** – those who led in the Reformation of the sixteenth century to recover sound biblical doctrines. These include Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, Beza, and others.

C. Freeness of Evangelical Righteousness

1. *Am I Qualified to Receive?*

Notwithstanding what has been said concerning the matchless excellence of the Redeemer's righteousness, the reader whose mind is enlightened to behold the defects attending his own best performances—and whose conscience is affected with a sense of deserved wrath—may, perhaps, be ready to say,

As to the glorious nature and superlative excellence of this obedience, there is no dispute. But is it *free* for a mere sinner? Is it not rather designed for those who are in some way qualified for it by a set of holy principles and a series of pious actions—those who are distinguished from the altogether worthless and vile? Is there any possibility for a miserable sinner, a condemned criminal—one whose transgressions are great and whose corruptions are strong—to partake of it and be made happy by it? And if there be, which is the way?

To these momentous inquiries, God's Word furnishes a substantial answer. For it informs us that there is another excellency attending this righteousness that has a special regard to the manner of its communication, which therefore ought by no means to be overlooked. Yes, blessed be God! The unerring Word warrants me to assert that this righteousness is *absolutely free*. It was wrought for the sinner, was designed for the sinner, and is freely bestowed on the vilest of sinners.

It is not a matter of bargain⁵ or the subject of sale. It is not proposed on certain *conditions*, as the performing of some arduous course of duties or the attaining of some notable qualifications; but it is a free gift. Grace, as a sovereign, is exalted to confer it. And grace, we know, deals only with the unworthy. As a gift it is imparted; as a gift, therefore, it must be received. And as for an absolutely free gift, the possessor of it should be thankful.

The mere sinner, the condemned creature, feels himself in a perishing condition and is conscious that he deserves no favor. Such has the strongest encouragement given him to rely on grace as quite sufficient for his justification and absolutely free for his use. Yes, sorrowful sinner, you have no reason to hesitate whether you have a right to conceive of this righteousness and to call it your own. Believing the testimony that God has given of His Son, you

⁵ **bargain** – barter or trade, worked out by negotiating one thing for another.

receive it and enjoy the comfort arising from it. Heaven proclaims your welcome to Christ, and eternal faithfulness ensures acceptance to all that believe in Him.

2. *Romans 10:6-9*

By a figure of speech that is frequent in Scripture, this righteousness is represented as speaking. Doubtless then, so noble a righteousness must have a charming language; and a little attention will discover its meaning. The language of this righteousness is represented by Paul as directly contrary to that description which Moses gives of "the righteousness of the law" (Rom 2:26; see Deu 4:8).

And thus it addresses the anxious inquirer: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)" (Rom 10:6)—as though He had not appeared in our nature to perform a righteousness for the justification of sinners. Nor does it bid thee inquire, "Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)" (10:7)—as if He had not perfectly paid the debt. As a surety, He became responsible. In His resurrection, He received from the hand of His Father an acquittal in full for Himself *and* for His people.

"But what saith it," that is, what then is its language? "The word" of grace that reveals this righteousness "is nigh thee"—sinful and wretched as you are. Even so near as to be "in thy mouth" to proclaim its excellence "and in thy heart" to enjoy its comfort—"that is, the word [the doctrine] of faith, which we preach" (10:8). It further says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus," as dying an accursed death for the redemption of sinners, "and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead," as a divine testimony that the atonement made was accepted by eternal justice, then "thou shalt be saved" (10:9) from final misery and exalted to the joys of heaven.

The language of this divine righteousness is here described both negatively and positively. *Negatively*, we are not commanded to do some laborious work in order to obtain acceptance, nor are we required to do anything at all for that purpose. This is because it is evident that believing in Christ (which is mentioned in verse 9) is, in the business of justification, opposed to works and doings of every kind (see Rom 4:5-16; Gal 3:12-13). The faith here designed is, therefore, to be considered as the receiving of Christ and His righteousness, or as a dependence on Him alone for salvation. Be-

lieving the gracious report, we receive the atonement, enjoy comfort, and have the earnest of eternal glory.

The awakened sinner is often disposed to imagine that he must do some great thing to obtain the pardon of sin and peace for his conscience, therefore the language of this righteousness is also described *positively*. Thus considered, it plainly declares that the only obedience by which there is favor with God and a title to happiness is already performed. It plainly declares that the anxious inquirer is not left in a state of uncertainty how it may be enjoyed, for it is brought near in the Word of grace. There is a free welcome to rely on it and use it as his own, to the everlasting honor of its divine Author.

By comparing what the apostle says about the righteousness of *faith* with what Moses declares concerning the righteousness of the *Law*, we learn that whoever thinks of doing any good work as the condition of life

- is ignorant of that obedience which the gospel reveals,
- is under the Law as a covenant,
- is a debtor to perform the whole Law,
- and, as a breaker of it, is liable to its awful curse.

This is his case, even when, with the Pharisee in the parable (Luk 18:11), he thanks God for assisting him to perform the supposed condition, whether great or small. For the righteousness of the Law and the righteousness of faith are here placed in direct opposition. This is evident from the scope of the passage in general, and especially from the adversative⁶ *but* that introduces what is said about the righteousness of faith.

D. Usefulness of Evangelical Righteousness

This substitutionary obedience is as useful to the sinner as it is perfect in itself. By this work of our heavenly Substitute, that holy Law which we have broken is highly honored, and that awesome justice which we have offended is completely satisfied. By this righteousness, the believer is cleared from every charge, is perfectly justified, and shall be eternally saved. In this consummate work, Jehovah declares Himself well pleased, and in it all the glories of the Godhead shine. Yes, the obedience of our adorable Sponsor is as perfect as divine righteousness could require. It is as excellent as

⁶ **adversative** – grammatical conjunction such as the word *but*, expressing opposition and used to show relationship between two opposing parts.

eternal wisdom itself could devise. Admirable righteousness! Who that is taught of God would not with Paul desire to be found in it? And who that is conscious of an interest in it can cease to admire and adore the grace that provided it and the Savior that wrought it?

Is the obedience of the Lord Redeemer so glorious in its nature, so excellent in its properties, so free in the manner of its communication to the ungodly, and so extensively useful to all that possess it? What encouragement, then, has the miserable sinner to look to it! How safely may he confide in it as all-sufficient to justify his ungodly soul! Be the demands of the divine Law and infinite justice ever so great, numerous, or dreadful, the work of Christ completely answers them all. There is greater effectiveness in the grace of God and in the work of His incarnate Son to justify and save from deserved perdition, than there can be demerit in the offenses of a sinner to incur condemnation and ruin.

Nor can it seem strange that the work of Christ should be effective in this way. For God the Son performed it in the capacity of a substitute. God the Father declares His delight in it and treats as His children all those that are endowed with it. And it is the principal business of God the Holy Spirit, as a guide and a comforter, to testify of it. So, every other righteousness, in comparison with it, is quite insignificant. If set in competition with it, they are more vile than dross and worse than nothing.

In this righteousness, Christians of all ages have gloried, both living and dying, as the only ground of their hope. In this most perfect obedience, believers are now exalted and the saints in heaven triumph—for the work of Christ finished on a cross is the burden of their songs.

But who can point out all its beauties? Who can show forth half its praise? When considered under its divine character, the righteousness of Jehovah exceeds all possible praise, even after all that has been written or said about it here on earth by prophets and apostles. It exceeds all possible praise, even after all that has been sung or can be conceived by saints or angels in the world of glory. The inhabitants of the heavenly world must be conscious that their loftiest strains, though expressed with angelic fervor, fall vastly

short of displaying all its excellence. So that, “When Gabriel sounds these glorious things, He tunes and summons all his strings.”⁷

⁷ Hymn, author unknown; used in many 19th century hymnals, including *Psalms and Hymns for Christian Use and Worship*, General (Congregational) Association of Connecticut, 1855.

GRACE REIGNS IN GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION

A. Description

Divine grace is glorious in itself and infinitely superior to all that is called “free favor” among men. The way in which it reigns is absolutely without a parallel, and such as will render it forever dear to all the disciples of Christ. Therefore, the purpose and result of its gracious government is equally glorious, because its result is eternal life. Reviving, ravishing thought! This, in subordination to His own glory, is the great design of God in every gracious act towards His people.

The emphatic phrase *eternal life* is used in Scripture to signify “an everlasting state of complete holiness and consummate happiness, in the presence and enjoyment of God, in all His persons and perfections.” As a sovereign, grace infallibly brings her subjects to this blissful state through the person and work of Immanuel.

To help our feeble little minds form some faint ideas of celestial blessedness,¹ and to inform us by whom it shall be enjoyed, it is compared by sacred writers to the most delightful and glorious things that come under our notice in the present world. For instance, to denote its *superabounding delights*, it is called “paradise,” in allusion to the Garden of Eden, for at God’s “right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11).

To signify its *grandeur*, magnificence, and glory, it is called a “crown” and a “kingdom.” As a crown, it is unfading and incorruptible. To denote that none shall enjoy it except in virtue of the Redeemer’s obedience, it is called a “crown of righteousness” (2Ti 4:8). It is also called a “crown of life” and a “crown of glory” (Jam 1:12; Isa 28:5). As a kingdom, it was prepared for believers “before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). It is the kingdom of their Father, Who bestows it upon them here in right to possess; and hereafter in perfect enjoyment.

¹ See FGB 254, *Heaven*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

To ascertain its *perpetuity*, it is called an “everlasting kingdom” (Psa 145:13); and those that enjoy it are called “kings” (Rev 1:6). They are said to “sit with me in my throne” and to “reign in life” (Rev 3:21; Rom 5:17).

To inform us *who shall possess it* and on what ground, it is called an “inheritance” (1Pe 1:4). This plainly denotes that none but the children of God shall enjoy it; for a servant, considered as such, cannot inherit. We must, therefore, be the sons of the Highest by adoption and regeneration before we can justly hope to enjoy the heavenly patrimony. For however diligent the sons of God may be in keeping His commands and in performing His will, they shall not possess it under the notion of a reward of duty or as wages for work. They shall only possess it under the idea of a gift received via inheritance from a will. Yes, it is a gift by way of legacy, and is bequeathed to them in the everlasting testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is according to those words: “I appoint, by testament, unto you a kingdom.”² The kingdom is most glorious, and the inheritance most free to the children of God, and absolutely unalienable.

Nor are the heirs of this boundless bliss without some *joyful foretastes* of it in this life. Faith being, as the apostle defines it, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), they anticipate in some degree the joys of the upper world. In the present state, they receive the earnest of their future inheritance and rejoice in hope of the full enjoyment of it. Nay, at some bright intervals, they “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). For “he that believeth...hath everlasting life” (Joh 6:47)—in the promise and in the earnest of it.

The saints have “fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before” them. They possess those “two immutable things”: the promise and the oath of God, in either of which “it was impossible for God to lie.” Therefore, these afford them “strong consolation” respecting their final preservation and eternal happiness (Heb 6:18). They live by faith on the dying and ascended Redeemer as

² translation of Luke 22:29. Thus the celebrated Witsius renders and interprets the passage (*Econ.* 1. iii. c. x; section 28). To the same effect, Beza and Castellio translate the words.—*Booth*

Theodore Beza (1519-1605) – French Protestant Christian theologian and scholar; important in the early Reformation. He was a disciple of John Calvin.
Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563) – French preacher and theologian; educated at the University of Lyon; an expert in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek.

their surety and sacrifice, as their righteousness and advocate. And they view the stability of the promise in the covenant, the oath of Jehovah. Therefore, they have the greatest assurance that “when Christ, who is [their] life, shall appear, then shall [they] also appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4).

B. Separate Spirit

1. What Happens at Death

The future happiness of believers may be considered as it is enjoyed either a) by the *separate spirit*, before the resurrection and the Last Judgment, or b) by the *soul and body united*, after that awesome period is come and those grand events have taken place. The separate spirits of the saints possess thought and consciousness, and they enjoy indescribable bliss in communion with Jesus their exalted Head. These are truths clearly contained in the unerring Word.

As soon as that mysterious union which subsists between soul and body in the present state is dissolved by death, the soul, being made perfectly free from the state of sin, immediately enters into glory. Death, to the saints, far from being a penal evil,³ is numbered among their privileges, and makes one article in their comprehensive inventory of divine blessings (1Co 3:22). Death is the gate by which they enter those heavenly mansions prepared for them. In the possession of death, they enjoy delights that could not be experienced in this mortal state. The knowledge of that sublime blessedness and of an interest in it made Paul “desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phi 1:23), that is, infinitely preferable to all that can be enjoyed in this world.

The same incomparable man and infallible teacher says, “Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” (2Co 5:6). At the same time, he declares that it was far more preferable to him and his godly contemporaries, “to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (5:8). Now, if the apostle’s words have any sense and if their meaning is at all intelligible, we cannot suppose him to have imagined that his immortal soul, when separated from the body, would lie in a sleepy, unconscious, inactive state until the sound of the archangel’s trumpet should awaken it (which notion is by some warmly espoused). For in such a state

³ **penal evil** – suffering as a punishment for sin.

of absolute insensibility, he could not, with any propriety, be said to “*be with Christ*” or to enjoy the presence of God.

Before the dissolution of his body, he rejoiced in the light of Jehovah’s countenance and had much communion with his God. He was indulged with bright manifestations of divine favor and exulted in the certain prospect of a blissful immortality. According to the sleeping scheme, he instantly would have lost all of this by death! And under such deprivation, he would have had to continue for a long series of years, even until the voice of the Omnipotent and the alarming crash of a falling world should rally and awaken his dissipated and drowsy powers into activity. Thus would he be brought into a second enjoyment of himself and of his God. How discomforting such an idea is to the real Christian!

2. *The Converted Thief*

That the departing spirits of the children of God enter immediately into happiness might be proved from a great variety of divine testimonies. Among these, there are few more relevant than the remarkable and gracious answer of Jesus to the converted thief, when they were both on the verge of the unseen world. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luk 23:43). These words include a particular answer to the request of the expiring penitent, who prayed that Christ would “remember” him. As if our Lord had said, “I will not only remember thee as absent, for verily thou shalt be with Me in the everlasting mansions to behold My glory.”

As the dying petitioner desired his request might be granted when the bleeding Jesus should enter into His kingdom, the suffering Savior confirmed to him not only the *place* where He was to reign, which He calls “paradise,” but also the *time* when He was to enter into the possession of His kingdom—signified by “today.” Nor is it unworthy of notice that when this promise was made the day was half elapsed, for “it was about the sixth hour”⁴ (Luk 23:44). Yet Christ promised him the joys of Paradise before that very day concluded, knowing that, in the interim, they should both make their exit from this world. As the gracious promise to this thief was very extraordinary, and as the person to whom it was made was in such circumstances, and bore such an infamous character, Jesus there-

⁴ **sixth hour** – Jewish time of day was reckoned from sunrise (about 6 AM) to sunset (about 6 PM), and then from sunset to sunrise. The sixth hour of the day would be about noon.

fore confirmed this promise by affirming, “Verily.” It is as if He had said, “I, the Amen,⁵ Who am truth itself, solemnly declare that what I have promised shall certainly be fulfilled this day.”

The different punctuation and sense of the text that are given by those who adopt the sleeping scheme appear farfetched, strained, and unsatisfying. They contend that the words ought thus to be positioned: “I say unto thee to day, thou shalt be with me in paradise.” As if our Lord had not the least intention to fix the time when the converted evildoer should behold His glory; but only declared by the expression *today* the certainty of what He promised. To this forced, unnatural, and dull interpretation of the passage, it may be justly objected that, as the thief could not be ignorant of the limited time when the gracious promise was made, so he had no occasion to have that particular distinguished and confirmed in so solemn a manner. Nor is it the expression *today*, but the word *verily*, that indicates the truth of what was affirmed and the certainty of enjoying the promised blessing. For as “today” in our Lord’s answer denotes a precisely limited time, so it clearly corresponds to the adverb “when” in the thief’s petition.

This hypothesis appears not only uncomfortable to the real Christian, and anti-scriptural to the fair minded examiner of the sacred records, but also unphilosophical. For the soul is a thinking being; thus, if it were to be entirely deprived of thought and consciousness when the body dies, then it must, in spite of whatever appears to the contrary, lose its existence. But if so, instead of a resurrection at the Last Day, there must be a new creation—which is contrary to the analogy of faith⁶ and to the hope of saints in every age. A mind without thought and consciousness, and matter without solidity and extension, are equally absurd ideas.

Therefore, the separate spirits of saints—being lodged in eternal mansions and abiding at the source of all bliss—enjoy inconceivable pleasures. They are completely released from all troubles of every kind: from all sins and sufferings, from all temptations and

⁵ **Amen** – literally, “firm, true”; “that which is true, truth”; a word used in strong declarations, fixing as it were the stamp of truth upon the assertion that it accompanied. The Deity, to Whom appeal is made on such occasions, is called “the God of *Amen* [i.e., truth]” (Isa 65:16). With a similar significance, Christ is called “the Amen, the faithful and true witness” (Rev 3:14).

⁶ **analogy of faith** – method of biblical interpretation where the body of doctrine or truth (the “faith”) gathered from the whole Bible is used to interpret a particular passage under question.

sorrows. Moral evil, with all its attendants, is eternally banished from those bright abodes. The people that dwell there are all perfectly righteous, nor shall any of the inhabitants of that land say, "I am sick" (Isa 33:24). Their garments are always white; their harps are always tuned. Being with Christ according to His promise, they behold His glory and are delighted with His beauty.

3. *The Excellencies of Jesus*

The infinite excellencies of Jesus, the incarnate Jehovah, are illustriously displayed in that exalted state. Those divine and mediatorial perfections, of which we can form but very low conceptions while here below, beam forth on the holy and happy spirits in a blaze of glory. With adoring gratitude and pleasing astonishment, they reflect:

This is He Who once raised a feeble cry in the stable at Bethlehem!
This is He Who spent His life in one continued series of beneficent actions⁷ when surrounded with lowliness and poverty, with reproaches and sorrows! This is He—but, oh, how changed!—Who made His exit on Calvary under every mark of infamy, under the severest sensations of pain, both in body and soul. And all this to accomplish our salvation!

To view Him eye to eye, Who was once a man of sorrows and sufferings to the highest degree—to behold Him Who is their husband and head thus exalted and glorified, after all the abasement and misery to which He submitted on their account—must fill their souls with ecstatic bliss.

Nor are they mere spectators of His glorious exaltation. They behold their beloved and have communion with Him as do loyal subjects with an exalted sovereign. But in addition, He entertains and rejoices over them as His friends and brethren, as His bride and portion. This we may learn from the friendly freedom He used with His disciples while here on earth. For though, as their sovereign Lord, He required supreme respect and accepted profound adoration, yet He did not keep them at a respectful distance, but conversed with them in the most familiar manner. Doubtless, then, He does not behave with less freedom, or keep them at a greater distance, because of His exalted state. But rather, He takes them into a state of exaltation with Himself. For though He is exalted above all blessing and praise, yet this is not as a private

⁷ **beneficent actions** – acts of kindness and charity.

person, nor merely for His own sake, but as the Head of His numerous family, and as the Savior of all His people.

The advancement of Christ the Head could not be intended to remove the members to a greater distance; for there is the same relation and the same union subsisting between Him and them. Consequently, they must be honored and exalted with Him. Beholding His infinite glory, their adoring regards are heightened. But this is far from diminishing their nearness to Him or their delight in Him. It only serves to increase their astonishment and joy, as they find Him still condescending to admit them into such a familiarity with Him, and so liberally communicating His glory to them.

4. Directly Viewing God's Attributes

When they were in this lower world, His people discerned the signatures of Deity in the works of creation and of providence. They beheld yet brighter displays of Jehovah's glory in the operations of grace and in the amazing effects of His love, in the gift of a Savior and in His death on the cross. But now, having their intellectual powers abundantly strengthened, they have manifestations of His infinite excellence. In comparison to this, all their previous discoveries of divine perfection by the material creation—and all the happiness they enjoyed in the church militant—were poor and insignificant, were low and languid beyond expression. For now they are surrounded with the riches of God and eternally enriched with His bounty.

Paul, ravished with the more obscure appearances of divine wisdom, could not forbear exclaiming, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom 11:33). That being so, then what holy transports of wonder must it afford the spirits of the "just...made perfect" (Heb 12:23) to have the counsels of heaven laid open to their view!

a. Power

The contemplation of divine power, under the conduct of infinite wisdom, and leagued with boundless goodness, must heighten their pleasure. How delightful to behold, in the light of glory,

- that power which raised the vast frame of nature, and from the beginning sustained all things,
- that power which turned the mighty wheels of providence in every age of the world, through all the revolutions of time,

- that uncontrollable power
 - which restrained legions of wicked spirits and accursed fiends, in ten thousand different instances, from perpetrating their malicious designs and filling the world with mischief,
 - which wrought upon the stubborn hearts of rebellious creatures, caused them to acknowledge divine sovereignty, and made them willing to accept salvation in the appointed way,
- that power which, having formed their souls anew, preserved them in the midst of innumerable dangers that continually lay in their way to the regions of happiness,
- that power which never interrupted its guardian agency, till it brought them safe to glory!

b. Love

If the power of God, as beheld by the saints in light, is so delightful a subject of contemplation, what exuberant joy must the views of His love afford! For as love is the noblest passion of the human breast, so it is the brightest beam of divinity that ever irradiated the wide creation. Love is a pleasing theme; and the meaning of that divine sentence, “God is love,” is there unfolded to the very life (1Jo 4:8). The happy spirits are no longer obliged to learn Jehovah’s love from His names and works, for they now behold it as essential to His Being. The day they had long expected—that happy day which is appropriated to the full discovery of divine love—having dawned upon them, they take their fill of love.

Now the immortal spirit is invigorated in all its powers and enlarged in all its faculties. And it is for this purpose: to take in more abundant views and to receive abundantly larger manifestations of divine love than it could possibly before enjoy. They have now traced up the streams to the eternal fountain—the beams to the very sun of love. The bosom of their Father, where the thoughts of love were lodged from everlasting and where its noble designs were formed, is laid open to their view. Now they clearly see why the Son of God became incarnate, undertook the redemption of man, and, in order to accomplish the arduous work, obeyed, suffered, and died the most painful and infamous death. He died a sacrifice, an atonement for sin—a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

The wondering soul penetrates the vast design, and sees with warmest gratitude,

- why itself was not made an everlasting monument of divine justice,
- why its native enmity against God was completely subdued, and
- why its enormous crimes were pardoned.

All of this is resolved into the free, distinguishing love of God. The adoring soul beholds, with ecstasies of delight, how well the admirable effects correspond to their grand, original cause. Certainly, nothing short of heaven itself, which gives the experience, can give an adequate idea of such exalted bliss.

c. Justice

Nor will their views of divine justice—no, not in its awful effects considered as vindictive, and manifested in the damnation of innumerable myriads of apostate angels and sinful men—in the least reduce their joys or damp their pleasures. For though infidels may now object against an eternal punishment being inflicted for transient crimes, and arraign the Book of God itself, which asserts that so it shall be, to these saved souls it appears in the clearest light that sin is an infinite evil and therefore justly deserving of perpetual misery. Their holy wills, being perfectly conformed to the pleasure of God, fully acquiesce in the sentence pronounced upon offenders, and rejoice in the execution of it on all the daring sons of rebellion, whether angels or men. They now more fully discover how holiness in the Lawgiver, the demands of His Law, and the rights of His justice were all displayed and perfectly satisfied in the redemption of their souls by the blood of the cross. The remembrance and views of that cross are a scene of wonders and an inexhaustible source of joy.

d. Holiness

The spirits of believers in glory contemplate divine holiness with supreme delight. God is “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11). This perfection of the Godhead has frequently been celebrated in lofty strains of devotion by saints on earth (1Sa 2:8; Psa 30:4; 97:12). Now if those who dwell in houses of clay, whose views, at the best, are so feeble and partial, have been much affected by meditating on holiness, what thoughts must they have who behold it in all its glory? With adoring hearts and ravished eyes, with inflamed devotion and notes divinely sweet, they join the heavenly choir in that seraphic hymn: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.” Heaven and earth are full of His glory! (Isa 6:3). How inconceivable the

pleasure; how divine the joy! And may I not venture to add, the views of this glorious holiness must have such a transforming effect on the happy spirits, producing in them a perpetually advancing conformity to God in holiness and in glory!

5. *Close Communion*

The face of Moses shone with peculiar brightness after he had been admitted to close conversation with Jehovah on the mount. How much greater than this must be that brightness which God communicates to those who constantly behold Him without any veil in between! The transcendent amiableness of Jehovah greatly consists in His immaculate holiness (for holiness is nothing but intellectual beauty), in which He presents Himself to glorified saints as the Infinite Beauty. Therefore, they must perpetually rest in Him as the proper object of their love and as the center of their delight. Nor can they cease to admire the equity of that command which requires the most perfect love to God on account of His own infinite loveliness and all-surpassing excellence.

Being favored with a more perfect knowledge of God, and more intimate communion with Him, their love to Him is proportionally heightened. That grace which reigned in their whole salvation, being discerned by them in a stronger light, inflames them with the most ardent love to its adorable Author, and to Jesus, by Whom it reigned. All the amiable and infinite perfections of Deity shining upon them in the light of glory, their holy bosoms cannot but glow with the utmost fervor. They cannot but make returns of love, and in such a manner as is suited to their happy and exalted state. Their supreme love to God causes them to contemplate His divine perfections and astonishing operations with ever-new delight, by which they are more and more assimilated to His divine image. This is the source of that sublime delight that is called “the joy of the Lord” (Neh 8:10) in the sacred page.

There they are absolutely free from that pride and selfishness which tarnish our best services here, and quite remote from all those imperfections that attended them in a militant state.⁸ Songs of sincerest gratitude and hymns of holy wonder are their uninterrupted and sweet employ. These they offer with the profoundest acknowledgments of multiplied obligations to reigning grace, and the loftiest strains of thanksgiving to God and the Lamb. They are ever free to declare that the only cause of their enjoying the beatific

⁸ **militant state** – life on earth as a spiritual battleground for the saint.

vision, and being seated on thrones of glory, is that grace which—as a mighty, magnificent, and bountiful sovereign—reigned through the person and work of Immanuel. Grace appears, shines, and triumphs

- in rescuing them out of the hands of Satan,
- in preserving them through all dangers,
- in supporting them under the severest trials,
- in bringing them safe to glory,
- in crowning them with unutterable bliss.

Hence grace is the grand and unvaried theme of their songs. To the “God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10), the triune God, they address all possible praise with divine delight.

C. Body and Spirit Reunited

Peculiarly great and glorious is the sublime blessedness that is possessed by the separate spirits of saints in heaven. Nevertheless, it comes far short of that happiness which shall be enjoyed in their *whole persons*, and which belongs to the consummation of that celestial state. For the Word of God frequently intimates that the bliss of the saints will not be absolutely complete until the general judgment is past and the end of the world is come (Col 3:4; 2Ti 1:12; 4:8; 1Pe 5:4). We may, therefore, take notice of some things by which their blessedness will then be enhanced.

1. Victory over Sin

Their bodies, being raised in glory and reunited to their immortal spirits, will not only be a demonstration of divine power and a display of divine goodness (very wonderful in their eyes), but also an addition to their blessedness. The happy spirits in glory cannot be ignorant that the power which sin obtained over man is not yet entirely abolished so long as any of the children of God continue in this perplexing, miserable world, and so long as the bodies of saints departed are confined in the grave. Consequently, they will know that something must be lacking in the consummation of their joy. But by the resurrection, death itself (which is the last enemy) shall be destroyed, never more to have the least power except over the enemies of God.

2. The Dead Raised

That the dead shall be raised is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. The justice of God and the comfort of believers apparently require that the same bodies which fell by death shall be

raised. This is clear from the Scriptures and is implied in the word *resurrection*. But though, as to their substance, they shall be the same—so far at least as to support their identity—yet as to their qualities, the alteration will be so great that we cannot form suitable ideas concerning them. The surprising change that shall pass upon them is absolutely necessary to fit them for the exalted state into which they shall be introduced, when reanimated by their immortal spirits. Hence those words: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 15:50).

The present constitution of our bodies renders them incapable of bearing the splendor of the heavenly world, and consequently of partaking in the joys of that state. The glory of it would be insupportably bright, too dazzling for them to sustain. Like herbs and flowers of the most delicate kind, exposed to the scorching glare of the sun at its height, they would faint under it. However,

- when that which was “sown in corruption” shall be “raised in incorruption,”
- when that which was “sown in dishonour [and] weakness” shall be “raised in glory [and] power,”
- “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality,”
- in a word, when that which was “sown a natural body” shall be “raised a spiritual body”

—then our bodies *will* be capable of partaking in the employment and bliss of heaven (1Co 15:42-44, 54).

When the bodies of believers shall be raised by almighty power and fashioned by infinite wisdom to be like the glorious body of Christ (Phi 3:21), then they will be fit companions for their souls to all eternity. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun,” both in body and soul, “in the kingdom of their Father” (Mat 13:43). The body partook in the sorrows and sufferings of this present world. It suffered various hardships and acts of violence from the enemies of Christ. It assisted the intellectual powers in performing religious duties. But *then* it shall be a partaker of the joys of that triumphant state.

Yes, the earthly tabernacle⁹ is the purchase of redeeming blood and the temple of the Holy Ghost, even when surrounded with imperfections. Then it shall be bright as the sun, vigorous with celestial youth, and undecaying as the power that shall support it.

⁹ **tabernacle** – tent; figure for a temporary dwelling; here: the body.

Therefore, we may conclude that the bodies of the saints, being raised from the dust of death, will contribute much to increase their bliss.

But who can form adequate ideas of the nature and excellence of a spiritual body? Who can declare the power and grace that shall be exercised and manifested toward the children of men in raising their sleeping dust? Who can declare the grace in forming their bodies afresh for an eternal world, after so dignified a model as the glorious body of Christ? Here we must leave them until we behold the glorified body of our exalted Redeemer or actually experience the happy transformation. The beloved disciple himself declares, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). To which I may add, in allusion to the words of the psalmist: when we awake from the sleep of death, in the likeness of our adorable Savior, we shall certainly be *satisfied* with the amazing alteration (Psa 17:15).

3. Public Clearing

Another thing that will add to the blessedness of saints at that day is their public acquittal by Jesus the Judge when standing before His tribunal. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Rev 1:7)! Infinitely grand and awesomely kind He now appears. Innumerable angels attend His approach and pour around His chariot. The brightness of ten thousand suns is lost in the blaze of His glory and in the luster of His countenance. Behold! A great white throne is erected (Rev 20:11), clear as light and fiery as flame. The Judge, inflexibly just and immensely glorious, ascends the tribunal; and before His presence, the heavens and the earth flee away (Isa 51:6; 2Pe 3:10).

Those innumerable millions of rational creatures that people the universe are now assembled. The books are opened. Myriads of adoring angels and countless multitudes of anxious spectators await the grand result. The wicked, with trembling hands and throbbing hearts, with horror in their aspect and damnation in view, would be glad to lose their being. But the righteous are bold and fearless, for the Judge is their Friend and their Savior! The righteousness in which they appear was performed by Him. The plea that they make, He cannot reject. For this righteousness is the blood that He shed to atone for their sins. And this plea is the

promise He made to comfort their souls, under the expectation of this important event.

There the righteous stand, not to have any fresh indictment brought against them; nor to have anything laid to their charge by Satan, or the Law, or justice. But they stand to be honorably acquitted in the presence of angels and of the whole assembled world. The sentence of justification—long before pronounced in the court of heaven, and in the court of conscience at the time of their conversion—is now recognized in the most solemn and public manner. The works of faith and labors of love performed by them toward their needy fellow Christians in the time of their pilgrimage here below are now produced by the omniscient Judge as fruits and evidences of their union with Him, of their faith in Him, and of their love to Him.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Matthew 25:34-40. It is very observable how different the conduct of saints will be at this awesome and glorious time from that of nominal professors—as represented by our Lord in Matthew 7:22. Here we find the Judge taking notice of His people's works, when they make no mention of them. Not only so, but when He is pleased to mention their labors of love with high approval, they seem to have forgotten them. This is a plain proof they did not expect salvation by them, nor ever thought of any such thing. No, Christ was their righteousness, and that was sufficient. The works they performed were designed to glorify Him and to express their gratitude to God for His benefits. But so conscious were they of the imperfections cleaving to their performances, they were ashamed to mention them.

Whereas, when our Lord represents the reason of hope in self-righteous persons, He tells us that they will say, with great persistence, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But He will answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (7:22-23). They plead their own works, religious duties, and great usefulness as sufficient reasons why they should be admitted into the kingdom of glory. Not that they pretend to have done these things by their own strength or natural abilities. No, they acknowledge that all was done in the name of Christ and by His authority and assistance. For this reason, we may suppose, they would be the more confident of acceptance with Him. Hence, we have done this, and we have done the other, is their cry and their plea.

They thought of coming to heaven by their own works. They did them for that end and were loath to be disappointed. But what is the result? Why, truly, these mighty workers and very useful persons are branded as the workers of *iniquity*; not acknowledged as the people of God! They are thrust down into hell, with all their fine recommendations and imaginary goodness—notwithstanding all their pleas and their promising hopes founded upon them. On the other hand, the poor in spirit are those who are sensible of their own unworthiness, who live by imputed righteousness, making that the only ground of their hope. These, from love to the truth and to Christ, perform good works with a view to the glory of God. They do not in the least expect

The nature and quality of a Christian's works, the principle from which they proceed, and the end for which they were done, together with the character of those that were benefited by them—will afford sufficient evidence for determining to whom the performers of them belong. These expressions of love and fruits of holiness are remembered by Christ, though forgotten by the saints. He will then avow them for His own; He will number them among His jewels; He will confess them before His Father and all the holy angels. Then shall their characters, which, in the time of their sojourning here below, were defamed with every foul reproach, be fully vindicated to their everlasting honor and to the eternal confusion of all their adversaries.

With a smile of divine satisfaction, the Judge will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat 25:34). Reviving words! Having long desired to be near the Lord, they are invited to come and be with Him forever. Now the painful fears that they once had are eternally removed, for they are pronounced "blessed of my Father" by a voice that the whole assembled world shall hear.

admission into the eternal kingdom for the sake of their pious performances. These, who say not a word about anything that they have done, are accepted by the Judge of all into everlasting honor and joy.

Let the legalist be cautioned by this not to trust in his own duties, though of the most splendid kind. And let all who love the truth be encouraged to abound in every instance of duty to God, especially in that of sharing with the indigent members of Christ. For the Judge will say to them on His right hand, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mat 25:40). What condescension is here! Christ is not ashamed to own the most common of His people under the character of "brethren."

There is reason to fear that many professors, whose situation in life is a little more elevated than that of their neighbors, are almost above looking at the *poor* brethren of Christ. They would be extremely offended if one of those indigent disciples were to address any of them under the character of a *brother*. But who are you, reptile of the earth, that you should be ashamed of them whom Jesus, the Lord of glory and Judge of the world, will acknowledge as *His* brethren? What! Shall a little shining dust, or worldly honor, so elate your dishonorable mind and swell your compressed heart, that the poor members of Jesus Christ shall have no place in your affections! Beware, lest after all your profession, you should go down to hell with a lie in your right hand. Beware lest all your expectations of eternal happiness prove no better than "the baseless fabric of a vision" (William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 4, Scene 1)!—*Booth*

4. *Possessing a Kingdom*

These believers were all poor in spirit, and the generality of them poor in material things. How agreeably, then, must they be surprised to hear that they are called to possess a kingdom—called to inherit it as princes of the blood royal, who are born to thrones and crowns! Lost they will be in pleasing astonishment to find that, before they had a being or the foundations of the world were laid, the eternal God had prepared this kingdom for them. And every reflection upon the way in which they came to possess it must heighten their amazement and joy. Then shall they be admitted, in their whole being, into the fullness of bliss—into a nearer and more perfect enjoyment of God than they ever before enjoyed.

Their blessedness thus heightened shall be eternal. It is eternity stamped on their enjoyments that gives them their infinite worth. For could they, who are so high in bliss, be apprehensive of an end of their happiness, however remote, then “that ghastly thought would drink up all [their] joy.”¹¹ But their inheritance is unalienable, their crown unfading, and their kingdom everlasting.

Jehovah Himself is their “light,” and the Most High their “glory” (Isa 60:19). Yes, the infinite God is their portion and their “exceeding great reward” (Gen 15:1). Their happiness, therefore, is as permanent as the divine perfections they adore and enjoy. It is made certain to their own comprehensive minds beyond the possibility of a doubt. This makes their state supremely glorious. This constitutes it heaven indeed.

5. *Forever More*

Now, what if the limits of the saints’ capacities should be forever *enlarging*, and forever receiving greater measures of glory? For the Deity is an infinite source of blessedness; and finite vessels may be forever expanding and filling in that ocean of all-sufficiency. What an amazing state of ever-growing pleasure! And what an astonishing scale of bliss! Jehovah shall open inexhaustible stores of blessings as yet unknown to angels, and feast their souls with joys that are ever new. Nothing equal to this can be conceived by mortals; nothing superior can be enjoyed by mere creatures.

¹¹ Edward Young, *Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*: “Night the First” (London, 1742), line 185.

Edward Young (1683-1765) – English poet, critic, philosopher, and theologian; educated at Oxford; born at Upham, near Winchester, England.

Yet this—hear it, O ye nations! and listen, ye isles from afar! while the millions of glorified saints dwell on the stupendous truth!—this is the *end* of the victorious reign of grace. Grace reigned in the eternal counsels when contriving the way to this glorious end. Grace reigned in providing the means, and in bestowing the blessings, that were necessary to its accomplishment. Grace reigned to the complete execution of the noble, astonishing design from first to last. Surely, then, reigning grace should have the unrivalled honor of all the blessings enjoyed by believers on earth and by saints in the light of heaven. Yes, and it shall have the glory in all the churches of Christ below and in all the triumphant hosts above. For when the last stone of the spiritual temple shall be laid, it will be “with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it” (Zec 4:7)!

In these respects, the blessedness of saints—in their entire persons, after the resurrection and the general judgment—will exceed that of their separate spirits. And in how many other particulars the proceedings of that day will add to their happiness, I neither affirm nor presume to inquire. It is quite sufficient for us to know, while in the present state, that we are heirs of this blessedness, and that it is inconceivably great. We should rest contented with what is revealed concerning it, without indulging a curious imagination in searching after those particulars that the Spirit of wisdom has given us no intimations of or that are very obscure. Such inquiries are sure to be attended with vanity rather than edification.

6. *Angelic Hosts*

Nor will the angelic hosts be unaffected spectators when that grandest of all divine works, *redemption*, shall be completed. They had often been charged with offices of great importance to the church of God, and to its particular members, while in this lower world. They had seen with astonishment the incarnation of their Sovereign, His feeble appearance in the manger, His life of poverty, of reproaches, and of suffering. They saw His agony in the garden and heard His cries and complaints. They saw Him extended on the cross and beheld Him laid in the grave. They were witnesses of His victorious resurrection, and they attended His triumphant ascension into the realms of glory. They beheld and often reflected on these things with amazement. They diligently looked into these works of divine design, these mysteries of infinite love, wondering

what would be the grand result (1Pe 1:12; Eph 3:9-11). They had long desired the unfolding of the mysterious plan, and now they have it.

*Now they are struck with deep amaze,
Each with his wing conceals his face;
Now clap their sounding plumes and cry
The glories of the Deity.*¹²

Those first-born sons of light and love could not forbear shouting “for joy” when they beheld the material world rise into existence and saw its finished form (Job 38:7). How much greater reason will they have to rejoice when they behold all the redeemed world brought safe to glory and confirmed in bliss! Those morning stars, those burning ones and sons of God, must exult with joy, when they view the spotless perfection and ravishing beauty of the whole church (Eph 5:27) considered as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev 21:9). Nor can anything short of transport seize their breasts when, realizing that the original of the church was low and miserable, they reflect that all this spotless innocence and matchless beauty arose from reigning grace, through the person and work of their incarnate Sovereign.

D. Applications

1. *To the False Professor*

And now, reader, what are your thoughts of this blessedness? Very probably you are one of those that hope to go to heaven when they die. If so, what is your hope? Is it a mere wish, or a well-grounded expectation? Remember that the Word of God requires you, as a Christian professor, to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1Pe 3:15). Have you ever seriously inquired why *you* hope to be happy, when so many millions will be eternally miserable—when it is certain from the Scripture that there are comparatively very few who find the way to life? You have, perhaps, never thought much about these interesting subjects. But why then do you call yourself a Christian? Why hope to go to heaven? For if this be your condition, you are “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Act 8:23). You are—may God enlighten your mind to see it; may

¹² Isaac Watts, “Jesus the Only Savior,” *Horæ Lyricæ: Poems, Chiefly of the Lyric Kind* (1705), stanza IX.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) – English hymn writer and theologian; recognized as the “Father of English Hymnody.”

reigning grace deliver you from it!—you are at present a child of wrath, and an heir of destruction!

But why hope for heaven when you have no delight in God, no pleasure in His ways, no love to His people—in a word, possessed of no holiness? And without holiness, intellectual happiness is impossible. Heaven, were you there, would be no heaven to you. Nor, as an unregenerate sinner, can you desire it for the sake of its enjoyments, for they are contrary to the prevailing inclination of your will. You do not love heaven, but you are afraid of hell. The inhabitants of the celestial world would be no companions for you. Their business would be a toil and their language unknown. Their sweetest hosannas would afford you no pleasure, and the symphony of their golden harps would be discord in your ears.

Nay, were you to be admitted into those mansions of purity in an unregenerate state, then the enjoyment of God, which is their highest joy, would be your greatest uneasiness. For happiness consists in the enjoyment of an object that is completely suitable and satisfying to our desires. A holy God, therefore, cannot be our happiness without our partaking of His holiness. Remember, sinner, that if you leave the world in an unsanctified state, as you cannot be fit for heaven, so you must not enter those abodes of blissful purity or taste their sublime pleasures. Instead, your state will be eternally fixed where there is “weeping...wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 8:12; 13:42).

2. To the Possibly Deceived

Are you a serious person and a strict professor? Be it so; yet it is right for you to consider what is the foundation of your hope. For “there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro 16:25). A man may be zealous for God and, in many respects, exemplary in his life, yet, after all, he may perish forever (Rom 9:31-32; 10:2-3).

What then is the reason of your hope? Is it the grace that reigns through the person and work of Christ? Can you say with the first-century Christians, “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved” (Act 15:11)? Have you reached a conclusion about that most interesting and solemn affair, the salvation of your immortal soul? Is your hope of glory lively and bright, or languid and obscure? Is it such as is attended with rejoicing, as purifies the heart and conduct (Rom 5:2; 1Pe 1:3, 5; 1Jo

3:3)? Does it have Christ and His finished work for its everlasting support, together with the promise of Him that cannot lie?

O professor, seek for certainty and satisfaction. They are to be had in the knowledge of Christ and in the belief of His truth. If you love your soul, rest not in uncertainty about an affair of infinite consequence. You are building for eternity; be cautious, therefore, with what materials you build, and upon what foundation. A mistake in the foundation of your trust will ruin your soul. Read your Bible, meditate, and pray that the Spirit of truth may direct you in the momentous concern.

3. *To the True Saint*

Are you a child of God and an heir of the kingdom? Then endeavor to make swift progress in vital religion and in real holiness. Do this by a conscientious attendance on all the public means of grace, and by maintaining communion with your heavenly Father in every private duty. Remember that holiness is the health, the beauty, and the glory of your immortal mind. Seek after it, therefore, as a divine privilege and as a heavenly blessing.

Watch and pray against the insurrections of indwelling sin, the solicitations of worldly pleasure, and the assaults of Satan's temptations. Watch, especially, against spiritual pride and carnal security. As to the former, rejoice not in your knowledge, gifts, or inherent excellencies; no, nor yet in your Christian experiences. Be thankful for them, but put them not in the place of Christ or the Word of His grace, so as to make them the ground of your present confidence or the source of your future comfort. For so to do is not to rely on the promise of God, and not to live by faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, it would be to admire your own accomplishments by which you differ from other men, and to live upon your own abilities. The consequence of this most commonly is either pharisaical pride, imagining ourselves to be better than others, or desponding fears, when our frames are flat and our spirits languid, as if there were no salvation for us. The peace and comfort of such professors must be very uncertain.

But as a guilty, perishing sinner, who has no recommendation nor any encouragement to believe in Jesus or to look for salvation by Him, except what is contained in the Word of grace—depend upon Him, live by Him. The more you behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the more will you see of your own vileness. The more you grow in real holiness, the more sensible you will be

of the power of your own corruptions—and of the imperfections attending all your duties. You will be more and more convinced that if the gospel did not warrant your dependence on Christ, under the character of a sinner, you could have no hope, even after ever so long and zealous a profession of religion. You should live under a continual remembrance that you are still an unworthy, guilty, damnable creature—but yet accepted in Christ and freed from every curse. The first will keep you truly humble and provoke to self-abhorrence; the latter will make you really happy and excite to praise and duty.

Watch against carnal security and spiritual sloth. Forget not that you have many enemies. Therefore, “be sober, be vigilant” (1Pe 5:8). Time is short and absolutely uncertain. Manage well your precious moments; lay them out for God. Be careful that the fruits of gratitude to your infinite Benefactor may adorn your whole behavior. Make the holiness and usefulness of the life of Jesus your fair example; copy after that brightest of patterns.

Remember that the eyes of God, angels, accursed spirits, and men are all upon you. Both friends and enemies inspect your conduct and mark your steps. How necessary then is watchfulness and circumspection! Watch, lest, falling into sin, your spiritual joys are impaired, your friends and allies are grieved, and your adversaries triumph. You have received the earnest of your future inheritance; you have had some joyful foretastes of that immense bliss of which you, O Christian, are an heir. Therefore, make it your constant business, as it is your indispensable duty, to live above the world, whether your temporal circumstances be affluent or sparing, prosperous or adverse.

Let your conduct be, as it were, in heaven, as becomes a citizen of the new Jerusalem. It is your duty and blessing to live in sight of the world to come, and as on the borders of it. Converse much with the Eternal Mind, in prayer, praise, and holy meditation. So shall you maintain a blessed intimacy with that sublime Being Whose favor is better than life, Whose frown is worse than destruction. By such fellowship with God, you will taste more exquisite delights than all the pleasures of sin can boast; than all the riches of the world can bestow. Yes, believer, by such converse with God, you shall find your mercies sanctified and your afflictions alleviated; your holy dispositions invigorated and your corrupt affections weakened. Be it your constant endeavor that, whenever your fair,

glorious, heavenly Bridegroom shall come, He may find you ready—having your loins girt, your lamp burning, and waiting for His glorious advent (Eph 6:4; Mat 25:4, 8-10). So shall your soul be peaceful, your life useful, and your death triumphant.

While we soar on the wings of faith and holy meditation in order to explore the wonders of reigning grace; while we endeavor to sound its depths and to measure its heights, we are elevated, as it were, to the suburbs of heaven. We taste of joys divinely sweet and savor the entertainments of angels. But, alas! How soon the wings of divine contemplation fade! How soon are we interrupted by the workings of indwelling sin, or by the rudeness of a noisy, busy, transient world! Yet, for our comfort, we have to remember that when a few more of our fleeting days are elapsed, we shall enter on a state unchangeable to enjoy those infinite delights that are included in the beatific vision, in the fruition of the eternal Jehovah.

E. To Conclude

From this imperfect and brief survey of the reign of grace, from this feeble attempt to illustrate its power and majesty, we may learn that the free favor of God manifested in our salvation is a theme full and sublime. So much so that

- all that can be said by the most evangelical and eloquent preachers,
- all that can be written by the most accurate and descriptive pens,
- all that can be conceived by the most excursive and sanctified imagination among the sons of men

—must come infinitely short of a full display. Yes, after all that is imagined or can be sung by angels or men—by seraphs¹³ or saints in the church below or in the choirs above—the charming subject will remain unexhausted to eternity. For the riches of Christ are unsearchable, and the grace of God is unbounded. Then,

*Who shall fulfil the boundless song?
What vain pretender dares?
The theme surmounts an angel's tongue,
And Gabriel's harp despairs.*¹⁴

¹³ **seraph** – angelic being near God's throne (Isa 6:2, 6).

¹⁴ Isaac Watts, "The Mighty Frame of Glorious Grace," eighth stanza.

